

Ghost From the Past

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Summary: When the man she loves vanishes, Lois must mend the pieces of her broken heart on her own. Five years later she comes face to face with the man she thought had died, but has no recollection of the past. When secrets are revealed how will they forgive one another?

Story Size: 137,255 words (760Kb as text)

A/N: This story is what you would call a tear-jerker, to say the least. The story of 'Jamie' is very real. It is what happened to me (minus the part about the husband not being around for five years). I lost my son to SIDS. Everything was perfect for those short sixteen weeks until one morning with no warning he was gone. This story is dedicated to him.

Huge Thank Yous to Deadly Chakram and Nostalgickick for helping me mold together how to get the scenes near the end just right. Big thanks to all the readers for all the wonderful feedback. It means a lot to me that this story was so well received.

<<Gunshots rang out as she watched Clark struggle in the water with the man she and Clark had come to know as Jason Trask. The echo of that final shot...

"Clark!!!!"

Two men in uniform pulled her back as she screamed in agony...>>

"Clark!" Lois shot up in bed, tears falling down her cheeks. She looked around the room, trying to gain her bearings. "Just a dream..." she mumbled swiping at the tears as she buried herself in her tear stained pillow.

It had been five years since that day in Smallville.

Five years since she'd last seen Clark.

Five years since she'd felt his lips against hers.

Five years and she still wasn't over it.

Six Years Ago...

Lois Lane looked up at the building in front of her and smiled. This was it. The beginning of everything: her independence, her career, her life, her...

"Lois!" Ellen Lane's voice interrupted her thoughts and shoved a box in her arms. "Come on! We've only got the truck for a few more hours. Let's get you unpacked."

Lois smiled wryly at her mother, "I'm going. I'm going..." Here she was in her last year at Metropolis University and moving into her very own apartment.

"Isn't this exciting, sis?" Lucy asked as she followed her up the stairs with an armful of boxes. "Independence...excitement..." she glanced at a tall gentleman that passed them in the hallway, "boys..."

"I don't have time for that, and you know it..." Lois said exasperated, "It's my last year at Metropolis University...I just want to finish my degree and start my career at..."

"The Daily Planet." Lucy cut her off. "I know, I know...It's still exciting though..."

"This is me..." Lois said, stopping in front of her door, "501."

Clark stepped off the bus and looked around the campus. After

dreaming about leaving Smallville for so long he'd finally taken the plunge and transferred to a large University. His parents had been hesitant about the move at first, but when he'd shown them the full scholarship Metropolis University had offered him there wasn't much of an argument there.

He looked around the streets of Metropolis and smiled. This was the first day of the rest of his life. He looked up at the large university and couldn't seem to wipe the smile off his face. He'd dreamt of this for so long. Now, here it was. His chance at a life outside of Smallville.

"Whoa! Sorry!" a young brunette bumped into him as she dropped the handful of textbooks in her hand.

"It's okay...Typical for me...barreling in without looking where I'm going..." the young woman said shyly. All he could manage to do was just stare at her and smile. She was gorgeous. "Uh, hi, Lois Lane," she extended her hand to shake his.

He took her hand and smiled back, "Clark Kent."

Present Day...

The room was filled with a green glow. Glass was shattered all over and the leather binds on the table were torn. Several soldiers were surveying the scene. Everything had been destroyed. All of their work...

Jason Trask stepped into the room and glared at the two soldiers that stood by the lead box that held the mysterious green glow.

"Where is the alien?" Trask asked.

"He's escaped..."

"Find him..." Trask ordered.

Lois pushed her way through the doors of the Daily Planet, ignoring everyone around her as she headed towards the elevators. She jabbed at the elevator call button and stepped on the elevator, waiting impatiently to arrive in the newsroom. After last night's dream, all she wanted to do was lose herself in a good scandal. Thinking about Clark and everything she'd lost was too painful.

As she exited the elevator she noticed the newsroom was quiet. Everyone was huddled around the televisions as the footage of a meteor showed on one screen and a group of military officers and scientists in front of City Hall showed on another. "What in the world?"

"'Nightfall' is close to seventeen miles across. It's travelling close to 30-thousand miles an hour. this could knock the Earth off its axis. Even throw us out of our current solar orbit. It's far larger than the meteor that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. The crater alone will throw enough dust into the air to start a new ice age. With something this size, there is no military option. We're looking into modifying a rocket, but, at best, it would be a fifty-fifty proposition."

Martha stared sadly at the empty room before her. It had been five years but she just couldn't let go. She couldn't accept that the little boy she and Jonathan had raised and watched grow up with his special 'gifts' was gone.

"Martha?" Jonathan's voice broke her out of her reverie. "Martha, you can't keep doing this to yourself..."

"I know..." She cried. "I just can't seem to let go...I had another dream last night...Jonathan, I just can't seem to shake the feeling that our boy is out there somewhere..."

"If Clark were alive he would have come home..." Jonathan argued. "Please, honey, I can't stand to see you like this..."

"It's been five years today..." Martha shook her head.

"I know..." the shakiness of his voice was evident as he tried valiantly to be the rock Martha so desperately needed right now. "I miss him too..."

"He was our miracle..." Martha cried. "I want to try and look again..."

Jonathan shook his head, “No, we have gone through that city from top to bottom and found nothing...No good can come of it. Now, Clark died ...”

“But what if he didn’t...With all his gifts why would you think he would ...”

Jonathan sighed, “Martha, I’m not going through this again...”

A stern look crossed her face as she turned away, “I’m going to Metropolis whether you like it or not. You’re either coming with me or not, but you’re not going to stop me.....My boy is missing...”

Jonathan hung his head, “Martha, it’s been five years...”

“Jonathan, my boy is going to come home...one way or another I am going to find him and bring him home...dead or alive.”

The pain he’d felt earlier seemed to have subsided. The streets he was walking seemed so familiar. The beautiful town seemed darker...

He looked up and watched as a large shadow passed in front of the sun. He wasn’t sure of a lot of things but he was pretty sure that this was not normal.

“Lois Lane,” Lois answered her phone through the frenzy of activity that had taken over the newsroom after the announcement of Nightfall.

“Lois?” a familiar voice asked on the other end.

“Martha?” Lois asked in a hushed whisper. She looked around to see if anyone was watching or listening then turned back to the phone, “It’s been...ages...”

“I know...” Martha gave a watery smile through the phone, “I wanted to take another look at Clark’s apartment...Do you still have the key?”

“Ye...Yes...Yes, I do...” Lois said shakily, resting her head in her hands as she spoke. The key. The key to her missing fiancé’s apartment. She went through this every year. It killed her every time. He had been written off by authorities as ‘deceased’ but there was no body and she just couldn’t accept he was gone.

“Good...” she said, “We’ll be coming in on the first flight in the morning...Can you meet us over there?”

“Sure...” Lois said softly.

“Great. See you then...” A resounding click was heard on the other end of the phone. It was hard to imagine this was the same woman she’d met so many years ago. They all had changed.

<< Lois and Clark walked hand in hand as she surveyed the small-town festival. They approached a middle-aged woman and Clark tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention. She turned around and smiled, giving Clark a big hug.

“Mom, this is ...Lois,” Clark said with a grin, wrapping a protective arm around her from behind.

“Hi,” Lois said shyly. “It’s nice to meet you, Mrs. Kent.” She held out her hand for the woman to shake.

“Martha, please,” she corrected.

“Martha,” Lois echoed.

“Clark tells me you’re a journalism major as well?” Martha said, trying to break the ice.

Relieved to be talking about something comfortable, Lois nodded, “Yes, senior year. I’m hoping to be working at the Planet next year when I graduate.”

“Daily Planet, huh?” Martha grinned, “Well, I’m sure if you work hard enough, anything is possible.” She cast Clark a grin. “Shoot for the moon I always say. Come on, you kids must be starving...”

Clark gave a wink then interrupted, “Actually, Mom, Lois thinks the chef might be a cross-dresser...”

Lois rolled her eyes and twisted her mouth as she glanced at the middle-aged man flipping burgers. Martha laughed, “Oh, honey, that’s Clark’s father! I can’t get him to buy me a dress let

alone one for himself...” >>

Lois stared at the picture on her desk as she hung up the phone, “Oh, Clark...”

There was something so familiar about this place. The brick seemed so familiar. Everything felt normal. He stared up at the steps in front of the apartment building. It felt like home... whatever that was.

He brushed his hands against the wood railing as he stepped up the stairs. It almost felt like there was something drawing him to this place...a presence.

Martha turned back to Jonathan and sighed, “I know he’s ALIVE. I can feel it in here...” She patted her chest to emphasize her point.

Jonathan sighed, following her out to the barn, “You keep doing this to yourself and dragging poor Lois into this depression with you every year. How is she supposed to move on with her life when you keep doing this to her?”

“Move on with her life?” Martha scoffed. “What makes you think she WANTS to move on with her life after what happened?”

“Martha...”

A loud bang was heard in the stalls and Martha jumped, “What was that?”

Six Years Ago...

Lois flipped through the articles in her hand as she made her way to her first meeting at the Met Daily newspaper. She’d been working her way up the ladder last two years and this year she was going to be in the action...not just doing research but actually writing stories and reporting like a real reporter.

“Whoa!”

Lois silently cursed her luck as she watched the papers go flying and a very familiar face behind brown rimmed glasses knelt down to help her once again. “I think you should probably look into that whole *looking* where you’re going thing...” he grinned back at her, “or look into getting a siren...”

Lois blushed, “Sorry...again.” She grinned back at him. This was embarrassing. She’d crashed into him at least a dozen times in less than a twenty-four-hour period. That had to be a record.

“Clark, right?”

He nodded, “You headed to the Met Daily too?” he asked, pointing to the Met Daily sign a few feet away.

“Yeah,” she nodded.

“Well, after you,” He motioned for her to go first and he followed behind.

“I guess it’s safer that way,” she shrugged.

“Sure,” He smiled, opening the door for her.

Later that evening, Lois stared at the papers scattered all over her coffee table. This was what she’d wanted...dreamt about and worked for, for so long. Working on the university newspaper and hunting down stories. She should be worried about how her first story for the paper was going to look and what her angle was going to be... Instead, all she seemed to be thinking about was that gorgeous smile that seemed to make her want to melt.

‘What is wrong with you? Pull it together.’

She had put on a good show and tried to stay focused on the story and ignore everyone around her during their first staff meeting. She’d put on a great tough act for everyone, but it had all been a lie. She’d spent a good bit of the afternoon fantasizing about Clark Kent and watching him while he tapped his pen against his notepad...biting his lower lip when he was trying to concentrate on something...

She felt something...every time she’d bumped into him, brushed up against him and touched him today. She felt a spark. It had been insanely hard to go about the day ... ALL day... and

focus when her mind kept drifting to this very handsome man that she had tried to take out several times today. He probably thought she was nuts. He'd been polite but...crashing into him over and over today...

'You don't have time for this. You do not have time for ...'

She shuddered involuntarily, recalling her daydreams that afternoon.

'Focus. Focus. Focus...'

"Yeah, everything went great..." Clark said as he spoke on the phone with his parents. "I like it... Everyone's going somewhere... doing something..."

"Impatient... like you," his dad said. "Well, I know you'll do great, son,"

"Did you get settled in okay?" his mom asked.

"Yeah," Clark nodded. "Between the money I've got left over from the football scholarship and the internship at the Planet I should be fine." He tossed the football in the air aimlessly and caught it as he spoke.

"Don't spread yourself too thin..." his mom interrupted. "You have to keep up with your grades as well as ..."

"I'm not, mom," Clark smiled. "Everything will work out. The Planet is part time. I'll be fine." He looked around at the dump of an apartment he'd moved into. "Hopefully after graduation, I'll be able to get something better..."

"Clark, you're being careful, aren't you?" his dad asked.

It was always a concern of his dad's. The gifts he had been given made him 'special' as his mom had put it, but there was always a fear they had that if anyone found out what he could do they'd put him in a lab and dissect him like a frog.

"I'm fine, dad," Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair, "I'm being careful. Acting normal... getting crashed into ... pretending not to see or hear things I'm not supposed to... I'm being careful. I promise."

"Crashed into?" his mom asked.

He laughed, "Yeah, this girl on the paper kept crashing into me today... I'm not sure if she was doing it on purpose or what, but all day..."

"Girl?" his mom prompted mischievously. "Was she pretty?"

"Mom..."

"She was, wasn't she?" his mom continued to tease him.

He could feel the back of his neck turning bright red. Yes, she was gorgeous. "Uh, yeah... she's *very* pretty." He admitted shyly.

Present Day...

The Daily Planet conference room was packed with reporters as Perry White, Editor-in-Chief, began barking out orders, "Okay, people. I know we're working late but this is a big one. I got us an extra half-hour before we go to press. Let's make the most of it." He turned to Lois, "Lois, where's the copy on the mayor's press conference this afternoon?"

"Uh, I'm still cleaning it up. It should be ready within the hour, though," Lois said hurriedly.

"If you need help you, can get with Roberto..." Perry offered.

"I work alone," Lois said curtly.

"Uh-huh," Ralph sneered from across the conference room table.

"What is *that* supposed to mean?" Lois asked, throwing a pencil across the table at him.

"You ain't always worked alone and you know it..." Ralph shrugged. "Just cuz ...uh, what's his name... your boyfriend... ain't here anymore don't mean you can't partner with the new guys like the rest of us..."

"His name is *Clark!*" Lois hissed at him angrily.

"Whatever..." Ralph shrugged. "He ain't here no more..." At the last remark, Lois stood up from the table, ready to clobber him when Jimmy and Cat grabbed her from behind.

"He's not worth it..." Cat whispered in her ear to calm her down.

"Hey, hey, that's enough of that you two... Now, we've got a paper to put out," Perry interrupted, "We don't have time for this. Ralph, shut your mouth unless I'm talking to you and keep your comments from the peanut gallery to yourself. Lois, get a grip and get me that copy..."

"Yes, Chief," Lois mumbled as she sat back down.

"Now, Jimmy, how's the lab coming with the slide from the telescope?" Perry asked, turning to Jimmy who had just taken his seat after the scuffle between Lois and Ralph.

"They said it'd be ready on time." Jimmy shrugged.

Perry let out a long breath, "I want you to go down to the lab, grab one of those folding chairs, and set your fanny down and wait. The second that picture's ready, I want it in layout."

"Okay, but I was thinking I could be more help..." Jimmy began to argue.

Perry glared at him, "Jimmy, I am in the '*order mode*', not the '*discuss mode*'. Now, which mode are you in?"

Jimmy sighed, "I guess I'm in the, uh, '*Grab-A-Chair-At-The-Lab-Mode*'."

"Good choice," Perry barked. Jimmy hung his head and grabbed his notebook to head down to the lab.

Lois watched him leave and mouthed, 'Good luck,' He smiled back and pointed at Ralph then did a slitting the throat motion. She couldn't help but smile.

Perry turned to Cat who was tapping her pen impatiently against the pad of her notebook, "Now, Cat, where were you when the lights went out this morning?"

"In bed," Cat said exasperated as if the answer should be obvious.

Lois rolled her eyes, "There's a surprise,"

Perry gave Lois a glare then turned back to Cat, "I'm talking side-bar here, ladies. Cat, I want you to call all those big names in that Rolodex you keep locked up in your desk and get me some human interest. If you need help, ask Applegate."

Lois and Cat both glanced at Applegate who was waving with a huge grin on his face. If you ever wanted to find the exact opposite of Cat Grant, Applegate was it. A short, balding, middle-aged man with thick glasses and an asthma problem.

Cat gave a fake smile then turned sweetly to Perry, "I don't think so. I work alone."

Perry clapped his hands, "Then do it fast." He then turned to the rest of the room, "Okay, boys and girls. It's show time. Let's go."

They all exited the conference room leaving Lois alone with Cat. "You know you shouldn't let Ralph get under your skin like that... He's a man trying to make a dig because you're a woman..."

"Easy for you to say. He wasn't..." Lois pinched the bridge of her nose. "I can't talk about this right now."

"Lois, it's been five years... Maybe you should..."

"What?" Lois asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Never mind, forget I said anything."

"No, what is it...?" Lois prompted.

"I just thought if you dipped your toe out there and started dating again..." Cat began but stopped when Lois glared at her. "You're a mess. Perry talks about how great you used to be to the interns and..."

"Used to be... *used* to be? I have won four Kerth Awards, three Merriweather Awards and I was THIS close to being nominated for a Pulitzer. USED to be???" Lois fumed angrily.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry I said anything..." Cat held her hands up, hoping to calm Lois down.

Six Years Ago...

They'd been partnered up by the editor and had been working

together for about six months. So far it seemed to be going pretty well. She tried to deny the fact that she was madly in love with him. She did her best to distance herself as much as possible by burying herself in her work, but it was harder and harder... especially when they spent so much time together. He was just so...

Clark sighed, following Lois into the conference room at the Met Daily with a look of exasperation, "Tell me again *why* I'm doing this..."

"Look, I got a tip that some of the football players aren't taking their own tests... You're friends with some of the guys on the team... They trust you. So, you can wear a wire and that'll be our proof," Lois explained as if it was obvious.

Clark raised an eyebrow at her, "I'm not sure what this has to do with the paper. Isn't this something that should go to the school board?"

"It will," Lois shrugged her shoulders, "This could be a really big story and I don't want to..." she stopped for a moment, hearing a noise in the corner of the conference room. She motioned for Clark to be quiet then turned towards the noise. "Is somebody there?"

Clark looked around, "I don't see anyone,"

Lois took a few steps closer, to get a better look. After a few moments of not seeing anyone she turned back to Clark, "What was I saying?"

"Oh, you were trying to explain what this 'story' has to do with the paper," Clark explained.

"It's a big story. Neanderthal macho jocks not taking their own tests..."

Clark gave her a funny look, "Neanderthal macho jocks?? You know some of these guys have more between their ears besides the game..."

"Not from where I'm sitting," Lois snapped back. "Every guy that I've met on the team has only been interested in three things: girls, football, and booze..."

"Don't you think that's a bit stereotypical?" He asked.

"No," She shook her head, "So, are you gonna help me, or not?"

He hung his head as if he was going to think about it for a few minutes, then caved, "If anyone isn't taking their own tests, then I guess it IS our job to report it."

"Exactly," Lois smacked him on the chest. "Let's go!"

STAR QUARTERBACK BENCHED

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

Lois looked happily at the headline in front of her as she took her seat in the lecture hall. It didn't matter how many times she saw her byline on the front page it never grew old. She glanced up when a familiar arm came around her shoulders and whispered, "Admiring your work?"

She smiled back, "Our work..." She cocked a half smile at him. "Couldn't have done it without you,"

"Oh, really, and here I thought I was just another Neanderthal macho jock..." he teased.

"Sorry," she winced, remembering the names she'd called all the football players before she'd known he was actually one of them. "I guess I WAS being a bit stereotypical..."

"Nah, really?" He teased back. "It's fine." He took the paper from her and leaned back in his seat, "So, what are you going to do now that you're famous on campus for stopping the evil football players from stealing good grades?"

She smirked back at him, "Do you always have to be such a smart ass?"

"No," he shook his head, "but I *really* enjoy it."

"Peggy wanted me to come to that party at the Lexor tonight, but I'm not really sure..."

"You should go," He reasoned.

"Why? It's just a bunch of kids getting *way* too drunk..."

"...or not." He interrupted.

"...and trying to hook up."

"It could be *fun*," He reasoned.

"Fun?" she repeated. "No."

"Chicken."

"Excuse me??" Lois glared at him. "I am not."

"Yes, you are." He laughed. "You are so afraid you might actually have a good time. No one's going to make you do something you don't want to do. Just live a little. Cut loose and have some fun. What's the worst that could happen?"

"Why did I let you talk me into this?" Lois asked, tugging on her skirt for the umpteenth time.

"Because you *always* have to be right," Clark challenged as they walked through the doors of the Lexor Hotel. "It's a party. In some societies, people actually have FUN at parties and don't try to *work*..." He glanced at the notepad in her hands.

"You never know where your next story will come from..." she winked at him.

"Yes, read all about it, 'Lois Lane at a Party!'" He teased.

She glared at him. "You're not funny."

"I'm hilarious." He shot back. "You just don't have a sense of humor."

"Enough of this!" she stood up, walking towards the crowd around the keg, "I'm getting a drink."

"Beer?"

"Water..." she corrected.

"Party animal," he teased.

"Shut up,"

Sometime later, Lois found she was actually enjoying herself. The room they were in had the center cleared out for dancing. Music was blaring and everyone was having a good time. She glanced over at Clark as she fiddled with the top button of her blouse nervously. Would it be so terribly bad if they started dating? The year was almost over and he was definitely a lot of fun to be with and a good friend. Smart, funny, and really *really* hot...

He was sitting with Joe and Pete laughing but she noticed he kept gazing over at her. What would he do if she asked him to dance?

"Hey, I know you..." A drunken slur whispered in her ear. "You're that one that squealed... and messed up the team..."

Realizing WHO was behind her, she turned around to face her accuser, "Whitley Roarke..." she breathed coolly. "Don't you think you've had enough?"

"I'll tell you when I've had enough..." He hissed angrily. "You and your big mouth... You better watch yourself..." His face was a few millimeters away from hers as he pointed at her angrily.

"Maybe YOU should spend more time studying and less time conniving..." She shot back. She turned to leave and he grabbed her tightly by the wrist.

"Why you little..."

"Roarke..." another voice interrupted. It was the running back, Thomas Jenkins. "Back off... Take it easy..." Roarke let her go and she rubbed the area on her arm where Whitley had grabbed her. "Sorry, my apologies..." He handed her a red solo cup, "Cheers,"

She looked at it hesitantly, "Uh, thanks..."

"Club soda," he said with a grin.

She nodded and took a sip before turning back to where Clark was with her friends. She knew being a reporter could be dangerous but it had been the first time she'd been threatened like that. "Hey," She walked up to where Clark stood with Peggy, Pete, and Joe laughing.

"Hey," Clark smiled at her. That smile...

'Here goes nothing'

She took him by the hand and pulled him away from everyone, "Where are we going?" he asked.

"To dance..." she said with more determination than she actually felt at the moment.

"You know, usually people ask one another if they want to..." He began to tease but stopped when she grabbed him by the collar and kissed him. At first, he seemed too shocked to respond but then she felt him kiss her back. His tongue outlined her lips and his hand moved to cup her cheek as their kiss deepened.

She slowly broke off the kiss and smiled up at him, satisfied with herself, "Finally speechless..." she murmured against his lips.

Present Day...

He sat on the steps shakily. He didn't know where he was or who he was. Everything was so fuzzy. The pain seemed to have subsided but everything around him seemed ... terrifying. He glanced down at the torn shirt he wore.

Memories of the green glowing rock that he'd been tortured with were seared in his mind. He saw flashes of a young woman... brunette... but he had no idea who she was. Hell, he had no idea who he was.

"Hey, this is a no loitering..." A middle-aged man with balding hair approached him, wagging his finger at him, "Kent???" he stared at him in disbelief.

Kent? Was that his name?

"I..."

"What the hell happened to you???" The man took a few steps closer to him and he felt his body flinch. He wasn't sure why he did that. He wasn't sure of anything. He held his hands up and took another step towards him. "It's okay. It's okay. I've still got your apartment. Your parents and Ms. Lane have been paying the rent while you were...uh, wherever you were..."

"Parents?" he asked curiously.

"Yeah, the Kents..." The man nodded. "Real nice people. So, you probably should get cleaned up...Do you want me to call your folks?"

"I..." He shook his head, "I don't know..."

"Okay, how about we just get you in your apartment and we can go from there?" the man offered.

"Okay," he nodded, looking up at him curiously. "Who are you again?"

"Floyd. I'm your landlord."

"Landlord?" He asked.

"For your apartment..." Floyd explained, motioning to the building behind him. "Come on, we'll get you cleaned up and then make some calls..."

He wasn't sure who this man was but he didn't seem to have an ulterior motive and it couldn't hurt. "Okay," He stood up shakily and followed Floyd to what the man claimed was his apartment. "So, you know me?"

"Yeah," Floyd looked at him with concern. "You don't remember?"

He shook his head, "So, my name is Kent?"

Floyd shook his head as he unlocked the apartment, "Clark. Your name is Clark Kent,"

Six Years Ago...

She had kissed him. She had kissed him like her life depended on it. He could still feel her lips against his as she sashayed away from him, leaving him speechless. That was apparently the point. From the comment, she had murmured right after, 'Finally speechless.' It had been her intention to make him speechless and she had definitely succeeded.

He'd spent the last few months working alongside her, trying to get the courage up to ask her out. This fiery brunette that had

crashed into his life...literally. The more he got to know her and spend time with her the harder he seemed to fall. He'd been surprised when she'd appeared at the Daily Planet too with her own internship. They'd spent months working together on campus and at the Planet. There was something about her...

"Kent, nice investigating work on that expose," Paul, the Editor for the Met Daily said as he approached him, patting him on the back. "Top notch,"

He smiled back, "Thanks, but that was actually more Lois than me."

"Even so, good work." Paul shook his hand. "You've got a real shot at making it in this business..."

He nodded, enjoying the compliment. He'd always looked up to the investigative reporters that exposed companies for their wrong doing and making a difference in the world. It was something he'd always wanted to do. Despite his 'gifts' he always felt like he was doing everything with one hand tied behind his back. He could never use his powers without fearing being found out. It was his and his parent's biggest fear when he'd left Smallville. But after promising to stay under the radar, his dad had finally caved and let him go.

He glanced around the room, looking for Lois. Where did she go?

Her head was a fog as she struggled to find her way towards the bathroom. Something was wrong. She could feel the room spinning around her.

"Well, well, what do we got here, boys..." the familiar voice of Whitley Roarke echoed in her ear as she felt someone grab her from behind.

"No..." she stammered out, struggling to release herself from his grasp. She looked up at Thomas Jenkins who held her securely in his grasp.

"I told you to watch your back..."

"Let go ...of me!!!"

She could feel the heat of Jenkins breath against her neck as he shoved her against the door to one of the rooms. "I don't think so..." He grinned, "What's wrong? Feeling a little under the weather? Maybe you should lie down..."

Roarke opened the door to one of the rooms on the floor of the party. "Time to teach you a lesson in keeping your mouth shut... since you like opening your mouth so much..."

"No...no...no, no, no!!!" she screamed as she struggled against Jenkins who was attempting to drag her into the room. She'd been drugged. As hard as she fought she could tell it wasn't doing anything to fend them off. No one seemed to be paying them any attention.

"Shut up!" Roarke hissed, slapping her across the face.

She felt a searing pain across her face as she glared back at Roarke. "Go to hell!" she spat back.

He raised his fist to strike her again, and she closed her eyes, preparing herself for the blow. Only it didn't come. She felt a gust of wind against her face and opened her eyes slightly, seeing Clark, hoisting Roarke up against the wall, "Get your ...hands off of her...now!!!"

"Kent...we were just playing around..." Roarke wheezed out as Jenkins released her from his grasp, taking a few steps back.

Before she knew what had happened Jenkins had been hoisted in the air along with Roarke. "I don't think so!!!"

"What's your deal, Kent? We were just having a little fun..." Jenkins argued.

Clark tightened his grip around their necks then stopped for a moment, seeming to contemplate something before throwing them to the ground. "Don't you dare come near her again..." he warned as Jenkins and Roarke scrambled out of the hallway, leaving him alone with her. He knelt down next to her, inspecting her wrists, neck, and arms where Jenkins had grabbed her. "Are you okay?"

"I think...they...drugged...me..." she managed to whisper as she leaned back against him. "Thank you..."

"I'm gonna get you to a hospital," He said, wrapping an arm around her shoulder protectively. "Can you walk or do you need me to carry you?"

She couldn't answer. Everything around her continued to spin as she leaned against him more securely, feeling confident he wouldn't let anything happen to her. It had taken everything in her to fight those guys off. Now that her adrenaline was no longer coursing through her she could feel her body giving into the effect of the drugs...

"Lois? Can you hear me?"

She gave into the sweet serenity of darkness as everything around her continued to spin.

Drugged. She had been drugged. He silently cursed himself for letting her come to this party. It had been *his* idea. His teasing that had made her step out of her comfort zone. He should have known. He should have been there to...

He watched as the ambulance pulled up outside the Lexor and sighed in relief. It had taken everything in him not to fly her to the nearest hospital but she had been in and out of consciousness and on the off chance, she was more alert than he realized he didn't want to have to explain...

He'd carried Lois outside and waited with her on the steps. As the ambulatory workers began assessing her they kept asking, "What did she drink? What was she drugged with?"

"I...I don't know..." he stammered. Anger coursed through him as he fought the urge to find Roarke and Jenkins and force them to tell him what was in that drink.

He followed them as they loaded Lois into the ambulance, taking a seat next to her as they continued to assess her. "Yes, I've got a female approximately twenty-one years old..."

The ride to the hospital felt like it was taking forever. They continued to pump fluids in her as they kept checking her blood pressure. He'd never seen Lois look so pale ... Counting the time around finals when she'd had the stomach flu.

As she was checked into the hospital, he stayed nearby. He watched as the doctors continued to work on her. He gave the nurse Lois's emergency contact information and paced outside her room in the Lobby. He'd never met her mother before but, from the stories he'd heard, she was a force to be reckoned with. He glanced around the entrance and saw a woman with short blonde hair and a young brunette that looked to be around seventeen right behind her. He'd recognize that look anywhere. Lois wore it on her face every time she got determined about a lead or angle on a story they were working on...

He approached them before they could check with reception, "Mrs. Lane?"

She turned to face him, giving him a once over. "Yes?"

"I'm Clark Kent. A friend of your daughter's..."

"*Friend????*" she fumed at him. "A *friend* wouldn't have allowed her to be in this situation in the first place..."

"Mom, calm down," the young woman whom he assumed was Lois's younger sister, Lucy, pleaded. "He probably didn't have anything to do with that..."

Ellen seemed to swallow her anger for the moment, "I'm sorry. I'm just very..."

He nodded, "She's still unconscious, but they won't tell me anything..."

Ellen nodded, looking at him sympathetically. "I'll get you an update when I know something..." she pushed past him and headed towards the front desk. The nurse seemed to recognize her and took her back to Lois immediately. He waited patiently, but hadn't seen Ellen or Lucy return yet. He tuned in his hearing to try and find out something...

"Mrs. Lane, we're doing everything we can, but right now we

don't know *what* she was drugged with. Her blood pressure is very low and we've pumped her stomach but..."

They needed to know what she'd been drugged with. He drew a fist as he held in his anger. He headed towards the exit and headed back to the hotel. If finding out what Lois had been drugged with would help he would get an answer for them one way or another.

Seeing Roarke inside the hotel room he'd tried to force Lois in, Clark headed towards it to confront him. He banged on the door, "Hey, open the door!"

"Piss off, jackass!" Roarke shouted drunkenly from the other side of the door.

It took everything in him not to tear the door off its hinges right there. "Piss off?" he repeated softly to himself. "Okay," He looked around and saw other people watching him. He couldn't use his gifts but as he examined the door it wasn't made of the best material. He could break it down without anyone being the wiser. He took a step back and lifted his foot, holding back as much strength as he could he kicked the door open.

"Hey!!!" Roarke's eyes widened when he saw Clark heading for him and tried to make a run for it.

"I don't think so..." Clark said as he grabbed him by the collar and slammed him against the wall.

"Kent, what's your deal man?" Roarke whined against him.

"What did you put in her drink?" He spat angrily as he pushed him against the wall.

"I didn't put anything in anyone's drink..." Roarke argued half-heartedly. He could tell from his heart rate he was lying.

He slammed him against the wall once more, "You can tell me or you can tell the police... What the hell did you put in her drink???"

Roarke seemed to be contemplating his situation for a split second before rolling his eyes and admitting, "It was nothing, man. Just a roofie."

"Where are they?" He tightened his grasp on Roarke's neck.

"I..." Roarke shrugged

He was lying. Clark released his grasp on him, holding onto his anger as he held back his strength with everything he had, and punching Roarke in the face before grabbing him by the collar once more. "Where *are* they??"

Frightened by the anger he saw reflected in Clark's eyes, Roarke reached into his pocket and pulled them out, "Here..." he held up the silver pack.

Clark took the pack from Roarke, releasing his grasp on him once more before striking him again and grabbing him by the collar once more, "You better pray to God she's all right..." he warned before throwing Roarke to the ground once more and heading back to the hospital.

The monotone beeping seemed to register around her as she slowly woke up. She looked around the room and saw monitors and what looked like a hospital room. She glanced across the room and saw Clark in a chair by the door, slumped over asleep with his glasses sliding down his face. Fragmented memories from the night before came flooding back, "Oh, God..." she winced as she tried to sit up. The pain in her head became more prominent as she tried to move.

"Lois?" She glanced to the side and saw Clark was by the bed next to her, awake.

"Clark?" She looked around, wincing as she became more alert and feeling more pain as she moved. "What happened? Where am I?"

"You don't remember what happened last night?" he asked concerned.

"We went to a party...that Roarke guy threatened me...I remember us dancing..." She trailed off looking at him for

confirmation, “I think I was drugged...I remember someone saying something about me needing to lie down...”

Clark’s expression was grim. “Yeah, that guy Roarke and Jenkins drugged you...I was able to stop them in time and find out what it was they put in your drink...Doctor said it was a mild sedative...” He looked at her with concern, “How are you feeling?”

“Okay, I guess...” Lois sighed. She looked at him in concern, “They didn’t...I mean...”

He seemed to thankfully realize what she was referring to and shook his head. “No, no, nothing happened. Thankfully I got there before they could... You were fighting them tooth and nail. Then, once the adrenaline wore off, you passed out.”

Lois nodded, taking his hand in hers, “Thank you,” She recalled something else that had happened last night but wasn’t sure if she remembered correctly. Had she really done it? She glanced up at him cautiously. He looked like he hadn’t slept in a week. The worry on his face was evident. “Clark...”

“Hmmm?”

He seemed really distant. This man sitting next to her was not the young man she’d come to know over the last six months. He was terrified. She tightened her grasp on his hand, “I’m okay,” she squeaked out, not so convincingly. “You know me...jumping in without looking...I guess I should have given that scoop to the school board before printing it like you said...”

“Lois, this is *not* your fault,” Clark reassured her adamantly.

He was a few inches away from her, holding her hand in his own. There was something about him that made her feel so safe. It was one of the many things she loved about him. She’d definitely fallen hard for him. Had she really kissed him last night? She really wanted to...

He’d saved her last night.

“I know,” she said softly before grabbing his collar and pulling him towards her to capture his lips. He tasted of coffee and doughnuts. She could feel him respond to her immediately as his hand moved to cup her cheek. She smiled against his lips as she released his collar, allowing her hand to rest against his cheek.

“Lois? Are you awake yet? I brought some breakfast...” Her sister’s voice intruded before she could break off the kiss. “Oh, my...”

She couldn’t help but blush as Clark pulled away, glancing back at her kid sister, standing there with a bag of what looked like biscuits. “Hi, Luce...” she could feel her cheeks turning a crimson red as she glanced at her sister.

“Hi,” Lucy responded, looking everywhere but at them.

“Ahem,” Lois cleared her throat, “Have you met Clark?”

“We met last night,” Lucy said with a grin. “Friend, huh?”

Clark blushed, not responding as Lois countered, “The best.”

Lucy nodded, “I’m gonna leave these here and ...I’m gonna go let the nurse know you’re awake...”

“Thanks, Luce,” Lois said, fighting back laughter as she watched her very embarrassed little sister leave the room.

“You did *what*???”

Clark hung his head as he listened to his father tear into him about how irresponsible he’d been. After making sure Lois had gotten home okay and leaving her with her mother and sister, he’d flown out to Smallville for his weekly visit with his parents. Unfortunately, visiting wasn’t high on Jonathan Kent’s priority list at the moment.

“Jonathan, calm down,” his mother urged, placing a supportive hand on Clark’s shoulder. “It was lucky Clark was there...”

“What if someone had seen you?” His dad fumed, “How would you have explained... You can *not* afford to lose your temper like that...”

“Gee, I wonder where he gets it from...” His mom said with

an arched eyebrow at his dad.

“You could easily lose control and slip up and then... Metropolis isn’t the Outback, you know. People in the city are always looking to make a quick buck. If they find out about you, they’ll put you in a laboratory, and ...” His dad continued.

Clark rolled his eyes and finished the familiar phrase with him. “... ‘dissect me like a frog.’ I know, Dad. Believe me, I’m trying my best to be like everybody else here, but I didn’t know what else to do...” Clark stood up and paced around the room. “You weren’t there... You didn’t see what those...I could have killed them if I wanted to...and believe me, I was tempted to...but I didn’t. The door wasn’t made of very good material. Anyone could have kicked it in...” Clark shook his head. “It was my fault she was there, to begin with...”

“Son, this is nobody’s fault but those ...illiterate...pea-brained...Darren Sharper wannabes...” He was doing his best to keep calm but it was hard. Clark noticed the way he held his hands in a fist as he fumed angrily about the situation. He knew he’d done the right thing, but knowing how scared his dad was for his safety made everything feel less satisfying. He hadn’t exactly been satisfied when he’d confronted Roarke about drugging Lois, but he hadn’t been ashamed either.

“I think what’s important here is that Lois is safe and those thugs are in jail...” His mom began, trying to change the subject. She turned towards Clark, “You have to be careful, though. You can’t be drawing attention to yourself like that...”

“I know,” Clark shook his head, “I know, I’m sorry...It’s just...seeing them...knowing what they were trying to do to Lois...”

“I’d have clocked ‘em too,” His dad admitted sheepishly. He was quiet a moment, then patted Clark on the shoulder, “You really care about her, huh?”

“I think I love her,” Clark said quietly.

His mom looked at him quizzically, “Are you just figuring this out? Your dad and I have known that from the first time you spoke about her...”

“Well, don’t wait too long to tell her.” He said, giving him a hug. “Please just be more careful. If anything ever happened to you...”

“I know,” Clark sighed, “I’m sorry for worrying you guys.”

Present Day...

Floyd set the phone down for the umpteenth time, shaking his head. “Well, uh, I’m not getting an answer...”

Clark nodded, looking around the apartment skeptically. The man hadn’t been lying. This was definitely his apartment. It had pictures of himself with the young brunette woman all over. There was a picture of himself with an elderly couple, his parents he guessed.

He stared at the pictures intently, hoping that looking at them would help jog some kind of memory. As he stared at the picture of himself and the young woman once more, he couldn’t help but smile. The way she was looking at him...he could feel his heart well up. This was someone he loved very much. That much he could tell.

Floyd seemed to notice Clark’s gaze and nodded. “That’s your fiancée, Ms. Lane. Real looker...She never gave up on you. Was convinced you were out there somewhere.”

“Out where?” Clark asked confused.

“Wherever you’ve been,” Floyd shrugged. “After so long the police declared you dead...”

“*WHAT*???”

Floyd shrugged, “That had been five years ago.” He looked around uneasily, “What happened to you?”

“I don’t know...I remember running until I found myself here...Everything else is pretty hazy.” Clark explained. A hesitant hand rested on his shoulder.

“Try and get some rest. I’ll keep trying the Kents and see if I can get a hold of someone for you...I, uh, I’m glad you’re safe now.”

“Thanks,” Clark nodded, looking around the room.

‘Safe?’

Was he safe? He didn’t know. All he could remember was fear. Now, all of a sudden he was faced with new emotions and wasn’t sure how to handle them. He glanced at the picture again. Fiancée. He had been engaged. He had loved this woman. Something in him told him he still did.

He looked around the apartment aimlessly, hoping to connect with something. He walked toward the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed. It felt comfortable enough. He pulled the sheets back and noticed a silk negligee that had been bunched up in the corner. He glanced at it, picking it up, fingering the material gently. He brought it to his face, inhaling the scent of lavender and orchids. There was something so familiar about that smell...

Trask poured over the site plans as he barked out orders, “Jenkins, you take the south perimeter...” He pointed at an area in red on the map and then pointed at an area in blue, “Myerson, take the east, and Johnson, you take the west. I’ll take the north. He couldn’t have gotten far...”

“Mr. Trask, without the meteorite he could have gotten a lot farther...” Johnson began to argue.

“Then, we’ll have to expand the search...” Trask snapped. “I’ve worked too hard and too long to let it all blow up in our faces now...”

Lucy Lane touched the edge of the couch hesitantly, tapping her fingertips against the fabric as she gazed at Lois cautiously. “So, this Nightfall...kinda scary, huh?”

Lois turned back to her sister with a watery smile, “Yeah,”

Lucy caught her gaze and placed a hesitant hand on her shoulder, “Do you want to talk about it?”

Lois shook her head, “What’s to talk about?”

“Jimmy called me earlier. You can’t let people like that get to you...” Lucy began.

“I know...” Lois sighed, raking a hand through her hair “It’s just when people talk about him like he doesn’t matter...I just get so...”

“You’re grieving. It’s natural, but you’ve gotta hold it together when you’re at work.” Lucy soothed.

“It’s been five years today...” Lois said in between tears. “Five years...”

“Clark wouldn’t want you to do this to yourself...” Lucy said, rubbing her sister’s back.

“How do you know what Clark would want?” Lois snapped. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this. None of this makes sense. We were supposed to...” The tears fell down Lois’s cheeks and Lucy held her close.

“I know...” Lucy sighed. “If there was anything I could do to fix this you know I would...”

Lois nodded, pulling herself away from Lucy for the moment. “I know. I just... Everything I thought...dreamt...it’s gone, Luce. It’s not something you just get over...”

“Have you tried talking to someone?”

“Like who?” Lois asked. “How do I even begin to explain what happened in Smallville...what happened to Clark...and Jamie...” her voice cracked as she mentioned the last name. Every time she mentioned Jamie’s name she cried.

“Lois...”

“Every time I feel like I’m going to be okay or ... start to feel human again I get pulled right back again. Is it insane that I keep hoping he’ll just show up on my doorstep like the last five years never happened?”

Lucy shook her head, “No, I think that’s only natural when

you lose someone you love...”

Six Years Ago...

“Lois...” he rasped out in between heated kisses. He leaned back against his couch, cupping her cheek hesitantly as their embrace continued. “Oh, God, Lois...”

It had been three weeks since the attack at the Lexor. Roarke and Jenkins had been charged with aggravated assault, kicked off the football team, and expelled from the school. The last few weeks she tried to forget everything that had happened by doing what she did best...distancing herself. She found solace in work and school and lately...in the arms of Clark Kent.

They’d been out on a half a dozen dates since the incident and she’d enjoyed pushing the envelope with him as their *very* heated make-out sessions became more and more intense. She’d been surprised with how patient he was being. He never tried to push her or touch her without permission.

She wondered if he felt the same way about her as she did him. She knew he definitely liked her and enjoyed spending time with her, but he never pushed things past kissing. She recalled her breakup with her high school boyfriend, Joe and how he had warned her that no guy was going to wait around forever if she wasn’t willing to give up the goods. Clark was a few years older than her...most likely more experienced. Would he expect her to ‘give up the goods’ as Joe had put it? Would she be willing to? Something about crossing that line terrified her. She knew she definitely loved him...

She nibbled on his neck, teasing him with her breath against his neck, molding her body against him as he held her small frame against his. She had him laid out on the couch beneath her. What would it feel like to touch him...? She could feel her heart racing a million beats a minute as she moved to straddle him as she captured his lips. He was so good at ...She slipped her hand in-between their bodies, brushing against him ever so lightly and felt him respond immediately.

“Whoa!” He pushed her back away from him, sitting up halfway and moving away from her as he grabbed her hand from where it had drifted. “What are you doing?”

She was a bit shocked by his reaction. Most of the time it had been the other way around with previous boyfriends trying to push the boundaries and see how far they could push her. Apparently, that had not been on Clark’s mind. She glanced at him shyly, “Just curious...”

He gave her a wry smile before offering her a half grin, “Careful — curiosity killed the cat.”

She couldn’t help but offer a full smile to that remark. What had she been doing? She’d been curious. What would she have done if he hadn’t stopped her? Would she have wanted to stop? She had felt him respond to her touch ...apparently that had scared him enough to stop kissing her. Maybe he wasn’t as experienced as she thought?

“Well...” she shrugged, not sure what to say.

He looked at her carefully then sighed, “Lois, are you okay?”

“Fine,” she shrugged, leaning towards him to recapture his lips. “It’s nothing...”

“No, that was definitely...*something*.” He argued, pulling away from her. “What’s going on?”

“It’s nothing. It’s fine. I was just curious.”

“About what?” he asked.

“What you would do...”

He looked at her aghast, “Lois, I would never...Why would you think I would?”

“Most guys do one way or another...” she said shyly. She really wanted to stop talking about this.

“I’m not most guys,” Clark said firmly.

“No, you’re not,” she smiled back at him.

“What gives? What’s going on?” Clark pressed.

She pulled herself away from him for a moment, “I don’t want to talk about it right now,”

“Seems to me lately you haven’t wanted to do much talking... at all.”

He’d noticed what she’d been doing. Of course, he did. He seemed to notice everything. “It’s been a rough few weeks...” She said quietly.

“I know,” he acknowledged, “I’ve tried to give you your space, but Lois I’m just not... WE’RE not ready to cross that threshold just yet... especially with everything that happened a few weeks ago.”

She shrugged then looked at him with a wry smile, “You’re kinda incredible you know that?” He smiled back at her. “I think I knew you wouldn’t push things. I guess after everything I just needed to prove it... if that makes sense? You’re really something.” She leaned up to kiss him on the lips. “I guess that’s why I love you...”

She stopped. Panic was written all over her face as she did the best impression of a statue she could. She’d said it. She’d said the scary words she’d been holding in for months and thinking about... Oh, God. They’d only been dating for a few weeks. He probably thought she was a lunatic... One minute she’s trying to grope him the next she’s declaring her love for him...

To her surprise, he didn’t run. He didn’t pull away. He smiled back at her and cupped her cheek and whispered, “I love you too.” She’d never been so relieved in all her life. He leaned in to capture her lips, keeping them feather light and short. She sighed in relief as she concentrated on kissing him back. He loved her. She loved him. Thank God.

Present Day...

Martha arrived in Metropolis amidst the chaos in the airport. With all the fear that was in the air from the meteor, Nightfall, it had been near impossible to get a flight from Smallville to Metropolis. Jonathan hadn’t been able to make it. When Wayne Irig had appeared in their barn, bloody and bruised Jonathan had insisted on staying back to take care of his friend. It was for the best she supposed. Arguing with him about Clark wasn’t something she wanted to do.

There was a feeling she couldn’t shake. Clark was alive. She *knew* it. She knew this was hard on Lois. After losing her and Clark’s child to an unknown cause of death at the age of sixteen weeks she had lost the last thing that kept her close to Clark. Ever since the funeral, it had been vague cards and notes back and forth. Lois had buried herself in her work and become an award-winning journalist in the last few years, but she wasn’t the same Lois she’d met years ago. She was hardened and cold, pushing everyone around her away.

She looked around the airport, hoping to see Lois or a familiar face from the Planet. “Well, I guess I can find the apartment from here...” she pulled out her phone and began to dial.

Lucy looked at the caller id on her sister’s phone as she slept. It was Martha Kent. After everything Lois had been through the last few days and the threat of Nightfall, the last thing she needed to do was dredge through the past with her almost mother-in-law. Lucy held down the power button to Lois’s cell phone and turned it off.

“Sorry, sis, but right now you need some rest.”

Clark stared at the address book in front of him. Something about the name ‘Lois Lane’ was so familiar to him. He needed to find her. All he seemed to remember was the green room and bits and pieces of this woman Floyd called ‘Ms. Lane’. He assumed Lois was the same person, but couldn’t be sure.

He needed answers.

He stood up carefully and headed towards the phone and

began to dial.

“You’ve reached Lois Lane...” a familiar voice came on the recording. “I can’t get to my phone right now but if you leave a message I’ll get back to you as soon as I can...”

He hung up the phone and sighed. She didn’t seem to be answering. Maybe he’d have better luck trying to see her in person?

“Lucy!!” Lois cried out through the apartment as she gathered her things. “You let me oversleep! I’m going to be late!”

“You needed your rest, Lois,” Lucy argued, following her sister throughout the apartment.

“I was supposed to meet Martha this morning. I’ve missed the staff meeting. Perry is going to kill me.” Lois rambled on as she threw her clothes on.

“You’ll live,” Lucy spat back. She was about to give Lois her own thoughts on how she’d been taking care of herself lately but stopped when there was a knock at the door.

“That’s probably Martha,” Lois sighed, shaking her head. “I’m almost ready. Will you get the door while I finish up?”

Lucy nodded, intent on giving Martha Kent a piece of her mind for upsetting Lois further. “Mrs. Kent, I...” She stopped when she realized it wasn’t Martha Kent.

Three men dressed in uniform stood at the door. They pushed their way through, closing the door, “I believe we have some catching up to do. You’re not Lois Lane. Where is she?”

Lucy didn’t answer, praying whoever these men were would leave before finding her sister in the bedroom.

“Lucy?” Lois’s voice echoed from the bedroom, “I don’t have time to...” Lois stopped when she stepped out of her bedroom ready for work, “You...”

“Oh, Ms. Lane, I’m afraid you’re going to have to make time,” Jason Trask said, raising a gun at her. “Where is he?”

Martha Kent stormed up the steps to her son’s apartment. It had taken four hours to get through the madhouse at the airport but she had gotten there. The familiar figure of Clark’s landlord was standing in the hallway when she approached, “Mrs. Kent? You got my messages!”

“What messages?” she asked, concerned.

“Your son... He’s alive. He was sitting on these steps here last night... I tried to call you.” He rambled.

Martha struggled to find her voice as she felt the knot in her throat begin to expand. He was alive. Clark was alive. “You saw my son?” she managed to squeak out in between tears.

Floyd nodded. “He’s in rough shape. Didn’t know his name or nothing. I thought about calling the police but thought they might think I’m crazy. Anyway, I knew you and Ms. Lane had been looking for him for years...” He motioned for her to follow him to the apartment door. “Like, I said before he’s in pretty rough shape. Didn’t know who I was at all. I let him in last night to get some rest...”

He opened the door and Martha peered over his shoulder, “Clark?”

Lois immediately recognized Trask, the man who had shot Clark. “You... you... you... sick, twisted, disgusting, murdering... sociopathic... psychopath...” Lois fumed angrily. “Get the hell out of my apartment!! Haven’t you taken enough from me?”

“Oh, I haven’t taken anything...” Trask countered, “I believe it’s you that’s taken something from me. Now, where is *HE*?”

“Who?” Lucy asked, confused.

“Clark Kent. He escaped... I know he had to have contacted you...”

“What???” The color drained from Lois’s face as she fell to her knees. “He’s alive? I knew it! What did you do to him, you sociopath...”

“Yes, a ruse so we didn’t draw unwanted attention... He had information we wanted... He didn’t want to cooperate the old-fashioned way...” He turned to one of his men, “Check the bedroom...” He then turned back to Lois, squatting down to face her so that he was a few inches from her face, “You know, it’s considered treason to harbor a fugitive. Just remember that...”

She spat in his face, “Go to hell!”

He raised his hand to strike her but was distracted when his men returned to the room, “No one’s here.”

Trask glared at her. “Very well. It seems we were mistaken.” He turned back to Lois, “We’ll be seeing you,” With that he left the apartment, slamming the door behind them.

“Oh, God...” Lois gasped, panic written all over her face.

Lucy knelt down to hold her sister, “It’s okay, Lois. I’m right here...”

“He’s alive... Lucy, did you hear what they said? Where’s my phone?”

The apartment was empty. Martha began to cry, burying her face in her hands, “Where is he?” She swatted at Floyd angrily. “Where is my boy? Where is he? Where is he? Where is he?”

“I don’t know...” Floyd said, trying to get out of Martha’s grasp. She was a petite elderly woman but there was power behind each blow. “He was *here*.”

“Well, where is he now?”

Perry White stared uneasily as he stared at the young man that had entered his newsroom. For five years he’d listened to Lois mourn over her fiancé, Clark Kent, who had been shot in a scuffle with a government agent. Five years of trying to pull her out of the maximum security enforced shell she’d buried herself in after he’d died. She had voiced so many scenarios over the years when they never found his body... feeling like he just wasn’t gone. It looked like that feeling had been correct.

The hustle and bustle of the room was quiet. Everyone was staring. Perry approached the young man cautiously, “Kent? Is that... you?”

He looked back at him curiously, “You... know me?”

“Yes...” Perry began cautiously. “Son, are you okay?” He eyed the torn jeans and shirt Clark was wearing skeptically. It was the same outfit Lois had described to the police when she’d been searching for him.

“I don’t know.” He said softly. “I was looking for a...” He snapped his fingers as if he was trying to remember, “Lois Lane...”

Perry eyed Lois’s desk where Clark was standing. “She, uh, isn’t in yet. Here, why don’t you come into my office and we’ll talk.” He then turned back to the peering eyes of his newsroom, “What’s everyone standing around for? We’ve got a paper to get out! Olsen, as soon as Lois gets in have her meet me in my office!”

“Got it, Chief,” Jimmy replied with a smile.

Lois tapped her foot as she cradled her cell phone in-between her neck and shoulder and made her way out of the apartment with Lucy not far behind, “Come on, come on, pick up, pick up...”

“Lois, wait up! I’m coming with you!” Lucy called after her.

“Hello?” the familiar voice on the other end answered.

“Martha! Thank God! You won’t believe what just happened...”

“Lois, he’s alive!” Martha cried. “He’s alive and he’s missing and...”

“What?” Lois felt her heart jump into her throat. “What do you mean?”

“His landlord found him last night. Let him in his apartment. Then this morning when we came he was gone...” Martha cried.

“Oh, God... Martha, those men that attacked us in Smallville

were here. That Trask guy said he’d escaped and they were looking for him...”

“Oh, God, you don’t think they found him, do you?” Martha asked, panicked.

“I don’t think so... They just left a few minutes ago. I’m headed to the Planet right now...” Lois sighed, “He’s alive. We know he’s alive. We just have to find him.”

“How?”

Six Years Ago...

“What is this place again?” Clark asked looking up at the staircase skeptically. It had been three months since their fiasco with Roarke and Jenkins. They were three months away from graduation. Over the last few months, they’d been working more and more with the Planet to complete the required hours needed for their internship. Lois was itching to start working as a reporter instead of fetching research for the reporters at the Planet but had yet to be given a shot by Mr. White.

“Cat Grant said there was a tip about a big meeting going down between a congressman and some big shot in the military. We’re scoping it out to see if there’s any merit.” Lois shrugged, walking carefully through the darkened office.

“Cat Grant is a *Gossip* columnist...” Clark reminded her. “I don’t think this falls under a research assistant’s job description either...”

Lois shot him a look, “Oh, come on, live a little. Just imagine the look on Perry White’s face when he realizes the biggest story of the year was cracked open by two first years. He’ll have to give us a shot at reporting then...”

He gazed at her skeptically, “This could be dangerous,” He warned.

“...or not,” she countered. “Come on, we’ll look around and see if we can see anything.” She motioned for him to follow her up the stairs.

He sighed. She could tell he seemed to have an internal battle for a moment before agreeing. “Fine, but I go first. Just in case...”

Lois rolled her eyes, “Fine, just hurry up!”

Ian Harrington stormed through the office impatiently, “I don’t appreciate being summoned, Roarke!” He glared at the elderly man sitting in the chair in the conference room.

“I sign your checks!” Roarke snapped back, standing to his feet to confront Harrington, “You’ll come when you’re called. Got it?” He jabbed a finger in Harrington’s chest.

Crouched in the corner of a supply closet with the door cracked just enough for them to see through was Lois and Clark. “Clark isn’t that...?” Lois whispered in his ear.

He nodded, whispering back, “Congressman Ian Harrington. Guess that tip was legit... but isn’t that Whitley’s dad?”

“I see the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree...” Lois muttered under her breath. “Where’s the camera?” He handed it to her without even looking over his shoulder as they focused on watching the exchange between the two men.

Harrington handed Roarke an envelope and Roarke handed a larger envelope to Harrington. The two men examined the contents and Harrington ran a hand through his hair, “That’s the last of the system specs. I’ll have the information on the testing for you tomorrow. Dates, procedures, the whole thing...”

Roarke nodded, “Good. What about a new vote?”

Harrington sighed, “I can’t initiate a re-vote until after the test results are analyzed and the plan rejected. Hopefully...”

Roarke took a step closer, grabbing Harrington by the collar, “*Hopefully* isn’t good enough. That’s not why I bought insurance... *you*.”

Harrington pulled away, adjusting himself, “You don’t own

me, Roarke.”

“I own you lock, stock, and re-election fund, Mr. Chairman. Never forget that.”

Lois continued to snap pictures over Clark’s shoulder as they continued to watch the exchange. He wasn’t sure what this ‘vote’ was but it didn’t sound good and this Roarke guy seemed dangerous. The guy standing behind him seemed equally dangerous.

“Lois, we’ve got to get out of here...” Clark whispered as the men moved closer to the closet.

“How do you plan on doing that?” Lois whispered between gritted teeth.

They watched as Roarke left the office with the burly man and Harrington stayed behind, shaking his head, “What have I done?”

Lois stretched slightly to readjust herself and knocked the box of pens on the shelf behind them. “Crap...” she whispered.

“Lo-is...” Clark glared at her, closing the door and holding the knob closed. “Great, what’s your big plan when he discovers us in here... which he will...” he said, staring at the door.

“Take off your shirt,” Lois said hurriedly.

“*What??*” he gasped in a hushed whisper as she tugged at his t-shirt to lift it over his head. “Lo-is...” He stopped when he noticed her unbuttoning her blouse. “What are you doing?”

“Shut up and kiss me,” she ordered, mussing up his hair.

“Are you cra...?” He was cut off when she captured his lips, pressing her frame against his. Her right leg hiked up slightly, increasing contact between their bodies. He could feel his body responding to her as the cotton from her blouse and the lace from her bra pressed up against his chest. “Oh, God...” he moaned against her lips, releasing his hold on the doorknob.

She grabbed his hand and brought it to her chest so he was cupping her right breast as she deepened the kiss, slipping her tongue inside the warm crevices of his mouth. He could taste the lingering flavor of chocolate and coffee on her tongue. He could feel his body responding to her. Her hand rested on his chest, brushing against his pectorals. “You are so...” she murmured against his lips as she moved downward, brushing her lips against his collarbone.

He returned the gesture, teasing the lace on her shoulder, nibbling at the flesh mounds that were held together with the tiny piece of white lace. “God, I love you...” he murmured against her chest as she reached in-between their bodies to cup him through his jeans. This time he didn’t pull away.

She leaned her head back, stroking the back of his neck as he began to forget about the impending danger that waited outside the closet door. “Oh, God, yes...” she murmured as he brushed his lips against the white lace that held her flesh mounds. “Clark, that is so...”

The door opened and both their heads jerked up as they looked up at the intruders. “What do we have here?” Harrington snapped as he caught the two in their state of undress.

Clark looked around sheepishly, “Uh, sorry, we were just...”

Harrington glanced between the two of them for a moment before nodding, “This is private property... If you want to canoodle your honey do it in a hotel room...”

They nodded, quickly grabbing their things as Lois worked on buttoning her blouse back up and Clark threw his shirt back on. Once Harrington was out of earshot and they were in the elevator Lois muttered, “Worked like a charm...”

Clark smirked at her, “A little too well...” He admitted, running a hand through his hair.

“Yeah,” Lois smiled back at him. Her face was still flushed from earlier. “Walk me home?”

“Always,” he said, wrapping an arm around her as they headed to the streets outside to hail a cab.

The ride back to Lois’s apartment was quiet. Her body was still on fire from their encounter in the closet. She could still feel his lips on her skin and his hands on her...

“We’re here,” the cab driver said, pointing to Lois’s apartment building.

Lois thanked him and Clark paid for the cab, then followed her up to her apartment. Once they were at the door, Lois pulled her keys out, unlocking her door. “So...”

“So...” he echoed, gazing back at her.

“Sorry, I sprung that on you. We needed a distraction and that...”

“...was *definitely* a distraction.” Clark acknowledged. “It worked.”

“Yeah,” Lois smiled back at him, noticing the flush tone of his face. He was still as affected by their encounter as she was. “I guess we should... talk...”

“...or not,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

“...or not...” she smiled back at him as she felt his lips press against hers. That spark she’d felt at the beginning of their relationship seemed to have morphed into a raging inferno. She knew she loved him and he was so good at...

She ran her hands up and down his chest methodically, encouraging the embrace. He deepened the kiss, cupping her face with one hand. She linked her arms around his neck, pulling him closer. She tugged at his lower lip as he explored the inner confines of her mouth.

She could feel the evidence of his arousal pressed up against her as their embrace continued. He picked her up in his arms and she wrapped her legs around his waist as they made their way into the apartment, not wanting to lose contact with one another for a second. “Oh, God, yes...” she murmured against his lips.

She raked her hands through his hair as he staggered away from the doorway, keeping her wrapped in his arms as he began to explore the crevices beneath her chin with his tongue. They fell to the ground and she gazed back at the door that was still cracked open a few feet away from them. “Door...” she managed to murmur.

He looked over his shoulder and leaned his left foot back just enough to kick it closed. Before she could respond he was back in her arms, nibbling at her collarbone and slipping his hand beneath her blouse so he was cupping her right breast. “Yes... Oh, God, Clark... don’t stop...” she moaned in pleasure.

“Is this a dream?” She gasped in-between heated kisses.

“Not unless we’re having the same one...” He murmured against her skin. “We can stop... whenever... you... want...”

“Never...” she whispered, reaching for the hem of his t-shirt and tugging it over his head. He pulled back, long enough to disentangle himself from the shirt and throw it over his shoulder. She gasped, taking in his perfectly sculpted body for the first time. He was... perfect. “Wow...”

Before she could voice her protest he captured her lips once more, “You are so... gorgeous...” he murmured against her lips, resting his other hand on the small of her back.

“I love you, Clark...” she whispered as he began to rain a trail of feather light kisses against her collarbone, slipping lower and lower.

“I love you, Lois Lane...” he murmured against her skin.

She glanced down, he still hadn’t unbuttoned her blouse, leaving her to make that choice. She gazed at him hungrily through her eyelashes. Right now all she wanted to do was lose herself in his arms. Was she ready to cross that line with him... go where she’d never been before? She felt the tightness in her stomach as his lips brushed against her skin. She definitely felt ready.

She tugged at the top button to her blouse, revealing her ivory skin to him. He groaned against her skin as he gazed at her hungrily before looking up at her, “Are you sure?”

She reached up, running her hands over both sides of his face. They were a few millimeters away from one another. She felt her breath catch in her throat as she saw the desire reflected back in his eyes. She ran her hand over his left cheek and whispered, “Make love to me, Clark Kent,”

Without a word he scooped her up and carried her to the bedroom, kicking the door closed behind him. He laid her on the bed and she pulled him down with her, linking her arms around his neck. “I love you so much...” he whispered against her skin as he rained a trail of feather light kisses against her abdomen, tracing the waistband of her pants cautiously.

He seemed hesitant. Scared almost. She gazed back at him with a smile, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong...” He whispered. “I’ve just ...I mean...”

She caught the look in his eyes and immediately understood. “Oh, me neither...” she said hesitantly. “I’ve never...”

“So, we’re both in uncharted territory here...” Clark reasoned, brushing his thumb against her waistband ever so lightly. “We could stop...”

“Do you want to stop?” she asked him incredulously, praying the answer would be ‘no’.

He shook his head, “No.”

“Me neither,” She said, pressing her body against him. He groaned against her skin and she could feel him tense up. “Just love me, Clark. We’ll figure it out together...” She reached for the waistband of his pants. His hand covered hers. His lips met hers and the passion between them began to build as they sought the closeness of being skin to skin with one another. One by one each item of clothing fell to the floor and the couple lost themselves in one another’s arms. They continued exploring one another’s bodies throughout the night...

The next morning, Clark awoke to the most incredible feeling — holding the woman he loved in his arms after spending all night making love to her. He gazed at her sleeping figure curled up so perfectly against him...as if she was meant to be there forever. He brushed a stray hair out of her face, cupping her cheek.

“Clark?” she mumbled in her sleep, not quite waking up.

“Good morning, beautiful,” he whispered as she opened her eyes to gaze up at him.

“Morning,” she mumbled against his chest. “Oh, God, what time is it?”

“A little after five,” he whispered, “Go back to sleep.”

She shook her head, “No, I’ve got to start getting ready and you...” she gave him a lingering gaze, “need to go home and change.”

“Change?” He teased, feigning confusion. “I just thought I’d wear what I’m wearing now...”

She rolled her eyes, wrinkling her nose at him, “I don’t think so...Some things are better left in the bedroom...” she said, running her hands up and down his chest seductively. “I was ready to jump your bones the minute you took your shirt off...I can only imagine how Cat Grant would react if you came to the Planet like this...” She gazed down at him appreciatively.

“Really?” He teased, cupping her cheek as he outlined her jawline with his thumb and index finger.

She raked her fingernails against his chest as she nodded her head, brushing her nude body against him. “You’re so ...” She whispered as he nibbled at her neckline, “I don’t know how we’re going to make it through the day...”

“Five times wasn’t enough for you last night?” he murmured against her skin as she tightened her thighs around his waist. “You’re insatiable. What am I going to do with you?”

She reached in-between their bodies, “I have a few ideas...” she whispered, hovering over him as she felt him begin to respond to her touch.

“So, do I...” he murmured.

“Oh, Clark...” she moaned in pleasure as she leaned forward, recapturing his lips with her own, intent on repeating last night’s activities.

“Lois??” The bang of the front door to her apartment caused both of them to look up.

“Oh, God...” Clark groaned in agony. “Who is that?”

“Lucy...” Lois muttered, covering her face with her hands. “I’m going to kill her...”

“Lois?? Where are you??? Your front door was open...”

Clark stifled his laughter and she covered his mouth with her hand, “Shhh, do you want her to come in here?”

“It’s either laugh or cry at this moment...” He said glancing downward.

“I know. I’m sorry...” she whispered. “Maybe if we’re really...”

“She’s in your apartment. I don’t think you can pretend not to be...” He began to argue but was cut off by the bedroom door swinging open.

“Lucy!!!” Lois pulled the sheet up over her and Clark, trying to maintain some sort of modesty with her sister in the room, even though she was in her bed completely naked, straddling him. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out what Lucy had interrupted.

“Oh, my God!!” Lucy ducked out of the room and slammed the door behind her. Her voice echoed from the other side of the door, “Sorry! Seriously really, really, *really* sorry...”

“Guess it’s time to get up,” Lois reached for a tank top and shorts that were on the floor and began to pull them on. Clark watched her get dressed and held a hand up, “I’m going to need a minute...”

She nodded, “Sorry,” she whispered before heading out of the bedroom to deal with her sister

Lois stepped out into the living room to find her sister sitting on the couch, toying with a loose thread on the arm rest. “Hey, Luce.”

“Hey,” Lucy still wasn’t looking at her.

“So...”

“So...” Lucy echoed.

“Uh, what’s up?” Lois asked.

“Nothing compared to what was up with you...” Lucy said shaking her head in embarrassment. “I am SO sorry...I...” she shook her head.

“I get that,” Lois said. “Just...knock first ...”

Lucy nodded. “I just never thought ...”

Lois sighed, not wanting to get into her personal life with Lucy just yet, “So, what’d you stop by for?”

“Oh, uh, mom is being...well, MOM.” Lucy shrugged. “I was hoping maybe I could get some reinforcements?”

Lois sighed. Ellen Lane was a force to be reckoned with. She always steamrolled right through everything and would leave disaster in her wake if she had to. She had struggled to deal with her mother growing up and even still today. When her father had left their mother in her late teens it had caused her mother to go through a downward spiral of drinking and self-loathing that only seemed to stop once Lois defied her father’s wishes and began to pursue a career outside of the medical field. Once she’d declared her independence, Ellen had begun attending AA meetings and began her recovery one step at a time. Despite the changes for the better she was still hard to deal with at times for both Lane sisters.

“What now?” Lois asked.

“Well, you know how I’m graduating next month, right?” Lucy prompted. Lois nodded. “Guess who mom refuses to allow to attend MY graduation?”

“Daddy?” Lois guessed sheepishly, knowing the answer already.

“Not, *just* Daddy...but Grandma and Grandpa and the entire

side of the Lane family. It's *my* graduation. Can't they get along ... or at least pretend to get along for a day...a few hours???" Lucy cried angrily.

Lois sighed. Lucy hadn't seen the worst of their parents' fights. A lot of the times, she was at a friend's house or locked up in her room when fights would break out. The relationship between the two was very volatile. "I'll see what I can do, but I can't make any promises..."

The sound of the bedroom door opening caught her attention and she turned just in time to see Clark step out of the bedroom with no shirt. She gazed at him hungrily before turning back to her sister who had caught her gaze as well and was mouthing, "Oh, my God!" to her inaudibly. She couldn't help but grin happily to herself, knowing every inch of Clark Kent was all hers. She groaned inwardly when she watched him put his shirt back on from last night.

"I gotta get changed. I'll see you at the Planet," he said, leaning in to give her a kiss before leaving. Lois nodded, watching him leave.

As the door closed behind him Lucy smacked her on the shoulder, "Oh, my God! Wow..."

"I know..." Lois smiled back at her sister.

"He spent the night, huh?" Lucy teased.

"Oh, yeah..." Lois grinned impishly, unwilling to divulge any more information as she headed back to her bedroom to get dressed.

Lois stepped off the elevator to the Daily Planet with a smile. Last night had been ...incredible. As scared as she and Clark both were at the beginning both of them seemed to have gotten over any insecurities by the end of the night, making love well into the evening when they both passed out from exhaustion.

She dropped her things off at her desk then headed towards the photo department to have her photos from last night developed. An elderly man in his mid-sixties was at the drop-off window, reading through the latest edition of the Dirt Digger.

She raised her hand to get his attention, waving it in his face, "Excuse me? Phil, right?"

He looked up at her and smiled, "What can I do for you?"

She handed him the film, "How soon do you think I could get these developed?"

Phil glanced at the stack of pending requests then back at her with a smile, "Anything for you, Ms. Lane." He took the film from her and gave her a big grin. "Hot lead?"

"Maybe," she admitted.

"I'll get these brought up to you by nine," he said.

"Thanks," she smiled back at him.

"No problem," He turned towards the large machine that was used for developing the photos and began to get to work. Lois turned back towards the newsroom to get started on the latest research requests.

When she arrived at her desk, the newest reporter, Claude Cluny, sat on the edge of her desk, "Getting in a bit late this morning, aren't you Chéri?"

Lois rolled her eyes as she took a seat, "Running an errand. What do you want, Claude?"

He fingered the stack of requests on her desk, "Oh, just wondering what a research assistant could possibly need in the photo department..."

Lois glared at him, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

He stood up, standing behind her, "You're working on a story, right? Don't you think you need a mentor to help... piece everything together?"

She cringed as she felt his breath hit the side of her face and pulled away, pushing him away, "If I did need one... you wouldn't be my first choice..."

"Oh, come on," He teased, placing a hand on her shoulder,

"How else do you expect to ... move up the ladder? Who do you think gives Perry the recommendations?"

"I have a boyfriend..." She stammered, pushing him away once more, "...and I can do just fine on my own merits..." She shot him a disgusted look before turning away.

"Don't say I never offered..." He shrugged, walking away.

"*Don't say I never offered*..." What an ass!" she muttered to herself as she opened the first file on top.

"Well, gotta give him credit, Lois. He never stops trying to hit on the help," Cat said walking up behind her.

"Cat!" Lois turned around, surprised, "You scared me!"

"Aren't you jumpy this morning?" She teased, handing her a file. "I've got a tip on the Mayor's new campaign manager. Can you run a background check and let me know what you find? Let me know once you've got something."

Lois nodded, taking the file from her, "Sure, no problem."

Cat glanced at the desk adjacent to Lois's, "Where's Clark?"

Lois was quiet a moment, unsure how to respond. "Um," She glanced up at the elevators and saw Clark stepping off the elevator with a pastry bag and two cups of coffee, headed in her direction, "Speak of the devil..."

"Hi," he said warmly, handing her a coffee when he approached them.

Lois smiled back at him, before looking down at her desk, trying to avoid eye contact as much as possible. Who were they kidding? Cat Grant could smell dirt from a mile away and she was staring them down as if they were little red riding hood and she was the big bad wolf. '*She knows*' she thought to herself, recognizing that look Cat was giving her. She tried not to make any sudden moves.

"Uh-huh," Cat nodded before turning to walk back to her desk.

She breathed a sigh of relief once she saw Cat was out of earshot, "Thank God..."

"What was that about?" Clark asked, confused, as he took a sip of his coffee.

"*She knows*..." Lois whispered. "I could see it in her eyes..."

"Knows what?" He asked, still confused.

"*Knows...knows...*" Lois whispered.

Recognizing what she was referring to he raised his eyebrows and shook his head, "I don't think so."

"You didn't see the look," Lois whispered as he took a seat at his desk.

"What look?" He asked.

"A look..." she whispered back.

He shook his head at her, "I think you're reading too much into looks." He pointed at the stack of files on her desk, "That this week's?"

She split the stack in half, "Here you go." She then lowered her voice and whispered, "I, uh, dropped our film off with Phil to develop. Should be ready by nine then we can talk to Perry when we get back from class,"

He nodded, "So, what's the plan?"

Metropolis University was almost always busy and filled with the noise of people going from one place to another no matter what. For some reason that noise seemed to stop the moment they headed towards the Met Daily. Clark looked around skeptically as they turned the corner and stopped. A sound only he could hear...

He pushed Lois back against the wall, "Stop."

She looked at him incredulously, "What?"

He shook his head, "Something's wrong..."

She glared at him, "You mean other than us being late?" She pushed past him and he pushed her back again, "Clark, stop it. This isn't funny..."

The echo of a single gunshot being fired at the ceiling rang throughout the halls and an alarm began to blare. "Lois, I think we

need to get out of here...”

“What the ...??” Lois gasped when she saw a blonde figure with a gun raised towards them.

“Get Down!!!!” he pressed her against the wall, shielding her with his body as best as he could. “Don’t move...” he whispered in her ear, holding her close. She nodded, shaking against him as they listened to the shots fire off. Every instinct in him wanted to go over there and help stop whoever it was from firing shots off but he knew if he tried his secret would be exposed. Instead, he would have to focus on protecting Lois.

The gunfire stopped. He looked around hesitantly with his enhanced vision and saw the person with the gun was reloading and heading towards the Met Daily. He scanned the office and noticed a group of people huddled on the floor. He had to do something. He turned to Lois and whispered, “Get to a phone and call the police...” he shoved her towards the door and disappeared around a corner at super-speed.

She looked over her shoulder, “Clark?”

He could hear her calling his name as he raced at super-speed to grab the gun from the perpetrator.

“I know you’re in there Paul! Do you really think you can *dump* me on a freaking POST-IT and I’m not going to do anything about it??? Get your skinny...” The gun disappeared from her hands. She looked down in confusion, feeling for the gun that had vanished right before her eyes. “What the...?”

Clark blew the guns a few feet away, careful not to touch them from a distance then watched as the campus police approached with tasers drawn. He sighed in relief, turning back to find Lois who he found standing right behind him, “Are you *CRAZY???*” She smacked him against the chest. “What are you *DOING???* Trying to get yourself *KILLED???*”

He held his hands up, pretending to try and defend himself, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry...I was just...” He stopped when he saw the fear in her eyes. “I’m fine, see?” He held his hands up for inspection. “Looks like Paul’s fling of the month didn’t take it too well,” He motioned to the young blonde being escorted down the hallway in handcuffs.

Lois stared at him angrily, “Don’t you *EVER* scare me like that again, Clark Kent!” She stared at him a moment before grabbing him by the collar and kissing him fully on the mouth. He wrapped an arm around her protectively, sighing in relief. It didn’t appear she’d seen him.

He looked down at her leg and saw blood. “You’re hurt,” He said, kneeling down to look at it.

She shrugged it off, “I’m fine. It just grazed me,” She shrugged him off. “Unlike *SOME* people that decided to go barreling into a *hostage* situation ...” She smacked him against the head, “What were you thinking?”

“I ...thought I ...I don’t know...” he finally stammered out. He couldn’t tell her that what he’d really been doing was trying to stop the hostage situation. There were so many things he just couldn’t tell her because he didn’t understand them himself.

She relented a moment, “Remind me to smack the crap out of Paul for being such a...” She stopped when she saw Paul being loaded into a stretcher by ambulatory workers. “Oh, my, God...”

Clark was quiet for a moment. He’d thought he’d gotten to her before she’d hurt anyone. Paul had been shot. Lois had been grazed by a bullet and a few workers had been hit by stray bullets. All these gifts and he still couldn’t stop it.

Present Day...

Lois stepped off the elevator with Lucy in tow and headed for her desk, “Jimmy!”

Jimmy Olsen looked up at her in surprise and ran up to her, “Good morning, Lois!”

“Not for me!” she snapped angrily, throwing a glare at Lucy. “Someone turned my phone off this morning.”

“Oh, would you let that go already?” Lucy fumed angrily.

“Lois...” Jimmy began.

Lois turned back to Jimmy ignoring her sister. “Jimmy, remember that government agency I had you help me dig into awhile back, ‘Bureau 39’?”

“You mean the one that doesn’t exist?” Jimmy asked skeptically. “Look, the Chief...”

“If they don’t exist then why did they appear in my apartment this morning?” Lois asked with an arched eyebrow.

Jimmy just gave her a skeptical look but Lucy spoke up, “They had guns and were threatening Lois about helping Clark...”

“Clark?” Jimmy asked confused. “Look, Lois, the Chief wanted me to...”

Lois gave him a shaky sigh then said, “He’s alive.”

Jimmy nodded, “Well, there was some weird guy looking for you earlier. Perry has him in his office. Wanted to see you when you got in...”

“What???” Lois slapped him across the chest. “Why didn’t you say anything???” She stormed towards Perry’s office and opened the door, closing it behind her.

Jimmy just stared at her retreating figure and sighed, “I *tried...*”

Lois stared at Perry who was sitting at his desk, tapping a pencil against the notepad in front of him, “Lois?”

Her eyes were shut tightly as she sank to the floor in tears. “Is it true?” she managed.

“Yes.”

It was one word—one word that changed her world. She felt her chest tighten as she gasped for air in-between tears. She held a fist over her chest and began to cry harder.

He took a deep breath and approached her cautiously. “I’ve got Dr. Helene Friskin talking to him in the conference room right now. She’s supposed to be one of the best with...” He stopped a moment, watching as Lois struggled to come to grip with everything. “Lois, he doesn’t remember a thing. He said something about a green room...I’m not even sure he remembers who HE is, but...”

“He doesn’t remember???” Lois looked at Perry in shock. “How could he not remember???” She gingerly fingered the ring on her finger that Clark had placed there so many years ago. “Five years...”

“I know, honey,” Perry knelt down next to her and wrapped an arm around her shoulders as she continued to sob. “But I think he *does* remember *you*...” She began to cry harder. “I found him by your desk. He said he was looking for you and said your name.”

“I don’t know how to do this, Perry...I...” She sobbed uncontrollably, burying her face in her hands.

“I know,” Perry sighed. “Lord knows you’ve survived more than anyone should ever have to endure. You can do this. I know you can. He needs you...as much as you need him.”

Lois rocked herself back and forth for a moment, struggling to regain her composure before standing up. She began to pace around the office as Perry stood up and took a seat on his couch. “It’s not that simple. Those men I told you about...that secret government agency?” Perry nodded. “They’re here. They came to my apartment and threatened me. Thought I was hiding Clark...”

“What???”

“Apparently, he had information they wanted and he wouldn’t give it to them so they kidnapped him and faked his death...How I don’t know...” She said as she continued to pace. “What am I supposed to do? I can’t take him back to his apartment...or mine...” She huffed angrily.

Six Years Ago...

After giving their statements to the police and being checked out by the paramedics Lois and Clark decided to head back into

the Planet to pitch their scoop to Perry White. Lois and Clark sat in the conference room with Cat Grant, Brian James, Claude Cluny, and Ralph Simms as Perry White held up the enlarged photos from their stakeout the previous night. Phil was hanging up the last of the photos for them to examine when Cat pointed at the image of Harrington, "Isn't that...?"

"Congressman Ian Harrington," Lois supplied and nodded.

Ralph looked between the two of them, "How did you two...?"

Lois shrugged and Clark just reasoned, "Guess we were just in the right place at the right time,"

Perry smiled broadly, "That's what being a good reporter's all about." He looked around the room then back at Lois and Clark, "Since you two cracked this one open, how about taking the lead?"

Lois's eyes lit up, "Are you serious?"

"As a heart attack," Perry shrugged. "You showed me the initiative. Now let's bust this one wide open. We'll need a task force..."

"Task force?" Lois asked skeptically.

Perry nodded, pointing around the room, "Claude, you hit the street and see what you can find out from your contacts with the House of Defense. What's the Chairman of the House of Defense doing meeting an ex-military man like Thaddeus Roarke in the middle of the night like this?"

"...and the most notoriously sexy man in Washington..." Cat added with a broad smile.

"Unsubstantiated rumors..." Ralph corrected.

"The best kind," Cat smiled with the wiggle of her eyebrows as she gave Clark a once over, causing him to shift uncomfortably under her gaze, adjusting his glasses. Lois gave her a glare, taking a step closer to him and crossing her arms over her chest possessively.

"What do we know about where they were meeting?" Perry asked, pointing at Ralph. "Get with Donna in Realty and find out who this building is leased to and find out everything you can on who owns this building. I bet you a set of gold plated Elvis plates they're involved somehow..."

"What about us, Chief?" Lois asked nervously.

"Undercover..." Perry said, pulling out an envelope from his briefcase.

"Undercover?" Clark asked.

Perry pointed at the map, "The office where these jokers were meeting is right across from the Lexor Hotel..."

Lois nervously shifted, "Perry, I..."

Perry shook his head, "Its Chief..."

"Chief," she corrected herself. "I'm really not sure about..."

"You'll be in the Honeymoon Suite...set the cameras up at the window facing this office. It's the perfect cover...Two honeymooners in the honeymoon suite..."

Lois shifted uncomfortably, "Chief, I'm not so sure about...I mean, how would that look?"

Perry held up his hands, "Like the perfect cover," He nodded between the two of them, "Get packed. Let's get this going...You two will be on the evening shift. We'll have you switch out with Cat and Claude later when you're in class." He instructed, pointing out the door.

"Well, there won't be class for at least a week after the shootout," Clark explained.

"Shootout?" Perry asked confused.

Lois smirked, "Yeah, our editor at the paper apparently dumped a crazy chick and she decided the best way to handle it was to gun him down at the university..."

Perry pointed to Claude, "Get someone down there and get me some page one photos." He then pointed to Lois and Clark, "You two get with Scott and he'll get you set up with badges. Type everything you've got on it and I'll help you get it cleaned up for

this afternoon's edition!" They stared at him a bit dumbfounded for a moment until he roared, "Hello? Am I running a wax museum here? Get!!"

Everyone grabbed their things and headed out. Clark noticed Lois seemed a bit withdrawn. He walked up to her cautiously. "Lois, are you okay?"

She shrugged, looking back at him, "I don't have much of a choice..." Seeing his expression she smiled, "I'll be fine. Besides at least this way we can pick up where we left off this morning... give a really good impression of a couple on their honeymoon..."

He grinned back at her and said quietly, "I'd like that, but I just wanted to make sure you were okay...being at the Lexor after what happened a few months ago..."

"If I'm not I'll get over it." She shrugged, sorting through the stuff on her desk. "Now scoot. Let's get this typed up so we can get our first big story..." He nodded, taking a seat at his desk and began typing, keeping a watchful eye on her as he did. She was definitely not 'fine'.

Later that evening, after checking in at the Lexor Hotel as husband and wife and getting the equipment set up for their neighbors across the street, Lois sat curled up in Clark's arms. As she reviewing her notes from BioChem, the voices from across the street echoed from the sound equipment they'd set up in the living room.

"...so I told her to stop calling me. I mean, when a thing's over it's over, right?" a man's voice echoed through the speaker.

"What a jerk," Clark muttered, not looking up from his notebook.

Another man's voice came through, "Exactly right. Next time, don't even pick up the phone. Remember when I dumped Tawny? Women hang on like there's no tomorrow."

Lois's jaw dropped and she glared at the speaker, shaking her head in disgust. "Why are some men such...PIGS???"

Clark shut the speaker off, "I think that's enough of that. We'll turn it back on when they come back"

"Probably for the best," Lois said, tapping her pen against her notebook. "Did we ever find out who owns those buildings?"

Clark nodded, handing her a file, "Apocalypse Consulting."

"Never heard of them," Lois said wrinkling up her nose.

"Brian said they're a subsidiary of LexCorp," Clark said with a shrug.

"As in Lex Luthor?" Lois asked.

"The one and the same," Clark said. "Don't you think it's odd that LexCorp seems to come up in almost ALL of our research in corruption?"

Lois shook her head, "I don't know. I guess. There's not a whole lot anyone knows about the reclusive Lex Luthor, though, other than what's printed in the tabloids and his official biography."

He tapped her knee with his hand lightly, "You think anything they said was true?"

She laughed, "Oh, wearing shoe boxes for shoes and never wearing anything but black? I don't know. I've read the same stuff you have. Maybe one day we'll find out and do the biggest expose ever on Lex Luthor but for now, we should focus on Apocalypse Consulting. One corrupt company at a time..."

He smiled, "Whatever you say," He leaned in to kiss her, tracing the outline of her lips with his tongue as he deepened the kiss.

The phone rang and Lois reached up to grab it, "That's probably Perry with an update," She answered the phone, "Hello?"

An elderly woman was on the other end of the phone, "Is Clark Kent there?" She looked at the phone quizzically then back at Clark and handed the phone to him, "It's for you," she whispered.

He took the phone, "Hello?"

She could hear the echo of the woman's voice on the phone, "CLARK JEROME KENT, what are you doing in the *Honeymoon Suite*???"

She couldn't help but laugh. It was obviously his mother and someone had obviously misinformed her or she'd gotten the wrong idea. He gave her a warning glare, "Mom, no, I'm...No, I didn't...Mom, Mom...Mom," He was struggling to get a word in as his mother lit into him about the 'wedding' she hadn't even been invited to or 'introduced to his wife'. He held the phone away from his ear for a moment, waiting for his mother to finish her tirade before calmly trying reason with her again, "Mom, I'm here for WORK...We're *undercover*. That's it...Yes, I understand why you were upset. No, I'm not...Okay, fine, fine, uh-huh, bye." He hung up the phone then turned back to Lois, "That was NOT funny."

"I know," Lois laughed, trying to hold in the squeals of laughter she had been holding back. "No, it was hilarious...I mean, the way she lit into you..." She laughed even harder.

He threw a pillow at her. "I'll show you hilarious..." He reached for her to tickle her. She squealed in laughter, squirming in his grasp.

Later that evening, they began setting up the video equipment with the sound. Lois hit record as she pulled out a pair of binoculars to watch across the street as Harrington and Roarke entered the office.

"This isn't what we discussed," Roarke said throwing a stack of papers on the table. "I told you..."

"That's all I could get..." Harrington argued. "Even I don't have exclusive privileges before the test..."

"Mr. Chairman, you better *GET* privileges because you *DON'T* want to be on my bad side when this all comes to head..."

Harrington shook his head, "Are you *SURE* you can pull this off?"

"I guarantee it," Roarke snapped.

"Because if you don't...What happens to...me?" Harrington asked skeptically.

"Pray you never find out." Roarke threw a bag at Harrington. "You have until midnight tomorrow. Don't disappoint me."

Harrington hurriedly left the office, leaving Roarke and his guard to laugh as they closed the door, "Lex Luthor will never know what hit him."

Lois dropped the binoculars for a moment, "Clark, what would you say if I said I don't have a clue what they're talking about but that whatever it is, it's even bigger than I originally thought?"

Clark nodded, "I'd say you're absolutely right,"

The next morning, Lois lazily stretched in the king bed. Clark's arms were wrapped securely around her waist with his chin tucked in-between her neck and shoulder. It seemed last night's extracurricular activities had worn him out. His concern about her uneasiness of staying at the Lexor Hotel had been warranted but he seemed to enjoy distracting her from the painful memories and replacing them with much more enjoyable ones.

She felt her hands wrap around her hips as he kissed her shoulder.

"Morning..." he murmured against her skin.

Realization dawned on her and she sat up. "We're gonna be late!" She jumped out of bed and headed towards the bathroom to get ready.

"We're late..." Lois muttered as they stepped out of the lobby of the Lexor hotel. She headed towards the corner to hail a cab. Clark laughed as he watched her mutter to herself. It had been *her* idea to take a shower together, but he wasn't about to remind her of that at the moment.

She held a hand up to hail a cab and he noticed a truck

speeding out of control on the street. Just as she was about to step off the curb to get into the cab that had pulled up, he pushed her back, "Look out!"

He pulled her back just as the truck crashed into the cab. "Oh, my..." She looked back at him, "How did you...?"

"Uh, why don't you call the police?" He prompted. She nodded, pulling out her cell phone to dial as he approached the driver of the truck. The truck driver seemed a bit dazed. He reached up and peeled the door to the truck open enough so he could get out. He then turned his attention to the cab driver who was rubbing his head. He checked to make sure no one was looking and blew at the simmering engine of the truck to cool it off. He then approached the door of the taxicab and opened the door to help the man out, "Are you okay?" The man nodded and looked up at him, dazed as police officers arrived on the scene with paramedics.

He stepped back to let the professionals handle it from there and turned back to see Lois heading towards him with an impatient look on her face. He wasn't sure what to make of her expression. Had she seen him? She gave him a curious look before grabbing him by the arm and dragging him with her. "Come on, let's get going..."

He nodded, following her as she headed towards another cab.

"Daily Planet," she said as they sat down in the cab.

"You got it."

As they stepped into the lobby of the Daily Planet, something seemed to click in Lois's mind as she turned to grab a copy of the morning edition of the Daily Planet. She scowled at the cover when she noticed the leading story was a scandal that broke out in the mayor's office last night. "Where is it?" She mumbled under her breath as they headed towards the elevator with her flipping through the paper. Six pages in she finally found what she'd been looking for. "*LOOK!!!*" She gleamed happily, pointing at the article on the school shooting. She did a double take, "Special contribution by Claude Cluny...*What???*"

Clark sighed, taking the paper from her as they stepped into the elevator. "He did interview the other people that were there, Lois..."

"That's not the point!!!" Lois fumed. "That was our story...He wouldn't have even known about it if we hadn't have..."

She stopped her tirade when he pressed his lips against hers, cupping her cheek with his hand. "You're missing the bigger picture," He said with a grin.

"What's that?" She said with a smirk.

He held up the paper with a grin, "Our first byline in the Daily Planet...a *real* newspaper."

She smiled back at him, taking the paper from him to look at the article again, "I guess you're right...But we're still interns... Who knows if Perry's actually going to sign us on as reporters after the internship is over...I still don't like sharing credit with that..."

The elevator dinged announcing the arrival to the newsroom. "I know," He took the paper from her and began to fold it up as they stepped off the elevator. "I don't trust him any more than you do, but..."

"Lane, Kent, nice of you to join us this morning!" Perry bellowed across the newsroom. "Conference room!"

Lois shot Clark a glare, "I told you we were gonna be late!"

"So worth it..." he whispered in her ear as they entered the conference room.

Clark watched Lois pace around the room as Perry's team began bouncing off ideas and sharing where they were investigation wise on Roarke and Harrington. "Who's Roarke? What 'system' are they talking about? And what 'test'?" Lois ticked the questions off on her hand as Perry wrote them up on the

dry erase board.

“Don’t forget the ‘vote,’” Clark added. Perry nodded and added it to the list.

Ralph grinned, “We should get our hands on every available record of every vote taken by Harrington’s committee for the past...” He glanced at Brian with a shrug.

“Six months,” Brian wrote on his notepad, “Already on it.”

“It’s got to be something big,” Cat added, “Congressmen don’t sell out for less than ‘big.’”

Claude shook his head, “I ran Roarke, name, and picture through every program we’ve got or have access to...”

“The man’s a ghost,” Brian finished for him.

“Anything on Apocalypse Consulting?” Clark asked.

Brian shook his head. “Subsidiary for LexCorp. This location, however, has no bank accounts or transactions that I can trace. Apocalypse opened this location here a few months ago and paid off a five-year lease on the offices...in advance.”

Cat let out a low whistle, “Business must be good.”

“What business?” Lois asked, shrugging her shoulders.

Perry pulled out a file and opened it, handing it to Lois, “Thaddeus Roarke. International arms dealer, electronic weapons system analyst, entrepreneur, and general bad boy. Last known base of operations, Beirut...”

“How’d you...” Ralph began at the same time Brian stammered, “Where’d you...”

Perry smiled, proudly, “Sources, boys and girls. Sources. The lifeblood of journalism...”

Cat took the file and flipped through, finding Perry’s ‘source’ so to speak. She held it up, “People Magazine, really Chief?”

Perry grabbed the file back, shaking his head. Clark leaned back in his chair thinking for a moment. “Arms dealer...House Defense Committee...” He shrugged his shoulders, “Makes sense.”

Perry nodded, “Now, a scoop’s a scoop but if we’ve stumbled into something that impacts national security we have to bring in the Feds...”

Lois looked at him in despair, “Now?”

Perry shook his head, “When the time’s right. So far we have more questions than we have answers,” he pointed at the board, “Let’s hear some theories...”

Claude nodded, “Okay. The Defense Department is about to test some new weapons system and Roarke wants to know about it?”

Ralph nodded, “So he bribes Harrington to slip him the info...”

Clark shook his head, “But Harrington is also afraid of Roarke...”

“...or maybe he’s afraid of what Roarke will do once he has the information...” Lois guessed.

Perry nodded, pointing to Cat, “Do you think you can find Congressman Harrington and stick with him?”

Cat let out a breath, offended, “Please...Like superglue.”

Perry then turned to Brian, “Next time Roarke shows...”

Brian nodded, “Got him,”

Perry then turned back to Lois and Clark, “You two need any help?”

“We’re...” Lois began at the same time Clark began, “Uh...”

Lois pasted on a smile and just said, “We’re coping...”

Ralph wiggled his eyebrows at them, “I bet you are...”

Clark couldn’t help it. Something in him just made him do it. He kicked Ralph under the table.

“Ow...” Ralph looked around the room, trying to figure out who had kicked him. He was sitting in-between Claude and Cat. He looked at Claude and punched him in the arm.

“Ouch! Jeez man, what was that for?!” Claude stood up angrily.

“You know what that was for! Don’t kick me!” Ralph accused.

“You’re nuts! I didn’t...” Claude began to argue but was cut off by Perry interrupting.

“Hey! Hey! Hey! Stop it both of you! Now, we’ve got two days left. Let’s get crackin’!” Perry ordered.

Later that evening, they struggled to set up the video surveillance equipment. It seemed things had gotten knocked around from the previous night. “Hand me that cord,” Lois said, plugging the others into the camera.

He handed her the cord and she plugged it into the camera and a red light came on. “We have power,” He smiled back at her. The sound of humming caught his attention and he looked around the room panicked for a moment. He scanned the living room and saw the maid headed towards the bedroom.

“What’s wrong?” Lois asked.

Without a word he laid the camera on the bed, covering it with the covers then grabbed Lois by the waist, “Clark, what are you doing? This isn’t funny!” She pushed against him when he laid her back on the bed, “Clark, stop it! I’m serious, stop it!”

She pushed against him as he laid down on top of her, silencing her protests with his lips. She was still pushing against him. The door opened and she froze. He continued to kiss her, hoping the maid would leave soon. Lois was not comfortable at all. He could tell she was angry by her rapid heartbeat.

“Extra towel, yah?” The maid’s voice asked as she entered the room. When she saw them, she stopped, “Oops...Sorry...”

The door closed and he heard her leave. He pulled himself off of her and looked at her. Her face. He’d seen that expression before months ago. Fear. He hung his head, apologetically, “I’m sorry I heard...”

She glared at him angrily then slapped him across the face. He’d deserved that. “Just get off of me!” She pushed him off and headed towards the bathroom.

He sighed, raking a hand through his hair, “Great...”

Lois took a deep breath as she stepped into the bathtub, trying to calm her nerves. She’d overreacted. She knew that. She just didn’t want to admit it to Clark right now. He’d grabbed her and her mind immediately went back to that night at the Lexor so many months ago.

<< “I told you to watch your back...” >>

“Let go ...of me!!!” >>

<< “What’s wrong? Feeling a little under the weather? Maybe you should lie down...” >>

<< “Time to teach you a lesson in keeping your mouth shut... since you like opening your mouth so much...” >>

“No...no...no, no, no!!!” >>

<< “Get your ...hands off of her...NOW!!!” >>

“Kent...we were just playing around...” >>

<< “What’s your deal, Kent? We were just having a little fun...” >>

“Don’t you dare come near her again...” >>

Lois took a shaky breath as she did her best to will the memories from that night out of her mind. She knew in her heart that Clark would never hurt her. Her mind...didn’t seem to register the difference between him and Jenkins though. All she seemed to be able to register at the moment was that someone was grabbing her without her consent. She took a shallow breath as the tears continued to fall, stinging her eyes as they did.

A knock at the door caused her to pull her mind back to the present.

“Lois?”

Lois had been in the bathroom for at least two hours now. He’d heard her running the bathwater a little bit ago but she should be done by now. They needed to talk. He knocked on the door softly, “Lois?”

“What?” She snipped through the door.

“Are you okay?” He asked through the door.

“What do you think?” She snipped again.

He sighed, running a hand through his hair for the hundredth time. “I’m sorry. Can I come in? I just want to talk.”

She was quiet for a moment, seeming to think about his request. After what felt like an eternity, he heard the splash of the water the thud of her feet hitting the tile and a resounding click of the metal on the door knob, unlocking the door. He then heard the sound of her feet on the tile once more and another splash. He cracked the door open, “Lois?”

“What?” She repeated a bit more softly than before. She was sitting in the bathtub with candles lit around her, not facing him... not even trying to look at him.

“I forgot,” he said simply, approaching her cautiously. “I should have given you a warning. I’m sorry.”

She glared at him. He could tell from her tear-stained cheeks she’d been crying. “Darn right,” she muttered, before shaking her head. “What the hell is wrong with me?”

“Nothing.” He responded.

She glared at him with tears in her eyes, “I hate this! I hate that I react like this and...*ARGH!!!*” She balled her fist and slammed it into the water, splashing water all over him.

He couldn’t help but laugh as he took his glasses off to dry them off, “I guess I deserved that,” he began quietly.

She smirked at him with a half-smile, “You know I’m not normally like this. It’s just after everything...I don’t know...”

“I know,” he nodded, putting his glasses back on. He leaned forward, “I’m going to kiss you. Are you going to stop me?” She shook her head ‘no’ and he leaned in to kiss her. “They’ll go away with time...” he murmured against her lips.

“You can’t do that,” she argued, shaking her head. “You can’t just grab me like that...being here again...and being grabbed like that...just brings it all back.”

He hung his head and let out a long breath, “What can I do?”

“Just don’t grab me like that again...it just...” she trailed off, shaking her head.

He nodded, “Okay,” He leaned in to kiss her. “No grabbing.” He held up his hands to prove his point as he kissed her again.

She tugged his tie, pulling him towards her. “Nothing wrong with touching,” she teased, brushing her hands against his soaked dress shirt.

“Touching I can do,” He whispered against her lips as he cupped her cheek with his palm. She moaned against his lips, leaning back against the very large bathtub...with plenty of room for both of them. He felt her respond, deepening the kiss, tugging on his lower lip with her teeth.

“Good,” She whispered against his lips, “Take your clothes off,”

Without any further encouragement, he unbuttoned his dress shirt and tossed it to the side before climbing in the tub with her, “Clark! You’re gonna flood the bathroom!” She shrieked as he leaned down to capture her lips, throwing his soaked pants on the floor with his shirt.

“I’ll clean it up, later.” He promised, concentrating on more important things at the moment. He tossed his glasses to the floor and concentrated on the feeling of her very wet and naked body pressed up against his.

Later that evening, they laid on the bed in the aftermath of their lovemaking. Lois had the silk sheet wrapped around her body as she laid on top of Clark. “So, I’ve got an idea...” he began as she looked up at him, “...Maybe this weekend we could drive out to Smallville and you could meet my parents...tour the town...let me show you off...”

“You want me to meet your parents?” she asked.

“Yes,” He brushed his lips against her hair, “I love you and

I’m sure they’ll love you too. We’ll be back by Monday I promise...So, what do you say?” He looked at her expectantly.

What could she say? She knew she loved him. Meeting the parents was a normal step in any relationship. She knew that. Were they ready for that step? She’d heard Clark talk about his parents with love and admiration. He seemed to have had a wonderful childhood and good memories of growing up. Her parents on the other hand...

She sighed, looking away for a moment.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“It’s nothing...This weekend sounds...great...” she managed weakly.

“But?” He prompted, wiggling his hip against hers.

“But meeting your parents means you’ll have to meet MY parents and unlike you, I didn’t have that great of a time growing up...The Lane household was fights, fights, and more fights...”

“I’m sorry,” He said quietly. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to. I just figured...mom said she’d like to meet you and I’d love for you to meet them, but if you’re not...”

Lois shook her head, giving him a peck on the lips, “No, I want to. I think we’re at that stage of our relationship...” She motioned to their naked bodies beneath the sheet, “...we’ve definitely explored all the physical aspects...”

“...not all of them,” he whispered against her lips.

Later that evening, Lois and Clark stood at the window with binoculars and the camera, listening and watching Roarke and Harrington who had returned to Apocalypse Consulting.

“So, there’s ... no possible way the test will be postponed?” Roarke asked.

Harrington shook his head, “Weather’s clear. Naval monitoring ships are en route. Dawn, day after tomorrow. It’s set,”

Roarke smiled, “Good and after the test fails we’ll get my system approved and installed. How soon before you can vote again?”

Harrington shook his head, “There’ll be delays of course. Analysis of test results, modification proposals...”

Roarke shook his head, “No,” at Harrington’s confused look, “After what happens at that test no one will be interested in ‘modification proposals’.”

Harrington seemed on edge, “What...what exactly will happen?”

Roarke smiled, “Why don’t I show you?” He motioned for his bodyguard to get the blinds.

“Drat!” Lois fumed.

“Lead-lined,” Clark muttered under his breath.

“What? Lead-lined? What does that mean?” Lois asked.

“Uh, I, uh...” Clark stammered before pointing at the blinds being opened. “Look, they’re opening the blinds again,”

Roarke wore a smug smile while Harrington was shaking in fear, “What do you think of the computer model Bart had made up? Murderous, isn’t it?”

Lois looked back at Clark in concern, “What do you think it was?”

“I don’t know, but it can’t be good,” He said pointing at the visibly shaken Ian Harrington.

The next day, Lois and Clark sat in the conference room going over what they’d learned last night during their surveillance with Roarke and Harrington. Cat pulled out a file on the table, “Tsunami?” She glanced around the room. “Is that the one with avocado and crab?”

Lois gave a forced smile, “Yes, Cat, that’s the one.” She glanced at the board impatiently. “Is this everything you were able to get?”

Brian nodded, “I wasn’t able to get much from my source... Apparently, these were in the files under ‘Vote’.”

Cat glanced through the file. “Why would they keep a file on Japanese seafood?”

Clark sighed, feeling bad for Cat, “Cat, Tsunami isn’t what you think it is,”

Brian nodded, “It’s a giant wave. Like a tidal wave.”

Cat glanced between them confused then Perry nodded, pulling out a file, “Wave? I’ve got a wave here too,”

Lois and Clark opened the file which read, ‘Project Shockwave’ in big bold letters.

Brian snapped his fingers, “Wait a minute, ‘Shockwave’...” He leafed through a few stacks of papers before he found what he was looking for, “Harrington’s committee voted on something called Project Shockwave not too long ago...here it is!” He handed the file to Clark, “‘Appropriation approval for system test installation’.”

Lois read the file, handing it back to Clark. “This vote was taken five weeks ago.”

“Passed eight to zero with one abstention...Congressman Ian Harrington,” Clark read. He glanced at Lois. “Still nothing about *WHAT* Shockwave is.”

Lois nodded, “This is what they were talking about. Roarke wanted Harrington to have the vote reversed...”

Perry nodded, “Sounds like a good theory if I ever heard one... You two thinking he wanted his own system approved instead...whatever that means?”

Lois nodded, “If only we knew what Shockwave was...”

Clark nodded, turning back to Cat. “How’d it go with Harrington yesterday?”

Cat smiled broadly, flipping open her notebook, “One thirty: lunch with a semi-attractive blond. Three o’clock: haircut and manicure. Four thirty: drinks with a so-so redhead. Seven p.m.: dinner with a mousey brunette.”

Perry sighed, “Geez, nice to know our tax dollars are being spread around,”

Cat continued, “Ten o’clock: drinks with an auburn haired beauty,”

Brian nodded, “Finally, a little class. Who was she?”

“Me!” Cat grinned impishly. Perry and Brian stared and she shrugged, “Like superglue!” She then continued, “He then came back here to meet Roarke.”

Lois glanced at Brian, “What about you?”

“After they left yesterday evening, Roarke and his body guard, Bart drove to Pier 31 and went into a warehouse. They were still there this morning when I left to come back here. Warehouse leased to...” He gave a drumroll to hold the anticipation.

Clark held up a finger. “Let me guess, ‘Apocalypse Consulting?’”

“Bingo!” Brian said, handing over his notes. “...but I couldn’t even look inside...no windows.”

Lois tapped her fingers against the table. “We’re spinning our wheels. Some test monitored by the Naval units is taking place tomorrow at dawn and Roarke is planning on sabotaging it.”

Perry sighed, “I think it’s time. Time to go to the top. To the man who always knows what’s going on...The man who’s never let me down...”

Brian’s eyes widened. “You don’t mean...”

Perry nodded, “I do...Bobby Bigmouth!”

Lois looked at Clark and whispered, “What’s a Bobby Bigmouth?”

Lois stared in disgust as she watched the middle-aged man fill his plate with a mountain of food.

He held up a piece of bread. “Roll?”

Lois shook her head in disgust. “No, thank you...Mister... Bigmouth?”

Bobby smiled, “Please, call me Bobby.”

“Bobby,” she nodded. “So, what can you tell us about Project

Shockwave?”

Bobby seemed to think a moment then took a bite and spoke, “Where did you hear that name?”

“We have reason to believe Thaddeus Roarke is working with Congressman Ian Harrington to sabotage Project Shockwave,” Clark explained. “It’s due to be tested...”

“At dawn tomorrow,” Bobby nodded. “I know all about it. Project Shockwave: experimental coastal defense network. A couple of years ago the Navy being lobbying for their own version of a Star Wars system. Several proposals were made, the Navy picked Shockwave. Roarke’s system was runner-up.”

“Who’s behind Shockwave?” Perry asked.

“Luthor Technologies,” Bobby said, taking another bite.

“Figures,” Lois muttered then asked, “Why was Shockwave picked?”

Bobby took a bite, “More sophisticated. It’s designed to automatically analyze any foreign object within sensor range and calibrate an appropriate response.”

“What kind of response?” Clark asked concerned.

Bobby smiled, “Think of it as a sonic curtain. Sonic vibrations providing an impenetrable barrier that would disable whatever tried to pass. Rumor is Roarke had millions tied up in his own system so it’s not that farfetched that he’d take the steps to guarantee he gets a return.”

Lois shook her head. “He said something about how stopping the test would be ‘murderous’. What does that mean?”

“It means he’s off his rocker and is dangerous. The information you have is classified,” Bobby explained. “There’s no way to stop the test tomorrow...Lex Luthor made sure of that when he designed it.”

Lois exchanged a look with Clark. “Then I guess we go to the source.”

“How do you plan on doing that?” Perry asked, bemused.

“Lex Luthor has never met with any press since his takeover of his father’s company at seventeen.”

“He’s never met Lois Lane before,” Lois said smugly, grabbing Clark by the arm. “Let’s go.”

Present Day...

Jimmy stared towards the Editor-in-Chief’s office in anticipation. Something was going on. Everyone had been talking about how Clark Kent had risen from the dead. He’d never met the man but he’d heard stories. Lane and Kent had cracked open the biggest story of the year on their first undercover story.

He’d heard Lois talk about Clark. He was the love of her life, her best friend, and nobody could compete. She had lived and breathed the Daily Planet after losing Clark. Then a year later, after she’d been given the miracle of a son...a son she’d never known existed until three months after Clark had ‘died’... he had been taken from her too. The police had ruled it a ‘SIDS’ death. No explanation. No cause. Unknown. That had been a punch to the gut for Lois. A taunt by fate for her to lose the last piece of the man she loved.

The sassy and fun Lois Lane had disappeared and been replaced with a no-nonsense, hard-bitten newswoman that would stop at nothing to uncover the truth when chasing a story. Very few times, she’d break down and he’d see a glimpse of the old Lois Lane he’d met when she was expecting Jamie, her and Clark’s child. This morning was one of those times.

“Excuse me, Earth to Jimmy!!!” Brian waved a hand in front of Jimmy trying to get his attention.

“Huh?” Jimmy shook his head, bringing himself back to the present. “What is it, Brian?”

He pointed at an elderly woman near Lois Lane’s desk. “She’s looking for Lois...Where’d she go?”

“Oh, I got it, Brian.” Jimmy approached the woman with a smile. “I’m James Olsen. Can I help you?”

The woman looked at him skeptically. "I'm looking for my... uh, I'm looking for Lois Lane," she said hesitantly.

"Oh, she's in the Chief's office," Jimmy explained, pointing toward Perry's office. "Her partner reappeared in the newsroom this morning and..."

She looked at him in despair. "Her partner?"

"Clark Kent?" Jimmy squeaked out as she got in his face, forcefully.

"Where is he?" she asked, grabbing him by the shirt.

"I...I don't know...the office I think..."

She grabbed Jimmy by the ear, pulling on it, tightly.

"Owww!!!" he exclaimed.

"Where is my son??" She repeated vehemently as she dragged him towards the office.

Perry looked at Lois with concern as she paced around the office.

"I feel like I can't even go home, Perry. What am I supposed to do?"

"We'll figure this out. If I have to I'll set you two up in a hotel under a surname or something..." Perry reasoned.

"How is that going to work? We have a meteor heading straight for Earth!" Lois fumed. "I doubt there's even..."

The door opening caught Perry's attention and he and Lois both looked at the doorway to see a very angry Martha Kent with Jimmy Olsen being held by his ear. She released Jimmy then looked at Perry and Lois. "I want some answers, NOW! Where is my son??"

Six Years Ago...

Lois stared up at the Luthor Towers in anticipation as she nervously fidgeted with her jacket. Clark seemed to notice her nervousness and placed a hand over hers to calm her nerves. She glanced over at him and smiled.

Perry stepped out of the lobby with two thumbs up. "We've got ourselves a meeting."

An elderly man with a mustache and balding hairline stepped outside behind Perry and cleared his throat, "Mr. White? Mr. Luthor will meet with you and your colleagues in one hour at this location." He handed Perry a note. "No recording devices," the man warned, looking between Lois and Clark.

"We understand," Perry nodded, shaking the man's hand. He turned to Lois and Clark. "Let's go."

When they arrived at the location, they realized they were approaching the warehouse to which Brian had tailed Roarke and Harrington. Lois looked around nervously. "Are you sure this is the right place?"

Perry nodded, then pointed to the limo pulling up behind them. "There he is now."

A man in black stepped out of the limo, wearing sunglasses and brown curly hair. He had a certain air about him as he approached them. He gave Perry a nod, "Mr. White, I presume,"

Perry nodded, "Mr. Luthor, it's an honor, but I wish these were different circumstances."

Lex Luthor nodded, turning towards Lois and Clark. "You must be Mr. Kent and Ms. Lane."

Clark nodded, extending his hand to shake his, "Clark Kent, sir."

"Lois Lane," Lois said briskly. She noticed Lex's gaze staying on her longer. She shifted uncomfortably, reaching for Clark's hand. She had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach and couldn't shake it. Why were they at Apocalypse Consulting's warehouse? "What is this place?"

"A warehouse owned by a dummy company posing as my subsidiary, Apocalypse Consulting," Lex answered. "...But let's get to the real issue here. Luthor Technologies has approximately

half a billion dollars in research and development tied up in a project code-named Shockwave. Shockwave, even the name, is top secret. Yet, Mr. White you call to tell me you not only know of the project but suspect Thaddeus Roarke, a man with whom I've had previous unsatisfactory dealings, is intent on sabotaging the impending test. Under the circumstances, I might have elected to stay home and watch reruns of Flipper on an all-night cable channel. But instead, I'm here with you three. What is going on?"

Clark sighed, "We've Roarke and Congressman Ian Harrington under surveillance. Roarke is positive your system will fail its test, leaving the door open for his system to be adopted instead."

Luthor sighed, raking a hand through his hair in confusion. "You say Roarke is positive?" When Lois and Clark nodded, he continued, "That would imply sabotage. No one ever described Thaddeus Roarke as an incurable optimist."

"How could your system be sabotaged?" Lois asked.

Lex shook his head, "So far as I know, it can't..."

Perry tapped his fingers against his chin. "What about power failure?"

"Too many back-ups," Luthor shook his head.

Lois shook her head, "No, Roarke hinted at something more than a simple breakdown..."

Clark nodded, "He described it as 'murderous' and hinted at this being something BIGGER..."

Something clicked in Lois's head. "Like a tidal wave?"

"Tsunami!" Clark caught on to her train of thought.

"Shockwave," Lex said grimly.

The sound of guns cocking behind them caused them to turn around. Lois glared at the man holding the gun. It was Bart, Thaddeus Roarke's bodyguard, with Thaddeus Roarke beside him. They both held guns on them all.

"You," Lois breathed.

"I see you've all figured out my plan," Roarke said shaking his head. "Too bad it's a bit too late." He looked at his watch. "Mr. Luthor, your test will be taking place in one hour. Don't want to miss the big show!" He motioned towards the column on the pier.

A sinister look crossed Lex Luthor's face as they were escorted at gunpoint towards the pier. Lois did her best to remain calm but when she tripped over the corpse of Congressman Ian Harrington she couldn't help but scream.

"Stupid...stupid..." Lois muttered to herself.

Clark sighed, looking around. Roarke and his man had left them tied to the column on the pier to watch the view. He knew he had to do something, but he had to get everyone off this pier first. He began working on the chain that held his wrists together. He couldn't just break everything at once or he could risk exposing himself. He had to do it slowly...

"Well, this wasn't exactly how I envisioned my first meeting with you, Mr. Luthor," Perry was saying in a half joking manner.

"Please, we're all tied to this pier and most likely going to die together...call me Lex," Lex said with a grim smile. "I should have known..."

"This isn't your fault. It's Roarke's," Perry sighed. "I wish I could talk to Alice one last time..."

"Alice?" Lois asked, intrigued.

"My wife," Perry said with a broad grin, looking over his shoulder. He sighed, "At least you two are with the one you love in the end..."

Lois looked back at him in shock, "How did you...?"

Perry sighed, "Lois, I didn't become Editor-in-Chief of a great metropolitan newspaper because I can yodel. Did you seriously think I hadn't noticed? The looks...the hand holding...the finishing each other's sentences?"

Clark smiled to himself. He'd suspected Perry had known about their relationship. They'd tried to keep it professional at the

office, but hiding how they felt about one another when in close proximity wasn't an easy task. He felt one of the links to the chain that bound his hands together give and he smiled to himself. This was going to work.

"Oh, my..." Lex stammered, staring at the water that began to build by the pier.

Clark looked towards the water that Lex, Perry, and Lois were staring at. It had to be at least a hundred feet tall. Noticing that they all seemed to be in shock, he broke the chains and stood up, pulling first Lois, then Perry and Lex to their feet and pushed them towards Perry's parked car. "Run!!!!"

They nodded, unable to say anything. He waited until they were out of sight then took flight, heading straight for the center of the tidal wave. He could hear Lois calling for him as he began to spin, pulling the wave down with him.

"Clark!!!" Lois looked around, unable to find him.

"There's no time!" Lex snapped, trying to pull her back as she tried to run towards the wave that was headed in their direction.

"I have to find Clark!!" Lois struggled against Lex's grasp.

"I told you there's no..."

Perry interrupted, "Look!" He pulled out his camera and began taking shots of the tidal wave to end all tidal waves as it began to fold on itself back to the bay.

"I don't believe it..." Lex stammered, still holding onto Lois.

"Let me go!!" Lois snapped angrily before kneeing him hard below the belt.

"Ohhh!" Lex groaned in pain, releasing his grasp on her.

She ran back towards the pier where they had been tied, looking for Clark, "Clark!"

"Unbelievable," a familiar voice said from behind her.

She turned around and smiled when she heard the familiar voice of her boyfriend. "Clark!" She ran to hug him, planting kisses all over his face. "I thought..."

"I'm fine. I...saw the wave fold over like that and...I just kinda stopped running..." he managed. "Nice touch, kneeing Luthor like that. Great first impression," he teased.

She smacked him lightly. "You know I don't respond well to being grabbed like that..."

He nodded, "All too well." He patted his face, pretending to wince at the memory of her slapping him.

"How'd you get us out of there?" she asked.

"One of the links in the chain was weak so I was working on it until it finally gave away. Lucky, it broke when it did."

"Yeah," she said, running her hand through his hair, noticing it was slightly damp. "Your hair's wet."

He ran a hand through her hair as well, "So is yours...I think the mist from the wave..." he shrugged. She stared at him for a moment contemplating something. "What?" he asked nervously.

"Nothing, it's just...You're always saving me..." she said softly, linking her arms around his neck.

"Someone's got to..." he murmured, leaning in to kiss her, cupping her cheek with his palm.

"You signing up to be my personal superhero?" she teased.

"Maybe...the benefits are out of this world..." he murmured, against her lips.

Present Day...

"Can you let go of my ear now?" Jimmy whined, trying to pull himself out of Martha's grasp.

She seemed to realize she still had a hold on Jimmy and released him, turning her attention back to Lois and Perry. "What is going on?"

Perry stood up, motioning for her to come in. "Jimmy, why don't you give us a minute?"

"Seriously?" Jimmy asked in disbelief.

"Seriously," Perry said, pointing at the door for him to leave.

He sighed and left, muttering something about never being a part of the action as Perry closed the door. He looked towards the couch where Lois was seated and, with a grim look, said to Martha, "You probably want to take a seat,"

"I'll stand," Martha said, crossing her arms over her chest. "What's going on? Where's Clark?"

"I found him in the newsroom this morning...ragged...looked like hell," Perry began.

Martha's face filled with anger. "Why didn't you call anyone?"

"I did," He looked towards the conference room to the left of his office. "He's talking with Dr. Helene Friskin..."

"A shrink?" Martha asked, aghast, familiar with the doctor's name. "My son doesn't need a *SHRINK!* He needs to be home with the people who love him..."

"Martha, he doesn't remember what *HOME* is..." Lois interrupted softly.

"What?" Martha asked, looking at Lois like she'd just punched her in the gut.

Perry nodded, "He has no idea who he is right now. He just knows he felt...safe...here. When he got here he was looking for Lois."

"So, he does remember *SOMETHING*..." Martha began hopefully.

"Honestly, I don't know," Perry shook his head. "This whole thing is so bizarre and messed up. I don't even know where to begin. Clark's memory is shaky at best right now."

Martha turned to Lois. "Have you seen him?" she asked quietly, taking a seat next to her.

Lois was holding back tears. "No," she managed to squeak out.

Martha took her hand, hesitantly. "If he remembers you then you need to be the one to see him...talk to him...help him." Her voice was shaking as she spoke. Everything she was saying was true but it tore her up that she couldn't be the one to help her son right now...her son that she'd searched for...for five years. Martha watched as Perry stepped out of the office, leaving the two of them alone for a moment.

The last of Lois's resolve seemed to melt and she began to cry, "I don't know if I can do this...I don't know if I'm strong enough..."

"You are...and you will..." Martha said, holding her close. "He needs you..."

"I know, but he was so much better at this than I am...I NEED HIM..." Lois cried.

"Lois, you are the strongest woman I have ever met. After everything you've been through...Hasn't the last five years taught you anything?" She turned Lois's face to look at her, "You can do this."

Six Years Ago...

Lois had her feet propped up on the dashboard as the music played, leaning back against the leather seat. She could feel her shorts sticking to her thighs from the heat and sweat was causing her sleeveless top to stick to her back. Clark was driving his truck and they were headed to 'Smallville'. She had no idea how she'd gotten talked into spending a whole weekend in the country but it was too late to change her mind. Maybe she'd surprise herself and actually enjoy the trip. She glanced at him appreciatively. He seemed to fill everything so perfectly. He wore a blue t-shirt and khaki shorts and sunglasses, replacing his usual brown rimmed glasses. He looked so different without his glasses...

She got it all

My heart, my soul, my wishes

All of my love, my hugs, my kisses

Everything that means anything at all

All of my life I've spent a hopin'

*I could give someone such devotion
Every sweet memory I can recall
She got it all*

After their fiasco with Roarke, they had called the police to report what happened. A Detective Henderson had handled the case and helped them stop Roarke and his man, 'Bart', at the airport. Roarke had been furious that his tidal wave hadn't worked. They had enough material for at least three follow-ups and they even got to share a byline with their own Editor-in-Chief, Perry White. It had been a group effort on all of their parts.

Lois had been surprised when Perry had let them take the lead on the follow-ups a few days later. She was even more surprised when their follow-up on the murder of Congressman Ian Harrington had landed her and Clark's first byline, without any other senior journalists tied to it, had landed them on the front page of the Daily Planet. Clark had taken her out to celebrate and they'd been given a three-day weekend by their Editor in Chief to 'relax and enjoy themselves'.

"We should be there within the hour," Clark mentioned, holding her hand as they came to a stop at the railroad where a train was passing by.

*You know that I admit
That someone to love like this
Only existed in my prayers
Until I saw her face
I knew I'd found the place
Where I could keep my every faith eternally 'cause*

Lois stared at the train as it passed by. "How long is this going to take?"

"It takes as long as it takes," Clark sighed.

"We've been here forever..."

"Two minutes," he corrected.

*She got it all
My heart, my soul, my wishes
All of my love, my hugs, my kisses
Everything that means anything at all
All of my life I've spent a hopin'
I could give someone such devotion
Every sweet memory I can recall
She got it all*

"Same difference," she shot back impatiently. "I just want to get out and stretch my legs."

He eyed her legs appreciatively and smiled. "There'll be plenty of time for that later." She shook her head and he smiled. "It always takes people from the city a while to decompress."

"I could think of a lot better ways to decompress than staring at a train that's ten miles long going through this intersection at two miles an hour," Lois shot back.

*All of my life I've spent a hopin'
I could give someone such devotion
Every sweet memory I can recall
All of my heart, my soul, my wishes
All of my love, my hugs, my kisses
Everything sweet memory I can recall
She got it all
She's got it all*

"It's almost done..." He reassured her, rubbing her back. She turned to look towards the train that was almost done blocking the intersection. She felt a cool breeze on her back and shuddered slightly.

"Where'd that breeze come from?" she asked, fanning herself.

"I don't know..." he shrugged. "Felt good, though?"

"Oh, yeah," she nodded, turning back to him as the railroad crossing lights stopped blinking and the level crossing, blocking them from crossing the tracks, lifted up. "Let's go."

"Yes, ma'am," he smiled, shifting the truck into drive and headed towards the sign that read 'Smallville 70 miles ahead'.

Clark parked the truck outside a diner and got out. Lois unbuckled her seatbelt and turned as Clark opened the door for her, offering his hand as she climbed out of the truck. "We'll grab something to eat then head over to the farm and unpack. Mom said Dad's gonna be helping Masie out with a broken water heater and Mom's helping Rachel out with the Corn Festival plans...so we have some time to kill."

"Good!" Lois sighed. "I'm starving...Did you say *Corn Festival*?"

He laughed at her expression as they walked through the crowd of people outside the diner. "I think we better take a seat outside." At her look, he continued, "Yes, the annual Smallville Corn Festival."

Lois looked at him skeptically. "Do I want to know?"

He smiled half teasing, "Sure, I'll bring you out here after graduation and you can see the Corn Queen Pageant, the Husk-Off, the Corn-o-Rama. popcorn, creamed corn, corn-on-the-cobb...It'll be a corn-a-rific time..." He managed to say without laughing.

She laughed, "Be still my heart!"

He laughed, unable to hold it in. "It is a lot of fun. Some of its kinda corny...no pun intended." They took a seat at a table that had just been wiped down and Clark wrapped an arm around her.

She smiled up at him, leaning her head against his shoulder. He gave her a peck on the forehead as a familiar voice approached them.

"Clark Kent?" He turned around to see Masie standing behind him with two glasses of Iced Tea. "I didn't think you were gonna be here till tomorrow!" She turned to Lois who was watching the exchange with amusement. "You must be Lois." She held out a hand for her to shake.

Lois nodded, "Lois Lane..."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Masie," Masie gushed. "All the stories about Metropolis from Martha seem to begin with your name."

Clark felt the back of his neck turning red with embarrassment. Did his mom have to tell everyone *EVERYTHING* he said?

Lois smirked at him, "Oh, really?"

"Yes, all the stories you guys have worked on and what a good writer you are..." Masie gushed.

Lois cast him a look then turned back. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Masie. I guess everything spreads quickly in Smallville, huh?"

She smiled back, "Yes, that's Smallville for you. Everyone knows everything about everybody else."

Lois's eyes brightened. "Really? Got any dirt on Clark here?" She pointed at him as he tried to keep the redness on his neck from spreading to his face.

Masie patted Clark on the shoulders. "Oh, well with Clark here what you see is what you get." She then pulled out her notebook. "Any idea what you guys want to eat? Stove busted when your dad was trying to fix the water heater earlier so I grabbed up some volunteers and got them grilling. Burgers, hot dogs, steak...If you can grill it, we got it..."

"Uh, not sure yet," Lois said.

"Just give us a minute," Clark nodded.

"Sure thing. Holler when you're ready." She smiled and left.

"What you see is what you get, huh?" Lois teased. Clark laughed as she leaned up to kiss him. "Somehow, I don't think that depiction is quite accurate."

He wrapped his arms around her, holding her against him for a moment before releasing her, reminding himself they were in public. He glanced back at the grill to see who exactly Masie had conned into grilling for her and laughed when he saw his dad with an apron and chef hat on, manning the grill, with Masie yelling at him over the burnt corn on the cobb. "Well, you know these small

towns..." he shrugged.

Lois wrinkled her nose. "Not really," she said, looking around skeptically. "Feels like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz...Shouldn't a tornado be whisking us off to Oz pretty soon?"

He laughed, "Bad metaphor, Lois. Dorothy *wanted* to go back to Kansas."

"Technicality." Lois shook her head. "It's just weird. I've never left Metropolis a day of my life."

"I can tell."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Lois asked.

"You're a bit...intense compared to everyone out here. It's not like Metropolis..."

"That's for sure," Lois said, leaning against him.

"What I mean is...think of it as a slower...more relaxed...laid back Metropolis," he corrected.

"You're kidding right?" Lois laughed. "I've heard about these small towns." She looked back pointing at his dad in the chef hat manning the grill. "See Mister Farmer Joe flipping burgers?"

He did his best to keep a straight face and nodded, "Yeah,"

"Bet you he's a cross-dresser," Lois said.

"Really?" His eyebrows shot up as he tried to imagine his dad wearing a dress. He did his best to keep a straight face. "Should we leave? I mean, you wouldn't want a *cross-dresser* cooking your food..."

"Very funny." Lois smacked him with the menu.

After his teasing, Lois had decided she wasn't in the mood for something heavy so they'd decided to walk around the town a bit. Some of the larger decorations for the festival were already up. Areas, where different kiosks were going to be, were marked off with tape. Lois and Clark walked hand in hand as she surveyed the small-town festival. They approached a middle-aged woman and Clark tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention. She turned around and smiled, giving Clark a big hug.

"Mom, this is ...Lois," Clark said with a grin, wrapping a protective arm around her from behind.

"Hi," Lois said shyly. "It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Kent." She held out her hand for the woman to shake.

"Martha, please," she corrected.

"Martha," Lois echoed.

"Clark tells me you're a journalism major as well?" Martha said, trying to break the ice.

Relieved to be talking about something comfortable, Lois nodded, "Yes, senior year. I'm hoping to be working at the Planet next year when I graduate."

"Daily Planet, huh?" Martha grinned, "Well, I'm sure if you work hard enough, anything is possible." She cast Clark a grin. "Shoot for the moon I always say. Come on, you kids must be starving..."

Clark gave a wink then interrupted, "Actually, Mom, Lois thinks the chef might be a cross-dresser..."

Lois rolled her eyes and twisted her mouth as she glanced at the middle-aged man flipping burgers. Martha laughed, "Oh, honey, that's Clark's father! I can't get him to buy me a dress let alone one for himself..."

Later that afternoon they sat in the town square with Clark's friend, Pete Ross who was catching them up on the happenings of Smallville. She sat in Clark's lap at a picnic table while Pete sat across from them. "Yeah, so Rachel was a shoe-in for Councilwoman and has been handling everything for the festival..."

"Who's Rachel?" Lois asked. That was the second time her name had been mentioned.

"Oh, she's a friend of ours. A few years younger... real nice gal... You'll like her," Pete reassured. "Don't worry nothing romantic or anything..." He winked at her before turning back to

his story. "...Anyway... You should have been here last week when Laura Lang LOST it when she found out Rachel was taking over the plans for the festival...I'm talking like blow up of all blow ups...I mean, we thought Lana was bad when you dumped her but...this..."

Lois gave Clark a quizzical look at the mention of an old girlfriend.

Clark looked uncomfortable, "I didn't...not exactly...I never..." He was stammering.

"Whatever. She was under the misinformed impression that you were taking her to prom and blew her top when you agreed to take Rachel as a friend instead...My bad!" Pete continued. "Anyway, this blow-up beat that one..."

Lois laughed. It was hard not to. It sounded like it would have been a lot of fun to have met Clark a few years ago back when he was in high school.

"Hey yall," A female voice said, taking a seat next to Pete. Lois turned to see who it was. She was a short woman with short blonde hair and blue eyes. She wore a blue t-shirt and khaki shorts. She turned to Lois extending her hand, "Rachel. You must be the infamous Lois Lane Clark's mom's been talking about..."

Lois smiled, shaking her hand. "That's me,"

"Hey, Rach, I was just catching them up on everything..." Pete said with a grin.

"Nothing too embarrassing for Clark, right?" Rachel teased.

"Just the slightly embarrassing ones that are enough to turn his neck red...nothing too bad." He grinned back.

"Gee thanks," Clark muttered with a grin, throwing a piece of popcorn at Pete.

"Y'all ain't seen Laura Lang over here have you?" Rachel asked.

"No," Pete said shaking his head, "but you better look out cuz her daughter's headed this way..." He pointed behind her.

Lois and Rachel turned around to see a short blonde girl with blue eyes headed their way. She wore a pink mini skirt and a white tank top that was barely covering anything. Lois rolled her eyes and groaned at the same time that Rachel muttered, "Conniving tramp probably sent here to do her mother's dirty work for her..."

"Rach..." Clark admonished.

"It's true," Rachel muttered, "You should know..."

Lois looked at him curiously but didn't say anything as the infamous Lana Lang approached them. "Rachel Harris! Who do you think you are...going against MY mother and..." Lana stopped when she saw Lois and Clark staring at her in confusion. "Oh, Clark," she blushed. "I didn't see you there..."

He raised an eyebrow and shook his head. Pete smiled, eating up the local town drama, "Oh, yeah, Clark came to town for the weekend to show off his girlfriend from Metropolis."

Lana looked like she was about to spit nails. "Girlfriend???"

Clark nodded, "Lana, this is Lois Lane." He smiled softly as he wrapped a protective arm around Lois.

She looked a bit shocked, unable to voice what was obviously running through her mind. "Girlfriend?" she repeated. "But you... I mean...I thought you were..." Pete and Rachel were laughing pretty hard at this point.

"What?" Clark challenged, staring her down with a steely gaze. It was obvious he had no idea what she was referring to.

"Oh, I don't know. Good looking...never dating...never a girlfriend..." Lana ticked off as Rachel and Pete both rolled their eyes.

Clark narrowed his eyes. "I had girlfriends, Lana."

"Just not you..." Pete muttered under his breath in laughter.

Lois had a pretty good idea what Lana thought. If he wasn't interested in her, then there must be something wrong with him. She knew girls like that in high school. Drama, nothing but drama. "Nope," Lois shook her head, "No problems in that department..." Was all she could manage as she reached behind her to pat his

inner thigh. She could hear Clark choke on his soda in response. That caused Pete and Rachel to laugh even harder. Lana seemed to be putting the pieces together, noticing where Lois had her hands and meeting her stern look.

“You...” Lana was fuming. She turned to Rachel who was almost beet red from laughing so hard. “What is so funny, Rachel Harris?”

“Your face,” Pete sputtered out, laughing harder as Clark struggled to clear his throat from the soda he’d just choked on.

“You’re messing with fire,” Clark whispered in Lois’s ear, tightening his arms around her.

“Maybe I want to get burned...” she murmured softly, rubbing her palm against him once more. He shuddered against her, tightening his arms around her as he brushed a kiss against her neck, sending a shiver down her spine.

“I hate you!” Lana fumed angrily, throwing a bottle at Pete’s head. He ducked to the side and laughed even harder when she stormed away.

Clark had turned them towards the table so that their legs were underneath it and now seemed intent on getting his revenge for feeling him up in the middle of the town square. His hands roamed up and down her inner thighs, exploring the exposed skin with his palms. She could feel her face getting flushed. She’d been the one to tell him she wanted to get burned... She just didn’t expect him to...

She felt Clark’s body shake against hers as he laughed at Lana’s retreating figure. Pete extended his hand to Lois’s and grinned, “Congrats! You survived!”

“Survived what?” Lois asked skeptically.

“Your first Lana Lang blow up.” Rachel said with a wink. “Won’t be the last.”

The things Clark was doing to her were making it so hard to concentrate on the conversation happening around her. It was a battle of wills. She would be the victor. She reached behind her once more. She felt him let out a shuddered breath against her neck as he slipped a finger beneath the fabric of her shorts, inching higher and higher. Oh, the things she wanted him to do to her...

“What was all that about?” Lois asked in confusion, doing her best to ignore the effect Clark’s fingers were having on her.

“Oh, don’t mind her. She’s just a little girl that’s mad someone got the toy she wanted. She’ll get over it.” Rachel admonished.

“Toy?” Lois asked in curiosity as she leaned forward, folding her hands in front of her, as she pressed her chest against the edge of the table. She was done teasing Clark. She knew she couldn’t do it any longer without torturing herself.

“Metaphor,” Pete said, “See, she’s mad Clark here never went out with her... even though she did all but draw a diagram for him to take a hint... after the ‘miscommunication’ at prom.”

‘Toy’ It was ironic they were talking about Clark being a toy and she was fighting the urge to take her ‘Clark Toy’ and have her way with him right here in the middle of town square.

Pete did air quotes over miscommunication, causing Clark to give him a stern look. “There was no miscommunication. She’s just nuts,” Clark corrected as he slid his hands up her shirt from beneath the table, resting his palms just below her ribcage.

Pete brushed his comment off, “Anyway, she convinced herself that it wasn’t her... it was him...”

Lois squirmed slightly as she his fingers brush against the edge of her bra. “I’m sure she did...” she managed.

“Yeah, too bad nobody believed a word of it...” Rachel added. “Happens when you’re the town gossip and caught lying about everyone...”

“Mmm hmmm...” Lois managed as she felt Clark’s breath against her ear. “That’s... good...” She managed as his palms slipped underneath the underwire of her bra. Oh, God... They had to get out of here.

“Hot enough for you...?” he whispered in her ear.

Oh, God... The things he was doing to her. She wanted nothing more than to turn around in his arms and take him right there on the table but she couldn’t. They were in a very public setting and... How far away had they parked? She looked around and smiled when she saw the truck not far away. If she could just...

“Do you want me to stop...?” he whispered in her ear teasingly.

It was no use. She knew if he kept doing what he was doing she was going to cry out in pleasure. She nodded and he smiled, removing his palms from below her top. He readjusted her shirt and she smirked at him.

She was just about to make up an excuse for them to leave when Rachel looked at her phone, “I gotta go, yall. Duty calls. It was nice meeting you, Lois,” she winked, “We’ll have to trade Clark stories later.”

“I’ll walk you,” Pete said, following Rachel to her car.

“Let’s get out of here,” Clark murmured in Lois’s ear.

“God, yesss...” She moaned, linking her arms around his neck to kiss him square on the lips.

He groaned against her mouth and stood up, holding her close as he wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his hands beneath her ribcage as they walked back towards the truck as fast as they could.

As soon as they’d gotten inside the truck, Clark had ordered her to the other side of the truck—as if that was going to make a difference. She laughed when they pulled up to the farm and parked by the barn. He looked around as if was looking for something before wrapping an arm around her, cupping her cheek, “Where were we?” he murmured against her lips as he rained featherlight kisses against her neck, inching himself lower as they slid down into the bench seat of the truck.

“Oh, God, that is sooo...” she moaned in pleasure. “What if someone catches us?” She asked as he tugged at the top button of her top.

“No one’s around for miles. Mom and Dad are still in town...” he whispered as he brushed featherlight kisses along her collarbone.

“Good,” she murmured, capturing his lips with her own as they lost themselves in one another’s arms, forgetting the world around them for the moment.

Clark leaned back against the seat, lazily tracing random patterns along her back with a slow smile, “That was...”

“I know...” She rested her head against his chest, reaching for her bra that sat on the gear shift.

“Such a waste of time,” He murmured disappointed at the lack of view now that she’d clasped her bra back on.

She looked around, “We’re still parked outside where peering eyes can see us. When we’re at home maybe I’ll lose the bra...”

“Promise? Whose home?” He winked at her as she buttoned her blouse.

“Is that your fantasy, Mr. Kent? Me with no bra?” she teased.

He shook his head. “No, you on my bed in my football jersey... nothing on underneath...” He murmured brushing his lips against her neck.

“Football jersey, huh? Maybe if you’re good, we’ll try it out sometime...” She leaned back against the seat, climbing off of his lap as she handed him his shorts. He pulled them on and looked back to see Lois tugging her shorts back on and fumbling with the button. She looked in the mirror. “Do I need to fix my hair?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean, does it scream ‘I just had sex in the cab of a truck’ or...” He laughed as he opened the door, helping her out.

“I don’t know much about hair styles, sorry,” He pointed her towards the barn. “You can always throw some hay in it and say

you fell.”

Lois smacked him, “Or I could push you.”

Clark smiled back at her, unable to wipe the grin off his face.

“What?” She asked nervously.

“Nothing...just realizing how much I love you...You’re gorgeous, intelligent, sexy, and I couldn’t imagine my life without you, Lois Lane.”

She smiled at him, leaning up to kiss him. “I love you too, Clark Kent, and I pray you never have to find that out.”

He smiled down at her and kissed her. The sound of a car approaching broke the moment and he looked up to see his parents parking the old red Ford in the driveway. “Looks like mom and dad are back. Last chance to throw you in a pile of hay,” he offered.

“So not funny...” She grabbed a handful of hay from the pile he was pointing at and chased him with it as they made their way back to the farmhouse.

Later that evening after Lois had gone to bed, Clark stared at the stars with his dad, contemplating how to bring up the subject that had been weighing on his mind for the last few weeks. He was in love with Lois Lane. He knew she was the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, but he knew a future with her wouldn’t be a real future unless he told her everything about himself.

“Stars seem so much brighter out here...” Clark said quietly, leaning back against the tractor. “I forget how beautiful it is here. The only stars you see in Metropolis are riding around in limos.”

His dad shook his head and smiled, “You’re the one that wanted the rat race. I couldn’t live there. Not for a minute.”

Clark smiled broadly, “There’s something about the city though, Dad...the pace...the people...”

“Lois?” Jonathan prompted with a grin.

“Yeah,” he sighed with a broad grin. “Being in Metropolis. Working at the Planet and finishing up school at Met U... It’s a dream come true...”

“But?” Jonathan prompted with a knowing look. He knew him too well. Clark just stared down at his feet, unsure of how to continue, “You still feel like you don’t fit in...”

Clark sighed, standing up and pacing back and forth in front of his dad. “I don’t!” He kicked a pebble nonchalantly a bit harder than he intended and they both watched it fly out of sight into space. “See?” He pointed at the rock as proof. “I don’t fit in. I have to control myself all the time and never use my powers because I might jeopardize my chance at a normal life...”

“Whatever that means...” His dad sighed, placing a supportive hand on his shoulder.

He shrugged. “Just being human like you and Mom. Living... working...having a family...”

His dad shook his head, “We don’t know if that’s possible and you can’t risk anyone finding out about you...If they knew...you could end up in some laboratory where they would...”

“...dissect me like a frog,” Clark nodded, finishing the familiar phrase for his dad. “I know, but I can’t hide forever and I can’t keep lying to Lois...”

“You’re not lying. You’re just omitting certain facts,” his dad corrected carefully.

“It feels like I’m lying to her. I want to be able to share everything with her...not just this...” He gestured to himself, “but me, Clark Kent...the man that can fly...bend steel over his head... and loves everything about her.”

Jonathan shook his head, “It’s just too risky, son,” He placed a hand on Clark’s shoulder, “You’ve only known each other less than a year...”

“But...” he began to argue but thought better of it when he saw his dad’s stern look. “I love her.”

“I know you do, son,” he sighed. “Just give it time.”

“Do you think there’ll ever be a time where I can use my powers for good and still be ...me, Clark Kent?” he asked wistfully.

“I don’t know, but if anyone can find a way, you can,” Jonathan said, giving him a hug.

Present Day...

Lois felt like she was moving in slow motion as she approached the conference room door. Her arm felt like it weighed a ton as she lifted it to knock on the door. A woman in her mid-forties and glasses approached the door, opening it just enough for her to step out. “I’m...I’m...”

“Lois Lane I presume?” The woman smiled, extending her hand, “I’m Dr. Friskin. I specialize in cases of memory loss.”

“Is it bad?” Lois asked, tearfully.

“He seems to remember small chunks of time but nothing too much about his past...where he grew up...he only knows his name from other people around him...” Dr. Friskin explained, “but he seems to know you...keeps asking for you.”

“I don’t know what to do here. I mean, it’s been five years...” Lois said, raking a hand through her hair.

Dr. Friskin noticed the ring on her hand and smiled, “You still hadn’t given up hope, had you?”

Lois shook her head, stroking the ring on her finger, “No, I couldn’t...”

Five Years Ago...

Lois fidgeted nervously in her seat as she waited patiently for Perry to respond. Today was the last day of her internship with the Daily Planet and she didn’t know if she’d get that final nod with an offer from the Daily Planet. She felt she’d all but proved herself with the stories she’d helped on over the last few months. But if she’d learned anything during that time it was that nothing was ever certain.

“So...” Perry began, folding his hands in front of him as he leaned forward. “I think you’ve done a tremendous job this year. Learned a lot...gotten your feet wet...cracked open a nationwide scandal...” he added with a grin, shaking his head.

Lois couldn’t help but smile at that, “Yes,” She and Clark had worked tirelessly with Perry and the others after the fiasco with Roarke and Harrington. ‘Corruption in Washington’ had been the headline for the Planet for a few weeks as they followed up on the murder of Harrington and exposed his involvement with Roarke and other unsavory characters. It had been incredible, seeing her name in print along with the other city beat reporters. She’d felt like a real reporter.

“I think you’ve definitely got what it takes...I know a good investigative reporter in the making when I see one...” Perry smiled.

“Really?” Lois couldn’t help but smile at the compliment. Was he buttering her up to just let her down though?

“I try to look at the whole picture when making an investment in reporters and writers for the Daily Planet. I value integrity, experience, initiative, and heart...you’ve proven you have all of those. So?” He pulled out a folder on his desk and she felt like her heart was pounding as he took a slight pause to hand her a letter on the infamous Daily Planet stationary. “It is my pleasure to officially offer you a job in the newsroom as a First Year City Beat Reporter.”

“Are you serious??” Lois took the paper as she stood up in excitement.

“As a heart attack!” He stood up to shake her hand in congratulations. “We had three openings on the city beat. I’m sure you won’t mind being teamed up with the new guy?” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

“New guy?” She asked with a confused expression. He nodded, pointing in the newsroom towards Clark’s desk where he

sat at his computer, working on the latest story with Claude on his desk. She smirked when she saw Clark push Claude off his desk and walk towards the copy room. “You two work well together. As long as you can keep it professional in the newsroom I don’t see why you can’t work together... Welcome to the Daily Planet.”

Lois sighed happily, grinning ear-to-ear when she took a seat at her desk. She’d had her official press badge made and updated all her information with HR. Now, she was ready to start working... as a reporter.

Clark smiled as she sat down, “Perry gave you your letter?”

She nodded then looked at him. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

He had had his interview with Perry yesterday but had never told her what he’d said. He shrugged. “I was told not to.”

She threw a wadded-up note at him and he laughed.

Present Day...

<< “He doesn’t remember a whole lot, but he remembers some things. Just be patient with him and try to help him through this. He’s going to need as much support as he can get right now...” >>

Lois recalled Dr. Friskin’s words as she opened the door to the Conference Room. ‘Here goes nothing,’ she thought to herself as she stepped inside, closing the door behind her.

She held her breath as she stared pensively at the man sitting at the table, staring out the window. He turned to look at her when she closed the door and smiled, “Hi.”

It took everything in her not to break down and cry when she heard that familiar voice. After so many nights of praying to hear his voice again it felt like a dream come true to hear his voice... but it wasn’t. She gave a weak smile and approached him hesitantly, opting to pace in front of the table for the moment, “Hi, yourself.” She fidgeted with her ring nervously. “So, uh, Perry said you were looking for me?”

He nodded and replied quietly, “Yeah.”

“Dr. Friskin said you don’t re-remember anything?”

He nodded with a wry smile, “That’s not exactly true. I remember some things.”

“Some things?” Lois prompted. “Do you remember what happened to you?”

He shook his head, “No, I think its all really choppy... I remembered your face...”

“My face?” She asked nervously.

“Yeah,” he shook his head. “This is nuts... They said people thought I was dead and...” He stopped for a moment, holding back on something. “Nothing makes sense.”

Lois sighed, taking a seat across from him. “Well, I guess we’ll just have to figure it out...” She tapped her fingers on the table nervously. “How much did Perry tell you?”

“Not much,” he shrugged. “He was trying to figure out what I remembered...” Clark said softly, “...which is not much.”

Lois nodded, allowing a few stray tears to fall down her cheeks.

“Are you okay?” he asked concerned.

She just shook her head, unable to hold the tears back anymore. “I’m sorry, I just...” she began, unable to stop the tears as he placed a hesitant hand over hers.

“It’ll be okay...” He smiled weakly at her.

“How?” She cried.

Five Years Ago...

Lois stepped off the elevator with Clark, listening as he showed her the latest article in the National Inquisitor. “I can’t believe you read that trash...”

“I got this one from Ralph...” He explained, “They’re just fun to read. This one about the Invisible Robin Hood?” He pointed at

the article. “This invisible guy breaks into the safe of the city’s most notorious slumlord, takes the money, then hands it out to the tenants in one of his buildings...”

Lois glanced at the article he was reading and pointed. “Did you happen to notice the article right next to it?” she laughed. “‘Benjamin Franklin is Alive and Living in My Electric Blender’,” she read.

They made their way to their desks and Perry approached them with tickets in hand. “Invite all your friends and tell ‘em to bring people who know how to dance and don’t mind dancing close.”

“What is this?” Lois asked, taking the pair of tickets from Perry.

“Coates Orphanage Charity Ball being hosted by Mr. Lex Luthor himself... even promised to make an appearance.” Perry grinned. “Maybe one of you can land that elusive personal interview with him.” With that Perry turned back towards the next set of unsuspecting employees and continued to hand out the tickets to the charity ball.

Clark smiled, “I guess I better get a tux.” He waved the tickets in the air.

She smiled back at him appreciatively. “When is it?”

He looked at the tickets, “Friday night.”

“I don’t suppose its optional,” Lois shrugged.

Clark shook his head, watching Perry force the tickets in Eduardo Friez’s hand. “Not from where I’m sitting.”

“Well, maybe we’ll get lucky and we can use the fact that we all basically almost died together to get him to give us an interview.”

“He didn’t even want his name mentioned in the Roarke/Harrington scandal,” Clark reminded her. “What makes you think you can convince him to give a one-on-one interview now?”

Lois shrugged, “Never hurts to ask.” A commotion on the television caught their attention, “What in the world?” Lois stood up to stand with the crowd of reporters huddled around the television screen.

The LNN Newscaster showed footage of a catering truck stopped at a stop light and the driver’s side door opening and the driver being thrown out of the truck. “If you’re not seeing what I’m seeing then you’re witnessing a miracle. Captured on amateur home video this morning, a catering truck, loaded with fancy treats for a political fund-raiser, was high-jacked by the ‘Invisible Man’,”

“Has everyone lost their mind?” Lois muttered. “There is no such thing as an invisible man.”

“Then how do you explain that?” Clark asked, pointing at the screen where the catering truck was driving off by itself without anyone behind the wheel. The footage showed the driver yelling and chasing after the truck in the distance.

“That truck ended up at the fourth street shelter here in downtown Metropolis, where homeless families feasted on goose liver pate and cold lobster salad. Many thanks to the Invisible Man!” The LNN Newscaster finished and the screen went back to the leading newscaster.

Eduardo Friez tapped Lois on the shoulder. “Catch.”

“Huh?” Lois looked at him confused.

“When the whackos come off the street, the newbies take ‘em...” He pointed toward the conference room where a large woman with red hair stood nervously. “Invisible Man’s wife...”

Lois motioned for Clark to follow her, “You’ve got to be kidding me...” She muttered under her breath.

“Come on, it might turn into something...” Clark reasoned. “Let’s check it out.”

“Why are you so interested in this?” Lois asked.

“I’m fascinated with the paranormal...” Clark shrugged.

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Lois said, taking him by the arm. “Who knows? Maybe she’ll introduce us to Casper, the

Friendly Ghost?"

Clark rolled his eyes as he opened the door. "After you..."

Present Day...

"Nightfall is nearly seventeen miles across. It's travelling close to thirty thousand miles an hour..." Dr. Daitch read off at a news conference being aired by LNN in the newsroom.

"Is there anything the military can do?" a reporter called out.

"We're working with a team to try and push this asteroid off its current course... to Earth, but trajectory and accuracy wouldn't be guaranteed. We can pray our efforts work..." Dr. Daitch explained.

"What happens if it doesn't?" another reporter asked.

"Worst case scenario? We are looking at Earth being knocked off its axis... even thrown out of our current solar orbit. This asteroid is much larger than the meteor that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. The crater alone will throw enough dust into the air to start a new ice age."

"How long until this Nightfall hits us?" another reporter asked.

"Four days."

Clark stared numbly at the blinds that had been closed, unable to speak. He had instinctually wrapped an arm around Lois after she began to cry. It seemed to just be second nature to him. He hadn't been able to decipher exactly what she was saying when she was rambling, in between tears, but him holding her seemed to help calm her.

Floyd had said they were engaged. He certainly felt an attraction to her, but he didn't have much of a memory at the moment. All he knew was his name and what people had told him. Mr. White had told him he'd worked at the Daily Planet as a reporter. The doctor said he was suffering from post-traumatic amnesia. He wondered if this had anything to do with that green room and those men he was running from earlier.

Lois was quiet. He looked down at her, uncertain of what to say. She seemed to be thinking about something. She pulled back from him for a moment, "I think we need to get out of here. That Trask guy showed up at my apartment looking for you... It's only a matter of time before he comes here... which probably means you can't go back to your apartment just yet..."

He held up a hand, "Whoa! Slow down... Who... what? ...I, uh, lost count..." He smiled sheepishly.

Lois smiled wryly back at him, "Sorry, I tend to ramble when I'm upset." She turned to face him, "The man that... shot you... Trask?" She prompted. He nodded, not sure who this Trask man was, but he guessed this man was responsible for the men chasing him. "He showed up at my apartment this morning looking for you... I guess you escaped?"

He shook his head, "I don't know. I just remember a room with a weird green glow in it and running for what felt like forever and then somehow I ended up in front of my apartment where Floyd found me and then I found myself here."

"Well, you always were most comfortable when you were writing..." Lois reasoned.

"I just wish I remembered..." Clark sighed. "I hate this."

Lois nodded, "Well, your mom's in Perry's office. Maybe she can help..."

"My mom?" Clark asked, confused.

"Martha Kent," Lois elaborated.

He shook his head, "Are you sure? I seem to remember my parents dying when I was younger..."

Lois shook her head, "You were adopted. Maybe you're remembering your birth parents?"

"Maybe," he shook his head. "Weird..."

"So, you're remembering some stuff..." Lois said with a smile. "That's a good sign."

"Still choppy though," Clark corrected.

Five Years Ago...

Lois stalked through the newsroom irritably as she made her way back to her desk. What a waste of time. Clark had been convinced this woman might have a story to tell and had convinced her to look into Helene Morris's story about her husband turning invisible but all she heard was headlines for the latest Dirt Digger.

"What a waste of time..." Lois muttered as she put her purse and coat down at her desk. "Poor woman. Her husband's probably got something on the side, walks out on her and she thinks he's turned invisible."

"How do you know he isn't?" Clark asked.

"Clark, are you serious? We're talking about a figment of somebody's overactive imagination. Plain and simple."

"Does everything in life have to have a perfectly reasonable explanation?" he countered.

"Everything," she said.

"All grounded in clear, scientific reality," Clark pressed.

"Of course," Lois shrugged, not sure what he was getting at.

"So, there's no magic left in the universe?" Clark teased with a grin.

"Well, there's no werewolves or vampires loose in the city either," Lois shot back.

Eduardo approached them. "How'd it go?"

"Dead end." Lois snapped.

Eduardo pointed at the television coverage and shook his head, "Maybe not."

The television coverage showed Helene Morris in front of her home with a swarm of reporters around her. "He worked day and night to make himself invisible. I guess he finally figured out how. All I want to say is: Alan, if you're listening please come home."

Lois rolled her eyes, "Trying to get her ten minutes of fame I see."

"Lo-is, I don't think..." Clark began.

Eduardo shook his head, "From what I gather her nosy next-door neighbor sold the story to the wire services. Pretty crazy story."

"See?" Clark added.

Lois shook her head, "It doesn't matter. There's no story here anyway. There is *no* such thing as an invisible man."

Perry hollered across the newsroom, "Friez! Where's that piece on Barnes' escape from prison? You were supposed to have it on my desk an hour ago!"

"Coming, Chief!" Eduardo called.

"It's not even seven yet," Lois muttered as they stepped out of the cab.

"Well, crime never sleeps." Clark shrugged, following her into the jewelry store.

"Not sure how this is news..." Lois shook her head as she pulled out her press badge to be let in behind the police tape.

A tall man about six foot with dark hair and glasses approached them. "You two with the Daily Planet?" They nodded and he continued, "Name's Henderson. Detective Henderson. Friend of Perry White's. He told me you were working on the piece on the invisible man..."

"Yes, but what does that have to do with..." Lois began.

He gestured for her to follow him through the store and they approached the back storeroom where the store's security system and videos were. "Watch," he instructed. The video showed shoppers in the store then it showed the door opening and closing by itself with a gun floating in the air. Gunshots flew around the room and people fell to the ground. The glass in the display cases was smashed by itself and jewelry was taken.

"I don't believe it..." Lois gasped in shock.

Henderson shook his head, “No prints, no leads, no nothing.”
 “What about the witnesses?” Lois asked.

“Witnesses to what? An invisible man? You’ll forgive me if I don’t call in our sketch artist.” Henderson asked. “You saw the tape. We’ve got a warrant out on this Morris guy but we’re not sure how to find him. Do either of you have any information on him?”

Lois and Clark both shook their heads.

“We spoke with his wife yesterday, but from what she was saying, he was trying to help people...this seems different.” Clark said.

Lois shook her head, “This is nuts. There has to be some kind of...explanation. There is no such thing as an invisible man...”

Clark pointed at the security guard nursing a cut to the side of his head, “I think the security guard might disagree with you.”

“If you two find anything on this guy let me know,” Henderson handed them his card.

“We will,” Clark nodded. “Thank you, detective. It was nice meeting you.” He watched as Henderson left and then followed Lois back into the store. “So, yesterday you were saying something about this being a dead end...”

Lois shook her head. “I’m not convinced. There has to be an explanation. People don’t just turn invisible...”

“At what point are you going to start believing in this?” Clark asked.

“When I don’t see it with my own two eyes.” Lois retorted. “Come on, let’s head over to Helene’s. Maybe she has some leads on Alan Morris.”

Lois and Clark cautiously entered the basement laboratory of Alan Morris. Everything was broken and the lights were flickering on and off. Lois looked at Helene who was nursing a bruise on the side of her head, “Helene, when did this happen?”

Helene looked away, shaking her head, “A few hours after the news vans left. I came downstairs and he hit me on the head. I haven’t called the police yet.”

“Are you okay?” Clark asked concerned.

Lois looked at Helene cautiously. “Has your husband ever been violent with you before?”

Helene shook her head, “You think it was Alan.” She adamantly shook her head over and over, “No, never, never, never. He wouldn’t hurt a fly. Really, he wouldn’t. If there was a fly in the kitchen, he’d spend half an hour catching it and setting it free.”

Lois looked at her in disbelief. The woman was incredible. She was still defending him. “So, what you’re saying is that some other invisible man...”

“...is impersonating MY invisible man,” Helene finished for her.

“I cannot believe she’s still defending him...” Lois muttered as they walked back towards the taxi cab that was waiting for them.

“She said it wasn’t him...” Clark argued.

“He bashes her on the head...” Lois continued.

“But she said it wasn’t him...” Clark countered. “Just because he’s a little eccentric...”

“Eccentric? Try a Taco short of a combo...” Lois retorted.

“Maybe, but he doesn’t sound like the man who’s been terrorizing the city...or at least

emphasize that there is no evidence to suggest Alan Morris is an armed robber. The man was giving money away. Why is he now stealing it?”

“I don’t know,” Lois shook her head. “But you know there’s a possibility that Helene is wrong...”

“Well...”

“After all, nobody really knows anybody...”

“But...”

“We like to think that we do, but we all wear disguises. Don’t you?”

“I...”

“Everyone disguises everything...nobody really knows anyone because everyone knows once you reveal yourself...once you open yourself up...they wind up using it against you...” Lois rambled angrily. The emotions from her parent’s divorce were coming to head.

“But marriage is about sharing everything you have, even when you don’t feel like it.”

“So’s divorce,” Lois said bitterly. “Ask my mother.”

Clark stared at her cautiously and she looked away, not wanting to give into the emotions that were threatening to overtake her. “Lois?”

Lois laughed bitterly, “It’s been twelve years and I guess I still get a bit angry about my parents’ divorce.”

“Sorry.” He rested a hand on her shoulder. “Lois, not everyone has that kind of relationship.”

“You mean where they wind up hating one another...” Lois muttered bitterly. “In my head, I know everyone doesn’t end up like they did, but...I don’t know...” She looked up at him sadly. “Seeing Helene with that bruise just brought a lot back...Sorry for going off like that.”

He cupped her cheek. “It’s understandable.” He leaned in to kiss her. “Come on, let’s head over to Morris’s work and see if we can find anyone that may know something.”

Lois nodded, “Yeah.” She took him by the arm and headed towards the Jeep.

The next morning Lois and Clark sat at the conference table with Eduardo, Ralph, Cat, and Claude as Perry went over the status of everyone’s stories. “Friez anything from the Commissioner on the prison break last night?” Perry asked.

“No, but the police aren’t talking right now. I think they know more than they’re letting on,” Eduardo explained.

“Invisible man lets out a whole cell block of prisoners. I wouldn’t want to talk about it either...” Ralph laughed.

“Mayor has everyone on a nine o’clock curfew for now,” Eduardo explained. “If I hear anything new I’ll let you know.”

“Good,” Perry nodded. “Lois, Clark, how are you coming with this invisible man stuff? Anything to it?”

Lois shook her head, “We went to Morris’s work yesterday and no one seemed too concerned when he didn’t show up for work. Didn’t even bother to call him. They just replaced him. You should have seen this place, Chief. It was a whole bunch of lab techs in little cubicles. Really impersonal.”

“We dropped the material from his lab off at S.T.A.R. Labs. We should have a report back by this afternoon,” Clark added.

“And the robberies?” Perry prompted.

“Henderson’s stumped,” Clark said. “Invisible Robin Hood is still out there doing good but there’s also this invisible robber...breaking into jewelry stores...breaking prisoners out... Seems like a different guy.”

“Don’t forget that robbery last night,” Ralph added, pulling out a police report. “House of Rare Coins. The owner’s in the hospital from a crushed windpipe.”

“Judas Priest,” Perry muttered. “This just keeps getting better and better.” He shook his head in disgust. “So, we’re assuming there are TWO invisible men out there?”

“Could be more,” Lois said. “All of Alan Morris’s suits were stolen from his lab.”

“Uh-huh,” Perry said. “Well, once you hear from S.T.A.R. Labs we’ll add the sidebar on the ‘invisible suit’, but for now hold off on that just yet. Maybe just a mood piece on the effect of the evil vs. good invisible man? Ask the real invisible man to come in and sort everything out?”

Lois and Clark nodded and Perry then turned to Ralph,

“Simms, I want you to work with Friez on this Barnes story and see what you can come up with from your contacts at the Metropolis P.D. Find out why they’re keeping their mouths shut.”
 “Got it,” Ralph nodded.

Clark held up a report as he approached Lois at her desk.
 “Report from S.T.A.R. Labs.”
 “What’d they find out?” Lois asked, taking a sip of her coffee.
 “The material from Alan Morris’s lab is a type of fiber optic. It’s designed to reflect visible light as ultra-violet light,” Clark explained.
 “Come again?” Lois asked quizzically, still not understanding what he was saying.
 “The ultraviolet...or...UV light is an invisible part of the spectrum,” Clark continued.
 “So, you’re saying this...” She held up the report she was reading, “...CAN make someone invisible...?”

Clark nodded, “Think of it as the next stage in stealth technology. If you wore a suit made of this kind of material, you could appear invisible.”
 “Of course,” Lois said smugly, “The appearance of invisibility is different from REAL invisibility.”
 Clark laughed, “You know Lois it must be tough being right all the time.”

“It is,” she laughed.
 Brian approached them with a smile. “Lois, that story you and Clark wrote asking the Invisible Man to turn himself in really paid off.”

“Another one?” Lois grumbled irritably.
 “I got the last one,” Clark muttered, turning to the stack of files on his desk.
 “Fine,” Lois followed Brian to the elevator where a man in a trench coat, wrapped in gauze with sunglasses stood. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I am the invisible man,” he laughed.
 Lois ripped the gauze bandage off his nose and he yelled in pain. “Sorry, buddy. Try central casting!”

Present Day...

Martha stared at the coverage of the Nightfall asteroid numbly. Four days. They said they had four days until the asteroid would destroy life as they knew it on Earth. She knew in her heart that if they could get Clark to remember he could possibly stop the asteroid, but how could she get him to save the world when he couldn’t even remember who he was?

Lois stepped out into the newsroom, leaving Clark in the conference room. She scanned the room and found Martha sitting with Lucy. “Martha?”

Martha looked at Lois. “How is he?”
 Lois shook her head, “He doesn’t remember a lot. He seemed to remember that his parents ... died, I guess. I never knew that.” Martha’s eyes widened slightly at the mention of Clark’s birth parents’ death. “I just thought he was adopted. Anyway, I thought maybe it would help if you tried talking to him. Familiar faces seem to help I think.”

Martha nodded, “Sure.” She handed Lois her cell phone. “I’ve been trying to get through to Jonathan but I can’t. Could you try and see if you can get him? Let him know what’s going on?”
 Lois nodded, “Sure thing.”

Five Years Ago...

Lois and Clark stared at the timid middle-aged man sitting across from them skeptically. After dealing with fake invisible men all day Lois had called it a night early, but when she’d arrived home she found Alan Morris—the real invisible man—waiting for her. Seeing a floating head had scared her so he’d quickly changed

out of the invisible suit. She’d called Clark for help and now they were trying to figure out what to do.
 “I was the invisible Robin Hood, but I’m not the one doing all these bad things. There’s another invisible man out there!” Alan angrily paced in front of them.

Lois glanced at Clark, unsure if Alan was aware of what happened to Helene. “Alan, we believe you.” He visibly sighed in relief. “I just don’t understand ... why you wanted to make yourself invisible. Why did you leave your wife like that?”
 “It’s not like that, Ms. Lane,” Alan shook his head. “I was trying to become invisible to become visible again...” At their skeptical look, he continued, “Well, at some point...I’m not exactly sure when...I ... Alan Morris ...became invisible. I disappeared. I went to work every morning, did the same thing. I drifted apart from my friends. Helene and I stopped talking. I guess, she lost interest in me. I became so invisible in my own life, that I decided to do it for real. I started experimenting.”

Clark lifted up the white fabric of the suit, “Where did you get the idea for the suit?”
 “From a fluorescent light bulb,” Alan explained. “A fluorescent light bulb turns invisible light into visible light. I reversed the process. It took me fifteen years to build a working suit.”

Lois looked at the suit. “How come we can see it?”
 “Because it hasn’t been activated yet,” Alan explained, handing her the hood, “Go ahead. Try it on.” Lois slipped the hood on and he continued to explain, “There are switches in the interior lining.” He pressed a switch and Clark’s eyebrows raised when her face disappeared. Lois took off the hood and handed it back to him. Alan looked down shamefully, “Someone must have stolen my other suits. I had several backups.”

Clark looked at Lois in concern, realizing Alan didn’t know what had happened. “Alan, have you spoken with your wife recently?”

Alan shook his head, “No, I knew she’d lose it on me, but I was having so much fun helping people. It felt like I was finally making a difference in the world.”

Clark nodded, understanding the man’s need to help others. He had that same need, but unfortunately, he couldn’t just turn invisible...could he? “Alan, somebody broke into your home and...”

Alan’s eyes widened. “Is Helene...?”
 Lois calmed his fears, “She’s fine.”
 Alan breathed a sigh of relief, “Oh, thank goodness! If anything ever happened to her...” He shook his head, “Will you help me stop whoever’s doing this?”

Lois sighed, “It’s not going to be easy. Invisibility is an incredible advantage.”
 “Alan, you can stay at my place until we get all this sorted out,” Clark said. “We’ll do everything we can to help.”

Lois and Clark sat in his dining room with files spread across the table. Lois groaned in frustration, rubbing her temples as she sat up. “This is impossible!”
 “Lois, keep your voice down,” Clark admonished, pointing at the sofa bed where Alan was asleep.

“Sorry,” Lois whispered. “I’m just frustrated. These invisible men keep hitting places all over Metropolis and we’re not any closer to finding out who is behind the invisible mask...”

Clark rubbed her shoulders lightly, “We’ll figure it out...”
 “Even after eliminating all the armed robbers still in jail or accounted for somewhere else, we’ve still got hundreds of suspects...” Lois whined.

“Let’s go over it again.” Clark pulled out his notepad. “First, he robs a jewelry store, then a rare coin shop...”
 “Jewels?” Lois guessed. “Precious metals?”
 “...but not all precious metals,” Clark reasoned, pulling out

the list of items that were stolen from the jewelry store.

“A gold ring with emerald stone, gold chains, a gold brooch, gold coins...” Lois read off the list.

“Gold!” Clark exclaimed. “He steals gold.”

“And what criminal just escaped that was notorious for stealing gold?” Lois asked as she sifted through the list they had compiled with every criminal’s modus operandi. “Ah-ha! Barnes... That guy that escaped. The one Eduardo was covering...”

Clark nodded, “I’ll give him a call.”

It was late at the Daily Planet. Most of the staff was gone except for a few reporters, Perry White, and the cleaning crew. Lois and Clark stepped off the elevator and headed toward the conference room where Eduardo had told them to meet him. He was on the phone when they entered the room. He gestured for them to close the door behind them. “Yeah... thanks for your help. Uh-huh, bye,” He hung up the phone and looked up at them in disbelief. “How did a story about an invisible man link back to Golden Boy Barnes?”

Lois shrugged, “Just dumb luck I guess.” She handed him the research they had. “It certainly seems like his ‘MO’.”

Eduardo nodded, “Yeah, and the prisoners that were broken out of that cell block were all a part of Barnes’s gang that was busted on their last job to rob the Metropolis Gold Repository.”

“An invisible gang of criminals,” Clark shook his head. “We’ve got to figure out a way to stop them.”

“Well, they’re bound to strike again,” Eduardo said, handing them the old article he wrote on Barnes’s capture.

“But where?” Clark asked.

Lois held up the article. “Maybe he went to go take care of some unfinished business...”

Clark nodded, “We need to warn Henderson. Maybe Alan has a way to make the suits visible?”

“It’s worth a shot,” Eduardo shrugged. “Good luck.”

Clark unlocked the apartment and stepped inside, being careful to be as quiet as he could. He motioned for Lois to follow him and he closed the door behind him. “He’s still asleep.”

Lois nodded, “Well, let him be, then. We’ll wait awhile. I don’t know if he can help anyway.”

Clark nodded and headed for the kitchen. “I’ll make some tea.”

“Sounds good.” Lois followed him into the kitchen and watched as he filled the kettle with water and put it on the stove.

“How’s Lucy adjusting?” Clark asked, stirring in tea leaves and some spices she didn’t recognize.

Lois shook her head, “Oh, you know the usual... I don’t understand her sometimes. She keeps going from one major to another...”

Clark laughed, “She’s figuring out where she fits in in the world. I guess it’s normal at that age.”

Lois shook her head, “I wish she’d hurry up and figure it out. I’m sick of being the go-between with her and Mom.”

“Can your dad help?” Clark asked cautiously.

Lois shook her head, “No, we don’t really talk ... Ever since I moved back in with Mom when I refused to go to medical school, he kinda hasn’t been around... for any of us.”

“I’m sorry,” Clark patted her shoulder.

“It’s okay,” Lois smiled back at him. “I’m much happier doing what I love and ... as much as she drives me crazy... I do enjoy having Lucy living with me.” Clark poured the cups of tea and he guided her out to the back balcony where she took a seat in the chair he had out there. She gazed up at the stars and smiled up at him, taking a sip of the tea. “Nice,”

“Lapsang Suchang,” Clark said with a smile, recalling the memory of the first time he’d had it. “My mom used to make me

tea with raisin scones when I was feeling bad. Years later, I had them for high tea at the London Savoy but it never tasted as good.”

Lois smiled, “Your parents are really wonderful. I surprised myself and actually enjoyed Smallville.”

“I’m glad,” He said softly. “Mom and Dad really love you. I think Pete and Rachel love you, too.”

Lois laughed, recalling the torture under the picnic table in front of Pete and Rachel when Lana had been in rare form confronting Rachel. “That was a lot of fun. Pete seems like a lot of fun. I’m sure you guys had a lot of fun growing up together.”

Clark shrugged, taking a seat next to her and looking up at the stars. “Yeah, I guess you could say that. Pete and I used to get into a lot of trouble when we’d play on Wayne Irig’s tractor. One time we were running from him and fell into this huge mud puddle ...” He laughed at the memory, “... we were busted before we even got home.” He placed his mug on the side table. She handed her mug to him to put with it as well and then turned to wrap his arms around her from behind as she leaned back against him.

Lois laughed, “Sounds like you were a bit of a hell raiser when you were younger, Mr. Kent.”

He shrugged, “Not really. Just a bored kid with too much curiosity for his own good.”

Lois looked up at the stars wistfully. “When Lucy and I were little we’d play this game... Invisible or Fly. We’d ask each other what would you rather be able to do? Fly or be invisible?”

Clark looked at her tenderly. “And you chose?”

“Mmmm, Invisible,” she said softly, leaning against him as he wrapped an arm around her and kissed her head. “I wished I could walk through all those closed doors. I guess I still do.”

Clark smiled, “And what did you think you’d find behind all those closed doors?”

Lois looked back at him with a tender smile, “I don’t know. Something different... wonderful...” She intertwined her fingers with his, leaning back against him. “Something I don’t have... couldn’t have.” She then smiled broadly at him, looking back to meet his eyes. “So, what about you?”

“Huh?” he asked confused.

“Invisible or fly?” She turned in his arms to face him.

He looked up at the stars and smiled broadly. “Fly.”

“Really?” Lois asked, surprised, linking her arms around his neck.

“Yeah,” Clark nodded. “I think it’d be great to be able to fly in the sky... touch the clouds... the stars...”

“That does sound wonderful,” Lois sighed against him.

“Listen to us,” she laughed, “dreaming of being invisible and flying around the world like a bunch of kids.”

He laughed lightly, “Sometimes it’s fun to be a kid...” He leaned in to kiss her.

“Maybe,” she laughed, “but I’m glad I’m not a little kid anymore. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy... this,” she leaned into him, capturing his lips with her own and he groaned against her. “...or this...” she whispered, brushing her lips against his collarbone as she unbuttoned his dress shirt, “...or this...” she whispered inaudibly as she brushed a hand against his inner thigh, feeling the twitch of his hardened muscles pressed against her.

“Lo-is...” He yelped when she reached between their bodies, surprising him. She laughed against him and he tightened his arms around her. “Not out here,” he murmured.

“Race ya to the bedroom...” she whispered mischievously, slipping out of his arms and dashing inside to the bedroom.

“Great plan,” Clark muttered as the doors to the gold repository safe closed on himself, Lois and Alan.

“Now’s not the time to be a smart ass,” Lois shot back as she paced around the room.

“He said it was airtight,” Alan instructed, “Maybe we need to

stop wasting our breath on arguing.”

Lois glared at Alan. It had been a good plan: put the invisible suits on and sneak into the Gold Repository with the Phosphorous and throw it on them to make the criminals visible to the police. Unfortunately, Alan Morris seemed to be allergic to phosphorous and he sneezed it all over them... right in front of Barnes and his gang. Now, here they were in an airtight safe, praying for a way out.

Clark was fumbling with the keypad on the safe. Alan was sitting on the floor, trying to calm his breathing, and Lois was trying to figure out a plan. She didn't have her phone. It was definitely getting harder and harder to breathe. “Clark...” She mumbled incoherently as she took a seat on the floor. The weight on her chest felt like an anvil. It hurt.

“Just a sec...” he said as he continued to play with the keypad. “I can't breathe...”

That seemed to register with him and he stopped what he was doing and took a seat next to her, “Lois?” He looked at her and Alan for a moment then back at the wall where he had been fumbling with the keypad.

She thought she could smell something burning for a moment and felt the tightness she'd felt in her chest relax as air began to fill her lungs more rapidly.

“I'm gonna get us out of here. Just give me a minute,” He instructed returning to the keypad.

She nodded, then turned to look at Alan who seemed to look better than he had a minute ago. She took a shallow breath, standing up to examine the door. She noticed a small hole on the metal doors. Had that been there before? “Hey, Clark, look at this...”

Before she could point it out to him the doors opened. She looked at him in surprise. “Finally figured out the code,” he said with a grin. “Let's get out of here...”

“Wait, what about Barnes?” Lois asked.

He nodded, “I'll take a look and make sure he's gone. Stay here.”

Before she could respond he was gone down the hall. Lois rolled her eyes, “If he thinks I'm just going to sit here while he gets to have all the fun he's out of his mind...” Lois muttered as she looked around the hallway for any sign of Barnes. “Come on, Alan, let's go...”

“But he just told you...”

“I know what he told me, Alan...” Lois shot back. “Come on!”

When she came out the front of the Gold Repository, she found Detective Henderson with a swarm of officers that had surrounded the place. Clark was standing with Henderson and had already shed the visible invisible suit. She walked up to him, interrupting, “What happened?”

Henderson smiled, “I was just telling your partner, Barnes and his gang had come out with guns blazing and we couldn't see where the shots were coming from. Thankfully, when that wind came through it had knocked the bag of phosphorous on them. Strangest thing I've ever seen.”

“Phosphorous?” Lois asked. “I thought that bag was still inside.”

“I guess not...” Clark shrugged.

Henderson pointed at the two of them and Alan, “You need to get checked out. Make sure that stuff doesn't have any negative effects...”

“We've got to file this the Planet, but we'll get checked out. Promise,” Clark said, walking away.

“Don't forget,” Henderson warned.

“We won't,” Lois added, rolling her eyes as they headed to the Jeep. “Let's get out of here before he tries to tie us to a stretcher.”

“With pleasure,” Clark replied.

Present Day...

“So,” Clark began hesitantly, “You're my...mom?” Martha nodded quietly, unable to speak. “I'm sorry. I just don't seem to have any memory of you,” he smiled apologetically.

Martha nodded again, but found her voice, “It's okay. I'm just so...happy you're okay. You have no idea how long we've prayed you'd come home...”

“From what Lois was saying it sounds like I can't exactly ... go home.” Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair.

Martha nodded hesitantly. “Well, don't you worry about that. We'll figure this out. Are you sure you don't remember anything about the men that you were running from?”

He shook his head, “No, just a green glowing room, Lois... and I remember dreaming about flying...” He said wistfully. “I guess I must have enjoyed flying...”

Martha nodded. ‘Flying.’ What if he started using his powers on accident like he did when he was thirteen? “Have you noticed anything...different?” She gave the signal she and Jonathan had developed when talking about his special abilities.

“Different how?” he asked, confused.

She didn't want to scare him, but if he accidentally figured out he could fly he could end up scaring himself even worse than when he was a teenager. She had to tell him. “Clark, you know you were adopted, right?” When Clark nodded, she continued, “We didn't exactly have a standard adoption.”

“What do you mean?” he asked suspiciously.

Martha looked around the empty conference room, checking to make sure the blinds were closed before she continued. “We found you. We didn't know where you came from...we decided we didn't care. We would raise you as our own...”

“So, I'm a foundling?” He asked. He seemed surprised with the word choice he used.

“Yes,” She said tearfully, placing a hand on his. “You were our miracle...but we never told anyone how we found you...” she sighed. Taking a deep breath, she continued, “When you got to be a pre-teen you started to have something strange happen ... you... were able to lift tractors on your pinky finger...”

His eyes widened and he pulled away from her as she continued, “What? That's crazy...This is crazy...”

“You began to have x-ray vision, heat vision, enhanced hearing, the ability to absorb and eat...anything without it hurting you...” Martha continued.

Clark paced around the room, shaking his head ‘no’ over and over as he muttered, “This is insane. You're insane...” He didn't notice himself floating in the air as he paced around the room.

“...When you tried to get rid of something you'd eaten you had a sort of cold freeze breath...Then when you turned eighteen you began to ...” She stopped short when she noticed he was floating a few inches off the floor as he tried to cover his ears to tune out what she was saying to him. “... fly.”

“Oh, my God!”

Clark and Martha looked towards the conference room door where Lois stood in shock.

Five Years Ago...

Lois held up a blue sequined dress in the mirror, looking back at the black dress she had on the bed. “I don't know...”

Lucy shook her head, “Lois, for God's sake just pick a dress already!” She sank back against the bed, watching her sister get ready. After her graduation, she had moved in with Lois to attend college at Met U.

“I just don't know...” Lois said nervously. “I've never been to one of these...”

A knock at the door caught Lucy's attention and she turned to answer, “That's probably Clark...Maybe *he* can make you get ready faster...” She muttered under her breath as she answered the door, “Hi Clark.”

Clark was dressed in his tux, “Still getting ready?” he asked. Lucy pointed towards the bedroom, “Good luck! I give up!” She then headed towards her room, leaving Clark to chuckle to himself. He headed towards the bedroom and found Lois holding both dresses up for inspection.

She didn’t notice him come in, preoccupied with her task at hand so he decided to wait patiently on the bed. After a few minutes, she seemed to notice him and turned to smile, “What do you think? It’s our first big shindig with the Planet. I just don’t know what to wear. Do I go big and poufy or do I go with long and slender...”

He gazed at her, taking in the sight of her in a black lace corset with matching panties and thigh highs, “I like what you’re wearing right now,” He said with a sly grin.

“Later,” she swatted at him, turning to face him with the two dresses. “Which one?”

“Which one’s easier to take off?” He asked, being completely serious.

“You’re not helping,” She said as he wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her towards him.

“Blue...” He murmured, brushing his lips against hers.

“Thank you,” she whispered against his lips as she turned to begin putting the blue dress on. As she stepped into it and pulled her arms through, she backed up to him holding her hair up, “Zip me?”

He slowly slid the zipper up, tucking it down so as not to poke her. “Ready?”

“Let’s go,” Lois smiled.

Perry White stood with a middle-aged woman with short blonde hair dressed to the nine in the lobby of the Metropolis Marriott as Lois and Clark made their way inside. “Glad you two could make it!” He grinned at them.

Clark smiled, “Wouldn’t miss it.”

“Oh, honey, these are the two I was telling you about, Lois Lane and Clark Kent...” He turned to the woman with him. “This is my Alice.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Alice said, shaking their hands. “I’ve heard a lot of great things about the two of you.”

“Thank you, Mrs. White,” Lois smiled, uncertain what things she could have heard about them from Perry.

“Alice,” she corrected.

“Alice,” Lois echoed.

“I heard you two found a real invisible man,” Alice said with a wink as they made their way into the ballroom where everyone was gathering.

“Not exactly,” Lois argued.

“Pardon?” Alice asked, “I thought I read...”

Clark laughed, “Lois doesn’t believe there’s any magic left in the universe.”

“He wasn’t invisible. He was wearing a suit to make him *appear* invisible.” Lois argued.

Perry shook his head, “Always an explanation for everything,” He took Alice’s arm as he handed his tickets to the usher at the door.

Lois and Clark followed, continuing the argument. “The appearance of being invisible is completely different from real invisibility,” Lois continued.

“Uh-huh,” Clark said sarcastically.

“Well, I say it’s just lucky that Barnes guy’s suit malfunctioned like that. Who knows what they could have done if the suits hadn’t malfunctioned...” Alice shook her head.

Lois was quiet a moment, recalling how she and Clark had been trapped in the bank vault with the ‘invisible man’ Alan Morris. “Yeah, we were really lucky.”

“I’m just glad you two made it out of there. Maybe the next story you bring in you won’t become a part of a hostage situation,

hmmm?” Perry gave Lois a poignant look.

“That was not my fault!” Lois argued.

“You two did get checked out, right? No side effects from that stuff that got all over you?” Perry asked, trying to change the subject.

“Uh, yeah,” Clark said rather quickly.

Perry gave Lois a look and she rolled her eyes. “Yes, we got checked out. Everything’s fine.”

“You’d better have. I don’t need my reporters falling down on the job because they didn’t follow doctor’s orders... Shall we?” Perry motioned towards the ballroom that was filled with food and music.

Lois and Clark followed them and took in the view. It was intimidating to say the least.

“Wow,” Lois said shakily.

“Yeah,” Clark nodded looking around the room.

“Shindigs like this always bring out the rich and famous.

Don’t let that intimidate you. Rub elbows. Make contacts...” Perry pointed to Lex Luthor who was standing between the Mayor and a few well-known judges, laughing. Perry shook his head. “Take notes.”

“Unlike Mr. Luthor, we don’t have a rich lifestyle and a well-known father to fall back on,” Lois said irritably, readjusting her dress nervously.

Perry shook his head. “He wasn’t always rich. Mr. Luthor is a rags to riches... wrong side of the tracks... story. self-made billionaire... owns dozens of companies and has his finger in every pot. Man of the year every year and employs thousands of people throughout Metropolis. The only catch is he won’t do personal interviews.”

“Not even after meeting us?” Lois asked. “I thought he liked you, Chief,”

Perry winked, “Not even for me, but if you can convince Mr. Luthor to do a sit-down interview, that’s a story every paper would want to buy.”

“Was he challenging me?” Lois asked as she watched Perry walk away with Alice.

“I don’t know...” Clark said, wrapping his arms around her as the music began to play. He noticed Perry taking Alice on the dance floor and was just about to follow suit when the elusive Mr. Luthor approached them.

“Ms. Lane, Mr. Kent, a pleasure. So glad you could make it.” Lex said with a smile.

“Well, it’s for a really good cause,” Clark said with a smile.

“Yes, growing up without a father... no matter how rich or well known... I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.” Lex said quietly. He turned towards Lois, “May I steal you away for a dance?” He held his hand out for Lois. Lois looked at him skeptically for a moment then nodded, allowing him to lead her out on the dance floor.

Clark watched as they danced on the floor for a moment, keeping a close eye and ear on them. “Clark and I were wondering if we might be able to do a sit-down interview with you, Mr. Luthor...”

“Lex,” He corrected as he spun her around.

“Lex,” she echoed. “I know you’re hesitant to give interviews, but...”

Lex nodded, “I hope you can understand, a man in my position. I wouldn’t want to be misinterpreted and I have had one or two bad experiences with the media...” He crooned, leaning in a little too close for Clark’s comfort.

Clark decided it was probably best if he go ahead and cut in. He continued to listen with his super-hearing.

“But not with me,” Lois argued.

Lex grinned back, “Why don’t we make it dinner... but just you.”

Lois seemed to think about it for a moment as Clark approached them, “Mind if I cut in?”

“Not at all,” Lois said smiling at Clark.

Lex seemed to hesitate a moment then released Lois into Clark’s arms. “I don’t like that guy,” he muttered under his breath.

“I think I might have just grabbed the biggest interview of the decade!” She said with a grin on her face.

“That’s great.” He leaned her back with a slight dip, admiring the view of the curve of her breasts as he leaned her back then pulled her back to him, wrapping his arms securely around her. He glanced back at the crowd for a moment and was surprised to see Lex Luthor watching them.

Lois laughed as she linked her arms around his neck, pressing her body against him, “You are full of surprises...I would have thought only square dancing was your style...”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet,” he murmured against her lips, “I took two years off and traveled around a lot. I actually learned ballroom dancing from a Nigerian princess who studied it in London.”

“Was she pretty?” she teased as he spun her around.

“She was very pretty...she was also eleven years old...” he added before Lois could begin to ponder too long about his past.

“Always taking my breath away...” she laughed when he leaned in to kiss her.

“Better believe it,” he murmured back.

Lex watched as Lois and Clark danced close, swaying together to the music along with the other couples on the dance floor. His eyes narrowed as he watched Lois’s arms link around Clark’s neck, pulling him in for a kiss.

“I was beginning to think you were antisocial, Lex,” a voice from behind him said, tapping him on the shoulder. He turned around and smiled when he saw the blonde behind him.

“Ms. Drake,” He smiled, “Always a pleasure.”

She looked around at the crowd, taking a step toward him, “You have time to talk about your testimony next Monday?”

He led her to the dance floor, “You dance and we’ll talk.”

“You ready to get out of here?” Clark asked, intertwining his fingers with Lois’s.

She smiled at him, “Sure, just let me grab my purse.”

He watched as she headed over to coat check to get her purse and smiled to himself. He loved Lois Lane with every fiber of his being. Even though his dad had told him they didn’t know each other well enough to share his secret with her...he couldn’t help but feel a need to tell her. She said she’d liked the trip to Smallville. Maybe another trip was needed? He could share his secret with her with his parents there to help. He hated lying to her. Well, not lying...per se. He wasn’t lying, he just wasn’t telling her everything. He needed to tell her.

A hand clamped over his shoulder and a very drunk Ralph Simms hung on him, “Hey, Kent, how ya’ doing man? Have I got a deal for you...”

Clark winced, smelling the booze all over the man. “What is it Ralph?”

Ralph pointed at two blondes across the dance floor. “See those two ho..ties? Cousins. I can’t take one home without a date for the other...I know you and Lane got something going on the side but ...”

Clark pushed Ralph off of him, “I don’t think so.”

“Come on, she won’t find out,” Ralph whispered. “Don’t you get bored with just one chick? I mean...”

“Ralph, I’m not interested and... my relationship with Lois is none of your business.” He stepped away once more, intent on finding Lois as soon as possible.

He headed toward the coat check and found Lois grabbing her coat and purse from the attendant. “Hey you,” she smiled when he wrapped a protective arm around her waist. “Miss me?”

“You have no idea,” he muttered, shaking his head as they

headed for the nearest exit. “Feel like going for a walk with me?”

“Always,” she smiled at him.

“Pie smells good,” Jonathan said with a smile.

“I’m doing a test run for next week at the festival,” Martha said as she sliced the pie. “Let me know what you think. I think there may be just a bit too much cinnamon.”

“Never,” Jonathan smiled, eyeing the slice Martha had handed him. He held up his fork and was about to take a bite when a rapid tapping at the door caused him and Martha to look up. “Who could that be?” He headed to the door and answered it, surprised to find his neighbor, Wayne Irig at the door. “Wayne?” He turned back to the door that was slightly open and called, “Martha, it’s Wayne Irig. Put on some coffee.” He motioned to Wayne, “Come on in.”

Wayne shook his head, “No, better out here...” He motioned for Jonathan to follow him. Jonathan grabbed his coat and followed Wayne out to Wayne’s truck. “You know that big oak tree I got out back? Well Tuesday’s storm blew it right out of the ground...”

“Need some help chopping it up?” Jonathan asked in concern.

“No, uh-uh. I found somethin’ under that tree...” Wayne began. Jonathan looked at him curiously. Wayne’s property wasn’t too far from where they’d found Clark... or where he’d buried his space ship. He looked at Wayne wearily. Could he have found it? “...a rock! I sent a sample off to the state lab to check it out.

Today I got federal agents asking me a lot of questions. They got bulldozers showing up tomorrow.”

“Bulldozers?” Jonathan repeated hoarsely. If they found Clarks’ ship...

“I need you to keep this for me till I figure this out,” Wayne instructed, pulling out a large metal box from his truck and opening it up. A large glowing rock sat inside it with dirt and roots from where Wayne had pulled it out of the ground.

“What...what do you think it is?” Jonathan asked.

“Don’t know...” Wayne said, handing him the box after he closed the lid. “I’ll be in touch.”

Lois sighed happily as they walked down the sidewalk a few blocks in silence. Clark had been quiet since they left the Marriott. His arm rested on her shoulders as they walked. She smiled when she realized they were approaching the gate to MetU where they’d first met. “Feeling nostalgic?”

He smiled, “Maybe.” He pulled her to him, placing her in the same spot she’d been in when she’d literally crashed into him at their first meeting. “Do you realize it has been exactly a year today since we first met?”

“Really?” She scrunched her nose. “A year?”

“Yes,” he smiled. “A year ago, today, I was staring at these enormous gates, contemplating my future in Metropolis. Then you crashed into my life...” He laughed at the memory.

“I wouldn’t say crash...exactly...bumped...maybe glided...” she corrected with a smile as she linked her arms around his neck. “It’s been a crazy year.”

He smiled, “I wouldn’t trade a single moment.” He cupped her cheek, brushing a few stray strands of hair out of her face. “I love you so much Lois. I...I can’t imagine my life without you in it.”

“...and I love you,” she whispered, leaning in to kiss him. “I’ve never known anyone like you...” She stroked his cheek, outlining his jaw with her fingers. “I really...love you...You know that?”

He smiled at her, “Yeah, I love you too...” He rested his forehead against hers, “I... just...I don’t know. I imagine the world...the future...I can’t imagine any of it without you there... standing with me.”

She could feel the butterflies in her stomach fluttering as he spoke. Before she knew it she was saying the scary words she never thought she’d be the one saying, “Marry me.”

He looked at her in surprise, “What?”

Had she just said that? Of course she did. That had definitely been her voice. Had he heard her? Yes, he definitely heard her. She could feel the tears welling up as she anticipated him pulling away from her...but he didn't. Instead he cupped her cheek and whispered, “Yes,” before capturing her lips with his own.

Lois laughed as they made their way into his apartment, fumbling with the keys in between heated kisses as he closed the door behind them. “Sorry about Lucy...” Lois murmured against his lips. “I didn't know she'd still be up...”

He brushed his lips against her neck, slipping his hands around her back as he fumbled with the zipper of her dress. “At least this way...no interruptions...” His jacket fell to the ground as he slipped a finger beneath the bell sleeves of her dress, brushing it off her shoulders. His shirt soon followed as her dress pooled around her waist, revealing the black and blue lace corset she had been wearing earlier when he'd come to pick her up. “I love you...” He murmured against her lips as she fumbled to unfasten his belt buckle.

“Oh, Clark...” She gasped when she felt him lift her up in his arms and out of her dress.

“You are so...sexy, Lois Lane...” he whispered as he carried them towards the bedroom.

“Yes, Clark...” She cried out when he laid her on his bed, not losing contact with her for a moment as his lips devoured hers as his pants fell to the floor along with the rest of her clothing.

“I love you...” He whispered, cupping her cheek with his palm. She nodded hazily reaching for him hungrily.

“Yes...”

“Tell me what you want...” He whispered huskily.

“You,” she gasped as they fell on the bed together.

Her legs wrapped around his hips, linking around her arms around his neck as they murmured cries of pleasure to one another. “Don't stop...”

“Never...” He murmured, recapturing her lips with his own.

Present Day...

Lois fumed angrily as they drove in the Jeep to Smallville. Traffic was a nightmare. She had panicked after seeing Clark floating in the air...well, pacing in the air. Martha had closed the door and given her a quick explanation of how she and Jonathan found Clark when he was a baby, not knowing where he came from until Trask had come to Smallville looking for alien life. Somehow, she'd been talked into getting them out of the newsroom and driving to Smallville. She'd agreed but she still wasn't happy.

“Lois, are you going to talk to me?” Martha asked.

“No,” Lois snipped angrily. “What is there to talk about? I can't be angry...not really. I mean you only had six years to tell me something that might have been important to know when I was oh I don't know...*pregnant*...I can't be mad at Clark because he doesn't even remember anything...” she fumed angrily. “Why didn't you tell me?”

“It was Clark's secret to tell and honestly we were planning on telling you...” Martha began. “It just happened too fast. You had Jamie. Then you were recovering and we were still stuck in our grief over Clark...then after Jamie died...There just wasn't a right time to tell you...”

“Were you *EVER* going to tell me?” Lois cried. “Was he???”

Martha sighed, glancing back at Clark who had fallen asleep in the backseat. “He tried...Jonathan didn't want him telling you until you two had known each other longer. Then when you came to Smallville engaged, Clark said he wanted to tell you. We agreed but before he could the whole fiasco with that Trask character happened...I'm sorry.”

“Six years!” Lois fumed angrily. “Six years...I think I'm

entitled to be a little upset,”

Five Years Ago...

“I still don't think it's a good idea,” Clark said, following Lois into the elevator as they left the newsroom the next day.

“This is a huge opportunity!” Lois argued, holding her hands up to symbolize the click of a camera, “Lex Luthor's First Personal Interview by Lane and Kent...”

“Except he doesn't want *me* interviewing him he wants just *you*, Lois Lane...I don't know...Something about the guy is just...off...” Clark argued.

Lois sighed, “How about this? I go to the interview and if ANYTHING is out of the ordinary, I leave...deal?” She linked her arms around his neck and pulled him in for a kiss. “It's a really big opportunity...”

He relented, wrapping his arms around her protectively. “If he even sneezes wrong you leave.”

“Yes, Master,” she teased, bobbing her head like Jeanie from ‘I Dream of Jeanie’ as they stepped off the elevator.

“Not funny,” Clark countered.

Later that evening, Lois entered the Luthor Towers' main lobby with a notebook in hand and tape recorder ready. This was the moment. The turning point in her career. She knew Clark was uncomfortable with her interviewing Lex alone but she had talked him into backing off so she could land this interview.

The elevator doors opened and an elderly man with a mustache and balding white hair stepped out. “Ms. Lane?”

“Yes?” She stood up from her seat.

He looked her up and down and frowned. She glanced down at her business suit, uncertain what the look was about.

“A bit under dressed for dinner, but...uh, right this way...”

She followed him onto the elevator and watched nervously as the floor numbers changed over and over until they reached the penthouse. They stepped off the elevator and she entered a dining room where Lex sat at a long table with dinner prepared and a man servant stood behind him, waiting. “Ah, Ms. Lane, so glad you could make it.”

Lois nodded nervously looking around the room. There were candles and roses all over the room. Suddenly she was feeling very uncomfortable.

“What do you mean a rock?” Clark asked as he listened intently as Jonathan explained what Wayne Irig had left with them before leaving town.

“It's a strange eerie green rock. Got a strange glow to it,” Jonathan explained. “I don't think it's from here. It's not too far from where we found you...” he trailed off.

“What do you think it's from?” Clark asked.

“I don't know...” Jonathan shook his head. There was so much they hadn't told Clark yet. “I think you may need to come out here and see for yourself. The Feds are showing up tomorrow to tear Irig's property up. I gotta...”

He was cut off when Clark exclaimed, “What???”

Jonathan sighed, “They're looking for something. I'm guessing whatever this is it's what they're looking for.”

Lois sat across from Lex Luthor with her pen ready, ignoring the food on her plate as she did her best to get him to open up. “Both your father and mother died when you were fourteen, correct?”

Lex stiffened slightly then gave a nod, smiling with charisma as he took a sip of wine, “Why don't I have my office send you a biography?”

Lois shook her head, glancing around the room once more nervously. It was apparent his agreement to an interview was a ruse to get her here but she refused to give up. This might be the

only chance to land the first personal interview with Lex Luthor and she wasn't going to turn that down just because he was under the misinformed assumption this was a date, "I don't want the standard line. If I did, I could go buy it for 19.99 at any bookstore. What I want is the *real* Lex Luthor. What makes you tick? What you want... what you strive for..."

Lex smiled, taking her hand and removing the pen from it as he said smoothly, "Pleasure." His eyes darkened. "The pursuit of pleasure." He pushed a strand of hair out of her face, "Does that surprise you?"

"I would have guessed you'd say 'power'." She remarked.

"Power is a means, not an end," Lex said smoothly. He seemed to be getting some sort of satisfaction from how uncomfortable he was obviously making her.

She shifted in her seat and decided to try a different angle "But achieving power must give you pleasure." Lois deducted.

"Very good." He nodded, impressed.

Lois smiled then turned back to the business at hand as she wrote in her notepad. He was really making her uncomfortable but she wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of scaring her off by his advances. This was the only chance she'd have to get him to open up. "You took over your first company at the age of twenty-one, but there were rumors that the buy-out was coerced." She noticed Lex stiffen at that remark. He seemed to be working hard to throw her off her game. Could there be something sinister in his background he didn't want her to find? Clark had said he didn't trust him and she was beginning to see why. "Is it true the Board of Directors was paid substantial, unreported fees?"

There was a flicker of something across his face for a split second. He recovered quickly but she knew what she saw. He smiled as he tried to change the subject, "Do you ever let your hair down?" he asked amused. He reached across the table and took her hand in his. "Was the food not to your liking?"

Lois watched him hesitantly, still trying to make up her mind about him. She wasn't sure why he felt the need to flirt with her so blatantly no matter how many times she tried to redirect to the business at hand. Maybe he was trying to distract her? Why? Was he trying to hide something? "I'm here to work. Not eat."

"All work and no play... your credo, Lois Lane? Can't we just enjoy the evening? Enjoy each other?"

Lois took a breath. "I think you have the wrong idea about this dinner." She took her hand from his.

Lex took an empty glass and poured a bit of chardonnay as he spoke, "I hope you don't think we're here merely because you are a beautiful young woman. That wouldn't speak well for either of us."

Lois silently fumed. He still wasn't budging. "No, I'm here for..."

Lex offered her the wine glass and she pushed it away. He frowned then set it down next to her as he continued, "You wanted an interview. A scoop. I understand that, but quid pro quo, let me tell you what I want."

Lois folded her hands on her lap and smiled, "By all appearances, it seems to be avoiding answering any questions."

Lex smiled, "You just haven't asked the right question yet,"

Lois smiled, "And what is the right question?" She shook her head. "I'm not interested in... whatever it appears that you've misinterpreted this dinner to be. As you said before, I'm here for the interview, not for a date."

"So defensive," He noticed with amusement, "Can I ask why you are so against enjoying the evening with me while we continue this interview?" Lois crossed her arms over her chest as he continued, "I think you and I both know you can walk out that door any minute. But you're not because your need to land the elusive interview with me is stronger than your desire to leave. Am I getting warm?"

"Maybe," She admitted coolly.

He smiled, obviously proud of his assessment, "My talent in life is not making money or juggling companies. It's character assessment. I sense things about the people I do business with and build relationships with. Do you think it's just a mere coincidence that I agreed to be interviewed by you, Lois Lane, first-year reporter of the Daily Planet? No, I do my homework and investigate of course, but I also follow my gut. I sense things about you. Possibilities... potentials. You have the intelligence, spirit, and vision to transcend the mundane."

"And yet you continue to skirt away from the question by dosing on the flattery," Lois said, tapping her pen against her notebook.

"What was the question?" He asked with a smooth smile. She wasn't sure if he was trying to be difficult, but she was finding his evading questions to become more and more trying on her nerves.

"Did you pay off the board members with your first corporate takeover?" Lois asked, picking up her notebook once more, pen in hand.

"Ah, the rumors," Lex smiled with satisfaction.

She sighed, holding in her frustration, "Yes, the rumors."

Lex shook his head, "Always a successful man or woman's downfall." Lex mused, "To answer your question," he took a sip of his glass, "no, there was no coercion. Just being at the right place at the right time... Shall we move on?" He reached for her hand once more, this time intertwining his fingers with hers.

She pulled her hand back and sighed in frustration. He wasn't going to discuss the takeover. It was clear she wasn't going to get what she had come here for tonight. "I need to get going, Mr. Luthor. I have a deadline."

"No dessert?" he inquired.

"No thanks," she replied hurriedly.

"Really? You don't know what you're missing." Lex smiled and stood up with her. "I'll have Asabi bring the car around. Where to?"

Jonathan Kent walked through the wooded area of his property with a shovel, looking around to be sure no one was around. He couldn't seem to shake the feeling he had that he was being watched. He counted his footsteps one at a time until he reached sixty-eight steps then turned left and counted thirteen more steps. He glanced around him once more and began to dig...

"General Newcomb?" The officer listened for a few minutes and then responded to the general. "Yes, Mr. Irig has disappeared but before he did he left something with the neighbor. I've been following him... a Jonathan Kent. You won't believe what he just unburied..."

Clark impatiently stared at the phone, willing it to ring. Lois had said she'd call if anything happened. It had been hours and he still hadn't heard anything. Maybe she forgot? He picked up the phone and dialed. The familiar sound of her voicemail began to play after five rings, "Hi. Sorry, we're not home to take your call. If you'd like to leave a message for Lois, or Lucy, you can do so at the..."

He hung up the phone then turned toward the balcony where the wind was blowing the soft fabric of the curtains from the open window. He walked toward the window, holding the curtain open for a moment as he stared at the night sky before jerking the curtain closed and turning back toward the empty apartment. He reached for his coat and headed out the door.

"I think you learned a lot more about me than I learned about you," Lois said ruefully.

Clark watched from around the corner, listening in on Lois's conversation with Lex Luthor as they approached the glass double doors of Luthor Towers. "Yeah, I'll bet," he muttered under his

breath. He didn't like Lex Luthor. There was something about the man that was fictitious about him but even more than that...he didn't like the way he looked at Lois.

Lex smiled, "I think we've both only scratched the surface." He gestured toward the double doors where a limo awaited them.

"Unbelievable," Clark muttered to himself as he watched the exchange, "I don't believe this guy."

"Not exactly the point of an interview," Lois said with a smile.

Clark smiled, "That's my girl. Put him in his place."

"Well, I'm a firm believer that the chase makes everything more worthwhile," Lex said opening the door to Luthor Towers for her to exit. "You never did tell me where to drop you off at,"

"That swamy..." Clark muttered to himself as he watched Lois continue to evade Lex Luthor's advances. He grimaced as Luthor reached for Lois's hand and she pulled it back.

"I can manage from here," Lois said, pulling away from Lex's grasp once more.

Clark sighed in relief as he watched Lois head towards the corner on the left, heading closer to where he was hiding. She had pulled out her phone and was calling herself a cab. He looked around himself, realizing she wouldn't take too kindly to him watching her. Right now, he just looked like a jealous fiancé. He made sure no one was around and ricocheted himself into the sky toward her apartment, hoping to catch her at home before she got there.

Present Day...

Lex tapped his fingers against the wood grain of his desk as he examined the large red specimen of what appeared to be some sort of rock in the lead lined case Jason Trask had placed on his desk. "Your team found this in Smallville, you say, Mr. Trask?"

"Yes," Jason Trask nodded, "my men were able to recover more of the meteorite. Its molecular structure is out of this world. We are certain it came from the same planet as the alien we captured."

"Yes, the alien that escaped," Lex rolled his eyes. "I find it convenient that the very day I am supposed to meet this alien is the day that he turns up missing. Don't you find it a coincidence?"

"No, Mr. Luthor, I can assure you when we find him there will be no escaping..."

"When?" Lex scoffed, "I think you mean 'if' because it's been almost twenty-four hours and no one knows where this creature is."

"I still don't understand what you think you can do with him?" Trask asked exasperated.

"Superpowers ... Under the right guidance can be used to ensure victory over our enemies and defeat anyone who dares to stand in our way. This is something that can be cultivated with LexCorp. When you asked for my investment last month I was promised full access, but right now I'm beginning to rethink my position with your team, Mr. Trask."

"We will find him," Trask promised. "We believe this meteorite is from the same planet as him...the green variation appeared to have a physical effect on him. Since we're unable to find any more large specimens after the lab got raided we're hoping the red variation will have a similar effect."

Lex stared at him for a moment then replied coolly, "I suggest you find more of this green meteorite just in case. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, Mr. Luthor," Trask nodded, turning to leave.

Lois stared angrily out the window as Clark slept next to her in the backseat. His head was propped in her lap. He seemed to be restless, flinching and groaning in his sleep as Martha drove.

"He doesn't seem to be sleeping well," Martha noted as she drove.

Lois nodded, "No telling what he's been through." Lois was

trying her best to control her anger but it was hard. In one day she'd discovered the man she'd been so completely in love with was not only still alive but also may not even be from this planet. The silent lull that filled the rental car was interrupted by a news report about the asteroid. Martha turned the radio up.

"There is no need for panic. We are confident we can handle this latest challenge with our existing resources..." There was a pause and the General continued, "We have several delivery systems, notably the Asgard booster which we are in process of re-programming. At the same time, we're currently attaching nuclear payloads which, if we can deliver them, will detour Nightfall from its current trajectory course toward Earth."

<<Gunshots rang out as she watched Clark struggle in the water with the man she and Clark had come to know as Jason Trask. The echo of that final shot...

"Clark!!!"

Two men in uniform pulled her back as she screamed in agony...>>

He'd been shot. She'd thought he'd been shot anyway. Had he been faking the injury? She recalled how he'd gone back toward the gunshots when Paul's fling had tried to shoot up the Met Daily. He had surprised her when he didn't seem to be phased or hurt by the bullets...

<< "Are you CRAZY??? What are you DOING??? Trying to get yourself KILLED???"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry...I was just...I'm fine, see?">>

<< "You're hurt,"

"I'm fine. It just grazed me. Unlike SOME people that decided to go barreling into a HOSTAGE situationWhat were you thinking?"

"Ithought II don't know...">>

All of the little things he had done over the first year they'd known each other and now it all seemed to fit.

<< "Look out!"

"Oh, my ...How did you...?">>

He was invulnerable, could fly... What else could he do?

<< "Run!!!"

"Clark!!!" >>

<< "Clark!"

"Unbelievable,"

"Clark! I thought..."

"I'm fine. I...saw the wave fold over like that and....I just kinda stopped running..." >>

<< "How'd you get us out of there?"

"One of the links in the chain was weak so I was working on it until it finally gave away. Luckily, it broke when it did."

"Yeah, your hair's wet."

"So is yours...I think the mist from the wave...What?"

"Nothing, it's just...You're always saving me..."

"Someone's got to...">>

The sound of a groan from Clark brought Lois back to the present. She glanced over at his sleeping figure and noticed sweat on his forehead. She'd never seen him sweat before. "Clark?" She brushed her hand against his forehead. He was burning up. He groaned in pain. She looked down at his chest and saw it was soaked in sweat, "Martha!"

"What is it?" Martha asked, not looking back. "We're almost in town and..."

"I think something's wrong with Clark!" Lois cried. The car jerked to a halt and Martha turned to look at her. "He's burning up..."

Martha climbed into the backseat from the passenger door and felt Clark's forehead. Lois could tell by the expression on her face that she was just as worried as she was. "He feels sick..."

"I thought he couldn't get sick..." Lois pointed at his damp shirt, tugging at the wet fabric. "What is wrong with him?"

"I don't know!" Martha snapped. "Obviously someone has

done...*SOMETHING* to him.” Martha shook her head, uncertain of what to do. Lois made her mind up for the moment, tugging at the shirt Clark was wearing and pushing it off his shoulders.

“What are you doing?”

“Trying to get him out of these wet clothes...” Lois groaned as she pulled the t-shirt off of him.

“What is *that*??” Martha gasped, seeing an eerie glow coming from Clark’s chest.

“What in the world...?” Lois gasped, fingering what looked like a very badly done suture on his right shoulder.

“I’ll be right back,” Martha said, leaving Lois with Clark.

She stared at his chest in awe, unable to focus on anything else but the eerie green glow that was coming from beneath his skin. “Oh, Clark, what in the world did they do to you?”

Five Years Ago...

Lois stepped out of the cab and paid the fare before heading up the steps to her apartment. Dinner had been a bust. She’d thought for sure she’d be able to weasel an interview out of Lex Luthor tonight. But unfortunately, he’d had other things on his mind and giving an interview was not one of them. Her stomach growled as she made her way down the hall to her apartment. She’d been so focused on rebuking Lex’s advances and trying to salvage the evening somehow by trying to get something on him she’d forgotten to eat. Now, here it was almost ten o’clock and she was starving. Nothing delivered this late.

She unlocked the door to her apartment and was surprised to find her sister still awake on the couch and an amazing smell coming from the kitchen, “Hey, Luce, what are you doing up?” She sniffed the heavenly smell again. “...and what is that delicious smell?”

Lucy smiled, “Finals, and ask your fiancé. He thought you’d be hungry so he decided to take over the kitchen. I’m not complaining as long as I get some,” Lucy winked, “I didn’t think you’d mind.”

“Not at all,” Lois sighed happily as she dropped her things on the sofa and headed for the kitchen where Clark was busy stirring what looked like a pasta dish in a large skillet. “Hey you,” She gave him a peck on the cheek from behind.

“Hey.” He leaned back to kiss her. “I figured you wouldn’t have eaten during the interview, so I thought I’d whip up some dinner since it’s so late. Hope you don’t mind,”

She smiled at him, wrapping her arms around his waist and examining the spread he had simmering on the stove. “Nope. You actually read my mind.” He held up a spoon to give her a taste. “Oh, God, this is incredible.”

“Thank you,” he smiled, “It’s just some grilled chicken with alfredo sauce. Nothing fancy.”

“Nothing fancy?” Lois laughed. “That’s it. You are in charge of all cooking from now on.”

Clark laughed, “What? You’re never cooking?”

Lois shook her head, “It’s not something you want me to do, trust me.”

Clark laughed, “I’ll teach you.” He leaned in to kiss her. “How’d the interview go?”

Lois shook her head. “It was a bust.” She wrinkled her nose. “He spent the whole time trying to evade my questions while trying to hit on me.” She felt him stiffen in her arms as she added with a kiss on his neck. “Needless to say, there won’t be a follow-up.”

Clark smiled softly, “I’m sorry, Lois, I know you wanted that exclusive.”

Lois shrugged, “It is what it is. But there was something very odd about him. Every time I asked him about his parents or the first company he took over his eyes did a little dance. Almost like there was something more going on. May be worth looking into,” she said.

He nodded, “Definitely.” He turned the stove off and moved the pan from the burner it was on to let it cool. “This is just about ready. Just needs to cool.” He turned her in his arms so he was facing her and captured her lips with his own, cupping her cheek with his hand. “I missed you.”

She sighed happily against his lips as she wrapped her arms securely around his neck, “I missed you, too,” she managed as he nibbled at her neck. She could feel her body starting to respond to the soft caressing of his lips against her skin. “Oh, Clark,” she sighed happily as he recaptured her lips with his. She felt his arms tighten around her waist and began to seriously contemplate how to get him to the bedroom with her sister in the living room.

A knock at the bifold kitchen doors caught her attention and they both looked up. Clark laughed, “She has the worst timing,”

Lucy opened the door. “You guys almost done in there? I’m starving!”

Lois sighed, turning around in Clark’s arms to face her sister, “I don’t know. Ask the cook.” She nudged Clark with her hip and smiled.

“Should be done by now,” Clark nodded, turning toward the stove to stir the pasta.

“Let’s eat!” Lois said with a grin, grabbing some plates.

Jonathan Kent looked around cautiously as he uncovered the ship he’d buried so long ago. He brushed his hand against the familiar emblem engraved on the end with a frown. Federal agents had shown up on their doorstep after they’d found Clark and Martha had begged him to burn the ship. He just couldn’t do it. It was a part of Clark. If he ever had questions about where he came from, they wouldn’t have an answer for him. He’d been tempted to dig it up, but with Clark still learning how to manage his powers, he didn’t want to burden him with even more questions about his heritage.

He opened the cover cautiously and saw a round globe like object positioned in the front of what looked like a very sophisticated computer system for the ship. He reached for it and it seemed to glow a red aura. He gasped in surprise. The name Krypton filled his head as he watched the globe change shape. “What in the world?”

“What is that???” Lois asked as she watched Martha pull out what looked like a long green glowing bullet from Clark’s shoulder. She’d been shocked when Martha had come back with a small surgical kit from Masie’s. She’d been even more shocked when Martha had instructed her to hold Clark down. Then, when she began cutting his shoulder where the green glowing was coming from, she’d been terrified. He wasn’t supposed to bleed. That was what they’d said. Why was he bleeding?

“I don’t know,” Martha said as Clark groaned in pain. “Whatever it is it seems to be hurting him...”

“Then get rid of it!” Lois yelled frantically, wincing as Clark withered in pain next to her.

“No, no, no...” Clark moaned in pain.

Martha nodded, handing her a damp cloth covered in alcohol, “Here, keep the pressure on his shoulder. I’ll be back,”

Lois watched as Clark’s face seemed to relax as the green glowing... whatever it was was removed from the car.

Five Years Ago...

“So, did this Wayne guy say where he was going?” Lois asked as she and Clark drove up the driveway to the Kent farmhouse.

“No, and dad hasn’t been able to get a hold of him,” Clark sighed, turning the engine off and opening the door for Lois to get out.

“Maybe he went out of town?” Lois suggested.

“Wayne doesn’t have any family or friends outside of Smallville...He wouldn’t leave town without telling someone,”

Clark said, worried, as he followed Lois up to the farmhouse with their bags.

The door to the farmhouse opened and Jonathan walked out to meet them halfway with a smile on his face, “Back so soon, Lois?”

“Wherever the wind blows,” She smiled back as he took their bags.

“Here, let me help you with that,” Jonathan took the small bag off Lois’s shoulder. “Martha’s already got everything set up for you.”

“Thanks,” Lois smiled as she headed into the farmhouse to greet Martha.

Jonathan and Clark hung back, watching as the door closed behind her, “We, uh, we’ve got to talk...”

Clark nodded, “Yeah, we do.”

Lois sighed happily as she walked into the farmhouse, taking in the heavenly aromas that were coming from the kitchen. “That smells wonderful,” she beamed, stepping into the kitchen to see Martha pulling a pie out of the oven.

“Just something sweet to go along with dinner,” Martha winked. “How was the ride in?”

“Long and bumpy,” Lois said.

“Well, I’m glad you two were able to come out to the festival this year. I’m sorry you missed it last year,” Martha said.

“Yeah, just wish this wasn’t a business trip,” Lois said.

Martha shook her head, “I hate what they did to Wayne. He came over here the other night and gave Jonathan a fright, then just disappeared...”

“And no one’s heard from him since?” Lois asked.

“Nope,” Martha shook her head, “Those EPA guys showed up the other day and no one’s seen him since... It’s ridiculous how the government can just kick someone off their property like that... I don’t understand why after all these years they decided to do soil testing for ‘pesticides’ from the fifties on Wayne’s property. It just doesn’t make any sense.”

“Well, that’s what we’re here to find out,” Lois said, patting Martha on the arm.

Martha turned toward the door, “I wonder what is taking those two so long...”

“I’m gonna tell her, dad,” Clark said shoving his hands in his pocket as they walked toward the barn.

“Clark...” Jonathan began, following Clark to the barn, “we talked about this.”

“We’re engaged,” Clark cut his dad off.

“What?” Jonathan asked, surprised.

“I can’t take the lying anymore. The secrets. There’s a lot we don’t know about me, but ... Who’s to say that’s a bad thing? Maybe it’s a good thing. I just want to have a normal life with Lois... working at the Planet... She’s the one. I know it.” Clark said turning to face his dad.

Jonathan sighed in defeat, realizing from the expression on his son’s face he was right. “I know. We just spent so many years trying to...”

“I know,” Clark nodded, “but you don’t need to protect me anymore. I’m invulnerable, remember? I wanted to tell you guys in person.”

“You really love her, don’t you son?” Jonathan asked.

“Yeah, I do,” Clark beamed happily. “I can’t explain it. She makes me so... happy... so complete. I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life making her as happy as she’s made me.”

“I know you will,” Jonathan said, hugging his son.

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks, Dad,” Clark smiled softly.

“Well, I guess it’s time to pull out your Grandmother Clarke’s ring, huh?” Jonathan asked.

“I’d like that,” Clark said. “What was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Uh,” Jonathan looked around, “It can wait till after dark,”

Present Day...

Trask stood with the various agents, looking on the screen in front of them, “Any progress?”

“Sir, we haven’t been able to get the computer system up and running yet,” One of the technicians explained, “but once we’re up and running we should be able to track the alien with the tracking device we implanted on him,”

“Hurry up,” Trask ordered, “the longer he’s out there the longer its going to take us to reprogram him,”

“Sir, the programming was never...” one of the technicians began, but was cut off by Trask’s glare.

“I know it was never completed. That’s why I want you to fix this...” He gestured to the damaged computer system around them, “so I can finish programming him.”

Green. Everything was green.

<< “You will hand over the alien. You will release it from your mind. You will hand over the alien...” >>

The green glowing around him grew as the pain increased.

<< “You will hand over the alien. You will release it from your mind. You will hand over the alien...” >>

“No!” He cried out in a panic.

“Clark, it’s okay,” The reassuring hand of Jonathan Kent rested on Clark’s shoulder as he awoke from his nightmare in a cold sweat.

Clark looked around the room, unsure of his surroundings. It felt oddly familiar, but not. Where was he?

“Where am I?” He rasped out in confusion.

“The Harris farm,” Jonathan explained. “We couldn’t risk those agents finding you ... whatever it was that they put in you...” He shook his head in disgust.

“The green...” He mumbled incoherently.

“Are you starting to remember anything?” Jonathan asked.

“I...” Clark shook his head in a daze, “I don’t know. I remember a room and a weird green glow... being in pain... I... feel like I should know you. Who are you?”

Jonathan’s jaw tightened and he took a deep breath as he recounted the same speech he’d given Clark yesterday when he’d gotten the call from Martha outside of town. “I’m your dad, Jonathan Kent.”

“I’m sorry,” he croaked out, looking around at the strange surroundings. “Where’s Lois?”

“Uh, she’s back at the farm, sleeping. The last twenty-four hours have really done a number on her and your mother...” Jonathan explained.

“Yeah,” Clark nodded, “The asteroid.”

“Clark, are you sure you don’t remember anything?”

Clark shook his head, “Pieces... its choppy...”

Jonathan sighed, “Well, we’ve got to figure something out...” He looked at Clark bemused and Clark looked down, noticing he was floating in the air, “I, uh, see the powers are still in working order...”

“I guess,” Clark shrugged. “They just kinda ... happen...”

“That’s how it happened when you were younger too,”

Jonathan explained.

“At least something hasn’t changed,” Clark said.

“You’ve been through a traumatic experience... we’re not even sure what exactly you went through...” Jonathan said shakily. “Five years of... not knowing...”

Clark reached out to pat Jonathan on the arm, “I’m sorry. I know if I could have... I would have... I remember trying to escape... I just...”

"I know you wouldn't have stayed away unless something was keeping you. I just hate myself...It's all my fault."

"What is?" Clark asked.

"I never should have taken that damn meteorite from Wayne in the first place. It's the whole reason you didn't have your powers that day. The whole reason they were able to..." Jonathan began to ramble, holding back the tears that were threatening to overflow.

"The green glow," Clark seemed to fit the pieces together.

"Yeah," Jonathan nodded, "it was a meteorite."

Five Years Ago...

Lois smiled as she walked back from the town square hand in hand with Clark. Seeing Smallville in full Corn Festival swing was surreal. It brought back a lot of memories from her first visit to Smallville the previous year. "It's nice out tonight," she commented.

"Yeah," he smiled, intertwining his fingers with hers as they walked towards the pond behind the farmhouse.

They'd caught up with Pete and Rachel earlier and he'd been surprised to find out Rachel was now Sheriff Harris. Pete was working on building his own photography business after traveling with missionaries over the past year photographing the hardships endured in third world countries. Many of his photographs had landed in National Geographic and Time Magazine.

"I still can't believe Pete is *MOVING* to California," Clark shook his head in disbelief.

"I think it's great. He's found something he's good at and he's pursuing something he loves...like someone else I know," Lois said softly, giving his hand a squeeze. He nodded, giving her a quick peck on the cheek as they turned the corner to where the gazebo above the pond was lit up with white Christmas lights and greenery. "What is all this?" She asked looking around at the lights.

Clark wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her to him, "I wanted this to be perfect." They walked up the steps to the gazebo and Clark traced the outline of her jaw with his hand, as if he was mesmerizing the shape of her face. "I love you," he whispered.

She smiled back at him, "I love you, too." She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him.

He slowly broke off the kiss and rested his head against hers. "I know technically we're already engaged, but I wanted to do this right...I'm not sure if I'm supposed to get down on one knee, but..." he said, pulling a small velvet box out of his pocket as he dropped to one knee.

"Oh, my God...Clark," She gasped when she saw the antique ring with a ¾ carat diamond in the center of a white gold sitting in the jewelry box he held up to her. "Is that for me?"

"Yes," he said softly with a smile. "Do you like it?"

"It's beautiful," she whispered.

He smiled broadly, placing the ring on her finger as he stood up. "You're beautiful. Lois, I love you and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

She reached up to kiss him. "I love you, Clark Kent," she murmured against his lips. "I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

From the porch of the farmhouse, Jonathan and Martha watched as Clark slipped the ring on Lois's hand. "Our boy's getting married," Jonathan said emotionally.

"He loves her," Martha said softly. "I knew she was the one when he first started talking about her."

"What happens when she finds out he's not just an ordinary guy?" Jonathan asked worried.

"There has never been anything 'ordinary' about Clark. They'll work through it," Martha reasoned. "They love each other. Honestly, I think she loves him too much to walk away. You'll see."

Wayne Irig sat at a long table across from three men in army camo. One of the men with the nametag of 'Trask' on his uniform seemed to be taking orders from a man named 'Newcomb' while the other man named 'Thomas' seemed to be taking everything in. "I...I don't know what you want from me..." Wayne stammered.

"You sent a sample of an alien substance to our lab. It picked up the presence *ALIEN* components..." Trask said irritably, "Do you have any idea what that means, Mr. Irig?"

"No, I..." Wayne shook his head in confusion.

Newcomb interrupted, "It means we have a possibility of an alien life form here on Earth. Alien components were found in the sample you sent in to the lab, Mr. Irig. Alien. '*Not of this world.*' A meteorite with radioactivity that doesn't affect humans. We have reason to believe this meteorite didn't travel to Earth on its own. It came here with someone or something. Whether that thing died up on arrival or is still living and breathing here on Earth we don't know. What we do know is you're not being honest with us about where you found this meteorite,"

"I told you..." Wayne began, but was interrupted by Trask.

"It seems to me, General, that we have two possibilities. Either he buried it somewhere on his farm or he gave it to someone." He then turned to Wayne with a menacing smile, "Now which is it?"

"There wasn't anymore. That's it," Wayne stammered.

Newcomb sighed, rubbing his temple with his hands, "I guess we're going to have to do this the hard way. Agent Trask, activate 'code terrorist' on Mr. Irig here and show him what we do with traitors..."

"Yes, General," Trask said, standing to attention as General Newcomb and the man named 'Thompson' left the tent.

"What's 'code terrorist'?" Wayne asked nervously.

"You're about to find out," Trask said, pulling out a syringe from a cooler across from him.

Clark followed Jonathan out to the barn and watched as his dad closed the door. "What's up?"

Jonathan pulled a large white cloth up from the corner of the barn and pointed, "I dug this up after Wayne came by. I didn't want anyone finding it."

Clark gasped when he saw the small space craft covered in dirt and clay. It was no bigger than the size of a bassinet with silver and blue engravings on the side along with what looked like some sort of emblem on the end of it. "What is it?" Clark asked.

"It's the ship we found you in," Jonathan said shakily.

"What?" Clark croaked.

"Now, look," Jonathan began, "I had buried it a few days after we found you when we had some federal agents show up asking about 'debris from a Russian satellite'...It seemed fishy so your mom told me to destroy the ship..."

"But..." Clark began.

"Your mom and I didn't want people who'd shoot you into space to get their hands on you. We figured even if you were a Russian, you were only a Russian baby..." Jonathan continued.

"Is that what you think I am?" Clark asked cautiously, "A Russian experiment?"

"Son, we don't care if you're a Russian or a martian. You know that. Anyway, your mom wanted the ship destroyed because she was afraid of those men coming back and trying to take you. We figured that the spaceship had to be destroyed so nobody'd ever have any evidence on how you got here...I planned to burn it, but I couldn't...I never told your mother. Didn't want to worry her..."

"So, this..." Clark began cautiously fingering the emblem on the ship.

"Is everything we found you in... except for the blanket you were wrapped up in. Your mom has that in your baby box," Jonathan sighed, "With those guys tearing up Wayne's property

not too far from Schuster's Field I figured it was best to dig it up for now..."

Clark nodded, "What are they looking for? You said something about a rock..." He said turning back to his dad.

Jonathan motioned for Clark to follow him to the tool box where he had a large lead metal box sitting on the workbench. "Wayne Irig found this rock and sent a sample to Wichita for analysis thinking it would be worth something... Then the Feds showed up."

"That doesn't make any sense." Clark said. "Why go to all this trouble for a rock?"

Jonathan sighed, "Because the preliminary report said it was some kind of meteorite. Wayne was scared when the feds showed up so he gave it to me for safekeeping." He unlocked the box and lifted it up, revealing a large green glowing crystal like rock. "I figured since it was found a few miles from where we found you it could be related..."

As soon as the box was opened Clark felt a strange sensation wash over him. He couldn't really describe it. It was uncomfortable and... painful. His stomach was turning in knots as he backed away from the workbench slowly. "Dad, I'm feeling kinda... strange..." He managed as he took another step back. It hurt. It definitely hurt. This was what pain felt like.

"My God you think it could be this?" Jonathan asked, not turning to look at him. Clark wasn't able to answer as he fell back against the bags of seed behind him. Jonathan looked back as he fell and shouted, "Clark! What is it?" He knelt down next to him, cradling his head but Clark was unable to answer in anything but a painful groan. "Martha!!!" Jonathan yelled before turning back to Clark, holding him close, "Oh, my boy... my boy..."

Clark struggled to speak but was unable to as darkness fell over him.

Present Day...

Lois looked out at the pond on the old farmhouse nervously, recalling the events that had happened there so many years ago. "Do you think it's safe to be here?"

Martha nodded, "I think as long as we don't bring Clark here... until we can figure out what's going on... It'll be fine." Martha was quietly looking up at the sky. "Two days until Nightfall hits..."

"Unless some miracle happens," Lois said quietly.

Martha nodded, "Maybe Clark coming back IS our miracle..."

"I'm still trying to wrap my head around this," Lois said cautiously. "I mean... everything I thought was..." She began to cry and Martha placed an arm around her shoulder.

"I know, I know," Martha sighed. "Jonathan is trying his best to jog Clark's memory so we can figure out what happened... Maybe if he remembers..."

"What?" Lois asked.

"Lois, there's an asteroid headed for Earth in two days..." Martha began slowly.

"So?" Lois shrugged, "We'll have to make the most of our time together I guess," Lois sighed, "I just got him back. I'm not going to lose him again..."

"Would you rather have two days or a lifetime?" Martha asked. As Lois turned away, she continued, "I know my boy. He is always helping... even when he shouldn't... even when he's told not to... he is there to help. It's what he was born to do."

"What happens when he flies up there and can't breathe... or... or something goes wrong and... he gets hurt..." Lois fumed. "No, I am not talking about this..."

Martha folded her arms over her chest and gave Lois a look. "Lois, I know you're scared. I am too, but I can't think of any other way. Do you think I want to send him up there like that? Of course not, but I don't know what else to do. I don't want to lose him again anymore than you do. If that asteroid hits us we could

all die."

"So could he," Lois said shakily. "What happens if it does work and... and then he's exposed? That is not the kind of life he would want... He doesn't even know who he is!"

"No, he doesn't." Martha said softly, "but we can ask him if he wants to try... What do we have to lose?"

"Everything," Lois said tearfully.

Lois stood in the corner of the Harris farmhouse living room watching as Jonathan patted Clark on the shoulder, worry written all over his face. "I know this is a lot to take in..."

"You're saying I could stop this... Nightfall?" Clark began.

Martha nodded, taking a seat next to him. "Clark, you have no idea how powerful you are... You could stop this. I know you could. Anytime you put your mind to something you make sure it happens..." She gave a smile and looked toward Lois.

Lois looked away nervously and Jonathan continued, "The world needs you now, son. More than it ever has I expect,"

"Flying into space to stop an asteroid doesn't exactly come naturally does it?" Clark asked, worry written all over his face.

"You're the only one that could do it," Martha said softly.

"I don't" even remember how to use most of my powers... The flying just sort of... happens..." Clark shrugged nervously then looked over at Lois. "What do you think, Lois?"

Five Years Ago...

"Well close the box, Jonathan!" Martha snapped angrily as she slammed the lid to the metal box that held the meteorite Jonathan had shown Clark. "You said it was what made him sick..." She knelt down next to Clark, feeling his head. "He's burning up," she said with worry.

"I didn't think..." Jonathan began to say.

Martha cut him off, "You didn't *think*... period. Why didn't you tell me about this?" She pointed to the box on Jonathan's workbench, then pointed to the spacecraft in the corner of the barn, "or that?"

"I didn't want to worry you," Jonathan said quietly.

Clark's groaning caught Martha's attention and she muttered "Too late," Before moving closer to check on Clark. "Clark, honey, can you hear me?"

"Ugh..." He let out another groan, "Lois..."

"He's starting to come to..." Martha said. "Let's get him out of here,"

Trask watched as Wayne collapsed against the table in front of him, "Won't be long now. Mr. Irig, until you're singing like a canary. Are you ready to tell me where the rest of that meteorite is?"

"No..." Wayne moaned in pain.

"A broken hand, dislocated shoulder, and sodium pentothal..." Trask smiled. "You can't last much longer without medical attention..."

"No..." Wayne growled.

Lois looked at Clark cautiously as he sunk back onto the full size bed in his childhood bedroom. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'll be fine," he said shakily. "Just..."

"Allergies?" Lois looked at him skeptically. "I don't know. Maybe you need to see a doctor..."

"I'll be fine," he murmured incoherently, drifting off to sleep once more.

Lois sighed, pushing him back further on the bed. "You're not *fine*," she whispered, taking his glasses off and putting them on the night stand before climbing in bed with him.

The next morning, they drove up to the road block on Wayne Irig's property and parked. Lois grabbed her pursed and notepad,

“You coming?”

Clark nodded, “Go on. I’ll just be a minute,”

Lois placed a hand on his head, “You feel normal.”

He shrugged, “I am...normal.”

She looked at him cautiously, “So everything’s okay, right?”

He nodded, “Yeah, of course.”

“Then let’s go...” She said stepping out of the truck. She slammed the door shut and turned to find Clark standing behind her.

The same man that had been helping Trask and Newcomb interrogate Wayne Irig was dressed in a business suit with a clipboard at the roadblock calling out, “Sorry off limits to the public.”

“We’re not the public,” Lois said pulling out her press badge, “we’re the press.”

“We’ve already issued a statement to the local paper,” Thompson said writing in his clipboard.

“I’m Clark Kent,” Clark offered his hand, “This is my partner, Lois Lane. We’re here with the Daily Planet.”

Thompson took his hand to shake, eyeing him skeptically. “I’m Agent George Thompson. Field Liaison for the EPA.” He said gruffly. “What’s a newspaper like the Daily Planet doing here?”

Lois shrugged, “Well, Agent Thompson, that’s why we’re called the ‘Daily Planet.’ We cover the world.”

Thompson nodded then turned behind him to point out, “What you’re seeing here is an ecological risk assessment. During the fifties and sixties the owner used a lot of pesticides and we’re concerned about seepage into the local ground water.” Thompson gave a smile. “That’s it. Public safety. No big story I’m afraid.”

Lois arched an eyebrow. “Well, we’ll need to speak to the property owner.”

“Mr. Irig’s been given relocation money during the testing. He didn’t say where he went.” Thompson explained.

“I’m sure you’ve got that information...somewhere...” Clark interjected pointedly.

“No, I’m afraid not,” Thompson shrugged. “He’s probably holed up in one of the local motels somewhere.”

“I don’t think so,” Clark laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Thompson asked with a bite to his tone.

Lois crossed her arms over her chest and smirked, “The fact that you’d think there’d be a motel available during the famous Smallville Corn Festival. Most of the rooms around here book up months in advance.”

“The government has pull!” Thompson snapped.

“Fine,” Lois said narrowing her eyes, “We’ll be back for the name of that motel.”

“I’ll see what I can find,” Thompson smiled back as they walked away.

Lois climbed back in the truck and looked at Clark, “There is no way that guy is with the EPA,” Lois said slamming the door behind her. “I mean seriously, ‘the government has pull?’ Give me a break!”

Clark nodded, “Let’s head into town and see what we can find out.”

Present Day...

“A disguise?” Lois asked skeptically as she watched Clark pace around the room, floating in the air as he did so.

“Well, a costume of some sort...something I could wear so I won’t be recognized. I want to help. I really do, but I don’t think there’s a way I can do that without being seen...” He pointed at the television coverage of the asteroid. “They’ve got constant coverage on it.”

“So, you’re going to do it?” Lois asked nervously.

He nodded, “I have to. I can’t let people die...knowing I could have done something to prevent it...It’ll work. It has to. If I have an effective disguise then we don’t have to worry about those

agents finding me...or anyone else finding out about me.”

Lois sighed, “Okay, so you want some sort of costume...”

That afternoon, Martha brought her sewing kit along with stacks and stacks of different types of fabric. Clark tried on different ones. Some looked like they belonged in the ‘scary costume’ section of the Halloween costume stores while others were colorful and bright.

Martha was exhausted. The worry lines on her face were evident as she paced the living room, waiting for Clark to come out, “What about that one?”

“I don’t know...” Clark said from the bedroom where he was changing.

Lois tapped on the door. “Come on, Clark, let’s see.”

He opened the door and Lois smiled, admiring his physique underneath the blue spandex with a yellow belt, red boots, and cape. “Wow...”

He turned around, walking in front of the full length mirror and Lois followed him in, admiring the suit on him. She could see every muscle move with him in the suit and glanced at the tight red briefs that covered his groin then smirked, “One thing’s for sure,” she slipped her hand over his buttocks and whispered, “Nobody’s gonna be looking at your face...”

“Lo-is!” He hissed, jumping back slightly as she laughed.

Martha knocked at the door frame, entering with a smile, “Well, Clark, they don’t call ‘em tights for nothing.” She walked over, circling him for a minute. “I don’t know. Something’s missing...Something...” She snapped her fingers and poked her head out to Jonathan, “Jonathan, go grab that box from the barn...”

Five Years Ago...

Newcomb slammed Trask against the floor with a swift kick, “Are you out of your mind? You are going to blow this entire operation!”

“He didn’t know anything...” Trask argued. “I gave him...” Another kick in the ribs and Trask groaned in pain.

Newcomb, reached down and grabbed Trask by the collar so that he was a few millimeters from his face, “You listen to me you maggot! You find that traitor and you bring him and anyone he’s with back here now!!!”

Lois sighed as she took a seat with Clark at one of the picnic tables outside Masie’s. “I feel like my feet are going to fall off...”

Clark smiled, taking a seat next to her and wrapped an arm around her. “Sorry. I know it’s a lot of walking.” He gently massaged her shoulders and she leaned back against him, enjoying the feeling of his hands massaging her tense muscles.

“Okay, so four hours at City Hall. What do we know?” Lois asked, leaning back against him as he continued to work his magic on her shoulders.

“We know that in twenty years, here were no permits and no citations on the Irig property,” Clark said.

“No activity that would attract the attention of the federal government in anyway,” Lois said, rolling her shoulders. “That feels good.”

He leaned down to kiss her, “I aim to please.”

“Yes, you do,” she whispered with a wicked grin. He laughed, slipping his arms around her waist and pulling her to him. She laughed, pulling out of his grasp, “Nope, remember what happened last time? We’re here to work. There’ll be time for that later.”

“I hope so,” he whispered, giving her a soft kiss on her collarbone.

“Clark...” She laughed, wrapping an arm around his neck from behind. “Focus!”

“I am...” He teased.

She laughed, leaning back in his arms as she enjoyed the feeling of being wrapped securely in his warm embrace. A familiar voice brought them back to the present and Clark reluctantly pulled away.

“Lois, Clark, what are you two doing in Smallville?” They turned to see Maisie with her serving tray and notepad.

Lois smiled up at her, “We’re here with the Planet on a story... um, working...” She managed to say with a slight blush.

Maisie winked at her, “I see,” Lois blushed a bit more, brushing a stray strand of hair behind her ear. The sparkle from her engagement ring caught Maisie’s eye and she gasped, “Is that what I think it is?”

Clark nodded, wrapping his arms around her from behind happily, “Yes.”

Maisie took Lois’s hand examining the ring with a smile, “Congratulations you two... Whatever you want... it’s on the house!” She leaned over to hug both of them, “I’m so happy for you...”

Jonathan stared at the metal box in front of him angrily. Martha opened the door to the barn and entered, closing the door behind her, “Jonathan?”

“In here,” He muttered gruffly.

“I’ve been looking all over for you. What are you doing in here?” Martha asked.

“I need to get rid of it,” Jonathan said, shaking his head.

“Get rid of what?” Martha asked.

Jonathan pointed at the box on the workbench, “That... poison... Whatever it is. It’s dangerous.”

“Jonathan, there’s no way you could have known...” Martha began, “We don’t even know what it is.”

“It’s poison is what it is.” Jonathan snapped.

“All his life Clark’s wanted to be normal... now he is,” Martha said, trying to rationalize what had happened.

“You don’t go all your life with powers and then poof they just disappear...” Jonathan said. “Being normal for Clark is being ‘super’... until I opened that box.”

“What do you want to do with it?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “I don’t know what to do with it. I can’t give it to anybody, but I sure as heck don’t want to keep this anywhere near Clark...”

The tapping at the door caught Jonathan and Martha’s attention as they heard Wayne Irig outside, “Jonathan! It’s Wayne! Open up!”

<< “The government has pull!” >>

<< “Do you want to dance?” >>

<< “Clark, look out!” >>

<< “Lois, get down!” >>

<< “There’s men at my house. Men with guns...” >>

<< “We’ve got to destroy it, Wayne!” >>

<< “What’s happening? Clark!” >>

Lois groggily came to as pieces of the evening started coming back to her. She tried to move but she couldn’t. Something was restraining her. “Cl...” Her eyes fluttered and the intense yellow light that was shining in her eyes caused her to blink back tears from the brightness. Her head felt foggy. Something was wrong. She looked around and saw she was tied with a large rope. On either side was Jonathan and Martha. “Clar.k.” She rasped out. Her throat was dry. Her heart began racing as she looked around. “Where’s Clark?” she whimpered.

“Shhh,” Jonathan whispered. “Pretend like you’re still sleeping, Lois...”

“But...” Lois began to argue but the noise behind her... the familiar noise of a gun being cocked made her rethink her argument.

“Any luck?” a man’s voice asked.

“No, he’s still not cooperating...” another voice said.

“I guess we’ll have to take extreme measures with Mr. Kent then...” the man’s voice from before said.

Present Day...

Martha took the large brown box from Jonathan and smiled as she began pulling out the little knick knacks inside. “Let’s see... your first finger painting... the little romper we found you in...” She held up a dark blue romper with a small ‘s’ emblem on the waist of it and Clark smiled, “...the baby blanket we found you in so long ago...” She held it close to her. “...and this,” She held up a large ‘S’ emblem similar to the one on the romper.

“Let’s see...” Lois held it up against Clark’s chest and smiled, “Looks good.”

“I still don’t know about this...” Clark said looking down at the cape on the outfit, “Are you sure about the cape?”

“I think it’ll be great when you’re flying...” Martha said. “It’ll be perfect with the disguise... you can take off the glasses and do your thing...”

Clark eyed his reflection in the mirror skeptically, “I don’t know...”

Five Years Ago...

The tent was quiet. Too quiet. Lois peeked her eyes open, looking around for a sign of any of the intruders that had attacked them at the Kent farm. Had it really been twenty-four hours since she’d last seen Clark?

“Cl...” she squeaked out painfully. Her head was pounding and her arms and legs were stiff from being tied up.

“Shhh... it’s okay, Lois,” Jonathan whispered, shifting against her. “They haven’t been back in here for hours...”

“Cla...” She squeaked out again with a bit more strength in her voice.

“I don’t know,” Jonathan said grimly.

“Hurt...” She managed, finding more strength in her voice as she swallowed hard. “They’re... going...”

“Clark can take care of himself,” Jonathan said adamantly. “I promised I wouldn’t let anything happen to you and I’m a man of my word. Just try to relax...” Jonathan said, shifting against her back. “We’re gonna get out of here...”

Lois looked over her shoulder at Martha who appeared to be asleep. The tear stains on her cheek were lined with blood from the scratches on her face. “She’s hurt.”

“We’re gonna get out of here,” Jonathan said adamantly.

Lois sighed, wincing as she moved. If she’d just done what Clark had asked they wouldn’t be in this predicament in the first place.

24 Hours Ago...

Clark parked the truck and helped Lois out as they walked toward the pond on the Kent farm. He took a deep breath and sighed, Lois looked at him carefully, “Are you sure you’re okay? You really don’t look that great...” She placed a hand on his chest and he let out a shallow breath, “Clark, what’s going on?”

He nodded, lowering his head to look at the ground for a moment, “Lois, there’s something I need to tell you... something I’ve been meaning to tell you but I just haven’t found a way...”

“What is it?” Lois asked curiously.

A loud crash from the barn caught both their attention and fear crossed Clark’s face as he headed toward the barn after handing her his keys. “Go to the house and call Rachel...”

“But Clark...” She began to argue when another loud bang was heard inside the barn.

“Now!” he hollered as he headed toward the barn.

She knew she should listen, but there was something in his voice that she’d never heard before... fear. She followed close behind, trying to catch up to Clark, but found him nowhere in

sight.

24 Hours Later...

Lois sighed in relief as she felt the rope that had her arms and legs restrained over the last day was finally removed, “Thanks,” she mumbled softly.

“Not a problem,” Rachel said, helping Lois rub her wrists to help bring the circulation back to the areas that had been restrained by the rope. “You guys want to tell me what happened here?”

“I wish I knew,” Martha said softly. “How did you find us?”

“Wayne showed up at the sheriff station about an hour ago covered in blood, rambling about government agencies and a kidnapping...” Rachel said. “Is there anyone else in here?”

Lois was in tears as she shook her head, “No, they grabbed Clark though. We don’t know where they took him...”

“We’ll find him,” Rachel promised, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder. “Let’s get you all to the hospital and we’ll find him.”

“He was ...shot,” Lois stammered. She noticed the expression between Jonathan and Martha.

“We’ll find him,” Rachel repeated. “I won’t rest until we find him.”

Present Day...

Jonathan stood on the porch with Clark, dressed in spandex and a cape, shaking his head. “It’s definitely...colorful.”

“Lois said she thought it would distract people from recognizing me...” Clark said with a smirk.

Jonathan looked at him skeptically, “You really think the glasses will be enough of a disguise?”

Clark shrugged, “I am not really sure about much right now. I keep getting pieces ... blocks of memories at a time... I remember this place...Pete, Rachel...you and mom... but everything else... Metropolis...the past five years...It’s just blank...”

“I thought you said you remembered Lois?” Jonathan pressed.

“I remembered her face, but all I know right now is from what people have told me...the last thing I remember is leaving for Metropolis to start my senior year at Met U. Obviously, I know there is a lot missing...”

“I think whatever it was that your mom pulled out of your shoulder may have been keeping you from remembering,” Jonathan observed. “Lois said after they took it out you seemed to be remembering more...”

Clark nodded, “Yeah, I just wish I could remember what happened in the first place that cost me five years of my life...”

Jonathan looked at his feet for a moment, contemplating something for a moment then shook his head, “I’m sure it’ll come back soon, son,”

“Do you think this will work?” Clark asked nervously.

“Showing up in boots and a cape offering EPRAD a way to stop the asteroid hours before it’s set to impact Earth and destroy life as we know it?” Jonathan shrugged, “It’s worth a shot.”

“Where’s Lois?” Clark asked.

“She, uh...” Jonathan placed a hand on Clark’s shoulder, “You’ve got to understand... these past five years have been hard on her... between that and finding out about your...gifts...”

Clark sighed, realizing what his dad was saying. He didn’t remember much about her but it still hurt. “She doesn’t want to say goodbye...”

“It’s not that she doesn’t want to... she *CAN’T*...” Jonathan explained, trying to reassure his son. “You have no idea what she’s been through... just like she has no idea what you’ve been through...”

Clark nodded, “Okay, well here goes nothing...”

EPRAD control room was filled with technicians zeroing in on Nightfall, discussing the possible effects Earth would suffer when

the asteroid came into the Earth’s atmosphere, “We’re talking about a complete destruction of life as we know it. This asteroid is bigger than the one that destroyed the dinosaurs...”

Another technician opened his mouth to argue but stopped when he did a double take on the screen, seeing a man in red and blue with what looked like a scuba tank on his back FLYING toward the asteroid. “Hey, Bill...”

“I mean, this is something that everyone talks about...history in the making...I guess we’ll finally get to see what it was like for the dinosaurs...”

“Bill!”

“What?” Bill looked at the other technician irritated.

“Look!”

They both looked at the screen in awe as they watched the man in red and blue begin to spin in space, heading foot first toward the asteroid. “Are you seeing what I’m seeing?”

“A guy in tights and a cape trying to drill his feet into the asteroid?” Bill asked. “Yep, I see it. But I don’t believe it...”

Alarms began blaring over and over as the intercom announced, “This is EPRAD Ground Control. We are thirty-six hours from impact of ‘Nightfall’. What is the trajectory?”

They looked at the screen again and another voice announced, “This is EPRAD Ground Control. We are now fifty-four hours from impact of ‘Nightfall’. What is the trajectory?”

“Um, what did they just say?” Bill asked.

“Mission trackers reporting an anomaly. Switching to backup computers for corroboration.” The intercom announced, “Roger confirmation. Asteroid velocity and density is decreasing...”

“The asteroid seems to be reversing its course and...losing its density...” Bill responded in his radio headset.

“Roger, what is the cause of this anomaly?”

Bill looked at Ted for a moment and laughed, “A guy in tights and a red cape with a scuba tank on his back...” They stared at the screen in awe as they watched the asteroid disappear into a fiery explosion as the mysterious man in red and blue struck the asteroid, disappearing from the screen. “No one is gonna believe the report on this...”

The force of the contact he made with the asteroid caused the air tank to explode. He couldn’t breathe. He could feel his body weakening as he fell toward Earth. Everything around him felt like it was on fire.

Five Years Ago...

Clark parked the truck and helped Lois out as they walked toward the pond on the Kent farm. He took a deep breath and sighed, Lois looked at him carefully, “Are you sure you’re okay? You really don’t look that great...” She placed a hand on his chest and he let out a shallow breath, “Clark, what’s going on?”

He nodded, lowering his head to look at the ground for a moment. He needed to tell her. He couldn’t take the lies anymore. Even though he was weak and had no powers right now didn’t mean they wouldn’t return. He had to tell her. “Lois, there’s something I need to tell you...something I’ve been meaning to tell you but I just haven’t found a way...”

“What is it?” Lois asked curiously.

A loud crash from the barn caught both their attention. What if someone had found that meteorite? His dad had said he was going to destroy it... The spaceship. His dad. What if they found it? He did his best to cover the fear that he knew was written all over his face and handed the keys to Lois before whispering, “Go to the house and call Rachel...”

“But Clark...” She began to argue when another loud bang was heard inside the barn.

“Now!” he hollered as he headed toward the barn, not bothering to look behind him anymore. There was no sign of his mom or dad anywhere. He couldn’t seem to squash the sick

feeling he had in the pit of his stomach. Something was wrong.

As he approached the barn, he silently cursed his luck for not having his powers anymore. He stood in the shadows, watching as several men in government uniforms tied his parents up. His mother was tied up along with his father. In the corner, he recognized Wayne, his missing neighbor, badly beaten and gagged. “No...” He murmured to himself.

“Who are you? What do you want?” his mother asked.

“I’m Agent Jason Trask with Bureau 39, a top-secret government agency intent on protecting Earth from any alien invasion...” He smiled as he tightened the ropes, pulling out a lighter from his pocket, “If this doesn’t go well, just remember, you give your lives for your country... Where is he?”

“Go to hell!” his dad spat back. Trask looked like he was about to strike his dad. Clark tensed up, ready to pounce if needed to help his parents. Trask nodded to the remaining agents in the room and they left. Clark flattened himself against the wall, staying out of the line of vision as he continued to listen and watch the scene before him unfold. Trask, who was taunting them, remained alone in the barn with his parents and Wayne. If he could overpower him somehow maybe he could stop him before the other agents got back...or at least distract him long enough for his parents and Wayne to get out of here.

“I don’t think you understand your predicament, Mr. Kent,” Trask laughed, “We came to Smallville in search of a meteorite...a meteorite we believe to be the key to an alien threat...and a meteorite we found in your possession. From what our scientists have told us this meteorite came to Earth at the exact same time your son was born...” He grinned, “If I were a betting man I’d say that’s more than a coincidence...Now, I’m not going to ask again, where is your son?”

“You stay the hell away from my son!” his mom spat.

Her retort was met with a blow to the head as Trask stood with his back to the doorway. Unable to stifle the anger he felt inside himself, Clark lunged, on top of Trask, intent on making him pay for raising a hand to his mother. **“NOOO!”**

Trask was strong. Clark did his best to meet each blow with one of his own. He would not let Trask win. He couldn’t. He continued to avoid blow after blow as Trask advanced toward him. How had he ended up outside? It didn’t matter. Hopefully, his parents and Wayne would be able to make it out...

He fell into the pond with Trask, struggling to fight him off. He could feel his weakened body trying to give up but he fought through it, grabbing him by the collar and striking him again and again until he was up against the old oak tree, wading in the pond as he continued to fight.

A hard metal object pressed up against his side. Trask had a gun. Clark couldn’t let him use it. He saw the glint in Trask’s eyes and his eyes widened when he realized what he was trying to do. He struggled with him, knowing it was a lost cause. He heard a resounding pop and felt a piercing pain in his chest.

“Clark!!!” the sound of Lois’s cry reached his ears.

“Lois...” he managed to whisper softly as darkness overtook him.

Present Day...

Lois sat on the bench by the gazebo, staring at the water with a faraway look on her face. Martha walked up behind her cautiously, “Mind if I sit?”

Lois turned to look at her and shrugged, “Sure.”

“How are you holding up?” Martha asked, noticing where Lois’s line of vision was focused. It was the place where Clark had been shot five years ago.

“I’ll be fine,” Lois said with a weak smile. “It’s just a lot to take in over just a few days.”

“I know.” Martha hugged her.

“I don’t know how to do this,” Lois said softly.

“Do what?” Martha asked.

“Assuming he even gets his memory back...” Lois’s voice began to crack, “How do I even face him? How do I tell him?”

Realizing what Lois was referring to Martha sighed, “Is that why you didn’t want to say goodbye?”

“I can’t...The more he remembers the more guilty I feel for not telling him. I mean, I don’t know how to tell him...”

Martha sighed, “Why don’t we just take this one step at a time? We’ll work with him about his memory then we’ll take it one thing at a time. Five years is a lot to catch up on,”

“I only had him for sixteen weeks,” Lois cried, “but Clark never got to...”

Martha hugged her tightly as the tears fell even harder. “You’ll get through this.”

Five Years Ago...

Clark groggily began to come to. The room he was in looked like a hospital room of sorts. He could feel his body was restrained. He heard voices around him but couldn’t make out what they were saying. There was a familiar green glow coming from across the room. It wasn’t close enough that it was painful but it was enough to make sure he was uncomfortable.

The men around him seemed to realize he was awake and surrounded him. One of the men he recognized as Trask. The other he recognized as Agent Thompson. The other man he didn’t recognize at all but he suspected he was in charge.

“I see you’re back in the land of the living, Mr. Kent,” Trask said with a smug grin, “Maybe we can try this again...”

“I’m going to make you a deal, trusting that your stay in Metropolis has put some sense in your head. Give up the alien and I’ll let you live,” Trask said, leaning over the table to stare Clark down.

Clark stared at him nervously, uncertain what he was talking about. He seemed to be out of his mind, thinking there was some invasion coming. The other men with him seemed just as delirious. “What makes you think I could do that if I wanted to?”

He slammed the large metal box his father had had in the barn on the table and said, “This came to Smallville around the time you were born. There has to be a connection. Tell me and I’ll let you live.”

Clark did his best to cover his nervousness. “There’s nothing to tell. I’m learning all this for the first time right now.”

Trask slammed the palm of his hand on the table angrily. “I’m trying to save humanity from an alien invader, Mr. Kent!”

Clark did his best to portray a calm he didn’t feel. “You have no proof of that.”

Trask looked back at him calmly and Clark shifted nervously in his seat. “There’s another possibility.”

“What’s that?” Clark asked.

“Perhaps the alien has taken over your mind, infused you with its power,” Trask said, fingering the metal box with a sinister expression.

If he opened that box...No, he had to call his bluff. He couldn’t reveal himself. “Nobody’s infused me with power and nobody’s taken over my mind.”

The box opened and he felt his body begin to go numb as he slumped forward, “Are you certain of that, Mr. Kent?” he heard Trask say before he drifted to unconsciousness.

Present Day – One Week Ago...

“Trask!” Thompson roared angrily as he headed to the underground shelter where Trask had what was left of Bureau 39.

“Well, this is a surprise,” Trask said coolly.

“The Bureau is being shut down.” Thompson slammed an

order in Trask's face. "Everything you have on Smallville needs to be destroyed. No evidence of Bureau 39..."

"But..." Trask began.

"You've diverted from the mission time and time again," Thompson warned. "I warned you what would happen..."

"I know the alien is..."

"I don't care!" Thompson sneered.

"You've diverted from the mission time and time again..." The voice echoed from the hallway and he looked around, seeing no sign of the guards that normally manned the room.

"Your team has been dismissed. You have twenty-four hours..."

He looked around the room and saw the green glow. He had to get out of here before he tried to use it on him again. The torture.

"You have produced no results. He can't kill... He can't be used as a weapon..."

He could feel the strength that had left him slowly coming back...

He would wait for his chance. When the man came back to try and do his experiments he would escape. The door opened and he saw him enter the dark room. "Where is everyone?" he sneered. "Thompson!" He growled, pulling his keys out of his pocket.

He narrowed his eyes as he watched the door open. Any moment now...

Shots rang out around him as he overpowered the man and was able to keep the green glow away from himself as he destroyed the room. He would escape this time. He had to get out of here. He had to escape. He had to find...

Present Day...

It hurt. He could feel the heat from the explosion around him. He felt like he was gagging as he entered the Earth's atmosphere, desperately trying to take in the Oxygen he'd been deprived. Images from the past seven years rushed through his mind as he soared down to Earth.

<<"Whoa! Sorry!"

"Uh, sorry..."

"It's okay... Typical for me... barreling in without looking where I'm going... Uh, hi, Lois Lane,"

"Clark Kent.">>

<<"Clark, you're being careful, aren't you?">>

<<"Girl? Was she pretty?"

"Mom..."

"She was, wasn't she?">>

<<"Chicken."

"Excuse me?? I am not."

"Yes, you are. You are so afraid you might actually have a good time. No one's going to make you do something you don't want to do. Just live a little. Cut loose and have some fun. What's the worst that could happen?">>

<<"Where are we going?"

"To dance..."

"You know, usually people ask one another if they want to..."

"Finally speechless...">>

<<"Get yourhands off of her...now!!"

"Kent...we were just playing around...">>

<<"You better pray to God she's all right...">>

<<"You know me...jumping in without looking...">>

<<"Lois, this is not your fault,">>

<<"What if someone had seen you? How would you have explained... You can not afford to lose your temper like that...">>

<<"You could easily lose control and slip up and then..."

Metropolis isn't the Outback, you know. People in the city are always looking to make a quick buck. If they find out about you, they'll put you in a laboratory, and ..."

"... 'dissect me like a frog.' I know, Dad. Believe me, I'm trying my best to be like everybody else here, but I didn't know what else to do...">>

<<"...I could have killed them if I wanted to...and believe me, I was tempted to...but I didn't.">>

<<"I'm not most guys,">>

<<"You're really something. I guess that's why I love you..."

"I love you too,">>

<<"Great, what's your big plan when he discovers us in here...which he will..."

"Take off your shirt,"

"What?? Lo-is...What are you doing?"

"Shut up and kiss me.">>

<<"Sorry, I sprung that on you. We needed a distraction and that..."

"...was definitely a distraction...It worked."

"Yeah, I guess we should...talk..."

"...or not."

"...or not...">>

<<"Is this a dream?"

"Not unless we're having the same one...">>

<<"Stop,"

"What?"

"Something's wrong..."

"You mean other than us being late?...Clark, stop it. This isn't funny..."

"Lois, I think we need to get out of here..."

"What the ...??"

"Get Down!!!!">>

<<"Are you CRAZY??? What are you DOING??? Trying to get yourself KILLED???">>

<<"Clark, what are you doing? This isn't funny! Clark, stop it! I'm serious, stop it!"

"Extra towel, yah? "Oops...Sorry..."

"I'm sorry I heard..."

"Just get off of me!">>

<<"I should have given you a warning. I'm sorry.">>

<<"I'm going to kiss you. Are you going to stop me?... They'll go away with time...">>

<<"You can't just grab me like that...being here again...and being grabbed like that...just brings it all back.">>

<<"Clark! You're gonna flood the bathroom!">>

<<"Clark! I thought..."

"I'm fine. I...saw the wave fold over like that and...I just kinda stopped running...Nice touch, kneeling Lex Luthor like that. Great first impression.">>

<<"What?"

"Nothing, it's just...You're always saving me..."

"Someone's got to...">>

<<"Mom, this is ...Lois,"

"Hi... It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Kent,"

"Martha, please,"

"Martha,">>

<<"Such a waste of time,"

"We're still parked outside where peering eyes can see us. When we're at home maybe I'll lose the bra..."

"Promise? Whose home?"

"Is that your fantasy, Mr. Kent? Me with no bra?"

"No, you on my bed in my football jersey...nothing on underneath..."

"Football jersey, huh? Maybe if you're good, we'll try it out sometime...">>

<<"What?"

"Nothing...just realizing how much I love you...You're gorgeous, intelligent, sexy, and I couldn't imagine my life without you, Lois Lane,"

"I love you too, Clark Kent, and I pray you never have to find

that out,">>

<<"I don't fit in. I have to control myself all the time and never use my powers because I might jeopardize my chance at a normal life..."

"Whatever that means..."

"Just being human like you and mom. Living...working...having a family..."

"We don't know if that's possible and you can't risk anyone finding out about you....If they knew....you could end up in some laboratory where they would...."

"...dissect me like a frog...I know, but I can't hide forever and I can't keep lying to Lois..."

"You're not lying. You're just omitting certain facts,"

"It feels like I'm lying to her. I want to be able to share everything with her...not just this...but me, Clark Kent...the man that can fly...bend steel over his head...and loves everything about her."

"It's just too risky, son, you've only known each other less than a year..."

"But...I love her,"

"I know you do, son. Just give it time."

"Do you think there'll ever be a time where I can use my powers for good and still be ...me, Clark Kent?"

"I don't know, but if anyone can find a way, you can,">>

<<"Everyone disguises everything...nobody really knows anyone because everyone knows once you reveal yourself...once you open yourself up...they wind up using it against you..."

"But marriage is about sharing everything you have, even when you don't feel like it."

"So's divorce, ask my mother.">>

<<"Lois, not everyone has that kind of relationship."

"You mean where they wind up hating one another...In my head, I know everyone doesn't end up like they did, but.....I don't know...">>

<<"Invisible or fly?"

"Fly,"

"Really?"

"Yeah, I think it'd be great to be able to fly in the sky...touch the clouds...the stars...."

"That does sound wonderful,">>

<<"I'm gonna get us out of here. Just give me a minute,">>

<<"I hope you can understand, a man in my position. I wouldn't want to be misinterpreted and I have had on or two bad experiences with the media..."

"But not with me," Lois argued.

"Why don't we make it dinner...but just you,"

"Mind if I cut in?"

"Not at all,"

"I don't like that guy,"

"I think I might have just grabbed the biggest interview of the decade!">>

<<"Do you realize it has been exactly a year today since we first met?"

"Really? A year?"

"Yes, a year ago today I was staring at these enormous gates, contemplating my future in Metropolis. then Then you crashed into my life..."

"I wouldn't say crashexactly....bumped...maybe glided...">>

<<"I love you so much Lois. I ...I can't imagine my life without you in it."

"...and I love you. I've never known anyone like you...I really...love you...You know that?"

"Yeah, I know...I....just...I don't know. I imagine the worldthe future....I can't imagine any of it without you there...standing with me."

"Marry me,">>

<<"Yes..."

"Tell me what you want..."

"You,">>

<<"I think you learned a lot more about me than I learned about you,"

"Yeah, I'll bet,"

"I think we've both only scratched the surface,"

"Unbelievable, I don't believe this guy,"

"Not exactly the point of an interview,"

"That's my girl. Put him in his place,">>

<<"That's it. You are in charge of all cooking from now on,"

"What? You're never cooking?"

"It's not something you want me to do, trust me,"

"I'll teach you.">>

<<"He spent the whole time trying to evade my questions while trying to hit on me. Needless to say, there won't be a follow-up,"

"I'm sorry, Lois, I know you wanted that exclusive,"

"It is what it is. But there was something very odd about him. Every time I asked him about his parents or the first company he took over his eyes did a little dance. Almost like there was something more going on. May be worth looking into,"

"Definitely,">>

<<"I wanted this to be perfect...I love you,"

"I love you, too."

"I know technically we're already engaged, but I wanted to do this right...I'm not sure if I'm supposed to get down on one knee, but..."

"Oh, my God...Clark...Is that for me?"

"Yes...Do you like it?"

"It's beautiful,"

"You're beautiful. Lois, I love you and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

"I love you, Clark Kent, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you.">>

<<"What is it?"

"It's the ship we found you in,"

"What?">>

<<"Your mom and I didn't want people who'd shoot you into space to get their hands on you. We figured even if you were a Russian you were only a Russian baby..."

"Is that what you think I am? A Russian experiment?"

"Son, we don't care if you're a Russian, or a martian. You know that. Anyway, your mom wanted the ship destroyed because she was afraid of those men coming back and trying to take you. We figured that the spaceship had to be destroyed so nobody'd ever have any evidence on how you got here...I planned to burn it, but I couldn't...I never told your mother. Didn't want to worry her..."

"So, this..."

"Is everything we found you in...">>

<<"That doesn't make any sense. Why go to all this trouble for a rock?"

"Because the preliminary report said it was some kind of meteorite. Wayne was scared when the feds showed up so he gave it to me for safekeeping. I figured since it was found a few miles from where we found you it could be related...">>

<<"I'm Agent George Thompson. Field Liaison for the EPA.">>

<<"That feels good,"

"I aim to please,"

"Yes, you do...Nope, remember what happened last time? We're here to work. There'll be time for that later."

"I hope so,"

"Clark...Focus!"

"I am...">>

<<"Is that what I think it is?"

“Yes,”
 “Congratulations you two...Whatever you want...it's on the house!”>>
 <<“Do you want to dance?”>>
 <<“I figured we'd get married. Enjoy a very long honeymoon phase. Get a couple of Kerths....”
 “Pulitzer.”
 “...and a Pulitzer. Then start practicing.”
 “I don't think practice is something that's required in that department.”
 “That's just part of the fun.”>>
 <<“Lois, there's something I need to tell you...something I've been meaning to tell you but I just haven't found a way.....”
 “What is it?”
 “Go to the house and call Rachel....”
 “But Clark...”
 “Now!”>>
 <<“What's happening? Clark!”>>
 <<“I'm Agent Jason Trask with Bureau 39, a top-secret government agency intent on protecting Earth from any alien invasion...If this doesn't go well just remember, you give your lives for your country...Where is he?”>>
 <<“Clark!!!!”
 “Lois...”>>
 <<“Do you think this will work?”
 “Showing up in boots and a cape offering EPRAD a way to stop the asteroid hours before it's set to impact Earth and destroy life as we know it? It's worth a shot,”>>
 <<“Where's Lois?”
 “She, uh...You've got to understand.... these past five years have been hard on her.... between that and finding out about your...gifts....”
 “She doesn't want to say goodbye....”
 “It's not that she doesn't want to.... she can't...You have no idea what she's been through.... just like she has no idea what you've been through...”>>
 <<“Perhaps the alien has taken over your mind, infused you with its power,”>>
 ‘Lois,’ his mind cried out as he felt the air fill his lungs. He looked around and noticed a good bit of the suit had burned. He'd have to get his mom's help to fix it. He looked around and noticed he was near the Kent farm and headed toward the familiar farmhouse.

Perry White stared at the screen in shock, uncertain of what he'd just seen. A man ...a FLYING man had been captured on the satellite feed from EPRAD pushing the Nightfall asteroid away from Earth's orbit. The fears that had filled his mind since they had announced the possibility of Earth's existence being wiped out a few days ago subsided and he could feel the tension leave his body in a way he wasn't used to...tears. He turned back to his office, closing the door behind him as he blocked out the cheering around him.

He sunk into his chair, wiping the tears from his eyes as he fought for some control over his emotions. It had been over a week now since he'd seen Alice. She had gone upstate to visit Jerry and ended up stuck, unable to get a flight out. He reached for the phone, praying for a connection. The phone rang three times when he heard the familiar voice on the other end, “Alice, honey?” He couldn't hold the tears back anymore.

MYSTERIOUS PHENOMENA IN SPACE!

The headline for the Metro Gazette read.

CIEST MANIFIQUE!

The headline for the Paris Bulletin read.

ALIEN INVASION ON EARTH!

The headline for the Daily STAR read.

I'M HAVING THE SPACEMAN'S BABY!

The headline for the National Inquisitor read.

MIRACLE SAVE! SUPER MAN SAVES EARTH!

The headline for the Daily Planet read.

“We are in shock tonight as over the last few days we've been anticipating and preparing for the end only to be saved from Nightfall by this...flying man. No one knows who he is or where he came from. We are indebted to him, whoever he is...wherever he is...” the President of the United States addressed the press.

“Mr. President? Do you feel this ‘flying man’ as you put it is friend or foe?” Ken Groberman from the Gazette asked.

“At this time, we don't know enough about him, but by all appearances...he seems to be a friend,” The President said, “Next question?”

“Has anyone tried to contact this ‘flying man’ and find out if there are any others like him?” Mike McKee from the National Inquisitor asked.

The President sighed for a moment, “Mr. McKee, as I already stated we haven't spoken to him, but if it makes you feel any better when EPRAD was checking the footage from the rescue there were no signs of any unidentified flying objects in Earth's orbit.”

“But what if...”

“Enough of this!” Lois clicked the remote, turning the news coverage off. She looked around the living room of the Kent farmhouse and sighed. Martha and Jonathan had checked in with Rachel Harris to see if there had been any more sightings of Trask in Smallville but it seemed to be quiet. Martha was still nervous about returning to the farm after what happened to Wayne Irig, but Lois wanted someone to be here in case Clark came back.

She had called in the story on the Nightfall rescue to Perry earlier who was piecing it together with comments from EPRAD and people Jimmy had talked to around Metropolis. For the most part, people were grateful. There didn't seem to be a lot of fear, but rather gratitude that the world wasn't ending. She still didn't know how she felt about everything. The emotional ups and downs she'd felt over the last week should be considered an Olympic sport.

She should feel relieved. She should feel happy. There were many emotions she knew she should be feeling at the moment, but she didn't. Trask was still out there. A man that possibly knew about Clark was out there with something that could hurt him...if Jamie were still alive...

‘No, don't go there,’ she reminded herself.

She refused to allow herself to dwell on the what-ifs. It was too painful, especially now. How in the world was she supposed to tell him? He barely remembered her. Would he remember how to get back? His memory had been shaky at best when he'd left. She knew she should have said goodbye but her guilt wouldn't allow her to. She was angry. There had been so much Clark and his parents had hidden from her for years and she was still trying to process everything.

Martha had said he was planning on telling her that weekend they'd returned to Smallville...that he'd wanted to tell her before then...What had stopped him? Why had he not told her he was hiding such a huge part of himself from her? Was he afraid she wouldn't understand? Afraid she would turn him into the government?

She shuddered involuntarily at the last thought, knowing that was exactly what had happened to Clark when Trask had faked Clark's death. Why had she not pushed harder when they kept telling her Clark was dead? Maybe if she'd fought harder they would have ...

‘No. You can't rehash the past.’ She reminded herself. Years of therapy had taught her it did no good to relive the past. So where did she go from here? Did she still love Clark? Yes. Was she still

hurt? Yes. So where did that leave them?

She stepped outside, taking a seat on the porch swing as she stared at the night sky, looking for a sign of Clark anywhere. There was still no sign of Clark. It had been hours since the news media had picked up the coverage of his rescue. Where was he?

Now that the threat of extinction was gone, she had time to think and what she thought and what she felt were two completely different things. She was hurt he hadn't told her about himself but she was trying to give him the benefit of the doubt. Until he got his memory back she'd never know the answers to the questions that were racing through her mind. The biggest question she had was for herself, though: How and when was she supposed to tell him about Jamie?

A loud sonic boom could be heard in the sky. She looked up and spotted a red streak coming in for a landing behind the barn. Realizing it had to be Clark she took a deep breath and headed toward the barn, "Here goes nothing."

Inspector Henderson walked around what appeared to be an old abandoned warehouse with two officers, responding to a request for backup on a noise disturbance call. "No answer. I don't know what to do. The neighbors were complaining about strange noises coming from there...and then the smell..." Officer Joshua Reagan said as he followed Inspector Henderson around the perimeter.

"You said there was a possible...gunshot victim?" Henderson asked.

"Look!" Reagan pointed at the gun shell casings on the ground by the front door.

Henderson nodded then turned to the front door to pound on it. "Metropolis P.D., This is Inspector Henderson. Open up!" He hollered through the door.

No response.

He pounded on the door once more, "I repeat, this is Inspector Henderson with the Metropolis P.D. Open up!"

No response.

He looked around the building and saw no signs of activity. It didn't appear that anyone was there. He knelt down to examine the gun shell casing on the ground. It was bent...like it had been used. He spotted what looked like dried blood on the concrete and frowned, turning back to Officer Reagan, "You may want to step back..." He looked around to see if anyone was watching before hoisting his foot up to kick the door in.

"Clark!" Lois gasped, gingerly touching the exposed skin on his back where his suit had torn. "You're hurt!"

"I'll be...fine...just need...sunlight..." he wheezed out as he took a shaky step toward the farmhouse.

"Sunlight?" she asked, uncertainly as she helped him to the porch. He just nodded, unable to continue. He seemed to be struggling to catch his breath. "Clark?" He slumped down against the door, falling to the ground. She lowered herself to where she was eye level with him, "Are you okay?"

"Fi...ne..." he nodded, putting his arms around her waist. "Very...fi...ne..."

"Clark, do you know where you are?" Lois asked, turning his head so that she could see his face.

"Ho...me..." he said softly. "Fina...Finally, home..."

"Good," she nodded. It appeared his memory was doing a bit better than it had before. "Do you know who I am?"

He cupped her cheek, softly whispering her name barely loud enough for her to hear him, "Lo...is." He tightening his arms around her waist, pulling her to him, "My...Lois..."

He tightened his grip on her and she gasped, "Too tight."

"Sorr...y," he mumbled, against her shoulder.

"Good. So you remember who I am?" she asked as he loosened his grip on her waist.

"Of...course..." His voice seemed to be getting stronger but he still seemed out of it. "I could...ne...ver...for...get..."

She smiled at that last statement. "Clark, what happened?" She touched his back gingerly, noting that the scrapes that had been there before seemed to have disappeared.

"Hurt...hu...rts...to...brea...breathe..." he rasped out.

"Hurts to breathe?" Lois repeated, uncertainly. "Can you breathe now?"

He nodded, holding her close to him. "Bet...Bett...er..."

She could feel the tears she'd been holding back threaten to overflow. Ever since she'd been reunited with him this was the first time she'd held him...really held him. Five years of dreaming of this moment and now that it was here...She glanced at him and noticed his eyes had closed and he seemed to have passed out from exhaustion, but his grip on her was still pretty tight.

"Clark..." She tried to free herself from his grasp so she could call the Kents, but found herself unable to move. "Clark, you've got to let go of me..."

"No..." He mumbled incoherently. "Don't...leave..."

'Don't panic,' she reminded herself. 'He doesn't know what he's doing.'

"Green...glow...hurts...hu...rts...to...brea...breathe..." He murmured softly.

'He's delirious.' She realized as his body slumped against her, loosening his grip on her waist. She looked around, making sure there wasn't anyone nearby that could possibly report the landing of the newest superhero at the Kent farm. There didn't appear to be anyone but that didn't mean it wouldn't happen. She needed to get him inside and she needed to call the Kents.

Clark nestled his head against her shoulder, holding her waist as he slept. God, she'd missed this...She wrapped an arm around his waist and attempted to stand up with him, but found the task to be impossible as he slumped against her. "No..." He moaned in his sleep.

She was going to have to wake him up. There was no other way. She couldn't sit here in this position on the porch forever. She could already feel a cramp in her legs start to form.

"Clark?" She patted his cheek, trying to get his attention, "Clark, wake up."

"Huh?" His eyes shot open and he looked around, seeming to recognize her and his surroundings.

"Okay, we need to get you inside the house. Can you help me...?" She was cut off when he stood up and scooped her into his arms. "Okay, good! You're feeling better..." she muttered to herself as he walked into the house, closing the door behind him.

"Oh, God!" Henderson pulled his collar over his nose and mouth, "What is that smell?"

Reagan pointed to a room with a flickering light and motioned for Henderson to follow. "In there!"

Indeed, the smell got worse as they entered the room.

"Police!" Henderson called out as they entered the room with their weapons drawn.

"Can...can you see anything?" Reagan asked.

Henderson shook his head, looking up at the flickering light above them. He scanned the room. It looked like equipment had been pried from the walls. He moved his flashlight to examine the puncture marks in the concrete, "What the hell...?" He touched the metal that appeared to have been ripped from the wall.

"Henderson!" Reagan called out.

"What is it?" Henderson asked.

"We've got a... a homicide," Reagan said, pointing his flashlight to the corner of the room.

Henderson moved his flashlight to where Reagan was pointing and saw what appeared to be military uniforms thrown over the faces of... "One, two, three..."

"I'm counting about ten..." Reagan said, holding his collar

over his nose.

"We're going to need an ME down here...secure the perimeter," Henderson instructed. Reagan seemed relieved for an excuse to leave and Henderson called after him, "Don't touch anything!"

"You got it!" Reagan called over his shoulder as he headed out of the room.

Henderson could hear the chirp of Reagan's radio as he spoke into his radio. "What the hell happened here?"

"Mr. President?" General Newcomb stood at the doorway of the oval office, awaiting permission to enter.

The President waved him in, "General Newcomb, come in."

"I assume you have seen the reports, sir?" Newcomb asked.

"Yes, it appears this alien Trask was testing ...escaped...and a good thing, too."

"Sir?" Newcomb asked, uncertainly.

"I told you I wanted Bureau 39 shut down. I want its very existence annihilated. Not a single drop of ink should be left to tie this administration to that...freak show of an agency..."

"It has been taken care of Mr. President, I assure you..."

"This...alien...this *SUPERMAN* as they are calling him...can he identify us?"

"No," Newcomb shook his head. "Trask was the only one he ever saw."

"And we know who this alien is?"

"No," Newcomb shook his head, "He was strange...eccentric like that. I tortured him for years and never got the information I needed from him..."

"Pity," the President muttered, "Make sure this all falls on Trask. I don't need this coming back to haunt me."

"Anything you say, Mr. President," Newcomb nodded.

"General?" he called out.

"Yes?" Newcomb asked.

"Would you have believed five years ago that you'd be calling me, George Thompson, the President Of The United States?"

"No, but I always knew you had potential, Mr. President," Newcomb smiled.

"Any idea who Trask was trying to sell that meteorite to?" Thompson asked.

"No, it disappeared from the warehouse," Newcomb said bitterly. "What is the plan with the alien?"

"We will bide our time then if he makes a move against us we use what we know to bring him down..."

Lois paced around the living room nervously, waiting on the Kents to return. Clark had fallen asleep on the couch ...still exhausted. She wasn't sure what to do or how to act. She still wasn't any closer to having any answers. He seemed like he remembered her. Did that mean he remembered everything? She placed a hand over her abdomen and sighed. If he did then there was no way around it. She would have to tell him about Jamie. She just prayed he wouldn't hate her.

Five years and he hadn't changed a bit. He looked the same he had always looked...just tired. She'd never seen him look so tired before. Five years. What he must have been through...

She noticed a wayward curl that had fallen on his face and moved her hand to brush it out of his face. He caught her wrist before her hand made contact with his face. She gasped in surprise, trying to pull back, but he kept a firm grip on her. He opened his eyes, looking around, recognizing where he was and released his grip on her wrist, "I'm sorry. Are you okay?" He examined her hand to reassure himself he hadn't hurt her.

"Fine," She said softly, "just startled is all."

He sat up, looking at her in concern, "Lois?" He brushed a strand of hair out of her face and frowned, "What's wrong?"

"It's been an intense few days," She said shakily, fingering his

hand cautiously.

"I know," He frowned, looking down. "Still so surreal..."

"So...how...how much do you remember?" She asked cautiously. There. She'd said it. Just bite the bullet and get to the point.

He shook his head bitterly, "Everything...every...despicable...second." Lois bit her lip as she watched him hang his head in disgust. He remembered everything. This was good. He probably remembered everything from when he was captured as well. She watched him carefully as he looked down at his hand, studying it as he intertwined his fingers with hers, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" She sniffed, "You didn't do anything..." She gave him a watery smile. Why was he apologizing?

"I should have told you...about everything...the powers..." Clark sighed, "I wanted to..."

"Why didn't you?" She asked, trying to will the anger she still felt about him not telling her about his abilities after she'd opened herself up to him so completely. "I just don't understand..."

He shook his head, "I didn't know how to explain it... There was so much I didn't know...My dad had just told me how they'd found me that night before...All I knew was I had these abilities..."

"You could have told me," She said, shaking her head, "At least given me some idea... Finding out the way I did..."

"I'm sorry," He hung his head, "I had it drilled in my head for so long not to tell...The threat of being put in some laboratory and..." He shuddered slightly and she realized many of the fears he knew had come true when Trask had abducted him.

"Clark..." She brushed her hand against his cheek and he closed his eyes, wrapping his hand over hers. "I know." She let out a shaky breath.

"I wanted to tell you when we first came here six years ago," He said quietly. "Dad said we needed to know each other better... then after we got engaged and I found out everything from my dad...I'd planned on telling you that night...I was in the middle of telling you when all hell broke loose."

<< "Lois, there's something I need to tell you...something I've been meaning to tell you but I just haven't found a way..." >>

She nodded, recalling the conversation they'd had that evening. "I had wondered for years what it was you were so nervous about telling me..."

He nodded, "I still don't know that much. Dad said there was a globe of some sort with the ship...I have no idea where any of it is..." He shook his head bitterly, "if it's even in the same state anymore."

"I'm sorry," She said softly. "You're home now. That's all that matters," she reassured, resting her head against his chest.

"They're still out there, Lois," Clark shook his head, "Saving Earth from extinction is one thing but...I can't put you and my parents in danger like that..."

She lifted her head up to look at him in confusion. "Clark..."

"Hello?" Jonathan's voice echoed from the doorway. "Anyone home?"

"We'll finish this later," He said softly as he walked toward the kitchen to where his parents were.

"Lois?"

Martha's voice echoed through the doorway and Clark answered, "We're in here, Mom,"

Lois watched as the elder Kents wrapped Clark in a warm hug. Tears of relief fell from Martha's eyes as she held Clark. Lois bit her lower lip uncertainly. What had Clark meant just now?

<< "Saving Earth from extinction is one thing...but I can't put you and my parents in danger like that..." >>

"He's been asleep for hours," Lois commented, looking around the living room shakily. After catching up with his parents he'd changed out of the suit and into a t-shirt and shorts. It wasn't

long after that he'd passed out from exhaustion in the guest room. She'd spent most of the night watching him, reassuring herself he was okay...really there. It was morning now and he was still asleep. She'd gone to make some coffee and found Martha, who seemed to be having the same issue with sleep.

"Well, he probably needs the rest," Martha said uneasily as she fixed a cup of coffee. "Five years of who knows what kind of hell...then escaping...memory loss...that meteorite being lodged inside him...and then Nightfall." Martha sighed, taking a seat at the table with Lois. "He's going to be okay."

"How do you know that?" Lois asked tearfully. "How can you say that? I'm not *okay*. You're not *okay*. None of us are *okay*..."

"Lois, stop," Martha said placing a hand over Lois's as she began to cry. "He's alive. He's going to be okay. You're alive. You're going to be okay."

"Something happened up there..." Lois said shakily. "He kept saying he couldn't breathe..."

"He made it home," Martha reminded her.

"He nearly died," Lois cried. "You didn't see him...he was...delirious...could barely stand..." She pulled her hand back and glared at the older woman accusingly, "I told you it was too dangerous. I didn't want him to..."

"It's what he was born to do," Martha said firmly. "As hard as it is to stand on the sidelines and watch... It's what he was born to do."

"I just...I can't..." Lois shook her head angrily. She knew she was right. She was about to respond more but stopped when she heard her cell phone ring. She got up from the table and searched for her phone as it continued to ring. Finally, she found it in the living room on the table. "Lois Lane," She said as she answered the phone hesitantly.

"Lois? It's Perry," her Editor's voice echoed through the connection. "How are you doing darlin'? How's Clark?"

"I'm fine," her voice cracked. "He's...I don't know..." she said shakily.

"You tell him to take as much time as he needs...he'll have his job waiting for him whenever he's ready...same goes for you too. I'm serious. After everything...I couldn't even imagine what you must be going through right now. I want you to take some time..."

"Perry, I'm fine. I'll be fine..." she argued.

"Two weeks..." He instructed. "I don't want to see you back in this newsroom for at least two weeks..."

"Perry..." Lois began to argue but he cut her off once more.

"That's an order!" Perry boomed.

"So, you called to ground me after I sent you the biggest story of the century?" Lois shot back. "Perry that's not fair!"

"I want you to take some time to heal," Perry said, "but that's not why I called... not entirely anyway."

"Oh?" Lois prompted. "You have more restrictions?"

"No, I got a call from Inspector Henderson. It seems that agency you were convinced was involved in Clark's disappearance but no one could find any proof of its existence..."

"Bureau 39," Lois said shakily, "What about it?"

"There were ten bodies of Bureau 39 agents found in an old abandoned warehouse in Suicide Slum last night. I thought you'd want to know this Agent Trask was one of the bodies..."

"What?" Lois gasped in shock. Had she just heard what she thought she'd heard? Trask was gone. Bureau 39...

"Lois? Lois are you there?" Perry's voice echoed from the other end of the phone.

"I...I have to go," She said quickly hanging up the phone. She looked around the familiar setting, suddenly feeling very alone.

Lex held a large lead briefcase as he stepped off the elevator and headed for the penthouse. Nigel walked a few steps behind him. "Has the floor been cleared?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, all personnel have been removed from the floor as requested," Nigel nodded, following Lex into his office.

"Excellent," Lex said, setting the briefcase. "We need to get started on these tests..." He popped open the briefcase and smiled when he saw a green glow reflect from it.

She couldn't stop the tears.

After hanging up the phone with Perry Lois had barricaded herself in the guest room where Clark had fallen asleep and finally allowed herself to cry. She sat on the floor by the door, rocking herself quietly as the tears fell one by one. Trask was gone. The man that had terrorized her and Clark's parents for over twenty-four hours that dreadful night... The man that had faked her fiancé's death... The man that had stolen everything from her... He was gone. Why didn't she feel relief? She felt cheated. She felt betrayed. She would never see justice for what that man had done to them. Clark would never see justice.

"Oh, God..." She cried, uncontrollably. She could feel the weight of everything pushing down on her as she thought of everything over the past five years she and Clark had been robbed of. Their life together. Their son. She'd buried herself in her work for years, trying to forget the hole that ached in her heart. It had been four years since she'd seen Jamie's sweet face smile up at her. Four years since she'd heard his voice. Four years since she'd held him. Four years since she'd woken up to the nightmare that was her life and found him lifeless in his crib. "He's gone..." She cried angrily, unable to hold back the tears as her body shook uncontrollably, rocking back and forth as she cried.

"I'm right here," Two strong arms wrapped around her from behind and held her close as she cried out in agony. "It's okay, Lois."

"It'll never...be...o.kay..." She continued to cry as he held her. "Never..."

"I know," He said hoarsely, rocking her against him as she continued to cry.

"It hurts...it hurts..." She cried against him.

"I know," He held her close. "I know..."

"I want...my life...back..." She cried against him.

"I do too," He said hoarsely. She could feel the tears against her neck as he cried with her, holding her close. "I love you so much. I've missed you so much. I'm so sorry I hurt you."

"Oh, Clark," She cried, turning to face him, "I love you." She leaned in to kiss him, wrapping her arms around him. "I never... stopped. I was...so afraid...I'd lost...you..." she murmured against his lips.

He cupped her cheek and deepened the kiss, "You could never lose me, Lois," he reassured her, in between heated kisses.

"Make love to me, Clark," she murmured against his lips.

Before she could finish her plea he'd already scooped her up in his arms and carried her to the bed. She sighed happily, intent on forgetting everything as she lost herself in his arms.

He'd thought he was dreaming again when he'd woken up. It had taken him a moment to realize it wasn't a dream, but the harsh reality. He'd heard the quiet sob of "He's gone" escape from Lois's lips and immediately went to her side to comfort her.

"I'm right here," he whispered, wrapping his arms around her. He held her close as she cried out in agony. "It's okay, Lois." He silently cursed the men from Bureau 39 that had taken him from her for so long. He cursed the meteorite that had taken his abilities from him and allowed himself to be taken from her. He cursed himself for not being able to escape before now.

"It'll never...be...o.kay..." she continued to cry as he held her. "Never..."

She was right. They'd lost five years. "I know," he said hoarsely, rocking her against him as she continued to cry. No amount of time would ever make up for what they'd lost.

"It hurts...it hurts..." she cried against him. He could feel the lump forming in his throat as her breathing became more uneasy, holding her fist against her chest as she cried.

"I know," He held her close. "I know..."

"I want...my life...back..." She cried against him. He swallowed hard at that statement. There was nothing he wanted more than to pick up things where they had left off five years ago, but he didn't even know where to start. He'd been so afraid to touch her... There was so much that they needed to talk about.

"I do too," he said hoarsely, holding her close as the tears escaped, falling one by one. "I love you so much. I've missed you so much. I'm so sorry I hurt you,"

"Oh, Clark," she cried, turning to face him, "I love you." She surprised him by leaning in to kiss him, wrapping her arms around him. At first, he'd been too shocked to respond, but only for a split second before instinct took over. Five years. It had been five years since he'd held her. Five years since he'd kissed her. Five years since... "I never... stopped. I was ...so afraid ...I'd lost... you..." she murmured against his lips.

He cupped her cheek and deepened the kiss, "You could never lose me, Lois," he reassured her, inbetween heated kisses. Every second of every day of every moment she was all he'd thought about. Getting back to her. That was what had kept him going... Kept him motivated to stay alive... Made him keep trying to escape...

"Make love to me, Clark," she murmured against his lips. She hadn't even finished her plea before he'd scooped her into his arms, intent on fulfilling her request and making her forget the pain for the last five years.

Jonathan stepped into the kitchen, reaching for a coffee mug from the cupboard. "How'd you sleep?" he asked, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Martha shook her head, "I didn't."

"He's going to be okay," Jonathan reassured her, taking a seat next to her at the table.

"He's lost five years of his life, Jonathan...and when he realizes *who* he never got to meet..." She shook her head in disgust. "I just don't know how he's going to get through this."

"Don't ever leave me again," she cried, linking her arms around his neck.

"I won't," he reassured her, wrapping her into his arms, "I'm ...right here," he hated this. The pain in her eyes was unbearable. He wanted to make her forget. He wanted to make himself forget. He looked at her cautiously, making sure she was okay. Five years. How had he gone five years without...

She sighed happily against him, digging her nails into his back as he made love to her. "Please, Clark," she pleaded as her legs wrapped around his waist, "make me forget,"

"I've ...missed you ...so much," he whispered, brushing his lips against her lips.

"Don't ...don't...stop..." she pleaded in-between heated kisses.

"Never," he promised.

"Don't ever leave me again," she cried, linking her arms around his neck. She could do this. She had to. She couldn't not tell him about Jamie, but she just couldn't bear the thought of what he would do when he found out.

"I won't," he reassured her, wrapping her into his arms, "I'm ...right here." For now he was here with her. Until he found out she'd let their son die. She hadn't heard him cry because she'd been sleeping. She'd let him sleep in his own room for the first time that night and look what had happened. She should never have listened to the doctors ... or her mother. She should have let him sleep in the room with her. Who cared if it made him cling to

her more? Who cared if he didn't develop a strong sense of independence? He was a baby... But she *had* listened. She had listened and now she was paying the price. If she hadn't maybe she would have heard...maybe she would have been able to save him...

Oh, God, she'd forgotten how perfectly they fit. How perfectly his body molded against her when they... He still seemed to be holding back, looking at her cautiously as if he wasn't sure she really wanted this. She sighed happily against him, digging her nails into his back as he made love to her. "Please, Clark," she pleaded as her legs wrapped around his waist, "make me forget."

"I've ...missed you ...so much," He whispered, brushing his lips against hers. She tightened her grip on him, clinging to him desperately as she fought the urge to cry out. She wanted this to last. She wanted to memorize everything before she broke his heart so completely.

"Don't ...don't...stop..." she pleaded in between heated kisses.

"Never," he promised.

"This is Brock Thomas, with an LNN Special Report. It has now been over twenty-four hours since anyone has seen the mysterious flying man that saved Earth from a most certain death. Questions continue to be asked as the world wants to know... Who is this Super man?"

"Indeed," Lex said, puffing on his cigar as he turned to the other gentlemen in the room, "I think it's time we find out more about our flying friend."

"We were monitoring him for five years," Newcomb said, placing a file in front of Lex.

"Not long enough to know *WHO* he is," Lex sniffed.

Lois wrapped herself in the sheet, snuggling against the solid frame of Clark's chest as she let out a shaky breath. "Wow..."

"I know," he laughed, kissing her cheek as he tightened his arms around her.

"I think it's like riding a bike...once you learn ...you never forget..." she said breathlessly.

"I don't think I could ever forget," he reassured her, holding her against him. "Even when I was in that...fog, I couldn't forget you."

"Oh, Clark," she whispered tearfully, resting her head against his chest. "I love you. I don't think I could survive losing you again...not after..."

Her voice grew shaky and he looked at her in concern, "What is it?"

She shook her head. "You'll hate me. I hate myself," her voice cracked. "I thought if I..."

"Lois, I could never hate you," he said, cupping her cheek with his palm in concern. "What would make you ever think that?"

How in the world was she supposed to tell him?

'Just rip the band-aid off,'

She opened her mouth to speak but the words just wouldn't come out. She squinted back the tears as she tried to say the words she'd been dreading for four years. She swallowed the bitter bile in her throat and forced her voice to come, as scratchy as it was at the moment, "Clark, when we came to Smallville five years ago ... I was six weeks pregnant..."

"What??"

His voice echoed around her as she forced herself to continue, certain that if she waited too long he'd get his hopes up before she dashed them to pieces. "He died," she whispered hoarsely.

"Wha...What??"

She could feel his body stiffen against her as she continued, blinking back tears. "He was born a month early, but he seemed fine. Everything seemed fine. Then one night I put him to bed in

his crib and he...never...ne...ver...wo...ke...woke...up..." She cried.

She expected him to pull away from her...to run. Blame her. Yell. Something. He just laid there in shock, holding her against him.

"Oh, God..." He pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to hold back the wave of emotions that she was sure he was struggling with after what she'd just told him. "A...son?" his voice cracked and she winced as if she'd just been beaten.

"I'm so...so...sorry..." She cried. "I did...every... everything...they to...ld...told...me. I don't...know...wha..."

"Lo...is," his voice squeaked on the last syllable as he fought to keep himself from betraying the emotions he was holding in.

She'd done it. Told him the horrible truth that had been her life for the last four years. She prepared herself for the inevitable. He would hate her. He would blame her. She hated herself every day. She'd begged and pleaded God to take her instead that morning when she'd found her perfect angel unresponsive that morning.

"Please forgive me," she pleaded, burying her face against his chest as she cried, squinting her eyes shut as she prepared herself for the worst.

"Forgive you for what?" he asked, uncertainly, rolling over on his side so she was forced to look at him.

"I wasn't a good...mother..." She cried. "I didn't pro... protect him. I was **ASLEEP** when he was..."

"No, no, no," He shook his head, pulling him to her. "I'm sure you did...**EVERYTHING**... you... could," His voice was still shaky and she could feel the uneasiness of his embrace.

"I didn't hear him," She cried. "I don't understand how I could **NOT** hear him..."

"Maybe...he...didn't...make...a...noise..." He said uneasily.

"I'm so sorry, Clark," she cried, leaning against him. He tightened his arms around her, holding her to him as she cried. She could feel his body shake against hers uncontrollably as he finally gave into the emotions he'd been holding back. She reached up, wrapping her arms around him and holding him against her chest as he cried.

< "Hey, Jamie..." a soft feminine voice cooed as the camera zeroed in on the bright smile of a little baby boy with dark hair and eyes. His smile was infectious.

"Ah, ha, ah!" he cooed back at the camera.

"Hey, Jamie..." The feminine voice cooed once more and Jamie smiled brightly, grinning ear to ear.

"Ooooh," He cooed back with a big grin as he stuck his tongue out.

"Hey, Jamie," She said once more. Jamie stuck his tongue out once more and grinned happily, giving what appeared to be a silent laugh. She laughed, happily, "You've got a pretty smile. Smile for the video,"

"Ah, yah," He cooed.

"Yeah," She cheered.>

Clark picked up the remote and clicked a button, burying his face in his hands as the video played once more.

< "Hey, Jamie..."

"Ah, ha, ah!"

"Hey, Jamie..."

"Ooooh."

"Hey, Jamie, you've got a pretty smile. Smile for the video."

"Ah, yah." >

Anticipating the end, he hit replay again.

< "Hey, Jamie..."

"Ah, ha, ah!"

"Hey, Jamie..."

"Ooooh."

"Hey, Jamie, you've got a pretty smile. Smile for the video.">

He lifted the remote to hit replay again, but found it jerked out

of his hand, "Enough!" He looked up and saw his dad, trembling in anger, holding the remote. "Clark, you have been watching this video over and over and over again for hours. You can't keep doing this to yourself..."

Clark just stared back at his dad coldly, "Give me the remote."

"No," Jonathan said, shaking his head firmly.

Clark stood up, ready to confront his dad, but thought better of it when he saw the grim look on his dad's face. "Fine." In the blink of an eye he disappeared, leaving Jonathan there, holding the remote.

He stared at the screen as he fought to keep the tears that were glistening his eyes from escaping. "Oh, Jamie," he whispered hoarsely before blackening the screen with the push of a button. He stared up at the ceiling and whispered, "We miss you."

"What do you think you're doing?" Martha asked, watching Lois throw her things into a suitcase haphazardly.

"Packing," Lois said matter-of-factly.

"I can see that," Martha said wryly. "I was leaning more towards the 'why' part."

"It's been three days. He won't hardly look at me," Lois said shaking her head. "Not that I can blame him. I need to get back to Metropolis..."

"What you need is to cut him some slack..." Martha cut her off, grabbing her things from the suitcase and putting them back in the closet. "It's been three days, not three years! Quit trying to make rash decisions in the heat of the moment..."

"I'm not being rash..." Lois argued, grabbing the clothes from the closet once more.

"Yes, you are!" Martha said, grabbing another stack of clothes from her and putting them back in the closet. Lois reached for the clothes once more but Martha blocked her. "Lois, I may look small but I can hold my own. I will hog tie you if I have to but you are not walking out that door until you resolve this..."

Lois glared at the older woman, uncertain of how willing she was to follow through with her threat. She arched an eyebrow back at her, sending the silent message of how serious she was and Lois relented. "Fine," she harrumphed, storming out of the room. As she descended the stairs she heard a familiar swoosh. She wasn't sure if it was Clark coming or going, but right now she didn't care. She just wanted to leave.

Her breath caught in her throat as she caught Jonathan staring at the image of Jamie on the television screen with tears in his eyes. It was unnerving to see him like this. Jonathan was always so quiet and in control of his emotions. Even when they'd been held hostage, he'd kept his cool the entire time, talking them through everything.

"Oh, Jamie, we miss you," Jonathan whispered hoarsely.

Lois bit her lower lip and watched as the television screen went black. The pain in her chest ached. She felt like someone had taken a knife and stabbed her in the heart as she fought to keep her grief at bay. How she wished someone would just put her out of her misery. End the suffering. Make the pain stop. Then she wouldn't have to hurt anymore. She wouldn't have to continue to face each day without her little boy.

As quickly as the thought crossed her mind she pushed it out. She knew she could never give up. It wasn't what Jamie would want. She would just continue to live each day for Jamie, just as she always had...whether Clark was with her or not.

A son. He had had a son. A living breathing baby boy that had the most beautiful voice. How had this happened? How had he been robbed of so much? His mom had said it was 'cot death' or 'SIDS' as some people had called it. He hated that Lois had to go through this alone. He hated that he hadn't been there. He hadn't been there to help her through the pregnancy. He hadn't been there to help her through the birth. He hadn't been there to help her

through their son's death. He hadn't been there.

She'd had to shoulder all of it on her own. If he'd been there... maybe... just maybe he could have done something. He could have prevented it...

He couldn't stand to be around anyone at the moment. He hated himself for it. He knew his parents were trying to help and he knew Lois was just as distraught, but right now all he wanted to do was crawl under a rock and hide. Hide his guilt. Hide his shame. Hide the fact that when his fiancée had needed him the most, he hadn't been there.

He stared down at the clouds below him as he floated in the night sky, uncertainly. He had to go back eventually. He just wasn't sure he was ready. Going back meant talking. Talking meant dealing with things he just wasn't ready to deal with... not yet anyway.

"Still no sign of him?" Martha asked, stepping out onto the porch with a mug of coffee in her hand.

Jonathan shook his head, "Nope." The bitter amount of disapproval added a bite to his tone. "I know he's having to deal with a lot but right now..." he shook his head angrily, shaking his fist in the air to illustrate the anger he felt at the moment.

"I know," Martha sighed. "I'm trying to be patient, but I don't think Lois can take any more of the silent treatment he's been giving everyone." At Jonathan's knowing look she admitted, "I kinda threatened her into staying so they could work this out..."

Jonathan cracked a half smile, "Of course you did."

"I didn't know what else to do. I knew the minute she walked out that door she'd regret it..."

"She went for a run earlier..." Jonathan teased.

"I locked her suitcase in the attic for now," Martha shot back and Jonathan laughed. Martha shook her head in disgust. "How did we get here?"

He stared up at the night sky. "All I seem to be doing is making him angry... and vice-versa," he admitted sheepishly.

"She's been family for the last five years... the mother of our grandchild. It's normal to be protective," Martha reassured him.

"So, how do we get these two to start talking?" Jonathan asked.

"Well..." Martha shrugged, taking a sip of her coffee. He could tell from the glint in her eye she already had a plan.

Nigel laid the report on the desk as he recited its contents for Lex, "Not of earthly origin. Periodic element 126. Emits an extremely high band radiation that doesn't seem to have any negative effects on any of the subjects..."

"Maybe we need to begin testing on different subjects..." Lex began slowly.

"We've tested on subjects all over the world and no one has suffered any ill effects..." Nigel began.

"Well," Lex picked up the file in front of him and gave Nigel a slow smile, "I suppose if this isn't 'of earthly origin' we need to test it on someone with the same genetic makeup..." He lit his cigar and took a puff. "No sign of him yet?"

Nigel shook his head, "he's either ignoring the pleas for help or he's not close enough to hear them."

Lex threw the file down on his desk in anger, "We need something bigger... Think, Nigel, how can we draw him out?"

"Help Superman!" The cries for help continued to haunt him but he just couldn't. He couldn't put himself at risk like that... Not after everything he'd been through. Not after everything...

He continued to ignore the cries, watching from a distance to see that the authorities were able to handle the situation. He grimaced. Before stopping Nightfall... before Trask... he wouldn't think twice about rescuing someone in need... just without the flashy cape. His mom had made him a new suit to use just in case.

His return to Earth after Nightfall had left the original suit in tatters. So far, the only thing he was comfortable doing with it was using it as a way to fly away and escape. Here he was the strongest man in the world able to bend steel in his arms yet unable to escape his greatest enemy: himself.

Why had he thought flying back to Metropolis would help?

He spotted the familiar alley behind his apartment and landed quietly, spinning into his jeans and t-shirt from earlier. He headed up the steps to his apartment and pulled out the key he'd hidden inside the flower pot. He sighed, looking at the withering plant in disgust. Yet another thing that he'd lost.

He opened the door, looking around, scanning for a sign that anyone other than himself was in the room before he relaxed and closed the door behind him. They were still out there. They were still out there with that...

He shuddered slightly as he stepped into the familiar setting of his apartment. It looked like someone had been maintaining the place... His parents, maybe? He paced around the room, uncertain what he was looking for. He was tired. He was angry. He wanted to break something... but he couldn't. He could never lose control. He could never allow himself...

He fell against his bed, staring up at the ceiling. Lois had been pregnant when they'd gone to Smallville. When had it happened? There had been so many times... Lois had been on birth control so they'd thought they were in the clear but obviously not.

A son. They'd made a baby together. A baby he would never see. A child he would never hold. A son he would never know. He blinked back the tears, cursing the God that had given him such a gift only to snatch it away.

The phone on his nightstand rang and he glared at it angrily. Who knew he was here?

'Mom' he thought to himself. After the fifth ring, he decided to give up and answer.

"Hello?" He croaked, doing his best to cover up the despair he felt at the moment.

"Kent?" the voice on the other end was familiar but he couldn't quite place it.

"Who is this?"

"Floyd?" the man prompted on the other end of the line. Clark still wasn't sure who the man was and was about to ask but he thankfully prompted, "Your landlord?"

"Uh, yeah," he nodded, recalling the middle-aged man that had helped him a week ago. "Yes, I remember."

"Good, you sound like you're feeling a lot better." He remarked.

"Uh," he wasn't sure how to answer that.

"Anyway, the reason I'm calling is there's some stuff I've been holding in storage for Ms. Lane. Wanted to see if I could bring it by..."

"Uh, sure," he said. What had Floyd been holding in storage for Lois? Before he could respond, the phone line went dead and there was a knock at the door.

He scanned the door and saw Floyd on the other side holding a few boxes and closing his cell phone. He'd obviously been just giving him a last-minute courtesy call. He sighed, standing up and heading for the door.

He answered the door. "Uh, just put it in the living room." He pointed toward the couch.

Floyd nodded, handing him the stack of boxes before turning around, "I've got more in the truck..."

"Truck?" He asked, bewildered. He sighed, placing the boxes on the floor by the couch. What could be in them? He wondered. They were pretty light...

He turned around to help Floyd with the rest of the stuff. His voice caught in his throat when he saw what Floyd was carrying. It was a bassinet. His bassinet.

'Mom probably gave it to her for Jamie,' he thought to

himself.

Oh, God! He couldn't do this. He saw Floyd drop the bassinet by the couch and stared at it numbly. Box after box filled the living room along with pieces to a crib. He just stared at the bassinet, unable to move.

A hand rested on his shoulder and Floyd looked at him in concern. "I, uh, assumed you knew..."

He just nodded numbly, "Uh, yeah, she told me..."

"I'm sorry. I've got three of my own. Couldn't imagine what you and her are going through... I mean the hell they put her through..." He shook his head in disgust.

Clark looked up at him inquisitively, "They?"

"Cops! Rats! Every one of them. Someone loses their baby like that then gets treated like a criminal? It ain't right." Floyd muttered angrily. "Anyway, uh, if you need anything let me know..."

"Yeah," Clark nodded, "Thank you,"

<<"What you and her are going through...">>

<<"I mean the hell they put her through...">>

<<"They?">>

"Someone loses their baby like that then gets treated like a criminal? It ain't right." >>

The words echoed through his mind as he stared up at the ceiling.

<<"What you and her are going through...">>

<<"I mean the hell they put her through...">>

Report after report. He had read them all. The investigation into Jamie's death. The autopsy report. That made him shudder just thinking of someone cutting his son into pieces and examining his body parts. Thankfully nothing had been noticeable enough for them to examine anything further. It had been 'unremarkable' as the Medical Examiner had put it. His Brain. His Heart. His Son.

Why hadn't she told him?

'When did she have a chance?' his conscience accused.

He hadn't given her a chance to talk to him for the last few days. He'd made himself scarce on the farm and when his dad had found him in the den watching the only video they'd had of Jamie over and over, he'd snapped. He knew he wasn't being fair to them. He wasn't being fair to Lois. They'd dealt with their grief and now were having to go through it all over again because of him.

Cause of Death: Unknown. Categorized as Sudden Infancy Death Syndrome.

He could still feel the words glaring back at him, taunting him. No explanation. No nothing. Just unknown.

Sixteen weeks. That was all Jamie had had – sixteen weeks. He glared at the ceiling above him, shaking his head. He couldn't think here. Not with his son's things a few feet away. He felt like he was suffocating.

Without a second thought, he spun into his suit and fled the apartment, locking everything up at super speed as he ricocheted out the window, moving at a speed that was so fast he was nearly invisible.

<<"What you and her are going through...">>

<<"I mean the hell they put her through...">>

Martha smiled to herself when she heard the familiar sonic boom from a distance. Jonathan looked at Martha then at Clark as he approached, "You okay?" He asked.

Clark shook his head, "Where's Lois?"

"She went for a run," Martha said, motioning for him to come in. "How about some dinner?"

"I'm not hungry," He shook his head. She arched an eyebrow at him and he looked down. "but I guess I could make myself eat."

Jonathan laughed as he watched Martha drag Clark into the kitchen to eat. He grabbed the phone from the porch along with

the notes Martha had made when talking with Floyd earlier. It seemed to have done the trick...to bring him back home anyway.

<<"It's a boy!">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"I'm pregnant...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"I don't know how I'm going to do this...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"James Clark Kent...I wish he was here now...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"I love you so much, Jamie...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"We are right here with you...Anything you need. You're family. With or without Clark and...with...or without...Jamie...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"He has his smile...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"It's been three days, not three years! Quit trying to make rash decisions in the heat of the moment...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"Lois, I may look small but I can hold my own. I will hog tie you if I have to but you are not walking out that door until you resolve this...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"Oh, Jamie, we miss you...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"Hey, Jamie, you've got a pretty smile. Smile for the video...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"Look at that! World's number one bro!">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"Mama!">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"Ah la!">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"Lois, you can't spoil him like that. He has to sleep in his own room!">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<<"Three months is long enough to be room sharing...">>>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"His pupils are fixated...I'm sorry, Ma'am. He's gone!">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"Are you sure there was nothing in that crib with him?">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"Are you sure he was face-up?">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"How could you put him to bed and he just not wake up?"

Explain that to me...I've been on the force for years and there's ALWAYS a reason...">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"My baby!">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"You don't want to spoil him, do you?">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

<<"I didn't hear him. I don't understand how I could NOT hear him...">>

<<"I'm so sorry, Clark...">>

<<"A...son?">>

<<"Please forgive me...">>

Lois fell to the ground in tears, hitting the ground repeatedly as she screamed in agony. She fisted the grass beneath her palms, "Give him back..." She cried over and over pounding her fist into the ground. It hurt. Why did it have to hurt so bad? Why? She'd been able to ignore it and push it aside so long as she kept busy,

but now... Now it was like a floodgate had been opened. There was no pain like it. Nothing compared to this. She'd lost everything. She'd lost her baby and by association, Clark. "Give him back..." She continued to cry, beating the ground repeatedly. Her fists were bleeding but she didn't care. "I *HATE* you..." She screamed in agony.

She lifted her arm to strike the ground once more but found it unmoving as two familiar arms wrapped around her, "Stop it..." he whispered, wrapping his hands over hers as he wrapped her in his arms. "Please, stop..."

"My baby..." she continued to cry.

"I know..." he soothed. "I know," he croaked.

"You said...you wouldn't...leave..." she cried.

"I know," he cried. "I'm sorry. I'm *so sorry*..." He held her as she buried her face against his chest.

"Please forgive...me. I...I'm *SO*...sorry, Clark," she cried.

"There's nothing to forgive," he whispered, kissing her cheek. "Please stop doing this to yourself,"

"I just want him...back..." she cried.

"I know you do, sweetheart." He held her against him, rocking back and forth. "I do too."

"I loved him *SO* much...but it wasn't...enough..." She whimpered against him.

"I'm so sorry, Lois," he cried. "If I could...I'm so sorry..."

Lois slowly woke up, looking around at the familiar room in the farmhouse. Her body ached. Everything hurt. She winced as she sat up, feeling the heaviness in her eyes as they began to adjust to the light. She slowly opened her hands, wincing from the pain as she stared at the reddened, scabbed knuckles. Everything from last night came rushing back to her. Her breakdown. Clark. Jamie. She looked around the room. Where was Clark?

A groan from the floor caught her attention and she spotted Clark slumped over in a chair near the window. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed, wincing as her knuckles hit the sheets. She stood up and staggered toward Clark.

"Clark?" She knelt down next to him, running her hand over his chest. His hand clasped around her wrist and she winced in pain, trying to tug it back from him.

"No..." he mumbled incoherently, tightening his grasp on her. "Lois..." His other hand moved to her throat, tightening his grasp on her.

"Clark, wake up," she pleaded, flinching as she struggled to release herself from his grasp.

His eyes shot open and she caught the look of fear in his eyes before he released his grasp, "I...I'm sorry. Are you okay?" He asked, examining her neck and wrists.

"Fine," she said, grabbing her wrist back forcefully before he could get a good look at it. She stood up and walked to the other side of the room. "Another nightmare?" she asked uneasily.

He followed her to the other side of the room, reaching for her wrist. "Let me see it."

"No," she said, crossing her arms over her chest as she tucked her wrists beneath her arms, trying to hide the red marks.

"Lois..." Clark breathed irritably, reaching for her.

"It's nothing..." She said cringing as she showed him the red marks on her wrist.

"I'm sorry..." His face fell as he fingered the marks on her throat and wrist. "Lois, I'm *SO* sorry." He hung his head in shame as he released her from his grasp.

"You were having a nightmare...it's fine," Lois shrugged.

"No, it's not," he shook his head angrily, "It's not fine."

"I'm done talking about this," Lois snapped irritably, storming out of the room and slamming the door behind her.

A large group of suits escorted George Thompson through the back corridors of LexCorp. "Rouge is on the move..."

They approached a wall and one of the men held up a metal key card and waved it twice. A green light blinked and a door opened revealing a hidden lair. Once inside, the door closed behind them and Thompson pushed past his security detail. "What's the meaning of this, Luthor?"

Lex stood, giving a stern look to Thompson, "Watch your tone. You forget yourself, Mr. President." Lex lit his cigar as he took a step toward Thompson.

Thompson stared at Luthor for a moment before turning to his detail, "Leave us."

"But, sir," one of the security officers argued.

"Leave," Thompson repeated. The security officers hesitated a moment before nodding and turned back toward the panel that Lex had opened for them to leave through. After the officers had left, Thompson turned back to Lex, "Subtle."

"Always," Lex said, taking a puff of his cigar. "So, the reason for your visit? Prometheus."

"Prometheus?" Thompson wrinkled his nose. "The space station?"

"No, the alien!" Lex retorted sarcastically. "Of course the space station."

"What about it?" Thompson grimaced as Lex paced around him, puffing the smoke of his cigar toward him.

"The United Nations has contracted a mission in space to launch a space station. I want that contract..." Lex said, stepping into Thompson's face so that he was a few millimeters away from him.

"What makes you think I can make that happen?" Thompson snapped back. "It's called the United Nations for a reason, Lex... or did you forget that minor detail?"

"You forget who you're talking to, Thompson...I put you in the position you are for a reason. I can just as easily have you removed," Lex slammed his arm against Thompson's chest, "Don't ever forget that."

After changing into a pair of jeans and a T-shirt Clark found Lois in the hayloft, staring out of the window in silence. She looked back at him for a moment before turning back to the window, "I don't want to talk about it."

He nodded, climbing the steps to join her. "Okay." He took a seat across from her. "But we're gonna have to talk about it eventually, Lois."

Lois glared at him. "I'm fine," she shrugged, turning away from him.

"No, you're not," he challenged. "Neither of us are...*fine*," he finished softly.

"Yeah, well, all things considered..."

"You can't keep bottling everything in," he interrupted.

"What do you suggest I do?" Lois asked bitterly. "I can't talk to anyone about...anything that's happened."

"Maybe you should."

"What?" Lois breathed.

He shook his head determined, "Maybe we both should."

"Clark..." Lois looked at him in concern.

"Lois, I can't trust myself when I'm not awake." When she looked away uncertainly, he fingered the marks that were still on her neck. "I could never live with myself if I..."

"You didn't," Lois cut him off. "You woke up and..."

"...and I grabbed you so hard you have a bruise," he cut her off.

"You didn't mean to," Lois argued.

"...and that's what scares me," he said softly.

One Week Later...

"This is Brock Thomas, with an LNN Special Report. This afternoon, a press release was issued regarding the unidentified men found in an abandoned warehouse in Metropolis, New Troy

last week. They have been identified as agents with an organization known as 'Bureau 39.' So far, the White House has not responded to inquiries regarding the role this agency took on within the government or what the agency was doing in Suicide Slum. In other news, it has now been one week since the rescue from our mysterious flying friend. No one has heard from him. As questions continue to be asked, arson and muggings appear to be on the rise in Metropolis ..."

Martha clicked the television off and looked around the empty room. She heard the creak of the rocking chair from the porch and grabbed a coat before stepping outside. She spotted Jonathan in the rocker, staring at the night sky, rocking back and forth as he listened to the familiar sounds of the crickets chirping on the farm. He took a sip of his coffee as he rocked, mulling over the events that had taken place over the last week.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Martha asked, taking a seat next to him.

"Just thinking...how much has changed," Jonathan said softly.

"For the better," Martha emphasized.

"Yes, for the better," Jonathan nodded. He turned to look at her, "How'd you know Clark would go back to his apartment?"

"I didn't know for sure, but I know his habits. I just hoped it would work...dumb luck I guess."

"Well, they're finally talking," Jonathan said, looking up at the night sky with a small smile.

"Yes, they're finally talking," Martha echoed. "They'll work through this. I know they will."

"I hope so," Jonathan sighed.

Lois stared at the empty office walls uncertainly as she tapped her foot nervously against the desk she was sitting in front of. She and Clark had agreed to start counseling. They were both doing one-on-one therapy to deal with everything. It seemed to be helping, but the doctor she'd been referred to for her one-on-one counseling had been trying to push drug therapy on her. She'd thought she was past this. She'd thought she was better. She was wrong.

"Ms. Lane," The older woman looked at her with concern, "It says here you're refusing any drug treatments for the depression."

"Yes," Lois said narrowing her eyes. "I, uh, used them the last time and ...all it did was numb me."

"That's the point. To make life a little bearable...What you're going through..."

"That's the problem right there," Lois cut her off. "I don't want drugs. I don't want to be numbed. I want to feel the grief. I want to feel the pain."

"Ms. Lane..."

"I will go to another doctor if I have to..." She warned.

"Then perhaps you should find another doctor." The woman crossed her arms over her chest.

"Fine," Lois said, narrowing her eyes.

Lex stepped onto the terrace of his penthouse, looking down on the city of Metropolis as he took a puff of his cigar. A soft feminine hand wrapped around him from behind and he smiled, "Antoinette, sorry to have woken you."

"Come back to bed, Lex," she whispered seductively.

He caught her wrist, meeting her eyes, "I don't respond well to demands."

She rolled her eyes and whispered, "Please."

One Month Later...

"I don't want to talk about it," Lois said fidgeting in her seat as she looked away from the stare of her doctor.

Dr. Stephens nodded, "You can't run away from this, Lois."

"I'm not running," Lois said, shaking her head.

"We've talked about everything, Lois...everything except what happened between you and Clark last month."

"He didn't mean it," Lois argued.

"We've dealt with the trauma of losing your son, Lois."

"His name is Jamie," Lois snapped back angrily.

"We've dealt with the trauma of being held captive by a terrorist group..."

"Bureau 39," Lois corrected. "They weren't a terrorist group."

"You've been through a lot," Dr. Stephens pressed.

"Nothing I can't handle," she shrugged, rubbing her hands up and down her shoulders.

"Being attacked and drugged in college...losing your fiancé... your son...It's a lot." Dr. Stephens continued softly, "but what happened last month..."

"He was having a nightmare!" Lois fumed angrily, standing up and pacing around the room,

"You had bruises," Dr. Stephens reminded her.

"He had a nightmare! He stopped when he woke up..." Lois continued.

"Even so, having the man you love hurt you like that...Lois, you can't continue to hide from this..."

"I'm not!" Lois fumed angrily.

"Really?" Dr. Stephens challenged, "When was the last time you saw him?"

"I've been busy," She brushed her off.

"Talked to him?"

"Last week..." Lois winced as she spoke. She didn't want to talk about Clark. He'd been avoiding her since they'd returned to Metropolis.

"You can't keep hiding from what happened and you can't keep hiding from him. You have to deal with it." Dr. Stephens pressed.

Clark stared at his hands folded in front of him listening as Dr. Friskin spoke, "Have you had any more nightmares?"

He shook his head, "No, not that I recall."

"How are things between you and Lois?" She pressed cautiously.

"We're...taking it slow. After what happened a few weeks ago...I'm afraid of hurting her," he said softly.

"Have you two talked about what happened?"

He shook his head, "No."

"What about Jamie?"

Clark's body immediately stiffened at the mention of his son's name. "What about him?" he croaked.

"Do you talk about him?"

"What's there to talk about?" he asked. "He's gone."

"Uh-huh," She grew thoughtful for a moment. "So in the last two weeks, how much time have you spent with Lois?"

He shrugged and turned away, refusing to meet her gaze.

"Don't you think 'taking things slow' should require some time together?" she asked.

"I still...talk to her..." he began softly.

"Right," she nodded. He let out a shallow breath and she continued, "You were kidnapped and held captive for five years while your fiancée and parents were brutalized. That's a lot to come back from. You've made tremendous steps towards recovery. The nightmares used to be an everyday occurrence now they're not..."

"That's not enough..." he argued, "I could hurt her."

"Or you could lose her," she pointed out. "The men that held you captive are gone. The danger is gone."

"Am I supposed to be happy about that?" he snapped angrily.

"I don't know," she shrugged. "I can't tell you how to feel."

"I don't know how I feel," he said bitterly. "The things they did...They...I hated them...I wished them dead...Now, I feel guilty." He gave a bitter laugh, "How messed up is that?"

"It's a normal reaction," she said, leaning forward as she spoke. "What you're feeling is normal. But it's time to stop sitting around afraid of your own shadow and start taking the scary steps toward recovery."

"How?" He asked.

"Taking the first step...taking a risk..." she said softly.

"I can't do that," he shook his head. "I can't hurt her again,"

"She's hurting, too. She lost just as much as you did that day..." she reminded him.

"You have no idea..." He shook his head angrily.

"No, I don't," she said, catching him off guard. "I have no idea. Just like everyone else in the world...except Lois. The one person that can understand is the one you're shutting out."

"Perry, you can't be serious!!" Lois snapped angrily as she paced in her editor's office.

Perry looked at her calmly. "Lois, this is for your own good. Desk duty while you get back on your feet. It's only your first day back."

Lois could feel the tears stinging in her eyes as she fought valiantly to put up a tough as nails front. "Perry..."

"I don't want to hear it, Lois..." Perry held his hands up to stop her from arguing with him. "You had an emotional breakdown... You need to give yourself time. What you and Kent have been...what you ARE going through... You can't expect to get over it overnight."

'Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.' she told herself.

"I don't need to be coddled. I need a story..." Lois argued.

"No, what you need is to work with the copy editors on getting copy ready for the next edition," Perry said, handing her a large stack of unedited stories. "Get crackin'."

After his appointment with Dr. Friskin Clark headed toward the Planet, staring up at the globe that had caught his eye so many years ago. When he'd first come to Metropolis, his dream was working at the Planet, finding someone to love, and starting a family. It hurt. Knowing he'd had everything he ever wanted only to have it snatched from him.

After returning to Metropolis, he had begun his sessions with Dr. Friskin and Lois had begun sessions with Dr. Stephens trying to piece everything back together. It was hard to deal with everything and still keep parts hidden but for the most part, it seemed to be helping. Lois was supposed to start back at work today. He still hadn't seen her. Every time he thought about seeing her he stopped himself, recalling how he'd hurt her during one of his nightmares. He stared up at the globe sadly. Maybe visiting her at work wasn't the best idea.

"LexCorp is the face of tomorrow: Changing and adapting as the technology we use everyday changes. Everything we do is geared toward challenging ourselves and taking that next step. Pushing toward that next breakthrough..."

"Mrs. Cox?" Cat interrupted, "I appreciate your boss gave you a little speech and probably gave you a couple of prompts for this interview, but I don't care about LexCorp. I was promised an exclusive interview with Mr. Luthor." She narrowed her eyes at the woman in front of her, "and unless he's undergone some serious surgery," she gave a wink, "you're not him."

"Mr. Luthor doesn't give personal interviews, Ms. Grant," Mrs. Cox smiled back.

"...and I know that's a lie, too," Cat shot back. "He gave an exclusive, one-on-one interview with Lois Lane five years ago..."

"That was different," she shot back with an edge in her tone.

Cat rolled her eyes, "Sure it was."

Lois pulled out the first story to begin editing.

"What an egotistical, arrogant, self-righteous..." a familiar

voice raged through the newsroom.

Lois looked up and saw Cat slamming her purse on her desk as she threw herself into her chair angrily. Lois looked over at her cautiously, unsure if she should even bother.

Cat caught her gaze and stood up, brushing herself off as she approached Lois's desk, "First day back?" She gave Lois a forced smile.

"Yeah," Lois said mutely. She'd actually been excited about returning to work before Perry had benched her to desk duty.

"Five years climbing the ladder and one breakdown lands me right back where I started."

Cat twisted her mouth for a moment before leaning against her desk. "Well, you **DID** have a breakdown, Lois,"

"...and I **DID** get cleared by a doctor to return to work..."

Lois muttered angrily, "If everyone would just stop trying to coddle me..."

"Perry said you were refusing any drug treatments..."

"I was tired of holding it in," She said gruffly. "Dr. Stephens said the only way I was going to move past everything was to deal with it. So I dealt with it." She could feel the tears threatening to escape and shook her head, casting a glance at Clark's old desk.

Cat nodded, "How's he doing?"

Lois shrugged, not willing to go into details of how strained her relationship with Clark was at the moment.

He didn't want to talk...well not about what had happened to him...or Jamie. He wanted to talk about everything but what was important. He was seeing a therapist to deal with the trauma of being held captive for so long.

Cat glanced at her cautiously, "It must be strange having reporters mob you all the time about everything. I mean, you're probably used to doing the mobbing, then to have it turned around..."

"Cat is there a reason you're hovering over my desk like a vulture?" Lois asked irritably. Off Cat's hurt look, Lois sighed, "I'm sorry. I just... It's just hard. Harder than I ever thought..."

Cat placed a hand on her shoulder and nodded, "I know. I couldn't imagine going through even half of what you guys...Just take it a day at a time."

"Easier said than done," Lois said softly.

'Take the first step,' Clark reminded himself, knocking on Lois's door. He wasn't sure how to even begin talking to Lois, but he knew he needed to try. The door swung open and he saw Lois on the other side of the door still in her suit from the day.

"Hi," she said softly, surprised to see him.

"Hi," he repeated, giving her a weak smile.

"Uh, come in," she said, gesturing to the apartment. He nodded, stepping into the apartment with her. She closed the door behind him and locked the deadbolts before turning to face him.

He took a seat on the couch and looked up at her. She seemed a bit nervous. He hung his head, shaking his head, "I should have called. I'm sorry, I..."

"No, it's fine," Lois interrupted, taking a seat next to him. "It's fine," she repeated.

Clark cleared his throat. "I'm sorry I haven't been around... the last few weeks..." He gave her an apologetic smile. "I've been..."

"I know," she nodded. "It's a lot...for me too..." She said softly, "This is weird, huh?"

He nodded. "I'm sorry," he apologized, taking her hand in his. "I love you," he whispered. "I never meant to..."

"I love you too," she said softly. "...and I know..."

He cleared his throat, opting to change the subject to something more neutral. "So, today was your first day back at the Planet?"

She nodded quietly, twisting her mouth as she spoke, "I got grounded to desk duty." Lois said resignedly. "Perry thinks I need

to 'ease' myself back in."

He gave her a look of sympathy. "I'm sorry. I know that can't be easy."

She shook her head, "It's fine. I'll pull desk duty and ..."

"Sneak off to cover a big scandal?" Clark teased.

Lois grinned back at him. "I wish," She sighed, tapping her hand against his, "It's been kinda quiet lately."

"Well, maybe that's a good thing," Clark smiled.

"I don't know," she sighed.

He nodded and she looked around the empty room "Have you thought any more about... I mean, they're still asking questions..."

"Let them," Clark said bitterly. "I'm not..." He shook his head, "I can't," he finally said firmly.

"Clark," she squeezed his hand, moving closer to him, "Trask is gone." Lois reached over to stroke his cheek. "You don't have to hide from them anymore."

He shook his head, "It's not just them." He whispered, "There's so much hate out there... everywhere... It wasn't just Trask..."

"What do you mean?" Lois asked.

"I... I mean, it wasn't just him..."

"Clark, you can't do this. You can't just hide... If there is someone else out there that was responsible, then we need to find them and..."

"And what?" he asked. "I have no idea what they know or what they did. I was in and out of consciousness the whole time. If I gave myself away..." He shook his head. "I can't."

"You didn't have any problem before..." She said quietly.

"There wasn't a mob of public and media pointing the finger and asking questions," he said quietly.

"Why is that a bad thing?" she asked, "Maybe use it to your advantage."

"Lois..." he began.

"Clark, they've already taken so much from us... I hate..." She did her best to suppress the tears. "You shouldn't have to hide... the suit... It was a good idea..."

"It was a dangerous idea," he corrected. "Can we please just drop it?"

"Fine," Lois said, crossing her arms over her chest. "Consider it dropped... How are the sessions with Dr. Friskin going?"

"Good," he nodded, "I haven't had any nightmares recently."

"That's good," she nodded.

"She thinks I should start taking 'steps' back into my regular life," Clark said softly.

"That's good news, right? Getting back into your old routine?"

"I guess," he shrugged, "It's just strange."

She gave him a smile. "Well, it will be nice to have my partner back."

He sighed, quiet for a moment before choosing to speak, "Lois, I'm sorry. I know these past few weeks have been hell. Do you think you'll ever be able to forgive me?"

"I don't see any way around it," Lois sighed. "I'm gonna have to... especially if I plan on marrying you, but..."

He smiled, "You still want to marry me?"

"Of course," She said softly, stroking his cheek. "I love you, Clark Kent. I never stopped."

He leaned in to kiss her, stroking her cheek. "I love you, too."

Antoinette Baines laid a report on Lex Luthor's desk, meeting his gaze as he looked at her with a questioning gaze. "We have a problem, Lex,"

"We?" He gave her a half smile.

"Don't play cute with me, Lex," she snapped. "Platt found out about the sabotage to Messenger's launch pad. He filed a report..."

Lex took the report from her and dropped it in the shredder, "What report?"

"Lex..." she began to argue. "I can't just..."

She began to argue but he pulled her into his arms and whispered, "You're a brilliant scientist... on the verge of having all the fame and accolades you've dreamed of. Are you willing to let an engineer like Platt get in your way?"

"I guess not," she relented.

Three Weeks Later...

After his appointment with Dr. Friskin, Clark headed over to the Daily Planet to try and catch up with Lois. It was his first day back at work. Thankfully no mobs of reporters were around to follow him. Ever since they'd returned to Metropolis, all the paparazzi seemed interested in doing was following him and Lois around. There was speculation about everything from his miraculous reappearance to the status of his and Lois's relationship. It drove him nuts. He hated being the subject of the story rather than the one writing it.

He stepped into the lobby and headed toward the elevator hoping to make it there without being recognized.

"Hey, Kent!"

He cringed as he recognized the voice behind him. He turned and saw Ralph running behind him, "Hi Ralph." He turned to press the call button, hoping the elevator would come soon. He didn't want to talk to Ralph. He just wanted to go to work and do his job.

Ralph gave him a once over, "Five years of captivity and you still look the same. What's your secret?"

He shrugged, not willing to respond as he stepped into the elevator car.

"I heard there's a complete media blackout on the story of what happened to you. Why don't you do a guy a favor and give me a quote?" Ralph asked.

"No comment," Clark said firmly, turning back toward the elevator doors as he did his best to ignore Ralph the rest of the way up.

"No comment? You can't be serious," Ralph shook his head. "What happened to professional courtesy?"

"No comment," he repeated. One more floor till the newsroom.

"Whatever," Ralph sneered, "You know you really did a number on Lois. After you left a couple of the guys tried to make their move, but well, needless to say she got nicknamed a 'Cold Fish' ..."

He didn't even remember pulling the emergency stop. He didn't remember hoisting Ralph into the air or slamming him up against the elevator wall by his collar.

He did remember grabbing him by the throat.

"That... That's quite a ... grip you got... there, Kent," Ralph wheezed out.

"Don't you *EVER* talk that way about Lois again..." he growled menacingly.

"It's not like anything ... ha-happened..." Ralph stammered.

"I don't care..." he snapped angrily, slamming him against the wall once more.

"Like I said she... re-refused to... date," he wheezed out, "Didn't know... it'd be such a... big deal."

"Didn't think it'd be a big deal? You hound me for a quote then start talking about the mother of my child like that..." he threw him to the ground. "Watch yourself," he warned before releasing the emergency stop. The elevator hummed back to life and he could feel Ralph's gaze on him as he stepped off the elevator but he didn't care.

"You're nuts, Kent..." Ralph said pushing past him and scurrying over to his desk.

"You're nuts, Kent..."

Lois looked up to see Ralph scurrying over to his desk and

smiled when she spotted Clark by the elevators scanning the newsroom before meeting her gaze. He gave her small smile before walking down the stairs to meet her.

"Hi," she gave him a weak smile as he took a seat at her desk.

"Hi," he said softly, leaning in to kiss her.

She smiled against his lips, "Welcome back."

She looked over at Ralph, who was giving her a dirty look, and smirked. She could only imagine what Ralph had been doing harassing Clark for a scoop on his return from the dead. From the guilty expression on Clark's face it seemed there had been some kind of altercation between the two of them. Knowing Ralph he probably deserved it.

"So..." she began looking down at the file in her lap, feeling his gaze on her.

"Uh, what are you working on?" he asked curiously.

She smiled, handing him the file. "Nothing earth shattering, I'm afraid."

"Space Station Luthor?" Clark looked up at her aghast as he read the report in front of him.

"We're supposed to attend the 'Luthor Ball' tonight and find out what we can," Lois said with a grimace.

"Just like old times," he commented, shaking his head, "Nice to see some things don't change."

"Yeah, I don't understand why he's bothering though. I mean, the U.N. already gave the contract to Prometheus...and it goes up in a week." She pointed to the screen where the launch of Prometheus was being covered by LNN.

The LNN Newscaster on the television set showed the coverage of Messenger's impending launch. "The transport vehicle Messenger, piloted by Commander Jack Laderman and carrying the final propulsion module for Space Station Prometheus, is scheduled for lift-off Friday at 9 A.M. Many hopes are riding on the success of this mission, especially in light of the failure of last week's unmanned launch. Space Station Prometheus, an international effort, is still lying in its low orbit, awaiting the arrival of the remaining modules, including the colonist habitation module, scheduled to launch next week. Once all are in place, the Station will be lifted into permanent orbit. Dr. Toni Baines, Director of the Extra Planetary Research and Development Agency, reminds us that timing is crucial. A series of delays and launch failures has put EPRAD's back to the wall."

The coverage shifted over to a young blonde in a lab coat with a ticker at the bottom of the screen reading 'Dr. Antonette Baines's. "Unless all modules are in place within the next weeks, Space Station Prometheus will lose its orbit and fall back into Earth's atmosphere. That kind of occurrence would surely spell the end to any future projects and the space program as a whole."

Jimmy approached them with an arm full of files. "Lois, here's everything on EPRAD..."

"Here." Clark stood up to help Jimmy with the files. "Let me get those."

"Thanks," Jimmy smiled back at him. "Uh, I'm Jimmy Olsen by the way,"

"Clark Kent," Clark said extending his hand to shake Jimmy's.

"Yeah, the Chief said you were starting back today," Jimmy nodded.

There was a silent lull and Lois cleared her throat, "Jimmy took over Brian's position a few years ago, when he transferred to Central City...He's your go-to for research and photography."

Jimmy nodded as he beamed happily. "Lois, said you and her were partners back in the day. Started out as interns..."

Clark smiled sharing a look with Lois, "Yeah, it's hard to believe that was FIVE years ago..."

"A long time," Lois nodded.

"Well, welcome back." Jimmy patted Clark on the shoulder. "If you need anything I'm right over there." He pointed three desks down and Clark nodded watching him leave.

"He seems nice," Clark mentioned.

"He is," Lois said softly, giving him a peck on the cheek before standing up to show him around. "You've got your old desk back...next to me." She gave him a wink. "And the new owner Mr. Stern did a lot of updates and expansions as you can tell..."

"Looks like all the desktops got updated to notebooks," Clark said, pointing at the notebook on his desk.

"And all the faxes come in through email. Less paper waste," Lois added. "We now have an online and paper edition. You can imagine how well that went over with Perry."

Clark laughed, "Yeah, I'll bet." He looked up, scanning the changes in the newsroom. "Definitely...different."

"I know it's a lot," Lois apologized, stepping toward him.

He gave her a weak smile, "Just a lot of changes."

She toyed with the lapels of his jacket. "There's still a lot of things that haven't changed." She leaned in to kiss him.

"Hey, you two!" Perry bellowed across the newsroom, "What do you think this is a kissing booth?"

Clark laughed, pulling away slightly, "Well, the more things change..."

"...the more they stay the same..." Lois whispered with a smile.

Perry winked at them with a laugh, "It's good to have you back, son."

"It's good to BE back," Clark smiled back at Perry. "Thanks for giving me my job back."

"Well, I couldn't lose one of my best reporters to the competition," Perry smiled. "I might have lost my other along with you." He cast a smile at Lois.

"Somehow I seriously doubt that, Chief," Clark smiled, sharing a look with Lois.

"Well, it's good to have you back...in one piece," Perry said gruffly, "Did, uh, Lois show you all the changes Mr. Stern made? I still don't understand most of it, but, uh, subscriptions are better than they ever were, so..."

A loud commotion came from the elevators and they turned to see a middle-aged man in worn clothing who looked like he hadn't bathed in months. "Lois Lane!" He held up a brown package as he made his way down the stairs, "It's going to explode!"

"He's got a bomb!" one of the research assistants called out.

The man shook his head, "It's my credentials. You don't understand! The space station has been sabotaged! The Messenger is going to explode!" Two security guards came up behind him and tried to grab him as the man continued to shout from the balcony, "Ms. Lane! You must tell my story!"

"Sorry, Mr. White, he ran right past reception," one of the guards explained.

"Wait a minute, don't..." Lois began to argue.

The other guard interjected, "We've had trouble with him before. The guy's a box short of a variety pack..."

"Please! You have to believe me! The space program is doomed!" The man shouted as the security guards tried to pull him away and back into the elevator. Lois noticed Clark lower his glasses then one of the guards yelled out in pain. The man ran towards them, clutching the brown package.

Perry held up his hands, wagging his finger at him. "Now, look, I don't know who you are, but you can't just barge in here and..."

"Here!" The man handed the package to Clark. "They're my credentials!"

Clark took the package and began to unwrap it.

"Wait, Kent," Perry interjected. He stopped when he saw the disarray of papers inside and sighed, "Whew! You know you took a hell of a chance..."

"Well, it didn't, uh, look...like a bomb to me, Chief," Clark smiled back at his editor, sharing a look with Lois before turning to their visitor. "So, Mr. Platt?" He read the name off the

letterhead of one of the reports in his hand.

“Yes, Samuel Platt.” He extended his hand to shake Clark’s.

“We’re fine!” Perry called out as the two security guards approached with their tazers drawn.

The officer with the burnt hand shook his reddened hand at Platt, “If he gives you any trouble you know where to find us.”

Perry nodded, watching them leave then turned back to the newsroom that appeared to be in audience mode. “What’s everyone standing around for? Show’s over! Get to work!”

Lois pointed to the conference room. “Mr. Platt? Why don’t you come with us in the conference room? You can tell us exactly what’s going on... why you think the space station is being sabotaged?”

Asabi knocked on the wood door frame, announcing his presence. “Come in, Asabi,” Lex called from the other side of the door.

Asabi turned the knob and opened the door. “I’m sorry for the intrusion, Mr. Luthor, but there is a Mr. Lewis Honeybraun here to see you.”

Lex nodded, looking up from his desk. “Yes, Asabi, send him in.”

A short man with a round pot belly and a long grey mustache darkened the doorway as Asabi turned away, leaving them to discuss their agendas in private.

Perry sat at his desk, pouring over the latest copy Ralph had given him. The man could smell a scandal a mile away but couldn’t figure out when to say no to the semi-colon. Subscriptions had been wavering the last few weeks with the Planet refusing to print any more of the half-baked theories about the mysterious flying savior, but he suspected with Lois and Clark both back in the newsroom that would soon change. They had a way of accidentally finding front page news wherever they went. He just hoped the month they’d taken to recover was enough.

“Chief, I think there’s a story here and we should check this guy out.” Lois burst into his office with Clark a few steps behind. Perry looked up at her in shock, casting a questioning glance at Clark who just shrugged as she continued. “The crazy one from this morning? His name is Samuel Platt and he was an engineer at EPRAD for ten years until...”

He breathed a long sigh, “Lois, can’t you see I’m elbow deep in red ink here?”

“Oh,” She went quiet for a moment before looking at him curiously, tapping her heel.

“Lo-is,” Perry warned.

Clark walked up behind her placing two hands on her shoulders, causing her to visibly relax. Perry smiled to himself. Having Kent back definitely had its perks.

Perry picked up the copy he had been looking over before she came in to resume looking over the last paragraph when Lois fumed, “Chief!”

He threw the copy down, “Fine! What is it?” Clark handed him what they’d found out from Samuel Platt earlier and he scanned it. “Lois, just because one madman’s ravings about...” He squinted as he read the notes in front of him, “ion particles?” He looked at Clark for confirmation, who nodded, “check out with STAR Labs doesn’t mean...”

“That is a crock of...” Lois found Clark’s hand clamped over her mouth before she could finish.

“Chief, even if his theories are... out there... isn’t it worth checking out?” Clark interjected. “I mean, with more than a hundred colonists going up in the next launch are you willing to take that chance?”

Perry nodded, “I suppose getting Platt checked out and ... looking into his theories wouldn’t hurt.”

“Yesss!” Lois cheered, turning to kiss Clark as she grabbed

him by the tie to drag him out of the office. She called over her shoulder, “You won’t regret this, Chief!”

“I better not!” he called after her, “and you better be at that Luthor Ball tonight grabbing me an exclusive!”

“Are you sure this is the right place?” Clark asked, stepping out of the Jeep as he surveyed the rundown street they were on.

“155 River Lane,” Lois said, grimacing at the scenery as she took a step closer to Clark. “Worst street in town.”

“What’s a respected scientist doing living on the worst street in Suicide Slum?” Clark wondered aloud.

“I wouldn’t exactly call him ‘respected,’” Lois corrected.

“Up until a month ago, he was,” Clark countered, walking toward the alley where a light was blinking, and the door read, ‘155’. He grimaced, “Well, we’re here.”

She cringed, knocking lightly on the door. “Dr. Platt?”

“Nobody’s home,” they heard a voice from inside say.

Lois shared an annoyed look with Clark before she knocked again. “Dr. Platt, it’s Lois Lane and Clark Kent. You came by the Planet earlier...”

The door cracked open with the chain still on the lock, and Dr. Platt peered at them suspiciously. “Were you followed?”

“Uh, no,” Clark interjected, stepping closer to Lois. “We’re here to talk to you about the sabotage...”

“Shhhh!” he ordered, jerking the door open. As he ushered them inside, he glanced down the alley warily, checking for any possible intruders. “You never know who’s watching or listening.”

Clark bit the inside of his lip, fighting the urge to say something about this man’s paranoid state of mind. Lois cast a wary look towards him, and he nodded before speaking once more, “Dr. Platt? Has someone threatened you?” Hopefully, there was some plausible explanation for why or how this once respected engineer had fallen so hard and so fast in the scientific world.

He began sifting through shoeboxes of papers as he spoke, “They said I was crazy, but wouldn’t you be? After the drugs...”

“Drugs?” Lois questioned, examining him critically.

“Yes!” His eyes widened. “They drugged me. Didn’t I tell you?”

“Who drugged you?” Clark asked.

“No name. No face. No memory.” Platt sighed in defeat, pulling out a picture on the shelf he was rummaging through. A sense of calm seemed to wash over him as he spoke, “My Amy.”

Lois exchanged a look with Clark before offering Platt a weak smile as she found her voice, “Dr. Platt, how do you know you were drugged?”

Platt’s hand began shaking uncontrollably, and he winced, holding his wrist. She shared a look with Clark who nodded, and Platt glared at his hand angrily. “They keep getting worse.”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Platt,” Clark said. “We want to help... however, we can.”

“When did you first... notice the spasms?” Lois asked, recalling how Dr. Platt said his memory of the one who drugged him was gone.

“It was after I submitted my report to Dr. Baines,” he said solemnly.

“Dr. Baines the Director of the Extra Planetary Research And Development? That Dr. Baines?” Clark clarified.

“Yes, that’s the one,” he said solemnly.

“Do you know who might have wanted to hurt you?” Lois asked. “Do you have any enemies?”

“No!” Platt shook his head vehemently, “It’s Prometheus! Someone is sabotaging the space station!”

Lois sighed, trying a different approach, “Okay, say you’re right, and someone is trying to sabotage the space station. How could they have done the it? In order to bypass security...”

“...unless the orders came from high up,” Clark interjected.

Platt didn't respond, returning to his original train of thought, digging through the shoeboxes of files.

"You see, under extreme temperature conditions, the particle isolators were in danger of shutting down. To prevent that, we installed heating devices. But when I broke into one of the off limit labs, I discovered that the heating devices had been replaced by coolant systems." Platt explained, tossing another shoebox to the ground as he continued to rummage through the chaos on the shelf.

"To... freeze the ion particles?" Clark clarified.

"Yes, so they'd fuse, and the messenger would blow up! It's all in my report..." Platt continued rummaging.

"Yes, you went over that earlier, but you said you had a copy of that report and..." Lois was cut off by Platt once more.

"Of course! Why do you think I'm looking through shoeboxes like a crazy person?" He smiled at her. "I mean, what kind of scientist would I be if I didn't keep a copy of... Where did I put it?"

Lois sighed, looking back at Clark, "Dr. Platt, is there anything else you can tell us about the sabotage?"

He hung his head in defeat. "Please, you have to stop it." He pulled out the picture of Amy once more. "Space Station Prometheus is my Amy's last hope for a chance to walk again."

"We'll do everything we can," Clark promised. "When you find the report, please send it to the Planet."

Lois handed him another business card, and they left.

"So, what do you think?" Clark asked, opening the door to the Jeep for her.

"I think he's crazy," Lois muttered, stepping into the driver's seat.

Clark nodded at her with a knowing look, "But?"

"But I think we should still check out this Dr. Baines and see what she has to say," she smiled back at him.

He nodded, "Let's go."

Fumes of exhaust filled the air, and Lois crinkled her nose, covering her mouth with her coat to block the foul smell from her nostrils. She blinked back tears as her eyes began to water and she and Clark made their way through the EPRAD maintenance division. "You okay?" Clark asked in concern.

The smell.

The putrid smell of the fumes tingled in her nostrils, and she fought against the wave of nausea that was threatening to overtake her. Why did it have to smell so bad? Oh, this was bad. She was just a few feet away from the door. The door that meant no more of that awful smell... but she wasn't going to make it. She spotted a small plastic wastebasket by the door and grabbed it in a panic, emptying her stomach's contents into it.

"Lois?" Clark's hand rested on the small of her back, and she took a deep breath, setting the waste basket back down. She grimaced as she felt the burning in her throat and the persistent foul smell that teased her nostrils. Just a few more steps. She took out a tissue from her purse and grabbed a piece of gum to help get rid of the taste still lingering on her taste buds.

"Fine," she said not so convincingly as they finally arrived at their destination. Clark opened the door for her, and she rushed inside, sighing in relief as the rotten smell that had been overtaking her a few moments ago was now gone.

Clark looked at her in concern as she took another sigh of relief, taking in the warm scents of old coffee and the sterile office environment. She gave him a weak smile. "The fumes were just getting to me."

"Really?" He looked at her skeptically. "They're a little unpleasant but nothing to warrant..."

"I'm fine!" She snapped irritably. "Can we please just..." She motioned toward the hallway in front of them to the offices. He grew silent and nodded, following her to Dr. Baines's office.

Clark watched Lois carefully out of the corner of his eye as they followed up their investigation into Dr. Samuel Platt's claims with Dr. Antoinette Baines. She was a short young woman with short blonde hair and a seemingly empathetic view towards Dr. Platt. Not what they would expect from someone who was a part of a conspiracy to take down the space station.

Lois shifted uncomfortably as they stepped out into the maintenance room once more with Dr. Baines as she walked them into a room with large glass panel walls, giving them the view without the noise and the smells from the crew. "Dr. Platt was a brilliant scientist. Top of his class. I'm saddened to know he's fallen so fast and so hard..."

"Yes, his file said he graduated top of his class at MIT," Lois noted from the file in her hands. "Any idea what could have caused him to 'fall from grace' like this?"

Dr. Baines shrugged, "Your guess is as good as mine, Ms. Lane. If I had to guess, I'd say the pressure from building the space station along with the divorce finally got to him."

"Divorce?" Lois echoed. "He never said anything about a divorce."

"I'm not surprised." She sighed, shaking her head as she spoke. "When his wife and daughter left him it sent him on a downward spiral... drinking and taking drugs... I kept him on as long as we could, but after he set fire to one of the laboratories we had to let him go."

Clark's eyes narrowed at the last statement Dr. Baines gave them. She was lying. He could hear her heart rate pick up as she described Platt's divorce and downward spiral. He looked over at Lois and nodded. She gave him a half smile, and he continued her train of thought, "Yes, the fire he claimed to have set in order to stop the test launch last week?"

"Yes, that's correct," Dr. Baines replied coolly.

"According to Dr. Platt, he submitted a report to you detailing the sabotage of the Prometheus Messenger," Clark pressed, watching Dr. Baines as she spoke.

Dr. Baines's pulse quickened as she smiled warmly, "I'm not aware of any report."

"Something about coolant devices installed to..." Lois looked at him for confirmation as she continued, "...freeze the ion particles?" He nodded confirmation and looked at Dr. Baines expectantly.

"Coolants? No, I don't recall any report..." Dr. Baines smiled at them warmly before offering, "but I could check my records."

"Could you?" Lois pulled out her business card and handed it to Baines, "Let us know if you find anything?"

"Absolutely," she smiled back at her.

"Would it be possible for us to see the lab where the fire took place?" Lois added.

Baines shook her head with a forced smile, "No press allowed, I'm afraid. With us being this close to the launch we don't want to turn this into a media circus. You understand?"

"Of course," Lois nodded, offering Baines a forced smile.

"You'll call if you find anything?"

"Of course," she smiled back at them.

"Dr. Platt was a brilliant scientist. Top of his class. I'm saddened to know he's fallen so fast and so hard..." Dr. Baines shook her head.

Lois did her best to control her temper, but right now it was really hard to do when she didn't feel well. And this very young, thin, blonde woman kept making eyes at her fiancé. She crossed her arms over her chest, readjusting the file in her hands and making sure her engagement ring was visible as the interview continued.

"Yes, his file said he graduated top of his class at MIT," Lois noted from the file in her hands. "Any idea what could have

caused him to ‘fall from grace’ like this?”

Dr. Baines shrugged, “Your guess is as good as mine, Ms. Lane. If I had to guess I’d say the pressure from building the space station along with the divorce finally got to him.”

“Divorce?” Lois echoed. “He never said anything about a divorce,” She was doing it again. Would it be terrible form to claw her eyes out? Yes, Clark is an attractive man. Anyone with a pulse could tell that, but that didn’t mean she had to drool...or be so...

“I’m not surprised.” She sighed, shaking her head as she spoke. “When his wife and daughter left him it sent him on a downward spiral...drinking and taking drugs...I kept him on as long as we could, but after he set fire to one of the laboratories we had to let him go.”

Lois glared at her, listening to the words and fighting every urge to scream ‘Liar Liar Pants on Fire’ to the rooftops. She glanced back at Clark and saw him nod to her. Their silent signal to switch off. She nodded and gave him a half smile before he picked up with the questioning, “Yes, the fire he claimed to have set in order to stop the test launch last week?”

“Yes, that’s correct,” Dr. Baines replied coolly. She was practically leering at him.

“According to Dr. Platt he submitted a report to you detailing the sabotage of the Prometheus Messenger,” Clark pressed. Lois stared at Dr. Baines as she spoke, hoping for something more reliable than her gut that this woman was lying.

Dr. Baines smiled warmly, “I’m not aware of any report.” Lois fought the urge to scream, taking another step closer to Clark, hoping to send the silent signal of ‘back off’ to the blonde that insisted on lying to them. Surely Clark wasn’t buying this?

“Something about coolant devices installed to ...” Lois interjected, looking to Clark for confirmation on the technical terms as she continued, “...freeze the ion particles?” He nodded confirmation, and they both looked at Dr. Baines expectantly.

“Coolants? No, I don’t recall any report...” Dr. Baines smiled at them before offering, “but I could check my records.”

“Could you?” Lois pulled out her business card and handed it to Baines, “Let us know if you find anything?”

“Absolutely,” She smiled back at her.

“Would it be possible for us to see the lab where the fire took place?” Lois added, testing the waters to see what Baines’s reaction would be.

Baines shook her head with a forced smile, “No press allowed, I’m afraid. With us being this close to the launch we don’t want to turn this into a media circus. You understand?”

“Of course,” Lois nodded, offering Baines a forced smile, “You’ll call if you find anything?”

“Of course,” She smiled back at them.

They made their way out of EPRAD in silence. Clark noticed Lois seemed to be still struggling with the smells coming from the maintenance division of EPRAD. She visibly relaxed once they were out of that corner of EPRAD and away from the fumes. “Lois?” He placed a hand on her shoulder hesitantly.

“Just give me a sec,” She replied weakly. He nodded, watching as she took a few shallow breaths, seeming to fight the urge to get sick once more. He looked down the hallway they were in, trying to spot somewhere she could dart into if her nausea got worse. Thankfully, whatever had come over her seemed to pass and she gave him a weak smile. “I guess now we know why those guys wear the protective masks when working with all that stuff...”

He nodded, “You okay?”

“Yeah,” She nodded, reaching for his arm as they continued down the hallway toward the exit, “I don’t trust her.”

“A little *too* cooperative,” He commented. “Either her age is showing or...”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois asked.

“She’s really young for a woman in her position,” he pointed out.

“Ugh, that is just so...”

“What?” he asked, uncertain what had set her off.

“Typical.”

“What’s typical?” he asked, still not understanding why she was so upset.

“You and your typical male response,” she harrumphed.

“Typical male response?” he echoed. “All I did was mention she was young for a woman in her position.”

“Exactly! Typical male response: looking at the outside package while she’s over there throwing Platt under the bus and lying through her teeth...”

“I never said I believed her,” Clark added a bit irritated with her tone. “All I said was her age was showing.”

“But why her age?” She argued.

He gave her a half-smile, “Okay, fine, you win. Her inexperience is showing. Better?” He still wasn’t sure what was upsetting Lois, and right now he wasn’t sure he wanted to know. He hadn’t seen her this angry in a long time.

She seemed to soften her tone as her face fell a bit, looking at the doors they’d just exited angrily. “She’s lying,” Lois said indignantly. “That whole spiel about Platt’s divorce and drug use was a set-up so he could be the fall guy if anything goes wrong. I just wish I had more to go on than my gut.”

“I know,” he sighed, placing an arm around her shoulders, “If it makes you feel any better her heart rate picked up when we started asking about that report and Platt’s accusations.”

“So, we know she’s lying,” she said. “How do we prove it?”

“An LNN Special Report...” The announcer’s voice filled the newsroom as Brock Thomas began narrating the scenes of Lex Luthor standing with President Thompson at the White House with a smile on his face.

“Mr. Lex Luthor, self-made billionaire and owner of LexCorp, has just been named a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Honor. He is expected to be awarded this medal later this week during President Thompson’s visit to discuss the findings last month on Bureau 39.”

Ralph clapped his hands loudly, “All right Lex! You the man!”

Jimmy stared at the screen in awe. “He’s really something isn’t he?”

Cat rolled her eyes. “Yeah, he’s something all right, Jimmy.”

Jimmy glanced at Cat quizzically. “I don’t get what you and Lois have against him. He’s done so much good with all the charity work and giving jobs to almost all of Metropolis...”

“Figures,” Cat snorted, shaking her head. He looked at her, arching an eyebrow in confusion as he stared her down. Cat gave a hesitant laugh as if she was biting back on what she wanted to say before she spoke, “Jimmy, you’ve only been doing this for a few years. Lois and I have been doing this MUCH longer. When you’ve been in the business as long as we have you learn when someone’s blowing smoke and when they’re the real deal.”

“Man, you don’t know what you’re talking about, Cat!” Ralph interrupted. “Just because you weren’t able to land an interview with the guy is no reason to sling mud.”

Cat ignored him, continuing with her conversation with Jimmy, “Ever wonder why the only reporters that get even half a chance to ‘interview’ him are women?” Jimmy shrugged, and she continued, “The only ones that seemed to land any type of interview with him are ones that are willing to resort to ...shall we say, less than professional activities during these interviews.”

“Yeah, I’m sure they were sooo insulted, too,” Ralph sneered.

“You don’t get to be a guy in his position without being able to sniff out the gold diggers.”

“Gold diggers???” Cat scoffed angrily, “Are you out of your mind? These women were respected journalists.”

“Consenting adults,” Ralph corrected.

Jimmy was quiet a moment. “Just because he likes to play the field doesn’t mean he’s a bad person, Cat.”

“It is when he tries to use a promised interview as a bargaining chip for sleeping with him,” Cat sniffed.

“Oh, come on!” Ralph scoffed. “The guy’s worth billions. Why would he need to do that? He could have anyone he wanted.”

“Almost,” Cat shrugged. “I know for a fact two very well respected journalists that turned him down cold and had their interviews with him...stonewalled.”

“Another one of your unsubstantiated rumors?” Ralph asked with a grin. When she didn’t respond, he continued, “So, he’s a bit of a player.”

Jimmy added, “That doesn’t make him a bad person.”

“Just an untrustworthy one,” Cat added. “I don’t trust him.”

“Well, the president obviously trusts him enough to give him the Presidential Medal of Honor. Are you saying he’s wrong?” Jimmy asked.

“I...”

“Who’s wrong?” Lois asked from behind them, setting her things down at her desk.

Cat gave her a sympathetic look. It was evident the stress from the last few weeks was beginning to take their toll on Lois. Clark stood by Lois with his hand on her back, rubbing it as Lois looked at them expectantly.

Cat motioned to the television set, “Apparently, boy wonder is now charming the leader of the free world,” She cast a sideways glance at Ralph and added, “...and Ralph, his number one fan.”

Ralph grinned, and Clark shook his head, placing a protective arm around Lois. Ralph caught Clark’s gaze and cleared his throat, “I gotta go, uh, copy something...I’ll catch you later.”

Cat fought the urge to laugh as Ralph scurried away, looking back at Clark who was glancing up at the television screen with Lois. The screen showed Lex Luthor shaking hands with President Thompson. Lois shook her head in disgust. “You’ve got to be kidding me!” she muttered.

“Presidential Medal of Honor?” Clark read the ticker at the bottom of the screen. To Cat’s delight, she noticed Clark’s jaw tighten as he stared at the footage. It was nice to know at least one man wasn’t under the assumption that Lex Luthor could do no wrong.

“Tell me about it,” Cat rolled her eyes, “I was just telling Jimmy about some of the smarmy things the guy’s been doing over the years, but...”

“All I’m saying is just because he likes to play the field doesn’t make him public enemy number one,” Jimmy protested, looking at Clark for help.

“No, but it says something about his character,” Clark said sternly. “I don’t know about you, but if I wouldn’t trust him in the same room as my fiancée or any other woman in my life, why would I trust him to do anything else?”

Jimmy stared at Clark for a moment, “I guess I never thought of it that way.”

Cat grinned up at Clark for a moment, “It’s good to have you back Clark. We’ve missed you around here.”

He smiled back at Cat, tightening his arm around Lois’s waist, “It’s good to be back.”

“So, Lois, how’d it go with your crazy scientist this morning?” Cat asked.

“Okay,” Lois said. “Still trying to figure out if there was any sabotage or not.”

“Why would anyone want to sabotage the space station?” Jimmy asked. “You’d think everyone would want this mission to succeed.”

Lois exchanged an uneasy look with Cat for a moment before offering a wistful, “You’d think that, wouldn’t you? Sometimes it’s just not that simple, Jimmy.”

“Olsen!!!” Perry’s voice bellowed from the editor’s office, and Jimmy stood up from his seat. Perry stood in the open doorway holding a can of diet coke in his hand. “When I say ‘soda’ I mean real soda, not that lily-livered diet stuff! If you’re gonna do a job, do it right. Now get!”

Jimmy stared at the Editor-in-Chief’s office in defeat as the door slammed shut behind Perry. Cat glanced at Jimmy sympathetically, patting him on the shoulder, “Another important job for Perry White,” Jimmy muttered. “I gotta go.”

“Poor guy,” Clark said, watching as Jimmy raced toward the break room to fetch the Chief a real soda.

“He’s gotta fight back,” Cat said. “No one else can do it for him.”

Dr. Baines paced around her office uncertainly as she waited for Lex to get back to her. How had she gotten into this mess? It was supposed to just be a simple mechanical failure. Now it was turning into something more. Three men had been severely injured this afternoon. She had to stop this. She had to put an end to this before someone got killed. Surely Lex would understand. She couldn’t have any of these men’s and women’s lives on her conscience.

That evening Lois nervously examined herself in the full-length mirror. She wore a long violet dress with sheer tie sleeves and an open back. She smiled to herself, recalling how the last ball she and Clark had attended had ended. It seemed like a lifetime ago. Slowly but surely they seemed to be finding their way back to one another, but it still wasn’t the same. After her confession and breakdown about Jamie, he’d been distant.

They’d worked through a lot of what she thought were their main issues, but there still seemed to be this barrier between them. He still wasn’t letting her in. It had been five years of long lonely nights and praying for his safe return. Now here he was back in her life, and she didn’t know how to react. He seemed afraid to touch her. They still had yet to make love since her confession, and she wondered if a part of it was because he blamed her for what happened. He said he didn’t, but she couldn’t help but wonder...

“Wow, sis, you look hot,” Lucy said from over her shoulder.

Lois smiled back at her sister, “Thanks,” She glanced at Lucy in a simple black dress with spaghetti straps and embroidered lace along the neckline and back of her dress. “You look great. I’m sure Jimmy will love it.”

When Jimmy had started at the Planet he and Lucy had hit it off pretty well and had been dating off and on for the last year as Lucy finished up her degree. She’d taken a year off to help with Jamie after Clark’s disappearance and had fought hard to keep her grades up. Now here she was at the top of her class about to graduate with her degree in Criminology. A safe medium between their father’s dreams for her and her dreams for herself. She was still in the medical field while helping to fight crime with the Metropolis P.D.’s Crimes Against Children Prevention Unit once she graduated next month.

Lucy smiled happily, “Are you sure I’m dressed up enough? I wasn’t sure how nice to dress.”

“You look great, Luce,” Lois reassured her. “Do you need a ride or is Jimmy picking you up?”

Lucy shook her head, “Jimmy’s meeting me there. He said there was some emergency at work and was running a bit late,”

Lois nodded, smiling at her sister, “Feels like ages ago since I’ve been to one of these.”

Lucy smiled weakly at her, eyeing the ring on her left hand as she spoke, “Yeah, I’m sure it’s weird going to one of these again, but I’m glad you’re getting out again and living. I was getting worried about you.”

“You don’t have to worry about me, Lucy,” Lois said. “I’m

fine.” Her gaze shifted over to the shelf in the corner where Jamie’s urn sat with a white teddy bear.

Lucy smiled at her, wrapping a protective arm around her shoulders, “I miss him too.”

Lois bit her lip, fighting the urge to breakdown in tears as she dabbed her eyes with a tissue. “I don’t know what my problem is today. I feel like I’m one push away from breaking down in tears or blowing up at someone.”

“Well, you’re dealing with a lot. It’s expected,” Lucy reasoned.

“I thought I was supposed to be the one dishing out advice,” Lois sniffed. “I am the older sister.”

“Just giving you a break,” Lucy smiled at her.

Lois leaned her head on Lucy’s shoulder for a moment, finding solace in the quiet lull that had fallen between them for the moment. A knock at the door broke the moment, and she pulled away. “That’s probably Clark.”

Lucy smiled at her, “Go. Have fun. I’ll meet you guys there.”

“I’m not sure I understand you correctly,” Lex began cautiously. “You want me, self-made billionaire, owner of seven hundred and fifty-three different divisions of LexCorp, a company I built from scratch...to just walk away?”

“Lex, I know you’ve put a lot of time into this, but...”

“No, you have no idea what I’ve put time into, Antoinette,” he corrected her. “Do I look like I was born yesterday? You want me to blow fifty billion dollars because you have a sudden attack of conscience???”

“Lex...”

“No!” He raised his fist in the air. “I decided when a deal is done. This is just getting started. You will destroy Prometheus by any means necessary...”

“But what about those people that got hurt today...” Baines argued.

“Casualties of war,” he sniffed.

“But...”

“Let me repeat myself, darling. I’ll try to use small words, so you understand. Prometheus will be destroyed. Luthor Space Station will be launched in its place, and you will not do a thing to stop me, or they’ll never find your body. Are we clear?”

“Completely,” Baines breathed, narrowing her eyes at Lex.

The room was filled with music and Metropolis’s wealthy. Everyone that was anyone was in attendance, and all the press had been invited. “I’m surprised so many people from the Planet are here,” Clark mentioned as they stepped down the staircase with Lois.

“Every year, Mr. Stern buys up all the tickets he can and gives them out to everyone. Says he enjoys driving Lex Luthor crazy by forcing him to mingle with the common folk,” Lois explained.

Clark laughed, “I’m guessing he’s not a fan.”

“Oh, are you kidding?” She teased. “He said my best work was the exposé I did on LexCorp’s corrupt oil drilling practices...” she smiled back at him flirtatiously, “He’s a big fan...of anything that goes against Lex Luthor.”

“Whatever happened with your exposé plans anyway?” Clark asked.

“I hit a brick wall,” Lois grimaced. “Got stonewalled. Cat has a theory on that...”

“I heard,” Clark grimaced, placing a protective arm around her. “It feels like a lifetime ago we were here trying to nab the first one-on-one interview with him...Now, so much has changed.” Clark stared up at the high vaulted ceilings, glancing around the familiar setting they were in. It wasn’t that long ago that he and Lois had been to a similar ball with these same people and the world seemed so different back then.

<< “Which one?”

“Which one’s easier to take off?”

“You’re not helping,”>>

<< “Always taking my breath away...”

“Better believe it,”>>

<< “I imagine the world ...the future...I can’t imagine any of it without you there...standing with me.”

“Marry me,”

“What?”

“Yes,”>>

<< “Don’t stop.”

“Never,”>>

Lois hung on his shoulder, placing a hesitant hand on his arm, “You okay?”

“Yeah,” he smiled back at her. “Just remembering what happened here five years ago.” He leaned in to kiss her.

She smiled, cupping his cheek, “I remember. I do plan on collecting...” She kissed him again, and his arms encircled her waist as he began to forget about the world around them.

“Hey, you two!” Perry’s voice bellowed from behind them as they slowly broke apart. “I see some things still don’t change.”

Clark gave a light chuckle, releasing his arms from Lois but keeping one arm around her waist as they turned to their editor. “Chief, I didn’t know you were gonna be here.”

Perry shrugged, “It’s for a good cause.” He pointed to the banner above the entrance marked ‘Coates Orphanage’ where a small crowd of children was gathered together with an elderly man with a sign marked ‘silent auction’.

Alice White interrupted with a smile, “It was a good excuse to get him out of the newsroom and into a suit.”

They all laughed, and Perry smiled back at Alice, wrapping an arm around her. “What can I say? She knows how to drive a hard bargain.”

“Clark, Perry says you just started back at the Planet. How are you doing?” Alice asked, looking at him in concern.

Clark looked down for a moment, contemplating his words carefully, “It’s a bit weird having been gone for so long, but it feels good to be doing something I’m familiar with.”

Alice nodded, “I can’t imagine what you two must have gone through all these years, but I’m glad to see you’re getting back into a normal routine. After everything that happened...” She shook her head bitterly, “That man should have been held accountable for his crimes. I’m just sorry you won’t get that chance.”

Clark gave her a reassuring smile, “We’re fine.”

Jimmy walked up to them dressed in a tux with Lucy on his arm. “Hey guys! Have you guys seen the spread? I never knew there were so many different types of sushi...”

They laughed, and Lois turned toward Jimmy and Lucy, “Glad to see you made it. We were just catching up.”

“Pretty nice of Mr. Luthor to set up a silent auction for charity at this thing,” Jimmy observed. “Although, from looking at a lot of this stuff, I wonder if some of the stuff being auctioned should be in a museum.”

Perry motioned to the crowd around them, “Jimmy, you gotta know your audience. Everyone here is somebody...” he then turned back to Lois and Clark, “...or writing about someone.”

“Intimidating,” Jimmy said, scanning the room.

“That’s the idea,” Alice reassured him. The soft chords of the live band began to fill the air, and her eyes lit up as she tugged on Perry’s arm. “Come on, let’s let these kids have some fun. Besides, you owe me a slow dance.”

“Bye now,” Perry waved before following Alice onto the dance floor.

Clark chuckled, holding Lois to him as he watched Alice and Perry on the dance floor, ignoring the world around them as they danced to the music. He turned to Lois who had her head resting on his shoulder.

“Any idea where Lex Luthor is?” Lucy commented, looking around the room. “I mean I’m not an expert, but you’d think if he’s hosting this thing he’d be center stage.”

“Probably trying to make a grand entrance,” Lois commented dryly.

“Gee, Lois, tell us how you really feel,” Lucy teased.

Lois smiled back at them, “You laugh, but I’m serious.”

“Hey, look there he is!” Jimmy interrupted, pointing toward the staircase where Lex Luthor was mingling with the crowd.

The band started playing Elvis Presley’s “Can’t Help Falling In Love,” and the sound of Alice White’s squeal on the dance floor echoed throughout the hall. Lois laughed, taking Clark’s hand and pulling him to her as she walked toward the dance floor that was slowly filling up with couples, “Come on, Farmboy, I didn’t get this dressed up to stand around and watch other people dance.”

Wise men say

Only fools rush in

But I can’t help falling in love with you

Shall I stay?

Would it be a sin

If I can’t help falling in love with you?

“I guess I owe you a few dances,” he smiled at her, pulling her close as they swayed to the music.

Lois rested her head against his chest, and he smiled against her hair, “I’ve missed this.”

“Me too,” he whispered, holding her close as they swayed together. “I’m sorry.”

“You’ve got to quit apologizing.” She gave him a slow smile. “We both do.”

Like a river flows

Surely to the sea

Darling, so it goes

Some things are meant to be

Take my hand,

Take my whole life, too

For I can’t help falling in love with you

“I guess five years changes a lot,” He said apologetically.

“But we said we weren’t going to keep looking in the past,” she reminded him.

“I know,” he murmured, “but sometimes it’s hard not to think of everything we’ve lost.”

Like a river flows

Surely to the sea

Darling, so it goes

Some things are meant to be

Take my hand,

Take my whole life, too

For I can’t help falling in love with you

For I can’t help falling in love with you

As the song ended Lois leaned up to kiss him before pulling away. “Come on. I guess we should try and find...” She stopped mid-sentence when they spotted Lex Luthor in deep conversation with Jimmy and Lucy. “Great,” she muttered under her breath.

“You really wrestled an alligator with your bare hands?” Jimmy asked excitedly.

“In the Everglades.” Lex seemed disinterested in his conversation with Jimmy and more focused on Lucy at the moment. “Perhaps I could show you some time, Miss...”

“Lane,” Lois supplied from behind them, “Lucy Lane.”

Lex turned to face Lois, who was standing with her arms over her chest staring him down with disapproval. “Lois, always a pleasure.” He took a step toward her before turning to Clark, “Mr. Kent, I heard you ‘rose from the dead’ so to speak. Good to have you back among the living.”

He extended his hand for Clark to shake. Clark took it, grudgingly, offering a tighter than normal handshake. He couldn’t

help but smile as Lex winced in pain, “Thank you, Mr. Luthor. I see nothing’s changed around here.” He released his grasp on Lex Luthor’s hand which Lex took back with a wince of pain.

“Yes, well, you know how the rich like to spend money,” Lex tried to cover. “I’m just trying to give them something worthwhile to spend it on.”

“Like a Space Station?” Clark asked with a knowing smile.

“Ah, ah, ah, you’ll have to wait for the announcement at the end of the evening like everyone else,” Lex admonished.

“Lex was just telling us about some of his travels,” Jimmy said excitedly.

“Yes, I was telling Lucy here about my latest trip to the Everglades last July. Wrestled a seventeen-foot gator...” He took a deep breath, “...the thrill of the hunt. There’s nothing like it.”

Lois rolled her eyes. Clark could tell she was about to retort with some sarcastic comment, so he decided to beat her to the punch, “It was my understanding that hunting season was only during the fall in the Everglades.”

Lex seemed a bit taken aback by Clark’s observation. Lois smiled, and Lucy smirked looking back at Jimmy who was taking everything in, “Yes, well, I suppose they made an exception...I didn’t know you were well versed in alligator hunting, Mr. Kent.”

Clark shrugged, “I’ve done my fair share before college when I was traveling.”

“I see,” Lex nodded. “Well, I suppose I should get back to the rest of my guests,” he excused himself and left.

“What a dirt bag,” Lucy groaned, watching him leave.

“What are you talking about?” Jimmy asked.

Clark looked at him in concern, “You didn’t notice?”

“Notice what?” he asked. “He seemed cool. Telling us stories about his travels.”

Lois sighed, “Jimmy, he wasn’t trying to impress you — he was trying to impress Lucy.”

Lucy cringed outwardly, and Clark continued, “He was trying to hit on her right in front of you.”

“But...” Jimmy’s face fell as realization began to come to him. “What a...TOOL!” He grabbed Lucy’s hand and led her on the dance floor, “Come on Luce, let’s show these guys how to liven up a dance floor.”

Lois laughed, watching Jimmy and Lucy move with moves neither she or Clark were familiar with. “He seems nice. Lucy seems to like him,” Clark observed. “A little naïve.”

“He’s only been working in the newsroom for six months,” Lois said. “He just transferred from the mailroom this past Fall. He and Lucy hit it off pretty well. Been going out for about two months now.”

“They seem happy.”

“They are...I think,” Lois said, motioning to Lex who was standing with a crowd of overstuffed suits relaying his conquests in the Everglades once more. “He’s distracted. Maybe we can snoop around a bit.”

“Lo-is,” Clark sighed, giving her a disapproving look.

“Come on,” She tugged his hand with her toward the stairs.

“It’ll be like old times. Digging into a big undercover investigation...excitement and adrenaline...”

“Danger and risk,” Clark countered.

“That’s what makes it so... exhilarating and fun,” She said, leaning in to kiss him before tugging him up the stairs with her.

“Mr. President?” Jillian Rose, the Secretary to the President, called out as she entered the Oval office.

“Right here,” he said in a muffled grunt as he read through the latest bill that had come across his desk.

“Mr. President, I have had quite a few calls this afternoon about your giving Lex Luthor the Presidential Medal of Honor...”

“Yes, I’m sure everyone’s thrilled,” He grunted.

“Not really, sir...”

“No?” He put the packet he was reading through down and turned to look at her. “Well, Jillian what seems to be the problem?”

“The problem sir is...” She was interrupted by the doors to the Oval Office swinging open and the Press Secretary, Shepherd Wilson entered the room with two secret service officers behind him.

“Mr. President, I mean this in the nicest way possible, but what on God’s green Earth do you think you’re doing?”

President Thompson waved for the secret service officers to leave and turned his attention back to Shepherd, “Nice to see you too, Shepherd, don’t hold back...By all means...” He gestured for him to continue.

Shepherd seemed to sense his tone and dialed back, “Mr. President, you cannot give Lex Luthor the Presidential Medal of Honor.”

“And why not?” Thompson asked, “As far as I know I’m still the president...”

“Yes, but...”

“And as the President, it is up to me to decide who I can give the Presidential Medal of Honor to,” Thompson added.

“You won’t be for long if any of what I’m hearing is true!” Shepherd argued angrily.

“Oh? What are you hearing?” Thompson asked.

“He’s dirty. He’s a criminal. There are accusations of him using his position to force deals and force the hand of the press to portray him in a ‘just so’ way. I don’t think you should do it, Mr. President.”

“I agree,” Jillian added. “I’ve had calls from several of your campaign donors that are threatening to withdraw their support in the upcoming election if you don’t separate yourself from Mr. Luthor.”

“Campaign donors?” Thompson scoffed, “That’s what this is about, right?”

“Even the impression of corruption can kill a campaign. You of all people should know that,” Shepherd added.

“Corruption? Now, I’m corrupt?” Thompson sneered.

“Not you, Mr. Luthor,” Jillian corrected.

“Shepherd, however much coffee you are putting away throughout the day I want you to reduce it to half.” Thompson gave him an irritated look.

“I don’t drink coffee,” Shepherd argued.

“Well maybe you should start drinking some Decaf,”

Thompson muttered as he pulled out the golden nameplate that sat on his desk and handed it to, “Shepherd what does this say?”

“President George Thompson, Commander – in – Chief,” he read.

“Really?” He took the nameplate back, “So, it doesn’t say puppet...or push-over?”

“Mr. President...” Shepherd argued again but was cut off.

“I am President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief. I am not going to just bow down because a few donors got their tail feathers in a knot over an award that I can give to whoever the bloody hell I want. How do you think it’s going to look for me to take back an award after it’s already been announced?”

“I...”

“I’ll tell you what it’s going to do. It’ll draw more conspiracy theories and impressions of impropriety and the poll numbers will drop even more.” Thompson finished his rant then turned back to the bill he’d been reading when Jillian had interrupted earlier, “Jillian do me a favor?”

“Yes, Mr. President?”

“Anyone else calls about Mr. Luthor tell them to take it up with the Constitution and forward the calls to Shepherd here.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” She nodded.

“And one other thing.”

“Yes?” They both asked in unison.

“The next time Shepherd decides to barge into the Oval office without being announced have the secret service officers beat him with a baseball bat.”

“Yes Mr. President,” Jillian said with a smirk.

“This is insane,” Clark said as he closed the door behind them. Lois ignored him, making her way toward the expansive solid oak desk in the middle of the room.

“There’s gotta be something here...” She sifted through the papers then turned to him. “Use your vision gizmo and see if you can find anything about Luthor Space Station we can use.”

“Vision gizmo?” He looked at her perplexed.

She raised an eyebrow at him and added, “Okay, how about buzz buzz?”

He laughed, “Or you could just call it what it is: X-ray vision.” He lowered his glasses to scan the desk and frowned.

“What is it?” she asked, noticing the change in his facial expression.

“He’s got a false bottom to his desk, but it’s covered in lead,” he explained.

“So?” She asked.

“So, I can’t see through lead,” he explained.

“Oh,” she murmured softly, “I didn’t know that. Anything interesting in the drawers you could see?”

“Lots of weapons and some plans from Honeybraun Industries,” he shrugged, “I’ll have to do some research to find out what they are.”

“Okay, you keep looking. I’ve got to run to the little reporter’s room,” she explained, placing a hand on her abdomen.

He nodded, watching her leave the study they were in, leaving the door cracked as she left. Hopefully, Clark would be able to find something that could help them soon. Something about this whole Space Station venture of Lex’s seemed off. She just couldn’t put her finger on it.

Clark watched Lois leave, then turned back to the study they were in. Luthor definitely had a need to collect the rare and valuable. The paintings and antiques in the room had to be worth millions. He didn’t see anything out of the ordinary. Deciding he’d intruded enough, he turned to leave and found himself face to face with a menacing Lex Luthor and a sword at his throat. He looked down to study the sword and met Lex Luthor’s tempered gaze with a daring one of his own. “Macedonian?”

Lex Luthor pulled the sword back and smiled, “It belonged to Alexander the Great. A brilliant tactician. Alexander’s strategy was simple: always control the high ground. It was the sword that he...”

<< “Don’t you think it’s odd that LexCorp seems to come up in almost ALL of our research in corruption?” >>

“Defeated Darius the Third and was proclaimed King of Asia.”

Clark finished for him, recalling the story himself as he took the sword from the shocked Lex Luthor, examining the blade as he handed it back to him.

<< “There’s no way to stop the test tomorrow...Lex Luthor made sure of that when he designed it.” >>

Lex eyed him with intrigue. “You impress me, Mr. Kent. I’m not easily impressed.”

“Over a hundred rooms in this place and it takes forever to find a bathroom,” Lois said from behind them, “Sorry that took so long.”

Clark watched Lex smooth a smile on his face before he turned to Lois with his usual debonair air. “Lois, good to see you again. I was just catching up with Mr. Kent on his ... well traveled, it seems ... background. I was a bit surprised to find him here... in my study.”

<< “Coates Orphanage Charity Ball being hosted by Mr. Lex Luthor himself...even promised to make an appearance...Maybe

one of you can land that elusive personal interview with him.”>>

“He was waiting on me. I was just trying to find a bathroom in this place,” she replied sweetly, hooking her arm in Clark’s as she tried to make a move toward the exit.

<<“Why don’t we make it dinner...but just you,”

“Mind if I cut in?”

“Not at all.”

“I don’t like that guy,”

“I think I might have just grabbed the biggest interview of the decade!”>>

He saw a flicker of anxiety cross over Luthor’s face but just as quick as it appeared, it disappeared, as Luthor masked his facial expression with a forced smile. “Have you seen the view?” He opened the balcony doors and allowed the couple to step out and absorb the view of the Metropolis skyline as the sun set. “Tallest building in Metropolis. I must confess, I enjoy the fact that everyone has to look up in order to see me.”

<<“This is a huge opportunity! Lex Luthor’s First Personal Interview by Lane and Kent...”

“Except he doesn’t want ME interviewing him he wants just YOU, Lois Lane...I don’t know...Something about the guy is just...off...”

“How about this? I go to the interview, and if ANYTHING is out of the ordinary I leave...deal? It’s a really big opportunity...”

“If he even sneezes wrong you leave,”>>

Clark exchanged a look with Lois but didn’t say anything. He didn’t need to. She was thinking the same thing. Lex then ushered them out of the study. “Let’s get back to the party. I’m sure you two are just dying to know about my plans for Space Station Luthor.”

<<“I think you learned a lot more about me than I learned about you.”

“I think we’ve both only scratched the surface,”

“Not exactly the point of an interview,”

“Well, I’m a firm believer that the chase makes everything more worthwhile.”>>

Clark nodded, motioning for Lois to go first as he held the door for her. She exited, and he saw a scowl cross Lex’s face once more.

<<“How’d the interview go?”

“He spent the whole time trying to evade my questions while trying to hit on me. Needless to say, there won’t be a follow-up,”

“I’m sorry, Lois, I know you wanted that exclusive,”

“It is what it is, but there was something very odd about him. Every time I asked him about his parents or the first company he took over his eyes did a little dance. Almost like there was something more going on. May be worth looking into.”

“Definitely.”>>

Memories of the conversations they’d had with Lex Luthor years ago came flooding back, and he couldn’t help but wonder ‘what if.’ Here they were years later and Lex Luthor was still playing the same games he’d been playing before. He often wondered what would have happened if he hadn’t made that trip out to Smallville. Would Trask have still come after his parents? Would he have been able to keep them safe if he hadn’t been exposed to that meteorite? Would he and Lois have been able to find anything on Lex Luthor? Would Jamie still be alive?

‘Don’t go there,’ he reminded himself.

They made their way back to the ballroom and noticed a crowd had begun to form around a table in the middle of the room with a sign that read, ‘Space Station Luthor’ on the front of it. Lois sighed her contempt for any plans Lex had. He wondered if something more had happened in the past few years to warrant her obvious contempt and disdain for the man. He didn’t trust him either, but there was an obvious sense of ...something he couldn’t put his finger on with Lois when it came to discussions about Lex Luthor. He couldn’t help but wonder what it was all about.

“Honored guests. We’re here tonight for a good cause. Thanks to your generosity, Coates Orphanage will be able to take in more than 3,000 children as well as expanding itself into a group home for troubled teens. LexCorp has been a proud supporter of the Coates Orphanage for years now. As you know, I have dedicated my life to improving the quality of the lives of the citizens of Metropolis. Tonight, I’d like to go further.” The table illuminated in blue a 3-D model of Space Station Luthor appeared before their eyes. There was a lot of gasps with ‘Ooohs,’ and ‘Ahs,’ in the crowd.

Clark glanced at the model suspiciously, and Luthor continued, “It is my understanding that due, in part, to the terrible tragedy that befell the Messenger earlier today with the deaths of Captain Jack Ladderman and his crew, the United Nations intends to cancel Space Station Prometheus.”

“What is he talking about?” Lois breathed in a tone so low no one but him could hear her.

“I don’t know,” He whispered, watching as Luthor continued.

“I cannot stand by and allow that to happen to the citizens of this planet. Profit aside, potential benefits that a zero-gravity laboratory could bring — most importantly, pharmaceuticals that could end crippling diseases here on Earth — must not be lost. I had been toying with a Space Station of my own for quite some time.”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Lois muttered.

“...and was hopeful in joining Prometheus in space.” Lex continued.

Perry whispered in their ear from behind, “Meet me at the Planet when this is over.”

Clark looked back in surprise. The stern look of concern on Perry White’s face told him all he needed to know. He didn’t trust him either.

“I believe we can be ready for launch by Prometheus’s target date. Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you... Space Station Luthor. An engineering marvel. Signpost to a new age of exploration and scientific advancement. A gift to the future of mankind.” A scattered applause filled the room.

Lois breathed a long breath, “Let’s get out of here.”

“The world mourns the loss of Commander Laderman and the transport vehicle Messenger, which exploded in its test launch this afternoon.” Carmen Alvarado’s voice filled the newsroom and Lois, Clark, and Perry stared numbly at the screen.

“I want to know everything you’ve found out about the sabotage,” Perry said gruffly. The emotion on his face said everything he wasn’t able to say at the moment.

“Dr. Platt said there were cooling devices placed in the messenger’s launching mechanism to cool the ion particles,” Lois began cautiously.

“The cooling of the ion particles is what caused them to fuse and trigger the explosion,” Clark explained. “Dr. Platt claims he submitted a report to Dr. Baines.”

“And she denies having received said report,” Lois added, her tone disapproving.

“I take it we don’t believe her?” Perry asked.

“No,” Clark shook his head. “She was lying through her teeth during the interview.”

“Speaking of which,” Lois pointed to the screen that showed Dr. Baines on the screen.

“There are no clues as to the cause of this disaster, and, so far, no link to the previous setbacks EPRAD has encountered during the past year.”

The screen then faded out, and Carmen Alvarado’s face appeared on the screen, “Suddenly in doubt, however, is the fate of Space Station Prometheus. The United Nations will call a special meeting to debate whether or not to continue the internationally financed floating space laboratory. And what about the future of

the colonists who have sacrificed everything in order to make this voyage? For LNN news, this is Carmen Alvarado.”

“I may be reaching here, but my reporter’s instinct says it’s no coincidence that Lex Luthor has thrown billions of dollars into a space station at the same time that there are accusations about sabotage on Prometheus.” Perry drawled.

“He killed them,” Lois breathed shakily. “Murdered them and...” Images of Commander Jack Ladderman and his crew flooded the screen, and Lois grimaced when she saw him holding a young baby in his arms. The proud father’s smile tore at her insides. She let out a shaky breath, “I think I’m gonna be sick...” She made a dash for the ladies’ room, barely making it in time. The images continued to flood her mind.

He’d murdered innocent people.

<< “*Profit aside, potential benefits that a zero-gravity laboratory could bring — most importantly, pharmaceuticals that could end crippling diseases here on Earth — must not be lost.*”>>

Because of Lex Luthor’s greed Jack Ladderman and his crew would not be able to make it home for dinner tonight. Their families would forever mourn the loss of their loved ones for what? Profit?

It made her skin crawl to think someone could deliberately sabotage something that meant so much to the world. Another wave of nausea washed over her, and she emptied her stomach once more. The image of Ladderman with his family flooded her mind, and she began to cry, fighting the urge to empty her stomach once more. She heard a knock at the bathroom door and tried to regain control of her emotions. What was wrong with her? Why was she falling apart like this?

Perry watched Lois dart towards the bathroom in concern. “She all right?”

“She just needs a minute, Chief,” Clark explained. “Between the fumes from the explosion making her sick earlier and finding out what happened to Messenger this afternoon...” He motioned to the monitors that were still showing footage of the explosion. “It’s just a lot.”

“Hmmm,” Perry grunted, turning back to the screen. “I guess it’s hard to see stuff like this after everything she’s been through.”

“Yeah,” Clark nodded, unable to find the words to articulate what he was feeling at the moment. “I’ll be back,” he said heading toward the restroom to check on Lois.

When he got to the restroom door, he knocked lightly, “Lois?” He could hear her crying through the door, and he knocked again. “Lois?”

The door jerked open, and she stepped out into the hallway. Her makeup was smeared from crying. “Are you all right?” he asked, even though he already knew the answer.

She shook her head, “I’ll be fine.” She leaned against him, burying her face in his chest as she let out a shallow breath. “Let’s get out of here.”

He nodded his agreement, and they gathered their things heading for the elevator.

Jimmy looked around the empty apartment with Lucy, “Where do you think they disappeared to?”

“Who knows?” Lucy rolled her eyes, taking a seat on the couch with Jimmy. “Knowing Lois, it’s probably some BIG investigation.” She nudged Jimmy’s arm. “Well, you survived your first big-wig event at the Planet. Doesn’t look like you’re any worse for the wear.”

“Nah, it was fun. A little odd at some points in the evening,” Jimmy frowned as he spoke then gave Lucy a broad smile, “but fun.”

“That Lex guy is kinda weird, right?” Lucy crinkled her nose at him.

Jimmy nodded, “Yeah, did Lois ever tell you why she hates him so much? I mean, granted he’s a slimeball, but there seems to be something else going on there.”

Lucy shrugged, “I’m not sure. When Clark disappeared and... especially after what happened to Jamie she just kinda closed herself off from everything and everyone. I think it was her way of coping with everything.”

“That’s sad. It’s no way to live,” Jimmy murmured.

“No it’s not,” Lucy said, “but she’s slowly coming out of her shell again. The real Lois Lane is starting to shine through little by little.”

“The real Lois Lane?” Jimmy asked. “Who have I been working with for the past six months?”

“Well, you’ve been working with Mad Dog Lane for the last six months,” Lucy corrected. “Mr. White’s been working with Mad Dog Lane for the last five years, so consider yourself lucky.”

“Mad Dog Lane?” Jimmy echoed in disbelief.

“Don’t ever tell her I called her that. I will deny it and...”

Lucy wagged her finger in his face.

Jimmy leaned in to kiss her, “Your secret’s safe with me.”

Lois shivered slightly as the cool air hit her face. She glanced around at the stars surrounding her as Clark dressed in his ‘Superman’ disguise held her close, wrapping his cape around her. “It’s beautiful up here.”

“Peaceful,” he smiled back at her.

“Can anyone see us?” she asked apprehensively, looking down at the clouds beneath them.

He shook his head, “No, we’re high enough that no one can see.” She visibly relaxed and he cupped her cheek as she offered him a watery smile.

“I thought you didn’t want to do this anymore because it was too...risky,” Lois murmured.

He smiled, “Taking my fiancée for a flight to clear her head is different from showing up in red, yellow, and blue to rescues where the paparazzi can come out at any moment, or government agents...”

She linked her arms around his neck. “That was a long time ago...and Trask is gone.”

He rested his head against hers. “His ideas aren’t.” He noticed her pained expression and softened, “I’m sorry.” As she shivered slightly against him, he asked, “You cold?”

“A little,” she admitted shyly.

“Here.” He wrapped his arms more securely around her. “Let’s head back.”

They landed in an alley outside his apartment, and he quickly changed back into his suit before they exited the alley and headed toward his apartment building. After climbing the steps to his apartment and unlocking the door, he opened it and motioned for her to come in.

She looked around the apartment, taking in the familiar surroundings. This was the first time she’d been inside his apartment since his return. “You okay?” He asked cautiously as she looked around.

She wrapped her arms around herself and gave him a weak smile, “This place just brings back a lot of memories.”

“I put all of Jamie’s stuff in storage for now,” He reassured her as he caught her gaze toward the closet where he’d found some of Jamie’s old outfits. “I wasn’t...It was just hard having everything here like that.”

She nodded, “I understand.” He wrapped his arms around her, hugging her from behind.

“Do you?” he whispered in her ear. “I’m so afraid of doing the wrong thing. I just...”

She turned in his arms, reaching up to trace his jawline with her fingertips, “It’s okay. I get it. I had to put a lot of his stuff in

storage for a long time. Seeing it everyday...Lucy forced my hand a bit. She hired movers and rented the storage locker for me, so I didn't have to deal with it."

"That was nice of her," he remarked.

"I didn't think so at the time," She shuddered, recalling some of the names she'd shouted at her sister in the moment. "She was doing what she thought was best at the time, but I just couldn't see it back then."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that alone," he began cautiously before giving her a half-smile, "I know, I know. No more apologizing."

She chuckled, leaning against him, "I wasn't alone. Your parents were there. My parents were there in their own way. Lucy and Perry ...Even Cat, helped out where she could,"

His eyebrows rose, "Cat?"

"She is surprisingly really good with babies. Jamie used to like playing with her earrings. She'd take the hooks off and dangle them on his mobile." Her voice started becoming strained, and he whispered a kiss against her forehead, feeling her relax against him as she drew quiet.

"How about some coffee?" He suggested.

"Sure," she nodded, dabbing at the corners of her eyes as he headed for the kitchen to brew some coffee for them. After measuring out the coffee and turning the coffee machine on. He pulled out two coffee mugs and began spooning sugar into each cup, recalling how Lois only took half a tablespoon of sugar in her coffee. He glanced toward the living room and spotted Lois staring toward the bedroom window in a daze. He sighed, leaving the coffee to finish brewing as he went to check on her.

"You okay?" He asked, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind.

She leaned back against him, turning her head to look at him, "It's just strange being here after so long," she whispered hoarsely.

"Do you want to go back to your apartment?" he asked in concern.

"No," she shook her head. "I wanted to give Lucy and Jimmy some privacy."

He nodded, holding her close as she leaned back against him in silence. He wanted nothing more than to take away every burden she was carrying but he knew he couldn't. The pain she felt was something they both needed to work through. If he'd learned anything over the last month, it was to learn to understand there were some things that would always be out of his control.

An idea came to him, and he pulled away, turning to his bookshelf of many CD albums, looking for the right one.

"What are you doing?" She asked curiously.

Without a word, he put the CD in his stereo then grabbed the remote, returning to her side as he hit play on the stereo, placing the remote in his pocket as the soft chords began to fill the room. "You said I owed you a few dances," he explained, taking her in his arms as the chords to the Flamingos' "*I Only Have Eyes For You*" filled the air.

My love must be a kind of blind love

I can't see anyone but you

Are the stars out tonight

I don't know if it's cloudy or bright

I only have eyes for you dear

"After the last few years, I figure I owed you more than a few..." Clark explained.

She smiled, linking her arms around his neck as they began to sway to the music. "More than a few, huh? Careful, I might take you up on that."

His hands slid down the smoothness of her back, feeling where the sheer fabric of her dress came to the middle of her back. "Count on it," he smiled back at her, tightening his arms around her waist as he slowly floated them a few inches above the floor. She gasped in surprise. "Since we're alone I figured I could show

you real dancing."

She looked down at the floor in surprise then back at him, "This is so weird but...kinda cool at the same time." Her grip on him tightened.

"I've got you," he reassured her as her arms slipped down the front of his chest.

The moon may be high

But I can't see a thing in the sky

I only have eyes for you

"Does it feel weird?" she asked, glancing down at the floor below them. "Floating like this?"

"Not really," he said, looking around. "Sometimes I don't even have to concentrate. I just do it subconsciously. I sometimes have to focus on not floating." She nodded, resting her head against his chest as they swayed to the music together.

I don't know if we're in a garden

Or on a crowded avenue

You are here

And so am I

Maybe millions of people go by

But they all disappear from view

And I only have eyes for you

As the song ended and he floated them back down to the floor, she lifted her head to look up at him. "Thank you."

"For what?" he asked.

"Giving me a distraction."

"Anytime," he smiled back at her. "So, you want to tell me what's been bothering you all day?" He asked cautiously.

She gave him a weak smile. "Sorry, I guess I kind of overreacted earlier."

"Just a little bit," he teased softly.

"I guess I'm not handling everything as well as I should," she admitted sheepishly.

"Me neither," he sighed, lowering his gaze. "There's no manual to tell you how to deal with all this." He laced his fingers through hers, looking at her cautiously.

"Oh, yes there is. It's with the other useless books that try to tell you how you're supposed to feel or act." She let out a long breath. "I'm sorry I'm just not good at this."

"It didn't use to be this hard," he sighed, "It was never this hard before."

"A lot has changed," Lois reasoned.

"I know," he sighed. "Five years. I have to keep reminding myself...tonight it was like almost nothing had changed, except it had."

"He killed them, didn't he?" She whispered hoarsely.

"I think so," he grimaced, cupping her cheek.

"Six families destroyed for what?" She shook her head in disgust.

"I know, I keep going over it in my head. I wish we could have done something..."

"Like what?" Lois asked bitterly. "There was no warning. We couldn't have done anything. Even if we could have, I don't know that we would have. You've made it clear you don't want to use your gifts."

"It's not that I don't want to," he argued.

"Then, why don't you?" she accused.

"It's not that easy," he countered.

"Then explain it to me. I just...I don't understand how you can just stop doing something you've been doing your whole life; especially after we found a way for you to do it without exposing yourself to ... I mean, you have all these abilities, and you're hiding them away."

"I'm not hiding. I just...I can't take that risk. I can't put you or my parents in danger like that again."

"So what are you going to do if you're in a situation where you have to use one of your gifts to escape a bad guy or stop

something bad from happening?” Lois asked, placing a hand on his chest, “Look at what happened today...and don’t try to tell me that won’t happen. There’s a lot of not so nice people out there intent on hurting innocent people.”

“I know,” e sighed. “I want to help but...”

“But what?” Lois asked. “I’m not saying to shoulder the whole world’s problems. Just use your gifts where you can...to help.”

“And what happens when someone starts trying to dig into who I am and tries to come after you or my parents?” He shook his head. “You know it’ll happen.”

“Then we’ll have to make sure they never associate you with...You.” She traced an imaginary outline of the ‘S’ shield on his chest as she spoke. “You look a lot different without your glasses. No one has connected your return to ‘Superman’ yet. It could work...if you want it to.”

“If anything ever happened to you I would never forgive myself,” he murmured softly.

She gave him a half-smile. “I don’t know if you noticed, but I got pretty good at getting out of my own jams over the last couple of years.” He lowered his head as she continued, “But I’m sure having you help look after me could only make me safer.” She leaned up to kiss him.

“All these questions from the media for the past month... I don’t know if I’m ready to deal with all that on top of everything else.” Clark explained softly.

“So maybe we control the narrative a bit?” Lois suggested. “Give Perry and the world the answers they want but not giving them anything that could connect you with ...you,” She smiled up at him shyly.

“We can do that?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she shrugged. “We can try.”

He bit the inside of his lower lip, contemplating what she was saying for a moment, “What am I supposed to do? Just show up at a rescue and smile for the camera? I really don’t want to...”

“No, just help where you can,” she said. “Trask is gone along with those men that were working with him. Your dad’s been working with Mr. Irig to get that meteorite destroyed...” He shuddered slightly, and she rested her head on his chest as she continued, “Don’t you think actually being able to use your gifts without exposing yourself would help? You used to help all the time. Don’t let them win.”

“I do, and I won’t,” he promised. He leaned in to capture her lips with his own, sealing his promise with a kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she murmured. “And I hope you mean that because I don’t know about you but I’m sick and tired of letting a dead man and his crackpot conspiracy theories dictate my life. I want my life back. I want our life back,” she pleaded with him.

“I want that, too,” he said quietly. “More than anything.” The timer beeped on the coffee machine and he gazed toward the kitchen, “I guess I better get that.”

She nodded, smoothing the imaginary wrinkles on his shirt as she said, “I guess you should.”

She still hadn’t released him from her grasp. He caught her gaze, tilting her head to him as he leaned in to capture her mouth with his own.

“Three points!” Lucy cheered as she tossed the popcorn bag into the trash can from across the room. Jimmy laughed, watching as she jumped up and down to cheer herself on a job well done. “I can’t believe in less than a month I’ll finally be done with this stupid degree...”

“Hey that stupid degree got you that stupid job,” Jimmy corrected.

She rolled her eyes. “I think Lois’s connections in the police department helped with that as well.”

Jimmy nodded, “You and Lois seem close.”

“We are,” she said. “After graduation, I moved out because I

couldn’t stand being stuck in the middle with our parents’ constant bickering. Lois just took it all in stride. I helped out when I could, but she never asked or expected anything. She just wanted me to finish school and do what I had to do to get where I wanted in my career.”

“Then you took off a year to help her when Jamie was born,” Jimmy nodded, recalling the story she’d told him.

“She would have done the same for me,” Lucy murmured softly. “I think Jamie saved her from herself that year. With that story on those gunrunners coming across her desk and losing Clark...if she hadn’t been pregnant she would have been the one lost in the Congo instead of Claude.”

“I heard about that,” Jimmy began. “They never found him?”

Lucy shrugged, “Presumed dead I think, but it’s scary to think that could have been my sister...”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. Life is filled with choices. You make the wrong one and...POOF, it’s over.” Jimmy intertwined his hand with hers. “For what it’s worth I think Lois is very lucky to have a sister like you.”

“I just wish I could do more for her. I mean, I know things are better now, but when she came back from Smallville she seemed so...” Lucy fumbled for the right word, “...broken. I hadn’t seen her like that in years. Slowly she appears to be coming out of her shell, and I’ll see glimmers of who my sister was years ago. I know it’s selfish. I know it’s unrealistic. I know in my head she can never be the same person she was back then, but I still miss that Lois. I miss my sister.”

“I think that’s just a normal reaction to horrible circumstances,” Jimmy began slowly, taken aback by the emotion behind Lucy’s words as the corners of her eyes began to glisten. He put an arm around her. “Hey, come here.” She leaned against him and began to cry.

Lois stared up at the ceiling in a daze, feeling her mind slowly come back into focus as she laid against Clark’s chest. One month. Well, almost. It had been almost five and a half weeks since he’d returned. Five and a half weeks since they’d last made love. She glanced over at Clark who had a sloppy grin on his face as he stared at the ceiling as well. She couldn’t help but smile at him. She’d missed this. Being close with him like this.

For the last few weeks, she’d been struggling with not knowing how to act or react. After she’d told him about Jamie, he’d pulled away. Then after the incident with his nightmares in Smallville he’d gone weeks without speaking to her. She wasn’t sure if it was fear, guilt, or anger that had kept him away, but it had hurt. She’d done her best not to dwell on it, but it kept showing up in different ways. Short temper here. Emotional outbursts there. If she didn’t know any better, she’d swear she was...

‘Oh, no.’ Panic washed over her face as she mentally began checking the date. She couldn’t be. Not after... ‘Oh, God.’

“Lois?” He moved to cup her cheek, looking at her in concern.

She forgot. How could she forget? She couldn’t possibly be... Oh, but she could. It only takes one time. Now, after tonight if she wasn’t already she could be. Two times without thinking. Why hadn’t she made that appointment? Lucy had reminded her, and she’d forgotten.

‘Don’t panic.’ She told herself. ‘It’s not the end of the world. A little unexpected but not the end of the world.’

It had been five years, but she definitely remembered the symptoms.

Headaches

Mood swings

Sensitivity to smell

Nausea

At the last item on her mental checklist, she felt a wave of nausea wash over her. Before she could open her mouth to warn

him, he seemed to sense what was going on as she clamped her hand over her mouth and darted for the bathroom.

Clark stared up at the ceiling in a daze, feeling everything slowly come back into focus as he held Lois against his chest. One month. Well, almost. It had been five and a half weeks since he'd last held her like this. Five and a half weeks since they'd last made love. Five and a half weeks since he'd discovered Jamie's existence and everything he knew or thought he knew had changed. He didn't want to think about that. Tonight was about getting back what they'd lost. Trask had taken so much from him. He didn't want to dwell on everything he'd lost but rather what he'd gained.

After what had happened in Smallville he'd pulled away, afraid to hurt her again. It had taken intensive therapy and a good mental swift kick in the behind to get him to start talking to Lois again. He had been so afraid of hurting her, he hadn't realized what he was doing was having the same effect. He caught her gaze as she glanced over at him, smiling back. He'd missed this.

How had they gone so long without each other?

He felt Lois stiffen in his arms and he looked at her in concern, cupping her cheek,

"Lois?"

Her heart rate had picked up and was hammering in her chest. He watched as panic crossed over her face. He wasn't sure what had brought on this sudden sense of hysteria that was causing her heart to beat itself so rapidly in her chest. He was about to ask her when he saw a familiar pale expression come over her face. She was sick. Quickly he moved out of the way as she clamped a hand over her mouth and raced for the bathroom. He followed a few footsteps behind her, stopping to grab a warm washcloth.

He grimaced when he heard the all too familiar sounds of her emptying her stomach in the bathroom as he approached. Finally, the heaving seemed to stop, and he knelt down next to her placing the washcloth on the back of her neck. "You should probably get yourself to the doctor," he began. "Three times in one day. You can't blame that on the fumes."

"I know," she cried, leaning back against him for support. Her body shuddered against him, and he placed a supportive hand on her shoulder, squeezing it gently.

"First thing in the morning you need to call," he continued. "You should probably go ahead and call Perry tell him you won't be in because..."

She cut him off, "I'm not contagious."

Sensing where she was going with this, he cut her off and began to argue, "Lois, the story will still be there after you've recovered. You're in no condition to..."

"Not unless they're waiting nine months to do the launch," she said shakily.

"What?" He looked at her confused.

"I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I think I might be..."

The pieces seemed to click together in his head, and he finished her thought for her as she burst into tears, "Pregnant."

Ralph sat crouched down behind a couple of wheel barrels in a darkened alley with Cat Grant next to him. "Remind me why I'm doing this?" he asked, taking shot after shot of a busboy standing in front of Luthor Towers looking bored.

"Didn't you hear Lex tonight?" Cat hissed. "He had information before anyone else, and I guarantee you he's getting his information from the inside. We're going to sit here all day if we have to but we're going to catch whomever it is on camera."

"My leg is falling asleep," Ralph complained.

"Fine, go back home to your cushy bed, and I'll grab the scandal on Lex without you." Cat sneered.

"Scandal," Ralph scoffed. "What scandal?"

Just as he spoke a limousine pulled up, and Cat whispered,

"Get your camera ready."

"I'm recording," Ralph warned, holding his video camera up.

"Keep it focused." Cat warned. "Remember what happened last time?"

"Shhh..." Ralph admonished, pointing at a young woman with sunglasses and a sash covering her hair that had just stepped out of the limousine.

Behind her was an Indian man with a turban, holding her coat as she stepped inside Luthor Towers. Ralph stopped the camera and turned to Cat. "Who do you think that was?"

"I don't know, but we're going to find out. Let's get this down to the photo lab and get stills from the video footage."

"It's too early to tell," Lois argued, staring at the white plastic pregnancy test that was face down on the corner of the bathroom counter. After her revelation, Clark had gone out to get a pregnancy test for her. She'd changed into one of his old t-shirts which came just above her knee; she didn't have a change of clothes and she really didn't feel like trying to put her dress back on. He had changed into a t-shirt and his sleeping shorts. It had been three minutes. Three minutes and she just couldn't bring herself to look at that test. "Way too soon to tell. I mean normally you have to be late. I don't even know if I am late. I mean, I know, but I don't. What if I'm wrong? Oh, God, what if I'm not..."

Clark placed two lips against hers, silencing her panicked ramblings from going any further down the path of 'what-ifs' she had taken them on. She could feel the anxiety that had been rising into panic-mode slowly subside somewhat as she kissed him back. "Better?" He murmured against her lips.

She nodded, letting out a long breath after he slowly broke off the kiss, stroking her cheek with his palm as she rested her head against him, tucking her head into the nook between his chin and shoulder. "Now, you said you wanted to know...even if the test didn't say anything. If it'll make you feel, better I'll take you to the hospital right now, and they can get a blood test done, but since you've already gone to the trouble..." He pointed at the test still face down on the counter.

"Here goes nothing, right," she sighed, reaching for the test. She turned it over and looked. All the color drained from her face as she stared at the white window. She set it back down on the counter numbly.

One line.

She wasn't pregnant.

She was just making herself crazy and...

She could feel tears building up in the corners of her eyes as she stared at the lonely pink line She had been positive. She stared at the test tearfully before burying her face into Clark's chest. He held her tight, running a hand through her hair as she spoke. "It's going to be okay, honey," he reassured her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered hoarsely, unwilling to lift her head up to look at him. She shouldn't have told him her suspicions. It was too soon. Why hadn't she just gone to the doctor and ...

"Sorry?" He asked, confused. "What are you apologizing for?"

"I got your hopes up and scared you with a false alarm. There's only one line and..."

"Lois, there are two lines," Clark whispered, tilting her head up to look at him.

"What?" she gasped, looking back at the test. Sure enough, there was a faint pink line next to the other solid pink line. "Oh, God," she cried, muffling her cry of relief as she cupped her mouth, trying to control the array of emotions that had just washed over her. She was pregnant. She was going to have a baby...again. She was going to be a mother...again. She could feel the panic from before slowly try to seep through the forefront of her mind, and she quickly squashed it. She had a second chance. A second chance she never thought she'd ever get. She wasn't going to

waste a single moment stressing like she had before. She wanted this baby. More than anything.

“Lois, honey, are you all right?” Clark asked, nudging her shoulder slightly.

“Fine,” she managed to squeak out.

“I know it’s sudden. We didn’t plan on...” he began, wrapping his arms around her from behind.

She wasn’t paying any attention. Her face broke out into a huge grin, and she turned in his arms, planting her mouth on his as he had done a few moments ago to stop her ramblings. “I love you,” she whispered against his lips, “...so much.” she placed a hand on his chest.

“Are you okay with this?” he asked, holding her hand in his palm. She couldn’t help but smile at him struggling to hide his own grin.

She moved her hands up and down his chest, toying with the cotton of his t-shirt. “Right now is a close second to the day Jamie was born,” she whispered, leaning in to kiss him as she watched his face break out into a wide grin.

“I love you so much,” he murmured against her lips before lowering himself down to where he was eye-level with her belly button. He lifted up the t-shirt she was using as a night gown at the moment and brushed his lips against her stomach. She could feel tears stinging in the corners of her eyes as she watched him place his hands protectively over the faded stretch marks she still had from carrying Jamie. “All of you,” He whispered against her abdomen.

She had missed this — seeing his eyes light up with wonder at the knowledge of their unborn child’s existence and the way he looked at her with such love in his eyes. She fingered the hair on the back of his neck as she watched him run his hands up and down her sides in wonderment, resting his head against her abdomen. Even from this angle, she could see the sea of emotions that were running through Clark’s mind as he held her.

Relief.

Terror.

Love.

They were all there.

“I’m still going to have to get it confirmed,” she whispered hoarsely, trying to swallow the lump in her throat as she watched him.

“I know,” he whispered, standing back up so that he was eye-level with her. He cupped her cheek, leaning in to kiss her.

“Tomorrow we’ll figure everything out, but right now I just want to enjoy the feeling of holding you in my arms and hoping that that test is right. If I’m disappointed tomorrow so be it.”

She smiled back at him, “I’d like that.”

“Good,” he whispered, scooping her in his arms to carry her back to bed, intent on doing just that.

“I’m still going to have to get it confirmed,” Lois whispered hoarsely. He could hear the strain in her voice as she spoke. Her words stung. He knew he was getting ahead of himself. Getting excited about something they hadn’t even confirmed yet. He didn’t care. He wanted this. He wanted his family...his life back.

He’d watched Lois as the wave of emotions ran across her face after seeing the test results. At first, he’d been afraid she was upset about the pregnancy, then he realized she was upset because she’d thought she wasn’t pregnant. It had taken every ounce of restraint in him not to jump in the air with her when he saw that faint pink line on the test.

He stood up, watching her cautiously as he cupped her cheek, whispering, “I know.” He leaned in to kiss her. “Tomorrow we’ll figure everything out, but right now I just want to enjoy the feeling of holding you in my arms and hoping that that test is right. If I’m disappointed tomorrow so be it.”

He watched her cautiously and sighed in relief when her face

broke out into a grin, smiling back at him, “I’d like that.”

“Good,” he whispered, scooping her in his arms to carry her back to bed, intent on doing just that. The phone from the kitchen rang, and he groaned. “I should probably get that.”

Lois nodded. “Do you have to?” She asked, running her left hand up and down his chest seductively.

He smiled back at her, tempted to forget the phone, “It could be important.” Perry was still looking into Luthor’s involvement with EPRAD when they left. He could have found something. He glanced down at Lois in nothing but his old Met U t-shirt that came just above her knees. His eyes were full of regret as he headed for the kitchen, setting her down on her feet as he reached for the phone. “Hello?”

“Clark? Is Lois there? I tried her place, and Lucy said she hadn’t come home yet...” Cat’s voice echoed on the other end of the line.

He did his best to focus on what she was saying as Lois chose that moment to begin nibbling at his neck as she pinned him against the wall separating the kitchen from the living room. He let out a muffled groan and heard Cat ask, “Clark? Are you still there?”

“Uh-huh,” He managed, suppressing another groan as Lois ran her hands up and down his chest, kissing her way down his neck, laughing against him. As much as he wanted this to continue, he had to get her to stop so he could string together a coherent thought to put an end to the conversation before Cat got a one-on-one earful of his and Lois’s love life. He grabbed her hand, removing it from his chest and mouthed to her, ‘Stop it.’

She laughed again and whispered, “Who is it?”

“Hello? Anyone there?” Cat called from the phone.

“Cat...looking for you.” He said handing the phone to her.

“Me?” Lois asked confused, taking the phone from him. “Hello?”

He took advantage of her distraction and scooped her back into his arms, groaning his approval as she wrapped her legs around his waist, letting his hands rest on her hips as she continued her conversation with Cat.

“Bad Time?” Cat teased.

“What do you want Cat?” Lois asked, letting out a long sigh as he walked her back, so she was pressed against the wall and began returning her earlier treatment to him as he placed feather light kisses against her jaw and moved his way downward.

“I got some video footage of some woman visiting Lex tonight.” Cat explained.

“How is this news?” Lois prompted breathlessly as her legs tightened around him and he let out a muffled groan.

“I think it’s more than just his fling of the week,” Cat argued.

“Like what?” She asked, leaning her neck back to allow him better access to her throat as he devoured her hungrily. What had begun as teasing was slowly becoming something more. He could feel his body begin to respond to her closeness

Five years. How had he survived five years without her? He slowly set her down on her feet, letting out a shaky breath, running his hands up and down her sides as he waited impatiently for her to finish her conversation.

“I don’t know. Someone with EPRAD maybe? It’s just a theory. I’ll have the prints in the morning to...” Cat said.

“EPRAD?” She asked breathlessly, slipping her free arm around his neck, then back down his chest until her hand rested at the waistband of his sleeping shorts. He caught her gaze, and she leaned in to kiss him.

“Lois, would you please pay attention?” Cat asked annoyed. “I need you to focus.”

“Focus?” She echoed, licking her lips, “I’m very...” She clicked the end button, cutting the conversation short as they focused on satisfying a more urgent need at the moment.

Cat stared at her phone in disgust. “Unbelievable,” she muttered, stepping out of the cab and heading up to her apartment. “She hung up on me.”

“Have a good night, Ms. Grant,” The cab driver called after her.

“Night, Joe,” She called over her shoulder.

Unnoticed by either of them a tall man watched in the shadows, pulling out his phone as Cat locked the door to her apartment building behind her. “Ms. Baines? You were right.”

Lois stared at the ceiling, stroking Clark’s hair as he rested his head against her abdomen, silently celebrating the possibility of hope as he ran his hands up and down her torso. It hurt. The fear that was consuming her right now was crippling. The fear of repeating the devastating loss she’d already had to go through. She kept telling herself it would be different but reminding her broken heart of statistics on child loss with siblings. The chances were low, but that wasn’t enough. The chances of Jamie dying were low as well, and with Clark’s difference, there were so many things they didn’t know.

“Lois?” She gave him a watery smile as he wrapped his arms around her, holding her close. He seemed to recognize the anxiety on her face and sighed, stroking her cheek as he leaned in to kiss her, “It’s going to be okay. I’m scared too.”

Without warning, the fears and anxiety she’d been holding back for the last few hours became too much for her, and she let out a muffled sob, burying her head into his chest, “I’m just so scared. I don’t think I could go through that again...losing another baby.”

“I know,” he whispered, holding her close. “It’s scary.”

“Terrifying,” she corrected.

“A gift,” he reminded her, placing a kiss on her forehead. “A miracle.” He rested his head against hers, stroking her cheek as he whispered, “Are you going to be okay?”

“Are you?” she asked, looking up at him. “I mean, I know how I feel...which is complicated.” He smiled at her, and she placed a hand on his chest, “You’re still dealing with everything with Jamie and...”

He leaned in to kiss her, “I’m fine. It’s a bit overwhelming with everything else, but I couldn’t be happier.”

“Me too,” she said softly, “I didn’t realize how much I wanted...until I thought...” she trailed off tearfully, trying to convey the emotional rollercoaster her mind had been putting her through, “I guess you could say I’m cautiously optimistic.”

“I love you,” he whispered, “No matter what the doctor says.”

“I love you too,” She whispered back. “Dumb decisions and all.”

“Dumb decisions?” he asked, confused.

“Disappearing act...” She placed a kiss on his cheek, “Going into hiding...”

“Ah,” He nodded his understanding. “Not going to let that one go, are you?”

“You can’t disappear like that,” she said, feeling a lump in her throat begin to form. “You can’t try to protect me by disappearing. It’s not fair to me, you, or any potential children we may or may not have.”

“I know,” he nodded his agreement, “I haven’t been easy to deal with these last few weeks.”

“No more running away,” she repeated.

“No more running away,” he promised, sealing his words with a kiss.

Clark stared at the ceiling, watching Lois sleep. It had been a long night. Pregnant. He couldn’t help but grin at the prospect of being a father. He had missed so much in the last five years. The thought that Lois had had to go through so much alone made him want to crawl under a rock in shame. She had been pregnant with

Jamie when they’d gone to Smallville and then had been forced to go through her pregnancy, the birth of their child, caring for him, and even burying him...alone.

He hated himself for allowing that to happen. He knew in his head that he’d tried to escape so many times...unsuccessfully, but that knowledge was little comfort when faced with the reality of everything he’d lost. She’d made him promise not to disappear anymore, and that was a promise he would keep, no matter what.

She wanted him to use his gifts. He wanted to help, but he was terrified of losing another five years. Maybe Lois was right.

Maybe he could use the disguise they came up with and control the dialogue through the Planet. It could work. He was tired of ignoring calls for help or situations that he knew he could assist with. Everything had been so easy when he was blissfully ignorant to the real dangers that exposing his true self could bring. Still, it was something he felt deep inside...almost like it was calling to him...a need to help. He couldn’t deny that part of himself. He was coming out in more ways than one the more he ignored it. He grimaced, recalling his confrontation with Ralph in the elevator. His mom would have boxed his ears if she knew what he’d done.

He was becoming more and more angry and short-fused. He had to get some control. He had to find a way to be himself without having to control himself 24/7 because he was afraid of rouge government agents. Lois had asked him tonight if he had to think about floating but the opposite was actually true. He had to focus and think not to use his powers. He had lived so long, keeping tight control over his abilities. It was becoming unbearable not to fly, or float, or use what he’d been given to help.

Lois’s arm tightened around him, and he smiled down at her, noticing her left hand instinctually placed over her abdomen. It appeared she was a little more than cautiously optimistic. If he did do this, there would have to be boundaries set. He couldn’t just fly off to rescue anyone on a whim. He had a child to think about. What if someone got a hold of that meteorite again? Lois said it had all disappeared. He wasn’t exactly sure what that meant.

There was so much he had to catch up on. Tonight at Lex Luthor’s ball he’d felt like he was in the twilight zone. The same faces, five years older, and the same conversations all in the same room. He’d had flashback after flashback of the conversations they’d had with Lex Luthor.

<< “Don’t you think it’s odd that LexCorp seems to come up in almost ALL of our research in corruption?”>>

<< “Tallest building in Metropolis. I must confess I enjoy the fact that everyone has to look up in order to see me.”>>

<< “How’d the interview go?”>>

“He spent the whole time trying to evade my questions while trying to hit on me. Needless to say, there won’t be a follow-up,”

“I’m sorry, Lois, I know you wanted that exclusive.”

“It is what it is, but there was something very odd about him. Every time I asked him about his parents or the first company he took over his eyes did a little dance. Almost like there was something more going on. May be worth looking into.”

“Definitely.”>>

<< “It is my understanding that due, in part, to the terrible tragedy that befell the Messenger earlier today with the deaths of Captain Jack Ladderman and his crew, the Congress of Nations intends to cancel Space Station Prometheus.”>>

<< “I cannot stand by and allow that to happen to the citizens of this planet. Profit aside, potential benefits that a zero-gravity laboratory could bring — most importantly, pharmaceuticals that could end crippling diseases here on Earth — must not be lost. I had been toying with a Space Station of my own for quite some time.”>>

<< “Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you... Space Station Luthor: An engineering marvel. Signpost to a new age of exploration and scientific advancement. A gift to the future of mankind.”>>

He still didn't trust Lex Luthor. He wasn't sure if it was the way Lex had treated Lois years ago or if it had something to do with the look on his face when he'd been talking about people looking up at him. Lois said her research never got anywhere. Maybe he needed to take a second look at everything she had on Lex Luthor.

The next morning Dr. Baines stood in the doorway of Lex's penthouse with her arms crossed over her chest in defiance. "Lex, we have a problem."

"Oh?" He looked over at her in confusion. "What problem do *WE* have?"

"Reporters are crawling all over EPRAD after that stunt with Commander Ladderman. You said no one would get hurt!" She accused angrily.

"No, I promised *YOU* wouldn't get hurt or implicated," he corrected.

"That's another thing." She began pacing in front of him. "I was followed to your place last night." She replied coldly. "One of those reporters... I think she's onto me."

"What reporter?" he asked, alarmed.

"I don't know," she shrugged.

"I'll look into it," he promised, taking her hand in his. "Just think, this time next year we will be celebrating the anniversary of Space Station Luthor as it becomes both a deadly weapon and a source of scientific breakthroughs..."

"...and untold millions in patents," Baines added.

"This isn't about profit. It's about power, real power," Lex said, smoothly, staring toward the sword of Alexander the Great he had mounted on the wall.

"We are so late," Lois muttered, rubbing her arm as she and Clark stepped into the elevator at the Daily Planet. After rushing back to her apartment to get ready while avoiding Lucy and Jimmy who had awkwardly fallen asleep on the couch with an old movie in the living room, they'd gone by Metropolis General's clinic to get a blood test. After receiving the positive result, the doctor on staff had written a prescription for prenatal vitamins and recommended a few doctors in the area for her to follow-up with.

"I'm sure the Chief will understand," Clark said placing a protective hand over her abdomen. She couldn't help but smile at the gesture.

She wrapped her arms around her chest as another thought occurred to her. "I'm not telling him yet," She shook her head. "It's too soon. I don't want to jinx it."

"I know," he smiled, leaning in to kiss her, "I just meant we were here pretty late last night..."

"Yeah," She nodded, running her hands up and down her arms as she stared at the elevator doors that were taking forever to open up to the newsroom. "It's not that I don't want to. I do. I will. Just not now. Last time I ended up on dog shows and obituaries for seven months. I can only imagine what he'll do this time around," she explained.

"Things are different this time," he said softly, leaning in to kiss her. "Besides, I can't have my partner benched before we have time to land the story of the year on EPRAD, can I?"

Ralph laid a stack of printouts on Cat's desk with a yawn. "Here. Fresh off the printer."

"Thanks, Ralph," Cat said, flipping through the photos one by one.

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered. "Do me a favor? Next time you need a lackey get Olsen or one of the interns to help you. I lost a good four hours of sleep doing this." Cat rolled her eyes, watching Ralph saunter back to his desk. The man was as annoying as all get out but when it came to sniffing out dirt he had the nose of a blood hound.

She cast a glance toward the elevator, watching as Lois stepped out of the elevator with Clark in tow. To the outside observer, Lois looked completely professional. Her no-nonsense attitude rang in the air as she walked to her desk and began barking orders to the interns in research that got in her way. Yes, to the outside observer she was professional.

To Cat, however, who knew better, she was a mess. She saw the worry lines around her eyes were strained. The tension in her eyes gave away the anxiety Lois was hiding. Clark placed a hand on her shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze and her mask faded somewhat, giving him a smile before leaning in to kiss him – a gesture that not many around the office who hadn't been around years ago were used to. During the past five years, Lois had built up a reputation of being a force to be reckoned with. She worked hard and had earned the respect and accolades that came with it. The softer side, though, that was reserved for a select few: herself, Perry, and of course, Clark Kent.

Cat caught the gaze of the newest intern, Brady, who was standing by her desk, watching the scene unfold in shock. "New guy's got a way with the ladies, huh?"

Cat laughed, unable to hold it in. "Oh, Brady, if you only knew..."

"He moves fast," Brady said in admiration.

"Only with one lady," Cat corrected. "That is Clark Kent. Lois's fiancé." She looked back over at the couple long enough to catch Clark placing a hand on Lois's abdomen as he whispered something in her ear.

"Since when?" Brady asked, "Everyone said..."

"Since before your time," Cat said, rolling her eyes as she watched Lois laugh, turning to look at Clark, and just as quickly he removed his hand from her abdomen. She looked back at Brady who seemed oblivious to the exchange.

"Guess things are gonna be different around here, huh?" Brady asked.

"You have no idea," Cat smiled, watching as Clark leaned in to kiss Lois once more ... and once more placing a hand over her abdomen.

"Preliminary reports on the Annihilator," Nigel said, setting a folder down on Lex Luthor's desk.

"Excellent," Lex said, reading through the file in his hand. "If everything goes according to plan we'll have a new age of military weaponry at our disposal."

"Yes, having satellite aerial vision to annihilate any enemy from the Space Station is a stroke of genius, sir," Nigel mused with a half-smile.

"With Ladderman dead. There'll be no one left at EPRAD to point to Dr. Baines as a conspirator either," Lex said proudly. "She's the only one left that can point the finger at me, and after tomorrow night she won't be an issue."

"Is that...?" Clark began, staring at the still images on display in the conference room.

"Dr. Baines," Lois said accusingly as she took one of the pictures off the pin holding it up. "I knew there was a reason I didn't like her."

"She met with Lex last night a little bit before I called you," Cat said, throwing an annoyed look at Lois.

"Why were you following Baines?" Lois asked.

"I wasn't," Cat explained. "I was watching Lex Luthor's place to see if anyone from EPRAD would show up."

"You didn't buy the manure he was selling either, huh?" Perry asked, examining one of the images with a magnifying glass.

"If he's working with Dr. Baines then he's probably behind the sabotage," Clark concluded.

"I don't doubt it," Perry said, "but we're lacking a key ingredient to turn that theory into something we can print."

“Hard evidence,” they all said in unison.

“Hey, I don’t make the rules,” Perry shrugged. “We can’t go around printing theories without any facts to back it up. We’d be no better than the National Inquisitor. You all could kiss your careers goodbye. You know what he’s capable of.”

“All too well,” Lois said, shaking her head. “So what do we do?”

“Drop it,” Ralph suggested, entering the conference room with a video and files in hand.

“What?” Clark gasped, uncertain he’d heard him correctly. “You can’t be serious!”

“You’ve been out of the loop for a while Kent. You don’t know what Luthor’s capable of. These two...” he gestured between the Lois and Cat, “seem to think they’re untouchable. They forget what happened to a few well-respected journalists that thought they could go up against him. Drop it.” With that, he dropped the file on the table. “Some of the video footage stills had to be redone.” He explained then turned to leave the conference room, leaving them to contemplate what he’d just said.

“Chief...” Lois began.

“You know better than anyone what he’s capable of,” Perry began, shaking his head.

“You cannot be serious!!” Clark fumed angrily.

“Now, just hold your horses both of you,” Perry interjected, “All we have are theories, and a Space Station set to launch next Friday.”

“How about a murder?” Lois added.

“You have no proof.” Perry reminded her. “I can’t have you risking your neck and the paper’s reputation on a theory...”

“How is this risking the paper’s reputation?” Clark asked, confused.

Cat sighed, “The last paper that ran a story about Lex Luthor ...or even began to research him got drug through the mud. They were attacked from all sides until they lost all credibility.”

“He fights dirty,” Lois explained solemnly.

“If all of you know this then why not go to the police? Why hasn’t he ever been questioned in some of his shady dealings?”

Lois shifted uncomfortably in her seat, and Perry interjected, “Well, the problem is the amount of control he has over Metropolis.”

“What do you mean?” Clark asked.

“Police, detectives, District Attorneys, the Governor, even some senators are rumored to have been bought by Lex Luthor.” Cat explained.

“What?” Clark shook his head in disgust. “How has he gotten away with this for so long?”

“No one’s willing to go on the record against him,” Perry explained, placing a supportive hand on Lois’s shoulder for a moment.

“So, he’s just able to get away with anything, and no one is going to do anything about it?” Clark asked in disbelief.

“Someone needs to do something...to stop him.”

“We’ve tried.” Cat scoffed. “We can’t ever find anything to stick. No one is willing to go against him because they all know what would happen if they did.”

“This is Brett Aldridge coming to you live from this morning’s press conference at the United Nations. The members of the United Nations have been in deliberation all night after the catastrophic explosion that claimed the life of Captain Jack Ladderman and his crew late yesterday afternoon. Lex Luthor, self-made billionaire has submitted a proposal to replace Prometheus with Space Station Luthor, promising to meet EPRAD’s deadline. We will hear today what that decision is...”

“Are you sure you want to go in there?” Clark asked, looking at Lois apprehensively as she readjusted the EPRAD engineering

suit she’d borrowed.

“I’ve got a mask this time. I’ll be fine.” Lois reassured him, “Just see what you can find, and I’ll see if I can get anyone to talk.”

Clark nodded, turning to walk behind a secluded fenced in area marked ‘REPAIR.’ Lois finished adjusting her mask then turned to the building marked ‘RESEARCH’ and closed the door behind her. Clark was going to scan the building and hopefully find some proof that Baines or someone at EPRAD knew about the sabotage to Prometheus. She was intent on taking as many photos of the damaged space shuttle as she could.

“What are you doing here?” A familiar voice from behind her asked.

She turned around and saw Dr. Baines standing in front of her with her arms crossed over her chest defiantly. Putting on her best brave face she stared her down, “I know yesterday’s accident wasn’t an accident. I’m just trying to find out what happened.”

“By breaking in?” Dr. Baines accused.

“You lied to me about that report.” Lois shot back.

“I never got a report!” Baines argued. “Platt was Looney Toons! I don’t know what report he’s talking about.”

“He knew enough to know that the Messenger was going to explode,” Lois said coolly.

Dr. Baines was quiet for a moment before she replied softly, “I know. I’ve been combing through the wreckage for hours trying to find a cause...Jack. He was a friend. Naturally, we’re all still in a state of shock. I don’t suppose I have to tell you what a catastrophe the explosion was. Jack Laderman... he was one of our best. Three kids, his wife, Anna...”

Lois watched Baines’s expression soften as she spoke. She cared. She genuinely cared. “You seem to care about them a lot,” Lois observed.

“I worked with them for years,” Baines pointed out. “Of course I care.”

“Then help me. All I want is the truth. I just want to find out what happened and get Ladderman and his family the justice they deserve. Don’t they deserve that?”

“I...” Baines began.

“Please...” Lois pleaded with her.

The soft tone that had come over Baines washed away, replaced with a cold calculating expression. “I’m sorry Ms. Lane. I can’t help you. We won’t know the cause of the explosion until we examine the burned wreckage...as I told you before there is no press allowed. Please leave.”

Lois nodded, pulling out her card. “If you change your mind.” With that, she left.

Back in Baines’s office, Clark was moving at super-speed, scanning document after document that had been filed away, keeping an ear out for anyone that might walk in on him.

Hopefully, Lois would be able to get enough photos of the wreckage to piece together what had happened and prove Dr. Platt’s theory correct. He just needed to find that report.

Nothing.

No reports at all from Platt.

No reports.

The wheels began to turn in his head.

Why would there be no reports at all from Platt? Baines was his supervisor. Surely he had to send in weekly reports on the progress of the Messenger’s work. There was nothing here. Almost like someone was trying to hide something.

A noise outside the door caught his attention. Realizing he wouldn’t have enough time to leave the office without being seen he floated up to the ceiling, hoping to avoid detection.

Dr. Baines entered her office, looking around the room as she laid a card down on her desk. He read the card and recognized it immediately. It was Lois’s.

She pulled out her phone and began to dial. After a few minutes she left a message, “Yes. Mr. Luthor, please? Tell him it’s urgent. What? What do you mean he isn’t accepting any calls? Yes, I do mind...” She slammed the phone down in anger.

He watched as a calm washed over her face and she pulled what looked like a flash drive from her purse. “Hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Isn’t that what they always say?”

She pulled up a file on her computer, and he scanned it. ‘Bingo.’ He thought to himself. It was Platt’s reports. All of them. He waited as she sent the files to her printer and grabbed the papers from her printer. Once she was done, she removed the flash drive and took it with her down the hall.

Clark waited a few minutes, scanning across the hall where he saw her getting on an elevator with the papers in hand. He floated down and approached the printer. Smiling to himself, he hit the reprint button and watched as report after report began to print again. Once he was done he folded the papers up into his back pocket and headed out to find Lois.

On their way back to the Planet, Clark explained what had happened in Dr. Baines’s office. “We still have to get more evidence, but this does prove the reports were sent to Dr. Baines. I used to read scientific journals, but even I can’t understand what he’s trying to say in some of these reports. We’ll probably have to have someone decipher it.”

Lois scanned the report in his hand before handing it back to him as she scanned the crowded street in front of them. “We’ll call Dr. Klein at S.T.A.R. Labs. He can help make heads or tails of it.”

“Dr. Klein?” he asked, curious.

“A source... well, friend. He helped make sense of a lot of the terminology in the autopsy report after Jamie died,” she explained softly.

He caught her gaze before turning away. Another thing he hadn’t been there for. “I’m glad he was able to help. I guess when we get back we’ll give him a call.”

Lois reached for his hand and smiled, giving it a gentle squeeze. “Hey, things are different this time.”

“I know.” He sighed, turning toward the crowd of cars still unmoving in front of them. He glared at the meter in the cab that was still ticking away. “Maybe we should just walk?”

“Sure,” Lois nodded.

“How much?” Clark asked, pulling out his wallet.

“Twenty even.” The cab driver said, holding his hand out.

Lois groaned but Clark handed him the money then opened the door and helped Lois out. “I wonder what’s holding everyone up,” He observed as they walked the remaining few blocks toward the Planet.”

“Who knows?” Lois shrugged, “Traffic in Metropolis is one of those everyday mysteries.”

As they turned the corner, they saw a crowd of people surrounding the middle of the street where a construction crew had part of the street cut off. “I guess that answers that question,” Clark observed, watching as one of the men with a yellow vest and hard hat lowered himself down into the open manhole with a toolbox in his hand and a light in the other.

“You’d think they’d wait until after normal working hours to do stuff like...” Lois was cut off by the sound of a loud explosion.

One of the men in charge began ordering everyone to move, “Everyone! Step back!”

Clark saw the steam from the explosion simmering from the manhole and sparks electrified the metal rails around the manhole. “There’s a man down there! Call the fire department!” The supervisor called out.

“Clark...” Lois breathed. He scanned below and saw the man that had lowered himself down a few moments ago caught on an electrical wire that was almost electrocuting him.

Without thinking, he moved toward the back of the crowd

where there was another manhole away from the explosion and lifted up the cover, climbing down into the sewer line at super-speed and pulling him from the wire that had been exposed. He laid him down on the concrete, examining him for any breaks. He listened for signs of breathing and a heartbeat. When he didn’t hear any rhythm of the man’s heart he grabbed the exposed electrical cord, using himself as a conductor to jump start his heart. The man let out a long, muffled gasp as he choked on the air he was struggling to breathe. Satisfied he would be okay to move, he then moved him to the manhole he’d come down from, lifting him up into the awaiting arms of the supervisor and fire department. Then at super-speed, he returned to the surface next to Lois.

Lois cast a worried glance at him, “What did you just...?”

Before she could finish her question, the man he rescued shouted, “That man. He... he saved me.” He was pointing at him, Clark Kent. He shifted nervously as Lois’s eyes widened at him.

“I, uh,” he stammered, trying to ignore the man’s accusations. “He’s delirious.”

Lois gave him a forced smile, “Obviously.” Then she patted at his suit that was now covered in ash and residue from the sewer he had been in a few minutes ago. Thankfully no one in the crowd seemed to take the man’s accusations seriously.

He caught Lois’s gaze for a minute. She was mad. “He didn’t have time to wait,” he explained.

“Maybe next time you should change...” She reminded him, with a stern look, “...so you don’t ruin your suits.”

He sighed, looking down at his now ruined suit, “Yeah,” he muttered, turning the corner with her toward the Planet.

After rescuing that construction worker, Clark had left to go home and change, leaving Lois to take the reports he’d found to S.T.A.R. Labs to try to decipher what Platt was trying to say in them. “So, what do you think?” Lois asked nervously.

“I think whoever wrote these last three reports was on drugs.” Dr. Klein said wryly.

“He was,” Lois said. “Whoever is behind the sabotage drugged him to discredit him.”

“Oh,” Dr. Klein nodded, scanning the reports. “That makes sense.”

“What about the Messenger sabotage? Is there anything in there about that?” Lois pressed.

“I don’t know.” Dr. Klein crinkled his nose, scanning the reports in front of him. “I’ll have to read through a bit and see what I can translate. Do you really think someone is trying to sabotage Prometheus?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Lois sighed, crossing her arms over her chest as she paced around Dr. Klein’s lab. “I think Dr. Platt discovered what they were doing and called them out on it. And now his life and everyone he’s close to are in danger. I just need some proof before I can do anything about it.”

“And you think this is your proof?” Dr. Klein asked.

“It’s all I’ve got,” Lois explained.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Dr. Klein sighed, taking the stack of papers and pulling out a notepad to begin.

Nigel set a stack of photos on Lex’s desk, “It seems we have a problem, sir,”

Lex sifted through the photos, and his eyes narrowed. “Antoinette went to the police?”

“Thankfully, she reported your involvement to a Detective Wilson that is currently on the payroll,” Nigel explained as Lex continued to sift through the photos. “There’s more.”

“More?” Lex prompted.

“The report she ‘lost’ from Platt? She found it and showed it to Metropolis P.D.,” Nigel explained.

“Who has the report now?” Lex asked.

“Dr. Baines. She refused to leave it with Detective Wilson,” Nigel said calmly. “What do you want me to do, sir?”

“Do what you have to,” Lex said coldly.

“Yes, sir,” Nigel nodded before turning to leave.

Clark reentered the newsroom, finding Lois in the conference room sifting through a shoebox of notes. He knocked on the door as he opened it, “What’s all this?” He asked, taking a seat next to her.

“Platt’s supposed report.” Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair as she stared at the scattered papers.

“What did Dr. Klein say?” He asked.

“The last three reports Platt wrote up were illegible so he’s working on deciphering it as best as he could. It’s just going to take time. I’m trying to make heads or tails of this ‘report’ Jimmy picked up from Platt this afternoon. Unfortunately, it doesn’t look like that’s happening any time soon.”

“Here,” Clark grabbed one of the notebooks that had scribbled markings in it and lowered his glasses to scan the pages at super-speed before setting it down.

Lois looked at him with a raised eyebrow before asking, “Anything?”

He tapped his thumb on his chin for a minute. “He keeps talking about some boss in the notebooks. ‘The boss is the drugs’.”

“‘The boss is the drugs’? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“I know,” Clark’s eyebrows furrowed as he reached for another notebook and scanned it as well, “There it is again. He’s trying to tell us something.”

“Couldn’t it be just delirium?” Lois asked.

Clark shook his head, “I doubt it. It’s the same phrase over and over again. If it were the drugs, his phrasing would be sporadic and similar, but not the same every time.”

“Maybe we should pay Dr. Platt another visit. See if he can help decipher this?” Lois suggested, throwing the papers and notebooks she’d pulled out of the box back into it.

Lois and Clark approached Dr. Samuel Platt’s apartment warily, eying the sketchy crowd that stood a few feet away from Platt’s apartment building with caution. “Just keep walking,” Lois advised, taking his hand in hers as she climbed the three steps to Platt’s door and knocked, “Dr. Platt?”

No answer.

She turned the knob, and the door cracked open. She glanced back at Clark before taking a step inside. Something flickered from across the room. Lois glanced toward the corner of Dr. Platt’s office where they had been interviewing him the day before and gasped at what she saw, “Clark...”

In the corner was Dr. Platt tied to a chair with his feet sitting in a bucket of water and an electrical cord positioned in the water, slowly electrifying him. At super-speed, Clark moved toward Platt and removed him from the electrical currents. Lois watched in amazement as he broke the binds that held Platt in the chair with ease and lifted him from the chair.

A sharp click could be heard, and a disguised voice echoed throughout the room, “Bad boy... You’ve just triggered your own death.”

Before she knew what had happened, she felt something push her to the ground as the sound of an explosion echoed around her. The air filled with the smell of burnt C-12 and she instinctually reached for her abdomen, sighing in relief when she felt Clark’s hand already there.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you. I’m not going to let anything happen to you,” he whispered in her ear.

She lifted her head up and gasped when she saw the remnants of what was Dr. Platt’s apartment. “Is he...?” She asked cautiously.

He shook his head, pointing to the other side of her where

Platt’s unconscious pale body laid. “He’s still breathing. We’ve got to get him to a hospital.”

Lois glanced at Platt’s trembling body, “I’ll call the police.”

Five Years Ago...

Lois poured over her notes from her interview with Anthony Taylor earlier and began pinning note cards to the map she had on the bulletin board in the conference room — pictures of suspected captains and lieutenants involved in the gun-runner scheme she’d come across. Mr. Taylor had insisted he wasn’t involved. He’d told her to talk to ‘the boss’, but who was the boss?

“What do we have here, Chéri?” Claude crooned from behind her. She flinched, pulling away from him when he took a few steps toward her.

“None of your business,” she replied coolly, grabbing her notes.

He reached for one the notebooks on the conference room table. “Are you sure there isn’t anything I can help with? Lighten the load?”

She jerked her notebook back from him. “No, thank you.”

He took another step toward her, and she grimaced as the scent of his aftershave hit her nostrils. He ran a hand down her spine, and she flinched, pulling away from him. “What do you think you’re doing???” She accused angrily.

He ignored the question, “You’re working awfully hard lately. How about you let me take you to dinner?”

“How about I don’t,” Lois snapped irritably.

“Oh, come on, you could surprise yourself and have fun,” he smiled at her.

“I don’t think so,” Lois said gathering her things. He came closer, and she grimaced again, feeling a wave of nausea wash over her. She threw her things to the floor and sprinted to the nearest wastebasket a few feet away, but not soon enough.

“You Salopè!” He fumed angrily as she emptied her stomach contents into the waste basket. “These are imported!” She took a deep breath, wincing as she spotted the splatter of liquid on Claude’s Italian loafers. “You did that on purpose.”

Her eyes narrowed at him, and she glared, “If I could control it, I’d do it on you right now...” She set the waste basket back down, taking a shaky breath. With that she grabbed her notes and left, slamming the door behind her. She stopped by where Joe, the janitor, was coming out of the men’s bathroom with a mop bucket and whispered, “Joe, I’m really sorry. I had a... situation in the conference room.”

“Another one?” The elderly man looked at her in concern. “You sure this is just nerves, Ms. Lane?”

“I... I don’t know,” she grimaced, taking a shaky breath.

“I’ll take care of it. Don’t worry,” he said, pushing his cleaning cart to the side as he hung a new mop head on the mop. “You should probably get yourself checked out,” he called over his shoulder.

“Probably,” she nodded. “Thanks.”

That was the third time in the last week. She needed to see a doctor. She knew that, but seeing a doctor wasn’t high on her list of priorities. She was so close to cracking this story wide open. She knew it. If she stopped, then she’d have to deal with everything she’d been holding back for the past few months. She wasn’t ready to do that. She wasn’t ready to think about Clark right now. She wasn’t ready to think about Smallville. She just wanted to keep working.

Asabi knocked on Lex Luthor’s door, announcing his presence. Without looking up, Lex called, “Come in, Asabi.” He was pouring over reports on his desk, scribbling notes on the margins with a scowl on his face.

“It seems we have a problem, Mr. Luthor,” Asabi began cautiously.

“What is it?” Lex asked, narrowing his eyes at Asabi as he leaned back in his chair, waiting for him to continue.

Asabi laid a few surveillance photos on the desk for Lex to see of Lois Lane talking to Anthony Taylor, owner of the Metro Club and leader of the Metro Gang outside the club. “It seems your dealings with Mr. Taylor and his gun runners in Southside have begun to come to light.”

Lex picked up the photo and frowned. “Ah, Ms. Lane,” he sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Keep her under surveillance but do nothing more. I’ll handle her myself.”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor,” Asabi nodded, stepping out of his office.

After her confrontation with Claude, Lois thought it best to get out of the office to avoid any other altercations. Her stomach was still in knots. She seemed to be more and more sensitive to smell lately. She wasn’t sure what that was all about. Her temper was shorter. Her moods were more and more drastic. She wasn’t dealing with what happened in Smallville very well. She knew that. Her stomach churned again, and she winced.

She stood in the aisle at the local drug store trying to find something to help her stomach. Looking at the signs posted over the aisles she spotted the aisle she was looking for and found the digestive health section. ‘Stomach pain. Bloating. Nausea...’ she read off the treatments on one bottle and grabbed it heading toward the checkout when she came face to face with a large poster board sign with a woman holding her stomach and three words in large black type printed above her. “Are You Pregnant?”

For a split-second, she began to contemplate the possibility before shutting it down. ‘Of course, you’re not pregnant. You’re on the pill...No, you were on the pill. You stopped taking it after what happened in Smallville...’

She glanced around the empty aisle to make sure no one was watching her before grabbing the pink box on the shelf and turning on her heel to head toward the register.

Anthony Taylor looked around as he stepped out of the Metro Club talking with one of his lieutenants. His limo pulled up, and he nodded to the driver as she opened the door for him. Must be a temp. He thought to himself as he slipped inside. He pulled out his phone to call his daughter, Toni. “We’re heading out now. Be sure Johnny is ready.”

Before he could finish his call a distinct scent filled his nostrils, and he grimaced, coughing in panic. He dropped the phone, reaching up to bang onto the glass. He tried the door handles, and they were both locked. The windows were locked as well. The gas continued to fill the limo.

“No, no, you don’t understand...”

Lucy was sitting on the couch sifting through her notes on Criminology 101 when Lois opened the door to the apartment slamming it behind her and leaning against it for support as she took a deep breath. “You’re home early,” Lucy observed cautiously.

“I feel sick,” Lois said shakily.

Lucy looked at her with concern. “Do you need to lie down?”

Tears glistened in the corner of her eyes, and she shook her head adamantly, pulling out a familiar pink box. Lucy’s eyes widened, “Lois?”

“I haven’t taken it yet,” Lois said hurriedly. “If I do, then ...” Her beeper went off, and she silently cursed, pulling it out of her purse. She grimaced as she looked at the screen, “I’ve got to go.”

“But Lois...” Lucy began to argue.

“Do you have class tonight?” Lois asked, looking at her pleadingly.

She did have class, but the look on her sister’s face told her she was needed more with Lois than at class. She shook her head, offering a small smile. “Do you think you could sit with me when

I take this test? I don’t think I can...” Her beeper went off again, and she hung her head. “I’ve got to go.”

Before she could protest or respond, Lois had disappeared again. Lucy picked up the pink box Lois had laid on the table and sighed, reading the label on the box, ‘First Response Pregnancy Test.’

“What’s going on?” Lois asked as she stepped into the conference room where Perry and Claude, were huddled around a chalkboard with what looked like a sketch of the Metro Club’s hierarchy. “What are you doing?” She accused, recognizing some of the names from her own notes.

“Claude got us a big one-Gun running scheme.” Perry explained, scribbling another name on the board.

“Excuse me??” Lois fumed angrily.

“Yes, well while you were powdering your nose, Chéri I was able to get some of my contacts in the police department to confirm ...”

“You lying, sack of...” Lois accused angrily, jabbing him in the chest with her pen. “How **DARE** you???”

“You think you’re the only one investigating the Metros? Chéri you are a lot dumber than you look...”

“Why you little...” Lois fumed angrily.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” Perry interjected. “What in the blazes is going on here?”

“That’s my story!” Lois fumed, pointing at the board with the names she’d gotten from Bill Henderson last week.

“So possessive,” Claude teased, snickering to himself. Lois narrowed her eyes at him, and he stopped. “It’s not about who got the scoop first. It’s about who pushes send.” He corrected. “I was able to confirm some names and get some information from my contacts in the Bureau...”

“You son of a...” Lois accused.

“Ah, ah, ah, language,” Claude scolded.

“**ENOUGH!!!!**” Perry roared, whistling sharply to bring their attention back to him. He turned to Lois, “Lois, why didn’t you tell me you were investigating this?”

“I was confirming everything I got from Henderson this morning,” Lois replied, glancing at him uncomfortably.

Perry then turned to Claude. “Claude, where did you get your information on this?”

“Why does it matter?” he asked, “I’ve got the sources to back up the information. This could be huge!”

Perry sighed, glancing back at Lois, “I want you two to work together on this one.”

“**WHAT???**” Lois shouted, “I’m not working with that *rat!*”

“You don’t have a choice,” Perry countered, wagging his finger at her. “You got your sources, and he’s got his. Get me the story and...”

Brian opened the conference room door, “Chief?”

“What is it, Brian?” Perry sighed, glancing between Claude and Lois skeptically.

“This just came through on the wire.” He handed Perry a folder. Perry nodded, taking the folder from him and began to scan its contents.

His eyebrows rose, and Lois looked at him in concern, “Perry?”

“Anthony Taylor. Body was fished out of Hobb’s Bay an hour ago.” Perry said, handing her the report.

“No,” Lois breathed, flipping through the report in her hands.

“I want both of you on this,” Perry ordered. “This is too big for just one reporter to handle.”

“Perry...” Lois began to argue.

“No arguments.” Perry shot back. “Get me that story.” Another knock on the door and Perry looked up.

Brian had another note, “Chief, your wife’s on line three.”

Perry nodded, “I’ve got to get that.” He turned to Lois and

Claude. "Quit fighting and start investigating."

Claude smirked at her as Perry left, "Well, I guess we'll finally have that dinner..."

She cringed when she saw him leering at her. Suddenly feeling dirty under his gaze she tugged her suit jacket closed. "In your dreams."

<<"Uh, hi, Lois Lane,"

"Clark Kent,">>

<<"Do you always have to be such a smart ass?"

"No, but I REALLY enjoy it.">>

<<"Chicken."

"Excuse me?? I am not..."

"Yes, you are. You are so afraid you might actually have a good time. No one's going to make you do something you don't want to do. Just live a little. Cut loose and have some fun. What's the worst that could happen?">>

Lois pulled herself back to reality, staring numbly at the four tests laid out in front of her on the bathroom counter. Pregnant. She was pregnant...with Clark's baby.

She fought back tears. Clark. Just thinking about him made her want to break down in tears. She couldn't afford to break down. She couldn't afford to lose focus.

<<"Where are we going?"

"To dance..."

"You know, usually people ask one another if they want to..."

"Finally speechless...">>

<<"Are you okay?"

"I think...they...drugged...me...">>

<<"You know me...jumping in without looking...I guess I should have given that scoop to the school board before printing it like you said..."

"Lois, this is NOT your fault,">>

<<"I'm not most guys,"

"No, you're not,">>

<<"Do you want to dance?">>

<<"Clark, look out!">>

<<"Lois, get down!">>

<<"There's men at my house. Men with guns...">>

<<"We've got to destroy it, Wayne!">>

<<"What's happening? Clark!!">>

<<"You're not fine."

"I'm here with you. I'm more than fine.">>

<<"He was ...shot,"

"We'll find him...I won't rest until we find him,">>

<<"What was that for?"

"Do I have to have a reason?">>

<<"If I'd known I'd get that kind of reaction I'd of proposed a lot sooner...">>

<<"Clark!!!!">>

Lois pushed the jagged memories out of her mind. She could feel the corner of her eyes burning as she fought the tears that were threatening to overcome her. How was she supposed to do this? How was she supposed to keep moving forward without him?

Her mind told her he was gone. It had been months since Smallville and Rachel still hadn't found any sign of Clark or the agents that had taken her and the Kents hostage. Her mind knew what the logical answer was, but her heart...

Her heart refused to give up on the idea that he was still somewhere out there.

<<"How many??"

"Three or four."

"You're nuts."

"You asked."

"Four kids? That is insane."

"Not all at once. I figured we'd get married. Enjoy a VERY

long honeymoon phase. Get a couple of Kerths..."

"Pulitzer."

"...and a Pulitzer. Then start practicing."

"I don't think practice is something that's required in that department."

"That's just part of the fun.">>

Lois leaned her head back against the door frame, sinking to the floor in tears as she finally gave into the tears she'd been suppressing. "Oh, Clark..."

Pregnant.

She was pregnant. She was going to be somebody's mommy. Another life was going to depend on her for everything. How? How was she supposed to do this? How was she supposed to bring a baby into the world and raise him or her without Clark? This wasn't planned. Far from it.

She'd never imagined having children. They'd talked about it theoretically, but she was sure they would have celebrated each child's life together. She imagined the look on his face when she told him she was pregnant. That gorgeous smile that had captured her heart would light up his face and ...

<<"I guess we should...talk..."

"...or not..."

"..or not...">>

<<"Is this a dream?"

"Not unless we're having the same one...">>

<<"Are you sure?"

"Make love to me, Clark Kent,">>

<<"I'm gonna start out...slow...">>

<<"Farmboy?"

"It's a compliment..."

"Whatever you say...Just don't stop...">>

<<"I told you we were gonna be late!"

"So worth it...">>

She closed her eyes, imagining his hands on her as he made love to her...just as they had so many times. When was it? The night he'd given her the ring? That was the last time they'd made love. He had been drained but had insisted he was fine...

<<"You're always saving me..."

"Someone's got to..."

"You signing up to be my personal superhero?"

"Maybe...the benefits are out of this world...">>

<<"You're messing with fire,"

"Maybe I want to get burned...">>

<<"When we're at home maybe I'll lose the bra..."

"Promise? Whose home?"

"Is that your fantasy, Mr. Kent? Me no bra?"

"No, you on my bed in my football jersey...nothing on underneath..."

"Football jersey, huh? Maybe if you're good, we'll try it out sometime...">>

<<"Just realizing how much I love you...You're gorgeous, intelligent, sexy, and I couldn't imagine my life without you, Lois Lane,"

"I love you too, Clark Kent, and I pray you never have to find that out,">>

Tears fell down her cheeks as she imagined her fiancé's hands and mouth on her body. His scent filled her nostrils as the memory of his body intertwined with hers filled her mind.

<<"Which one?"

"Which one's easier to take off?"

"You're not helping,">>

<<"I wouldn't trade a single moment, I love you so much, Lois. I ...I can't imagine my life without you in it."

"...and I love you...I've never known anyone like you...I really...love you...You know that?"

"Yeah, I love you too...I...just...I don't know. I imagine the world ...the future...I can't imagine any of it without you there..."

standing with me.”

“Marry me,”

“What... Yes.”>>

<< “Tell me what you want...”

“You,”>>

<< “I wanted this to be perfect...I love you,”

“I love you too,”

“I know technically we’re already engaged, but I wanted to do this right...I’m not sure if I’m supposed to get down on one knee, but...”

“Oh, my God...Clark,...Is that for me?”

“Yes...Do you like it?”

“It’s beautiful,”

“You’re beautiful. Lois, I love you, and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you,”

“I love you, Clark Kent, I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you,”>>

<< “Nope, remember what happened last time? We’re here to work. There’ll be time for that later.”

“I hope so,”

“Clark...Focus!”

“I am...”>>

“Clark...” She breathed heavily as she rocked her body back and forth uncontrollably, allowing the quiet sobs to escape at their own accord. How was she supposed to do this? How was she supposed to raise a baby on her own? She’d yet to establish her career at the Planet. Her parents weren’t exactly the most supportive. What would she do if her child got sick? Would Perry be accommodating? Would she be able to balance work and home without subjecting her child to the same treatment her dad had put her and Lucy through?

Could she do this without Clark?

Yes.

Did she want to?

No.

“And yet another case of arson has drawn firefighters to the Southside area here in Hobb’s Bay. That makes six in the last twenty-four hours, and still, Metropolis Fire Department officials have no leads.”

“You can’t just not tell him,” Lucy admonished watching her sister pace around the living room nervously.

“I’m going to tell him...just not yet. I’m really close to breaking this gun-runner scandal wide open. After that...” she took a deep breath, “I’ll tell Perry everything.”

“How’s the morning sickness?” Lucy asked, changing the subject. She knew there was no way to change Lois’s mind once she had made a decision.

“F-fine,” Lois said not so convincingly.

“Uh-huh,” Lucy reached for her water on the coffee table.

“When was the last time you ate?”

“I haven’t been able to keep anything down,” Lois shrugged nonchalantly.

“Lois!” Lucy yelled at her with a disapproving look.

“It’s not like I haven’t tried! I just keep...” She looked down as she trailed off.

“Lois, you’re pregnant.” Lucy reminded her.

“Yeah, I was there when the two lines appeared on that test,” Lois sighed, taking a seat next to her.

“You can’t keep running down leads like you’re invincible and you definitely can’t keep doing it without eating.” Lois sighed, and Lucy continued, “Maybe try talking to daddy? See if he has any ideas that might help.”

“Dad knows nothing about obstetric practices other than what he had during his rotations as an intern. He’s a surgeon, not an OB. Besides I really don’t feel like trying to explain everything

with Clark to him.”

“Have you found a doctor yet?” Lucy asked, changing the subject.

“Not yet.” Lois murmured. “I’m still trying to let everything sink in and figure out what I’m going to do when the baby gets here.”

“But you are going to keep it?” Lucy asked.

“Of course!” Lois snapped, seeming to be shocked at the question. “It’s the only thing I have left of Clark.” She whispered, stroking the diamond on her ring as she spoke. “This baby is a part of him. I could never...”

“I know. I’m just trying to figure out where your head’s at. It’s been two months since you came back from Smallville. Who knows how far along you are? You need to get in to see a doctor.”

“I have a list. I’m doing my research. Don’t worry, Luce, I’m not going to have this baby without a doctor,” Lois smiled back at her.

“I know. I just worry about you,” Lucy said, resting her head on her shoulder. “You’ve changed.”

“Well, I was kidnapped and held hostage while my fiancé – the father of my child – was being murdered. That changes you,” she said softly.

“You don’t know that...I mean, not for sure,” Lucy smiled reassuringly back at her. She knew her words were nothing but false hope at this point, but she hated seeing her sister so distraught.

“There’s no other explanation,” Lois said stroking her hair as she spoke. “If he were alive he would find me. He would find his parents. He would find someone. It’s been two months. I need to start facing the possibility...even if my heart doesn’t want to.”

“So, what are you going to do when the baby comes?” Lucy asked carefully. “I mean, I guess you could get mom to help...” Lois blanched at that thought and Lucy quickly regretted it. “Yeah, probably not the best idea. She’s only been sober for a year.”

“I need to tell them,” Lois said quietly.

“Who?”

“His parents.” Lois looked down at her and Lucy gave her a sympathetic look. “I need to tell them. I need to tell Mom and Dad. I need to tell Perry. I just...I don’t know how to even begin...” The tears she’d been trying valiantly to hold back escaped and began running down her cheeks. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

Lucy sat up and put a supportive arm around Lois as she cried. “I know. I know. I’m here. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere.”

“I miss him so...so...m-much.” She cried.

“I know.” Lucy rubbed her shoulders as Lois continued to cry.

Present Day...

Clark paced the waiting room of Metropolis General with Lois, waiting to hear the status of Dr. Platt’s injuries. Someone had tried to kill him. Someone had come after Platt, but who? They’d already drugged him to the point of being the laughingstock of the scientific community. No one was taking him seriously. So why?

He glanced over at Lois who was curled up with his jacket in the corner on a few of the uncomfortable waiting room chairs. He’d offered to take her home, but she’d insisted on staying. After the explosion and getting checked out by triage, she’d spent a few hours in the restroom. He wasn’t sure if it was more sickness from the pregnancy or after effects from what they’d witnessed, but he was worried about her.

Twice. Twice in one day he had given into his desire to help and put aside his own fears. The first time had been a fluke. He’d seen the man in trouble and reacted the best he knew how. He still couldn’t bring himself to bring the suit with him when he’d changed at his apartment earlier. There was that voice nagging him in the back of his mind to just ‘do it,’ but then the fears of ‘what if

begin creeping in and he'd left it at home. If he'd been wearing the suit, maybe they could have gotten Platt to the hospital sooner. Maybe he'd have been able to do more.

The minute he'd lifted Platt out of that chair and heard the clicking noise of the bomb being triggered all he could think about was getting to Lois. The fears that haunted him about being exposed to the world vanished. Platt could have seen him move at super-speed or he could have seen him use his body as a shield to protect him and Lois from the blast. He hadn't been thinking about that, though. All he had been thinking about was protecting them and doing what he could to stop the blast. Only time would tell if Platt saw anything. He seemed like a good person. He was risking his life to save the Space Station without any superpowers to fall back on. That had to count for something, right?

The doors to the waiting room opened, and he recognized Bill Henderson walking with one of the doctors that had been treating Dr. Platt. Henderson spotted them and approached with a grim expression. "How is he?" Clark asked.

"Coma," Henderson said grimly, glancing over at Lois's sleeping figure, "How's Lois?"

"Tired and sore, but nothing major," Clark explained. Henderson chuckled, and Clark ran a hand through his hair. "Someone tried to kill him. Is there anything that can be done to make sure it doesn't happen again?"

"I can see what I can do, but I can't guarantee anything," Henderson explained. "These days it's hard to tell who you can trust."

Clark shook his head in disgust, "We should have known. We should have protected him."

"How?" Henderson asked, "The guy's been in and out of institutions, attempting suicide... There's no way anyone could have predicted..."

"That his theories were correct?" Clark prompted.

"I'll put a protection unit outside his door, but right now that's all I can do," Henderson explained, "until he can wake up and tell us who did this..."

"Excuse me?" They turned and saw a young woman with auburn hair, pushing a young girl in a wheelchair. "I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm looking for Samuel Platt." Clark's face flooded with anguish when he realized who was standing in front of them.

"You must be Mrs. Platt." Henderson extended his hand to shake hers. "I'm Inspector Bill Henderson. We spoke on the phone..."

"Yes," she nodded shakily.

Henderson seemed to sense her uneasiness as she glanced back and forth between them and back to the young girl in the wheelchair. He pointed toward the double doors. "Why don't we talk over here?" She nodded and followed Henderson away from them and out of earshot.

The young girl stared at her mother for a moment then said sadly, "They tried to kill my dad." She gave him a forced smile when Clark looked at her in surprise. "She was crying on the phone, and I overheard. She thought I couldn't hear, but I did."

"I'm sorry," He knelt down, so he was eye-level with her. "You must be Amy. I'm a friend of your dad's. Clark Kent."

"Are you going to help protect the Messenger?" She asked.

"I'm gonna try," he promised.

"Yes, we are," Lois's voice said from behind him. "Hi, Amy."

"Who are you?" She asked, looking at her curiously.

"This is Lois Lane, my partner. She's helping me to work on proving your dad right," Clark explained.

"He's not crazy," Amy said.

"I know," Lois said. "We're doing everything we can to prove that and to protect him."

"Amy?" Mrs. Platt walked up to them, brushing tears out of her eyes. "We're going to go see your dad now."

"Bye," Amy waved at them as Mrs. Platt wheeled her away

calling a small thank you over her shoulder as one of the doctors escorted them back to see Dr. Platt.

"That poor girl," Lois murmured, watching them leave.

Clark placed an arm over her shoulders. "How are you doing?"

"A little sore, but fine," Lois said, leaning her head against his shoulder. "... Thanks to you." She placed a hesitant hand on his chest, "That's twice in one day. Are you okay?"

"Terrified," he breathed softly. "I was so afraid I wasn't going to get to you in time." He held her close, placing a kiss on her hair as he spoke.

"I'm okay," she managed to squeak out against his chest.

"This is Brett Aldridge coming to you live from the UN. Any moment now we're expected to hear from Sarita Gupta, the Chairperson of the UN's Scientific Advancement team." The video footage zoomed in on a table of microphones and a young woman standing in front of it dressed in traditional Hindu sari.

"Thank you all for coming," She began, looking around the room with a warm smile, "I am pleased to announce that we have unanimously decided that Space Station Prometheus will proceed."

"What about Lex Luthor's proposal?" One of the reporters asked from the crowd.

"This body would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Mr. Lex Luthor for his generous offer... but it is our firm belief that the Space Station should go forward as originally planned: a project dedicated to global cooperation for the advancement of the sciences."

Lex Luthor stared at the screen in a rage, crushing his fist through the glass display case that held the model of 'Space Station Luthor' that he'd presented to the board members just hours ago. In a blind rage, he dismantled the plastic model as the blood from his hands and wrists began to drip inside.

"What about the safety of the colonists? Can you assure the public that this next launch will be problem-free?" a reporter asked.

"We have suffered losses in the past, but we shall take extra precautions to ensure the safety of future space travelers.

However, should, any serious problems arise from this point on, we shall be forced to cancel the mission. We don't anticipate that happening. We anticipate success." Sarita explained. "The colonist launch, scheduled for next week, will proceed as planned."

Lex's facial expression changed as a new calm washed over him. Realization began to dawn on him as a plan began to form...

Five Years Ago...

"Lois, this is getting scary," Lucy said looking at the names on her sister's notepad of possible connections to the Metros gun-running schemes. "Congressmen, senators... Somalian pirates. Lois, this is dangerous."

"I know," Lois said shakily, taking a sip of her water as she leaned back against the couch.

"Why aren't you working with that partner of yours on this?" Lucy asked, sifting through Lois's notes. "I mean, Perry assigned you to work with him for a reason, didn't he?"

"Why, so he can steal my story right from under me? I don't think so." Lois shook her head adamantly. "I can handle this."

"Can you?" Lucy asked. "I don't mind introducing you to my professors to help out where I can, but this is different Lois. This is pirates and gangs... Do you know what these guys do? They smuggle kids and women in and out of various countries and sell them like a slab of meat. There is no limit to what they could do. You can't..."

"Luce," Lois cut her off, "calm down. I'm not rushing off to Somalia." She placed a supportive hand on her sister's shoulder. Placing a hand on her abdomen for a moment, she continued,

“Besides I couldn’t even if I wanted to. It’d put the baby at risk... and Claude already beat me to it.”

Lucy smiled, placing a hand over the invisible bump where her nephew or niece was growing. “Best present Clark ever gave you.”

“Lucy!” Lois laughed.

“What?” Lucy shrugged, “If it keeps you out of trouble, I’m all for it.”

Lois rolled her eyes, “You sound like Mom.”

“So what’s your plan?” Lucy asked cautiously.

“Well I can’t do anything about the Somalian pirates, but I can investigate the gun-runners here in Metropolis. Everything seems to be pointing back to the Metro Club. I’m going to go undercover and see if I can sniff out the connection,” Lois explained.

“The connection?” Lucy asked confused.

Lois pointed to the note cards on the table. “Southside fires. Organized crime focused in certain areas at certain times only. Gun-runners working out of Metropolis possibly connected to the Somalian pirates organization.”

“Didn’t the guy that was running the Metros die?” Lucy asked.

“Murdered,” Lois corrected. “His son took over, but he wasn’t the one calling the shots. He said something about a ‘boss’ that was pulling the strings.”

“Who’s the boss?” Lucy asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Schools, shops, restaurants, theaters, offices, apartments: a self-contained community. A giant step forward in urban reawakening. A new, bright jewel in Metropolis’s crown.” Lex Luthor said in front of the cameras as he unveiled the proposed changes to the Southside block in Metropolis that had recently been hit with unexplained arson attempts.

“Aren’t you worried about making such a large investment in the Southside area at this time?” Linda King from the STAR asked.

“I never worry, I act,” Lex said, simply offering a charismatic smile to her.

“But what about the fires?” Eduardo from the Daily Planet asked. “Surely you have a plan to keep your million-dollar investment safe? Or are you relying on faith, Mr. Luthor?”

There was a flicker of a scowl that crossed Lex’s face for a moment before he recovered and smiled, “We must strike at the root of this problem. When a tree is sick, you don’t merely trim its branches.”

“Instead you’d chop it down and plant a bigger one?” Linda King from the STAR asked.

“If necessary,” Lex smiled. “Southside is currently a blight on the face of our fair city. LexHarbor will change all that.”

“How do you respond to accusations that coercion was used to pressure the city council to approve this project without appropriate study?” Ralph asked.

The scowl returned to Lex’s face once more. “I don’t respond to accusations. I’m more concerned with results. I believe in this city. I believe we can empower ourselves and take back our streets from crime and gang influence.”

Inside the Metro Club, Johnny Taylor sat at the head of the board meeting table with his sister, Toni Taylor, across from him. “Rocko, you tell the Robertson boys they got one week to pay up, then you take care of it. Next, Lou, numbers. What’s the take this week?”

“Down, Johnny. Less street traffic on account of the fires, which I think it’s time we start talking about.” Lou explained shamefully, shaking his head in disapproval.

“So, you want to run the meeting now, Lou?” Johnny barked accusingly at the young man.

“Johnny, I didn’t say ...”

Johnny cut him off, “Then shut up and worry about your own problems, like getting revenue up before I give Briggs your territory.”

“Okay, Johnny, no problem., Lou tried to ease Johnny down.

Johnny looked around the room expectantly. “Anybody else?”

“Johnny, Lou’s right, I think we should discuss these fires,”

Toni spoke up.

“You got something to say, save it for later,” Johnny ordered, waving his index finger at her disapprovingly.

She let out a low breath then turned to him. “If I’ve got something to say, why shouldn’t I say it now?”

“Because you don’t talk at meetings, that’s why,” he ordered.

“Maybe I should start,” Toni quipped.

Johnny sucked in a low breath. “You hear that?” He turned to the group, looking at them menacingly before turning his attention back to Toni. “Let me tell you something, Miz M.B.A. All that piece of paper means around here is do the books and stay out of business.”

“Stay out and watch it go down the drain you mean?” Toni shot back.

Johnny’s eyes narrowed, and an uncomfortable silence fell over the room as the crowd of lieutenants eyed Johnny warily. He gave a nod, shaking his head as he looked around the room with a menacing glare before setting his gaze on Toni, “Sure, okay. Go on, tell us how stupid we all are.”

“Ever since Papa died I’ve sat back and watched my brothers run this organization...”

“That was how POP wanted it!” Johnny shot back.

“Yes, that’s what Papa wanted,” She nodded. “I’m sure he wanted Tommy to get shot in an obvious set-up by the police to take him down with our top artillery weapon suppliers...”

“That was not his fault! Don’t you go slinging mud at the dead!” Johnny warned.

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Toni continued, “Then there was Gus who got himself caught red-handed and won’t see the outside of a prison cell for the next two hundred and forty years—even with good behavior—because he couldn’t keep his trap shut to his slut of the week.”

“Hey, he’s loyal,” Johnny shot back. “He didn’t squeal.”

“No, he didn’t squeal.” She then narrowed her eyes looking at him cautiously. “Then there’s you Johnny...”

“Yeah, what about me?” he snapped irritably.

“We’re inefficient. We’re misdirected. We’re a fraction of what we could be if only we concentrated on real business instead of this nickel and dime gangster stuff. Look at us. We’re more interested in the new lounge act than in preserving the family legacy. What would Papa say?”

Johnny glared at her, pointing his finger at her once more. “Pop would tell you to find a good husband, start havin’ some babies and leave the *real* work to the *men*.”

Toni looked at him in disgust. “That’s what he did tell me, Johnny. Only he didn’t realize that you all would destroy everything he worked so hard to build.”

She got up to leave, and he pointed his revolver at her. “I’m still the head of this organization and don’t you forget it.”

With that, he emptied several rounds around her head.

Everyone in the room except for Toni ducked for cover. She stared at him unmoving “Just what we need. A cool head in charge.”

“I am *NOT* working on this story with **RALPH!**” Lois fumed angrily as she paced around her Editor-in-Chief’s office. She’d finally caught a break in her story on the Southside fires. This was the first big story she’d come across since the exposé she and Clark had worked on with Roarke and Harrington. She needed this. She needed to lose herself in her work, so she didn’t have to focus on the huge gaping hole in her life. She’d already lost her lead on the Somalian Pirates’ involvement when Claude had found

her notes on the gun-running story and gotten Perry's approval to investigate. She'd been furious. True, she couldn't chase the Somalians in her current condition, but that didn't mean she wanted Claude chasing them for her.

"You don't have a choice," Perry said, folding his hands on his desk as he spoke. "You want the story you work with a partner." She fought to suppress the blind fury that was threatening to consume her as she watched her editor destroy her undercover assignment with one mighty blow. Ralph? He wanted her to work with Ralph? The smarmy, fast-talking, sleaze ball that even Cat Grant wouldn't stoop low enough to associate herself with. That was who she was being partnered with.

"But..." she tried to argue once more, but Perry shook his head.

"Lois, the guys you're going after aren't just club owners. They're gangsters. You need back-up." He gave her a pointed look. "After what happened these last few months I want to make sure you're covered."

"Don't bring Clark into this," Lois said vehemently, wrapping her arms around her chest as she glared at him. "He has nothing to do with this."

Perry held his hands up in surrender. "Maybe not, but you're not the same. You need to have someone to help with the investigation."

"Isn't there anyone else that could help?" Lois pleaded. "I mean, Perry, come on... It's Ralph!"

"Sanchez is in Reno. Cat is in D.C. Eduardo is in Guatemala. Claude is in Somalia..." Perry pointed out. "Ralph's the only city beat reporter I've got available."

"Fine!" Lois turned on her heel and left his office, slamming the door behind her. To her dismay, Ralph was already sitting at her desk waiting for her. "Great," she muttered under her breath.

"Howdy, partner." He held his hand out for her to shake and she glared at him.

"We are not partners," Lois corrected. "This is a *temporary* assignment. Notice the emphasis on '*temporary*,'" she glared at him.

"Yeah, yeah," Ralph shrugged. "Where you wanna begin?" Ralph asked, taking a bite of his apple. The smell hit her nostrils, and she grimaced. "Something wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head, heading for the ladies' room. This was not going to be easy.

Lois frowned at her profile as she examined herself in the mirror. The slinky dress left little to the imagination. She placed a hesitant hand over her abdomen. Thankfully she'd yet to start showing yet. She was almost in her second trimester now. The morning sickness had thankfully subsided, and now she was enjoying taking some control over her body once more. It had been thrilling to hear her child's heartbeat on the monitors for the first time. Lucy had stepped up and taken it upon herself to help her with the doctor appointments and making sure she was eating healthy. She'd found a recipe book with '1000 Twenty Minute Healthy Recipes' and had insisted on trying it out. It was amusing to see her sister so excited about becoming an aunt.

She still hadn't told Perry. After losing the gun-runner story to Claude, she just hadn't had the courage to tell him. Hopefully, after this investigation was done and she'd proved herself she could break the news gently.

She peeked outside the curtain from backstage and spotted Ralph in fake beard and rugged clothes that looked like he'd found them in the local thrift shop. "You've got to be kidding me..." she muttered, watching in dismay as he made his way toward the curtain, looking around with a leering grin. "This is my life." She grimaced before grabbing him by the collar from behind the curtain to confront him. "What are you doing here???"

He smiled at her, giving her a leering glance. "I came to see

the show." He pulled out a camera, "What's your policy on cameras? Flash? No Flash?"

"Don't even think about it!" She snapped, taking the camera from his hand and tossing it in the waste basket. "You need to get out of here. You'll ruin everything."

Ralph shook his head, "I think you're forgetting the part where the Chief partnered us up on this one."

"I didn't forget," she snapped.

He gave her another glance, and she shifted uncomfortably under his gaze. "Looks like you're real close to the story."

"As a matter of fact, I am," she shot back, "Now if you don't mind..." She gestured toward the exit.

"I'm here to back you up," Ralph said nonchalantly, "...and watch the show."

"Five minutes!" The backstage hand called.

"I don't need back up, Ralph. I need you to go."

"I think you do," he shot back with a smile. "How'd you get so close to the Metros anyway?"

"I know guys who know guys," she said off handedly.

"Guys, who know guys?" he laughed. "What are you a gangster now, Lois? You gettin' cozy with Johnny Taylor?"

"Ugh! Not in this millennium!" she snapped back.

"Right," he nodded. "I forget." He pointed to the ring on her hand. "Engaged."

"Go...*AWAY!*" She hissed at him.

"Places! That means you, sweet thing," the backstage hand called again.

"Tell me what you've found out," he said crossing his arms over his chest, looking at her expectantly.

"No. I don't have time. Now scram..." she snapped irritably.

"And miss your debut? I think I'll stick around," he grinned back at her.

"Ralph, you'll stick out like a bull in a china shop," she snapped irritably.

"Maybe, maybe not. I can take care of myself, though," he shrugged. "Thanks for worrying, Partner, but... I think you're on, Sweet thing."

On stage, Lois watched as Johnny Taylor sat with a familiar man in Indian garb. The singer on stage was singing with four dancers around her. How had she gotten sucked into this assignment and agreed to do something like this?

But I ain't up to my baby tonight

'Cause it's too darn hot

It's too darn hot

It's too darn hot

Something seemed to be happening across the room. She saw four men in silver suits enter the building with some sort of blow torch on steroids pointed toward the stage. "Duck!" She called out, pushing a few of the girls down before the flames hit where they had been dancing a few moments ago.

"Tell your friends the Toasters are here to stay!" one of the men said before turning to leave with a laugh.

Present Day...

Clark stirred in a spoonful of sugar into Lois's coffee and handed it to her as they walked back to his couch in the living room of his apartment that evening. "You were right," he murmured softly, setting a cup of coffee on the coffee table in front of him as he took a seat next to Lois.

"Of course, I was," she said half-jokingly. "What was I right about?"

"I can't stand by and watch people hurting and not do anything." He lowered his head to meet her eyes. "If I had just gotten to him sooner... maybe we could have..."

"Could have what?" Lois asked. "We had no way of knowing what would happen." She leaned her head against the nook of his

shoulder. “You did what you could with what we knew.”

“They’re just going to keep coming after him...” Clark shook his head in disgust.

“Then we’ll stop them,” Lois reassured. “You did good.” She gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“It wasn’t enough,” he said softly. “It’s never enough.”

“What is?” She asked.

“Helping from the shadows...It just keeps happening...” Clark explained softly, lacing his fingers with hers as he spoke.

“You can’t save everyone, Clark,” Lois tried to reassure him.

“I also can’t put you in danger like that again,” he said solemnly.

“What are you talking about?” She asked.

“I panicked. I hesitated because I was afraid of Platt seeing me. If I hadn’t...” He lowered his head in shame. “It was pure luck that nothing happened to you.”

“Clark...” Lois reached up to stroke his cheek reassuringly.

“I can’t take that chance again,” he said solemnly.

“But you just said...” She began to argue.

“I know,” he sighed. “I can’t stand by and watch people hurting knowing I can do something to help. I’m not going to.”

She smiled up at him, “You’re going to start using the disguise.”

“We still have to figure out how to do this because, right now, I don’t have the slightest clue...The coverage from Nightfall is still all over the news...”

Lois smiled, “Just leave that to me. I’m sure we can come up with something they’ll buy.”

“I guess I need to talk to mom about getting some more suits made. I only have the one...” She leaned up to kiss him, stroking his cheek as she smiled against his mouth. “It’s not going to be easy.”

“No, but it’s a step forward,” she said reassuringly. “No more letting Trask and his men control our lives.”

He smiled, meeting her gaze as he let out a sigh of relief. “I like the sound of that.”

“Me too.” She leaned in to kiss him.

“I’m still not so sure about this ‘Superman’ name...” he began.

“Really? I kinda like it.” She toyed with his tie seductively. “Definitely suits you.”

Outside of Dr. Platt’s room, a man watched from a distance as Mrs. Platt and Amy left, leaving only the officer on duty and the doctors and nurses tending to him. He watched as one of the nurses entered Platt’s room. A few minutes later she left, giving him a wink before turning down the hall.

Alarms began to blare, and the officer on duty stepped aside as doctors began working on reviving Dr. Platt. He smiled to himself. His work here was done.

Five Years Ago...

“Chief, talk some sense into her!” Ralph complained as Perry made his way into the conference room.

“What now, Ralph?” Perry asked, mild irritation apparent in his tone.

“She almost got herself killed last night...and me in the process...” Ralph began.

“If you can’t stand the heat then stay out of the story,” Lois shot back. “Chief, we got a huge break last night...”

“Oh, yeah, great break!” Ralph sneered, “I’ve got the burnt hair on the back of my neck to prove it.”

“Oh, quit complaining!” Lois shot back. “No one made you come to the Metro Club last night. I told you to leave...”

“And let you scoop me? I don’t think so...” Ralph shot back.

“Enough, both of you!” Perry shouted. “Ralph, it’s the Metros, and there are vandals going around burning buildings. If you don’t

want in on the investigation, let me know, and I’ll reassign it.”

“But Chief...” he began to argue.

“End of discussion,” Perry ordered. Lois couldn’t help but smile at Perry’s directions. “Lois, that doesn’t mean you can take unnecessary risks.”

“I’m fine. I’m perfectly placed. No one suspects a thing.” Lois reassured him. The cell phone she’d been using for the Metro Club rang, and she reached for it, “Loi-Lola Dane.” She said, covering with a sultry whisper. Ralph gave her an eyebrow wiggle, and she glared at him.

“Sure. Sounds great,” she nodded before hanging up the phone.

“Anything interesting?” Ralph asked.

“Just debuting as the new singer at the Metro Club tonight.” She gave him a warning glare. “Don’t even think about it.”

“But...” Ralph began to argue.

“You nearly blew my cover last night,” Lois shot back.

“Lois, you can’t go in there without backup,” Perry warned.

“Fine. Get me someone other than Ralph.”

“The first thing we gotta do is find out who these guys are and arrange for a little payback,” Johnny began.

“I don’t think so,” Toni interrupted

“Hey, I’m talking,” Johnny argued.

“Not any more. Your days of speaking for this organization are through. You should’ve seen this coming, and you should’ve taken steps to protect us *before* it happened. As of now, you’re out,” Toni explained.

“Says who, you?” Johnny laughed.

“Let’s leave it up to the boys,” Toni said smugly as all the lieutenants stood behind her one by one. Johnny’s eyebrows rose in surprise, and she narrowed her eyes at him, “Take a vacation, brother. A long one.”

“Quit it!” Lucy scolded as Lois reached for another spoonful of the soup simmering in the Crockpot. “It’s still got to simmer for another hour.”

“I can’t help it. I’m starving,” Lois said, taking another spoonful.

“Here.” Lucy handed her an orange.

“You’re no fun,” Lois argued half-heartedly.

“It’s good for the baby,” Lucy explained. “What time do you got to go in?”

“A couple of hours.” Lois glanced at the clock.

There was a hard knock at the door, and she frowned, padding her way to the front door, “I swear, if that’s Ralph...” She opened the door and was surprised to find Detective Bill Henderson standing outside her door. “Bill? What are you doing here?”

“Can I come in?” he asked, pointing toward her apartment.

She nodded, “Sure.”

He stepped inside the apartment and closed the door behind him. He glanced at Lucy warily for a moment and then back at Lois. Lucy realized his hesitation. “Uh, Luce, could you give us a minute?”

Lucy sighed, giving Henderson a warning glare. “Don’t do anything to stress her out.” She then went into her bedroom, leaving Henderson staring at his feet while Lois stared at him expectantly.

“Well?”

“Perry White called me this afternoon. Said you’re involved in an undercover investigation with the Metros...” Henderson began.

Lois sighed, “If you’re here to try and talk me out of this you can just...”

“Lois, relax,” Henderson soothed. “I’m not here to talk you out of your investigation. I’m here to help you...well, actually I was hoping we could help each other.”

“I’m not following,” Lois said, trying to get him to elaborate.

“Metros are connected to another organized crime unit in Metropolis we’ve been trying to bring down.”

“The boss?” Lois noted Henderson’s surprise when she uttered the name. “I ran across it when I was doing the research on their gun-running schemes.”

“Well, no one’s been able to pin anything on this guy, but we know he works closely with the Metros.”

“What does that have to do with me?” She asked.

He held up a wire. “I want you to wear this. It’ll help us nab him and bring down the Metros once and for all. If you get into trouble all you’ve got to do is press this button, and it’ll send a radio signal to the unit that’s watching, and backup will be on its way. What do you say?”

Present Day — Smallville, Kansas

“Hold still while I fix this hem,” his mom said, readjusting the cape off the back of Clark’s shoulders. After his and Lois’s talk, she’d convinced him to fly them out to Smallville to try and begin planning his debut and introduction to the world. She’d reiterated to him over and over on the way not to say anything about the baby yet. He hoped he wouldn’t slip up. It took everything in him not to shout it from the roof tops.

“I like that,” Lois said, tilting her head to look at him.

The collar wasn’t nearly as low as it had been on the one before this. The cape was hooked inside the suit so that the suit just pulled over the cape which was hooked around his shoulders. It definitely felt more comfortable than the other suits.

“See?” his mom said, adjusting the collar once more as she placed pin after pin around the red fabric that was hanging out. “I just need to finish hemming this one, and then I think we’ll have a winner.”

His dad set a plate of fried chicken on the kitchen table. “Who wants extra spicy?” He looked at Lois expectantly.

She gave him a pleading look. Any other time Lois would be eating anything spicy without a second thought, but with her stomach acting up due to the pregnancy, her appetite wasn’t the same. Deciding to deflect with a little humor he interjected, “Careful, Lois. Dad’s extra spicy’s ...” he gave a low whistle, “deadly.”

“I’m actually not that hungry,” Lois gave him an apologetic look.

“Okay, well just help yourself whenever you get hungry,” his dad smiled back at her, “You know where everything is.”

She nodded back at him, “Thanks, Jonathan.”

“Almost done,” his mom said, sticking another pin in the shoulder of his suit.

“Clark, what about you, son?” his dad asked.

Clark shook his head, “Sorry dad, after this afternoon I can’t really think about eating...”

His dad placed a supportive hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze. “I understand.” He took a seat at the table, setting a couple of plates out before taking a seat and grabbing a piece of chicken, “So, you think this...Lex Luthor is behind Dr. Platt’s attempted murder?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said solemnly. “It’s way too convenient. I know that.”

“He’s trying to push for his Space Station to go up in Prometheus’s place,” Lois said, taking a sip of her water.

“I remember you were saying something about some dirty dealings with him on one of your investigations,” his dad recalled. “Were you not able to ever prove his involvement?”

Lois glanced down at her drink for a moment. Clark watched her curiously. There was that look again. He couldn’t put his finger on exactly what it was, but he could sense there was something going on there about Lex Luthor. He watched as she fingered her glass gingerly, outlining the rim as she stared at the water before looking up at him, “No, the lead just...dried up.”

“That’s too bad,” his dad said. “Now he’s over here terrorizing this Platt guy... Sounds like a bully to me.”

“Yeah.” She brushed a stray hair out of her eyes. “We’re hoping we can prove it.”

“He plays dirty,” Clark said solemnly. “I’m hoping to be able to help where I can without being recognized will help protect the innocent lives he keeps coming after.”

‘And maybe dissuade my guilt,’ he thought to himself.

“That’s all well and good,” his dad began carefully, “but you have to remember to be careful. We still don’t know what happened to that meteorite.”

“I have to do something, Dad,” he murmured, “Dr. Platt could have been killed tonight, but if I hadn’t hesitated...”

“Clark, you’re one man. You can help where you can, but you can’t expect to protect everyone,” his mom said, eying him critically as she finished adjusting his cape. “You help where you can and when you can.”

“That’s right,” Lois chimed in. “Taking this disguise on is just so you can help but it doesn’t mean all the world’s problems are yours to shoulder.”

“Exactly!” his dad added. “You did what you could.”

He smiled back at his parents and then at Lois, “I guess you’re right.”

“Of course we’re right,” his mom reassured him, patting him on the shoulder. “Okay, that’s it. Let’s have a look...”

Metropolis, New Troy

Dr. Platt’s room was quiet. The monitors blinked a monotone beep and Mrs. Platt stared at her husband in despair. “I thought you were going to protect him!” she accused angrily.

“We’re doing the best we can,” Detective Ryder said. “We don’t know what exactly happened, but we’ve doubled security...”

“Security?” she asked in dismay. “What good is security when you don’t even know who did this? We don’t know anything!” She slammed her fist against the side of Platt’s hospital bed in anger.

“Mrs. Platt, we’re doing the best we can right now,” he pleaded with her. “I’m angry too. This is unacceptable, but...”

“Ryder?” one of the detectives knocked on the door, and they both looked toward him. “There’s a Lois Lane and Clark Kent here to see you.”

Ryder sighed, “Not now.”

“You’re not even going to talk to them?” Mrs. Platt asked.

“They’re reporters, Mrs. Platt. They mean well, but at the end of the day they’re just finishing up their story. I’m trying to help you here...”

She shook her head, “They believed Samuel when no one else would.” She grabbed her things and left. “Maybe they can help figure out who’s doing this and stop them.”

Five Years Ago...

Lois held in a breath as one of the detectives readjusted the camera that was taped to her bra strap. “You should be good to go. Just keep your bra covered and you won’t have anything to worry about.”

“That won’t be a problem,” Lois reassured.

“Okay, so this button,” She pointed at the red button taped to the front closure of her bra, “is your panic button. If anything goes wrong, press it and the surveillance unit will get notified. We’ll have someone by your side within minutes.”

“Okay,” Lois nodded, “Thanks, Detective...”

“Reed,” she said simply, “Betty Reed.”

Lois stepped out on stage looking around the room. She spotted Toni Taylor, the new head of the Metros, sitting up front with none other than Lex Luthor. She did her best not to react. Surely he wouldn’t blow her cover here in the middle of her number, right? What song was she supposed to be singing? Oh,

right...

<< “Clark...Focus!”

“I am...”>>

Hmmmm I've got a crush on someone. Guess who

I've got a crush on you, sweetie pie

All day and night time give me sign

I never had the least notion that

I could fall with so much emotion

<< “Oh, my God...Clark,...Is that for me?”

“Yes...Do you like it?”

“It's beautiful,”

“You're beautiful. Lois, I love you, and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you,”

“I love you, Clark Kent, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you,”>>

Lex stared at her with intrigue. What was he doing? Was he trying to draw attention to her? She smiled, looking around the room at no one in particular in hopes that it would distract her. This was bad. A very bad idea. She fought the urge to place a protective hand over her abdomen where her and Clark's baby was growing.

<< “Tell me what you want...”

“You,”>>

Could you coo, could you care

For a cunning cottage, we could share

The world will pardon my mush

'Cause I've got a crush my baby on you

As she sang the lyrics to the song, she fought back tears, recalling Clark's face when she'd first plowed into him at Met U. She felt her heart rate slow down and took a deep breath. She could do this.

<< “I figured we'd get married. Enjoy a very long honeymoon phase. Get a couple of Kerths...”

“Pulitzer.”

“...and a Pulitzer. Then start practicing.”

“I don't think practice is something that's required in that department.”

“That's just part of the fun.” >>

How glad the million ralph from millionaires to caddies

Would be to capture me

But you had such persistence; you wore down my resistance

I fell, and it was swell

“Crap!” She'd looked at Lex again. Why was he staring at her like that?

She needed to get out of here...but she couldn't. She was undercover. She scanned the room and noticed a couple of the Metro goons by the back door with Ralph.

“Double Crap!”

You're my big and brave and handsome Romeo

How I won you I shall never never know

It's not that you're attractive

But, oh, my heart grew active

When you came into view

Don't think about it. She told herself. Think about Clark.

Slowly she began to calm down as memories of the past two years flooded her mind. The expression on his face when she'd first kissed him. The love in his eyes when he held her after the attack from Roarke. The teasing smile he'd offered her everyday for two years. A smile she hoped their child would inherit.

<< “Best present Clark ever gave you.”

“Lucy!”>>

I've got a crush on you, sweetie pie

All the day and night-time give me sigh

I never had the least notion that

I could fall with so much emotion

“Look out! It's a trap!” Ralph called from the corner of the club.

Lois looked around, not sure what he could be referring to.

“Trap? What was a trap?” She saw no sign of anything amiss.

Opting to finish her number she gave a warm smile to the crowd and finished the last line.

Could you coo, could you care

For a cunning cottage

That we could share

The world will pardon my mush

'Cause I have got a crush, my baby, on you

Present Day...

Lois took a seat next to Clark in the conference room, handing Mrs. Platt a bottle of water. “Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Mrs. Platt. I'm so sorry...”

“The doctors are doing everything they can for him, but whatever they stuck him with...They're not sure he'll recover.”

“I'm sorry,” Clark said solemnly.

“They said you two were the ones that ... found him?” she asked cautiously.

“Yes,” Lois said quietly.

“He made us leave. He was sure they'd come after him. He was afraid that Amy and I would get hurt, so he sent us away.” Her voice grew shaky as she brushed a few tears out of her eyes, “Everything we worked for was for Amy. The space lab Prometheus was the only hope... and now... My husband was not insane.”

“We know that,” Clark reassured her.

“Please help me. No one will listen to me...” She said shakily.

“We're doing everything we can,” Lois reassured her. “Our biggest problem is trying to decipher his report. It's a lot of ramblings and nonsense. Doesn't make sense.”

Mrs. Platt nodded, “Samuel writes in code. A bit of paranoia of colleagues trying to steal his work.”

“Do you know anyone that might be able to help decipher it?” Clark asked.

She grew thoughtful for a moment and then nodded, “I might have something...” She jotted an address down on a piece of paper. “Can you meet me at my home? I have a lot of his old journals. They may help.”

“Any help we can get is greatly appreciated,” Clark reassured her.

“Thank you,” she said, standing up as she headed for the door.

They nodded, walking with her out into the newsroom. “We'll be in touch,” Lois reassured her.

Mrs. Platt turned to head for the elevator when she spotted a familiar face on one of the television monitors, “Isn't that Dr. Baines, Samuel's boss?”

“Hey, turn that up!” Lois motioned to Jimmy. He complied, pulling out the remote to raise the volume.

“It appears at this hour that Dr. Antoinette Baines was a victim of a car bombing this evening as she was leaving EPRAD. Officials don't know the details...”

Clark let out a long breath, glancing at Lois who reached for his hand, squeezing it gently. “He's killing everyone,” Lois muttered in a barely audible tone.

Five Years Ago...

“Lois, are you okay?” Lucy asked when she'd rushed inside the apartment in a hurry.

“Fine,” she breathed, taking a deep breath as she leaned back on the couch. “Fine.”

She didn't know what had happened. The whole place had erupted in gunfire. Thankfully she'd been able to find cover under one of the tables as she'd tried to make her way out of the club without getting hit.

“Lois, you're trembling,” Lucy observed. “What happened?”

“This was a mistake. A big, big mistake,” she said shakily.

“What was a mistake?” Lucy asked.

“I almost got shot tonight,” Lois cried, placing a hand over her abdomen. “If I... Oh, God...”

“Lois,” Lucy placed a hand over hers, “This is too dangerous.”

“I know,” she cried. “I didn’t think I...”

“You need to tell Perry,” Lucy sighed. “You need to slow down.”

Lois dabbed her eyes as she sat up. “I know. I never should have agreed to do this. I’m just so afraid of losing my edge... my big break.”

“I don’t want to lose my sister and niece or nephew for a story,” Lucy said quietly. “Please be more careful.”

“I will,” she promised.

“No more unnecessary risks,” Lucy added.

“I’ll do what I can, but I can’t guarantee anything,” Lois said.

A hard knock at the door caught their attention. Lois looked up in surprise.

“Expecting someone?” Lucy asked in surprise.

“Nope,” Lois shook her head.

“When were these taken?” Lex asked Asabi with a look of disapproval.

“About an hour ago,” Asabi explained, “Ms. Lane is working with the police to bring down the Metros... and the boss.” He gave Lex a warning glance.

“I see,” Lex took a puff from his cigar. “Well, I guess we need to teach Ms. Lane what happens when you get too close to the fire.”

“Ms. Lane,” Detective Wilder stepped inside her apartment looking around.

“Something I can help you with?” Lucy asked cautiously.

“Just wanted to check and make sure your sister was okay after what went down tonight,” Wilder explained.

“Fine,” Lois said a bit too quickly.

“Undercover assignments are hard. Especially when you’re not used to them,” he explained, looking around the apartment.

“I’m gonna fix some coffee,” Lucy said pointing toward the kitchen. “I’ll be right back.”

“Do you think you got what you needed?” Lois asked. “I tried to point the camera where you could see everything...”

“Yeah,” He nodded, “We got everything we needed.”

Lois glanced at him, pacing around the living room nervously. Something seemed off. She just couldn’t put her finger on it. Her phone rang, and she reached for it, “Lois Lane.”

“Lois? It’s Perry.”

Lois gave a quick look to Wilder. “It’s my Editor. I’ll be right back.”

Not wanting to have a conversation with Perry in front of Detective Wilder, she stepped into her bedroom and shut the door. “What’s up, Chief?”

“Where are you?” Perry asked with an edge in his voice.

“In my apartment. Why?”

“There’s a leak in the department. Apparently, the whole sting operation got leaked to the boss...”

“*What???*” Lois gasped.

“Henderson just called. I need you to get to the Planet and...”

Lois stepped outside her bedroom and let out an inaudible scream when she saw her sister unconscious on the floor. “Oh, no, no, no, no...” She knelt down next to her. “Lucy?”

“Lois? Are you still there?” Perry asked.

“Perry, Lucy’s been attacked...”

“I’m on my way...”

“No, Perry...” She stopped when she felt a leather glove covered hand wrap around her throat. Her eyebrows shot up in fear.

‘No. This wasn’t happening. Not now.’

“Hang up the phone like a good little girl, and your sister just might make it out of this alive,” he whispered in her ear.

“Go to hell...” she spat angrily, elbowing him in the gut hard enough that his grip on her throat loosened just enough for her to wiggle free from his grasp.

“Oh!” He groaned, “You miserable...”

She raced to the front door only for him to grab her by the hair, pulling her away from freedom. “Nooo!!!” she cried out as his gloved hand closed around her throat once more.

“Oh, I’m going to enjoy this so much...” he taunted her, “the boss liked your song. Wanted me to send his regards...” He slapped her across the face, and she winced in pain. “Where’s the tape?” he snarled, tightening his grasp on her.

“Bite me...” she spat, trying to portray a bit of confidence she didn’t feel at the moment with his hand closed around her throat. His other hand held her wrists behind her in a vice-like grip, preventing her from escaping.

“Is that an invitation?” He teased. Her eyes widened, and he tightened his grip on her. “Don’t worry your pretty little head. All I want is the tape.”

“I don’t have it.” She snapped back, not so convincingly.

“I think you do,” he shot back, moving his hands up and down her chest. “You took the wire off.”

“Go to hell!” She snapped back.

His grip tightened on her once more, and she cringed when she felt her air supply slowly depleting. No, this couldn’t be happening. Not now.

“You miserable... Tell me where the damn tape is!” he snarled.

She could feel a weightlessness wash over her. This wasn’t fair.

She wasn’t even given a chance. No chance to do what she’d wanted. She wanted to be a mother. At least be given a chance. A bright light shone in her eyes as the memories from the last few years ran through her mind at a rapid pace.

“Clark...”

At least now she’d know for sure if Clark was dead or not.

“Go to hell!” Lucy slowly came back to consciousness and began to stir. She heard her sister from across the room. What happened? One minute she’d been in the kitchen and the next...

“You miserable... Tell me where the damn tape is!”

Her head hurt. She could feel a sharp pain in the back of her head. She looked around and spotted the lamp that had fallen from the table during Lois’s struggle. She heard her sister gasping for breath, and her grasp tightened around the neck of the lamp, feeling the metal base in her hands she lifted herself up cautiously. She fought the urge to cry out in pain.

She suppressed a whimper as she watched her sister’s lips grow blue. With one hefty swing, she raised the lamp to hit the intruder as hard as she could in the back of the head. He fell to the ground in a silent groan, releasing his grasp on Lois.

“*Lois!!!*” Lucy cried, cradling her sister’s head as she pulled her out from under Detective Wilder’s very large body. “Oh, Lois...”

She leaned over her, listening for any signs of breathing. Remembering her training from some of her required CPR certification classes she’d taken last semester, she began chest compressions, trying to force herself to stay calm.

The door opened behind her, and she heard Perry White, “Oh, my God...”

“One... two... Lois, don’t you dare give up on me...” She said, leaning down to give her breaths before returning to her chest compressions.

“What happened?” Henderson asked from behind her.

“What... do... you... think?” Lucy hissed between compressions.

“Yes, this is Detective Bill Henderson. I have a female

approximately 23 years old..."

"Lucy, why don't you let me take over?" Perry suggested, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"No, if I stop...no, no, no..." She continued to give her compressions.

"Lucy, you're bleeding..."

"I'm fine!" She screamed in tears, "Come on...Lois...*fight!* Come back to me please!"

"We've got an ambulance on its way," Henderson reassured her as she continued pumping her sister's chest at a rapid pace as she alternated between chest compressions and giving her breaths.

"Don't you dare give up on me, Lois... Fight, damnit!" she cried in despair. "Please God, no!" she cried out.

The sound of an ambulance arriving from outside reached her ears as she continued to give compressions and breaths. The world around her seemed to be going in slow motion as she kept giving her sister breaths and compressions. "Lois...Please don't leave me..." She felt a vibration against her, and she cried, "Lois, come on, you can do this. Fight. You're a fighter..." she encouraged.

Lucy cried out tears of joy when Lois coughed and her body spasm against her.

"Clark!"

"Shhh..." She held her close. "I've got you."

"My baby..." she cried in hoarsely.

"She's pregnant," Lucy whispered, looking back at Henderson and Perry who were helping the ambulatory workers set the gurney up.

"Pregnant?" Perry asked in surprise.

"Twelve weeks." Lucy nodded.

"Clark's..." Lois said softly as she was loaded onto the gurney and the ambulatory workers began working on her.

Detective Wilder sat in his hospital room, rubbing the back of his head gingerly. He was handcuffed to the hospital bed and he saw two uniforms outside. He glanced across the room and noticed his tazer and issued firearms were missing from his police duty belt that sat abandoned on the table.

"I really stepped in it now..." he muttered to himself.

"The understatement of the millennium, Detective Wilder."

He looked up and saw a tall man in a white lab coat he recognized as being one of the top lieutenants with the boss.

"I can explain..."

"I'm sure you can," he said pulling syringe out of his lab coat, "but the boss gave strict orders for you to follow and you disobeyed. We can't have that."

"I'm sorry okay. I was trying to get the tape back but the no-good tramp just wouldn't..."

The man slapped him across the face, "We won't have you disrespecting a mahila like that."

"What's going to happen to me?" Wilder asked in concern, watching the man warily.

"You're going to enjoy retirement," The man said, approaching the IV that was hooked up to him and inserting the syringe, "A very long, relaxing retirement...in the Swarga Loka where you will spend the rest of your days."

"Swarga what?"

A burning sensation began to fill his veins and he looked up in fear. "You were never supposed to lay a hand on Ms. Lane. You were supposed to issue a warning from the boss and get the tape. For your disobedience, your death will be a painful one..."

"Wha..." he croaked, unable to speak as the burning sensation filled his lungs.

"It's amazing what you can find when you have the right resources. Drugs that were rejected by the FDA because of their likelihood to cause an overdose. Drugs that can't be detected when mixed with a patient's blood stream. Drugs that can cause your entire body to shut down simultaneously in...one...minute. Once

the toxin reaches your heart it will stop beating. Your Brian, your lungs, your liver...all of them will be destroyed." The man walked toward Wilder's police duty belt and removed a microscopic chip that was hooked to the inside of his handgun holster. "It was a pleasure doing business with you Detective Wilder."

"Okay, just lie back," the doctor instructed, "This is going to be a bit..."

"Ahhh!" Lois jerked away as the cold gel hit her stomach.

"...cold." She smiled back at her.

"No kidding?" Lois said sarcastically, her voice hitched with a slight squeak. Lucy gave her a warning glare and she stopped herself, "Is the baby okay?"

"Let's take a look here..." she said, rolling the wand over her gel covered belly. The sound of fast rhythm filled the room and Lois let out a sigh of relief. "You hear that?" The doctor smiled at her.

"Thank God," Lois breathed a sigh of relief, reaching for Lucy's hand to squeeze it.

"Is the baby okay?" Lucy asked. "She wasn't getting any oxygen and..."

"It looks like this little one is fine. Whatever your body went through you seemed to have been affected by it more than the baby," the doctor reassured her. "You're very lucky. This one has a strong will to live."

She handed Lois a few wipes to clean the goo off of her, "Be sure to follow up with your OB as soon as possible."

Lois nodded, "I will."

Lucy gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "How are you feeling?"

"Like someone just tried to kill me?" Lois sighed, her voice was still scratchy from her ordeal, "Luce, I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't..." She felt the tears stinging the corner of her eyes. "You saved my life...mine and this little one's. I'll never forget that."

"I'm just sorry I wasn't able to get to you sooner," Lucy whispered tearfully. "I still can't believe this... That guy was a cop!"

"I know," Lois said hoarsely.

"Why don't you try and get some rest?" Lucy said, patting her leg. "You've been through a lot. We can talk tomorrow."

"I saw Grandpa James," Lois said in a soft whisper.

"What?" Lucy asked, looking at her in surprise.

"There was this big flash and I saw him. He told me it wasn't time and then I woke up," Lois whispered hoarsely.

"Grandpa James?" Lucy made a funny look.

"I know it sounds crazy," Lois said, rolling her eyes at her sister's expression, "but I know what I saw."

"I didn't say anything," Lucy said.

"Uh-huh." Lois leaned back in the hospital bed, "Luce?"

"Huh?" Lucy looked at her warily.

"Clark's not dead."

"Every parcel on the list? Excellent. Nothing like a little firestorm to lower prices on real estate. Let's move directly to phase two. I'd like to break ground on LexHarbor sometime next month... No, I wouldn't worry about that. Toni Taylor and I have an arrangement. ... Destroy them. Plans, too. Should we ever need to revive the Toaster technology, it'll be easy enough. I know you will. That's what I pay you for." With the click of a button, Lex ended the phone call, taking a puff from his cigar.

"Asabi?" He called out. "Any news from Lois Lane in the Daily Planet?"

Asabi stood by the door, "No, sir, it appears she's been placed on administrative leave after her attack."

Lex nodded, "Keep close tabs on her, Asabi."

"Yes, sir."

Present Day...

Judge Walker read over the warrant in front of him with a furrowed brow. "What's this?"

"Your honor, we've received an anonymous tip that Dr. Antoinette Baines, the Director of EPRAD was seen leaving Mr. Luthor's home within twenty four hours of her untimely demise last week. All we're asking for is permission to watch him. If nothing comes up, then there's no harm, but if something does come up..."

"We'll be happy we did it," Walker nodded. "You know you're treading on dangerous territory here, right?"

"I do, your honor," Henderson nodded solemnly, "but a woman is dead, and it is my job to find out why."

Walker nodded, scribbling his signature on the warrant. "Go get him."

Clark watched Lois squirm in the uncomfortable waiting room chair. After everything that had happened at Dr. Platt's apartment, he'd insisted on getting her in to see an OB to make sure everything was fine. Even though the doctors at the hospital had reassured them both Lois was okay, he still needed that extra reassurance. They'd sent in what they had on Platt to Perry, but neither of them were hopeful on it getting to print with the lack of hard evidence they had at the moment. Dr. Platt was their source, and he couldn't corroborate their story because he was in a coma. The Messenger was scheduled to launch in two days, and so far they hadn't come up with anything solid to prove sabotage or convince EPRAD to postpone the launch.

"Here." Lois handed him a pamphlet from the table that was next to her.

"First Trimester Q&A?" He read through the pamphlet. It seemed there were a lot of changes to be expected in the first trimester. Mood swings, sensitivity to smell, loss of appetite, bloating... He glanced over at Lois once more and couldn't help but smile when he saw her place her left hand over her right which was covering her abdomen. *'Definitely more than cautiously optimistic.'* He thought to himself. He glanced around the room, noticing the different sizes of the women's protruding bellies that filled the waiting room. Some were small, medium, large... All were carrying a new life. He wondered what it had been like for Lois to go through this without him.

He reached for her hand, lacing his fingers with hers as he ran his thumb against the base of her ring, "You okay?"

"Just uncomfortable." She sighed, twisting in her chair once more to look at him. "Five years and they still have the same uncomfortable chairs they had before."

He smiled at her attempt at humor and brought her hand up to kiss. She smiled at him, and he sighed, running his thumb against her ring. The ring he'd given her five years ago. He could tell from the imprint on her finger she'd never taken it off. He'd had no intention of making her wait five years when he'd given her that ring. With impending fatherhood and the changes, they were looking to make with his alter-ego he wanted to have some permanence in their lives. The question was, was she ready?

She stroked his cheek, leaning in to kiss him, "We'll figure this out. You'll see."

He gave her a weak smile. "No, I was just thinking how much our lives are going to change..."

"Yeah," she smiled at him, resting her head against his shoulder as he spoke. "but in a good way."

"A very good way," he smiled, placing a hand over her abdomen, "I love you so much, Lois, I..."

"Lois Lane," The nurse called.

Lois sighed, reaching for his hand as she stood up and headed toward the door, "That's us,"

"Mr. President?" Shepard Wilson called into the Oval office,

"General Newcomb to see you."

"Send him in," Thompson said, not looking up from his notes.

"You must like playing chicken," Newcomb said as he closed the door behind him.

Thompson looked up at him in surprise, "Chicken?"

"Lex Luthor," Newcomb said firmly. "He's becoming a problem."

"I know," Thompson said bitterly, "He's getting more demanding."

"People are going to start to put two and two together and then where will we be?" Newcomb asked. "I stepped aside because it was what was good for the mission. He's becoming reckless. The FBI has opened a file on him..."

"What am I supposed to do?" Thompson asked. "He's got us both by the..."

"I know," Newcomb said, pacing the room uneasily. "He knows too much."

Five Years Ago...

Lois stared at her lap as Perry paced in front of her. It had been six weeks since her attack. The man that had attacked her had suffered a heart attack in his hospital room. She'd thought it suspicious as did Henderson but there was nothing either of them could prove.

The last few weeks she'd begun taking self-defense classes with Lucy to help build up her confidence again. After her attack, she never wanted to be in that position again. Never wanted to feel helpless again. Surprisingly the evidence of her pregnancy remained hidden beneath her clothes quite well. She'd had to loosen some of her skirts and pants, but for the most part, the little one remained inconspicuous. The morning sickness was completely gone and left her wanting to make up for the loss of appetite for those five weeks.

Today was her first day back at the Planet, and Perry had summoned her in his office before she could even set her things down. She was surprised when he'd begun asking about the pregnancy then recalled how he'd found out when she was being loaded up on the gurney. He seemed hurt that she hadn't told him about the pregnancy but even more upset that she'd agreed to go undercover for Henderson knowing she was pregnant.

"You were lucky to make it out of there alive," Perry said gloomily, looking at Lois uneasily.

"I know," Lois said cautiously, looking at Perry uncertainly. "Perry, I was going to tell you..."

"After everything you've been through why would you take such a huge risk like that???" He fumed angrily.

"I didn't realize how big of a risk it was until I was already neck deep," Lois explained.

Perry fingered his chin for a moment seeming to be trying to stop himself from losing his cool, "I think right now... Considering what you've gone through, you need to stick to the smaller stories. No more investigative pieces."

She knew this was coming. She couldn't really argue with him at this point, "Okay."

"Once you've had the baby and come back from leave you can start working on the bigger stuff again, but for now..."

"Dog shows and obituaries," she sighed, running a hand through her hair.

"This is no reflection on you as a journalist," he explained. "It's just after what happened in Smallville then with this fiasco with the Metros and Claude MIA I don't want to take any chances."

"MIA?" Lois asked, "What are you talking about?"

Perry sighed, "That lead you were so adamant about chasing that you claimed Claude stole from you?" She nodded, recalling the gun-running story, "Claude's been missing for the last four weeks. No one's heard anything from him. I've got people

looking, but it doesn't look good."

"Oh, my God..." Lois gasped, covering her mouth in surprise.

"Lois, you've got to drop this. We've got reporters dropping like flies. I don't know what you stumbled onto here but *YOU* cannot follow-up on it while you're pregnant. It's too risky and ..."

"I get it." Lois nodded, trying to suppress the strain in her voice at the moment. She didn't like it, but she did understand. "What do you got for me?"

"Ah," He pulled out a file folder from his desk and handed it to her. "Christening of 'LexHarbor' at noon."

Lois visibly cringed. "Oh, fun."

"Now you take it easy." Perry wagged his finger at her, "Take care of that young'n and stay out of trouble." His face softened slightly. "When I mentioned to Alice ... Well, she wanted to talk to you about your plans for a nursery." He handed her a card. "Just give her a call when you get some time."

"Thanks," Lois nodded, "I will." She got up to leave.

"Lois?" Perry called. She turned back to look at him, "I'm glad you're back."

"Me too," she smiled back at him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you LexHarbor..." Lex said, cutting the ribbon on the pier with a smile. Lois watched as he made his way through the crowd, posing for pictures with the different officials that had made their presence known. The police commissioner, the mayor, and even the governor had made it to the christening of LexHarbor.

She had to admit. It did look good. The older buildings that had been run down were revitalized, and new apartment buildings had been built to replace the rundown ones that had been an eyesore for so long.

Across the street, she spotted a group of middle-aged women in a small crowd, watching the presentation with a frown on their face. She noticed the looks of disapproval and pointing at Lex and the apartment buildings with nods and looks of contempt on the women's faces. Sensing there was more to the story, she approached them, notebook in hand, "Excuse me, can I ask you a few questions?"

One of the young women, dressed in worn out jeans and a worn knit top looked her up and down with a raised eyebrow. "Don't you have a boardroom meeting to get to, Miss Congeniality?"

Lois glanced down at her skirt and blouse then back up at the woman, folding her arms over her chest. "A simple 'no' would suffice."

"You don't want to talk to us," another woman said. "We're part of the 'problem'," She did air quotes as she spoke the word 'problem', giving a disgusted look toward Lex as he posed for pictures with the Mayor.

"What problem?" Lois asked.

They pointed toward the apartment building, "This used to be our home. Now we have to move to West Side. We can't take our kids there."

"I'm not following," Lois said, looking at them in confusion. "They revitalized the neighborhood. Why can't you stay here?"

"Sure," the first woman said, "they 'revitalized' it and made it so everyone that used to live here can't afford it."

"But..." Lois began but was cut off by another one of the women.

"Those ritzy types don't care about us. You don't care about us," she sniffed, "We're just a foot note on someone's contract. An inconvenience. You think Mr. Luthor cares about the fact that my boy's gonna have to walk to school through the roughest neighborhood in Metropolis? You think he cares that all of our children are now going to be at risk of being shot by gangs? No, of course not. He doesn't care." She pointed at the crowd around

him. "They don't care. You..."

"I care." Lois interrupted. The woman gave her a look of disbelief. "I do. Please, let me tell your story."

"No." Perry shook his head adamantly.

"But Perry..."

"I said no investigative pieces, Lois, and I mean it," Perry argued. "Let it go."

"Someone has to tell their story."

"I'll give it to Ralph," Perry interjected.

"Ralph couldn't investigate his way out of a paper bag." Lois snapped. "Please, Perry this is important..."

"So was the Gunrunner story and look what happened."

"Perry, you and I both know Ralph won't give this the attention it deserves," Lois pleaded.

"Fine," Perry gave a heavy sigh. "You can take Cat. No undercover work. No getting yourself mixed into anything. If it requires investigations, you let her handle it. Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Lois said flatly.

"I'm serious Lois. If I get even a whiff of you trying to get yourself thrown into another story like what happened with the Metros. You are going to be pulling desk duty for the rest of the year. Are we clear?"

Lois smiled, nodding her agreement, "I'm looking at real estate, not gangsters."

"Promise me?" Perry encouraged.

She sighed, "Fine. I won't go undercover. I'll leave it up to Cat."

Perry nodded, "That's my girl." When she let out an exasperated sigh he continued, "You'll thank me when you're holding that healthy baby."

"You are so overprotective," Lois sighed.

"Just looking out for ya," Perry smiled. "Go find Cat and get to work."

Lois stepped into the newsroom and found Cat at her desk, "Cat?"

"Just a sec, Lois," Cat said, finishing up typing her notes on her computer. She had a pen in her mouth, and her nose was crinkled as she stared at her screen typing at an insane speed across her keyboard.

Lois tapped her foot while she waited. Cat glanced up at her curiously, stopping what she was doing. "Yes?"

Lois claimed a seat next to her. "I've got a story I need your help with."

"And you're coming to *ME*?" Cat asked with intrigue.

"What's the catch?"

"No catch. Perry won't let me work alone after what happened last month," Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair.

Cat nodded, "Yeah, I heard what happened. How you holding up?"

"Fine," Lois said a bit too quickly.

"Uh-huh," Cat said, not believing her. "Well, what have you got there?" She pointed to the file in Lois's hand.

Lois glanced down at the file and handed it to her. "You remember those fires last month..."

Lucy Lane stepped off the elevator of the Daily Planet, scanning the newsroom. Seeing her sister at her desk, Lucy sighed in relief before heading her way. She hadn't called. She hadn't come home. It was nearly nine o'clock at night, and Lucy'd been worried sick. When she reached Lois's desk, she was ready to light into her for worrying her when she realized the problem: Lois was asleep. She had fallen asleep, hunched over her desk.

Lucy let out a long breath, reaching for her sister's shoulder, "Lois?" She groaned a response but didn't wake up, "Lois, it's Lucy," Another grunt. Lucy shook her a little harder, "Lois, you

need to wake up.”

She lightly tapped the back of her neck, and Lois’s head shot up, jerking away from her in fear, “No, don’t!”

“Lois, relax, it’s me,” Lucy reassured her, holding her hands up in defense.

“Lucy?” Lois looked around the newsroom, reaching for the back of her neck as she lightly massaged it, trying to focus on her surroundings. “What time is it?”

“Nearly nine,” Lucy said, looking at her sister in concern.

“Nine?” Lois gasped in shock. “How long was I asleep?”

“I have no idea,” Lucy shrugged. “When you didn’t come home or call I got worried and came looking for you.”

“Oh, Luce, I’m sorry,” Lois apologized. “I remember packing everything up and then scanning over these notes one last time and...” She let out a long yawn, “I guess I fell asleep.”

“You’re in your second trimester. You need more sleep...” Lucy sighed, “Come on, let’s get you home.”

Present Day...

The loud thumping filled the room as the sonographer rolled the wand over Lois’s goo covered belly. “Definitely pregnant,” the sonographer smiled at Lois. Clark watched as tears fell one by one down her cheeks. She didn’t brush them away. She just kept staring at the screen where the small gummy bear shaped organism the sonographer had found and labeled as ‘baby.’

“It’s pretty mind-blowing, huh?” the sonographer remarked. “That tiny little dot will grow into a beautiful baby in just nine short months.” She handed Lois a towel to wipe off with, “I’m gonna grab the prints off the machine. I’ll be right back. Why don’t you get cleaned up and meet me outside?”

Lois nodded tearfully, unable to say anything. He kept a firm grip on her hand, pulling it to him as he brushed his lips against it. He glanced up at Lois who was still staring straight ahead in tears. He felt his own emotions overcome him as tears began to escape the corners of his eyes. This was their child. A miracle. He leaned in to kiss her, cupping her cheek as he ran a hand through her silky hair. “I love you so much.”

“This is really happening,” she sniffed. “We’re really having a baby?”

“Yeah,” he said softly, stroking her cheek with his thumb. “I guess we are.”

“I’m not crying because I’m upset,” she sniffed.

“I know,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her tears away. “It’s just overwhelming. I get it.”

She covered his hand with hers, lacing her fingers through his. “I love you.” He leaned in to kiss the top of her head, and she sighed, “I’ve missed you.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” he promised, resting his head against hers.

Nigel set a small portable disk on Lex’s desk. He looked up, “What’s this?”

“All the files from Dr. Baines,” Nigel explained.

Lex picked up the disk and walked toward the painting of Alexander the Great that hung on the wall, feeling for the familiar latch to release the hidden door. Once it opened a safe was revealed, and he began typing in the code as he spoke, “So kind of Dr. Baines to give us this information, don’t you think so, Nigel?”

Nigel wore an amused smile, “Yes, so it would seem, sir.”

“Such a tragedy,” Lex shook his head, reclaiming his seat as he wrote in large capital letters ‘I KNOW YOU’RE WATCHING’ and held it up toward the ceiling.

“Damn it!” Henderson fumed, watching the surveillance tape as Lex held up his message to their undercover team. “He knows we’re watching. He’s not going to do anything to slip up now.”

“But how did he...?” Officer Raegan asked, looking up from

his place in front of the computer with headphones, listening in on Lex Luthor.

“I don’t know.” Henderson kicked an empty chair nearby. “I don’t know.”

“The warrant just came through this morning.” Officer Raegan began.

“I know,” Henderson sighed.

Five Years Ago...

Lois sat at her desk going over the eviction notices in front of her shaking her head, “This is insane.”

“Tell me about it,” Cat said. “Look at all of this. These people were basically booted out of their homes because the place burned down and given no compensation to rebuild or relocate. How is that legal?”

“They were given money by the insurance,” Lois pointed out.

“That’s pocket change compared to what they should have gotten,” Cat said in disgust.

“They got around it because they were listed as subsidized income tenants meaning the insurance only had to give them three months of what they were actually paying not what the full value was.”

“It’s sick.”

“I agree.” Lois sighed, “It’s not right.”

“You know I grew up with a single mom struggling to put food on the table. I could have been any of these kids. This...” Cat shook her head in disgust.

“I never knew that,” Lois said softly, looking at the older woman in a new light.

“It’s not exactly something I advertise,” Cat shrugged. “We struggled a lot, and I promised myself if I ever made it out of there I’d do everything I could to take care of my mom for everything she did for me.”

“And did you?” Lois asked with a smile, “Make it?”

Cat smiled, “I like to think so.”

“Your mom must be pretty proud,” Lois said sadly, placing a hand on her abdomen as she spoke.

“She was,” Cat began. “Didn’t agree with some of my choices at times, but she was proud.”

“Was?” Lois asked picking up on Cat’s use of the past tense verb.

“Was,” Cat nodded. “She died of breast cancer a few years back.”

“Oh, Cat, I’m sorry.” Lois placed a hand over Cat’s.

“It’s fine. In the past,” Cat shrugged. “Anyway, the point is we can’t let them get away with this.”

“So what do we do?” Lois asked.

Cat gave her a half-smile, “Well first you deal with your visitor while I discreetly hide all of this,” she said, taking the files from her desk and shoving them into a drawer.

“Visitor?” Lois looked behind her to see what Cat was talking about and groaned when she spotted the problem. Lex Luthor was descending the staircase, heading her way. “Oh, no.”

“Oh, yes,” Cat said, getting up to leave.

Lois closed the door of the conference room, turning to face Lex who was watching her with a careful eye. “What can I help you with, Lex?”

“I heard what happened last month. How are you doing?” he asked, concerned.

“I’m fine,” She shrugged it off.

“It must have been traumatizing having someone you thought you could trust break into your apartment and attack you and your sister like that.”

“Yes, it was...” She stopped for a moment, “How did you know that?”

“Know what?” he asked.

“That he attacked Lucy,” Lois pressed, crossing her arms over her chest. “No one but the people that were there knew about that.”

<< “*The boss liked your song. Wanted me to send his regards...*” >>

“I have friends in high places,” he shrugged it off.

“Uh-huh,” she muttered, not quite believing him. “What were you doing at the MetroClub with Toni Taylor?”

“Pardon?” he asked.

“Toni Taylor? The new head of the Metros...”

“Well, I wasn’t aware,” he brushed it off, “I was meeting with her about the revitalization of the Southside district.”

“What does that have to do with Toni Taylor?” Lois asked.

“Yes, well, according to her, we have similar interests in the Southside district,” Lex began cautiously.

“How does the head of the Metros have common interests with LexCorp?” Lois quipped.

He looked away, “She talks a good line: slum clearance, uplifting the neighborhood, micromanagement, growth and prosperity.”

“She should run for Congress,” Lois mused wryly. “Sounds like Congressman Harrington’s promises from a few years ago.”

“I never said I believed her,” he said with a smile, growing thoughtful for a moment. “In fact, I think the whole thing was designed to get me to slow down my own plans for reviving the area...”

“Not everyone’s happy with the changes you’ve made to the area,” Lois countered. “A lot of families are being moved to west side.”

“Well, you can’t please everyone...” he shrugged.

“You can’t ignore them either,” Lois countered. “What is LexCorp planning to do to make what the insurance companies did to those families right?”

“Why should LexCorp do anything?” he asked. “We’ve already done more than our fair share to revitalize the community that those people you say are angry with the changes destroyed.”

“What are you doing here?” Lois asked, changing the subject as she realized she wasn’t going to win this argument. Not today at least.

“I came to warn you. I think Toni’s hiding something,” He began cautiously.

“Hiding what?” Lois asked.

“I wish I knew. I only know that if I were a smart reporter looking for answers, I wouldn’t bother to look any further for the source of all the problems in Southside district than Toni Taylor.”

She narrowed her eyes, at him uncertainly. “Toni Taylor?”

“Yes, she’s up to something. What, I’m not sure.”

She clicked her tongue in her mouth, sizing him up as she let his last statement sink in. What would Clark say?

‘*Pretty convenient he’s come all this way to point the finger at Toni Taylor.*’

She opened her mouth to respond but was caught off guard when he gave her a warm smile and whispered, “Let’s do it.”

“Excuse me?” she choked out, uncertain if she’d heard him right.

He then snapped his fingers, humming to the song of ‘*Let’s Do It Let’s Fall In Love*’ by Bing Crosby and she visibly relaxed. He then smiled, “A song request. I never knew you to be so...sultry, Ms. Lane.”

<< “*The boss liked your song. Wanted me to send his regards...*” >>

“Your memory must be clouded.” She blushed, turning away.

“I was just playing a part.” She brushed a stray strand of hair behind her ear, “No danger of repeating that again.”

“Oh, why not? You were wonderful!” he crooned.

“Thanks, but local gangster hideouts aren’t where I like to hang my hat.” She gave him a half-smile, “No offense.”

“None taken,” he smiled. “Actually Toni Taylor wasn’t the only reason I came down here.”

“Oh?” she asked, trying to feign a bit of surprise.

<< “*The boss liked your song. Wanted me to send his regards...*” >>

“I wanted to follow up on our dinner a few months back and see if you’d be interested in accompanying me to the Opera,” he smiled taking a few steps towards her.

She shifted uncomfortably, “I don’t think so, Lex,” she gave him a weak smile. “I’m just not in a good place right now.”

“I heard about your partner.” He continued with a frown. “Tragic.”

“Fiancé.”

“Pardon?”

“He was more than my partner. He was my fiancé,” she corrected. “Listen, thanks for coming by, but I’m really busy right now and...”

“I understand,” he nodded. “Another time then?” She gave a nonverbal shrug, and he stepped out. “He’s a lucky man.”

“Asabi?” Lex called in his office, knowing the man was waiting just outside the hall.

“Yes, sir?” Asabi called as he stepped into the office.

“I want you to find out everything for me that happened in Smallville, Kansas regarding the disappearance of Clark Kent.” Lex said as he pulled out a file in his desk marked ‘Bureau 39’.

“Are you sure?” Cat asked, looking at Lois in disbelief.

“Positive.” Lois breathed shakily. “It took everything in me not to strangle him. He knew about Lucy’s attack. No one but the people that had been there that night knew about it. He was there when I was singing at the Metro Club. Wilder said ‘the boss’ liked my song. Don’t you see? Lex is the boss.”

<< “*The boss liked your song. Wanted me to send his regards...*” >>

Present Day ...

Clark slipped his arms around Lois from behind, whispering a featherlight kiss on her cheek, “How was your shower? Feeling better?”

“Yeah,” She gave him a weak smile, placing a hand over his. “Sorry about dinner. I guess this one doesn’t like chicken.”

“I’ll try to remember that. You sure you don’t want me to make you anything?” he asked in concern. “I could whip up some soup or something...”

“No, I’m not that hungry right now anyway.” She gave him a weak smile before turning back toward the window. “In less than twenty-four hours Messenger is supposed to launch.” She said staring up at the sky from her bedroom window. “If we can’t prove there is sabotage...all those lives...”

Clark tightened his arms around her from behind, whispering a kiss against her cheek, “Don’t think about that. We are going to prove it. We’ll figure this out.”

“Dr. Platt’s been in a coma for almost a week,” Lois said sadly. “Dr. Klein said the reports are about fifty percent deciphered...”

“Well, Jimmy said STAR Labs was recreating the launch for EPRAD officials to determine the cause of the explosion. If they can prove, there was sabotage maybe...”

Lois sighed, “Even if we prove it was sabotage I doubt we’ll be able to prove WHO was behind it.” She walked back toward her bed, leaning back against the pillows in defeat.

Clark followed her, taking his place next to her on the bed. She was quiet, staring up at the ceiling. She’d been quiet since they’d left the doctor’s office that afternoon. After a failed attempt at dinner which had ended up with her in the bathroom for half an hour, she’d spent most of the night lost in thought. It was driving

him crazy not knowing what was going through her mind but he didn't want to push her. Her moods seemed different lately, and he didn't want to set her off.

He watched her nose crinkle as she seemed to be contemplating how to stop Messenger from being launched into space with the sabotaged ion particles like a ticking time bomb set to explode at any moment and kill the innocent passengers on its voyage.

"Lois," he began slowly, turning on his side to look at her, "proving who is behind this isn't nearly as important as stopping it. You're right." He brushed a strand of hair behind her ear as he spoke, "with how well Lex Luthor has been playing the game all these years he probably already has a fall-guy lined up. We may not prove what he's doing, but we have our suspicions..." She visibly winced at that remark, "...and we can use what we know to help stop him."

He watched as her facial expression changed to remorse as she stroked the skin beneath her tank top just above the waistline of her pajama bottoms. She fingered the spot on her abdomen gingerly, and he noticed the pained expression on her face, "What is it?"

Lois looked back at him and gave him a watery smile, leaning into his arms, "This feels so weird."

"What does?" Clark asked, tightening his arms around her.

"This." She set the printout on her nightstand, turning back into his arms as she rested her head on his chest. "I went through all of this with Jamie, but it was different...scary, but..."

"But?" Clark prompted, brushing a few stray strands of hair that had fallen across her face with his fingers.

"I guess I'm scared for different reasons this time," Lois said, covering his hand with hers, "I mean last time I was worried I couldn't do it on my own...and don't get me wrong Lucy was amazing." She sniffed, "You should have seen her with Jamie. She would do this game with his blanket, and he would laugh so hard..." She stopped when she saw the solemn expression on his face. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he whispered, tightening his arms around her. "I love hearing about him."

"Are you sure?" she asked uncertainly.

He stroked her cheek, resting his head against hers. "I'll admit it is...hard hearing about him, knowing I'll never get the chance to make my own memories with him..." She sighed, lowering her head as he spoke. He tilted her head to look at him, "but getting to know him through your memories is as close as I'm going to get—So, no, I don't want you to stop telling me about him."

She sighed, leaning her head against his chest as she tapped her fingers on his shoulder, "I miss him. Right after..." She couldn't finish her sentence, unable to say the words, "...I used to wake up looking for him...thinking I heard him crying." He placed a kiss on her head, remaining silent as he allowed her to finish.

"He had your smile." She said wistfully, letting a few tears fall down her cheeks. He felt the tears hit his chest and tightened his arms around her.

"I'm sorry." He ran his hand through her hair, tucking it behind her ear.

"I'm happy about this baby, really I am, but at the same time I'm just so..."

He leaned in to kiss her, brushing featherlight kisses against her lips.

She met his lips with a surprising intensity fingering the back of his neck as he rolled them over on the bed, so she was beneath him. "I know," he murmured against her lips. "We'll get through this," he whispered his lips against her cheek, holding her to him.

"I know," she whispered, stroking his cheek, "I'm just so scared of reliving the nightmare I went through with Jamie. I don't know if I could survive losing another baby."

His head rested against hers, and he held her to him, "I know. I am so sorry you had to go through that all alone."

"I wasn't alone," she whispered, stroking his cheek. "I had Lucy...and your parents...and I made sure he knew who you were."

"You did?" he asked hoarsely, feeling his voice giving away the emotions he was feeling.

She bit her lower lip. "Of course," she let out a low breath. "I never gave up hope...especially after..." She stopped, frowning as a dark cloud washed over her face.

He looked at her in concern, "After what?"

She pulled away, sitting up as she folded her knees below her arms. "It's not important."

"Lois, what is going on? I can tell something's bothering you..." he pleaded, sitting up to look at her.

She glanced back at him with a pained expression. "Clark, please, don't..." She shook her head adamantly in tears.

"Lois, honey, please talk to me," he pleaded gently. "Whatever it is is eating you up. I can't stand to see you like this." She let out a shallow sob, and he sighed, "Is it Luthor? Did he do something?" She cried harder, and he put an arm around her, pulling her to him. "Lois..."

"You'll hate me..." she sobbed.

"I could never hate you." He reassured her, tightening his arms around her. "Please talk to me."

She looked down at her knees, seeming to be contemplating whether to tell him or not. After what seemed like an eternity, she looked up and sighed, "The first big story I covered after your disappearance?" He nodded, and she continued, "It was a gunrunner story. I found connections to both the Somalian pirates as well as to the Metros and a mysterious 'boss' here in Metropolis."

He looked at her in concern, "You didn't go all the way to..."

She shook her head, "No, thankfully I had found out I was pregnant with Jamie around that same time, so I was focused on the Metros and the boss...Actually, Claude kinda wormed his way into my investigation..."

"I heard about that," Clark nodded. "Somalian pirates seemed a bit out of character from his normal stories on corruption with politicians."

Lois nodded, "I wanted to kill him when he was trying to pitch this story I'd uncovered as his own...but Perry decided the best solution was to team us up."

"I'm sure that went over really well," Clark remarked, recalling how much Lois couldn't stand Claude in their early days at the Planet when he kept trying to hit on her and had even taken credit for some of their stories.

"Oh, yeah, he did nothing to help the investigation. Then when I wasn't looking he stole my notes and pitched the investigation into the Somalian pirates before I could do anything. I mean I wasn't going to go over there, but it was just..."

"The idea that he'd taken credit for something you did." Clark nodded, "I'd have been upset too."

"Anyway, after that, there were a bunch of fires in Southside district. No one could explain how so many fires were getting started in such a short amount of time. The Metros leader had been killed a few weeks back, so there was a power struggle going on. The fires were in the same area the Metro Club was so I thought there was a connection."

Clark realized where this was going, "So you went undercover?"

"Yes, I got a job as a singer...thought I'd be able to find something out..." She grew quiet, and he nudged her.

"Did you?"

"Yeah," she said softly. "Perry had teamed me up with RALPH of all people on this one. Said I wasn't the same and needed backup." He did his best to suppress his laugh at the

mental image of Ralph working with Lois. "It's not funny."

"Of course not. Sorry," he apologized.

"So, I was working undercover when this group of guys comes in with these blow torches on steroids. It was insane. I'd never seen anything like it. They tried to burn the place down." He looked at her in concern. "I didn't get hurt. Just a little shaken is all," she reassured him, and he placed a hand over hers, waiting for her to continue. "Anyway, after that Ralph refused to go back there with me, and Perry wouldn't let me go alone."

"Good," Clark nodded his agreement.

"So, he got Henderson to help," Lois began shakily.

"Henderson?" Clark looked at her in concern.

"Yeah, they were watching the Metros too...since I was already undercover..." Lois shrugged, "They were trying to catch a meeting between the Metros leader and the boss on camera."

"The boss again, huh?" he observed.

"I figured I was protected, you know, the police were watching. Nothing to worry about."

She let out a shaky breath, and he kissed her head. "What happened?"

"When I was up on stage I saw Lex there," Lois said uneasily. His brow furrowed in concern, "I don't know. I saw him talking with Toni Taylor...She apparently had taken over the Metros the night before."

He let out a low breath, "Lois..."

"I don't know what happened. Ralph showed up trying to warn me about a trap then before I knew what was happening the whole place erupted into gunfire. Johnny Taylor, Toni's brother, showed up shooting the place up. I got out of there. Was shaking. I didn't realize what Ralph was trying to warn me about until later."

"Was it Lex?" Clark asked.

Lois shrugged, "I'm getting to that."

"Okay, sorry," he apologized. "Continue."

"I got back to my apartment and took the camera off. Was sitting with Lucy when this Detective Wilder showed up. At the same time, Perry had called and warned me there was a leak at the police station with the boss. I turned around and found Lucy on the floor unconscious." He tightened his grip on her, rubbing her shoulders as she continued, "She'd been hit upside the head with something."

"Wilder was the leak?" Clark guessed.

Lois nodded, "He wanted the tape. I knew if I gave it to him he was just going to try and kill Lucy and me anyway so I tried to get away, but I wasn't fast enough," she cried. "Luckily Lucy came to when she did. I remember losing consciousness..." She let out a shaky breath, "and nearly dying."

"Honey..." He kissed her head.

"Lucy still thinks I'm crazy to this day but almost dying...I saw my grandparents, but I didn't see you. That's how I knew...that you weren't dead. For sure, I mean."

"I'm so sorry." He nuzzled her neck, holding her close. "I had no idea..."

"Lucy saved my life." She said resting her hand on his knee, "and Jamie's."

"I'll have to thank her for that," he whispered, tightening his arms around her waist. "Did they catch him?"

"Who?" she asked.

"Wilder?"

She shook her head in disgust, "He had a heart attack in the hospital room that next morning handcuffed to his hospital bed with two protective units standing outside the door."

"That sounds *convenient*," he observed cautiously.

"It took everything in me not to pursue it." She placed a hand over her abdomen, "After everything that happened... I couldn't risk losing the only thing I had left of you." He let out a long breath as she turned in his arms, "I've often wondered if something might have happened to him when I was unconscious."

Lucy said I wasn't breathing when she found me..."

"Lois, you can't do this to yourself," he sighed, holding her close. "That is not your fault. Even if that was connected to what happened to him... That is on Wilder, not you." He placed a kiss on her cheek.

She relaxed in his arms, "After that, I was put on leave for a few weeks to recover. Then Perry had me taken off of all the investigative pieces."

"I'm sure that went over well."

"I didn't fight him on it," Lois said calmly. "I wasn't going to do anything to endanger Jamie like that again. Lucy made me promise not to take any more risks like that, so I didn't. I owed her that much."

"That must have been hard."

"It was," she said, "At first, but you know me. I can't seem to cross the street without finding a story..." He gave her a playful smile, and she continued, "When he was attacking me..." Her voice cracked a bit, and he nodded for her to continue, "He said 'the boss enjoyed my song.'" She let out a breath, "I still can't prove it, but I know he was talking about Lex...and I know he was the one that gave the order for Wilder to come after Lucy and me."

"Oh, Lois," he sighed, holding her close as she cried.

"He's a monster. I have been working with Henderson for years trying to prove it, but he is always one step ahead of me," Lois fumed bitterly. "I just wanted him to pay for what he did."

Five Years Ago...

Jason Trask looked up and down the darkened hallways nervously as he approached the office ahead. He'd been told 'the boss' wanted to see him about his research into the alien threat. He wasn't sure who this 'boss' was, but he had been assured by General Thompson he was a great ally to their cause.

He opened the door and was surprised to find Lex Luthor on the other side. "Mr. Luthor!"

"Ah, Mr. Trask, so glad you could make it," Lex said with a warm smile. "Come on in."

"I don't understand..." he began, "You're the boss?"

"Yes," Lex snapped his fingers, pointing at one of the guards. "Get this man a drink, will you?"

"Yes, sir." One of the guards left to fetch the bourbon and ice from the bar, returning with the drink.

"How did you know I...?" Trask began uncertainly.

"Ah, ah, ah," Lex scolded, "I'll ask the questions from here on out."

"Yes, sir," Trask nodded his agreement.

Lex paced in front of him, "I'm told you were involved with a tragic incident in Smallville a few months back. With a...Clark Kent?"

'*How did he?*' Trask did his best not to react. He still wasn't sure if he could trust him. He just nodded. "Yes, we suspected he knew where an alien life form had come to Earth."

"What brought you to this...conclusion?" Lex asked amused.

"Information we came across when a local sent an odd sample to the lab for testing," Trask began. "It doesn't matter now. We were right about the alien, and we have begun testing his abilities and are working on programming him to be used as a weapon."

"A weapon?" Lex laughed. "How?"

"Weak minds run amuck in the world, Mr. Luthor. No matter where you come from or what you do your mind can be controlled given the right circumstances..." Trask mused, leaning back against the wall behind him. "...even a powerful alien like this one."

"I'd be interested to see this," Lex said, taking out his checkbook, "maybe funding your mission."

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Mr. Luthor," Trask said briskly. "Introducing the alien to any outsiders would only hinder our work."

“And what work is that?” Lex asked.

“Breaking the alien’s mind so that all he knows is what we tell him. All he’s capable of is destruction. All he remembers is that he is our soldier...under our control,” Trask boasted proudly.

“I see.” Lex took a sip of his drink, thinking for a moment. “I was told you came across a special kind of rock...”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor.”

“May I see it?”

Trask shook his head, “If it’s all the same to you, Mr. Luthor, I’d rather you didn’t.” At Lex’s surprised expression he continued, “You’ve just met me, and I’ve just met you. I can guarantee the presence of an alien life form, and I can confirm that a special rock connected to this alien exists. Anything else I’m unwilling to confirm until we get to know one another better.”

“That wasn’t the agreement General Newcomb made with me,” Lex countered.

“General Newcomb doesn’t run this operation; I do.” Trask boasted. “He doesn’t even know the identity of the alien or where he is. I do. If you want to be a part of this, I welcome the support but remember this is my operation.”

“I admire your gusto,” Lex said, taking another sip of his drink. “Who do I make the check out to?”

Present Day...

That evening Clark laid awake staring up at the ceiling fan as he listened to the two heartbeats next to him drumming together as one. Lois laid curled up in the bed with the comforter wrapped snugly around her waist. He’d held her while she cried, telling him about what had happened to her. Lex Luthor had arranged for her to be sent a message and Lois had nearly lost her life because of that.

Try as he might he just couldn’t come up with a good enough reason not to confront him. A police detective had come to Lois’s apartment and attacked her. She’d said Lucy had saved her life; which meant Lois’s life had been at risk. Jamie’s life had been at risk. He held her close, brushing a kiss against her forehead.

She kept blaming herself for what had happened to Jamie. He had done what he could to reassure her, but so far they seemed to be empty words to her. It killed him that she carried around this guilt while this man that very well could be responsible for Jamie’s death walked around like he was untouchable. No. He had to do something.

Lois awoke in the middle of the night to find the right side of the bed empty. “Clark?” She called out, looking around her empty bedroom. She poked her head out into the living room and smiled when she spotted Lucy curled up on the couch with her notes from studying for her finals. “Oh, Luce.”

She grabbed a blanket from the linen closet, and unfolded it, placing it over her sleeping sister, moving her notes from her sleeping hand and setting them on the coffee table. She tucked a pillow behind her sister to give her some support and leaned in to give her sister a peck on the forehead. “Sweet dreams.”

She glanced around the apartment wondering where Clark could have gone. Could he be responding to a rescue? He’d said he was getting calls for help in the middle of the night that he was ignoring. Maybe he’d finally gotten the nerve to respond to one?

Inside the surveillance van, Henderson spotted a familiar face enter Lex Luthor’s study. He looked around at the oblivious officers that had given up on watching the screens for the night and switched the tape deck out. Just in case...

“It looks like he’s turning in for the night,” Henderson said, shutting down the monitors. “Why don’t we pack it in boys?”

“But...” One of the rookie officers began to argue but was nudged quietly by his supervisor.

“He knows we’re watching him. He’s not going to do

anything,” Henderson sighed, “I’ll stay here and keep watch. Call you if anything happens.”

Clark stormed into Lex Luthor’s study and found him sipping his chardonnay in the peace and quiet of his home in front of the fireplace. “No, you can’t go in there!” he heard Asabi call from the hallway.

Lex turned and saw him standing in the doorway with a few of his bodyguards standing on either side of him. “I’m sorry sir, we tried to stop him,” one of them pleaded with him.

Lex waved the guards off. “Mr. Kent, this is a ...surprise.” He observed carefully, standing up to approach him.

“You low life sociopathic scumbag...” Clark spat out angrily, advancing toward him.

“I seem to have upset you, Mr. Kent but I have no idea how... Could you enlighten me?” Lex smoothed a grin across his face. It took everything in him not to wipe it off his face.

“What you did, you demented piece of garbage...” Clark spat angrily, grabbing Lex by the collar and pulling him close so that he was a few mere millimeters away from him. He slammed Lex up against the bookcase with his arm, holding him in place by this throat. “You saw Lois at the MetroClub. Realized she was able to identify you as the boss. Sent one of your goons to attack her...”

“No, that’s not true...I have no...i-id-eha what yo-you’re talking about,” Lex wheezed from beneath Clark’s tight grip.

“So what happened? You decide you couldn’t use her anymore, so you hired someone to kill her?” Clark spat vehemently.

“No, of course not! I would never...”

He tightened his grip on Lex, “I should kill you right here and now for what you did to her. She was pregnant, you son of a ...”

“I didn’t know. I would never...”

“Would never what? Attack a woman for not going along with your plans?” he spat. “I think we both know that’s not true.” Clark fumed, tightening his grip on Lex. He could kill him. It wouldn’t take very long for him to...

<< “You can NOT afford to lose your temper like that...”>>

<< “You could easily lose control and slip up and then...”

Metropolis isn’t the Outback, you know. People in the city are always looking to make a quick buck. If they find out about you, they’ll put you in a laboratory, and ...”

“... ‘dissect me like a frog.’”>>

His father’s words from long ago rang through his mind, and he released Lex, throwing him to the ground. He seemed visibly shaken but recovered quickly, being sure to keep his distance as he brushed himself off. “Accusations are empty, Mr. Kent,” Lex shot back. “You lack a key ingredient in your theory there...evidence.”

“Not after I’m done with you...” Clark snapped, “You stay the hell away from my family or so help me...”

Lex laughed, “Your family? Mr. Kent, you surprise me. It’s been five years. Are you sure she’s still **YOUR** family?”

Infuriated by Lex’s accusations, he took a step toward Lex just as he darted out of his grasp. Remembering his father’s words, his jaw tightened and he grabbed Lex by the collar, threatening him in a menacing tone, “Come near Lois again, and I swear I will make you regret the day you were ever born.”

“Did I hit a nerve?” Lex challenged. “Go ahead, show me what you’re made of...”

<< “You can NOT afford to lose your temper like that...”>>

“You can’t do it, can you?” Lex smiled in victory as he loosened his grip on him. “Such a waste...” He stepped away from him, rubbing his neck where Clark had had him pinned against the wall by his forearm.

“You stay the hell away from her or, I promise you, next time you won’t be so lucky...” Clark spat before turning to leave.

“Till next time?” Lex called after him.

Lois heard the door open, and she began to stir, glancing at the clock as she took in her surroundings. Lucy had woken up and taken herself to bed hours ago. She'd waited up for Clark but fallen asleep from the late hour. A pair of familiar arms wrapped around her as Clark leaned in to kiss her. "Hey, what are you doing up?"

"Couldn't sleep without you..." she mumbled incoherently.

"Come on, let's get you to bed," he whispered, scooping her up off the couch and carrying her back to the bedroom.

She smiled against his chest as he laid her down on the bed, rolling onto his side as he did so, "My hero..." she whispered incoherently before drifting off to sleep.

"Ah, a beautiful morning," Lex crooned looking out his balcony the next morning.

Asabi stood nearby, ready to read off the updates that had been happening in the organization. "Southside District B was most profitable by the tenants this quarter..."

"Excellent news," Lex took a deep breath as he smiled. "Any news on Dr. Baines's car bombing?"

Asabi fumbled through his notes. "Everything is under investigation," Asabi explained.

"Such a tragedy, wouldn't you agree, Asabi?"

"Yes, sir," Asabi said solemnly.

"We should send flowers to the service," Lex said. "After all Dr. Baines's hard work and she won't be here to see the fruit of her labor. Such a tragedy..."

"Indeed, sir," Asabi nodded, making a note in his notebook. "Any word from Mr. St. John?" he asked. "He never checked in last night."

Lex frowned, "No, nothing yet."

"Help! Somebody, please help! My baby..."

A call for help reached Clark's ears, and he shot up. Lois gasped in surprise when he took the covers with him, sitting up with a start.

"What is it?" Lois asked in confusion, not quite awake.

"Someone's in trouble," he stated, getting up.

"And you want to help?" Lois prompted with a smile.

He smiled back at her, "Yeah."

She leaned in to kiss him. "Go help. I'll be here when you get back." He nodded, standing up as he stared at his feet for a moment. "What is it?" She asked.

"I just want to try something..." He explained before disappearing into a red and blue blur before reappearing fully dressed in his Superman disguise sans the gelled back hair.

Lois smiled up at him, "Close, but you're missing one thing."

He nodded, moving at super-speed to fix his hair then reappearing before her eyes, "Better?"

She nodded, "Yeah. Go be a hero, Superman," she whispered leaning in to kiss him once more before he disappeared out her window at super-speed.

He could make out the faint whisper of "Be careful" as he approached the Metropolis bridge where a large SUV had turned over, and the mother stood outside the passenger window, holding her young child's hand. He grimaced, examining the scene before him. If he moved the little girl the wrong way he could risk paralyzing her but if he didn't move the SUV soon the damage to the vehicle could cause it to burst into flames.

"*This is all part of the job*," he reminded himself as he came into land.

Nigel St. John sat across from General Newcomb, "Everything is going according to plan. EPRAD will be Mr. Luthor's downfall, and then Metropolis will be ripe for takeover."

Newcomb took a puff from his cigar. "Excellent. Keep me updated on his coming and goings. We don't want Mr. Luthor

getting wind of any of our plans."

"No, sir," Nigel said with a smile.

"It was amazing..." Clark gasped, pacing in front of Lois in the living room as he recounted the rescue to her. "No one recognized me as Clark Kent. The little girl called me '*Superman*,' and she's going to be fine. I haven't felt this...free." He stopped pacing and looked back at her, taking her hand in his. "Thank you."

"For what?" She asked, uncertain how he'd gone from celebrating his first Superman rescue to thanking her.

"For believing in me. For pushing me to do this." He pulled her into his arms, cupping her cheek as he gazed into her eyes. "I don't know what I'd do without you." He leaned in to kiss her, running his hands through her shoulder length locks, fingering the strands of hair gingerly. "I love you, Lois," he whispered against her lips.

"I love you, too," she murmured back, looking up at him, "I'm glad you were able to help...without any qualms."

He smiled back, "I'll admit I was a little nervous when I first arrived on the scene but once I got in the action and everything it all just kinda clicked." His smile broadened, and he tightened his arms around her. "Marry me."

She smiled back at him. "I already asked that question," she teased, fingering the lapels of his jacket as she looked up at him, waving the ring he'd given her in the air.

He smiled back at her, "That's not what I mean, Lois. It's just..." He seemed to be struggling to find the words, "It's been five years. I don't want to wait any longer." He cupped her cheek. "I want us to start our life together."

"I want that, too," she whispered, brushing away a stray lock that had fallen across his face, "more than anything."

"So maybe after we get everything settled with Platt and EPRAD we can talk about setting a date..." he prompted cautiously.

She leaned in to kiss him. "I think that's a wonderful idea. Something small. Family and friends."

"Yeah," He smiled at her. "Whatever you want. All I care about is you finally becoming husband and wife..." he placed a hand on her growing abdomen, "...and making sure this little one is safe."

She placed her hand over his. "Me, too." She leaned in to kiss him. "So, I guess we should go ahead and do that interview. Perry's gonna be chomping at the bit when we get in..."

Bill Henderson stared at the image on the video in front of him. It was Kent. Clark Kent was storming into Lex Luthor's penthouse. He had stopped the recording before he'd done anything but he knew if this ever got out...

He grabbed his coat. He needed to have a talk with Lane and Kent and make sure they understood they couldn't be interfering in his undercover assignments like that again. Everything on this tape now had to be scrapped because of one minute and six seconds of Clark Kent's face appearing on tape. Whether it would have ever amounted to anything he didn't know, but he did know he couldn't afford to keep tossing tapes.

Lois stared at the elevator doors as she and Clark rode up the elevator, unable to wipe the grin off her face, "You sure you don't want any credit on this? I mean technically it is your story."

He shook his head, "No, Superman came to you and gave you the interview. The more distance I put between Clark Kent and Superman the better." He gave her a soft smile. "Besides this way we get Perry off our backs and the world will stop asking questions..."

"They're not going to stop asking questions," Lois argued.

"Then I guess you'll have to be there with your pen and pad

ready for a way to answer them.” He smiled back at her as he wrapped his arms around her waist from behind. “Just think of it as an early wedding present.”

She laughed, leaning back in his arms to kiss him. “Mr. Kent, I believe you already gave me that present.” She moved his hands to cover her abdomen where their child was growing as the bell to the elevator dinged, announcing their arrival to the newsroom floor.

“All right, everyone!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom. “I want exclusives. I want pictures. I want *the* interview. *The* story of the year is here! Who is Superman?”

“You ready?” Clark asked, taking her hand in his as they stepped out of the elevator.

“As I’ll ever be,” she smiled back at him.

“Lois, Clark!” Perry barked in their direction. “Where have you been all morning? We’re getting *SCOOPED* while you two are acting like you’re on a permanent honeymoon...”

“Calm down, Perry, don’t forget what the doctor said about your blood pressure,” Lois tried to soothe him.

Perry nodded motioning for Jimmy to come to him. “Jimmy, grab my blood pressure monitor, would you?” Jimmy nodded and headed toward Perry’s office as Perry held his hand against his neck, staring at his watch as he tried to calm himself down.

“Where the Sam Hill have *you two* been?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. You don’t want the one-on-one interview I nabbed with Superman?” Lois asked sarcastically, “I’m sure I can check out other...”

“Now hold on just one minute...” Perry interrupted, trying to calm his nerves. “Superman interview? One-on-one?” He glanced at Clark who shrugged.

“She was just at the right place at the right time, Chief.”

A broad smile spread across Perry’s face as he did an air fist, “*Yeesssss!*” He pointed at the duo, “Get it written up and ready for copy. Olsen! See if you can get any of the footage from LNN and we’ll try and get some screen captures...”

“Oh?” Lois pulled out her digital camera from her purse, “I have some shots here. He was nice enough to pose for a few shots before he had to, um...fly off.”

“Olsen!!!” Perry bellowed, looking at Lois in disbelief.

“Right here, Chief...” Jimmy said, rushing into the newsroom with Perry’s blood pressure monitor.

“What are you doing?” Perry handed him the SD card from Lois’s camera. Get these printed and ready for copy...”

“But Chief, you said...”

“I don’t care what I said. We’re putting out a special edition. Get crackin’!” he bellowed. Jimmy nodded, heading for his desk with the sd card to send the photos over to Photo and Development.

“According to my sources, Mr. Luthor sent over another request to have Luthor Space Station replace Messenger in this launch. He’s gotten sloppy, Mr. President,” Sheppard Wilson explained.

“So it would seem,” Thompson said with a sigh. “I don’t suppose we have any concrete facts to back up the claims against him?”

“There never are, Mr. President,” Wilson sighed. “You can’t afford to be seen swaying to his side. Garner is gaining support. The primaries are just...”

“I know. I know,” Thompson said, cutting him off. “Make the call.”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Wilson nodded, stepping out of the room.

Lois sat in the conference room with Clark, smiling as she read over her front page story ‘Superman: Hero to the World’ ‘I still think it would have looked better with both our names on it.’

He wrapped his arms around her waist. “Maybe later. For now, we put a little distance between me and the local superhero.” He placed a peck on her cheek.

She grinned back at him. “Jimmy said he was going to head over to STAR Labs to check out Dr. Klein’s progress after our morning meeting. Hopefully, he’ll have some good news.”

“We’ll see,” he sighed, looking at her in concern. “How are you feeling?”

“Little nauseous but it comes with the territory,” she sighed, looking back at him. “I took the anti-nausea medicine and have my Ginger Ale. That’s all I can do.”

“Okay,” he whispered, giving her a peck on the cheek. “Just let me know if you need anything.”

The door to the conference room opened, and Perry along with the rest of the staff began piling in for their weekly staff meeting. Regrettably, the couple separated, trying to portray a more professional manner in the office as their colleagues slowly filled the seats at the conference table.

“Sorry about the early hour, boys and girls...” Perry apologized as everyone took their seats.

“Where’s the coffee?” Ralph complained when he looked around the empty coffee bar in the back.

“Why don’t you make some?” Cat suggested.

“Why don’t *you?*” Ralph shot back.

“Can it, both of you!” Eduardo snapped. “Like working with five-year-olds...” he muttered under his breath.

“Can we get back to business now?” Perry asked, irritated.

“Yes. Sorry, Chief,” Cat responded, glaring at Ralph.

“Now, Friez, you’ve got the piece on the Presidential Medal of Honor. That’s not far from the launch. After the press conference, I want you on the streets getting everyone’s reactions on EPRAD’s launch for a companion piece to go along with the Messenger launch piece.”

“You got it,” Eduardo nodded, taking notes.

“Lois, Clark. Any word from that Dr. Klein on Platt’s report?” Perry asked.

Lois was about to answer but felt a dizzy spell starting to come on. Clark noticed the expression on her face and interjected, “Uh, we’re following up with him this morning. Should know something after this meeting.”

“Good.” Perry nodded. “Keep me in the loop. I’ll check with my sources at Ground Control and see if we can get them to do another sweep of the place to be sure of it’s safety.” Perry sighed, looking down at the list.

“Cat, I want you on every government official’s door asking the hard questions. How do they view Superman? Do they trust him?”

“What??” Lois gasped out in a shaky breath. “Perry, you can’t be serious! Of course, we can trust him...”

Perry looked at her in surprise. “I’m sorry, Lois, something you’d like to add?” he asked sarcastically.

“He just saved us all from annihilation. We can’t...” She looked around the room noticing the looks she was getting and stopped. “Don’t we owe him a little...gratitude?”

“What makes you think we’re not grateful?” Cat interjected. “And stop trying to hijack my story. Some of us don’t have a Pulitzer prize winning story land in our laps...”

“It did not *land* in my lap...” Lois shot back.

“I bet I know what she’s ‘*grateful*’ for...” Ralph snickered. Lois saw Ralph lean towards Myers and whisper, pointing toward her and Clark as he laughed. Clark’s arm tightened around her slightly, but he kept his cool, choosing to ignore the behavior.

“Oh, shut up Ralph!” Cat snapped.

“Hold it! Hold it! Hold it!” Perry bellowed holding a time-out sign up as he looked around the room at his misbehaving reporters, “I’m still driving this ship.” He looked at Lois and sighed, “Now, Lois, we’re not saying we aren’t grateful. What

we're saying is there are some people in the world that will have forgotten what he's done and focus on the dangers. It's our job to report that," Perry explained dryly, "but if you'd like to add your two cents on the matter you're more than welcome to visit the editorial department..."

"Calm down," Clark whispered in her ear, tightening his arm around her.

"Fine," she snipped. "Maybe I will."

"Ralph, I'll see you in my office after this meeting..." Perry said. Lois did her best to suppress a chuckle and noticed Cat was having the same problem.

"But Chief..." Ralph argued.

"I don't want to hear it." Perry cut him off. "Now Myers..."

Later that morning, Jimmy watched in awe as Dr. Klein set up a 4D Hologram display illustrating the affects the cooling devices would have on the Prometheus Messenger if it were to go into space. "Going over Dr. Platt's reports, I was able to replicate the information and put it together for presentation to EPRAD this morning..."

The 4D Hologram showed an explosion in the left quadrant—the same place where the explosion had taken place on the test launch that killed Ladderman and his crew and the same place where Dr. Platt had claimed to have found cooling devices.

"Totally rad!" Jimmy said in awe as he watched the display.

"Mr. President?" Shepard Wilson called into the Oval office. "We're ready when you are..."

George Thompson smiled back at Shepard Wilson and nodded, "The first space shuttle to be a living breathing laboratory in outer space can't go up without a christening from the President."

"No, sir," Wilson nodded, walking with him. "Air Force One is ready. Prometheus' Director of Advanced Science will be waiting for your arrival along with Mr. Luthor."

"Luthor?" Thompson snapped irritably. "He has nothing to do with this. What's he doing there?"

"I'm not sure Mr. President," Wilson responded shakily before speaking into his radio. "Rogue is on the move. Repeat rogue is on the move."

After the staff meeting, Jimmy met up with Lois and Clark and went over what he'd learned from STAR Labs. "So, Dr. Klein re-created the launch in this 4D hologram... It was really cool..." At Lois's exasperated look he pushed through, "Anyway, they concluded that Platt's theory was right. There was deliberate sabotage. The transport explosion was no accident. Congrats."

"Yes!" Lois cheered happily, wrapping Clark into a big hug.

"We did it." Clark smiled back at her, leaning in to kiss her when Jimmy cleared his throat, reminding them of their audience.

Unashamed she turned back to Jimmy, "Have you told Perry yet?"

"What about the launch? Has Dr. Klein sent this over to EPRAD?" Clark asked.

Jimmy opened his mouth to respond but was cut off when Perry opened the door. "Just got off the phone with ground control over at EPRAD. After Dr. Klein's pitch this morning, they went back over the colonist launch vehicle with a fine-tooth comb.

Discovered the same coolant problem in the left quadrant's band and fixed it. The launch is all set." He pulled out two badges from his pocket. "Messenger just dropped these off. You'll be in the gallery watching the launch with Dr. Platt."

"Dr. Platt?" Lois asked surprised.

"He just woke up this morning," Perry smiled back at them.

"He can't join Amy and Mrs. Platt on this launch, but on the next one, he'll be able to join them."

"That's great news," Clark said happily.

A knock at the door behind Perry caught their attention, and

they saw Bill Henderson standing in the doorway looking miffed. "Glad someone has some good news. Because I don't."

"What do you mean?" Lois asked confused.

Henderson looked at Clark, then back at Perry and Lois.

"Kent, there somewhere we can talk...without any prying ears?"

"You're in a newsroom, Bill, spill it," Lois said irritably.

"Now, Lois, I'm sure we can accommodate the Inspector's request..." Perry began.

Clark cleared his throat as Bill looked at him with raised eyebrows. "I can meet you downstairs in a minute."

Henderson nodded, "That would be wise." He turned on his heel and headed toward the elevator, leaving Lois and Perry looking at Clark curiously.

Lois looked at him expectantly, and he leaned in to whisper, "I'll be right back." He gave her a quick peck then headed out the door.

"Be right back? What is going on?" Lois asked exasperatedly as she realized she was yelling at a closed door.

"Now, Lois, I'm sure if it's important, Clark will let you know..." Perry reasoned.

"Uh-huh," Lois said, grabbing her things to follow Clark downstairs. She wasn't sure what was going on, but she was going to find out.

Outside the Daily Planet, near Marge's Café, Clark paid for a coffee, waiting in silence as he watched Bill Henderson quietly sip his coffee and find a seat in the corner of the café. He watched the older man intently uncertain what this could be about. His mind was racing as he tried to read Bill Henderson's mannerisms, looking for a tell that would let him know

After a few minutes, Henderson looked up, pulling a small tape out of his jacket. "I've had Lex Luthor under surveillance since yesterday afternoon." He folded his hands on the table, meeting Clark's gaze with a knowing look. "I think you know what's on this tape."

Clark hung his head, heaving a sigh of recognition as he buried his head in his hands. "How much was on the tape?" His confrontation with Lex Luthor. That's what this was about.

"I stopped it before you grabbed him," Henderson said with a sigh, "but you and your caveman tactics are gonna end up compromising my investigation."

"Thank you," Clark said softly. "I shouldn't have done that. I know." He was ashamed of his behavior. He had let his anger get the best of him last night. He still hadn't succeeded in sending a message to Luthor. The man had tried to goad him into killing him.

"What happened?" Henderson asked, looking at him in concern. "What did he do?"

"Nothing I can prove," he sighed. "Lois told me what happened with Wilder after her undercover assignment at the Metro Club and ...I lost it."

Henderson sighed, "We've been trying to bring him down for years, Clark. I want him to pay just as much as you and Lois do but I can't do that if you keep barging in and mucking up my investigations. You cannot lay a hand on Lex Luthor ever again. Are we clear?"

"Yeah," Clark sighed.

"Now from your expression earlier am I to assume you haven't told Lois about your midnight escapade?" Henderson edged cautiously.

Clark shook his head, "No, I had a lot on my mind this morning..."

"Yeah, I saw the Special Edition. Tell Lois I said congrats. Looks like a Pulitzer to me," Henderson smiled, standing up as he handed Clark the tape. "I'm giving this to you to do whatever you need to do with it, but speaking as a man that's been married for thirty years let me give you some advice. Tell her what happened

before she finds out some other way.”

“I will,” Clark sighed. “Thank you.” With that he left, leaving Clark alone with his small cup of coffee to contemplate Bill Henderson’s words.

In the corner, out of Clark’s peripheral view, Lois sat with a copy of the Daily Planet held up to cover herself as she listened in on Clark and Henderson’s conversation. Henderson walked past her giving her a wink before leaving. She sighed in relief that he hadn’t given away her cover. She waited a few minutes for Clark to leave but he wasn’t budging. He took a sip of his coffee then looked directly at her.

‘Crap.’

Lex sat in a chair on his private floor at EPRAD ready to watch the fireworks as Messenger met its final demise. He had received word that the Presidential Medal of Honor had been rescinded by President Thompson. An oversight he was sure to correct when he confronted the man today. He fisted the Special Edition paper in his hands angrily. There was a piece on the return of the local superhero they were calling Superman. His attempts at testing him had been thwarted when this ‘Superman’ never showed up to rescue the prey he’d put in danger. A plan he hadn’t thought through as thoroughly as he should have. Now that he was back he would wait for his chance and learn what he could until he was ready to strike. There was only room for one ‘golden child’ in Metropolis, and he had no intention of embracing this ...alien.

Asabi stood by his side. “Mr. Luthor, Mr. St. John has still not checked in.”

Lex frowned, tightening his fist over the ‘Special Edition’ copy of the Daily Planet that had been handed out. “Keep looking. I want to know the minute you find him.”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor,” Asabi nodded, before retreating to the hallway to continue his search.

Lex stared at the front cover of the Daily Planet and frowned, “Superman? We will see...”

“Are you sure the programming will work? He’s been out of the matrix for a few months...” President Thompson commented as he stared at the latest plan General Newcomb had left him when he arrived in Metropolis.

“Yes, Mr. President. We had five years to program the orders. Trask was very thorough. He seems to have taken on this public persona to help...” General Newcomb laughed at the last statement, “but we both know that’s a ruse.”

“Trask said he was capable of bending steel bars in his hands, shooting fire from his eyes...” Thompson listed off.

“A true asset to our cause and the most powerful assassin the world has ever seen...controlled by you.” Newcomb’s eyes narrowed as he spoke.

She’d thought she’d gotten away with it, but Henderson had found her. Then she’d thought she’d be able to sneak out of the coffee shop without Clark noticing her there when he’d turned and caught her eye before she’d had a chance to duck out of sight. It served her right for trying to hide from a man with super-hearing and super-vision. He had stood up and walked over to her table, taking a seat across from her and crossing his arms over his chest, raising an eyebrow as he prompted, “Well?”

“Well, what?” she asked, trying to go on the defensive mode. He had no right to be mad at her. He hadn’t told her about his confrontation with Lex last night. How could he not tell her?

“Did you get what you came here for?” he asked, his eyes twinkling with amusement. He knew. He’d known the entire time probably.

“I don’t know,” she huffed airily. “When were you going to tell me what happened last night with Lex?”

“When were you going to tell me you followed me and were listening in on mine and Bill’s conversation?”

“You were hiding something. That much was obvious. I was just trying to figure out what,” Lois said huffily, avoiding his gaze. Truth be told she did feel a twinge of guilt for following him, but if he had just told her, she wouldn’t have had to eavesdrop.

“Uh-huh.” He gave her a skeptical look before getting up to leave.

“Where are you going?” she asked, racing to keep up with his hurried pace.

“Back to the Planet,” he sighed, pointing to the large globe across the street.

“You’re not going to answer my question?” Lois asked in shock.

“No, not right now,” he said exasperatedly. “I think you already got the answers you were looking for. Now, if you don’t mind...” he motioned back toward the Planet, “I’d like to get back to work.”

“What about the tape?” Lois asked.

“What about it?” he snapped.

“What are you going to do with it?” She asked concerned.

“I don’t know,” he sighed.

“Clark...would you just talk to me please?”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Lois,” he repeated, crossing the street to head back to the Planet. Lois sighed, following him in silence. It was clear from his body language she wasn’t going to get anything else out of him, so she did what she did not do best... she bit her tongue and decided to wait him out.

General Newcomb walked down the narrow hallway of the viewing towers at EPRAD heading toward his seat when he felt a hard weight grab him from behind, pulling him into one of the suites. He looked back, and to his dismay, it was Lex Luthor’s manservant standing behind him with a sinister look in his eyes. “Mr. Luthor would like a word with you...”

Lois and Clark found their seats in the visitor’s viewing suite at EPRAD. Guards were placed on each corner, monitoring the coming and goings of each guest in their assigned quadrant. Samuel Platt sat in his wheel chair on the back row talking with Amy and Mrs. Platt as the family said their emotional good-byes.

“I’ll see you soon, pumpkin,” Dr. Platt promised.

“You won’t let the men that did this to you hurt you again, right?” Amy pleaded with him. “I couldn’t bare it if...”

“Everything is fine,” Dr. Platt reassured her, catching Lois and Clark’s gaze from behind his family. “I’ve got a couple of superheroes looking out for me.” He motioned for them to come closer. “I know you all have already met, but I figure an official introduction is warranted considering...”

“You sound like you’re doing and feeling a lot better,” Lois commented with a smile.

“Thanks to you two,” Dr. Platt beamed. “Amy, these two got me out of that apartment before it blew.”

“We met,” Amy smiled at them. “I can’t thank you enough.”

“Samuel said you saved his life,” Mrs. Platt beamed. “I don’t know what we would have done without...” She lost her voice in tears, and Dr. Platt hugged her. “I’m sorry. It’s just an emotional day.”

“We understand,” Clark said. “I’m sorry we couldn’t do more, but we’re both glad you’re doing better, Dr. Platt.”

“All passengers scheduled for transport please report to Gate E-L for boarding. Have your boarding passes ready...” The announcer called out over the speakers.

“That’s us,” Mrs. Platt said tearfully, leaning in to kiss Dr. Platt once more. “You stay safe and keep doing your physical therapy and stay away from that awful Metro Burger...”

Dr. Platt smiled back at her, stroking her cheek, “I’ll see you in

October, Marie.” She smiled tearfully, stepping away as Dr. Platt reached out to hug Amy. “You take care of your mom, kiddo...and do what the doctors tell you.”

“I will, Dad,” she grinned back at him. “Hopefully, the next time you see me, I’ll be walking.” Mrs. Platt began to wheel Amy with her to the exit.

“Good luck,” Lois called after them with a smile. She turned back toward Clark, taking a seat with him next to Dr. Platt.

“Did you seriously think I wouldn’t find out, you conniving worm?” Lex snarled angrily as Asabi began his assault on General Newcomb in a secluded corner of EPRAD outside of the security camera’s vision.

“You can do whatever you want to me, Luthor...” Newcomb spat, “but you are through! Our business is done!”

“No, I decide when our business is done,” Lex corrected, watching as Asabi struck Newcomb repeatedly. “Our business is just beginning.”

Lois watched as the passengers lined up on the mat to begin boarding. Security teams were set up throughout, identifying each passenger and assigning a card to them, designating them to a testing quadrant team. She stood up and walked down the steps toward the viewing window to get a better view as the doors opened. Jimmy wasn’t able to come with them, but she had gotten permission to use a disposable camera so she’d brought a few dozen to get as many pictures as she could. As of right now, the Daily Planet was the only paper being granted access to inside EPRAD during the launch, and she was going to take advantage of it.

“You get the shots you need?” Clark asked from behind her.

Lois turned to see Clark standing next to her, leaning against the railing on the viewing window. “We’ll see when these get developed,” she sighed, taking a break. She’d gotten the photos she needed for now. Once the launch started she’d continue getting some shots. “What did you do?” She asked cautiously.

“What?” he asked confused.

“Last night,” she said, staring out the window as she spoke. “What did you do?”

“Nothing,” he spoke hoarsely.

“Nothing?” she countered. “If it was ‘nothing’, Bill wouldn’t have come all the way down to the newsroom to talk to you.”

“He was just mad about his investigation. He’ll get over it. You don’t have to worry. I’m not going over to Luthor’s ever again.” Clark said hurriedly shoving his hands in his pockets as he looked away.

“Why did you go over there in the first place?” Lois asked, grabbing his arm to force him to look at her.

He turned to look at her, and she was surprised to see guilt on his face. His jaw tightened as he spoke softly, “I think you know.”

“No, I don’t. I don’t know...because you won’t talk to me,” she whispered, doing her best to fight back tears.

“You already overheard everything with Bill. What do you want from me?” he asked in exasperation. He looked back toward the viewing window then back at her.

“I want you to tell ME what happened. Not Henderson. Me.” Lois hissed angrily in a hushed whisper as she fought back tears.

“You don’t want to know what happened,” he said flatly.

“Why don’t you let me be the judge of that?” she challenged, crossing her arms over her chest.

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Lo-is...”

“You left in the middle of the night to...what?” she pressed, “Almost get yourself arrested?”

“It wasn’t like that,” he said irritably.

“Then what was it like?”

“I was just trying to scare him...to...”

“To what?” Lois pressed.

“I wanted to hurt him.” At her worried expression, he sighed. “I came close, but I didn’t. What he did...”

“Clark, do you have any idea how dangerous he is?” She whispered fearfully, placing a protective hand over her abdomen.

He caught the gesture, and his face softened as he wrapped his hands around her wrists, pulling them up as he pulled her to him. “He had to know he hadn’t gotten away with it.”

“And did you?” she asked hoarsely.

“I don’t know. He was challenging me to do it. To hurt him. To kill him...” He hung his head in remorse as he seemed to revisit the events from last night.

“Clark...” She placed a hand on his chest in comfort.

“...but I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t...” He raised his fist in the air, tightening his jaw as he shook it. “I wanted to. Believe me, I wanted to...but I couldn’t do it.”

Lois’s face softened, linking her arms around his neck as she pulled him to her, “Because it’s not in your nature, Clark. You could never hurt someone intentionally.”

He looked down, “I hurt you.”

“That wasn’t intentional,” she whispered, looking away. “I thought we weren’t going to talk about that.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized.

She reached up, placing her hands on both sides of his face, forcing him to look at her, “Look at me. You cannot let him win.”

“What if he already has?” he asked bitterly. “Look what he’s done...”

Sensing Clark’s train of thought starting to go down the long line of Lex Luthor’s various crimes, she stopped his impending tirade with a kiss, sealing her lips over his, pulling him to her by the knot of his tie. Immediately she felt his arms encircle her waist, holding her to him as the world around them slowly disappeared.

He slowly broke off the kiss, cupping her cheek as he whispered, “I’m sorry.”

She smiled up at him, “Just don’t shut me out anymore?”

He nodded, resting his hands on her waist, “I promise.”

She let out a soft groan, and he looked at her in concern. “I have to go the bathroom...again.” She handed him the bag of cameras. “Can you take over for me?” He nodded his agreement, and she disappeared down the hallway toward the restroom.

“When the thrusters are fired the countdown will begin for a bomb to go off, killing everyone aboard...” Lex explained coolly. “Messenger will be done making room for Luthor Space Station to step in and take its place.”

“You have no idea who you’re dealing with, Luthor! Just because you’re the boss in Metropolis doesn’t mean that applies outside this city’s walls.”

“No? Who’s going to challenge me?” Lex scoffed. “You?” He laughed, “Your right, our business is done...Asabi, show General Newcomb what we do to traitors.”

“Yes, Sir, Mr. Luthor,” Asabi bowed before reaching for Newcomb.

In the hallway outside the restroom, Lois spotted a man she recognized as Lex Luthor’s man servant covered in blood returning from a door marked ‘Personnel Only Restricted Access’. The blood drained from her face as she looked around for somewhere to hide. Seeing a small corner where the utility closet was located she ducked inside, sighing in relief when he walked past her.

“Oh, I wouldn’t get too comfortable just yet, Ms. Lane,” a familiar voice from behind her spoke. All nerves went on edge as she felt a sharp metal object pointed to her side as a sharp prick hit her neck.

She opened her mouth to scream, but nothing came out. She could feel her body grow heavy as her mind screamed out,

‘Clark!!!!’

Clark stood in the viewing tower, taking pictures as the last of the passengers made their way inside the space station that was about to launch. He glanced around the room. Lois still wasn’t back yet. He frowned. Hopefully, she wasn’t getting sick again. He knew she’d wanted to see the launch. He hated the thought that she might miss it.

‘Clark!!!!’

He looked around, trying to find the source of that voice. It sounded just like Lois, but she was nowhere to be seen. It wasn’t the same. It felt like she was calling his name inside his head. How was that possible?

Concerned, he decided to go look for her. He walked toward Dr. Platt who had wheeled himself up to the viewing window so he could see the launch. “Dr. Platt, I need to go check on Lois. Could you finish taking pictures?”

“Sure thing,” Dr. Platt said happily, taking the cameras from him. “Just point and shoot, right?”

“Get her loaded on the transport with the bomb. She’s been a thorn in my side for too long...”

Clark did his best not to panic as he heard Lex Luthor’s orders. He didn’t know how, but Lois was calling out to him. He had to find her.

“Yeah,” Clark smiled quickly before heading toward the restroom Lois had gone to. He scanned the area and grimaced at what he found. Someone’s blood was on the carpet along with Lois’s press badge.

Panic began to rise in him, and he did his best to squash it down. ‘Think. Think. How would someone ...’ Before he could finish his thought he spotted the answer.

“Within the half-hour, everyone on this transport will be a memory.”

Clark narrowed his eyes. He needed to find Lois, but not as Clark Kent. From the sound of what Lex Luthor had just said he had plans to blow up Messenger along with his fiancée and unborn child. This was a job for Superman.

From the viewing tower, Dr. Platt took photo after photo of the space station as the doors began to close and the announcer began doing a security check inside.

“Quadrant one is clear.”

“Echo, five, nine, eight...”

Dr. Platt took another photo and stopped when he saw a familiar man in the crowd below. A familiar man with a blood stain on his shirt. Surely he couldn’t be... He saw the glint in the man’s eyes and shuddered. That was the man. The man that had tried to kill him. He took another shot.

“What’s the meaning of this, Luthor?” President Thompson snapped angrily as he ascended the inclined hallway in the restricted area of EPRAD where he’d demanded a meeting.

“Is that anyway to speak to the man responsible for your current position?” Lex asked in mock surprise.

“You bought an election. Whoop de doo,” Thompson sighed exasperatedly. “From what I hear it wouldn’t have mattered either way.”

“Oh, but you’ll never know will you?” Lex hissed as he took a step toward Thompson. “When you and your...croonies came to me you were nothing! I made you who you are today!”

“You didn’t make anything...” Thompson snapped. “The organization made me into what I am now. If I were you...” He held a finger up, pointing in Lex’s face and Lex narrowed his eyes at him.

“You be careful where you point that thing, Mr. President, lest you lose a finger in the process.” Lex snarled angrily.

“I’m done taking orders from you, Luthor,” Thompson

snapped back. “The organization is cutting its ties with you. We are done bailing you out. We are done cleaning up your messes...”

“Says who?” Lex scoffed, “You need me!”

“No, that’s where you’re wrong. We don’t need you. You need us. It’s over. The company buy-offs. The federal witness information. The closing of federal investigations into you and your criminal activities. We’re done.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Lex said in a sinister tone. “You forget I worked with you on that pet project of yours. How aware is the organization about that project?”

“That’s in the past,” Thompson said uneasily.

“You also forget I know about the testing of a certain meteorite you don’t want the public to know about and I know the same alien you held captive for five years is the one and the same...” he slapped a copy of the Daily Planet’s front page on Thompson’s chest, “Superman.”

“You don’t know anything,” Thompson said shakily, unable to maintain the superior tone he’d had once before as he stared at the image of Superman rescuing a young girl from a burning car on the front page of the paper.

“I think I do,” Lex pressed, “and from your face, I can tell you’re not as pleased with his presence as your office tries to make it out to be.” In a hushed whisper, he egged Thompson on, “Join me. Help me rid the planet of his existence and together we can become unstoppable...”

At super-speed, Clark changed into the suit and raced through the doors of the ‘Personnel Only’ hallway where he found Lex Luthor standing with President Thompson with a look of satisfaction on his face. Two doors were at the end of the hallway. Lois could be anywhere.

“Superman!” Lex turned to him with a smile, “Such a surprise...”

“Where is she??” Clark barked angrily, grabbing Lex by the throat as he hoisted him in the air, slamming him against the steel plated wall panels.

“She??” Luthor croaked.

“You know exactly who I’m talking about. What did you do to her?” Clark fumed angrily.

“Now!” Luthor barked. “Get the meteorite...”

“I don’t think so...,” Thompson said smugly as he walked toward the exit. He pulled out a small metallic device with a red glowing stone in the center and spoke into it, “Kill him.”

Something inside Clark seemed to click off as he tightened his grip around Lex Luthor’s throat, watching the color drain from his face.

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “He’s a monster. I have been working with Henderson for years trying to prove it, but he is always one step ahead of me. I just wanted him to pay for what he did.” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “He must die.” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “It took everything in me not to pursue it. After everything that happened ... I couldn’t risk losing the only thing I had left of you. I’ve often wondered if something might have happened to him when I was unconscious. Lucy said I wasn’t breathing when she found me...” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “He must die.” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “You could never hurt someone intentionally.” >>>

<< “Because it’s not in your nature, Clark. You could never hurt someone intentionally.” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<< “He must die.” >>>

<< “Alien. Destroy. Alien.” >>>

<<“You can NOT afford to lose your temper like that...”>>
 <<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>
 <<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>
 <<“He must die.”>>
 <<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>
 <<“You could easily lose control and slip up and then...
 Metropolis isn't the Outback, you know. People in the city are
 always looking to make a quick buck. If they find out about you,
 they'll put you in a laboratory, and ...”
 “... ‘dissect me like a frog.’”>>
 <<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>
 <<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>
 <<“He must die.”>>
 <<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>
 <<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>

“We are T-minus three minutes. All technical personnel should
 deplane at this time.” The announcer echoed throughout the
 launch station.

Dr. Platt watched from the viewing tower as the man who had
 attacked him made his way toward the corridor marked for
 Personnel Only. Frowning and sensing something wasn't right he
 pulled the switch for security on his seat and waited.

Lois groggily began to come to. Her head was pounding. She
 winced as she tried to open her eyes. She felt a wave of nausea
 wash over her as she tried to sit up. Instinctually she reached for
 her abdomen, placing a protective hand over it as she forced
 herself to open her eyes. What she saw caused her to scream out in
 fear.

‘19.58’ a digital clock stuck to the metal paned walls with
 wires on all ends stared back at her. ‘Bomb. Definitely a bomb.’

“Oh, my God!” She cried, looking around the room. It looked
 like some sort of plane.

‘Or a space shuttle.’ Her mind reminded her of the impending
 launch.

“Oh, God!” she cried, looking around for a way out. The doors
 were all sealed. She began screaming, “Help! There's a bomb.
 Someone, please!!! Get me out!!!”

He wanted him dead.
 He wanted to kill him.
 He had hurt Lois.

He had hurt Jamie.
 He had hurt his family.

But something inside him would not let him do it.

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

‘Man. I'm a man.’

<<“He's a monster. I have been working with Henderson for
 years trying to prove it, but he is always one step ahead of me. I
 just wanted him to pay for what he did.”>>

‘He hurt Lois.’

‘He could hurt her again.’

‘You could stop it here and now.’

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

‘Man. I'm a man.’

‘Kill him.’

‘No, I won't do it.’

‘You will do it.’

“I said kill him!!!” Thompson repeated angrily.

<<“He must die.”>>

‘You know you want him dead. You know you could do it.
 You're the most powerful man on the planet. You could destroy
 him and snuff out his life in an instant for what he did to Lois. He
 doesn't deserve to live.’

‘You must kill. You must destroy.’

‘No. You can't.’

‘You can kill him. The world will be a better place for it.’

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

<<“It took everything in me not to pursue it. After everything
 that happened ... I couldn't risk losing the only thing I had left of
 you. I've often wondered if something might have happened to him
 when I was unconscious. Lucy said I wasn't breathing when she
 found me...”>>

Lois had been attacked when she was pregnant on Luthor's
 orders. He watched as the blood slowly drained out of Luthor's
 eyes, meeting his gaze as his eyes narrowed back at him. He could
 do this. The world would be a better place for it.

“That's it! Kill that piece of scum!” Thompson ordered
 angrily.

<<“He must die.”>>

<<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>

<<“He must die.”>>

<<“You can NOT afford to lose your temper like that...”>>

No, he couldn't do it. He couldn't take a life. As much as he
 hated this man for what he'd done to Lois... As much as he
 wanted him to suffer... He just couldn't do it. He loosened the
 grip he had on Luthor's throat, hearing him gasp for air.

<<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>

“I said kill him, alien!” Thompson ordered angrily.

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

<<“He must die.”>>

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

<<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>

He threw Lex to the ground in anger as he fought the inner
 battle waging inside his mind, urging him to take a life. “No...”
 He shook his head over and over again. “Never.”

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

<<“He must die.”>>

<<“Alien. Destroy. Alien.”>>

<<“You could never hurt someone intentionally.”>>

“I said kill him!!!” Thompson repeated angrily.

Lex stood up warily, glaring at Clark uneasily. “You...” He
 croaked, waving a fist at him.

“You son of a...” Thompson brought the red glowing device
 toward him, and he felt something click inside him once more.
 “You will KILL him...”

“No,” Clark repeated, struggling once more for control of his
 mind.

“One minute and counting...” the announcer read off as Lois
 looked for anything to pry the doors open with.

“Somebody help!!!!” Lois pounded her fist against the steel
 door in despair. She glanced at the keyboard next to the doors and
 searched for anything she could use to pry it open with. She
 checked her pockets and smiled when she found her swiss army
 knife still tucked neatly in her left pocket. “Yes!”

“Forty-five seconds and counting...” the announcer read off as
 Clark stood to face Thompson in anger.

“I am not a murderer!” he spoke coolly.

Thompson took a few steps back, holding up the red glowing
 rock as if it would protect him from whatever demise he thought
 was coming his way. “You stay back!”

“Who are you?” Clark asked, advancing toward him.

“Really?”

“None of your concern,” Thompson stammered. “The point is
 I know who you are...” Clark stopped in surprise, and Thompson
 grinned, “I know all about the green meteorite...and Trask, and I
 know that you may be a caped God to some but in reality, you're
 nothing more than a common...”

Before he could react a shot fired and Thompson was on the
 ground. Clark turned to see Lex standing a few feet away with a
 pistol in his hand and a look of satisfaction on his face.

“You ...killed him!” he accused, advancing toward Lex.

“Somebody help!!!! There’s a bomb in here! Please!!!”

He heard Lois’s cries and moved at super-speed... leaving Lex Luthor to escape after assassinating the President of the United States. He flew down the hallway as he scanned the lead-lined panels, hoping to find some crack to show him where Lois was. There was none. Each door kept running him into dead end after dead end until finally, he found her heartbeat.

“Clark!!!!”

He calmed his nerves and focused on the sound, allowing it to lead him to her.

“Thirty seconds and...”

There was a pause, and the controls Public Affairs Officer looked up from his desk to see one of the officers holding up a time out sign. He looked at them in concern.

“Sir, we have a circuit failure in the main panel.”

“Due to a mechanical failure, we have suspended countdown at twenty-nine seconds. We will advise.”

“Lois?” Clark called out as he pried the doors open. He sighed in relief when he saw her hunched in the corner in tears.

“Oh, thank God...” she cried, pointing at the digital clock on the wall. “There’s a bomb...”

Seeing the timer ticking on the device he yanked it off the wall as Lois yelled, “Clark!!!”

Buried inside the mass of wires and crazy glue he found the C-4 plastic explosive card that was set to trigger the explosion and popped it in his mouth to swallow. As it exploded in his stomach, he let out a light burp, emitting a soft rain of smoke as he opened his mouth, “Excuse me.”

“Are you okay?” Lois asked, looking at him in concern.

He nodded, cupping her cheek as he pulled her to him, “Are you?”

“Sir? Due to our equipment problems and... an unexplained occurrence, I don’t think we have any alternative but to abort,” One of the technicians advised in the control room.

“You can’t do that!” Dr. Platt shouted from across the room.

“Dr. Platt? What are you doing here?” the Launch Commander asked, seeing the man wheel himself toward the control panel switch board.

“We can fix it. You can’t abort. He’ll have won.” Platt stammered.

“Who will have won?” The commander asked.

“Lex Luthor.”

Clark reached for the control panel board where Lois had begun cutting wires out and began working on repairing the damage with his heat vision. “I was trying to get their attention. I thought if something stopped working, they might stop before it was too late.” Lois explained sheepishly.

“I think I can fix this,” he said with a smile. “Just sit tight.”

Just then the doors opened, and the group of colonists stepped inside, looking at both Lois and Clark in his Superman suit in confusion. Lois noticed the looks of anger and mistrust on the colonists faces and quickly covered, “Uh, there was a bomb...he ate it.”

“I’m almost done repairing the damage,” Clark reassured them uneasily.

The head colonist took a step toward them then looked at Lois critically, “And what were YOU doing here, Miss...?”

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, “Getting drugged, kidnapped and thrown in here against my will.”

The head colonist looked at her with a critical eye before turning to Superman. “Mister...we have mechanics who can...”

Clark closed the control panel and smiled as it lit back up. “All

done.”

“Cool!” Amy Platt smiled up at him.

Clark smiled back, kneeling down so that he was eye-level with her, “Hi.”

“Hi. I like your costume,” Amy said with a shy grin.

A broad smile spread across his face, “Thank you. My mother made it for me.” She looked at him in awe, and he looked around the room, “What’s your name?”

“Amy. Amy Platt,” she introduced herself, holding her hand out to shake his. He took her hand and smiled as she asked, “Who’re you?”

“I’m...a friend.”

“I read about you in the paper. They called you ‘Superman.’ A man that can fly...” She grew thoughtful for a moment, “Is what they say true? Can you really fly?”

He nodded, “Yes I can.”

“Can you teach me?” she asked.

“Not to fly, but, once this lab is operational, walk... That’s very possible.”

“Attention, colonists. The mission has been scrubbed. Prepare to disembark.” The announcer echoed from the speakers.

“No...” murmurs of disapproval echoed through the room.

The head colonist sighed in defeat, “That’s it then. It’s over.”

“Why?” Lois asked in confusion, not understanding the reason behind the mission being canceled.

“Once the thrusters have been fired, they have to be replaced,” Mrs. Platt explained tearfully, looking down at Amy in despair.

“We’ll lose our launch window,” the head colonist sighed, “We just have to forget about Space Station Prometheus.”

A determined expression washed over Clark’s face as he stood up, “No you don’t.” Everyone looked at him in confusion, and he continued, “There’s nothing wrong with this transport vehicle or the station. You just need to get there.”

Lois feigned ignorance as she began to realize what Clark was suggesting, “And how are they supposed to do that?”

“Easy. I’ll give them a lift.” He smiled back at the surprised colonists.

“What do you mean, Lex Luthor?” The head of security asked.

Platt sighed, looking around at the skeptical looks, “It was him. It was all him. That man that attacked me was working for him. I think he did something to someone else because when I was taking pictures...”

“What pictures?” The officer asked.

Platt held up a bag of disposable cameras. “These.”

The Public Affairs Officer called out as he walked past them, barking orders to his team, “I want security and tech teams over every inch of that transport. We have...”

He stopped as they all stared at Messenger as it was lifted from the launch pad without the rockets being fired off.

“...Lift off?”

Everyone stared in awe when the chirp from one of the security team officer’s radio brought them back to the present, “Attention all EPRAD Control Units. We have a body. Repeat. We have a body. Nobody leaves. Nobody. Authorities have been notified...”

Lois watched numbly from the viewing tower as paramedics and police officers swarmed the launchpad of EPRAD Control. Two bodies. Once one of the men killed had been identified as President George Thompson, the Secret Service and White House staff filled the halls, questioning everyone over and over and over again.

“Miss Lane?” Dr. Platt looked at her in concern, “Are you gonna be okay?”

Lois shook her head. “I’m not sure,” she said weakly.

“It was him, wasn’t it?” Platt asked.

“Who?” Lois asked.

“Luthor. He was the one that hurt you, wasn’t he?”

“I don’t know,” she said shakily. “I don’t remember. All I know is I woke up in the main control panel staring at a bomb and sporting a serious migraine.” She looked at him in concern. “If you knew Lex Luthor was behind all this why didn’t you say anything?”

“Who would have believed me?” He asked.

A knock at the entry level’s wall caught both of their attention, and they looked toward the doorway to see Bill Henderson standing there with an irritated look on his face. “Just can’t stay out of trouble, can you?”

Lois sighed, “I went to the bathroom, Bill. It’s not like I snuck on board willingly.”

Henderson sighed, “What is this? Lane-luck?” Off her look, he stopped teasing her, “Listen I checked with the guys at the White House and since the footage on the security matches up with everything you said they’re going to let you go without any charges...”

“But?” Lois prompted.

“But be prepared to issue statements over the next few weeks. Apparently, they think they caught the president’s murder on tape. No idea when they will be issuing a statement to the public though...or the press.”

“Can I go home?” Lois asked.

LEX LUTHOR CAREER CRIMINAL
LEX LUTHOR ASSASIN
FALL OF THE HOUSE OF LUTHOR
SUPERMAN SAVES SPACE STATION

Lois didn’t want to go home. After she’d been looked over to make sure there weren’t any adverse effects from the injection she’d been given and told to follow up with her doctor, she’d gone straight to Clark’s apartment. She knew when Clark returned from giving Messenger the boost it needed to reach the space station lab he would need someone to talk to. She’d seen what had happened. Everyone had seen what had happened. She had been looking for signs of him on the local news stations, but all anyone wanted to talk about was the president’s assassination.

The video footage that had been sent to the news stations showed Clark grabbing Lex by the throat and nearly choking him to death before throwing him to the ground and President Thompson pulling out a red glowing device and pointing it toward Clark. Unnoticeable to the casual observer, Clark seemed to be struggling to fight for control as he advanced toward the president with his hands in the air.

Then a shot rang out, and Clark turned to see Lex holding the gun.

It was then that he disappeared and stopped the bomb from going off inside the Messenger Transport.

Something had happened inside that corridor. That much was certain. Why had he attacked Lex like that after promising not to earlier during his conversation with Henderson? Why had Lex shot President Thompson? Why had President Thompson been afraid of Clark? What was that red glowing device he was trying to use on Clark?

So many questions raced through her mind. No answers came to mind.

So here she sat, curled up in the corner of Clark’s couch with a bowl of popcorn and a rerun of ‘When Harry Met Sally’ on television. She leaned back against the cushions of the couch for support, snuggled close in Clark’s old football jersey as she fought back the tears that threatened to overtake her.

It scared her to know she’d come so close to losing everything.

“I love that you get cold when it’s 71 degrees out. I love that it

takes you an hour and a half to order a sandwich. I love that you get a little crinkle above your nose when you’re looking at me like I’m nuts. I love that after I spend the day with you, I can still smell your perfume on my clothes...”

Clark wrapped his arms around her from behind whispering the rest of the famous quote in her ear as she leaned back into his arms, “... And I love that you are the last person I want to talk to before I go to sleep at night. And it’s not because I’m lonely, and it’s not because it’s New Year’s, Eve. I came here tonight because when you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible.” She leaned back to kiss him, cupping his cheek as she wrapped herself around him. “You’ve seen that movie a million times and know every word by heart. Don’t you ever get tired of it?” he asked.

“Never,” she smiled back at him, linking her arms around his neck as she slid on to his lap, resting her head on his shoulder, “They released that video...”

“I know,” he sighed, running his hands up and down her upper thigh as he spoke. “I caught the frequency when I was coming back into Earth’s orbit.”

“How did everything go?” Lois asked, running her hands up and down his chest.

“The colonists have made it to Space Station Prometheus, and everyone is safe,” he said with a smile.

“Clark...” she began slowly, “that red device...”

“I don’t know,” he said, massaging her upper thigh as he spoke, “All I know is I kept having these thoughts to ...kill Luthor...in my head. I couldn’t do it. I wanted to, but I couldn’t do it. When I stopped the voices in my head seemed to stop. I have no idea how or why...” He shook his head in disgust. “I let him get away.”

“You saved thousands of lives today Clark...and helped expose Lex for the monster he really is,” Lois reassured him.

“Dr. Platt coming forward didn’t hurt any either,” Clark pointed out.

“At least now we know the real reason Platt was drugged,” Lois sighed. “He didn’t want anyone pointing the finger at him.”

Clark pulled her close to him, resting her head against his chest. “I’m so sorry. I got there as soon as I could.” He brushed his lips against her forehead, and she sighed against him. “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” she sighed, “now that you’re here. Just don’t go anywhere unless it’s an emergency, okay?”

“I won’t,” he promised, holding her close. “Come on, let’s get you and Junior to bed.”

She laughed, “Junior?”

“Sure, Lois Junior.” He grinned back at her with a teasing smile, and she smacked him on the shoulder lightly.

“I don’t think so,” she grimaced. “Baby has to have his or her own name...at least with living family members.”

“Okay,” he conceded the point, running his hands up her legs as he pulled her closer. He was still shaken by what had happened earlier. It was clear he was trying to focus on anything and everything to not think about what he’d almost done.

“Clark...” She whispered, stroking his cheek, guiding his gaze back toward her. “It’s not your fault.”

“I should have stopped that bullet. I was right there,” he said with a pained expression.

“He was trying to use that...thing on you. Who knows what affect it had on you? You weren’t yourself. It was not your fault,” she soothed, resting her head against his chest.

“I’ve never felt anything like that,” he said in a hushed whisper. “It was like someone else’s thoughts were being projected into my head. Like I was watching myself do things I didn’t want to do but couldn’t seem to stop myself...” He hung his head in shame.

"It was not your fault," she repeated, leaning up to kiss him, lightly at first then growing with more intensity as he sought her out hungrily. She couldn't get enough of the feel of his lips on hers or the way that his lips shuddered desperately into her mouth, pulling passionately on her lips as he pleaded for more. She willingly gave in, deepening the kiss until it became frantic, eager, demanding. "I'm...right...here." She reassured him as she felt his solid form press against her. She moved to straddle him, running her hands up and down his chest as she loosened his tie, tightening her thighs around his torso.

"Are...you sure...you're...feeling...up to...it?" He asked in between heated kisses, running his hands up and down her upper thighs.

"Everything's fine," she reassured him, tugging the silk tie from his collar as she pressed herself against him. "Kiss me."

"Everything's fine." She reassured him, tugging the silk tie from his collar as she pressed herself against him, "Kiss me."

He obliged, running his hands through her hair as he fingered through her dark locks, feeling the softness against his fingertips. Unwilling to break contact but desperate for the closeness he knew was sure to follow he stood up, wrapping her legs around him as he carried her to the bedroom. An old fantasy came back to him as he let his eyes linger on the sight of Lois in his old football jersey on his bed.

<< "When we're at home maybe I'll lose the bra..."

"Promise? Whose home?"

"Is that your fantasy, Mr. Kent? Me no bra?"

"No, you on my bed in my football jersey...nothing on underneath..."

"Football jersey, huh? Maybe if you're good, we'll try it out sometime...">>

She caught his gaze and looked back at him in concern. "What is it?"

"You are so sexy," he murmured, whispering feather light kisses against her throat, slipping his hands beneath the hem of the jersey. She fingered the buttons of his dress shirt, popping them open one by one as she helped shed him of his shirt.

"So much better..." She said with gratification as her eyes lingered on his chest, running her hands up and down his shoulders seductively. He groaned his approval, slipping his hands beneath the hem of her jersey and she whispered, "Hope you don't mind I stole this." She leaned her head back against the mattress, staring up at the ceiling as he fingered the waistband of her cotton panties, "It makes a very comfortable nightgown."

No, he didn't mind. It looked much better on her. He let his eyes wander down the soft curves of her body, watching where the faded red jersey wrapped snugly around her hips in just the right way. He could feel his dress slacks growing more and more uncomfortable by the second as the fantasies he'd had about her in this garment ran through his mind.

"I like it better on you," he whispered in her ear, "just without the panties."

"That's right. You had a fantasy about that...Me in your football jersey on your bed..." She recalled with a smile.

"...and nothing on underneath." He finished for her, moving his hand up the back of the jersey, expertly popping the clasp to her bra beneath the jersey.

She smiled back at him, tugging the lacy garment out of the left sleeve of the jersey and tossing it to the ground. "Well, now you've got me here on your bed, in your jersey with nothing underneath. Is that the extent of this fantasy or is there more?"

"There's always more," he smiled back at her, leaning in to kiss her, pressing his lips against hers as he allowed his hands to roam up and down her body from beneath the jersey unhindered by any garments.

"Tell me," she pleaded with him as she reached for him,

fingered his hard chiseled abs for a moment before moving her hands lower until they were resting on the buckle of his belt.

His mouth came crashing down on hers as he thrust his tongue against her lips, demanding entrance. The world slowly faded away as they both focused on losing themselves in one another's arms, pushing the stresses of the day away.

"You okay?" he asked, watching Lois as she let out a shallow breath, resting her cheek against his chest.

"Mmm hmmm," she sighed happily, leaning up to kiss him.

"That was amazing,"

"Mind blowing," he nodded his agreement, stroking her cheek.

"Super," she finished for him with a smile.

"Super," she finished for him with a smile. Lois stared up at the ceiling with a wide grin on her face. That had been out of this world. Where did he learn to do that? Why hadn't they tried that before? She glanced back at him, noting the look of satisfaction on his face as he stared up at the ceiling.

How she loved this man...

A thought occurred to her as she recalled their conversation from this morning. "One month," she said breathlessly.

"What?" He looked at her confused.

"One month," she repeated. "That'll give us enough time to get everyone together and plan a wedding. I'm not telling anyone about the baby until we're in the second trimester though."

"Okay," he smiled, leaning over to kiss her. "One month."

**THOMPSON CAMPAIGN A FRAUD
RECOUNT BRINGS GARNER TO WHITE HOUSE
SUPERMAN LINKED TO STRANGE "MIRACLE SAVES"
IN METROPOLIS**

LEX LUTHOR STILL ON THE RUN

LUTHOR CORP BANKRUPT

CORRUPTION IN METROPOLIS PD EXPOSED

MAYOR AND GOVERNOR FORCED TO RESIGN

Three Weeks Later...

Perry White smiled at the headlines in front of him as he made his way back to the Daily Planet. Things had certainly changed over the last month. Lex Luthor was still on the run from the authorities but he no longer held the iron clad grip on the city he once did. The officials that had been linked with the corruption had been booted out and elections were being held this week to bring in an official elected by the people for the office of governor and mayor as well as appointing a new District Attorney and Superior Court Judge who had been compromised by Luthor. Yes, things were definitely looking up.

He stepped off the elevator and into the newsroom only to be greeted by a very irritated Ellen Lane standing by the elevator in a cream pantsuit and white blouse. "You're late."

"Excuse me??" he choked out, uncertain what crime he'd committed in her mind to give him such a greeting.

"I said, you're late." Ellen repeated in a huff, pointing to the conference room.

"It's Saturday." Perry pointed out in a gruff tone as she guided him toward the conference room.

"I agreed to have this rehearsal here at the Planet against my better judgment to accommodate your schedule, Mr. White. Don't get smart with me." Ellen wagged her finger at him.

"Yes, ma'am," he nodded, stepping into the Conference room which was littered in post-it notes marking where everyone was supposed to stand. The table and chairs had been pushed to the side. "What in the blazes...?"

"Don't ask," Lois cut him off, crossing her arms over her chest. "You're late." She was dressed in a black and white striped cotton maxi skirt that hung loose around her torso and white

button blouse while the rest of the wedding party seemed to be dressed in business casual attire per Ellen Lane's orders.

"So I've been told," Perry replied dryly.

"So have we," Lucy added with a roll of her eyes.

"Repeatedly," Clark added.

"Can't have a rehearsal without the officiator," Ellen said, looking pointedly in his direction.

Perry sighed, setting his paper and coffee down on the table that had been pushed to one side of the conference room wall.

"Okay, I'm here, Mrs. Lane. Where do you want me?"

"Right here." Ellen pointed to the pink post-it that had been placed on the floor with his name on it. He nodded and took his place. "Pete, you stand over here." She pointed to the post it with his name in green. Pete got up from his seat and made his way over to his designated spot.

"Best man reporting for duty," he gave a fake military salute causing everyone to laugh except for the unamused Ellen Lane.

"I'm not laughing, young man," Ellen warned. "I have been given four measly weeks to pull this off. This is no time for jokes."

"Sorry," Pete managed to squeak out. He glanced back at Clark and mouthed, 'Yikes' to him. Clark shook his head telling him to knock it off.

"Lucy, you're across from Pete." Ellen pointed to the purple post-it with Lucy's name on it. Lucy got up from her seat and stood across from Pete. Ellen gave her an exasperated sigh, "Lucy, for God's sake, stop slouching..."

"Better?" Lucy cringed as she stood as straight as she could across from Pete, raising her shoulders at an uncomfortable height.

Ellen gave her an 'ok' signal then turned back to look at Pete and Lucy across from one another. "Can you two rotate forty-five degrees toward me?" They did as they were asked and Ellen nodded, "Perfect."

She then turned her attention to the couple that were sitting at the table watching as their family and friends were subjected to the wrath of Ellen Lane. "Clark, you're right here." She pointed to the yellow post-it with Clark's name on it. He got up and took his place next to Pete where the post-it was at. Ellen smiled, "And Lois you're over here." She pointed to the red post-it across from Clark. Lois took her place across from Clark as he took her hand, looking in her eyes with a smile.

Ellen took a step back seeming to take her hard work in. Perry couldn't help but smile at the view he was afforded: Ellen with a scrunched up face, trying to decide if they needed to move any way to the left or right while Lucy and Pete fought the urge to burst into laughter, and of course the soon to be bride and groom who seemed oblivious to the world around them at the moment.

"Okay, I think we've got everyone in place. Well, everyone that's here. Clark, when are your parents flying in? I should have someone meet them at the airport..." Ellen grabbed her notebook that they had all come to know as 'the wedding book' and began to write.

"Uh, I'm not sure." Clark began, getting a worried expression on his face.

"I think Pete was going to pick them up. That falls under the best man duties, doesn't it?" Lucy interjected, seeing a worried expression on the groom's face.

"I was?" Pete asked before Lucy slyly kicked him in the shin, "Ow! Right, I'm picking them up. No worries."

"Okay, that just leaves your father, Lois. Now, he swore on his mother's grave he would be there. If he isn't I will wring him up and..."

"Okay, we get the picture, Mom..." Lois cut her off, not wanting to hear the details of which Ellen was about to go into. "It'll be fine. If Daddy doesn't show up you can just walk me down the aisle."

"Lois..." Ellen gave her a tender look of sympathy, quite the

contrast of the woman they all had gotten to know over the past few weeks. "You're not going to have to worry about that." She reassured her. "He will be here... even if I have to hog tie him..." Lois laughed at the mental image and then sighed. "Okay, let's get started here, shall we?"

In the dark hallways somewhere underneath Metropolis, a man in a sharp suit and slicked back hair made his way through the tunnels of the abandoned subway until he came to a large steel door with a key code molded to the top right corner. He punched in a code and the door slid open, revealing a small laboratory. "Dr. Lane, how is the patient today?"

"I've done everything I can for him, Mr. Darryl, but without a power source I don't know how much longer he's going to survive..." Sam Lane took his glasses off, pinching the bridge of his nose in disgust. "When I signed on, I was told this was a robotics project."

"It is..." He motioned to the man on the table Dr. Lane had been working on. "Your robotics technology is going to work to help bring life back to those without a chance. Take Mr. Corbin here. Without you he would have died. Because of you and your brilliant use of robotics he has a second chance."

"He's plugged into a wall. That's not a life worth living," Sam snapped irritably.

"I may have a solution for you on that end," Mr. Darryl said, motioning for him to follow, "The organization has dabbled for years in research focused on advancing our technology and bettering life as a whole here on Earth." He turned the corner and entered another code. A blue light appeared and a table appeared from below them, showing a display of colorful glowing stones each the size of a human head.

"What in the world?" Sam stammered.

"Our testing on a meteorite that came to Earth around the same time this alien, Superman appeared. Some of these had no affect on him during his captivity while others had interesting and useful affects on him."

"Captivity?" Sam asked in disgust.

"We couldn't let that alien roam free without knowing what we were dealing with, now, could we?" Mr. Darryl asked, "and you do know this information is of the strictest confidence..." He said darkly, his eyes narrowing. "That daughter of yours seems awfully chummy with him. Don't get any ideas..." With that, he pressed a button and pulled out a black stone meteorite from the display. "This should be the answer to all our problems, Dr. Lane. Let me know when Corbin is operational and we'll begin testing."

"Yes, sir," Sam stammered heavily, taking the stone in his hand. "I, uh, will need to take next week off. My daughter's wedding is coming up and I promised her I'd be there."

"Just as long as we're clear on your role in the organization," Mr. Darryl replied with a sly smile.

"Yes, sir, crystal," Sam managed, watching as Mr. Darryl typed in a code to close the display and the table disappeared into the floor once more. His hand tightened over the black stone in his hand. What had he gotten himself into now?

After the rehearsal, Pete joined Lois, Clark, Lucy, and Jimmy for lunch at the local café, catching up on his travels and the happenings in Metropolis over the last few years. Lois had to make a quick dash to the restroom leaving Pete to relay his latest adventure to Jimmy and Clark while Lucy checked on Lois. "You should have been there. Rachel came with me on my first mountain lion adventure. We spent three days surveying the same area until he finally showed. He was getting nervous and we needed to hurry and get the shots before he jumped from the tree and went into some rough canyon country, making it impossible for us to make it to him before nightfall."

"That sounds amazing..." Jimmy said, looking through Pete's

photo portfolio with the images taken on his hunt.

“It was the thrill of the lifetime. Initially, I’d been signed on to capture the ‘hunt’ of the mountain lion but then they changed their minds and wanted to just capture some shots of him in the wild and in nature, Which I prefer. Never been too good at hunting game.” He gave them a wry smile.

“Me neither.” Clark crinkled his nose. “Never saw the point unless we were camping and there was nothing around.”

“Exactly!” Pete snapped his fingers. “I’m telling you, CK, this was by far the most intense project I’ve ever worked on. I’m not kidding—I pushed my body as hard as I could, until my muscles wouldn’t go any farther. When we finally closed in on the tree, we had to cross a large rockslide under a bluff and it was extremely steep. I knew one wrong step and I would end up in the bottom of the canyon with a broken bone and my shot was gone.”

“Clumsy Pete, fall? Nah...” Clark teased.

Pete laughed, “Thankfully, Rachel was there to pull me back when I was stumbling. If it weren’t for her we wouldn’t have gotten the shots at all and I’d have ended up owing National Geographic a lot of money...possibly moving back in with Mom and Dad,” he joked with a sigh as Clark smiled back at him. “At first, I couldn’t see the lion. He was treed in a large Douglas fir and the branches were too thick. I moved up the steep hillside farther, and there he was! We got some amazing shots. The landscape there is beautiful and the animals...” he smiled, “It was out of this world. Never been through anything like that.”

“It sounds incredible, Pete.” Clark smiled back at his friend.

Lucy followed Lois into the restroom, listening to her emptying her stomach, “Lois? Are you okay?”

“I just need a minute. I didn’t eat anything this morning and...” She let out a soft sigh, catching her breath in the bathroom stall.

Lucy sighed, “Lois, you seem to be having a lot of *‘forgetful moments’* lately. Unexplained sickness. Is there something you want to tell me?”

The door opened and Lois dabbed the corner of her eyes with a tissue as she walked toward the sink, “I’m fine.”

“You were just throwing up. You’re not fine.” Lucy snapped, tugging on Lois’s sleeve to force her to look at her. “What is going on?” Lois pulled out a travel toothbrush from her purse and began applying toothpaste to the brush after wetting it, staring at the mirror as she did so, not saying a word. “Why do I get the feeling you know what’s going on and you aren’t telling me?”

Lois silently finished brushing her teeth then gargled with mouthwash to get the taste out of her mouth. “I’m fine,” she said quietly. “You don’t need to worry.” Her hand moved to her abdomen instinctually and Lucy’s eyes widened.

“Oh, my God!” she said in a hushed whisper, “Are you *pregnant???*”

“Shhhh...” Lois snapped her head around to keep her volume down. “Not so loud.”

“Oh, my God!” Lucy wrapped her arms around Lois in a bear hug. “Why didn’t you tell me???”

“We didn’t tell anyone yet. Not even the Kents. We’re waiting till the second trimester to announce it.” Lois whispered softly, hugging Lucy back.

“Are you okay? I mean I know everything that happened with Jamie is horrible and awful and this doesn’t take anything away from that, but...”

Lois smiled back at her. “I’m okay,” she reassured her. “We’re okay.”

Lucy smiled, lowering herself to Lois’s stomach, “Hello in there, little niece or nephew. You have the greatest mom in the whole wide world and I can’t wait till you are born so your Aunt Lucy can spoil you rotten...”

“Lucy...” Lois laughed.

“What? It’s my job. It’s a rule: When you’re an aunt you spoil the niece and nephew.”

“A rule, huh?” Lois chuckled at her sister’s logic.

“You better look out. Your grandparents are gonna spoil you something awful, too.” Lucy looked up with a grin. “You two should probably start looking for a bigger place. Make sure you have a room dedicated to toys...”

“You’re not funny.”

“Who says I’m joking?” Lucy asked with a grin.

“Come on, we better head back out there before they send a search party after us,” Lois said, tucking her travel bag back into her purse.

“Hey, Lois?”

“Yeah?” Lois looked back at her.

She wrapped her arms around her, holding her close. “You’re gonna be fine. It wasn’t your fault. You know that, right?”

Lois bit her lower lip, seeming to suppress the tears shimmering in the corner of her eye, “I thought I was supposed to be older sister here. When did we switch places?”

Lucy held her sister as she continued, “There’s a lot of training we go through when we’re starting out on the force and one of the required parts is training on handling SIDS cases. I don’t know how that detective made it on the force as long as he did, but the things he did and the things he said were wrong. There are cases everyday about babies literally dying in their mother’s arms. No explanation. Just the same ‘Unexplained’ and ‘SIDS’ category. I read his report. There was nothing you could have done, Lois. There is nothing any of us could have done...”

“But he died alone...” Lois cried in a harsh whisper.

“He was in his room, staring up at that silly animal mobile with the light up stars you had to get him ... which he **LOVED**. He was in his bed. He didn’t have anything in that bed that could have done anything to him. He was safe. He was *loved*. All he knew in his precious little life was *love* and he knew that from you.”

Lois pulled away, grabbing a tissue to dry her eyes. “How did you get to be so smart?”

Lucy smiled, “I have this really great sister that taught me all I know. The rest I’ve learned these last few weeks in training at the MPD.”

“I love you, you know that, right?” Lois smiled tearfully back at Lucy.

“I know.” She wrapped an arm around her waist. “You have to...It’s a rule.” Lois burst into laughter then finished cleaning her face to head back into the café to join the guys.

Clark looked through the photos Pete had laid on the table in amazement, “I’m glad Rachel was able to go with you. These shots are amazing.”

“Man, you’ve got to take me the next time you do something like this...” Jimmy said in awe.

“I’m taking a little time off from the road for a few months,” Pete said with a sigh, “but maybe when I head up to Antarctica you can tag along. I’m always looking for a good eye.”

“That would be awesome!” Jimmy grinned in awe. “I still can’t believe I’m meeting you, Pete Ross, world famous photo journalist. I had no idea you and Lois were friends or you and Clark for that matter.”

“We stayed in touch over the years. Lois wanted to make sure Jamie had the best photos and who do you go to for the best?” Pete puffed his chest out as he spoke and Clark laughed.

“That is not what I said...” Lois corrected, taking a seat next to Clark at the table.

“Okay maybe I exaggerated a bit,” Pete offered them a smile.

“Pete was the one that refused to have any other photographer take Jamie’s pictures,” Lucy supplied giving Lois a smile.

Clark wrapped his arms around Lois, giving her a reassuring kiss on the cheek as Pete continued to backtrack, “I just didn’t

want you to regret the photos. I bet you're happy now, right?" He gave her his best broad grin. "That kid knew how to pose for the camera. Boy could he smile..." He shot Lois and Clark an apologetic look, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to..."

"You're fine, Pete." Lois reassured him. "You're right. Jamie had a beautiful smile and I'm grateful he had you taking his pictures for him. Almost the best decision I ever made."

"Almost?" he asked.

She looked back at Clark with a loving look. "Almost," she repeated.

Beneath the stones of the Van Dyne Crypt, down the hidden steps, there was a passageway where a young woman sat vigil by the side of none other than Lex Luthor. "You have to keep your strength up, darling."

"Gretchen, I am not a child," he spat angrily.

"You're still recovering from your ordeal, Lex. To have someone turn on you like that..." She sighed, "I will never understand why you trusted them."

"They approached me about coming to Metropolis to broaden the organization's reach. They needed me. Now they think they don't need me anymore?" He scoffed bitterly. "Soon they'll discover Lex Luthor's wrath. Soon."

"Just you rest, Lex, you can plot your revenge later," she soothed with a kiss.

Later that afternoon Lois sat on the couch, still in the cotton maxi skirt from earlier, as Clark finished bringing in the last of her boxes from her apartment. Clark had flown his parents into town earlier that afternoon and, after much debate, they had opted to stay in a hotel to allow room for them to finish transitioning apartments so no one was in the way. Clark had changed into a sleeveless green shirt and black cotton shorts much to Lois's appreciation.

"I think that's the last of everything," Clark said finally, setting the box in the corner with the scattered boxes he'd brought in from the truck Pete had driven over. Trying to explain their lack of need for a moving truck or movers wasn't something they envisioned doing easily so nodding and smiling was the way to go for the moment. Pete had gotten a ride from Jimmy back to the hotel and the two of them seemed to be hitting it off pretty well.

"Looks a little crowded, doesn't it?" Lois asked, crinkling her nose at the scattered mess in the corner of the apartment as Clark took a seat next to her on the couch.

"It definitely looks lived in," He smiled back at her. "We'll start looking for a place after we get back from the honeymoon..."

"We still need to decide on where we're going," Lois sighed. "Given that we don't have to worry about airfare thanks to Superman Express, we can go anywhere in the world."

He leaned in to kiss her. "I don't care where we go, Lois, as long as I'm with you." He moved his hand to her abdomen. "How are you feeling? I noticed you made another dash to the bathroom earlier."

"With all the wedding rehearsal stuff this morning I forgot to pack something to eat." Lois said with a sigh, "For the most part, as long as I remember to eat, the morning sickness is almost gone."

"That's good." He lifted her blouse up to press a kiss on the small bump on her abdomen. "You ready to start telling everyone next week?"

"Lucy knows," she admitted shyly, "or she figured it out rather. Don't worry she's not going to tell anyone until we're ready."

He smiled, leaning back into the couch with her as his arms encircled her waist, pulling her to him. "I figured it was only a matter of time."

"Me, too," she admitted sheepishly. "Lucy's got a keen eye."

"She knows you really well. She's a good sister," Clark reasoned, leaning in to kiss her.

"The best," Lois smiled back at him weakly, recalling her conversation with Lucy. "She said they're having her do a lot of training on SIDS cases on the force...recognizing the signs and all."

"That's good," Clark nodded, wrapping his arms around her protectively.

"I wish they'd done that years ago, When they were investigating Jamie's death..." She let out a shuddered breath. "It was the most traumatizing thing I've ever been through, Clark. This stupid detective kept trying to insinuate I'd done something to him before the ME's report came back."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that." His arms tightened around her as she continued, burying her face in his chest.

"I had Lucy and eventually Bill Henderson stepped in and got the guy thrown off the case, but the things he said...haunted me for a long time. I would never wish that on anyone. Finding Jamie like that and then to turn around and get treated like a criminal..."

"It isn't right," he finished for her.

"I'd like to do something to stop it," she said softly, "help bring awareness. Make sure people know SIDS is real and you can't just assume that because your parents did something one way that it's okay. Safe sleep has to be pushed. So many babies die everyday because people don't know any better and think it won't happen to them. So many officers are uneducated on real SIDS cases..."

"I think that's a wonderful idea," he said, stroking her cheek, "a great way to honor Jamie's memory." He kissed her cheek. "What brought all this on?"

"Some stuff Lucy said." She gave him a half-smile. "She knows me too well and wouldn't let me out of the bathroom until she was sure I'd heard her repeating over and over '*It wasn't your fault.*'"

"It wasn't, he reassured her, holding her close. "I read the report. There was nothing..."

"I know," she smiled back at him. "At least I think I do. It's an everyday mantra."

He leaned into kiss her, stroking her cheek as he ran his fingers through her hair, whispering, "It wasn't your fault."

She laughed against his lips, "We should form a support group: Self-Blamers Anonymous."

"We could start a revolution..." he teased.

She laughed against him, turning so she was laying on top of him. "I love you, Clark,"

He stroked her cheek. "I love you, Lois, I'm so glad you crashed into me in front of Met U and into my life."

She laughed against him, resting her head against his chest, "I wouldn't say crashed..."

"Glided?" he finished for her, recalling her correction the night she proposed. "Wasn't that the verb you offered up a few years back?" She reached for a pillow and smacked him with it, "Either way I wouldn't have it any other way. After everything we've been through...it's worth it. As long as I get to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Oh, Clark," she sighed, touched by his words, she leaned in to kiss him, stroking his cheek as she ran her tongue against his lips, outlining his lips with the tip. His mouth parted against hers, slipping his tongue inside her mouth to meet her tongue enthusiastically. He groaned against her lips, caressing the back of her head as his other hand ran up the back of her thigh.

She moved her left leg to the side, so she was straddling him, pressing herself against him as she felt a familiar hardness press against her. He reached up to stroke her jawline with his hand, cupping her cheek, as he slowly broke off the kiss and whispered, "Thank you."

"For what?" She asked, running her hand seductively down

his chest until she'd found her target.

"Everything," he whispered, "I don't know how I would have gotten through all this without you. You never gave up on me...on us."

She grinned down at him with a soft sigh, "I couldn't."

"I love you, so much, Lois, more than words could ever say." He leaned in to kiss her, and she smiled against him, linking her arms around his neck as he dipped his tongue into her mouth and the intensity of the kiss turned deep and hungry.

"I love you too, Clark," she whimpered against his lips as one kiss became another and another, melting into a fiery inferno of desire as her hands roamed aimlessly up his chest, seeking the feeling of his skin beneath her fingertips.

Sam entered the laboratory, looking around to see if anyone was around. He'd watched Mr. Darryl type in the code from earlier. Those stones. There was something eerie about them. The look on his face when he'd been discussing Superman was a look of hate and fear.

From what he'd heard from both his daughters and what he'd read in the papers there was nothing to fear from Superman. He had promised to help protect the people of Metropolis, and he had. Lex Luthor had been brought down. He had stopped the Nightfall asteroid, saving countless lives and not once asking for anything in return. He was a hero. Someone to be thanked not feared.

He had to do something...

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" a voice from behind him shouted angrily.

"Exposing you for what you really are!" Sam said, lifting the case to all the stones. "It's over. All of this...Superman has done nothing but..."

"Oh, you poor sap!" Mr. Darryl scoffed, "He's got you finger wrapped and tongue tied just like the rest of the sheep out there..."

"I am not a sheep! What you're doing is wrong..." Sam argued.

"Really?" Darryl pressed, taking a step toward him. "Well, you know what they say. If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck..."

He pressed a button on a small handheld device, and a long panoramic screen of monitors came down from the ceiling, showing surveillance footage of his daughter and her fiancé's apartment. He turned away when he realized what was on one of the monitors, trying to force the image from his mind. "You sick, disgusting sociopath..."

"You didn't really think we'd let the alien go without having some sort of surveillance on him, did you?" He snarled, grabbing Sam by the chin, to force him to look at the screen. He squinted his eyes closed, unwilling to give the man the satisfaction. "When will you invalids realize you don't make the rules. I don't make the rules. The organization makes the rules. Did you really think the alien just showed up on Earth and decided...Hmmm... there's an asteroid I should stop it from hitting that planet?"

"He saved all our lives including yours!"

"He's a **LIAR!!!**" Darryl snapped, tightening his grasp on Sam. "What you're too **STUPID** to realize, Dr. Lane is this...he's been right under your nose the whole time..."

"You're out of your mind!" Sam snapped back irritably, fighting against the man's grasp as he smelled old scotch on his breath.

"I'm out of my mind? Well, maybe you don't mind...I guess that's okay. We can just keep monitoring...Your daughter will continue to star in all the footage..."

"You get those cameras out of her and Clark's apartment now...They have nothing to do with this!" Sam snapped angrily.

"Oh, but they do, Sam. They do." His grip on him tightened. "That's your daughter allowing that alien to put his hands on her.

That's your daughter agreeing to carry *his* child. That's your daughter with her..."

He couldn't take it anymore. He found the leverage he needed and threw a sharp jab in the man's stomach, freeing him from his grasp.

"You're going to pay for that!" Darryl snapped angrily.

Clark's arms tightened around her as he held her against him. She let out a soft sigh of contentment, resting her head against his chest, "Promise me we won't stop doing that after we're married," she said wistfully.

He chuckled, holding her close, "Anything you want, Honey,"

"Honey? That's a new one," she murmured, leaning up to kiss him.

"Testing it out. Thinking of making a... list," he murmured against her lips.

"A list?" She asked breathlessly as he began to nibble at her earlobe, tugging on it seductively with his teeth as he moaned agreement.

"Sweetheart," he moved to cup both sides of her face, whispering feather light kisses against her jaw. "Darling," his teeth grazed lightly over the pulse point at her throat, nibbling on the sensitive skin seductively. "My little...tornado,"

"How long is that list of endearments?" She laughed.

"Very, very long...dear" He whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

"Still perfecting it, I see...How long will that take?" she teased.

"For you, a lifetime," he whispered before leaning up to capture her lips with his.

The Honor Of Your Presence Is Requested

At The Marriage Of

Lois Lane And Clark Kent

At Friday June 16th 1994

One Week Later...

Clark finished adjusting his tie in the mirror before stepping out into the courtyard of the country club Ellen had booked for the ceremony. Lois had been apprehensive about the location at first, but once she'd seen her mother had adhered to her wishes of keeping it family and friends only she'd agreed. He had to admit it was beautiful. The gazebo where the ceremony was taking place was right on the lake with flowers all around. The area around the gazebo had been cleared, and white satin chairs with red silk ribbons had been positioned in front to form the aisle for Lois to walk down. A garland feathered with baby's breath and lilies hung around the aisle, accented by red roses. It was breathtaking, and more importantly, it was exactly how they'd envisioned their wedding day.

"Here, Son, let me." his dad said, noticing the mess he had made of his tie.

"I tie these all the time..." Clark said shaking his head as he gave up and let his dad fix the mess he'd made with the black knotted fabric.

"I haven't done this since your graduation." He patted him on the shoulder as he finished. "It's just nerves."

"I guess," Clark sighed, "but I've never been more sure about anything in my life..."

"Something else bothering you?" his dad asked.

"I guess with everything going on lately I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"This." He looked around, "It's perfect. Too perfect. After everything we've been through..."

"It's hard to believe you're finally getting what you wanted for so long?" his dad asked.

"That and there are still so many unanswered questions..."

Clark sighed, “I shouldn’t even be thinking about this. I should just let it go.”

“Let what go?” his mom asked, walking up to them as she brushed a stray hair off Clark’s shoulder.

“Things are too perfect,” his dad explained.

“Oh,” his mom smiled, “That’s because it’s your wedding day. Just wait till the reception. That’s usually when the crazy uncles and cousins come out of the woodwork...and before you say anything Uncle Hershel broke his hip, so, no, you don’t have to worry about him.”

Clark laughed, “Thanks, mom.”

“Anytime.” She leaned in to give him a peck on the cheek.

“I just can’t help but feel like something bad’s about to happen...”

“Why do you say that?” his mom asked.

“Look at our track record,” Clark smiled back at her. “She finally kissed me, and she gets attacked...”

“That was not your fault,” his dad interjected, “or hers...Those hoodlums...”

“We get engaged, you all get attacked, and I get abducted...”

Clark added solemnly. “It’s just hard to accept that this is really finally happening.”

“Well, it is,” his mom said, “and nothing is going to ruin your wedding day...not if I have anything to say about it.”

Sam Lane stared at the stone in front of him, placing it in the powering station he’d developed and then powered it up. A purple light lit up around the stone, lighting up the powering station in a dark violet hue. “We have power,” he said to himself.

“Excellent,” Mr. Darryl said. “I’m so glad we could work something out, aren’t you, Sam?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Darryl,” Sam bit back. He thought he had won. He thought he had gotten what he wanted and gotten his message across. He was wrong.

In the mirror, Lois eyed herself critically as Lucy stood behind her, helping adjust her veil. “Did you eat already?” Lucy asked.

“Yeah, some crackers and Ginger-Ale on the way here.” Lois said looking down at her dress, tugging at the beaded fabric around her torso. “Is it noticeable?”

Lucy shook her head, “No, you look stunning...really.”

Lois smiled back at her sister, taking another glance at herself in the mirror. She wore a long spaghetti strap gown with beaded pearls sewn into the fabric. The top of the gown was white lace while the bottom half flowed into a soft A-line with enough room for her to move. The fabric around her abdomen was ruffled in a zigzag pattern to help camouflage the small bump that had become more and more noticeable over the last few weeks. Her hair was pinned up with a pearl barrette intertwined between a few strands of hair. She rested her hand protectively on the growing bulge the just barely poked out from beneath the fabric.

Ellen lightly knocked on her door. “Lois?”

Lois smiled, turning to her mother as she opened the door with Lucy behind her. “They’re just about ready...Your father called. He’s running late, but he’s on his way.” Ellen smiled, looking at Lois. “You are so beautiful...I still can’t believe we got this planned in such a short amount of time...” Ellen was dressed in an elegant cream suit with sequins embedded into the fabric. Lucy was in a strapless red dress with a shear sequins covered fabric along the back.

“Feels like I’ve been waiting my whole life for this moment,” Lois said wistfully.

Perry took his place at the gazebo next to Clark. “Don’t forget to breathe when she walks down that aisle. I nearly passed out at my wedding,” he whispered with a smile.

Clark grinned back at him, letting out a long breath, “It’s just

been a long few months.”

“Well, you two have been through hell and back a few times, but you found your way back to one another, fighting the odds and proving how love survives even the darkest journeys. What would normally tear a couple apart brought you closer.”

“Thanks, Perry,” Clark gave him a small smile. “You sure you don’t have an officiator business on the side we should know about?”

“No, I only save that for good friends,” Perry laughed.

“You should do it more often. That was good. You could write a Hallmark card,” Clark grinned back at him.

Perry laughed, watching as the guests began to arrive, filling the seats one by one. “They couldn’t pay me enough.”

Lois glanced down at herself once more and felt tears begin to form in the corner of her eyes, “No, don’t you dare,” Ellen said, handing her a handkerchief. “Today is a happy day. You have lost more than anyone could ever expect to in your life, but you’re still here. Us Lane women are made of strong stuff,” she said softly. “I still don’t know why you wanted to do this on Jamie’s birthday...”

“I wanted him to be a part of it,” Lois said with a sigh. “I wanted today to be about him as much as it is about Clark and me.”

“It will be. Every day will be,” Ellen said cautiously. “I can’t imagine what you and Clark are going through and will continue to go through, but you will come out of this stronger. You just have to remember to keep communicating. When you stop talking to one another, that’s when the problems start.”

The chairs were about halfway full, and Clark looked around with a smile. It was a beautiful day. Thankfully there had been no Superman emergencies for him to tend to. If he had any say in the matter, Superman would not be making any appearances for at least a few weeks until the media frenzy over what had happened with Lex Luthor and President Thompson died down. There was still no sign of the former philanthropist/assassin and all their leads had dried up. It was as if he’d disappeared. Lois had shrugged it off as ‘good riddance’ and focused on their follow-ups regarding the scandal behind Thompson’s illegal election into office as well as the corruption Luthor had brought to the government.

He still couldn’t believe he’d come so close to harming another person like that. As much anger and resentment as he had toward Lex Luthor, he had never once wished him dead. The fact that he’d come so close had scared him. Thankfully Lois had had enough foresight while at EPRAD to have the red device they found sent to her friend, Dr. Klein, at STAR Labs. He still wasn’t sure how much he could trust him, but so far, he’d proven himself to be a trustworthy ally.

“Good Lord, do you see that hat...” Perry muttered under his breath, bringing Clark back to the present. He looked toward the back to see Beverly, the wedding coordinator entering in from the back with a large bright purple hat with what looked like a bird fighting for space with the enormous flowers sewn into the monstrosity. He did his best to suppress his laughter as he looked away, glancing back at the small table in the corner where Lois had set up Jamie’s memorial candle. Several pictures were set up in sterling silver frames of their son with five too-small pearl white candles on a silver plate with ‘Jamie’ printed on a place card in front of it.

It had taken Lois a long time to iron out the details of how she wanted Jamie’s memory acknowledged today. They had finally decided on a memory candle for each of them to light during the ceremony. He let out a long breath once more, and Perry placed a supportive hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze.

Today was a beautiful day.

There was a knock at the door and Lois, Lucy, and Ellen turned to see Sam Lane standing in the open doorway, “Princess, sorry I’m late.”

“It’s okay,” Lois smiled back at him. “You’re here. That’s all that matters.”

Sam smiled back at her, “Uh, the Kents said everyone’s ready when we are...” He motioned toward the gazebo out front where the white cloth covered chairs with red bow ties had been set up for the ceremony. “Are you ready?”

“I’ve been ready for five years,” Lois said with a smile, taking the bouquet of white roses from her sister as she hooked her hand into her father’s offered left arm.

Lucy hugged her once more. “You look gorgeous, sis. I love you so much!”

Ellen hugged Lois and Lucy, “My girls...I was afraid I screwed you both up so much...I thought you’d never have your perfect wedding day...”

Lois smiled, “Mom, I’m marrying the man I love. It is perfect.”

“I think we did all right,” Sam said with a smile, looking between the two sisters. “You were a wonderful mother, Ellen.” With that they left a speechless Ellen Lane standing at the door, watching as they made their way toward the courtyard for Sam to walk his daughter down the aisle.

Lois took a deep breath as she saw Clark standing with Perry at the end of the aisle. Lucy and Pete had taken their places. Pete, standing next to Clark, gave her a thumbs up sign and a smile. Clark smiled back at her, and she could feel her heart fill with such love and joy. She felt the tears in her eyes begin to flow. She was so in love with this man.

“You ready?” Sam asked, patting her arm. She nodded, smiling as she walked down the aisle to the man of her dreams.

Clark took her arm, turning to shake Sam’s hand and then her father took his place in the seat next to her mother in the front row. They turned to face the Perry. He smiled at them.

“You look gorgeous,” Clark whispered. She smiled at him, gently squeezing his hand.

“Friends and loved ones, we are gathered here to celebrate one of God’s many gifts: Love. A gift bestowed on you. What is life worth living if you don’t have love? So, today we celebrate your love by unifying you as one for all to see. Before we begin, though, Lois and Clark would like us all to take a moment to remember a family member who cannot be with them today, their son, James Clark Kent born June 16th of 1989 and gained his wings on October 6th, 1989.” There was a ten-second pause as Perry lit a candle, handing it to both of them.

“We light a candle in remembrance of a life that is lost but never forgotten. A life formed from your love.” As he spoke, they both had moved to the table, lighting each of their candles with the candle Perry had given them. She could feel her unshed tears stinging her eyes as she gazed at the pictures of her 16-week-old son that would never meet his brother or sister or his father. Just when she thought she was about to fall apart, she felt Clark’s arms wrap around her, tightening around her waist as they walked back to where Perry stood, watching them studiously.

Perry smiled at them as Lois dabbed at her eyes, holding Clark’s hand in a death grip.

“I love you,” he whispered to her as she settled back into place in front of Perry.

“Now, marriage is nothing to be entered upon lightly. Just like a newspaper, it takes a lot of hard work to make it a success. But, if anybody can do it, these two can. Now, Clark, you’re about the most perfect guy I know. And Lois...” He smiled at her with a long pause, “... you’re perfect, too, just the way you are.”

“Always,” Clark mouthed to her with a smile.

“So, basically, these are two wonderful people... who love

each other... and deserve each other.

And now, as the King himself might say... It’s time for the big finish. Lois, Clark, will you please join hands.”

Clark took her hands in his, meeting her gaze with a smile as Perry continued. “Clark, do you take Lois to cherish in friendship and love today, tomorrow, and for as long as the two of you live, to trust and honor her, to love her faithfully, through the best and the worst, whatever may come, and if you should ever doubt, to remember your love for each other and the reason why you came together with her this day?”

His face lit up with a grin as he said, “I do.”

Lois smiled, squeezing his hand in hers as Perry continued, “Lois, do you...”

“I do! I do!” Lois cut him off eliciting a scattered chuckle in the crowd of their family and friends.

Perry bit his lip, trying to suppress his own laughter. “Okay, now the rings.” He motioned for Pete to hand him the ring. Pete nodded, pulling the velvet ring box from his pocket and handing it to Perry. “Clark?” Perry gave him the ring.

They had decided to write their own vows. Lois smiled shyly up at Clark as he took the ring from Perry and took her hand in his, “Lois, I have been in love with you from the moment you crashed into me at Met U six years ago.”

His eyes twinkled at her as she mouthed, ‘I didn’t crash.’

“I love you. I have been in love with you for so long I don’t remember what it was like not to love you, Lois, and I don’t want to know. I love your humor, your passion, the way you just dive right in...” Lois couldn’t help but smile at that, “...even when you shouldn’t. You’ve saved me from myself so many times... Your fight for justice and truth in a world ...so broken is inspiring. You refuse to just watch the world with all its flaws. You demand that the world be a better place and because of you, it is. That fire inside you is what made me fall in love with you in the first place. I told you before I can’t imagine my life without you in it and it couldn’t be a truer statement. Our life has been far from perfect, but that is life. A messy, complicated life with bumps in the road with wrong turns and U-turns along the way...all leading to this moment. It all comes down to who is by your side and who is willing to stand up for love even when it seems impossible. I think we’ve both proven over and over again just how indestructible our love is...and always will be. You are everything to me, Lois. Today, I give you my heart, my soul, and our future.” She smiled as he slipped the ring on her finger.

Perry motioned for Lucy to hand him the ring. Lucy pulled out a similar velvet box from her clutch. Perry took it and handed it to Lois. She smiled, looking down at the simple gold band and turned to Clark, taking his hand in hers, “Clark, you’re my best friend. Until I met you I never had a best friend. You make everything in this world so much brighter by making me laugh when I need to and holding me when I can’t stand to hold back my tears anymore...” She felt said tears falling down her cheek and he brushed them away with his hand. She laughed, “Case in point. Clark, I love you. I’ve loved you for so long...being without you is like being without air. When I thought I’d lost you...”

She felt the tears start again and squinted her eyes, refusing to give in, “I told you once before I hoped you’d never know what living without each other would be...but we both had to live that. We lost so much, but we found our way back to one another...” He gave her hand a gentle squeeze encouraging her to continue. She smiled back at him, reassuring him she was indeed okay, “Knowing what it was like without you in my life I know I could never love anyone else as much as I do you. You are the love of my life. I can’t imagine my life without you. Today, I give you everything I am. I give you my heart, my honor, and our life together.” She slipped the ring on his finger, smiling shyly up at him.

With that, she leaned up to kiss him, reveling in the

knowledge they were finally husband and wife. She smiled up at Clark, wrapping her arms around him as she deepened the kiss, pulling him to her. His hands slipped around her waist as he slowly dipped her, cupping her cheek as they both ignored the world around them, focusing on the fact that after five long years of heartache they had found their way back to one another. Finally, they were husband and wife. Finally, they were finishing what they had started so many years ago.

In the back of her mind, she seemed to register Perry saying, “By the power vested in me by this state and the First Church of Blue Suede Deliverance ... I now pronounce you man and wife. You may ... continue kissing the bride.”

*I found a love for me
Darling, just dive right in and follow my lead
Well, I found a girl, beautiful and sweet
Oh, I never knew you were the someone waiting for me
'Cause we were just kids when we fell in love
Not knowing what it was
I will not give you up this time
But darling, just kiss me slow, your heart is all I own
And in your eyes you're holding mine*

Lois wrapped her arms around Clark's waist as they swayed to the music, sharing their first dance as husband and wife. “So, Mrs. Kent, how are you feeling?”

She smiled back at him, “Wonderful, Mr. Kent.”
*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song
When you said you looked a mess, I whispered underneath my
breath*

But you heard it, darling, you look perfect tonight

She linked her arms around his neck, looking into his eyes, “I think it's time.”

“What's time?” he asked, confused.
*Well I found a woman, stronger than anyone I know
She shares my dreams, I hope that someday I'll share her
home*

*I found a love, to carry more than just my secrets
To carry love, to carry children of our own
We are still kids, but we're so in love
Fighting against all odds
I know we'll be alright this time
Darling, just hold my hand
Be my girl, I'll be your man
I see my future in your eyes*

She smiled back at him and laughed, “To tell everyone about the baby...”

“Should we just tell Pete to add it to his speech?” he teased.
*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song
When I saw you in that dress, looking so beautiful
I don't deserve this, darling, you look perfect tonight*

Lois laughed, “No, I don't think my mother or your parents would let us live that one down.”

“You're probably right,” he grinned back at her. “But you want to tell everyone about the baby...now?”

*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song
I have faith in what I see
Now I know I have met an angel in person
And she looks perfect, I don't deserve this
You look perfect tonight*

The song came to an end, and she smiled up at him, “Let's go find our parents...”

Sam watched from the table as Lois danced her first dance with Clark. He'd felt every emotion known to man over the last

week as he tried to wrap his head around the fact that the man his daughter was now married to was an alien. He didn't look any different from anyone else yet he had the power to break steel bars in his hands and destroy an asteroid headed for Earth to wipe out its existence. Over the past few months, he'd been forced to take a hard look at his life and his shortcomings as a father and husband. He hadn't been there. He had been a lousy father and a lousy husband. He hoped to start making amends. Both his daughters seemed willing to give him a second chance. He knew it would take more than a few kind words to get back in Ellen's good graces again.

<<“I have been in love with you for so long I don't remember what it was like not to love you, Lois, and I don't want to know.”>>

Knowing this man that his daughter had fallen in love with and planned a life around was the same man that had eaten a bomb to stop the space station from exploding and caught bullets with his hand was a hard concept to grasp. What was even harder was coming to the realization that Clark Kent—alien or not—was capable of something many people had a hard time doing. Love. Seeing the way he looked at Lois and hearing the words he spoke only reaffirmed his decision. He had to protect him and Lois from Darryl no matter what the cost.

“Enjoying the party?” a familiar voice from behind him asked as he took a seat next to him.

“This is my daughter's wedding...” Sam snapped in a harsh whisper. “Leave...”

“Not until you tell me what you did with that footage.” Darryl hissed angrily in a hushed whisper. “Yes, I know it was you. Imagine my surprise when I went to download the footage for the week, and every server had been wiped clean. Four years of surveillance had been cleared out. How do you suppose that happened?”

“Did you really think I was going to let you continue to violate my daughter like that?” Sam asked, staring straight ahead as he continued to watch his daughter dance in her husband's arms. “You have no idea who you're dealing with.”

“No, you are the one that has no idea who you're dealing with...” Darryl snapped, “Where are the tapes? What did you do with them?”

“Destroyed along with all your surveillance equipment. Locks have been changed, and they'll all be moving to an unknown location...”

“You really think you can out play me?”

“I checked the file. Apparently, only you, Trask, Thompson, and Newcomb were a part of this ‘Project K’ of Bureau 39's. An agency the government has publicly denied any association with...”

“How did you...?”

“Don't use your company's founding date as your password, Darryl, everyone knows that.” Sam retorted. “Face it. You need me more than I need you. So here's how it's going to work. You stay the hell away from my family. You stay away from Superman. You stay away from the Daily Planet.”

“And if I don't?”

Sam pulled out a handheld tablet and showed an image of Metallo on the operating table, “He's operational, but you forget a small detail—I programmed him. I can reprogram him anytime I want. If you come near my daughter or son-in-law ever again, Metallo's next orders will be to dismantle the organization starting with you.”

“You son of a...”

“Ah, ah, ah, language. I will not have you talking that way at my daughter's wedding,” Sam warned, wagging his finger at him.

“This isn't over,” Darryl warned in a harsh whisper.

“Oh, I think it is,” Sam said, standing to his feet as Lois approached him. “You've overstayed your welcome. Leave.”

“Daddy, have you seen Mom anywhere?” Lois asked as she approached the table. Darryl stood from his seat with a scowl on his face. He looked like he was about to say something but thought better of it and left. “What was that about?”

“Old business acquaintance. I forgot to have your mother remove him from the list. We had a bad falling out a few years ago,” Sam said hurriedly. “Uh, what did you ask, princess? I’m sorry my head’s all over the place today.”

“Mom? Have you seen her?” She repeated, eyeing him critically. Hopefully, she couldn’t tell he was lying.

“Oh, right! I think she went to meet that boyfriend of your sister’s. What’s his name? Lenny?”

“Jimmy,” Lois corrected.

“Right, Jimmy.” Thankfully the object of their conversation was headed toward them with Lucy and Ellen in tow.

“Lois, it’s almost time for the toasts. Where is Pete at?” Ellen asked as she approached, looking around.

“Um, I think Clark went to go grab him,” Lois said hurriedly. “Listen, I know everyone is on a tight schedule, but there’s something we really wanted to tell both of you...well all of you...” Lois shrugged her shoulders as he spotted Clark heading their way with the Kents and Pete Ross in tow.

“Okay, what’s this about?” Martha asked as Clark wrapped his arms around Lois’s waist from behind, pressing a kiss against her cheek as she turned to look at him with a smile.

“News?” Ellen asked confused. “Oh, no, you’re not dying are you?” Her voice grew frantic.

“No, mom, I’m not dying,” Lois reassured her.

“Not if I can help it anyway,” Clark encouraged, tightening his arms around Lois as she swayed her hips against him, smiling back at their small collection of friends and family. “We’re waiting on one more person.”

“All right folks...” Perry said, making his way to the table, “What’s going on? Your wedding coordinator...”

“Beverly,” Ellen supplied.

“...Beverly,” Perry corrected himself, “said you needed me over here for something?”

“Yes, apparently there is ‘news’.” Jonathan explained, looking at Lois and Clark expectantly.

“Well, first of all, we wanted to let you know how grateful we are for all your help over these last few weeks. I know it’s been stressful and crazy, but everything turned out amazing. We couldn’t ask for anything more perfect,” Lois began with a strained voice as the tears she was holding back began to become too much for her. “I’m sorry. I’m just really emotional. It’s an emotional day.”

Clark gave her a peck on the cheek and continued for her, “As you all know we chose to have the ceremony on Jamie’s birthday to let him be a part of everything. A reminder that he’s not forgotten. You all have been ...amazingly supportive through all of this, and we wanted to thank you for your support and love. We just hope you won’t let Jamie’s memory be forgotten in November, when we welcome the newest member of the family to the world.”

Squeals of joy echoed around them as hugs and kisses were exchanged. Sam watched as Lois and Clark were both enveloped in never-ending hugs from arms all around them. He took a moment to let the news sink in.

A grandchild.

A miracle.

A medical miracle.

He could write books and documentaries about this. It would make his career. As soon as the thought crossed his mind, he quickly banished it. This wasn’t a clinical study. This was his flesh and blood. His grandchild...possibly another boy, like his brother. Jamie.

It had broken his heart to watch Lois go through the loss of her

son without a way to help her. Despite being only half-human nothing had shown up on the reports as out of the ordinary. What were the odds that this would happen again? He watched the smile that spread across his daughter’s face and made a decision. He needed to tell her he knew. He needed to help them. Maybe he could help prevent anything from happening this time around? He sighed to himself, hopefully, she wouldn’t try to push him away again.

Mr. Darryl followed the young blonde down the narrow pathway beneath the crypt and into the hidden lair near the Metropolis sewer lines that were rumored to house the notorious Lex Luthor. As he turned the corner, a voice from behind him stepped out of the shadows, “So we meet again...and under less desirable circumstances.”

“Lex,” he hissed, looking back at the bloodied shirt of the once world famous philanthropist as he staggered toward him. “How’ve you been?”

Lex motioned for the young blonde to leave, and she nodded, heading up the steps and pulling the stone door closed behind her. Lex motioned to his surroundings, “How do you think? I’ve been robbed of everything, thanks to your organization...and Superman.” He snapped bitterly.

“How would you like to rectify that?” Darryl asked.

Lex laughed, “You? You’re going to help me? After everything you did to destroy me...”

“That was the organization.”

“That was you,” Lex clarified with a scoff.

“I don’t work for them anymore.”

“How convenient,” Lex remarked bitterly. “So what, now you expect me to help you? Why should I trust you?”

“Because I can get you something you desperately need.”

“Oh?” Lex asked, in mock interest. “What do I desperately need?”

“The destruction of Superman,” Darryl said with a smile.

“You and what army?” Lex scoffed, rubbing his neck. “He’s a temporary nuisance. I’ll deal with him in time.”

“Or you could deal with him now,” Darryl pressed.

“What do you suggest I do, show up at his house for tea?” Lex scoffed. “Give me a break!”

“It’s an apartment. Not a house.”

“Excuse me?” Lex looked at him in confusion.

Darryl handed him a folder from his suit jacket, “Our file on Project K. What’s left of it anyway. He came to Smallville, Kansas in 1966. Found by an elderly couple who raised him as their own until we were able to make contact...around the same time we discovered his weakness: the meteorite.”

“You’re saying Superman, this alien grew up here and has been here since 1966?” Lex asked incredulously.

“Yes, the alien, also known as Superman is, in reality, the adopted son of Jonathan and Martha Kent, Clark Kent.”

Lex laughed, “Of course he is.”

“You don’t believe me?” Darryl asked in anger.

“Even if this is true you’ve still yet to prove your worth to me. You’re useless. Your power, your contacts...all of them were with the organization.” He pulled a gun out and pointed it at Darryl. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t shoot you on the spot for the millions you cost me over the last seven weeks.”

“Intergang,” Darryl stammered.

“What?” Lex asked in confusion.

“That’s the name of the organization — Intergang.”

A shot fired and Lex smiled as he watched the body of Mr. Darryl fall to the ground. He glanced at the sewer they were standing over and kicked Darryl’s body into it. “Good help is so hard to find these days,” he muttered as he watched Darryl’s body float down the sewer pipes.

Lois watched her dad from across the room carefully. He'd been acting strange all day. She just couldn't put her finger on it. Was it the wedding? She knew fathers sometimes got emotional at weddings, but he seemed fine at the ceremony. Who was that man he was talking to earlier? It seemed more than just a tiff between business associates.

The soft strands to her dad's favorite song came on, and she smiled.

'*Must be time for the 'father-daughter' dance*' she thought to herself as she scanned the room for her missing father.

*Look at the two of you dancing that way
Lost in the moment and each other's face
So much in love, you're alone in this place
Like there's nobody else in the world
I was enough for her not long ago
I was her number one
She told me so
And she still means the world to me
Just so you know
So be careful when you hold my girl
Time changes everything
Life must go on
And I'm not gonna stand in your way*

She didn't see her dad anywhere. He was just there... Where did he go?

She sighed, looking around. Maybe she could steal Clark away from Perry, Pete, and Jimmy long enough for a dance. It seemed like ever since they'd announced the impending arrival of the newest Kent, they both had been getting pulled in opposite directions all evening.

She stood up from her seat at the table and walked toward the buffet where most of the wedding party was huddled. She felt a tap on her shoulder and turned to see her dad looking at her expectantly. "I think this is your mother's international signal for 'dance with your daughter'."

Lois smiled back at her dad as he held a hand out to lead her onto the dance floor. "Thanks for coming. I know it's not easy to get away, but I do appreciate you being a part of this."

He smiled, holding her as they swayed to the song. "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

*But I loved her first, and I held her first
And a place in my heart will always be hers
From the first breath, she breathed
When she first smiled at me
I knew the love of a father runs deep
And I prayed that she'd find you someday
But it's still hard to give her away
I loved her first*

"So, who was that man you were talking to earlier?" Lois asked, looking at him with an expectant look. "I know he wasn't a business partner."

He sighed, "Can't ever hide anything from you, can I?"

"Trouble with having an investigative reporter for a daughter, I suppose," Lois sighed, before softening her gaze on him. "Who was he, really?"

"A dangerous man. That's all you need to know."

"Why were you talking to him?"

"Nothing for you to worry about, princess," he reassured her.

*How could that beautiful woman with you
Be the same freckle-faced kid that I knew
The one that I read all those fairy tales to?
And tucked into bed all those nights?
And I knew the first time I saw you with her
It was only a matter of time*

"Why don't you let me decide what I should or shouldn't worry about?" she prompted.

"Because I think you have enough to worry about," he said

carefully, glancing around as if he was trying to make sure no one was close enough to hear them.

"I swear you are worse than Clark sometimes. I'm fine. The baby is fine. We're fine," she reassured him.

"Well, he has a lot to worry about." He pointed out, whispering in her ear. "If anyone found out you were carrying Superman's child..."

Her whole body stiffened as her eyes widened, looking up at him in shock, "What did you just say?"

"I know," he said.

"Know what?"

*But I loved her first, and I held her first
And a place in my heart will always be hers
From the first breath, she breathed
When she first smiled at me
I knew the love of a father runs deep
And I prayed that she'd find you someday
But it's still hard to give her away
I loved her first*

"I know Clark is Superman," he whispered in a hushed tone. She flinched slightly, biting her lower lip as she fought the urge to run, scream, cry. Before she could voice the thousands of questions racing through her mind, he added, "I'm not telling anyone, but I'm not the one you have to worry about."

"What do you mean?" Lois asked.

"There is an organization out there that was backing Bureau 39. Everyone that was a part of it is gone except one man."

"The man you were talking to earlier?" Lois asked in a harsh whisper. "Daddy? How did you get involved in this?"

*From the first breath, she breathed
When she first smiled at me
I knew the love of a father runs deep
Someday you might know what I'm going through
When a miracle smiles up at you
I loved her first*

"Let's just say I got more than I signed up for," he said, taking a step away from her. "I'm not going to tell anyone. I want to help."

Lois glanced over at Clark from across the room, hoping to catch his gaze, but his head was turned away from her. Panic slowly began to rise inside her as she processed the information her father had just given her.

He knew.

How did he know?

Could she trust him?

Could Clark?

Did they have a choice?

The room began to spin. She took a shaky breath, trying to focus on her surroundings. She blinked back tears as she felt her legs give out from beneath her. "Lois!" the last thing she heard was her father's voice before darkness overtook her.

Bill Church took a puff of his cigar as he made his way into the newly renovated office of CostMart. A 'Grand Opening' sign hung outside the doors, and he smiled. Things had come so far in such a short amount of time. Now with Lex Luthor out of the way his organization could reestablish the hold it had had on the city once again. Soon, Intergang would control all the crime in the world, and no one would be able to stop him.

"Martin, what's the status of Metallo? Will he be ready for testing soon?"

"Darryl was diverting from the plan for Metallo, so there will be some modifications and reprogramming required. I've already put a call into Dr. Lane to reprogram Metallo." Martin Snell explained.

"Excellent!" Bill Church cheered happily. "Soon Intergang will have control of Metropolis and then the world...and there's

nothing anyone will be able to do to stop us.”

“Lois?” Clark’s voice echoed around her as she slowly came to. She looked around and noticed the unfamiliar walls. He noticed her silent question. “We’re still at the Metro Gate.” He explained. “You passed out on the dance floor, and the manager was nice enough to let you use a bed in one of the empty rooms to lie down on.”

“Oh, good,” she sighed, leaning to sit up. “I hadn’t thrown the bouquet yet. I promised Lucy I’d throw it to her.”

He smiled back at her, lying down next to her, “I think you’ve had enough excitement for tonight.”

“Party pooper. I’m fine. I just got a little overwhelmed,” she said slowly as her conversation with her dad came back to her.

“From dancing?” he looked at her confused. “Since when?”

“No, from something my dad said.” He sat up, looking at her in concern, the silent question in his eyes. “I’m going to tell you something, and you’re not allowed to panic because I’m already doing the panicking and we can’t both panic because then there’ll be no one to think and then...”

He stopped her mid-babble, pressing his lips against hers to silence her ramblings. “You’re babbling.”

“I do not babble. I was merely thinking out loud,” she corrected, offering him a smile. “No panicking.”

He held up three fingers to do his ‘boy scout’ promise. “No panicking,” he repeated.

“He knows.” She said slowly. “I don’t know how or when or why. I guess I passed out before I could ask any of the important questions. I don’t know. This is all my fault...”

His hand wrapped around hers, offering her a gentle squeeze. “Okay, slow down. Who knows what?” She let out a long sigh, sinking her head back against the mattress as she stared up at the ceiling. Clark sank down next to her, “Lois?”

“My dad said he knows your Superman,” she whispered. His arms tightened around her, and she continued, “I don’t know how or why...I don’t get it. We were so careful and...” She glanced back at him. “Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“I was ordered not to panic,” he said with a wry grin, covering his face with his right hand.

“What are we doing to do?” she asked.

“What exactly did he say?” he breathed heavily.

“He said ‘I know Clark is Superman’.”

Clark hung his head, “No misunderstanding there.”

Lois nodded, “Then he mentioned something about getting more than he signed up for when I asked him about the man he was arguing with earlier. I don’t know what he got himself into, but I think he’s in trouble.”

“Do you think we can trust him,” he asked, “to keep the secret?”

“I think so. I hope so. I mean he’d never willingly do anything that would hurt me or Lucy. I don’t think,” Lois sighed, leaning against his chest, “What are we going to do?”

“I guess we need to talk to him and find out,” he said slowly, resting his hand against the small of her back. “How are you feeling?”

“Better. I think.” She said softly, sitting up. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“For what?” he asked, sitting up.

“If I hadn’t pushed you we wouldn’t be in this mess.” She began to cry.

“Hey, no one pushed anyone into anything,” he reassured her. “We made the decision for me to take on Superman. It wasn’t anyone’s decision but ours. You were right, there is a lot of good Superman can do for the world. I don’t regret it for a minute.”

“Are you sure?” she asked, looked at him skeptically.

“Positive.” He reassured her. “We’ll get through this the same way we got through everything else...together. You said yourself

your dad might be in trouble. Let’s find out what’s going on and take it from there.”

“Okay,” she sighed, leaning in to kiss him. “I love you, Clark Kent.”

“I love you, Lois Lane,” he whispered, cupping her cheek, “babbling moments and all.”

“I do not babble.”

“Yes, you do,” he whispered leaning in to kiss her once more.

THE END?

To be continued in *My Own Worst Enemy*