

The House of Luthor – Matchmaker Style

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Rated: PG13

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Summary: This is the 13th in the Matchmaker Style series and wraps up the set. Clark is pretending to be dead and Lois is pretending to go along with Luthor so that they can get the goods on him.

Story Size: 38,716 words (206Kb as text)

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

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

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

As with the series as originally aired the episodes build on one another making a contiguous story. It is recommended that if you are reading this story out of sequence you will miss some references. Please go back and start with the first episode of the set “The Green Green Glow of Home — Matchmaker Style and take the episodes in broadcast order from that point.

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

In this, the sequel to Barbarians at the Planet- Matchmaker Style. Lois and Clark have been back from the assignment in Smallville for almost a year. The events of PML were delightful; however, Lois really has no recollection of what happened. Clark finally had a chance to give Lois a real honeymoon. Then her life had been threatened because she had witnessed a murder. Next they investigated the kidnappings of the children of wealthy families. They have dealt with a murder and a threat to the internet and the messages regarding Clark’s origin. They had to deal with a rival paper and an invasion of the Daily Planet building. Now Lois and Clark have gone undercover and the investigation is being pursued.

Lois has returned to Clark’s ‘old’ apartment and Clark, as Charlie King, is living in Lois’s old apartment with Lois’s sister, Lucy.

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

Word is for emphasis

<“word”> is thoughts

/*word*/ audiotape playback

Chapter 1

%%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha -34 x Gamma 255 x Tau -225
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Lex was insufferably pleased with himself. Things appeared to be going just the way he had planned. He was celebrating. LexLabs had just completed a prototype of a virtual reality device and delivered it to him.

He was imagining himself soaring above the city the same way that Superman flew. The virtual world scrolled out beneath him and in his imagination he could see what he wanted to see.

Diving ground ward, he coasted above a cemetery and zeroed in on a particular headstone that read, “Clark Kent — RIP” which brought a smile to his lips.

Soaring back into the sky he flew over Lois’s apartment. As he paused outside her window he saw that she was looking at bridal magazines, searching bridal gowns.

Soaring back up into the sky again, he flew over Perry White’s cabana in Florida and he saw Perry, sitting in a lounge chair, a fishing pole stuck in the ground at his side, sound asleep. Lex smiled again. All of his foes had been dealt with and he felt secure in the knowledge.

His plan of making Lois completely dependent on him had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams, Kent was dead, Lois was going to be his and the one person that could have resurrected the Daily Planet was out of the way. Finally, he approached another burial plot, this one was up on top of a high mountain where no one would ever see it. The headstone simply read, “Superman.” In his exuberance Lex did a slow victory roll in the air.

As he removed the helmet he returned to his penthouse living room. The fire crackled in the fireplace. He was fueled with a new determination and moved to his desk. Once there, he wrote, “Once Superman is disabled, have him dissected to find the source of his powers and duplicate them ... in me.”

To prove that Luthor suffered from a case of wishful thinking, across town in Lois Lane’s old apartment, Clark, in his Charlie King disguise, was in the living room floating cross legged a foot above the couch typing on a laptop when Lucy walked in from the bedroom.

At her gasp, he floated back down to the couch. She said, “It has been months now and I’m still not used to that. You’re usually so ... normal, that I forget.”

“Sorry, Luce, I don’t mean to confuse you.”

“No, it’s not your problem. You are who you are. I’m still just getting used to it. How much longer will you be here?”

“Hopefully, it won’t take that much longer. We are working as fast on this as we can. We want things to get back to normal.” He chuckled slightly, “Or at least as normal as they can be for Lois Lane and Clark Kent, if you know what I mean.”

“I don’t think that life will ever be really normal for you two, considering just who you are.”

“We could only hope.” He thought for a second before continuing, “Hungry?”

Lucy smiled and said, “Starved.”

“One dinner, coming up.”

As Lucy followed him into the kitchen, she asked, “What’cha workin’ on, Clark?”

In a softly chiding tone, Clark corrected her, “Charlie. Remember?”

“Uh, sorry. What’cha on, Charlie?”

“I’m coordinating my notes on the investigation. We’ve collected a lot of data and more leads. Nigel has been a font of information. I just wish it wasn’t like pulling teeth to get anything out of him.”

Curious, she asked, “How much more do you need?”

“I can only hope, not much more.”

“I’m curious, you’re living here. Lois is at your apartment. Where’s Perry and everyone else?”

“Hopefully, the last place Luthor would think to look.

Actually, Perry made no secret of the fact that he would be spending a lot of time at his fishing cabin, but he hinted that he might move to Florida. So that would be no surprise. The surprise for Luthor would be if he looked in and saw, Jimmy, Jack and Denny in Perry’s cabin. We built a hideaway a little behind the cabin so that in the case of unexpected visitors, they can duck out and it would only be Perry, but we don’t expect any. As far as Luthor knows, Perry is retired and out of the way.”

“What’s really happening?”

“Perry is using his contacts to put out feelers to see if he can find a buyer for the Planet. That’s something he can do mostly by phone.”

“I hope his line isn’t bugged.”

“We check it regularly to make sure it isn’t. So far, so good. It sure looks like out of sight really is out of mind as far as Luthor and Perry are concerned.”

Just then the phone rang. Lucy picked it up, “Lucy Lane.”

Perry’s gruff voice came from the earpiece. He asked, “Is Charlie there?”

“Who should I say is calling?”

“This is Buzz. Tell him to get on the phone or he won’t get any more stuff. You got that?”

Lucy put her hand over the mouthpiece and had a mystified expression as she mouthed, “Buzz?”

Clark chuckled and whispered in her ear, “That’s Perry playing ‘cloak and dagger.’”

She nodded her understanding and passed over the phone. Taking the phone, he asked, “What can I do for you, Buzz?”

“You can come up with the scratch to pay what you owe me.”

“I’ve got it.”

“Okay, make the delivery.”

“I’ll see you in a little while.” He hung the phone up.

He looked at Lucy and said, “Something must have happened or else he wouldn’t be doing that. I’ll have to go see him after dinner.”

Moving to the refrigerator, Clark pulled out a medium sized steak from the freezer. Pulling a pan from the cabinet he placed the still frozen steak in it and, sliding his glasses down slightly, used his heat vision to thaw the steak. Turning back to the refrigerator, he pulled out an onion, a head of garlic, soy sauce, olive oil, a frozen packet of sweet corn and one of green beans.

After putting the corn and beans on to heat, he pulled out a loaf of French bread and quickly sliced it. Handing it to Lucy he asked, “Could you butter some of this, please?”

As she started doing that, moving to the sink, he peeled the skin off of the onion and then held it briefly under the water from the tap. Pulling out a cutting board he proceeded to chop and dice the onion so quickly that his hands became a blur. He poured some olive oil and soy sauce into the pan with the steak and then scraped the onion from the board into the mix. He removed two cloves of garlic from the bulb, removed the skin and placed them on the cutting board. He laid the side of the knife he had used for the onion on them and gave it a gentle rap, crushing the garlic which he then scraped into the pan, adding it to the mixture.

Using a pair of tongs he flipped the steak over a couple of

times, making sure that both sides were coated with the mixture before transferring it to a broiler pan.

As he was doing this, he asked, “Could you get out the utensils and plates?”

As Lucy moved to comply he set the broiler pan on the range and ramped his heat vision up searing the top surface of the steak. Using the tongs he flipped the steak over and repeated the process. He asked Lucy, “How do you like your steak?”

She replied, tentatively, “Is it too much to ask for medium rare?”

Smiling he replied, “Medium rare it is. Be ready in a jiff.”

Less than a minute later they were sitting down to dinner.

Lucy commented, “You make it look so easy.”

A little later, Charlie King drove up to Perry White’s fishing cabin. As he climbed out of the car, Perry White came out to greet him. Along with Perry were Jimmy and Jack. As he approached, he said, “Hi, Perry. What happened?”

“Come on in, let’s sit down.”

Once they were seated, Perry said, “You’ll never guess who I had a call from. Well, I know you won’t guess, so I’ll tell ya. Luthor.” At this statement, Clark started to worry. Perry pressed on, “He was calling to check up on me. He was ‘worried about my health.’ Wanted to see how I was doing.”

“What’d you tell him?”

“I told him that I get up around nine, take a stroll on the beach. By the time I get back, Alice pulls fresh-baked bread out of the oven. Then I sit and read my papers, have my coffee. Sometime around noon, I’ll walk over to the club house. There’s usually a card game going on. In the afternoon, there’re first run movies, arts and crafts, lemonade and cookies. I go to bed around nine, sleep like a baby. Weather’s perfect, never changes, and I haven’t had a cab try to run me down since I got here.”

“And he believed you?”

“With a cell phone I could be anywhere. He thinks I’m in Florida. I led him to believe that after the retirement dinner, Alice and I moved. I think he bought it.”

“That’s a relief. He might not come sniffing around.”

“How is it going with the witnesses?”

“Bill is making slow progress. He is reluctant to do more than watch for any individual that Nigel names. If any of them get so much as a parking ticket, he’ll grab them up. How is your end going?”

“I’ve been making some calls. So far I haven’t gotten anywhere. We need some kind of leverage to get them to move.”

In order not to appear too anxious to be on the inside as it were, Lois had limited the time that she spent in Luthor’s quarters. Since she had accepted his proposal, she had started visiting on a more frequent basis. Anything other than that would in itself look suspicious.

Luthor had given her a key card to operate the elevator so that she could come and go as she pleased. She was cautious in the use of the card because she knew that every use was tracked electronically. When Nigel had been locked up, his personal effects had been impounded. Lois and Clark had gone through his effects along with Bill. When Lois spotted his key card, Lois asked Bill to give it to her. With some reluctance, he passed it over. Lois promised to save it for emergencies.

Lois’s position at LNN was of a very unusual nature. She didn’t have any set schedule and she didn’t have any firm assignment. Since she was now engaged to the owner, even the head of the operation was reluctant to tell her what to do.

Not willing to just rest on her laurels, Lois found things to do. She became something of a troubleshooter. With the contacts she had developed as a reporter there had been numerous cases similar

to the one that announced her presence. She had been able to confirm or, in some cases refute stories giving LNN the scoop or in the case of the latter, keeping the station from having egg on its collective face by putting out a false narrative..

This afternoon she was going to be meeting Luthor in his penthouse. Before she left she placed a call. “Hello, Charlie. Is Lucy there?”

“No, she ain’t here right now. Ya wanna leave a message?”

“Yeah, tell her that I may be a little late for dinner. I’m meeting with my fiancé this afternoon. He called and said he had some things that we needed to go over.”

“I’ll be sure and pass the message on.”

“Thanks.” She hung up the phone and smiled knowing that Clark had the message and would be watching over her. She wasn’t sure if her line was bugged or not, but they weren’t taking any chances, thus the dialect from Clark and the veiled message from Lois.

A couple of hours later, Lois showed up at the penthouse. When she exited the elevator, Luthor approached and attempted to give her a kiss. As he neared, she turned her face so that he kissed her cheek rather than her lips.

Luthor’s disappointment was obvious, but he controlled himself. This only served to fuel his determination to dominate this very independent woman once she was his, legally.

Taking her hand, he led her into his office. As they entered, he glanced in the direction of a set of bookcases which lined one wall. Lois had noticed him glancing in that direction each time they had entered the office and was becoming suspicious.

They crossed the room to a large table. Laid out on top of the table was a set of blueprints.

Lois asked, “What is all this?”

Smugly, he replied, “These, my dear, are the plans for our new mansion. Forty rooms, a garage, stable, tennis courts, swimming pool ... all the comforts of home.”

Lois moved over and started to look at the plans.

Luthor pointed out a feature and said, “This is wrong. I wanted the doors off the master side balcony to be sliders. French doors make the room look smaller.”

Lois gasped out, “Lex, the master bedroom is three thousand square feet. That’s more than twice the size of my apartment.”

He pointed at another feature and asked, “Well, what about the exercise area? Should we put it back on the ground floor?”

Lois knew that she had to play along; they had come too far to blow it now. She sighed and said, “No, I think this is right. It’ll be great to get out of bed and have that stair climber staring me right in the face saying ‘Now, Lois. Now.’”

Luthor couldn’t pass up that lead-in, “But Darling, that’ll be my line.” Luthor had been pointing out the features and as he did, he worked his way around behind Lois. He was so close that Lois could feel his breath on her neck and shoulders. Shortly his breath wasn’t all she felt as his lips started at the edge of her neckline on her shoulder and kissed their way to and up her neck.

Lois pulled away slightly and said, “Thank you, Lex, for understanding about my wanting to wait ... for our wedding night. I just want it to be special.”

Luthor smiled a secret smile. She had absolutely no idea what he had planned for their wedding night. He said simply, “It will be.” He thought, <Making you submit will be the culmination of a year’s effort.> as he kissed the side of her neck again.

While Luthor had been kissing her bare skin, Lois had been feeling nothing so much as revulsion. Now, after his comment, she started to shiver with that revulsion and perhaps a little fear that something would still happen, that he would get on to them and take his pound of flesh from her.

Luthor felt her shiver and misinterpreted it, thinking that she was trembling in anticipation and smiled to himself.

Just then, there was a knock on the door and without waiting for it to be acknowledged, Mrs. Cox walked in. Without preamble, she asked, “Lex, could we run through your schedule for tomorrow?”

Lex was irritated by the interruption. He felt that he was finally making some headway with his intended conquest and Mrs. Cox had destroyed the mood he had been creating. If this kind of behavior continued, no matter how much he relied on her or enjoyed her company, she would have to be put in her place. Reluctantly he turned to her and said, “Of course. Come in Mrs. Cox.”

Lois was a keen observer. She was grateful for the reprieve that Mrs. Cox provided. She had caught the looks that Mrs. Cox had been giving her and was sure that she knew the source and was sure that sometime in the future she would be able to use the information. She watched as Lex and Mrs. Cox moved over to his desk. She laid out his calendar.

Once Lex was there and looking over her shoulder, she pointed at an entry and said, “You’ll notice the Series K field test is set for 3:45 p.m.”

Lois noticed Lex’s reaction; he smiled and said, “Excellent.”

As soon as he had uttered that word, the phone on the desk rang. Mrs. Cox picked it up and listened briefly. Pulling the phone away she said, “Bagdonis in Chicago.”

Luthor looked at Lois apologetically and said, “I’ll take it in the library.”

Chapter 2

Lois was curious and hoped that she could pump Mrs. Cox for information, so after Luthor exited to take his call Lois turned to Mrs. Cox and asked, innocently, “What’s Series ‘K’?”

Mrs. Cox knew that if she told Lois the truth that it would create problems, so she was deliberately vague in her response. “Oh, something we’ve been working on.” She considered how best to answer without giving any information, “The details are ... confidential.”

Lois knew that Mrs. Cox didn’t approve of her and Lex’s infatuation with her. She also knew that this was her way of expressing her dislike and showing Lois just where she stood, so she tried a subtle push, “Lex has no secrets from me.” She knew the statement was a lie, but she hoped to throw Mrs. Cox off the track. She didn’t want to give her the slightest inkling that they were investigating them.

Mrs. Cox almost gave away more than she should have when she said, “Really?”

To divert her, Lois changed tracks, “Tell me, Mrs. Cox, is there a Mr. Cox?”

Her blunt reply was, “He died.”

Lois feigned sympathy as she said, “Oh, I’m sorry.”

Mrs. Cox started to show her true colors, when she replied, “Don’t be. I’m not.”

Lois was shocked at her cold blooded response, but filed this snippet of information away as well.

Luthor exited the library and rejoined them. He asked, Mrs. Cox, “Anything else?”

“Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Cox. That’ll be all for now.”

As she moved away, Mrs. Cox added an extra sway to her hips. Luthor was just a bit incautious as he watched her go and Lois saw it. Another piece of information to file away. In order for her to give Luthor the impression that she was falling under his sway, Lois decided to let him think that she was becoming jealous, so once the door was closed behind her, she said, “I don’t like that woman.” She wanted to see how far Luthor would carry his deception. His response didn’t disappoint her.

Luthor was quick to reply, “She’s easily the best assistant I’ve

ever had, but, if you object to her, I'll ..."

Lois knew that he was being disingenuous, but decided to play it like he had convinced her. "No, it's okay, really." She wanted to put some distance between them so she walked out onto the balcony. Unfortunately, Luthor followed her.

Apparently Lois had not been entirely successful in hiding her revulsion and anxiety because Luthor asked, "What is it? You seem distracted this afternoon."

If she was being honest, Lois would have said that she couldn't wait to get home and take a hot shower so that she could scrub her neck and shoulder where he had been kissing her, but to maintain her cover she had to come up with something believable. After a brief, thoughtful pause she said, "Well, with my mom coming in, and all the wedding preparations ..."

Apparently she wasn't convincing enough and Luthor pressed her, "What else?"

She needed to come up with something else and she thought of just the right thing, "Oh... I was just wondering how everybody was. I haven't spoken to Perry or Cat in weeks."

Luthor felt safe when he offered, "Why don't you give them a call," because he 'knew' that Perry was out of the way in Florida and Catherine Grant was not a threat.

Lois considered for a second and then said, "I think I will."

Trying to change the subject, Luthor asked, "Now, did we decide on the twelve car garage, or the fifteen?"

As soon as she was able to, Lois excused herself and left Luthor to his business.

That morning, Lucy had been an interested observer as Clark prepared for the day. She had been about to leave for a class, but before leaving had needed to ask Clark a question. When she had knocked on the bathroom door, Clark had opened it to see what she wanted. When he opened the door, Lucy's jaw dropped because all he was wearing was a towel around his waist.

He asked, "Mind if I finish up?"

In a distracted tone, Lucy replied, "Huh? Oh, yeah. Okay, yeah, finish up."

Clark smiled at her reaction and picked up a hand mirror. Looking at himself he used his heat vision, bouncing it off the mirror to remove his beard stubble. Once he was finished, he ran a hand over his cheeks and, satisfied, reached for the after-shave and splashed some on his face.

Lucy asked, "Why bother to shave? Your disguise is a beard."

She smiled and said, "Ah, but Superman is clean shaven."

With a look of comprehension, Lucy said, "Oh, yeah, right. Superman can't start showing up with a beard. It would be kinda sexy though."

Clark laughed and said, "Superman isn't supposed to be sexy. He has to be impersonal and aloof. The skin tight suit is bad enough." He gave that a second to sink in and then asked, "What did you want to ask?"

"Ask? I wanted to ask something. I can't remember what it was. Oh well, if I think about it, I'll ask later. Gotta run, class. Bye."

Chuckling, he replied, "Wait a minute. I think I have to take you to your class. I need the car. I'll be finished here in just a second." He shifted into super-speed and finished donning his disguise and then escorted Lucy to the car.

After dropping Lucy off at school, Clark drove to Perry's cabin. As he exited the car, Perry came out on the porch to greet him.

Waving, Clark said, "Hi, Perry. It's good to see you."

Suddenly a thought came to Clark and he voiced what was on his mind, "What did you tell Alice?"

Perry shrugged it off, "Son, I've been married twenty-five years and if there's one thing I've learned it's you don't lie to your spouse."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her I was doing research for a book I'm gonna write."

Entering the cabin, Clark spotted Jimmy and Jack. Jimmy greeted him, "Hey, CK. How's it going?"

"I was going to ask you the same question. How's the research going?"

Jimmy shrugged and said, "Slow, man, using a modem line is the pits. Give me a high speed network connection any day."

"Have you gotten anywhere on the insurance angle?"

"Yeah, there *was* additional insurance on the Daily Planet building through a subsidiary of LexCorp-called Lexel Investments. Now all I have to do is find out how much and that will take some time, especially since I'm on a modem."

Turning to Jack, Clark asked, "Have you had any luck on the bomb?"

"Yeah, I went back to my old haunts and started asking around. I finally got a couple of names. Couple o' guys suddenly came into some money, real money, if you know what I mean."

"Get the names?"

"Yeah, the guys name was Pete. Pete Black and his brother John."

Perry asked, "Anything about who hired them?"

In a conspiratorial tone he replied, "Just that it was someone important, and they got paid a ton of money. He called him: 'The Boss.'"

Clark blurted out, "That fits, but I can't believe this 'Boss' would bomb the Daily Planet just to frame Jimmy for the job. There's another, bigger reason. Jimmy was just the fall guy. It's Luthor and he did it so that he could isolate Lois. This just shows what lengths he will go to do it."

Perry took charge and started giving orders, "Jimmy, Jack, find out where we can contact this John Black character. We need to clear Jimmy's name once and for all with the police. Henderson got him out on a technicality. We need to firm that up. I'll do some digging into Daily Planet finances."

Jimmy had a cheery tone as smiling he said, "Just like old times."

Clark said, "Okay, looks like we are on the road. I need to get back before I'm missed, besides, I have to pick up Lucy from her class."

"Okay, CK. Hey, once this is over, do you think I might have a chance with her?"

Clark laughed and said, "You'll have to check with Lois on that. See you guys later."

Clark had picked Lucy up after her class and taken her home. He was helping her with her studies when he heard an alarm. At 3:45 he cocked his head to the side and went silent.

Lucy saw what he was doing and said, "I've seen you do that before. You're listening to something, aren't you?"

He held up a finger for silence and Lucy stopped the flow of words. Then he answered, "Yes, I just heard a bank alarm. Gotta go." Standing up from where he was sitting, next to Lucy he grabbed his shades and jacket before jogging out the door. Exiting the building he headed for the alley that he commonly used, spun into his uniform and took off to respond to the alarm.

The alarm was still ringing when Superman landed. Everything looked peaceful which surprised him. Looking around, he spotted a guard just as the guard spotted him. The guard approached and said, "Thanks for coming, Superman, but it was a false alarm. The security system just went crazy all of a sudden. Sorry to take up your time."

Superman placed his hands on his hips and looked around again as he replied, "No problem at all."

Pedestrians were passing by. A few tourists with cameras stopped to take pictures of Superman.

One of the passers-by was Angelica Cox. As she walked by,

Superman suddenly felt faint and the pain almost doubled him over. It was brief. Mrs. Cox was within about ten feet of Superman for about fifteen seconds. As soon as she passed beyond that radius the pain faded.

The guard seeing how Superman was acting became concerned and asked, “Superman, are you okay?”

By this time the pain was fading and Superman was straightening up again. He replied, “Yes. I’m ... fine, now. For a minute there ...” Knowing what had just happened, he started scanning the people around him. By this time, Mrs. Cox had turned a corner and was out of sight.

Once around the corner, Mrs. Cox pulled out a cell phone and made a call.

The phone in Lex’s office rang once before he picked it up, “Report.”

“We have the genuine article, Lex. Works like a charm.” As she was speaking, she pulled a glowing green rock, hanging on a chain, from her cleavage.

Failing to find the source of his weakness nearby, Superman took to the air thinking that he should avoid another exposure.

That afternoon, Lois called and spoke to Lex, “Lex, I won’t be over tonight.”

“Might I ask, why? I was going to have Andre prepare one of his specialties.”

“I really need to get together with my sister. She’s been helping me with the wedding plans. I have some things to go over with her.”

The tone of his voice was one of disappointment, however he was actually relieved. With Mrs. Cox’s report that the rock was the genuine article he had some planning to do, “I’ll miss you this evening then. Enjoy your time with your sister. Doesn’t her current boyfriend live with her?”

Lois was wary and careful with her answer, “Yeah, but when we get together, he makes himself scarce. I think he takes the opportunity to go out and score. I’m really disappointed in my sister, taking up with a druggie.”

“Do you want me to do something?”

Lois was hasty to answer, “No, that won’t be necessary. None of her relationships ever last very long. I don’t see this one lasting much longer anyhow.”

“Okay, I was just thinking that if he was a problem or if he bothered you, I could have him removed.”

“I appreciate the thought, Lex, but that won’t be necessary.”

“Will I see you tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. There are some things happening that I want to cover for the station.”

“You do know that you don’t have to work, don’t you?”

“I ... know, but I want to. It’s just who I am.”

“Whatever makes you happy, Dearest. Can I plan for dinner tomorrow night?”

“I’ll have to let you know tomorrow.”

“I’ll look for your call.”

That evening, Lois showed up at Lucy’s apartment. As soon as the door was closed behind her, she threw herself into Clark’s arms. “Oh, Clark, I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Honey.”

“Look, it’s nearing the date of the wedding. Let’s finish this thing up so that we can give Luthor his surprise wedding present.”

“There’s nothing I’d like better, but we are still missing a lot of evidence.”

“We’ll just have to see about getting what we need.”

“Uh, there’s another thing ...”

Instantly apprehensive, Lois asked, “What?”

“Kryptonite. I was exposed to it earlier.”

The pieces of the puzzle started to fall together, Lois asked,

“When?”

“There was a bank alarm a little before four PM.”

“Could it have been 3:45?”

“Yeah, right about then.”

Thoughtfully, Lois muttered, “Series K”

“Series K? What is Series K?”

“Mrs. Cox came in to confirm a field test of Series K today at 3:45. It has to be Kryptonite. We have to stop this. Now that we know he has Kryptonite it places you in danger.”

“We can’t stop now. We are very close. We just need a little more.”

“Okay, at my first opportunity I’m going to go in and get what I can and since we know he has Kryptonite, you, my very dear husband will have to keep your distance.”

“What do you think you can get?”

“I won’t know until I get there, but I’ll get something.”

Chapter 3

That evening, after a dinner for two served up by Andre, Lex and Mrs. Cox had retired to his bedroom. After a period of intimacy, Lex rolled over and had his arm over his forehead.

Mrs. Cox released a pleased sigh and then said, “You have always been better than the Mr.”

“My dear, Mrs. Cox, you are easy to please.”

Mrs. Cox’s hand was groping under the covers when Lex stilled it in its quest. “We have important matters to discuss.”

“What?”

“Now that we know that what we have is authentic, I need to decide what to do with it. I had an idea some time ago and I think it would be appropriate. Kent had me placed in a cage. I have gone him one better, he is in a grave. Now I think that what Kent did to me would be particularly appropriate for Superman. We need to construct a cage. A **cage** of steel that will hold the **Man** of Steel.”

“Even steel won’t hold him though.”

“Perhaps not plain steel, but how about steel coated with Series K.”

“How can we do that?”

“What were the effects that you observed when you exposed Superbum to Series K?”

“It looked like he suddenly was in pain and weak. He almost collapsed to his knees.”

“I want a small piece of that rock. It will go into my vault. The rest I want ground to a fine powder. We will mix the Series K powder with paint and use that to coat the steel bars of the cage. Now, where would be a good place to hide it so that he could be lured into it?”

“There are any number of warehouses owned by LexCorp. They have high ceilings. The cage could hang suspended from the ceiling and dropped on him.”

“Ah, but what excuse could I give to have him come to a warehouse?”

“Perhaps a break-in?”

“That might work, but there is an old saying, ‘keep you friends close, but your enemies closer’ and I want him close so that I can keep an eye on him.”

“The only place with a high enough ceiling then would be the wine cellar.”

“Yes, that would work and I have video surveillance. That would be ideal.”

Mrs. Cox’s hand began its quest once more, this time finding the object of her desire.

His excitement at the possibility of overcoming his adversary transferred to his anatomy and as he moved over on top of her, he said, “See to the construction of the cage. We can’t be sure how quickly his strength will be removed so make the bars stout. It will have to be assembled in the wine cellar. Under it create a false

ceiling, some flimsy material painted with a lead based paint. We don't want him to be suspicious ...”

His orders were interrupted by Mrs. Cox's sighed, “Oh, Lex.”

While Mrs. Cox and Lex were being intimate and discussing his plans, Clark had returned to the cabin.

Once they were all together, Jimmy filled him in, “I found John Black. His address is in a rundown apartment building on the west side.”

“You need to go there and see if you can find anything that will give Bill probable cause. We need him to be able to get in there and search.”

“Jack and I will go first thing in the morning.”

“Good. He is relative small fry and I don't think Luthor will miss him if he is picked up.”

Perry reported, “I've been looking into the insurance angle. I'm expecting a call back.”

“I need to get back to the apartment, in case Lois calls. See you guys tomorrow.”

The next day Lex had been called away, on short notice, to a meeting in Milan. He had invited Lois to go with him, but she had refused, citing wedding preparations, so Lex had taken Mrs. Cox with him in her stead. She was very thankful that he hadn't insisted because she was afraid of being cooped up with him in a small aircraft with a big bed for God knows how long. He could have forced himself on her and if that had happened, she didn't know if she'd live through it. It had become clear to Lois that there was something going on between Lex and Mrs. Cox and it pleased Lois that it was the case because it, at least in some respects, took some of the pressure off of her.

In this case, knowing that he would be away for at least a full day, Lois had bided her time and, that evening, had executed her plan.

Lois was dressed all in black. She had left the apartment by a back way and avoided Lex's surveillance. Two streets over she had caught a cab, directing it to drop her off two blocks from LexTower. After the cab pulled away, she reached under her skirt and pulled down her pants legs. Undoing the catch on her wrap skirt she removed it and rolled it into a small cylinder which she stuffed into her bag. When she did, she retrieved a black ski mask which she donned. Staying in the shadows, she made her way to the underground parking garage entrance and remained out of sight.

Pulling a slingshot from her bag, she loaded a piece of metal and, swinging it around, let fly at a far wall. The clang of the metal went unnoticed so Lois repeated the procedure and this time drew the attention of the guard and he exited his little shack to investigate. Once he was out of sight, she slipped around the barrier and into the shadows. Making her way to the elevators she waited for the guard to return to his post. In his little shack he could not see the elevators. She used Nigel's keycard that Bill Henderson had given her to access the elevator to the penthouse. She was surprised and pleased that Lex hadn't disabled Nigel's card. Apparently he still hoped that Nigel would return from parts unknown after disposing of Clark's body and resume his normal duties. When the doors opened in response to the use of Nigel's card, she reached in and up so that she could place a cap over the lens of the camera. Once the lens was covered, she used Nigel's card to operate the elevator. If Luthor discovered that he had been broken into, she wanted Nigel to take the blame. This was her first opportunity to get in there without any chance of observation. Over the course of the last month she had caught glimpses of Luthor looking at a particular area of his office. They were surreptitious glances always at one particular area. That was enough to pique her interest.

Once she was in the office she immediately went to the area

that Lex had expressed an interest in and started to examine it. The area was covered with floor to ceiling bookshelves. She recognized a number of priceless first editions on the shelves. She was convinced that if there was something hidden here it would be done in such a way that he wouldn't have to move a lot of books to get to it.

Dipping into her bag she brought out a mini-flashlight and, hooding the light with two fingers, she used it to search. She started at one side and checked both visually and by touch every square inch till she reached the other side. Then she stopped to think, <Luthor wouldn't have inconvenienced himself. However this works it won't be too high or too low. Concentrate in the middle where it is easy to reach.>

She restarted her search, this time in the middle height shelves. She had only gone a foot when she felt a screw head that seemed out of place. Bringing her flashlight to bear she saw that what was supposed to look like a screw head was a little too perfect. Most screws have at least a little marring from the screwdriver being used on them. She tried to pull it out, but it wouldn't budge. When she pushed on it she heard a subdued click and the entire bookshelf started to move. Smiling in self-satisfaction, she stepped back to allow it room to move.

After moving out from the wall slightly it slid to the side revealing the door to a walk in safe. On the face was the dial of a combination lock as well as a keyhole. Nodding in satisfaction, Lois stepped to the safe and up to the challenge. First she delved into her bag and brought out her lock pick kit. She selected what she believed to be the appropriate tools and went to work. Within two minutes the slot was horizontal as if the key had been inserted and turned ninety degrees. She felt that she was half way there. Looking at the dial she reached into her bag once again and brought out another piece of equipment. She muttered, “I have to remember to give Jonathan a kiss to thank him again for his present.” She plugged in the headphones and then an appliance that looked like a suction cup on a tube. Reaching under her mask she put the earphones in her ears, attached the suction cup to the face of the safe near the dial and turned on her sound amplifier. She started twirling the dial experimentally and was satisfied to hear the whir of the dial.

She slowed the movement of the dial, turning it to the right. Finally she heard a distinct click. She pulled back and noted the number, 34. She started to turn the dial in the other direction. She was becoming anxious when she went all the way around and passed 34 going in the opposite direction, but she continued on. She was turning the dial slowly, but slowed even more for fear that she would miss the sound of the click. Finally there was a sharp click and she smiled in satisfaction. Pulling back she looked at the number, 24. She thought, <34 ... 24 Nah, it couldn't be.> Making up her mind, she listened while she confidently turned the dial in the opposite direction again. As she neared what she knew had to be the final number she mentally crossed her fingers. As the dial hit the number she had expected she heard a click again. She thought, <I can't believe he did that! My measurements!>

Grasping the handle she gave it a quarter turn and pulled. The safe swung open on well oiled hinges. The first thing that greeted her was a sickly green glow. <Oh, no! He has Kryptonite. This must be here as a trap for Superman. I'll have to tell Clark to stay away when the police open this vault.>

The Kryptonite was out on a table in the center of the vault. Next to it was a lead enclosure. Looking around the perimeter of the room, she saw drawers and shelves. She pulled down a book that looked like it had been handled a lot and opened it up. On the inside cover was a list of numbers with either an ‘S’ or a ‘C’ beside them. She delved into her bag once more and pulled out her camera. She snapped a picture of the open pages and then started flipping through, snapping as she went.

On other pages were lists of names, sometimes full names, but

mostly just last names and then, under another column, dollar amounts. Because of the indicated dates she decided that these were older transactions, she turned to the back of the book and copied the last ten pages. As she was doing so, she recognized some of the names as members of the Board of Directors of the Daily Planet.

On a date shortly before the explosion that had destroyed the Daily Planet there was an entry referring to a purchase from a firm she recognized as a construction company. The only explanation she could come up with for this was — whatever he needed, if there was residue, he didn't want it traced back to a LexCorp business.

She pulled down a couple more books and filmed pages at random until she had used up her whole roll. She placed everything back where she had found it and closed the vault again, pushing the screw. Nothing happened. Grasping a shelf she tried to pull the unit closed, but it refused to budge. She had been so sure, now she was starting to worry. She thought, <Don't panic. There has to be another button.>

Placing everything but the flashlight back in her bag, she began another search. She found a screw at the opposite end of the bookshelf and when she pressed it the mechanism that closed the hidden door operated again. When it finished she discovered why Luthor was constantly checking it. It didn't close all the way. She moved to the end of the unit and pushed. With a click it moved into place and locked.

Lois retraced her steps out of the office and took the elevator back down. As she exited the elevator she removed the cover from the camera lens. Easing up beside the guard shack, she peeked in and saw that the guard was engrossed in a novel and the door to the shack was closed. Crouching down, low to the ground and below the windows, Lois crept by the shack and out without being seen. As soon as she was away she removed her ski mask and returned it to her bag. She pulled out the skirt and, after donning it, rolled up her pants legs so that they wouldn't be seen. Two streets over, she caught a cab and went to Lucy's apartment.

When she arrived, Lucy was by herself. "Where's Charlie?"

"He rushed out of here a little while ago. I figured it must be a rescue or something. How do you do it, Sis? No warning, suddenly he rushes out and there's no way to know if it's the last time you will see him. You must worry yourself half to death when that happens."

Lois smiled an enigmatic smile and said, "He promised that he will always come back to me. I take him at his word."

"You don't worry about him?"

"Of course I worry about him. What wife wouldn't? There is a major difference between him and a cop or a fireman though ... there isn't very much that can hurt him."

Lucy had her arms around Lois in a fierce hug. "It's such a relief to see you. I've been so worried about you, too. Cl ... Charlie has been telling me how dangerous Luthor is. The longer this goes on, the more worried I get. I hope this will be finished soon."

Lois patted Lucy's shoulder and said, "I'm being careful." She looked around and said, "Since I'm here, why don't we go over some of the wedding stuff while we wait for Charlie."

Half an hour later, Charlie came in and, as soon as the door was closed behind him, Lois bounced up from her chair and threw herself into his arms. As he wrapped his arms around her, he asked, "What are you doing here? Is there a problem?"

"No, I just missed you, that's all." She extricated herself from his arms and picked up her bag. Pulling out her camera, she said, "Success!"

Clark was interested, "What kind of success are we talking about?"

As she rewound the film into the canister and then removed it

from the camera, she said, "I managed to break into Luthor's vault. I took pictures of some of his ledgers. You need to have Jimmy print these pictures. I think they will help with the investigation. There are account numbers, names, dates and amounts."

"None of that will be admissible in a court of law."

"I know, but with it as a source of information it can all be investigated and maybe, just maybe, it will be enough to provide probable cause so that Bill can get a search warrant."

"Well, it'll be worth a try. How did you get this?"

"Luthor is away. I let myself in. Remind me to give Jonathan another kiss to thank him for my super-hearing. I used it to crack the vault. Now, make yourself scarce. Lucy and I have a wedding to plan."

He chuckled and said, "Far be it for me to interrupt wedding plans. I'm surprised that Luthor is allowing you to plan your own wedding."

"He wanted to hire this high powered wedding planner, but I nixed that. I need to plan this. Now, go away and let us work."

"Okay, if you insist."

With a smile, she said, "I insist." He hesitated for a second before turning away, reluctant to leave her, but he finally turned away, sat on the sofa and turned on the TV. He muted the sound and turned on the closed captioning so that the sound wouldn't distract Lois and Lucy.

After a time, Lois joined him on the couch. She sat next to him and leaned into him as he put an arm around her. He asked, "So, what's so special about these wedding plans?"

With a conspiratorial look, she said, "Well, this isn't going to be your usual wedding. For one thing, I expect my husband to be there along with my 'fake' fiancé," she chuckled. "I sent out two separate sets of invitations. The one that Lex knows about and a second set that he doesn't know about."

"Why two sets of invitations?"

"There was a slight alteration made to the second set of invitations that we sent. We've been getting in the RSVP already."

Suspiciously, he asked, "What alteration?"

With a conspiratorial smile, Lois replied, "Well, for one thing, they will be going to a different set of people and for another, well, you'll just have to wait and see about the other."

"Oh, before I forget. You will need to fly in your parents. I'll be spending most of my time here so they can stay in the apartment. You should pick them up soon so that they will be here."

Chapter 4

The next morning, Charlie King dropped Lucy off at school before heading out of town. When he pulled up in front of Perry's fishing cabin, Perry, Jimmy and Jack all came out to greet him.

Once they were all inside, Clark pulled the film canister from his pocket and handed it to Jimmy. "Here you go, Jimmy, here's a job for you. You need to do your best work on this. Lois let herself into Luthor's vault and took some pictures. I guess we'll all need copies."

"No prob, CK. I'll have them done later today. Jack and I are going to look in on the Black brothers. After that I know a dark room I can use. I have a buddy that owes me a favor."

"Just be careful. We can't allow this info to fall into the wrong hands. It would put Lois's life in jeopardy. She's the only one that could have taken them and Luthor would know it. Don't let yourself be followed or intercepted."

Jack answered for Jimmy, "Don't worry, Mr. K. I'll watch over him."

Clark chuckled at Jack's bravado, "I'll count on you to do that, Jack."

Perry said, "I'm gonna follow-up on the Planet's finances.

How did they get into a position where the Planet had to be sold? Jimmy found out some things using the internet that I'll check up on. It sure looks like we are gonna be adding insurance fraud to the charges."

"The more charges we can bring to bear and make them stick, the better off we will be. But we have to be sure we can make them stick. Half measures will not do."

Jimmy spoke up, "CK, I was thinking. Back, before you were hired, Lois was involved in a gunrunning story. Turned out to be a bust and she barely made it out alive. I remembered the research she had me doing on that and decided to dredge up those old files. Looking at it fresh, with all that we know now, some things that we missed before make sense now."

"Like what?"

"Well, back then we thought we had found the name of the company, but the name didn't mean anything at the time. With the information we have been getting from Miranda and Toni, now we can fill in the blanks. The company name was L&M Enterprises. Back then it was just initials. The latest from Henderson puts names to the initials. It was Lex and Miranda. Luthor was the one responsible for the illegal arms shipments."

"Good job, Jimmy. Make sure you put that all together and get it to Henderson. Perhaps that can be added to her deal. We can excuse the charges against her if she will testify against Luthor."

"You got it, CK."

Later in the day, Perry White was dressed in a conservative suit with a Panama hat and sunglasses. Standing on the sidewalk he looked up at the building he stood before. Squaring his shoulders he entered the building, took the elevator to the tenth floor and entered an office on that floor. The sign on the door read, 'Bigelow and Fuller, Certified Public Accountants.'

He was in the office for some time and when he left, the bag he was carrying which was an old style brief bag, had expanded somewhat to accommodate the additional contents. As he exited he shook hands with a smartly dressed business woman.

Jack and Jimmy found the rundown tenement that the Black brothers lived in. Looking at the mailboxes in the lobby, Jimmy had to rub the accumulated grime off of the name plates to read them. Finally he found the correct one and pointed it out to Jack. They climbed the stairs and found the correct door. There was a window at the end of the hall. Jimmy went to it and looked out. He spotted a fire-escape and pointed it out to Jack. Jack nodded and the two of them headed out of the building. Around back they found the fire-escape that looked like it led to the appropriate room. Climbing the fire-escape they looked in through the window. John Black had obviously chosen that room because the fire-escape offered a quick exit in case the police chose to visit. Looking in, Jimmy spotted all of the components necessary for bomb construction. Pulling out his camera, he took some pictures. Turning to Jack he said, "Now I have two rolls of film to develop. Next stop — the dark room."

The quote from Robert Burns was particularly appropriate here, *'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a'gley,'* As they were exiting the alley behind the apartment, they saw an individual matching the description they had gotten of John Black.

Neither Jack nor Jimmy had ever seen him before and Jimmy decided on a bold move. As Black approached the door, Jimmy hailed him, "Hey, aren't you John Black?"

"Who's askin'?"

"A couple of guys that are lookin' to get some work."

"Why are you talkin' ta me?"

"We heard through the grapevine that you had just struck it rich. We thought you might be willing to spread the wealth some. I'd be willing to split any fees we get from a lead."

John was seeing dollar signs dancing in front of his eyes for

no risk and thought that this could be a gold mine. Let them take the risks and he would reap the benefits. "What can you do?"

Jack put on his street wise kid attitude and said, "Anything we put our mind to. B&E, cars you name it."

Black thought about it for a second and then said, "Okay, this is confidential. I recently did a job for this chick ..." He went on to describe the recent bombing of the Daily Planet.

They each had their assignments so while Jimmy left to use the dark room, Jack went off to pursue another aspect of the investigation. Jack had been given pictures of some of the board members. They needed leverage and that was what he was out to get.

After leaving Jimmy, he had found and had been following Mr. Simon Truesdale most of the morning. When it was approaching lunchtime, his target headed for a midtown eatery. Jack followed him in and managed to get a table right next to him. His diligence paid off. Within a few minutes of sitting down, the board member was joined by a very beautiful, curvaceous young woman. As he watched they had lunch and exchanged more than conversation. When she was preparing to leave, she leaned in and gave him a very passionate kiss. Truesdale sat back with a very satisfied expression on his face as he watched her sway away from him.

He was surprised when someone stepped in between him and the object of his fancy. He was even more surprised when the person addressed him, "Mr. Simon Truesdale."

Absently, he replied, "Yes, that's me. What can I do for you?"

Jack slid into the chair that the young lady had just vacated, displayed the mini-videocam he had in his hand and said, "I think you can do a lot for me and in turn I can do something for you."

Seeing the camera, Truesdale blanched. He spluttered out, "What is this?"

Jack smiled and said, "I think you know what this is."

Truesdale made a grab for the camera, but Jack was too quick for him and he snatched it out of his reach. As he did he said, "Uh uh, none of that."

"How much?"

Jack was truly mystified at this response. "How much what?"

"How much money for that tape?"

Jack smiled and said, "What do you take me for? I don't want your money."

Truesdale was surprised by his answer. He asked, "If you don't want money ... what do you want?"

"Information. That's all. Just information."

Truesdale was surprised, but realizing that this could only involve one thing, he started to sweat. If this was about what he assumed it was, Luthor would have him killed if he talked. "I don't know anything. I don't have any information that you would want."

"I beg to differ. I think you know exactly what I'm talking about otherwise you wouldn't be sweating bullets. We can do this several ways. We could go to LNN and you could make a statement." Seeing the fear in his expression, Jack said, "I didn't think so. Okay, here's what we'll do. We'll go somewhere nice and private and you can answer my questions. I promise to keep it all secret until Luthor can no longer harm you."

Truesdale's expression turned to one of curiosity as he asked, "You're not after me for ..."

"No, we are after Luthor. As far as we are concerned you can keep your ill-gotten gains. Luthor is who we want. We want to put him away where he can't hurt anyone anymore."

Truesdale let out a breath as he sighed the name, "Luthor."

"Your place or mine?"

"Yours."

Truesdale paid the check and exited with Jack. They hadn't gone very far when Jack ducked into an alleyway and said, "In

here. I don't think we'll be disturbed."

Truesdale, reluctantly followed Jack into the alley, fearful of being lured into a mugging.

When no one sprang out of the shadows to beat him up immediately, he started to move forward with more confidence.

Jack stopped, indicated a spot just in front of him and said, "Please stand there."

Fearful that this was where the expected attack would occur, he demurred.

Jack encouraged him, "Nothing is going to happen, other than I will record your statement. I just want to use the wall as a backdrop."

Cautiously, looking all around, Truesdale finally moved to the indicated spot. When he turned to face him, Jack brought up the mini-cam and started recording. He started asking questions, "Why did you choose to vote to sell the Planet to Luthor ..."

That evening Clark drove out to Perry's fishing cabin.

By mutual agreement the task force was using Perry's fishing cabin as their meeting place. When Clark arrived, it was deserted. Letting himself in, he settled to wait. It wasn't too long until he heard a car drive up. A few minutes later, Perry entered.

As soon as he was in the door, Clark asked, "Well, how did it go?"

When he entered the door, Perry was carrying a large case. Perry set the case down, took off his Panama hat, hung it on a peg next to the door and sat down before he answered. "Every member of the Daily Planet's old Board of Director's is ducking me." He pointed to the case he had carried in and said, "I did get hold of the transcript of the session where they decided to sell to Luthor." Perry looked around, making sure they were alone before he spoke again, "Instinct tells me they're hiding something." He considered his next statement for a second. "What I need is leverage."

"We'll have to wait and see what Lois sent. Jimmy should have that with him when he arrives."

"I'm sure that everyone will be hungry when they get here." So, to kill some time, Perry started cooking. He put a large pot on the burner and then started collecting his ingredients. He decided on a Cajun recipe that was a favorite of his.

While Clark arranged his notes, Perry was busy at the stove. He had all of the burners going with various concoctions simmering as he stirred the contents of a large pot.

Finally, Clark's curiosity got the better of him and he asked, "What's cookin'?"

"My own Crawfish Etouffée recipe. I hope you like it spicy."

Clark snickered and said, "If you can cook it, I can eat it."

Just then, Jimmy and Jack entered. A few minutes later, Bill Henderson drove up.

As they watched, Perry poured in a batch of crawfish that he had prepared. They popped and sizzled as they hit the pot.

Jimmy and Jack exchanged a look and Jack stuttered out, "Uh, I, I'm not really hungry. I just ate."

Not willing to take no for an answer, Perry said, "You'll eat again." As he was speaking he was continuing to add ingredients. He narrated as he did, "You gotta use the sweet paprika, not the regular. And cayenne pepper, plenty of it. 'Course the secret is the apple juice, half a cup."

As he finished speaking, Bill entered and Perry announced, "Supper is ready. Grab a plate and fill-em up."

Jimmy and Jack looked at the concoction warily, but being hungry they were willing to give it a try. They had each loaded their plates after Clark and Perry. Before dipping in his spoon, Jimmy looked over at Clark and saw him take a mouthful, chew and swallow as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Encouraged by this, Jimmy took a spoonful and brought it to his nose. Taking a deep sniff he detected a fishy aroma and then thrust the spoon into his mouth. He instantly regretted his decision as a five-alarm blaze

seemed to ignite in his mouth. Quickly chewing and swallowing he grabbed a glass of water in an attempt to quench the fire that started in his mouth and traveled all the way down his throat to his stomach. Looking down he was surprised to see that his shirt hadn't combusted.

Jack was only in marginally better shape and that was only because he had taken less on his spoon. Once he had drunk a quantity of water he choked out, "What's in that stuff, carbolic acid?"

Perry was laughing and Clark was having a hard time not doing the same. Perry replied, "That's just an old Cajun recipe. It'll put hair on your chests."

"More like burn off what hair I have," Quipped Jimmy.

Everyone, including the usually taciturn, Bill Henderson laughed at that.

Chapter 5

Once they were finished eating, Clark started cleaning the dishes while Bill, Jack, Jimmy and Perry started a council of war.

Perry started it off. "Every member of the Daily Planet's old Board of Directors is ducking me." He pointed at the overstuffed case he had brought in and said, "I did get hold of the transcript of the session where they decided to sell to Luthor." Reaching up he tapped his nose with a forefinger and said, "Something smells. Instinct tells me they're hiding something." Shaking his head he said, "What I need is leverage. According to the transcript, the board initially voted to reject Luthor's offer to buy the Planet. Then, suddenly, they all changed their minds. In the transcript there is no recording of any discussion to explain the change though. They're all also driving new Ferraris."

Jack said, "I might be able to help with that one."

"How is that?"

Picking up the video-camera, he said, "Let me hook this up for playback and I'll show you."

That was when Jimmy distributed the sheets.

Perry's interest was piqued and as Jimmy passed out the prints, he said, "Oh?"

Jack smiled and replied, "A picture is worth a thousand words and believe me, this is a mint."

As soon as Bill had the pictures in hand he started looking at them with a critical, detective's trained eye. Looking at the first picture, Bill asked, "Whose apartment is this?"

"Pete and John Black," replied Jimmy. "They're the ones that really built the bombs that were used to destroy the Planet. That is their bomb making setup there, on that table. Is that enough to give you probable cause to get a warrant?"

"How did you get the pictures?"

"We were able to look in from the fire-escape."

Bill sought confirmation, "You didn't break in to take these pictures?"

"Didn't need to. Just looked in from the fire-escape."

Thoughtfully, Bill nodded. "I'll send out a team from our special group to round them up and collect the evidence. Maybe they'll give up who hired them."

"I may be able to help with that too." Jimmy said, "That's not all I have. As we were leaving, we ran into John Black. He apparently had never seen either me or Jack. We pretended to be a couple of small time crooks looking to make a score." Jimmy pulled out a micro cassette player from his pocket. Just before he hit play he said, "We offered him a percentage of our pay if he would give us a contact. Listen to this."

The first voice was Jimmy, /**"Can you help us out here?"**/

An unrecognizable voice replied. Jimmy pushed pause, "That is John Black."

He pushed play again, /**"Yeah, I think I can. What will be my percentage?"**/

/*”How about twenty percent?”*/

/*”Twenty-five.”*/

/*”Okay, twenty-five. Now, where is this gold mine?”*/

/*”The chick’s name is Angelica Cox. I don’t know who she works for, but I think it might be none other than The Boss. She paid me to build several bombs. She even provided the materials. All I had to do was assemble them. She didn’t say what they were for, but I think I know. You heard about the Daily Planet building? Those looked like my bombs.”*/

/*”How did you keep from being caught?”*/

/*”I just built the bombs. They can’t even be traced to me because she provided the fixin’s. She picked them up and delivered them.”*/

/*”How do we get hold of her?”*/

/*”She gave me a number . . . I think it’s a cell phone, untraceable. Here’s the number.”*/

Bill listened attentively and when the recording was finished, he said, “Well, that cinches it. He knew enough detail about the incident that he is unquestionably involved. We will pick him and his brother up, if not later today then tomorrow.”

Clark interrupted, “Might I suggest that you do it under the cover of darkness?”

“Good idea, Clark. We’ve come too far to take a chance of someone seeing something.”

Jimmy handed Bill the cassette which Bill quickly stuffed into his pocket. As he did, he added, “Make sure you have the back covered. Remember, his room has a fire-escape. I’m sure he picked that room for a quick exit.”

Jimmy pulled out a card in a plastic bag which he handed over to Bill. “This is the number he gave me. I tried not to handle it any more than necessary so that I wouldn’t smear his prints.”

Bill took it and replied, “Trying for a spot on our crime scene unit?”

While Jimmy had been talking, Jack had hooked up a video-camera to the TV for playback.

Before he started the playback, Perry thumbed through the stack of pictures and documents until he came to the pages with the later dates. He blurted out, “Would ya look at that! Every single member of the Daily Planet Board of Directors is on this list.” He gave a whistle of amazement, “Would you look at the dollar figures associated with each of them, WOW! No wonder they voted to sell out. They were already bought and paid for. Judas Priest, I wish I had them here right now. I’d tell them a thing or two.”

Clark asked, “How can we use this information?”

In reply, Jack said, “Chief, I got something, too. This might just be that leverage you mentioned.” Before he pushed the play button he revealed what he had been researching. He said, “Mr. Simon Truesdale, former Daily Planet board member, has had a sudden attack of conscience. He’s now willing to confess to receiving a substantial cash ‘inducement’, I think he called it, to support the sale of the Planet to Luthor.” He played the recording.

Off screen could be heard Jack’s voice asking the question, “Why did you choose to vote to sell the Planet to Luthor?”

Truesdale responded, “Luthor assured us that if we didn’t sell the Planet to him that our ad revenue was going to tank. He had total control of our advertisers and said that they would do whatever he told them to do. He cited the recent downturn in ad revenue as evidence of his manipulation. After the damage done to the building during that criminal heist we needed to dip into our cash reserves to repair and replace equipment and facilities. When we approached the banks we usually deal with to procure some operating capitol, they refused. Luthor was gloating as he told us that he was also in control of the banks. Because of the amount of money he had on deposit, both corporately and personally, they would do whatever he told them to do. He pointed out that he could drive all of our advertisers away and he could force the

Planet into bankruptcy. If he did that, all of our stock would be worthless. We’d all be destitute.”

/*”Once he had told you that, what other inducements did he provide?”*/

/*”Luthor was most generous. He offered cash compensation to each of us if we would vote to sell to him. After some haggling on our part which had no effect on Luthor, we acceded to his demands . . .”*/

After viewing the recording, Perry said, “That confirms the money transactions we saw in the ledger.”

Jimmy asked, “Any particular reason for this ‘sudden attack of conscience’?”

Jack smiled and replied, “I thought you’d never ask. It might be related to an earlier portion of the video tape he’s hoping his wife never receives.”

Perry let out a whoosh and said, “Poor woman.”

Jack rewound the tape to its beginning, snickered and replied, “She wouldn’t be after the divorce settlement.” Jack pushed the play button and they all watched his philandering with the beautiful young woman and then witnessed his recorded testimony again.

Jimmy asked, “What about you, Chief?”

Perry grabbed his satchel and pulled out some papers. He said, “Lex has maintained that the Daily Planet building was under-insured and that he couldn’t afford to rebuild. Well, now, Lexel Investments **did** have additional insurance on the Daily Planet building.” Perry paused.

Jack acting the straight man, asked, “How much?”

Perry, with an I-told-you-so tone said, “About twice what it would’ve cost to repair it.” He paused to let that sink in and then gave the figures, “Lex Luthor cleared a cool seventy-five mil on the deal.”

Jimmy said, in an awed tone, “That’s motive. He’s nailed.”

Bill replied, “That’s not only motive, it’s also insurance fraud. We can now add that to the list.”

Bill started leafing through the rest of the documents. After printing the pictures, Jimmy had used a regular copy machine to make the copies.

“By the number length and sequencing, I’d say that these have to be Swiss and Cayman Island account numbers. We will start the process of freezing them. We will have to have everything in place so that they can all be hit at the same time, but it can’t be too soon. That would ruin our play.”

“Can we have everything ready in one week? That’s when the wedding is scheduled and we want to give Luthor his surprise wedding present.”

Bill thought for a second before saying, “Yeah, I think so. Yeah, one way or another we’ll have everything in place. Because of the security we have to work under, I’ve been in direct negotiations with upper echelons. I’ll make sure that everything is in place.” Bill thought for a second and then asked, “Do I need to ask where all of this came from?”

Clark’s reply was one word, “Lois.”

Shaking his head, Bill asked, “I wish I knew how she did it.”

With a chuckle, Clark replied, “No, you don’t.”

Agreeing, Bill said, “You’re probably right. I’m better off not knowing, but she was sure running a big risk to get this stuff.”

“I’ll pass along your concern the next time I see her.”

Bill pointed to a list of names and said, “I recognize some of these names. Most of them are small time hoods with rap sheets as long as your arm. I can start bringing them in for questioning.”

“I don’t think you should be doing that just yet. If Luthor somehow finds out that people that have been on his payroll are starting to go missing, he might become suspicious.”

“We did all right with Toni Taylor and Miranda. Don’t forget we have St. John too.”

“Those were special cases. We were able to fake the deaths of

the two women and we made it look like Nigel skipped town. We don't want to push our luck."

Jimmy, in a desultory tone said, "This is all great, of course, but the problem is none of it'll bring back the Planet."

Perry started to wax philosophical and related an Elvis yarn, "Elvis, first recording session for Sam Phillips, June of '54 it was, didn't turn out too well, but darned if he wasn't back in that studio in July and turning out his first couple of hits."

Jimmy commented, "I just know there's a point to this story."

Perry smiled and said, "You bet there is. Elvis didn't give up, we won't either. We have a lot on him. We just need a little more."

Jimmy nodded and said, "Got it."

Perry started to issue his orders, "Jimmy, I want you to start researching these accounts. These show the disbursements, but we need to show that they all received the money. Jack, can you help Jimmy with that?"

Jack replied, "Only one can work on the computer at a time. I was thinking I'd try to find another board member."

"Sounds good to me. The more we have the better."

"Bill, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to have a team pick up the Black brothers then I'm going to start checking on some of these other names on his list."

Jack said, "Let me see that list." Jimmy handed him a copy and he went through it carefully. When he finished he said, "Whew, my name isn't here. I guess it wouldn't be. He paid cash for the globe. There is an entry for \$1000 made out as a cash disbursement. That must have been me. That's a relief. There's no paper trail leading to me."

Perry asked, "Clark, how about you?"

"I'm trying to keep an eye on Lois. If she gets into a jam I want to be there to get her out."

Bill offered, "That's a full time job in itself."

Clark replied, "Don't I know it."

Perry said, "All right, I guess we all have our assignments. Let's get to it. We'll meet back here tomorrow night."

Chapter 6

Lex called Mrs. Cox to his office. When she entered Lex watched with obvious appreciation the rhythmic sway of her hips counterpointed by the bobbing of her breasts. As she approached his desk he asked, "Has Operation 'K' been completed?"

She struck a pose with one hand on her hip, one leg turned slightly out. She replied, "Yes. Everything is in readiness. Your plan should work perfectly."

"Very good. The ceremony is only a couple of days away."

Mrs. Cox leaned in so that Lex had a perfect view of her unencumbered breasts under her scoop necked blouse. She challenged, "Why her? Why Lois Lane? Why do you need her when you have me? Aren't I enough for you?"

"Ah, my dear Angelica, yes and no. You are a very willing and inventive lover; however, Lois Lane ... Lois is a challenge. She has a strong will. Breaking her will is the challenge and break her will I shall."

"But why? She **won't** go to **bed** with you, she **won't even** let you **kiss** her for heaven's sake. She must be frigid."

"That is the challenge. Like it or not, she will be bent to my will. I will **take** her if she will not come to me willingly ... repeatedly. She will have no choice and no escape. She will be totally at my mercy. Once her will has been broken in that way, she will come to me willingly."

"You're going to turn her into a sex slave?"

"For want of a better term, yes. That is exactly what she will become. My sex toy, my sex slave. You know how we sometimes play at bondage. She will experience the real thing."

Mrs. Cox asked, "Will you take the necessary precautions?"

Luthor nodded abstractly obviously lost in thought.

Mrs. Cox, picked up on it and said, "A billion for your thoughts."

Luthor snapped out of his reverie and said, "Sold." Then he leaned over and picked up a cigar from his humidor. As Mrs. Cox lit it for him, he continued, "Everything is falling into line. I was able to make the Planet vulnerable for a takeover, then I bought it, then I destroyed it. I broke Lois out of her comfortable routine *and* made a few bucks in the process. Now her 'family' is scattered to the four winds. That should drive another wedge between Lois and her old life."

Nodding, Mrs. Cox said, "Part one of your plan is complete."

In reply, Luthor said, "Yes. Time for Part Two: to conclude our business with Superman." He took the time to puff on his cigar and blow out a smoke ring before he continued, "Is everything arranged?"

Mrs. Cox simply nodded in reply.

Luthor took another appreciative puff on his cigar before tapping off the ash and, with it in his mouth, spoke around it, "Good. Now, we must put operation 'K' into operation. I need you to call Superman and ask him to meet me in the wine cellar."

In an exasperated tone, Mrs. Cox replied, "How am I supposed to do that? Do you have his cell number, or his unlisted number or something?"

Humoring her, he replied, "I was thinking of something simpler. I'm going to go down to the wine cellar. After I have gone, you will go out on the balcony and yell for Superman. Tell him ... tell him that I want to personally invite him to the wedding. It is in a couple of days and I wanted to give him time to get his suit pressed or whatever it is he does with it."

"Seems simple enough."

"Then you can bring him down to the wine cellar. I'll expect you in a few minutes." Turning, Lex entered his private elevator and descended.

Once he was out of the office, Mrs. Cox strode through the French doors onto the balcony and started scanning the heavens. Not seeing the hero, she gave a tentative call, "Help! Superman!" When after almost a minute, the superhero had not arrived, she tried again, this time somewhat louder, "HELP! SUPERMAN!" When another minute had elapsed she decided to give it all she had and shouted, "**HELP! SUPERMAN!**"

She was about to turn away and go back inside thinking that he could be out of the country or even in outer space and not able to hear her when she heard a voice from above, "Apparently this isn't an emergency. May I help you?"

She whirled around and looked up to see the superhero floating twenty feet away. She had been startled, but quickly regained her composure and replied, "Mr. Luthor would like a word with you."

"So naturally, you had to stand on his balcony and shout for help."

Looking down slightly, she replied, "We didn't know any other way to contact you. You aren't in the phonebook."

His reply held a touch of humor, "If I had a phone, the number would have to be unlisted. What does Mr. Luthor want to talk about?"

"He led me to believe it had something to do with his and Lois Lane's wedding."

"I have nothing to talk about with him."

"He seemed very sincere in his desire to speak with you, something about Lois wanting you there."

Clark was instantly on alert. This was an obvious lie, but not one that Superman would know for a fact was. As such he decided that he would have to play along with the charade. He floated over and landed next to Mrs. Cox and said, "I guess I'll talk to Mr. Luthor." He was thinking, "<I need to see what he's up to, but I'll have to be on the lookout. I know that he has Kryptonite. I should be able to detect it if it is present. I can do a scan of the area with

my x-ray vision.>

Mrs. Cox led the way to the elevator and took Superman down to the sub-basement where the wine cellar was located.

Before entering the room, Superman used his x-ray vision to scan the interior. Unfortunately, he didn't look at the ceiling, just the walls and floor. He didn't see any Kryptonite or any lead enclosure that could house a trap. There wasn't even a lead box in Luthor's pocket. As he watched through the heavy wooden door he saw Luthor as he drew a glass of wine from a large vat. Luthor lifted it to his nose and sniffed then he took a sip. Once he did, he made a face and spat the wine back out. His super-hearing picked up his muttered, "Not quite ripe." Superman thought, <Seems innocent enough. I don't see any Kryptonite or lead enclosures. Maybe that chunk that Lois found in his vault is all that he has.>

Mrs. Cox knocked on the door and then opened it.

As she did, Luthor called out, "Come in, come in. Don't be shy."

As Superman started to descend the stairs, Mrs. Cox exited, closing the heavy door behind herself. Even that heavy wooden door didn't threaten him and that was the only barrier he could see between him and the outside.

As Superman neared the bottom step, Luthor picked up a bottle. After wiping the accumulated dust off, he held it up to the light and said, "They say that civilization was invented so that men could cooperate in the making of wine."

Clark was impatient to get this farce over with and in a gruff tone asked, "You went to some lengths to call me, what do you want, Luthor?"

Luthor, at his most urbane, spread his hands and replied, "A favor."

Superman snickered and replied, "From me? You must be joking."

Luthor, as if trying to appease his guest, said, "Hear me out."

Superman didn't respond verbally, he simply crossed his arms over his chest and stared at Luthor.

Luthor tried to be ingratiating, "My fiancée, Lois Lane, **should** be deliriously happy at the prospect of our forthcoming wedding. Unfortunately, she is not. She misses her friends from the Daily Planet. Especially, her former husband, Clark Kent.

Clark was gratified to see just how well they had performed their deception; Luthor apparently had no clue as to who he was. He prompted, "So?"

Luthor spread his arms once again as if to display his vulnerability in the presence of Superman's power and said, "So, you and Clark were friends and you are also a friend of Lois's."

Superman replied, "I'm not following," as he moved a couple of steps deeper into the cellar.

Luthor was happy to see that Superman was in fact following, following his movements deeper into the cellar and away from the steps. He was almost where he wanted him so he baited him further, "I'm asking you, in view of the recent death of Clark Kent to come to the wedding as a friend of Lois's."

While Clark considered his answer, Luthor moved over to another vat in the cellar. Superman took a few paces in that direction, following Luthor's movements as he spoke, "You live in a fantasy world, Luthor. I will never do anything to support your marriage to Lois."

Satisfied that Superman was where he needed him to be, Luthor leaned down and placed a glass under a spigot. As he turned the valve, he said, "I see. Then, I suppose, you're of no further use to me."

As he turned the spigot, a switch was actuated that released a catch. That catch was the only thing holding the cage suspended above the false ceiling. The cage fell through the false ceiling like the tissue paper it was constructed from. As soon as it broke through, the Kryptonite that the bars were coated with was no longer blocked by the lead paint that the tissue paper had been

painted with and Superman could feel the effects. He was caught off guard and before he could even attempt to flee, he could feel his powers deserting him. By the time the cage clanged to the floor, Superman could barely stand.

Superman put up a brave front, trying to bluff, "Bars won't hold me, Luthor."

Luthor smirked and said, "Oh? I think these will."

In a brave show, Superman moved close to the bars, but as he did so they sapped his strength even more than when he was in the center of the cage and he had to flinch back.

Luthor actuated a switch which dimmed the lights in the cellar. Once the overhead lights died, the cellar was lit only by an eerie green glow coming from the paint on the bars of the cage.

Superman had been becoming weaker as time and the exposure went along and he finally could no longer stand, collapsing to one knee in the center of the cage.

Luthor taunted the fallen hero, "A fantasy world? Perhaps. But it's all about to come true. Once you have been sufficiently weakened, perhaps immediately after the wedding, I'll have you dissected to find out what makes you tick and if I can determine the source of your powers, I'll have them duplicated in me. Then I will be the only Superman and the world will bow to me as its emperor."

Luthor turned his back on his fallen adversary and approached the stairs. As he did he said, "I'm sure that Lois will miss your presence at the wedding, but that really can't be helped. I wouldn't want you to make a scene and disrupt the festivities. She is supposed to be happy on her wedding day." Luthor had his foot on the bottom step as he turned to face Superman again. "Oh, and let's not forget the wedding night. I have something very special planned for my soon to be wife. What I have planned will break that stubborn will of hers. She will be subdued, by me. By the time I am through with her she will be as docile as a lioness when the lion of the pride is standing over her. She will cower and offer herself to me, unreservedly. That is what I will demand of her and she will comply. It may take some time to break her, but I will have all of the time that I need. Once she is mine, no one will question what we do or what I do to or with her. No one will dare. My authority over her, body and soul will be complete."

Clark choked out, "You'll never ... break her ... or control her ... soul." He thought, <Lois, what have I gotten you into?>

Luthor started to ascend the steps again. As he passed it he touched the fire ax that hung on the wall. His fingers continued to touch the ax as he turned his head and spoke again, "If I tire of the entertainment that you provide, I'll return and we will finish this conversation ..."

Later that evening, both Lois and Lex were dressed in evening clothes and in the back of his limousine as they returned from an outing.

Things were at a critical stage. The wedding was just a short time away. The weather matched her mood, it was raining and Lois was simply staring out her window as they drove, lost in her own thoughts and only paying scant attention to Luthor, as if the streetlights reflecting from the wet pavement had suddenly become fascinating.

Luthor tried to make small talk, "I don't know when I've had better garlic chicken. Chef Andre deserves a raise."

Lois replied with a non-committal, "Mmmm."

He tried another sally, "And what a magnificent production of Othello. I especially liked the black and white set. Very inventive."

Lois's reply was the same as last time, a non-committal, "Mmmm."

By this time, Luthor had shifted his position so that he was looking at Lois. He could see that she wasn't paying him any attention so he tried something else, "You know, Shakespeare didn't write Othello. It was actually written by Dr. Seuss."

Again, Lois's reply was the same, a non-committal, "Mmmm."

Taking her hand to get her attention, Luthor said, "Lois, am I boring you?"

Lois realized what she was doing, obsessing over the investigation and wondering if they would be finished on time, but she couldn't say that to Luthor so thinking rapidly, she came up with an excuse he would accept, "What? No, of course not. I'm sorry. All I can think about is that enormous stack of RSVP's on my desk." She shrugged and added, "Minus a few."

"Who is missing?"

"Some of my old friends from the Planet."

In an apparent non-sequitur, Luthor said, "Propinquity."

Lois was caught off guard, "What?"

Luthor chuckled and said, "I thought you knew words.

Propinquity. A relationship based on convenience. You work in a particular place, shop in certain stores, become attached to the people that surround you. But, when you move on, the relationships end." He smiled an I-told-you-so smile and added, "That's what you have to do, Lois. Move on. It's not fair to you ... or to me. How about your family?"

"Lucy has been helping me plan so she'll be there. My dad is flying in. If my mom can stay sober long enough she'll be there as well."

Trying to placate her, Luthor proposed, "After the honeymoon, I promise you we'll heal all old wounds."

Lois was curious, she and Clark had their island getaway, but she wondered where Luthor planned to take her, if they were actually getting married, that is. It would be nice to know. If he told her she could mention it to Clark and maybe they could go, so she prodded, "You still won't tell me where we're going?"

In a teasing tone, Luthor replied, "No." he thought, "<If I told you, you would cancel the wedding and I can't have that.">

Lois asked, "Not even a hint?"

Luthor smirked and replied, "Clothing is optional."

Lois laughed, but not for the reason that Luthor assumed. Lois was laughing because that was how it was when she and Clark visited their island and she couldn't wait to get back there, with him. She was still investigating and thought that she might be able to catch him in an unguarded moment, "Lex ... when the Planet was destroyed, you lost quite a bit of money, didn't you?" The last time she had seen Clark he had told her about the insurance and she wanted to see just how far Lex would carry the deception.

He revealed just how far as he answered, "Yes, but I have wide shoulders and deep pockets."

Lois followed up with, "But, I mean it wasn't a total loss. There was insurance."

Lex continued to prevaricate, "Several policies. Unfortunately, not enough to justify reconstruction." Lois became apprehensive as he paused and asked, "Why the sudden concern?"

Lois had to come up with a good reason and thought that she had hit on one, "Because I can't help but feel that your buying the Planet in the first place had something to do with me."

She felt some relief and that she had hit on a good tactic as he replied, "It did. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I bought the Planet in a desperate, lovesick attempt to bring us closer together, to bring my life in tune with yours. Ironically, it wasn't necessary: here we are together. Our love was too strong. We were **meant** to be together."

Lois smiled a self-satisfied smile that was at least partly hidden by the dim lighting as he partly confirmed their hypothesis. She thought, "<Let him live in his dream world. I must be putting on a good act if I have convinced him that I love him. Perhaps there is some wishful thinking in there.>

Clark was experiencing the most pain he had ever been felt in his entire life. Every time he moved from the exact geometrical

center of the cage, the pain only exacerbated, thus his body was curled into as small a figure as it could be. He was a circle of pain personified. Over the physical pain that he was experiencing, even more painful was the emotional pain of the fact that he had failed Lois. Every time he tried to make a move to escape he came close to passing out. He had to think. He had to get out of this cage because Lois needed him. He couldn't fail her. If anything happened to her he would die, but if he died the things that he dreaded would happen to her. With that thought all sensibility left him and he lay unconscious on the floor of the cage. Each time he woke from his stupor it was only to renewed intensity of the pain he was experiencing.

After dropping Lois off at her apartment, Luthor returned to the penthouse. The first thing he did was to cross to the cabinet that housed his surveillance gear. Opening the doors he turned the monitor on and hit the switch for the wine cellar. He smiled when he saw the obviously unconscious Superman curled up in the fetal position in the center. Satisfied that his prisoner wasn't going anywhere he closed the cabinet, crossed to his desk and called downstairs. "Mrs. Cox?" He paused to listen. "I'm sorry I woke you. Would you like to join me for a ... night cap?"

After she replied he walked toward his bedroom and started to undress. Before he finished, Mrs. Cox, wearing a filmy negligee, entered and slipped beneath the covers of the bed.

As he joined her, physically, he sighed and said, "Ah, Mrs. Cox, everything goes according to plan."

Her reply was, "More. More."

Lex smiled and as he complied, he said, "Gladly."

Chapter 7

That evening, while Lex and Mrs. Cox were being intimate, Perry paid a visit to Franklin Stern. He had been surprised that he was able to schedule for so late an hour, but he was pleased at the outcome. The late hour would reduce the possibility of being observed by one of Luthor's minions.

As he was ushered into Mr. Stern's office, he was almost stunned by the opulence. The office was lavishly decorated in French provincial style. There were heavy curtains on the windows which reduced the amount of light in the room dramatically. On the desk was an old fashioned desk lamp with a green glass shade which provided what little artificial light there was in the room.

Franklin Stern, a very impressive looking African-American of large stature and short cut graying hair sat ensconced behind the desk in a high backed chair that, because of its durable construction, did not fit the rest of the décor. French provincial was somewhat delicate and a chair of that type would not long support the bulk of the owner.

As Perry entered, He addressed the resident, "Mr. Stern?"

Mr. Stern stood and stepped out from behind his desk. Holding forth his hand, he said in his deep, resonant and cultured voice, "Mr. White, thank you for coming in. Please sit down." as he indicated a chair in front of the desk.

As Perry was seating himself, he said, "Thank you for seeing me at this late hour."

After Perry was seated, Mr. Stern returned to his desk chair and after leaning back and getting comfortable, he said, "Perry, may I call you Perry?" he paused until Perry acknowledged with a nod, "I work a fourteen hour day, always have. If I show my face at home before eleven p.m. my wife calls the police." He smiled at Perry's acknowledgement and continued, "I'm sure you know what that's like."

Perry replied, "All too well."

They both smiled in acknowledgement of their common ethic.

Mr. Stern, commented, "Strange that we've never met. I'm

very familiar with your work, of course.”

Perry reposted, “As I am with yours.”

Stern frowned and said, “I miss reading the Daily Planet. It has imitators, but no true successor. Metropolis has lost an asset.”

Perry was pleased to hear this sentiment and replied, “Those of us who worked there were proud to call it home.” He paused a second before he continued, “That’s why I’ve come.”

Mr. Franklin Stern hadn’t made his money by beating about the bush, so he came straight to the point, “I didn’t think you were here looking for a fourth for bridge.”

Appreciating Mr. Stern’s candid attitude, Perry lost no time in making his pitch, “Mr. Stern ... you own television and radio stations. And you have interests in book publishing. But, have you ever considered owning a newspaper?”

Mr. Stern gave Perry a quizzical look and said, with a sardonic tone, “Perry ... correct me if I’m wrong ... there *is* no newspaper.”

Perry was prepared for this argument though. “The Daily Planet was more than concrete and girders. It was people and ideas and principles. Those still exist.” He was waxing enthusiastic as he continued, “There *is* a newspaper. There just isn’t a place to print it.”

Perry had apparently grabbed Mr. Stern’s attention because he leaned forward in his chair, out of his relaxed posture as he asked, “Even if that were true, why would *I* want to own the Daily Planet.”

Perry was nothing if not a Planet man and his reply spoke volumes, “I can’t imagine anyone wanting anything else.”

Stern gave Perry’s statement due consideration and then finally, with a shake of his head, leaned back and said, “I’m sorry, but my answer is no.” He then tried to mollify Perry by saying, “I wish you luck, though, in finding some way to rebuild. If you do, you have my subscription.”

Perry was crushed by his answer and as Mr. Stern came around the desk and offered his hand, Perry took it and shook it. As they were shaking hands, Perry muttered to himself, “I just hate to see Lex Luthor win.”

That name grabbed Mr. Stern’s attention and without releasing Perry’s hand asked, in a rather sharp tone, “What’s that?”

Perry was surprised at his interest and decided to give him some of the information, “Lex Luthor. We’ve gathered evidence that suggests he was behind the Planet’s fall. I’d just like to see the expression on his face ... well, thanks again for seeing me.” Perry didn’t know how much good it would do, but he decided to play the cards as they had been dealt. The evident interest displayed at the mention of Luthor’s name had given him the idea that there could be some form of rivalry and using that as a lever to generate interest was not below Perry. Perry decided to let Stern think about it so he broke the handshake and, turning left the office.

The next morning, Luthor went to a cabinet in his office and after opening it, switched on the monitor. In the center of the screen was the image of Superman collapsed on the floor of the cage, curled up in a fetal position in an obvious attempt to stay as far away from the bars of the cage as he could manage. He muttered to himself, “I think he looks like he could stand some company. I think I’ll pay him a visit.” Closing the cabinet he moved into his bedroom and grabbed a couple of cummerbunds of different colors then picking up a key on the dresser he headed for the elevator.

After taking the elevator down, he entered the wine cellar. After descending the steps, he crossed to and, using the key, opened the cage.

Stepping inside he stood over his fallen enemy for several minutes before he nudged Superman with the toe of his shoe. When he stirred, Superman looked up at Luthor. Luthor asked, “How are you feeling today?”

Superman tried to answer, but all that came out was a groan of pain.

With a sick sense of humor, Luthor asked, “Oh, still a little green around the gills?”

Pulling out a hand mirror, Luthor looked at himself, straightened his tie and preened. He was very proud of himself and expressed it, “How does it feel to know that the better man has won ... that I have won. I, Lex Luthor have triumphed over the world’s superhero, the so called man of steel. Right now you are more like a wet noodle.”

Looking up as if addressing the heavens, Luthor said, “I, on the other hand, am feeling wonderful.” He started to quote and as he did he added arm gestures as if he were on the stage, “‘She’s beautiful and therefore to be wooed. She is woman, therefore to be won.’” He resumed a normal stance and gave the reference, “‘Henry the Fifth.’”

Superman made a weak grab for Luthor’s ankle which Lex easily stepped away from.

Luthor could see the pain mirrored in his eyes and felt absolutely no pity, in fact he decided that he was going to rub salt into his wounds. “Tomorrow is the big day! The day that I make Lois Lane my wife. Yes, tomorrow the lovely Ms. Lane will become Mrs. Lex Luthor and tomorrow night she will grace my bed and there’s nothing in the world that you or anyone else can do about it. I know this must be hard for you. Seeing me hale and hearty, while you can only lie here helplessly and suffer.”

He struggled to raise himself and then weakly, Superman replied, “She’ll ... she’ll ... never submit ... to ... to ... you.” With his final word, he collapsed back to the floor.

Nudging Superman with his toe once more, Luthor said, “Losing interest so soon? You think that Lois will not submit to me? I beg to differ. I love Lois, but she’s much too independent, don’t you think? Well, leave that to me. The lovely Ms. Lane will have no choice other than to submit. I will have her in my power and she will never get away.”

He knelt next to Superman and said, “I really came to ask your advice. I’m trying to decide what to wear in the ceremony.” He held up a cummerbund in each hand and asked, “Should I wear the white or the red? Red for passion, or white for purity?”

Superman’s only reply was a groan of pain.

Lex smiled and said, “Yes, I agree. I think you are right. Definitely the red it shall be.”

Superman struggled to raise himself and croaked out in a hoarse whisper, “Luthor ...”

Luthor looked down again, absolutely no pity in his eyes when he did as he said, “Strange to hear you say my name and know it’s probably for the last time.” He paused to contemplate his vision of the future before he spoke again, “Is this a mistake? Will the pain of losing the challenge you represent be worse than the discomfort of constantly losing to you?” He paused to consider again before he shook his head and said, “Nah.” Finished speaking, Luthor turned to leave. As he did, he said, “I haven’t decided. Shall I have you dissected or shall I dissect you ... with the fire ax? Which would give me the most pleasure? If I have you dissected I may discover the source of your powers. But then you may succeed in escaping. I really need to decide, but then,” he glanced around at the greenly glowing bars of the cage and said, “this trap may make the decision for me.”

Luthor finally stood and strode through the door of the cage, closing and locking it behind him. Standing next to a wine cask near the foot of the stairs, just out of reach from the cage, Luthor placed the key to the cage on top. Tantalizingly, just out of reach, an additional torture for his fallen opponent. Turning away he started up the stairs. As he passed the fire ax he appeared to finally make up his mind and touching the ax, he said, “I’ll be back later, after Lois is in my bed, when it is all over and we’ll have a little heart to heart conversation. Have a nice ... death.”

If, after Luthor had climbed the stairs and closed the door, he could have looked back into the cellar, he would have been gratified to see Superman looking longingly at the key.

Shortly after Luthor paid his visit to Superman in his wine cellar, Lois was in her office at LNN when her phone rang. She was busy editing a news story and distractedly picked up the phone and from force of habit, said, “Daily Planet, City Desk, Lois Lane,” before she realized what she was saying. She heard a giggle from the other end and finally realized what she had said. She recognized the voice and asked, “What’s up, Luce?”

Instantly sobering, because of the news she was about to relay, Lucy’s reply was couched in such a way that someone overhearing would not determine her real meaning, “Sis, I was calling because, Charlie, you know, my boyfriend, well I’m starting to get worried. Charlie didn’t come home last night. It isn’t like him to stay out and not call, if you know what I mean. I’m really concerned.”

For security purposes they had been limiting their contact so the fact that he was missing had been unknown to Lois, until now. Lois was immediately apprehensive, but in a calm tone and couching her reply in terms that wouldn’t reveal anything if the line was bugged said, “I wouldn’t worry too much, you know how it is. He might have gotten hold of some really good stuff and is sleeping it off.” Lois’s mind was working at lightning speed. It wasn’t like Clark to stay away. There were no reports of Superman being involved in any major catastrophes. That could only mean one thing Lex had managed to trap him somehow. That would be the only thing that could prevent him from coming home. How was she going to find him was the question. She had to find him, and find him fast. The only thing that Luthor could use to trap him was Kryptonite. She had found a small chunk in the safe so she knew that he had it. She had warned Clark, but somehow, Luthor had managed to spring some kind of a trap and now, Clark was probably suffering terribly.

She realized that she needed a plan and she needed it quickly. Who would know how it had been done? Who would know where he was? There were probably only two people with that knowledge, Lex and Mrs. Cox. Lois remembered the comment about ‘Series K’ and the pieces fell into place. The test they had made and Clark had been weakened. They had been talking about Kryptonite. She had found the Kryptonite in the vault, but that must not have been all that Luthor had. Questioning Lex was out so that only left Mrs. Cox. Within a matter of seconds, the germ of a plan started to form. It was time to use the inside knowledge she had gleaned over the last few months to her advantage.

Lois quickly exited her office and stepped outside of the LNN building. She reached into her bag and picking up her cell phone, the one that Luthor didn’t know about, dialed the number of another cell phone. When the other end was picked up, she heard, “Henderson.”

Without preamble, Lois launched into full babble, “Bill, listen, I think that Luthor has trapped Superman. No one has seen him for a day. I told you that I found Kryptonite in that vault when I found the books. That is the only thing that could be used. I think that Angelica Cox will know where he is. I’m going to lure her out and subdue her. You’ll need one of those warrants made out in her name.”

The sound of rustling paper came through the earpiece as he said, “Making it out, now. Just let me know where to pick her up.”

“I’m going to call and have her pick me up so that she and I can go shopping. Once I have her, I’ll call.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

“This won’t take long. Every minute he is exposed to that stuff he is in pain and I don’t want that to go on any longer than necessary.” She closed the cell phone to break the connection and, returning to her desk, used that phone and dialed another number. When the phone was answered, Lois heard, “LexCorp, Mrs. Cox.”

Lois affected a honeyed tone as she said, “Ah, Angelica, just the person I needed to talk to. Listen, I need you to do me a favor. I have some shopping to do and I need to ask your opinion on some things. You are very familiar with Lex’s taste and I want to get him something special for a wedding present. Could you help me, please?”

“It’s not really within my job description -”

Lois interrupted her, “I was really counting on your help. You know Lex so well. It’s for Lex, after all. I’ll make sure he knows that you helped pick it out.”

“Well ...”

The tone of her voice was softening and Lois could tell that playing to her vanity was working. “Could you come get me, please?”

“Oh, all right. For Lex. Where are you?”

“LNN. I’ll meet you out front. Thanks, you’re a life saver.”

“Fifteen minutes,” was all the reply that Mrs. Cox would give her.

“I’ll look for you.” As she hung up, Lois picked up her bag. She checked the contents. One of the things she had added was a telescoping wand. Fully extended it was eighteen inches long and could be used as an escrima. Lois didn’t want to, but in a worst case scenario she would use it like a blackjack to knock Mrs. Cox out.

Lois was outside when Mrs. Cox rolled up in a limo and Lois climbed into the back seat. Lois said, “Thanks, Angelica, I really appreciate this. What was Lex doing when you left?”

“He was in a meeting. I left him a note. Where do you want to go?”

“That exclusive men’s store over on Fifth.”

Lois made small talk while Mrs. Cox drove. Lois’s plan was to have Mrs. Cox off guard so when they arrived, after parking, they went in. Lois had her help pick out a very expensive gift for Lex. When they left the store, Mrs. Cox made to take Lois back to LNN, but Lois asked, “Listen, instead of that, could you take me to Victoria’s Secret? I’d like to get you something, to thank you for your help. Please?”

The idea of getting something from there was too enticing to pass up, so Mrs. Cox turned the limo in that direction.

As they were exiting the car, Lois hooked her arm and as she pulled her toward the store asked, “What can I get you, Angelica?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” She thought about Lex and what she could wear to entice him and finally replied, “Perhaps a teddy.”

Lois had been in this store before and knew the layout. Lois picked out a red teddy, saying, “This would look spectacular with your coloring. You really need to try it on, to make sure it fits right.” She led Mrs. Cox to the fitting rooms at the back of the store.

As Mrs. Cox was changing, Lois watched under the drape. When she saw her skirt drop she made her move. Sweeping aside the curtain she swung her escrima catching Mrs. Cox just over the right ear. Mrs. Cox collapsed to the floor like a sack of meal. Quickly, Lois stuffed a hanky in her mouth and tied it in place with a bandana. She put another over her eyes and then secured her hands behind her with large cable ties. She pulled her skirt up and secured it and then bound her legs.

Peeking out she saw an empty corridor and, grabbing Angelica under the arms, dragged her out the back door. She dropped her in the alley and stood over her in case anyone should come by. She pulled out the cell phone again and called Bill Henderson.

Five minutes later, Bill showed up.

Mrs. Cox was just regaining consciousness and as she did she realized that she couldn’t see anything and that there was something in her mouth, preventing her from speaking. She next realized that her arms and legs were bound and she started struggling with her bonds.

All pretense of friendliness dropped from her voice as Lois

nudged her with her toe and dropping the sickly sweet tones she had been using with her, in a commanding tone Lois said, “Don’t bother. You’re not getting away.”

Mrs. Cox only struggled against her bonds that much more in reply and was still doing so as she was lifted into the back of a car.

Bill was there personally and Lois helped load Mrs. Cox into the back seat. She said, “Bill, the limo is out front. I’m sure it has a tracker installed, probably a listening device as well. You need to have them both disabled and then tow it away.”

Bill pulled out a cell phone and gave the necessary directions. He said, “They should be on scene in five minutes.”

Lois said, “I will be calling Luthor in about ten minutes. I would expect fireworks to start flying in fifteen.”

Lois actually waited fifteen minutes to see that the limo was towed away before she made the call using her regular cell phone. When the phone was answered, in a somewhat frantic voice, Lois said, “Hello, Lex? Lex, something’s wrong!”

In a placating tone, Lex said, “Calm down. It can’t be that bad. Now tell me what happened.”

“I really don’t know. Angelica and I were doing some shopping -”

He interrupted her and said, “I know. I saw her note. How did this happen? I thought you didn’t like her.”

“I was just trying to be nice, you know, build bridges. After all, we’re getting married and she’s your personal assistant.”

“I understand. Tell me what has you so upset.”

“Well, you see the thing is, we were having a really nice time together. She helped me pick out your wedding gift.” She affected a gushing tone as she continued, “It’s really nice. I’m sure you’re going to love it. And then I was buying her a thank you present in Victoria’s Secret and she said she had something to do.” Her tone returned to one of worry as she finished up, “That she’d be right back.”

“Well, how long ago was that?”

“Oh, I don’t know, perhaps fifteen minutes.”

“Give her some time. I’m sure she’ll be back. You could wait for her at the car.”

“That’s the thing; the car’s is missing too.”

“What? Let me check something. I’ll call you right back.”

As the connection was broken Lois smiled. She knew just what he was doing, checking the tracking device in an attempt to locate Mrs. Cox and the car. The smile broadened as time went by and he didn’t call back knowing that his level of frustration had to be climbing. She hoped it went right up through the roof. They had made Nigel disappear and now they had done the same thing to Mrs. Cox. Both of his chief lieutenants now appeared to have deserted him. This was exactly what they needed — keeping him off balance so that he didn’t see what was going on around him.

Chapter 8

When he hung up from Lois’s call, Luthor went to his cabinet and turned on a tracker screen. Pushing a certain button, he looked at a blank screen. “What the ... where is it?” He reached for another switch which rewound a tape. He started a playback. When he did he heard a pleasant conversation between Angelica and Lois. There was no hint of animosity. Nothing that would indicate a problem. He checked the tracker again and still saw nothing. The vehicle had dropped off the grid. In a fit of temper he slammed the doors of the cabinet shut. Thinking better of it, he reopened the cabinet and punched a button. In the center of the screen appeared a bed in an unadorned room. At each corner was the glint of metal. Luthor smiled in anticipation. Pushing another button, the monitor screen lit up to display the scene in the wine cellar with the cage and Superman apparently passed out on the floor. His mood changed to one of satisfaction and he shut the system down again. Now he was almost chortling with glee at the

hopelessness of his adversary.

He took a few seconds to get himself under control before he picked up the phone and dialed Lois’s number. When she answered, he asked, “Lois, shall I send another car for you?”

“No, Lex, that’s okay. I’m not that far from my sister’s place. I think I’ll just grab a cab over there. I was planning on spending the night before the wedding with her anyhow.”

“That’s right. The wedding is tomorrow.”

“I know. I’m looking forward to it.” She was actually honest in saying this because that event would signal the end of this charade.

Lois made it to Lucy’s and as soon as she was in the door, Lucy was asking her what was happening, “Was Clark supposed to be away? Is he dealing with an emergency somewhere?”

“No, Luce, he’s not. We knew that this was a possibility. I think that Luthor has him. Now I just have to rescue him.”

“What can I do to help?”

“Nothing right now, Sis. Thanks for asking. The best thing you can do is act naturally. I think you should be studying. Lex is going to be distracted for a while. I need to take advantage of that distraction.” She thought for a second, planning and then said, “I need your car, Luce.”

“Sure, Lo.” And digging into her bag, she handed Lois the keys.

Lois checked to make sure that she wasn’t being followed as she got into Lucy’s car and sped off.

She made it to the Brightview station without mishap and as soon as she came through the doors she was recognized. On the way over, she had decided that she had to get the information she was after and that she would do whatever she needed to in order to get it. It was time for the gloves to come off. She went up to Cooper and asked, “Where’s Mrs. Cox?”

“Holding.”

“Have her brought to interview one.”

Cooper demurred, “I’ll need to check with Henderson. After he dropped her off he had to go back to the Twelfth.”

Lois turned the fury of Mad Dog Lane on Cooper and said, “Coop, we don’t have time for that. Superman’s **life** is at stake. She knows where he is and she’s going to tell me, one way or another. Have her moved to interview one ... **NOW!**”

Cooper quailed before her fury. Everyone knew that she wasn’t part of the force, yet she was partly running the investigation along with Bill Henderson and that Bill had given her carte blanche, so he said, “Right away,” and practically ran down the hall to comply.

Lois went to interview one and waited. Within a minute, the door opened and a handcuffed Mrs. Cox was ushered in. They had taken her personal effects, but she was still dressed in her micro skirt and scoop-necked blouse. The matron that was with her made as if to stay, but Lois said, “You need to leave us alone, but before you go, handcuff her to that chair, wrists and ankles. Use four pair. One on each wrist and ankle.”

The matron demurred, “That’s not according to protocol.”

In full Mad Dog Lane mode, Lois commanded, “None of this is. Just do it and then get out, now!”

The matron hesitated, but seeing the determination in Lois’s eyes she did as she had been directed. She left the room briefly to retrieve the extra cuffs, but returned and complied with Lois’s requirements and left, closing the door softly behind her.

Stepping over to the door, Lois locked it with a loud click and then turned to Mrs. Cox. She stepped over and tested each of the handcuffs, assuring herself of Mrs. Cox’s inability to escape or even move more than a few inches. Deciding that she wasn’t sufficiently restrained, Lois pulled out the heavy duty cable ties and secured her arms and ankles to the arms and legs of the chair eliminating any possible movement, even the few inches that the

cuffs allowed.

As she was doing this, Mrs. Cox challenged, “What are you doing?”

“I think that is fairly evident. I’m eliminating your ability to escape.”

Not liking Lois answer, she sneered and said, “Why would I need to escape from you? You can’t do anything to me.”

Lois said, “You think not.”

Mrs. Cox challenged again, “What’s going on? Why did you kidnap me? Why are you doing this?”

With a sardonic laugh, Lois replied, “Well, Angelica, you see, it’s this way ... you have not been kidnapped. You have been taken into custody as a material witness.”

Mrs. Cox gasped, “Material witness? Against whom?”

“Lex.”

“You must be joking.”

With a stern look, Lois replied, “I’ve never been so serious in all of my life.”

In a display of bravado, Mrs. Cox replied, “I’m not going to tell you anything, so you may as well just let me go.”

Stepping back Lois said, “Well, Angelica, I don’t think so, in fact it looks like it’s just you ... and me.” Lois moved over until she was standing directly in front of Mrs. Cox and leaned casually back against the table after one last check to assure herself that Angelica’s hands were secured to the arms of the metal visitor’s chair that she was sitting in. Lois smiled what could only be described as a feral grin and said, “Now, *Mrs. Cox*, you are going to tell me what I want to know, and if you know what’s good for you, you will tell me immediately and completely, but rest assured, you will tell me whether you want to or not. I’ll ask nicely, one time,” there was a pregnant pause as Lois allowed Mrs. Cox to think about what she had said and then hit her with the critical question, “Where ... is ... Superman?”

Mrs. Cox gave the bindings on her wrist a jerk, testing their security before she got a sly look and replied, “What’s it worth to you?”

Pushing herself erect, Lois picked up her bag and said, “Wrong answer. I didn’t say that I would bargain with you. That’s what we’ve been going through with Nigel, but I don’t have the time to do that with you.”

At the mention of Nigel St. John’s name, Angelica gasped and hissed, “Nigel?”

Lois smiled that feral smile again and said, “Oh, yes. We have Nigel and he has been telling us plenty. Now, it’s your turn. We have you and Lex thinks you have deserted him the same way Nigel did. Now that you know which way the wind is blowing, why don’t you save both of us a lot of time, trouble and yourself some pain and tell me what I want to know?”

With utter contempt for anything that Lois could do to her, Mrs. Cox spit out, “Go to hell.”

“I said I would ask nicely only once.” She delved into her bag as she spoke; “Now I’m afraid, no actually, *I’m* not afraid, but *you* should be, because now, we have to do it ... the hard way.” Lois glanced at the door meaningfully and said, “Now it looks like only one of us is going to walk out that door. The other will have to be carried.” Throwing her words back at her, she said, “The one carried out will be in *her own personal hell*.”

Mrs. Cox strained against the bindings that bound her wrists and ankles, but was unable to do anything other than scrape her wrists. She watched as Lois reached into her bag. When she pulled it out Lois had a small leather pouch in her hand.

Lois opened the kit and displayed the instruments it contained. There were a variety of blades and thin wires with hooks of various sizes. Mrs. Cox recognized it as a lock pick kit. Starting to worry, she asked, “What are you going to do with that?”

Lois selected a slender needle with a crook at the end and pulled it out. As she twirled it in front of Mrs. Cox’s eyes, rolling

it between her thumb and forefinger, she said, “I saw in a movie one time how they performed a prefrontal lobotomy. They took a slender instrument, something like this and inserted it through the tear duct. That way they didn’t have to cut away the skin and drill a burr hole in the skull. I won’t say that it is a painless procedure. Once the instrument is inserted you just wiggle it around a little. All of the brain tissue gets, well, let’s say that it is somewhat messy. Blood starts to come out of the eyes and nose, what doesn’t build up in the skull that is. It’s kinda like a stroke. Now, if you start to twitch, actually you wouldn’t have any control over that, your body will twitch whether you want it to or not. Anyway the twitching causes the instrument to move around causing even more damage to the brain. We’ll probably have to throw that chair away. I wouldn’t want to clean it up. After you lose control of your bodily functions, if you know what I mean.”

“You can’t do this to me. I know my rights. I want my lawyer.”

Lois placed her foot against the seat of the chair and pushed. The chair screeched as it slid along the floor and then slammed against the wall, jarring Mrs. Cox and slamming the back of her head against the wall. That and the feral smile that Lois continued to give Mrs. Cox threw fear into her. Her previous disdain for Lois Lane and what she was capable of went out the window as Mrs. Cox realized that all she had been seeing was a mask, an act and that she had been completely fooled.

What Lois was saying took on greater meaning when she said, “You seem to forget, Mrs. Cox, I’m not a cop. I’m a civilian and I have a deep and abiding friendship with Superman. I know that Lex was behind the attempts on Clark’s life. I also know that Lex has Superman because Lex has what you called Series K. I have another name for it, but that doesn’t change the fact that I know he has it. **You** know where Superman is and you are going to tell me, either willingly or while you have a slight chance to save yourself from becoming a vegetable, although I don’t know just how long that will be. I am rather impatient to get the information and I may go too deep too fast and that would be a shame because then you wouldn’t be able to tell me what I need to know. I’ll have to try to restrain myself, but that will not be easy. You had better hope that you tell me while you have some cognitive ability left. Once it’s gone, there’s no getting it back and you’ll live out your pathetic life in a wheelchair being fed through a tube and having spittle dribble from the corners of your mouth.” A sudden thought occurred to her and Lois turned around as if looking for something. Turning back to Mrs. Cox she said, “Sorry, I seem to have forgotten the alcohol. I won’t be able to sterilize my ‘instruments’. That could result in infection, but then I don’t think you’ll be able to press charges or even complain about it, if you survive, that is.”

Lois held up her instrument and looked closely at it. “One last chance. Where’s Superman?”

There was fear in her voice as she replied, “I can’t tell you. Luthor’ll kill me if I do.”

“Who’s to say that I won’t kill you if you don’t? Actually, by the time I’m through with you, you’ll probably *wish* you were dead, if you are still capable of coherent thought, that is.”

Mrs. Cox threw her head back against the wall and started shouting, “**Help! Police! Help me! Help! Murder! Police!**”

While she was shouting, Lois leaned back unconcernedly against the table once again in a very relaxed posture looking at her ‘instrument’ as she continued to roll it between thumb and forefinger. After another ten seconds, when there was no response, not even the rattling of the doorknob, Mrs. Cox stopped, gasping for breath from a combination of exhaustion from the shouting and fear.

Lois said, “I told you, it’s just you and me. They’re not going to interfere. They know what the stakes are and they are giving me a free hand. Are you ready to talk?”

Mrs. Cox started to squirm in her chair, straining even more vigorously against the bonds that were holding her, but to no avail.

Lois pushed herself upright again and, holding the lock pick at Mrs. Cox's eye level, started moving in her direction. As she did, she said, "I tried. I really tried. Now you leave me no alternative." She paused for a second before she spoke again, "You're right handed, correct?"

There was terror in her eyes as she nodded.

Lois, in a deadly calm tone said, "I think I'll start on the left side then. That way the paralysis will be on the right. I'll be taking away your ability to do even something as mundane as brushing your teeth the way you normally would be able to. Most people don't realize that the signals are crossed. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body and vice versa." Lois put her left hand on top of Mrs. Cox's head to steady it with a firm grip, pushing it back against the wall. She said, "Hold still. It shouldn't hurt ... much."

Mrs. Cox cringed back as Lois approached. Her eyes were dilated with fear and sweat started popping out on her forehead. The closer Lois came the farther she tried to retreat, but she was locked in the chair. As she moved closer Lois shifted the lock pick so that the point was foremost. Suddenly there was a pungent odor and glancing down, Lois could see liquid puddling on the seat of the chair. The lock pick was one inch from her eye when she started to babble, "Wine cellar. He's in the wine cellar. Lex's wine cellar. Lex had a steel cage made. Coated it with paint that had Series K mixed in it. It was above a false ceiling. He dropped it on him when he wasn't expecting it. That's all I know."

Without moving the 'instrument' away, Lois commanded, "Tell me how to find the wine cellar."

Completely cowed, her eyes still focused on the probe, Mrs. Cox gave Lois the complete layout of the sub-basement where the wine cellar was located. She also explained the video surveillance setup and where the monitor was located.

When Lois felt that she had enough, she stood back and nodding, returned the lock pick to her kit. She said, "Thank you, Mrs. Cox. You've been most helpful. But you had better have told me the truth. If not, I'll be back and we will continue this conversation and I might not be so easy on you next time."

As Lois's hand was removed from her head, Mrs. Cox collapsed in the chair nearly unconscious from the strain and fear of the last few minutes.

Lois walked over to the door and unlocked it. When she opened the door, a guard and the matron both entered. Seeing Mrs. Cox collapsed limply in the chair, the matron asked, "How is she? Did you have to hurt her?"

Lois snickered and said, "I never even laid a finger on her. She's all yours. Oh, she'll need to clean up and you might need to give her a change of clothes. One of those nice orange jumpsuits would probably be good. It will go well with her skin color, almost as well as a red teddy." Lois said, letting Mrs. Cox know just how well she had been played.

Lois heard Mrs. Cox groan in reply.

Exiting, Lois returned to Lucy's apartment and waited for night to fall.

At nightfall, Lois exited Lucy's apartment and headed out. She made sure that she wasn't being followed once again. Either she was getting better at it, or else Lex was really scraping the bottom of the barrel when it came to hirelings. Stopping two blocks from Lex Tower, she parked. Like when she broke into the penthouse previously, Lois was in her snooping clothes with the pants legs rolled up under the skirt until she was in position. In any event, she was outside of the underground parking garage entrance watching and waiting for her opportunity when Lex Luthor returned. She saw him drive into the underground parking and decided that she would have to wait. She didn't have to wait long

until she saw Lex as he drove out again and, wonder of wonders; he was actually behind the wheel himself. Lois smirked to herself as she thought, <With Nigel and Mrs. Cox both missing I guess he doesn't trust anyone else to drive him.> She was able to see his features in the backwash of the lights and he looked drawn and haggard as if he was under a lot of strain. She smiled and said to herself, "With him just leaving, I should have enough time to do what I need to do."

Once he had entered the traffic flow and sped away she repeated the process she had followed previously. Now wearing a black turtleneck and pants and donning a black ski mask she snuck past the guard shack. This time she didn't draw the guard out by using the sling. After seeing how easy it was to leave the last time, it would have been so much wasted effort. Crouching down she was able to slip past undetected.

Using Nigel's key card again, Lois summoned the elevator. After covering the lens, she pushed the top button. Even though it was an express elevator, Lois railed at its perceived slowness as it seemed to crawl up the shaft until it finally stopped on the top floor. Exiting the elevator she entered his office.

Thanks to her 'interview' with Mrs. Cox she knew exactly where she had to go. She moved to a corner of the office and pulled open the door on a cabinet. When she did several monitors and a video tape recorder were revealed.

When she turned on the monitor she gasped. There on the screen was a view of Clark, in his Superman uniform. He was collapsed on the floor in the very center of a cage which glowed with a sickly green color. She muttered, "Hang on, Clark. I'm coming for you."

She knew exactly what she had to do and put the plan into action. She first moved to Lex's apartment and grabbed a black jacket and pants. She rolled these up and stuffed them into her bag. Returning to the monitor she hit the stop button on the video recorder and then headed for the elevator.

This was the same elevator that Asabi had used when he had conducted her to Lex's bunker. She knew that her destination wasn't that far down, but it still gave her the creeps to think of her old apartment being reproduced down there by that madman. This time she didn't take it to the garage or the bunker, but to a sub-basement. When she exited the elevator she was confronted by bare concrete walls. Looking left and right she didn't see any cameras so she exited and moved to the door to the wine cellar.

It was locked so she pulled her lock picks out of her bag and went to work. In her haste she fumbled somewhat. She muttered to herself, "Settle down. The longer this takes is that much longer that Clark has to be in that cage, exposed to the Kryptonite. I hope this ploy works." She settled down and worked carefully. Within thirty seconds she had the door unlocked, had pushed it open cautiously and peered in. There was no one in sight except Superman, apparently unconscious in the cage.

Pushing the door almost closed behind her, Lois made her way down the steps into the wine cellar. As soon as her foot hit the concrete floor, she ran to the side of the cage. Just in case there were audio recordings being made, even though she didn't think so, she said, "Superman. Superman, can you hear me?"

Hearing her voice, he stirred slightly. As his head came up she could see his dust streaked face as his pain-filled eyes centered on her. He croaked out, "Lois," in virtually inaudible tones.

She was all business as she said, "I've come to get you out of this."

As she was reaching for her lock picks he said, "Key."

Surprised, she asked, "Where is it?"

Feebly, he pointed at a wine cask near the steps.

Turning, she saw the key and quickly reached for it. She unlocked the cage and joined him, kneeling beside him and pulling him into an embrace. She was weeping with relief and showering him with kisses. After a few seconds of this she said, "Come on. I

need to get you out of here.”

Standing up and hooking her hands under his armpits she started to drag him out. As she did, she noted the tracks left in the dust which covered the floor and had an idea. While she dragged him, as they were passing through the door of the cage, he started to writhe in pain and it increased the closer they came to the bars. She realized then why he had been in the geometric center of the cage. At the center he was at the furthest point from the Kryptonite bars. She said, encouragingly, “Hold on. I’ll have you out of this cage in a second.” Once they were through the door of the cage he started to relax and the further away he was, the more relaxed he became.

She dragged him to a far corner and propped him up against the wall. Looking around, she spotted the implement that she needed to put her new plan into effect. Straddling him, she reached behind and put her hands under his cape. Finding the tab on the hidden zipper she started sliding it down.

Feebly he tried to shoo her away. He said, “We don’t have time for that.”

Chapter 9

After Lois finished sliding the tab down she then started to remove his top. She said, “I know that. We need a distraction and the suit is going to provide it, now help me get it off of you.”

As much as he was able, in his debilitated condition, he helped her remove the suit. Once he was down to his briefs, she pulled the clothes she had taken from Lex’s closet and helped him put them on.

Before making another move, she actuated the catch on his belt buckle the way she had seen him do and, reaching in, removed their rings. She stuffed them into her pocket and then closed the buckle. Taking the suit back into the cage she put it back together, laying it out on the floor in a position making it look like the wearer had been curled in a fetal position as he had been when she first saw him. Then she used a piece of cardboard to scoop up quantities of the dust that had accumulated in the corners of the room and sprinkled it inside the suit allowing some to leak out. Then she used the cardboard like a fan to blow the dust on the floor around, erasing her footprints without touching it or leaving brush marks.

Once she was finished she closed and locked the cage, replacing the key where she had found it. She returned to Clark and found that by being at a distance from the Kryptonite he had regained a little of his strength. She helped him to stand and, leaning on her, he staggered up the steps and out of that chamber of horrors.

Closing the door after them, Lois applied her lock picks again, this time to lock the door. Once that was done she helped Clark to the elevator. Taking it to the top floor, she let Clark rest in the elevator while she returned to the cabinet and, checking the monitor, saw what she had expected to see. The empty suit lying in the middle of the cage looking like the Kryptonite exposure had turned Superman to dust. She restarted the recorder, returned everything to the way she had found it and closed the cabinet. Returning to the elevator, they took it down to the garage level.

Positioning Clark in the shadows near the guard box, she moved to a far corner and picked out a limo. Backing off a couple of steps, she ran at the car and did a flying side kick which set off the car alarm. Dropping low to the ground, below the level of the cars around her, she scurried back by a route that would not be followed by the guard and returned to Clark. Even over the sound of the car alarm blaring, she could hear the sound of the heavysset guard’s footsteps as he crossed the garage at a run.

Thankful that the noise of the alarm would cover any sound they might make, as quickly as she could, she helped Clark to his feet and they scurried out of the garage and into the surrounding

darkness.

The side street on which the parking entrance was located was virtually deserted at that time of night so they boldly started across the street, the sound of the car alarm diminishing with the distance. They had just reached the opposite curb when Lois saw lights approaching. She quickly took Clark into an alley entrance. As she did she thanked her lucky stars that the clothing she had purloined from Luthor’s closet was black. Peering out she saw Luthor drive into the entrance. As soon as he had disappeared inside she helped Clark to his feet again and helped him to leave the vicinity. As soon as they were away, Lois removed her ski mask and stuffed it into her bag. Pulling her skirt from the bag, she donned it and rolled up her pants legs.

When Luthor entered the underground parking he saw the empty guard shack and heard the car alarm. Stopping near the limo he saw the guard fruitlessly trying to access it to shut off the alarm. Luthor used a key from his key ring to open the car and reset the alarm. He asked, “How did this happen?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Luthor. It just went off by itself.”

“You’re sure there wasn’t anyone in here?”

“I’m sure Mr. Luthor. No one could have gotten past me.”

Luthor was thinking to himself, <Unusual, but not unheard of. If it was an intruder, the alarm most likely scared them away.> He said, “Keep a sharp eye out. If it happens again, let me know, immediately.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Luthor. Yes, sir.”

As he returned to his car to park it, he grumbled to himself, “I need to make sure I take enough with me this time so that I don’t have to return before I check with all of my contacts. I just hope that the bribes I am paying out will result in the information that I need.”

He was in a hurry to get back out and continue the search for Mrs. Cox so, as soon as he had opened his small safe and stuffed his pockets full of cash, he looked at the cabinet that housed the monitor, longingly, but decided to forgo the pleasure of seeing his helpless adversary once again. He needed to get back out there and press the search, personally, because there was no one that he trusted sufficiently to do it.

With his arm across her shoulders, Lois helped Clark to walk, looking like a couple making their way home from a party with the man having drunk perhaps a little too much. Having traveled the two blocks, to the car, Lois helped Clark into the passenger seat and then circled around to the driver’s side and, starting the car, drove off.

Hoping that the surveillance on Lucy’s apartment would be as lax as it had been earlier and that any watcher would not be expecting a couple, Lois helped Clark out of the car and, with one of his arms across her shoulder and taking a good portion of his weight, she helped him up the steps and to the apartment. Lois knocked on the door and it was opened a few seconds later by Lucy. Seeing Lois supporting Clark, she quickly came out and took his other arm. Between the two of them they got him into the apartment and closed the door. Once they were inside the bedroom, they helped Clark to his bed. Once he was lying down, Lucy exited to lock the door and Lois stripped off the jacket and pants he had worn for the escape and then lay down next to him. Even in his weakened condition he was able to wrap an arm around her. She grabbed his arm and pulled it tighter reveling in the feel of his arm around her. Now that everything was behind them, the reaction finally caught up with Lois. She had been running on adrenaline ever since leaving on the rescue and now reaction hit and the floodgates opened. She was weeping openly as she kissed him and asked, “How are you?”

In a weak voice, he replied, “Now that we’re together, never better.”

Her tears turned to tears of joy and relief that he felt well enough to joke with her. She smiled and said, “Flatterer. Really, how are you? Tomorrow is the wedding. Can you be there?”

Grimly, he replied, “Nothing can keep me away.”

“Look, I told Lex that I was spending the night before the wedding with my sister so I don’t have to leave until it’s time to dress. I want you to sleep and I’m going to be right here with you the entire time. I can just imagine what you have been through.” Her tears were flowing again as she said, “I know what a brief exposure has done to you in the past. You were in that cage for more than a day. It’s a miracle that you are alive.”

“I wouldn’t have been for much longer. Lex wasn’t going to let me live. He told me that he was going to have me dissected so that my tissues could be analyzed. He wanted to duplicate my powers in himself.”

An involuntary shudder went through Lois’s body as she gasped and then said, “I knew he was bad, but that is even worse than anything I could have imagined.”

After a very short time, Clark fell asleep in Lois’s arms. Lois got up briefly and made a call after which she returned to the bed and snuggled up to Clark.

The sun was streaming in through the window when Lois awoke. She felt the bed and it was empty. Glancing around the room, she spotted Clark sitting in a chair with only his underwear on, basking in the sunlight streaming in through a window. She smiled in the knowledge that it looked like her memories were going to come true after all. This had been a close call, but they had made it through.

He must have heard her stir because he said, “Morning. Well, it’s the big day.”

“How are you? Is the sunlight helping any?”

“Yeah, it’s helping, but it will take time.”

“How do you feel?”

He smiled and said, “Well, I don’t think that a kitten could knock me over, but it would depend on how big the kitten was.”

“Are you going to be up for this?”

“One way or another I’ll be there. You’ll have to leave shortly. Your mom is meeting you at LexTower so that she can help you dress. I’ll dress and meet you there. Don’t forget; be careful, it isn’t too late for Luthor to escape. We have to keep up the charade until the last possible minute.”

“As soon as I knew you were missing, I called Jonathan and Martha. Since you weren’t available they caught a flight and came in last night. After you fell asleep I called them to let them know that I had rescued you. They will be at the wedding. They may stop by to check on you.”

After a hasty breakfast, Lois dressed for the trip downtown and was ready when the limousine that Lex had ordered for her arrived to take her to LexTower.

Once Lois was out of the apartment, Clark visibly wilted. He had been putting on a show for Lois’s benefit. He was much weaker than he had let on. Lucy saw when he let down and her concern was heightened.

In a concerned tone, she asked, “Clark, how are you, really?”

He snickered, “Not good, but better than I would have been if Lois hadn’t gotten me out of that cage. Luce, can you help me? I need to get dressed and the way that I feel it’ll take me all the time I have to dress and get downtown. Oh, and call my folks and tell them not to worry. I’m fine and I’ll see them at the wedding.”

In a hesitant voice, Lucy suggested, “Maybe you shouldn’t go.”

His voice was still weak, but his tone brooked no argument, “I have to be there and I shall be. Now, are you going to help me or not?”

Acknowledging the uselessness of argument, Lucy said, “Helping. Do you want to eat something first?”

“No, I don’t think so. Sunlight will help me more than anything else right now. My suit is in the closet.”

“Lois had a tux delivered. She wants you to wear that.”

Shocked, he blurted out, “A tux? What was she thinking?”

Lucy smiled an enigmatic smile as she answered, “She had her reasons.”

Acquiescing, he said, “Okay, I guess I wear a tux.”

Lucy brightened and said, “I’ll get it then I’ll make that call. I can’t wait to see you in it.”

Lex was tired, a deep down to the bone tiredness. He had spent hours looking for Mrs. Cox. He had personally checked with all of his underworld contacts, but she seemed to have disappeared as completely as Nigel and in a similar fashion. Why would she have deserted him in this fashion? Was it the fact that he would be marrying Lois today? He had seen jealousy. Could that be it? Didn’t she realize that their relationship would not significantly be changed by that new status? Once he had conquered Lois Lane’s independent spirit everything would have returned to normal. Oh, he still would have been married to Lois, he might have even forced her to have his child, but that wouldn’t have changed anything. Most nights he would have shared his bed with Mrs. Cox while Lois was chained to another bed, awaiting his pleasure. He actually preferred that thought to the other alternative, drugs. He could drug her into submission, but where was the challenge in that, better to break her spirit than make it disappear with chemicals.

Wiping the sleep from his eyes, he climbed from the bed and made his way to the office. The first thing he did was buzz for Mrs. Cox. His hope that she would answer his summons was doomed to failure however.

When she didn’t reply he made his way to the cabinet that housed the video surveillance equipment. After opening the doors he turned on the monitor. When the picture appeared on the screen he couldn’t credit his eyes with telling him the truth. Where yesterday Superman had lain huddled on the floor, now there was an empty uniform.

He looked down and saw that the recorder was still running. He stopped it and hit play then reverse scan and watched the picture. The empty uniform was there until it reached a certain point then there was a flash and Superman was there. He didn’t know it, but the flash had been created by stopping and restarting the recorder. He attributed the flash to Superman’s dissolution into his component atoms, leaving behind nothing, but dust. <Oh, well, so much for duplicating his powers.>

Then the realization hit him and he chortled, “He is gone! My arch enemy is gone! I’ve won! The final victory is in fact mine and there is no possibility of my being convicted. No corpus delicti, no crime. I have finally committed the perfect murder. So many have tried in the past and none of them have succeeded! This day shall go down in history as the day the perfect murder was committed!”

Exiting the office he boarded the elevator and took it down to the wine cellar. He noted that the door was in fact still locked; he used the key and opened the door. His eyes were on the almost empty cage as he descended the steps. Pausing at the base of the steps, he picked up the key from where he had left it on the wine cask. Crossing to the cage he unlocked the door and, throwing it open, stepped in and picked up the Suit. Crushing the material in his closed fist he raised his hands in triumph and shouted, “No more interference with my plans. No more worries about being discovered.” His eye caught the bright colored fabric and grasping it in both hands by the shoulders he held it up as if on a hanger and said, “I’ll have this placed on a mannequin and added to my trophy room. The biggest big game of all.” Hahahahahahaha he chortled.

He glanced at his watch and smiled, Lois would be arriving to

dress for the wedding. He needed to return to his apartment and dress. He started humming the tune to “I’m Getting Married in the Morning” as he climbed the stairs and didn’t stop until he was back in his apartment.

Lois and Ellen were in her dressing room and Ellen was fussing over the way the veil was laying while Lois looked at her reflection in the full length mirror in front of her. What she saw was the bride that Lex Luthor wanted. Her gown was of the finest silks and lace. Very demure with a high neck and a semi-transparent insert giving the illusion of a scoop neck with a lacy fringe. The dress had long sleeves that covered the backs of her hands and had little loops that hooked over her thumbs to keep the sleeves from climbing up her arms and becoming wrinkled. The veil was part of a little hat and draped to her waist. The train would trail four feet behind her footsteps. Her hair was done in an up-do, leaving her neck bare. The Bridal bouquet was a cascading floral arrangement of orchids, white roses and baby’s breath.

Turning to her mom, she asked, “What time is it?”

Her mom checked her watch and said, “You have a few minutes yet. It’s quarter of.”

In a somewhat worried tone, Lois asked, “Mom, I want you to go check and make sure that Lex is at the altar, please.”

“Why?”

Now, in an irritated tone, Lois replied, “Mother, don’t argue with me, just do it.”

At Lois’s tone, Ellen backed down and said, “All right. If you insist.”

“I do insist.”

Ellen left the dressing room and returned shortly and said, “Yes, he and his servant are at the altar waiting. They’re talking to someone in high church garb.”

“Good. Wait here. I’ll be right back.”

After grabbing her lock pick kit, Lois ducked out of the room and took the elevator to the penthouse. She opened the vault, dropped the Kryptonite into the lead box and closed the lid. Then she pulled out the ledgers and piled them on Luthor’s desk.

Quickly she took the elevator back down and rejoined Ellen. She speedily replaced her lock pick kit and removed any traces of her activity.

Lois was wondering if everyone had arrived and was properly seated. She hoped so. It was getting near to show time and everything, well, not everything, depended on everyone showing up.

Ellen was unaware of what was going to happen and was blithely going on about how good a provider Lex Luthor was going to be for her little girl.

At this point in the preparations, most brides are excited, nervous, apprehensive, expectant, perhaps anxious or some combination of all of those. Lois however was none of those. Lois was determined; perhaps she was a little anxious because she hoped that things would go as planned. There were so many things that could still go wrong, but she couldn’t afford to think about those possibilities. She asked, “Mom, what time is it?”

Ellen looked at her watch and said, “You must be more nervous than you let on. It’s only ten minutes since you asked that the last time. It is now five till.”

The rest of what Ellen Lane said, Lois allowed to just wash over her. She was concentrating on what was going to happen. She moved over to the closet and opening it, checked to see that there were two garment bags hanging in it. Satisfied that they at least were in place she paced back and forth between the mirror and closet, stopping in front of the mirror each time to check herself.

Ellen Lane stood off to one side and watched her daughter pace, chalking it off to nerves.

On one of her stops in front of the mirror Lois asked, “Time?”

“Two more minutes. I suppose I should go in and send your

father out.”

Lois gave Ellen a hug and said, “That sounds like a good idea, Mom. I’ll be seeing you shortly.”

Ellen wiped a tear from her eye, gave Lois one last hug, pulled her veil forward, partially concealing her face, and exited.

The festivities were being held in a ballroom and Luthor was already standing at the front with the Archbishop, and Asabi who was acting as his Best Man.

Luthor kept checking his Rolex and becoming more nervous as the minutes ticked away. He started to move away and Asabi stopped him. “Please, Sahib, do not go anywhere.”

“Where is she? I need to go make sure she hasn’t changed her mind.”

“Patience, Sahib. She will be here.”

Luthor was about to push around Asabi when the doors at the rear opened and an usher led Ellen Lane down the center aisle and seated her on the bride’s side. As she sat, Sam Lane arose and walked to the back and through the doors.

Asabi said, “There, you see, Sahib. She is coming. Perhaps it took longer to dress than anticipated.”

“Thank you, Asabi. You are right. I need to control myself.”

As he stood waiting, he looked around at the people that had arrived. Many on the bride’s side he recognized as former employees of the Daily Planet. There was one individual that he was surprised to see, Inspector William Henderson of the MPD. Actually, he wasn’t surprised that he was a friend of Lois’s; he was surprised that he thought her wedding important enough to attend.

On the groom’s side, he spotted a number of people he recognized, among them were the mayor and the governor. Some of his senior staff and a number of people that he didn’t recognize. He thought little of it. They were probably minor governmental functionaries that were there representing people that had been invited, but at the last minute couldn’t make it.

Lois continued to delay. She kept up her pacing. Finally her father said, “Lois, don’t you think it’s time to go in?”

She asked, “What time is it, Daddy?”

Sam looked at his watch and said, “Six minutes past.”

Lois nodded and said to herself, “I hope everyone made it,” stepped to her father, wrapped her free hand around his elbow and said, “Okay, Daddy, let’s do this.”

When Sam Lane exited, the organist started playing a prelude and improvised measure after measure until the page turner alerted her that the rear doors were opening. That was when she switched over to the Wedding March and everyone stood and faced the rear so that they could watch the bride-to-be as she entered.

Sam and Lois made their slow way down the aisle, using the measured pace that was customary to the front of the ballroom. When they reached the front, Sam turned to Lois and , after flipping back the veil, gave her a kiss on the forehead and said, “My princess.” He turned away and took a seat next to Ellen.

Lois and Luthor both turned to face the Archbishop and he began. “Dearly beloved we are gathered here in the sight of God and man to unite this couple in the bonds of holy matrimony. Before I do, I must ask if there be anyone present that objects to this marriage.” It was a standard part of the ceremony and usually was rather perfunctory.

As the Archbishop paused momentarily, Luthor was smiling because he could see the finishing line before him. His smile suddenly disappeared when a loud voice behind him shouted, “I object”

Chapter 10

The voice that had shouted an objection was shortly joined by a chorus of voices all saying the same thing.

Lex turned an angry scowl on those that had dared to interrupt the ceremony and saw that William Henderson was standing as

one that objected.

Luthor bellowed, “Henderson, I’ll have your badge for this!” Then he saw that almost a dozen men and women were also standing. He bellowed, “Who are all of you?”

Surprise overtook him when a voice from behind him, a voice that he was intimately familiar with echoed the others, “I object.”

He blurted out, “Lois!” and turned on her. She was holding up her hand, but she had a worried look on her face.

He looked like he was about to strike her when he was distracted by more voices. He spun around again to see, Perry White and James Olsen standing with hands raised. Not to be left out, Cat Grant, seeing how things were going decided to join in and jumping to her feet, yelled, “I object too!” She dragged her fiancé, George Amundsen to his feet and shouted, “So does he!”

There was one final voice added to the chorus. At the back, on the bride’s side, a lone individual stood and raising his hand said, “I also object!” Luthor looked at him with disdain; he was wearing a trench coat, had his hair spiked out with mouse, was wearing sunglasses and had a full beard and moustache. He looked like a refugee from a hobo camp.

Hearing that final voice, Lois started to smile, broadly. She hadn’t seen him as she had entered, so he must have slipped in behind her as she was progressing down the aisle.

This last individual made his way to the center aisle and started to follow the same path that Lois had just trod.

As he did, Luthor could hear a sigh of relief escape Lois’s lips. He looked back at her and saw recognition in her eyes, but there was more than recognition there.

Luthor was looking back and forth between Lois and this last speaker and was so distracted that that he didn’t notice the group that made their way from their seats to the side aisle and toward the front, eventually forming a semi-circle behind Luthor.

Lex’s attention was riveted on Lois as she started to speak. She turned to the Archbishop and said, “I’m truly sorry, sir, for the inconvenience we have put you through, but I think my objection is really valid. You see, it’s this way, if I were to marry Lex Luthor, I’d be committing bigamy because I’m already married to Clark Kent -”

Luthor interrupted her, “But Kent is dead, I had him -”

Asabi nudged him to shut him up, but he wasn’t quick enough.

Lois picked up on his slip and said, “You thought you had had him killed, is that what you were about to say? That’s what we wanted you to think.”

That was when Henderson spoke up. “My objection is also valid. I object because I’m placing Lex Luthor under arrest.”

Luthor roared, “What! You can’t do that to me! On what charge?”

Bill pulled a document out of his pocket that looked suspiciously like a warrant. As he read he replied in his normally phlegmatic tone, “Let’s see, in front of a roomful of witnesses, you just admitted to one count of attempted murder, but there are multiple counts; murder, multiple counts of that too; conspiracy, multiple counts; extortion, multiple counts; kidnapping, multiple counts; arson, multiple counts; insurance fraud, racketeering, international transport of illegal weapons, narcotics trafficking, prostitution, receipt of stolen goods ... need I go on?”

Luthor turned to the mayor, who happened to be in the audience, “Madam Mayor, you can’t let this happen!”

Seeing her smile he turned to the governor, “Governor ...”

Turning back to Henderson, Luthor demanded, “Where are your witnesses?”

Bill raised a hand and gave a signal. For the first time, Luthor saw that a guard had unobtrusively entered at the back and was standing at the doors. At Henderson’s signal he opened the rear doors and in stepped Toni Taylor who was wearing a smart business suit. Her hair was freshly coiffed and her makeup was done perfectly. She was followed by Miranda Michaels, who was

attired in a flashy, almost sixties-hippy style.

Luthor stuttered, “Toni, Miranda! But, but you’re both dead!” Behind him, Lois quipped, “Don’t you wish?”

Close on Miranda’s heels came Nigel St. John. Nigel was wearing an orange jumpsuit and had his hands manacled behind his back.

Seeing him, Lex’s tone was lower, dispirited, “Nigel. What is this?”

Behind Nigel came Mrs. Cox. Instead of her microskirt she also was wearing an orange jumpsuit and manacles.

In a defeated tone, Luthor said, “Et tu, Mrs. Cox.”

She simply raised one elegantly plucked eyebrow in reply.

Just then, two of the men standing behind Luthor grabbed his arms and, pulling them behind his back, applied handcuffs. The same thing happened to Asabi.

Luthor tried one more ploy, “Get me the president. He’ll clear this up. He’ll order my release.”

By this time, Bill had stepped out into the center aisle and had stridden to the front until he was almost nose to nose with Luthor. Bill replied, “I don’t think so, not this time.” He indicated the men and women surrounding him and said, “We have here representatives not only of the MPD, but also the FBI, DEA, ATF and INTERPOL. They all want their piece of you. This has been cleared at the absolutely highest level. I have to admit, I’ve had a devil of a time keeping all of this on the QT.”

Lois said, “Bill, his ‘secret books’ are laid out on his desk for you to pick up.”

Luthor choked out, “Secret books? My safe?”

Lois looked at him and with disdain in her voice said, “My measurements? Really! Get a life.”

Hearing that, Luthor’s expression fell.

The individual that had been approaching from the rear had made it half way down the aisle by this time and spoke again, “You’re through, Luthor. It has taken months to get the goods on you, but we finally did it. We got it all. You’re going away, probably for good.”

As this individual spoke, Luthor turned his piercing gaze on him. His look was pure rage. The stranger was sauntering, slowly up the aisle. He looked ill and a bit unsteady on his feet, but he walked with determined step. As he walked, he removed his trench coat which he dropped in a vacant seat to reveal a tux underneath. Pulling a pair of glasses from his pocket he replaced his sunglasses with them, dropping the sunglasses on the trench coat. Next he pulled out a comb and combed the mouse from his hair, returning it to his normal, fluffy do with a little forelock curling on his forehead. Once this was accomplished he peeled off the false beard and moustache. Luthor stared at him in fury as he metamorphosed before his eyes into Clark Kent.

There were gasps of recognition from Cat and several of the other guests as Lois turned to the Archbishop and performed the introductions, “Archbishop, my husband, Clark Kent. He went undercover and pretended to be dead so that we could lure Luthor out into the open and finally get the goods on him.”

The Archbishop nodded his understanding, his miter shifting slightly on his head.

As Henderson and the representatives of the various agencies started to move away with Luthor and Asabi, Lois turned to the guests and said, “You were all invited here for my wedding. Some of you thought that it would be to Lex Luthor. Well, as you can see, that isn’t happening. But so that you don’t go away disappointed, there will be a wedding. You see, when Clark and I were wed, it was a result of an old law on the books in Kansas. We went to the Justice of the Peace and had it formalized, but we never had a big formal wedding. Clark and I are now going to have the wedding we have been waiting for. You are welcome to stay if you wish.” She turned back to the Archbishop and said, “Neither of us is Catholic so we flew in the minister from Clark’s

church in Smallville to officiate. You are welcome to stay if you wish.”

Bowing to her he said, “That is quite all right. I have other matters to attend to.” He looked at Luthor, significantly, and said, “Perhaps a confession.”

Lois smiled and turning back to the audience said, “Mom, Martha, Lucy,” her voice softened and added, “and Cat, could you all join me in the dressing room. I’ll need some help.” She used her hands to indicate her gown and said, “This is the wedding gown of Lois Luthor, not Lois Lane-Kent. I need to change.”

The four all jumped up and, led by Lois, they headed for the dressing room. As she passed Clark she gave him a quick kiss and said, “Be right back. Wait for me.”

Martha gave him a quick hug in passing.

Jimmy saw that Clark looked ill and moved to the aisle to help his friend and, reaching the front, stood with him. As they approached the front, Jimmy caught George’s attention and beckoned him to join them at the altar.

Once inside the dressing room, Lois started giving directions like a general on a battlefield, “Mom and Martha, could you help me out of this monstrosity? Cat, over in that closet you’ll find a Bride’s Maid’s gown. I think it’ll fit you. Lucy, do you have yours?”

Lucy smiled and started to loosen her frock as she said, “Right here, Sis.” It turned out to be a cover over the Bride’s Maid gown that she was already wearing.

Lois smiled and said, “That’s my little sis!”

Martha and Ellen quickly finished unbuttoning all of the tiny pearls that fastened the back of the dress and Lois stepped out of it. When she did they could all see the white cotton, utilitarian underwear and thigh high white hose she was wearing. After ripping off the hat with the veil she almost literally skipped over to the closet. She pulled out her garment bag and opened it. The first things she pulled out were two small bits of lace and a silk slip. As she ducked into the bathroom she said, “Be right out.”

When she stepped out she was wearing the slip and everyone could see the outlines of the demi bra and thong that she had on underneath. Cat looked at her, gave her the thumbs up signal and said, “Much better attire for a bride.”

Lois smiled struck a pose and said, “**This** is for Clark. The other was in case something went wrong and Luthor got a peek.” She pulled the garment bag out and revealed another wedding gown. Turning to Martha and Ellen she asked, “Can the two of you help me into this?”

Without replying, Martha and Ellen both rushed to comply. This gown was much simpler in design, a fitted top with broad straps like a tank top and, at the waist, it flared out into billowy chiffon and only fell as far as her ankles.

Ellen started to complain, “I don’t know why you couldn’t have just worn the other gown to marry Clark. It was so elegant. This thing ...”

Martha countered, “Well, I think this is very nice. I think I’ve gotten to know Lois since she and Clark have been together and I think that this is more to Lois’s taste. I know it is Clark’s. He grew up on a farm and although he can appreciate the finer things in life, he still has simple tastes.”

Lois turned to Ellen and said, “I couldn’t wear that to marry Clark! It’s bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding. He saw me in that get-up and Martha is right. This is more to my taste. Besides, Luthor picked that thing out. This one I picked out with Lucy’s help.”

While she worked to button Lois into the gown, Martha said, “It’s lovely, sweetheart. I know that Clark will love it, but of course, he’d love anything you wear just because you are wearing it.”

Lois smiled and said, “I know. I love that man so.”

Martha finished the last button and threw her arms around Lois and said, “I know you do and he loves you.” She paused and then picked up her tote. Reaching into a side pocket she brought out a lacy creation. As she handed it to Lois she said, “Here, I made you a garter.”

Lois took it from her and there was a tear in the corner of her eye as she did. “Martha, I just don’t know what to say. It’s lovely.” “Go ahead and put it on.”

Lois sat and crossed her left leg over the right. She slipped the garter on and pulled it up so that it rested just below the band of the thigh highs she was wearing. Standing she ruffled her dress to straighten it out and slipped into her pumps.

When she turned around, she saw Lucy helping Cat to finish dressing. Cat looked at her and in a sincere tone she said, “Cat, I’m glad you came.”

Cat smiled and said, “I figured that there had to be a good reason for you to ask me to come dance at your wedding. I didn’t realize I’d be drafted into being a Bride’s Maid.”

With a worried expression, Lois asked, “Is that a problem? Was I presuming too much?”

Cat straightened up from putting on her heels and said, “No it isn’t a problem. There’s just one thing.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

She smiled and replied; “Now you’ll have to return the favor. I’d like you to be Matron of Honor in **my** wedding.”

Lois threw her arms around her former rival that had so recently become one of her closest friends and in a heartfelt tone, said, “I’d be honored.”

Lois looked around and said, “I think we’re ready,” and stepped to the door.

When she opened the door, she was shocked to see Luthor running across the hall and ducking up a set of stairs.

She shouted, “What the ...” and dashed off after him.

Martha was behind Lois and seeing her dash off, took off after her.

Chapter 11

Lucy and Cat were next out of the dressing room. They saw Martha disappear into the stairwell. Lucy shouted, “Cat, you go for the police.”

Cat responded, “What are you going to do?”

“Follow them,” and she took off at a run for the stairs.

As Lucy approached it was apparent that this was a concealed stairwell. It was unmarked and, if the door hadn’t been open, it would have blended in with the hallway walls. She looked around and finally settled on a sign on the wall. She broke a nail tearing it from the wall, but she successfully used it to block the door and prevent it from closing so that the police could follow. Having done this, Lucy started running up the stairs.

When Lucy reached the top of the stairs she found a door that she was able to push open. Passing through, she found herself in a bedroom. At least it looked like a bedroom, there was a king sized bed occupying the center of the room, but there were no other decorations or furniture. Lois and Martha were not in sight and the gleam of metal caught her attention. She stopped to give it a closer look. She was appalled at what she discovered. There were heavy metal manacles attached at each corner of the bed. Looking at them closely she decided that these weren’t just there for kinky sex. They were not the padded kind that wouldn’t hurt. These were serious restraints. Anyone locked up in these would be completely helpless. She could just imagine Luthor trapping Lois in them. He would have been able to have his way with her whenever, however and however often he wanted and she wouldn’t have been able to do anything about it. She was beyond shocked. The thought that Luthor had this waiting for her sister infuriated her. This had only taken a few seconds and it only fueled her anger at Luthor all the

more. She set off in pursuit once again.

Passing through another door, she entered an office. When she did, the scene that met her gaze startled her. Luthor was sprawled on the floor. Lois was standing over him holding a huge sword at his throat. Martha was standing over him with her tote, straps in hand, hauled back like she was ready to swing it like a bludgeon.

Groggily, Luthor asked, “What do you have in your purse, lead?”

Martha chuckled and replied, “This isn’t my purse, it’s my Bible tote. It just has an old, well used, copy of the King James Bible.”

Without taking her eyes off of Luthor, Lois quipped, “You laid him out with the Bible?”

Martha chuckled and said, “The Bible is good for lifting up the soul and for smiting evildoers.”

Spotting Lucy, Lois ordered, “Go get the police!”

“Cat went for them! They should be right behind me.”

“Good!”

A second later, Bill Henderson and a couple of his MPD men arrived, followed closely by Cat Grant. Bill took in the tableau and simply said, “Well, Lane, once again you wound up in the middle of things.”

Lois laughed and said, “He’s all yours. Think you can hold onto him this time?”

“I don’t know what kind of Houdini trick he pulled to get out of those cuffs, but this time we are going to double up. Put the cable ties on him along with the cuffs this time. Somehow he got out of the cuffs and slipped through a secret door which he locked after him so that we couldn’t follow. He’s not going to get away again.” He turned to Lois and asked, “Don’t you have a wedding to get to? I think your groom is becoming anxious.”

Lois dropped Alexander’s sword and turned to Martha. They shouted in unison, “Clark!” They turned and retraced their steps, trailed by Lucy and Cat, through the hidden bedroom, down the steps and past the dressing room. When they reached the doors, they were all huffing and puffing.

Lois tried to straighten her gown. Luthor had mussed it somewhat when he had grabbed her and tried to drag her along with him as his hostage in his escape.

Cat gasped out, “Lois, your mom already went in.”

Martha leaned against the wall trying to catch her breath.

Lucy, being the youngest, was in the best shape and said, “I’ll go in and get Jimmy. I’ll send him out to escort Mrs. Kent.”

With a wave of her hand, Martha, corrected her, “Martha, please,” showing that she had never lost any of her spunk.

Lucy smiled and amended, “I’ll send Jimmy for, Martha,” and she disappeared through the door.

Lois turned to Martha and concern in her voice asked, “Martha, how are you doing?”

“I’ll be okay, dear. I’m not ready to be put out to pasture, yet. This has been exciting, but I’m used to hard exercise. A farmer’s wife doesn’t have an easy life. There’s a lot of hard work around a farm.” She considered for a moment and then asked, “Is this how all of your investigations go?”

Lois laughed and said, “No, not all of them. Most of them are harder.”

Martha looked aghast and said, “Now I see why Clark worries so much about you.” Martha straightened her dress and fixed her hat. Once this was done she stood waiting to be escorted in.

A few seconds later, Lucy, followed by Jimmy Olsen came out. Martha took his arm and he escorted her to the front, on the groom’s side. Sam Lane left his seat and moved to the back. Once he was through the doors he approached Lois and asked, “Is everything okay?”

Lois smiled and nodded, “This time it is. Sorry about before, Daddy. We couldn’t tell anybody for fear that Luthor would get wise.”

“I understand. I’ve had to withhold bad news from a patient’s family before. Do you love Clark, Princess?”

“With all my heart, Daddy.”

“Does he love you?”

She smiled and said, “As much as I love him, if not more.”

“Well then, are you ready to do this?”

“Am I ever? I’ve been looking forward to this day for almost a year.”

He crooked his arm to her and she took it. He turned to Lucy and said, “I guess we’ll do this for real this time. Lead on, Peanut.”

Lucy gave Lois one final hug and then smiled, winked and said, “I’m gonna miss my roommate,” then she turned and opened the door. As soon as she did, the organ started the prelude again. Lucy was first down the aisle followed by Cat.

When Cat reached the front, the organ switched to the Wedding March and, arm-in-arm, Sam Lane and Lois walked, with measured tread, a little faster than was usual, down the aisle. She moved faster than the first time. The first time she had been dreading the outcome. What if something had happened and their plans had fallen through. It had been Luthor up there waiting for her. Her feet had dragged down the aisle as if she had a lead weight attached to each ankle. Now, all she could see was Clark and her heart sang. Her steps were light, so light she felt like she was floating in Clark’s arms. She fairly skipped down the aisle with a wide grin that only got wider as she got closer to the love of her life.

Then she saw that he was receiving some support from Jimmy and George who were standing next to him and a new wave of concern washed over her. He still hadn’t recovered from the Kryptonite exposure and was weak. She rushed Sam the rest of the way down the aisle. Sam didn’t have to throw back the veil because it was already trailing behind her head revealing the little bow on the crown of her head.

She released Sam’s arm, gave him a quick smile and, stepping up next to Clark, wrapped her right arm with his left, surreptitiously lending her support. As she did, Jimmy and George stepped back. She handed her bouquet to Lucy, looked at the minister and nodded.

He began, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here, in the sight of God and man to join this man and this woman in the bonds of Holy Matrimony. Before I do, I must ask if there is anyone here that objects to this union.”

This time there was blessed silence and the ceremony proceeded.

When it came time for the vows Clark spoke off the cuff, “Lois, I had been a wanderer, traveling the globe in search of a place, a place to belong. I have always had a wonderful family. My mom and dad are the best, but I wanted to have a family of my own someday. I found that place the day I arrived in Metropolis. The day I interviewed at the Daily Planet I knew that this would be my new home. I was being interviewed by Perry White when this brown haired tornado full of bluff and bluster swirled into my life. From that minute, I knew I was where I belonged. That was the second happiest day of my life. Today is the happiest. Now I also have the family that I wanted ... you.”

It was then Lois’s turn and she said, “Clark, I’ve always been driven to be the best. The best cheerleader. The best in my class. The best reporter. I’ve made some mistakes along the way and I almost made the biggest mistake ever by not immediately seeing how great a guy you were. I had been hurt in the past and didn’t want it to happen again, but your gentle ways and persistence have healed that hurt. Your unfailing kindness and gentleness finally tore down the walls I had built up and allowed me to love you and I do. I can’t wait to start the rest of my life by your side.”

The minister called for the rings. Lucy and Jimmy handed them to him and, addressing the gathering, the minister held up the

rings and said, “These rings which are to be worn are round ... each is a circle. The circle is a symbol of eternity. With a circle there is no beginning and there is no end. That symbol of eternity represents the eternal love of those that wear them. The love that this couple shares has been tried in the crucible and has only been strengthened by that testing.”

He turned to Lois and asked, “Lois, do you take Clark to be your husband, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer till death do you part?”

With a tear at the corner of her eye, Lois responded, “Yes, I do.”

The minister handed Lois the ring and said, “As you place this ring on his finger, please say, ‘With this ring, I thee wed.’”

Lois took the offered ring and, holding his left hand in her right, slipped the ring onto Clark’s ring finger as she repeated, “With this ring I thee wed.”

He turned to Clark and asked, “Clark, do you take Lois to be your wife, to love and to cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer till death do you part?”

With a firm voice, Clark responded, “I do.”

The minister handed Clark the ring and said, “As you place this ring on her finger, please say, ‘With this ring, I thee wed.’”

Clark took the offered ring and holding her left hand in his left, slipped the ring onto Lois’s ring finger as he repeated, “With this ring I thee wed.”

The minister said, “By the authority vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss the bride.”

Lois and Clark turned toward one another and started a long, slow kiss. As they kissed the minister announced, “I present Mr. and Mrs. Clark Kent.”

After a short time there was applause from the guests, they broke from the kiss and turned smiling faces on their guests.

Arm in arm they started to move back down the aisle. Clark was moving a little faster because Lois was lending him some support. As they were nearing the last row they noticed a rather smallish man in a dapper morning coat and wire rimmed glasses holding a derby hat in his lap. They stopped in mid-stride and Clark blurted out, “Herb?”

Herb smiled and nodded in reply, “I just had to be here for the big day. Congratulations.”

Lois reached for his hand and said, “Thanks, Herb. For ... everything.”

Herb patted her hand and said, “My pleasure, my dear. Don’t let me hold you up. There will be others that want to wish you congratulations as well.” He nodded his head toward the other side of the aisle where they could see Perry White in conversation with Franklin Stern. “I’ll stop by later. We’ll have a chat.”

After the reception, Lois and Clark returned to the apartment, Clark collapsed onto the couch and Lois collapsed on it with him.

She asked, “How are you?”

He pulled her into his arms and said, “Tired. Tired, but happy. I didn’t know that you had planned OUR wedding.”

“So, I surprised you?”

“I’ll say I was surprised.”

“And pleased?”

As he pulled her into a hug, he said, “Very pleased.”

Interrupting this private moment there was a knock on the door. Lois said, “Drat. Who is it?”

Clark looked over his glasses, “Sorry, I can’t see. My powers haven’t returned as yet. Didn’t Herb say he would stop by?”

Sighing, Lois said, “Yeah, that’s right. I guess I’ll have to find out the old fashioned way. I’ll go and see who it is.”

Standing she moved to the door and peeked through the curtain then as she opened the door she said, “Honey, look who’s here. It’s Herb.”

Clark struggled to stand, but Herb quickly said, “Oh, no, no,

no, my boy. Don’t stand on my account. I know how weakened you are. Please, sit and rest.”

Clark slumped gratefully back onto the sofa.

Lois joined him on the sofa and he pulled her close. Herb crossed to an arm chair nearby and sat down. Taking off his derby he placed it on the coffee table between them.

Sitting back, he said, “Well, it was quite a pleasure to be there for the wedding, I must say.”

Lois smiled and said, “It was all thanks to you, Herb. If it hadn’t been for my future memories, none of this would have happened, in fact, Clark would probably be dead.” She grabbed his hand and squeezed it, hard.

He yelped, “Ouch! Not so hard.”

She pulled his hand up and kissed it then said, “Sorry, I forgot. No powers, vulnerable.”

He smiled and said, “I’m always vulnerable to you. You are my greatest weakness.”

Lois smiled and reached up and kissed him. She said, “That’s nice to know.”

Herb cleared his throat to get their attention.

Lois and Clark broke from the kiss and Lois said, “Sorry, Herb. We tend to get carried away and forget everything else. So what brings you around?”

“I simply wanted to stop by and proffer my congratulations on your success investigating Lex Luthor and on finally having the church wedding that both of your families desired. It was a lovely affair and very fitting. Most of the other Clark and Lois couples I have met were not married so soon after meeting. Most took time to develop a relationship.”

Lois pointed out, “The future memories that you gave me of our married life really short-cut the process. Clark fell in love with me the minute we met. I have no idea how long it would have taken me to fall for him and I guess we’ll never know. You say that in most universes it took longer. Not in all?”

“No, we recently discovered a universe where they married early, but I have yet to investigate the circumstances. The couple I am most familiar with is the one in my own universe and it took them approximately three years to finally wed. Actually, since the timelines parallel, that Lois was also involved in a wedding, to Lex Luthor.”

Lois interrupted, “Please tell me that she didn’t go through with it.”

“It pleases me to say that she did not. It was a close thing though. At the very altar there was no one to object to the wedding, but when asked if she took Luthor as her husband, she said, ‘I can’t’ just as Perry White and the MPD invaded and arrested Luthor.”

“How did that work out? With all of the charges we have racked up against him, if he’s lucky he’ll get life and not the death penalty.”

“In that universe, as with you, Luthor had trapped Clark in a Kryptonite cage. As a result, Luthor signed his own death warrant. He managed to escape the police as he did with the police here; however, that Lois was not there to stop him ...”

Lois chuckled and added, “Or a Martha to lay him out with her Bible.”

Herb agreed, “Or a Martha to club him. He was cornered by the police on his balcony and chose to take that fatal leap rather than spend the rest of his life in jail.”

Lois’s hand flew to her mouth as she choked out, “From the balcony?”

Clark was practical, “Was anyone else hurt?”

Herb shook his head and replied, “No, just him.”

Clark nodded and said, “At least he didn’t hurt anyone else.”

As Herb reached into his pocket he said, “I do have a wedding present for you.” When he pulled out his hand he was holding a jewelry box. Handing it to Lois he said, “This is a very special

piece of jewelry to celebrate your wedding. I think you'll like it."

Lois took it and when she opened the lid, exclaimed, "Ohhhh, it's beautiful!"

The sight that had greeted her eyes was a silver pendent on a silver chain. The pendent was in the form of Superman's family crest and was studded with very unusual star sapphires.

Herb explained, "Beautiful, indeed and also eminently practical. You are familiar with green Kryptonite."

Clark looked at the pendent askance and said, "I don't feel anything, but why would you give Lois a green Kryptonite pendent, anyway?"

Herb had a shocked expression as then said, "No, my boy. That does not contain green Kryptonite. I was going to explain that there are other forms of Kryptonite out there with which you are unfamiliar. For instance, if you look closely at those star sapphires you will see that they actually have a double star. They are a hitherto unknown variety of Kryptonite and very rare. I hasten to add that the star sapphire Kryptonite will not affect you in any way. There is also a form with a red color whose affects will be unpredictable."

"Unpredictable?"

"Yes, one sample caused the Superman of my universe to simply lose interest in what was going on around him. Another one caused him to lose control of his powers, exacerbating their effects. Any normal movement was exaggerated ten times. Anytime he tried to move he would crash into furniture. He almost wrecked the house."

Lois interrupted, "Speaking of house. Clark, I saw a for sale sign that just went up the last time I was going to the Brightview precinct."

"I don't know, Lois. Right now, we are out of work."

Herb replied, "Please allow me to set your mind at ease on that point. Now that Luthor has been arrested the gentleman that Perry White talked to will in fact buy the Planet. You will be back to work shortly. You will be in temporary quarters until the building is rehabilitated and the printing will be done at another facility, but it will not be long."

Lois released a relieved sigh, and said, "Well, that is certainly good news. Who is ... uh, that is who will be the new owner?"

"I think I'll allow Mr. White the pleasure of informing you of that fact.. Uh. might I ask the address of the house you saw the for sale sign on?"

Lois pulled out her pad and checked, "348 Hyperion Avenue. It's an old brownstone, but it has a lot of character."

Herb smiled and said, "I believe that you will find that it has a secret closet where you can store your spare uniforms."

Lois gasped, "You know the house?"

"It is a funny thing about the parallel universes, so many things are duplicated. Most of the Lois Lane and Clark Kent couples I know live at that address."

Lois looked at Clark and said, "Based on that, I guess we can't go wrong. As soon as you are up to it, let's go see."

Smiling, Clark said, "Sounds like a plan."

Herb interrupted and addressed to Clark, "Now, back to the Kryptonite. Contained in that pendent are two forms of Kryptonite, the star sapphire that I mentioned and a red form that will not affect you." Turning to Lois he said, "It is very important that you carry this on your person at all times from now on."

"Why?"

"Ah, my dear, I must resort to my motto, 'too much information too soon is not good. Rest assured that when the time comes you will know why I have given you this caution.'"

"But won't the shape give away the secret?"

Herb smiled a secret smile and said, "I think you will find that, very soon, pendants such as that will be sold in stores with the proceeds going to the Superman Foundation. I would imagine that the only difference there will be between this one and those will

be the fact that yours is silver and contains the Kryptonite I mentioned." Herb gave a slight chuckle and finished, "I would imagine that many members of the Superman Fan Club will be wearing them."

Lois smiled and clasped the chain about her neck.

Chapter 12

It took two full days for Clark to recover enough to start floating above the bed. The next day they packed a bag each and he flew them to Smallville. His flying ability was still a bit weak, but they made it and the fact that it was a bright sunny day and they were in the sun the entire way helped.

After spending two days with Clark's parents lounging in the sun, and with Martha fussing over both of them like a mother hen over her chicks, he was recovered enough for the flight to their island. After packing, Clark flew them there.

As they landed in front of their bungalow, Lois kept her arms around his neck even though he had lowered her feet to the sand of the beach. His arms were still around her back and he pulled her towards himself and as he did, she almost literally melted into him. At the same time her lips joined his in a long, gentle, deep kiss.

When they broke from the kiss, Lois said, "I have missed you so. This last month has been torture. At least I was able to see you at Lucy's."

"I've missed you as well. Thank you for rescuing me. You still need to tell me how you found me."

Lois smiled and said, "Oh, there was nothing to it. I just asked Mrs. Cox, sweetly, if she would tell me where you were and ... she told me."

"Somehow, I don't think it was really as easy as that."

Lois moved back in and started another series of kisses which interspersed her words, "I'll" kiss, "tell" kiss, "you" kiss, "sometime." Then she stepped back and, reaching up, undid the top button of her blouse. As she undid the buttons, bit by bit the creamy flesh of her throat and chest came into view. Along with that, her new pendant was also displayed,

Clark reached out a finger and touched it. He said, "It is rather pretty, but not as pretty as the wearer."

Lois wondered aloud, "I wonder why he said I have to wear it all of the time."

"He usually has a reason for the things he says."

"Yeah, I just wish he would tell us what they were."

As he moved in for another kiss, he said, "Who cares. As long as it doesn't get in the way." He finished unbuttoning her top, moved his hands to her throat, gently cradling it before he slowly slid his hands to the sides and brushed her top off her shoulders and down her arms.

She whispered, "My turn." and, reaching under his cape, she found the tab of the hidden zipper. As she started to slide it down, Clark chuckled and said, "Remember the last time you did that? I misunderstood your motive and questioned it. But you were right. I think that leaving the Suit there did act as a distraction. You know it's going to be something of a shock to Luthor when he hears that Superman is back. I, for one, could wish to be there to see his expression when he hears."

When she had finished lowering the zipper, she grasped the Suit at the neckline and started pulling it down, revealing his muscular chest. After pulling the top from the bottoms and casting it aside, Clark removed the cape and let it join the top on the sand.

As soon as he let the cape fall, Lois's hands were on his chest, exploring the planes and valleys. Clark allowed that for only a few seconds and then pulled her into a hug during which he released the hooks of her bra. When he allowed her to step back she shrugged out of the garment and then returned her arms to his neck, pulling her body back into contact with his as she reached up

and started yet another kiss.

She reveled in the feeling of her breasts being gently crushed against his chest and her nipples started to get hard with the contact. She murmured, “It has been too long since we’ve been here. You know, now that we’ve had our ‘church’ wedding we could consider this our ‘official’ honeymoon and I don’t want to wait to consummate our wedding.”

With her arms around his neck and his around her waist, he floated them through the door of the bungalow and into the bedroom.

When her feet touched the floor again, she released his neck and stepped back. This started a period of marital intimacy.

She heaved a deep, contented sigh and said, “That was wonderful.”

“You can say that again,” was his reply.

She giggled and said, “That was wonderful.”

He smiled and said, “I’m not going to fall into that trap again. I really enjoyed that too.” He thought for a second and then asked, “How about a swim?”

Lois smiled and said, “Sure. Let’s use the pool under the falls.”

Picking her up, Clark floated them out of the bungalow and up to the pool. He was in the process of kissing his wife as they slipped below the water.

After playing in the water for a while, Lois swam to the edge and climbed out, beckoning her husband to follow, which he did. “Come on, husband, it’s time for another romp.”

Smiling he said, “I’m still not completely recovered from that Kryptonite exposure. You could wear me out.”

Lois smiled and said, “I intend to.”

As she finished speaking, he swept her up and carried her to the bungalow with her giggling and kissing him the entire distance.

Once they were in the bungalow, Lois picked up her bag and pulled out some of Clark’s gaily colored ties.

Seeing this, Clark asked, “Why on Earth did you pack my ties?”

Arching an eyebrow, Lois said, “Well, you see, it’s this way. At the reception, Lucy told me what she had found. I had been too intent on recapturing Luthor to notice that we had passed through a hidden room. It wasn’t exactly a bedroom although there was a bed in it.”

“Okay, so he had a secret bedroom. He had a lot of secrets.”

“I went back and looked, while you were spending some time with your folks. Luthor never told me where we were going on a honeymoon. But I think I know where. That room was where I was going to be spending ... perhaps ... months. There were restraints. He had told me that clothing would be optional, but I believe that only he would have had that particular option. He was going to make me a prisoner and ... sex slave. He probably thought that he could break me that way. Force me to submit to him ...”

“I told him that Lois Lane would never submit to him. He was convinced that he could break your will. I guess that was how he planned to do it.”

“Anyhow, that got me to thinking. Lay down.”

“Lois, you know that those ties won’t restrain me.”

“They will if you promise not to break them.”

As he moved to lie on the bed, Lois said, “I never would have liked it if Luthor had done that to me, but after I have my way with you, it’ll be your turn with me. I know that you could never be as cruel as Luthor would have been. With you it should be fun.” As soon as he was on the bed she had started securing his wrists and ankles to the bed posts with the ties. As she finished, she asked, “Do you promise not to break the ties?”

“Of course, you brought some of my favorites. I want to wear them again. The only thing is, every time I do, I’ll probably think

about this,” and he chuckled.

She finished tying the last knot and stood back to take in the vision of her naked husband, spread-eagled on the bed with his wrists and ankles secured. Not too surprising, his penis was half way erect. She supposed that the reason for that was the fact that she was standing over him also naked and partly in anticipation of what she was going to do. As she planned what she would do, her mouth suddenly went dry with anticipation and she swallowed and licked her lips. Making up her mind, she knelt on the bed next to him and started running her hands over the planes and valleys of his chest and abdomen. She gave him an arch look and got up from the bed. Moving over to her bag she delved into it and brought out a squeeze bottle of chocolate syrup.

Seeing that he asked, “What do you plan to do with that?”

Opening the cap she started to squeeze the brown liquid onto his penis as she said, “I want some dessert. I had Martha pick this up for me. After I have my dessert, it’ll be your turn.”

After spending a week on their island, Lois and Clark returned and found a message from Perry White on their answering machine.

The next day, Lois and Clark were standing arm in arm as Jack and Jimmy came strolling up. They were on the sidewalk in front of what had been the Daily Planet building. Clark greeted them, “Hi Jimmy, Jack!”

The yellow warning tape was still in place. The building was boarded up and placards proclaiming that the building had been condemned were visible.

Jimmy commented, “I wish they’d get it over with and tear this old place down.”

Lois replied, “Yeah, too many memories.”

Clark pointed out, “Most of them good!”

Jimmy replied, “What’s goin’ on CK? We had a call from Perry asking us to meet him here.”

Lois replied, “We had a call too.”

They were interrupted by a truck driving up with a large object covered by an even larger tarp on the back.

As they watched, workmen started to remove the tarp and revealed what was underneath — the Daily Planet globe resting in a cradle on the flatbed.

A crane that was mounted to the front of the flat bed moved its boom over the globe and the workmen hooked cables to it.

All four stood staring at the globe, unmoving as Perry strode up, behind them. Their first inkling that he was present was when he asked, “What do you think? Are you ready to get back to work?”

As one, the four spun around and stared at Perry. Finally, Jimmy asked, “Are you serious?”

They hadn’t noticed it, but a supporting structure had been erected in front of the doors of the building. The globe was lifted from the flat bed and swung into place, over the supports and slowly lowered into place.

Perry pointed at the globe and said, “Does that look serious?”

Clark replied, “Yeah, it looks serious, but the building isn’t ready to be occupied.”

Perry smiled and asked, “What is the Daily Planet?”

Lois flung out her hand and said, “A wreck.”

Perry chuckled and said, “No, Darlin’, the Daily Planet isn’t a building! The Daily Planet is people! A very special group of people. People dedicated to getting at the truth and telling that truth to the world.”

Just then a limo pulled to the curb and once the driver had opened the door, Franklin Stern stepped out. Addressing Perry, he asked in his resonant bass voice, “Well, have you told them?”

“I was just about to.” He turned back to the group and said, “I hated the fact that it looked like Luthor had won. I approached Mr. Stern and made an appeal. He didn’t like the idea any more than I

did. Meet the new owner of the Daily Planet, Mr. Franklin Stern. He wants us to get back to work. Now that Lex Luthor has been arrested we need to let the world know about it. Since we have the exclusive inside story, we have to be the ones to tell it.”

Lois looked around at the ruined building and asked, “I guess we could write the articles, but there are no printing presses.”

“Mr. Stern has taken care of all of that. They will start rebuilding next week. Until then, we need each of you to work from home.” He turned to Jimmy and said, “Jimmy, I need you to set up my new computer. I’ll be using temporary e-mail account until the Planet is all set up. You will write up your articles and e-mail them to me. I will edit them and send them to my liaison at Stern Publishing. There is a small weekly paper over on the north side of town and they are going to set aside some time on the presses for printing the Daily Planet. I’m going to be calling back as much staff as we can handle with the same deal. We’ll start with a single section. I called some of the sales people last week and they are already selling advertising. We have enough that a single section will still show a profit. As more ad space is sold we will increase the size of the paper.”

Mr. Stern interjected, “We’ll start on the building next week, but first I thought we’d announce to the world we’re back in business.” As he was speaking he gestured at the globe.

Perry thought of something and turning to Lois asked, “Are you ready for the trial, it starts next week?”

“Ready and eager, but I’ll probably be called as a witness.”

“When you are, we’ll trade off. I’ll have Eduardo fill in.”

Lois brightened up, “You called him back?”

“Sure did, Darlin’ and he’s as happy as a pig in a wallow.”

Mr. Stern addressed Perry, “There were some ideas I had about modernization.”

After what had happened with Luthor, Perry was wary and in a cautious tone, asked, “Modernization?”

Mr. Stern replied, “Yes, improvements, expansions ... Would you like to see the plans?”

Relieved that he appeared to be speaking strictly about building improvements, Perry started to follow. Jimmy and Jack followed along if Perry’s wake. Before they got too far, Jack interrupted the proceedings, “Uh, Mr. White?”

Perry turned a kindly eye on Jack. When Jack had first started, he had been a little rough around the edges, but through this investigation he had demonstrated many good qualities and Perry had come to like him, a lot. “What’s on your mind, Jack?”

“Well, you see, it’s this way, Mr. White, I completed my GED and, well, Mr. K, he went to bat for me with the Superman Foundation and they have offered me a scholarship ... to college.”

Perry’s face lit up with a smile and said, “That’s terrific news. What will you be studying?”

Looking at Jimmy, apologetically he said, “Computer Science.”

Perry replied, “We’ll miss you, but when you finish up, come back. There’ll always be a place for you with the Daily Planet.”

“I will Mr. White. I will. Thanks.”

Lois turned to Clark and asked, “Well, ready to get back to work, partner?”

Smiling, he replied, “Am I ever?”

Herb stepped through the portal into the transport center and looked once again at the motto over the door, “Only time will tell,” and smiled thinking <How true, how true.>

He took the tube to his floor and approached his office. As he did, the sensors picked up his bioelectromagnetic signature and the door opened automatically. As he entered, he said, “Lights,” and the lights, each of which was designed to look like an early twentieth century gas lamp, came on and illuminated the room. He removed his hat and coat, placing them on the coat tree just inside the door. As he undid his collar button and removed the starched

celluloid collar he said, “Computer!”

A female voice appeared to emanate from the very air, “Working.”

“Computer, I want to update the file on Universe ... Alpha -34 x Gamma 255 x Tau -225 — Herb 10.”

“Working. Accessing file. File accessed.”

“Computer, this will be an update to this file.”

“Recording.”

“The events in Herb 10 have progressed satisfactorily. The investigation into Lex Luthor and his activities were concluded. In this universe, the implanting of her future memories on the brain of this Lois kept her from falling under the influence of Lex Luthor. As a result, this Clark went undercover to prosecute the investigation while Lois pretended to have an interest in Luthor. Working on the inside, she was able to accumulate evidence crucial to the investigation. Pause.”

“Paused.”

Herb turned and approached the sideboard where he prepared a cup of Earl Gray tea. Picking up the tea, he made his way to the desk and set the teacup on the corner. Before sitting down he returned to the coat rack and retrieved a very small camera from a pocket. Carrying it back to the desk with him he placed it on an electronic pad. Picking up his tea, he took a sip and then said, “Computer.”

“Working.”

“Computer, access the data chip of the camera on the pad and upload the pictures. Attach them to the file for Herb 10. I was able to take pictures of the wedding of this Lois and Clark.”

“Uploading.”

While the computer worked Herb finally sat in his desk chair, which creaked as he did. Once he was settled he picked up his tea for another sip.

A few seconds later he heard, “Upload complete.”

“Computer, new topic. Memoranda to all survey teams — Teams should begin to carry micro-miniature recording devices and use them to record any interaction with the Lois Lanes and Clark Kents of the universes they are in and attach the recordings to their files for further analysis.”

“Memoranda posted to all survey team members.”

“Tickle file.”

“Recording. Event?”

“Schedule a trip to Herb 10 for September 1995, local time. I want to be there when the Newtrich sisters attack Superman with the red Kryptonite laser. Lois’s possession of the pendant should foil their plot. With the pendant, Superman’s powers will be duplicated in her giving birth to Ultra Woman, without stripping him of the powers.”

“Trigger?”

“Oh, I think I’ll take some time before I revisit. Next month will be soon enough. Allow 30 days to elapse and then when I have not had a mission for three days, remind me.”

“Recorded. Trigger set.”

Herb picked up his teacup and gave an appreciative sigh as he finished the cup. As he sat the cup back on the saucer, a light blinked on his desk. Spotting it, he muttered, “What now? Who could be sending me a message and what is it about?” Pushing a button on his desk a panel slid back revealing a flat screen monitor. Once the screen was lit, he said, “Computer, send the memo to my screen.”

A second later the text of the message filled the screen.

He muttered, “Report of survey team 125. Surely a follow-up report. Why bother me with it? They must have their reasons. I guess I’ll have to read it.”

As he started reading the report seemed indeed routine, but as he continued his interest was piqued.

“Report of survey team 125 on universe ULD — Alpha 223 x Gamma 104 x Tau 155. Report of observations of subjects: Lois

Lane and Clark Kent.

“At the time of discovery, this particular couple was dealing with Lex Luthor, however, they were married at the time ...”

Herb finished reading the report and commented, “My, my my. This will indeed call for an investigation. From the preliminary report I received just before this trip to Herb 10, I knew that they had been married early. I guess this calls for a personal visit.”

“Computer!”

“Working.”

“Memo to survey team 125. I will take personal responsibility for universe ULD — Alpha 223 x Gamma 104 x Tau 155. They are to transfer all files to my account. Re-designate this as Herb 11.”

“Memo sent.”

“Tickle file.”

“Recording. Event?”

“I will be making a personal survey of universe ULD — Alpha 223 x Gamma 104 x Tau 155, from now on to be known as Herb 11. I need to discover the circumstances surrounding their early marriage.”

“Trigger?”

“I think I’ll start next week, yes, next week it shall be. Remind me on Tuesday morning.”

“Recorded. Trigger set.”

THE END