

Winner Takes All

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Summary: In this Elsewhere story, a different twist is taken in the Pilot. Clark isn't the only one with suspicions about the man of the year, Lex Luthor. Clark's newly formed friendship with Lois Lane goes through its ups and downs as they work together against the many criminals that cross their paths during the beginning of their partnership.

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"Partners?" Lois echoed, staring in disbelief at Perry White. "You and Kent," he replied. "I want you two to cover the space station."

"I don't need a partner, Perry," Lois began. "Let alone a *hack* from Nowheresville!"

"If you want this story, you do." Perry glared at her; that fire that told her not to push it flared behind his gaze. "Kent is a good man and a good writer. That's the first piece that's crossed my desk in years that I haven't had to edit."

"Oh? Because he happens to dot every 'i' and cross every 't,' I'm supposed to work with him on the Space Station story? Forget it, Perry."

"Lois, I think you could learn a thing or two from having a partner."

"I don't need a partner."

"It'll make for good stories." At her look, he continued, "Lois, if you want this story then take your *partner* and go talk to EPRAD." He smiled up at her like a cat that had swallowed a canary.

She relented. "Fine. Don't ever say that I'm not a team player." She muttered as she stepped out of his office.

She grudgingly approached Clark Kent's desk. He was typing away at his computer; no doubt some fluff piece Perry had assigned him for the time being. "Perry wants us to team up on the EPRAD piece," she muttered.

Clark looked up at her and noticed the distaste in her gaze when she looked at him. He could tell she didn't want to work with him. He stood up. "Okay, where should we start?"

"We!?! No, no, no. There is no 'we.' This is *my* story."

"But Perry teamed us up, so it's *our* story," Clark corrected.

She glared at him, infuriated that he had corrected her. How dare he? "Let's just hit it!" she grumbled, heading towards the elevators.

"Mind telling me where we're going?" he asked, a few steps behind her.

"To interview Samuel Platt. He's convinced that the Messenger was sabotaged. I'll brief you on the way." She then turned to face him, challenging him to disagree with her. "And let's get something straight. I didn't work my buns off to become an investigative reporter for the Daily Planet just to babysit some hack from Nowheresville! And one other thing. You are not working *with* me, you are working *FOR* me. I call the shots, I ask the questions. You're the low man, I'm top banana, and that's the way I like it." They now stood in front of the elevator doors. "Comprende?" She turned towards him once more, daring him to challenge her.

"You like to be on top. Got it." He smiled back at her.

Lois sneered at him, unsure of how to respond to his smart remark. "Don't push me, Kent. You are *way* out of your league!"

"Well, Lois, how do you know what my league is if you don't even know me?" he shot back. They stepped through the elevator doors and Lois stood dumbfounded. He had the nerve to...to challenge her. How dare he?

"Where are we?" Clark asked, looking around the rundown apartments. The building looked to be infested with more than just bugs and rodents. The roof was caved in and the paint was peeling off the exterior.

"This is Suicide Slum. Most of my contacts live out here. This is Dr. Samuel Platt's building." She pointed to the sign reading 'Building A' and proceeded to walk up the stairs. Clark followed in hot pursuit.

Lois stopped in front of the door at the end of the stairs and knocked. "Dr. Platt? It's Lois Lane. Dr. Platt?"

The door opened slightly, revealing a grungy old man that resembled a 50-year-old more than the 39-year-old scientist he actually was. His eyes were glazed as if he had been drugged. "Come in," he whispered hoarsely once he recognized Lois.

Dr. Platt reiterated his story of the EPRAD's danger. "They said I was crazy, Ms. Lane. I'm not crazy. They drugged me! It's all in my report! After the drugs—all those drugs—they forced me to take them, you know? After I submitted my report to Dr. Baines."

"Dr. Platt, how could the Messenger be sabotaged? In order to bypass security..."

"Unless the orders came from high up?" Clark suggested. Lois shot him a dirty look for one-upping her in the middle of the interview.

Dr. Platt didn't seem to notice the exchange between the two; instead, he was focused on searching through his desk as he spoke. "You see, under extreme temperature conditions, the particle isolators were in danger of shutting down. To prevent that, we installed heating devices. But when I broke into one of the off-limits labs, I discovered that —"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Platt, you *broke into* one of the labs? Why?" Clark interjected, earning him a glare from Lois.

"No one would listen to me. After I was drugged, I did a lot of things I wouldn't normally do. Anyway, when I broke into the labs I discovered the heating devices had been replaced by coolant systems."

"To freeze the ion particles?"

"Of course! So that they'd fuse and the Messenger would blow up! It's all in my report!!"

"Dr. Platt, you keep talking about this report. What report?" Lois asked.

"The report I gave to Dr. Baines."

"Do you have a copy of that report?"

"Of course, what kind of scientist would I be if I didn't keep a copy of my reports?" He continued to search through his desk.

"Dr. Platt," Lois said, pulling out a business card, "perhaps you could gather your report some other time; I'll send someone to come pick it up." She noticed a picture on his desk and fingered the frame as she examined the picture inside. It was a woman in her late thirties and a young girl in her pre-teens. The girl was in a wheelchair.

"My family," Dr. Platt explained. "We planned to live together on the Prometheus."

"Where's your family now?"

"Gone. They left after—Well, it's all for the best."

"Dr. Platt, who would want to sabotage Prometheus?" Clark asked curiously.

"I don't know." Lois was surprised to find the man close to tears, "You see, the microgravity laboratory on the Prometheus could be the key to curing hundreds of diseases here on Earth. In

the zero-gravity atmosphere, we can actually separate the proteins that create viruses... So many children with crippling diseases.” He looked at the photograph once more and smiled. “My daughter. We could cure them.”

Lois and Clark looked at one another, then nodded back to Dr. Platt. “I think we should pay Dr. Baines a visit,” Lois said and headed out with Clark in tow.

As they headed over to EPRAD Lois lit into Clark. “What were you thinking; trying to undermine me in the middle of the interview?”

“I was thinking if we’re going to get to the bottom of this we need to ask questions. Isn’t that our job?” Clark shot back. He wasn’t sure what Lois’ problem was, but he was not about to let her push him around. He may lack the experience in actual investigative journalism, but he knew how to conduct an investigation.

“What part of you’re working *for* me didn’t you get?”

“What part of *partner* didn’t you get?” They were both staring at one another, an angry look in their eyes. Neither one of them was backing down.

“I do not need a partner!”

“Then take it up with Mr. White. Until then you’re stuck with me, honey!”

Lois fumed; he had a point. Perry had partnered them up and she was stuck with him. Hopefully, this would just be temporary. There was no way he would keep her partnered with someone as green horned as Kent.

A young blonde stood before them, Dr. Baines. “Naturally, we’re all still in a state of shock. I don’t suppose I have to tell you what a catastrophe the explosion was. Commander Laderman, he was one of our best. Three kids, his wife, Anna.”

“Dr. Baines, what is being done to investigate the cause of the explosion?”

“Well, we won’t know anything until we examine the burned wreckage. We’re in the process of moving it to a hangar for inspection.”

“Can we take a look?”

“Sorry, no press allowed.”

“No exceptions?” Clark asked, flashing her one of his brilliant smiles. Lois rolled her eyes.

She was even more surprised to see Dr. Baines give him a once over then reply, “I’ll see what I can do.”

“On the subject of Dr. Samuel Platt...” Lois interjected.

Dr. Baines opened a file on her desk and scanned through it. “I have his file right here. A real waste of talent. Seems the pressure of building the space station along with his divorce finally got to him. He started drinking and taking drugs. It went from bad to worse. We kept him on as long as we could. But after he set fire to one of the laboratories, we had to let him go.”

Lois and Clark studied Dr. Baines for a moment; each coming up with their own determination of her character. “Dr. Platt said he submitted a report to you?” Clark inquired.

“Something about coolant devices installed to freeze the ion particles?” Lois added, arching her eyebrows at the woman as she spoke.

“Coolants? No, I don’t recall any report. I could check my records.”

“Could you? And give us a call?” Lois handed her a business card.

Dr. Baines nodded and took the card from Lois. “No problem. Let me know if I can be of further assistance.”

Lois continued to stare at the woman, unsure of what to make of her. She headed out with Clark towards the car. “I don’t trust her.”

Clark wasn’t sure Dr. Baines could be trusted either but he

thought it would be fun to provoke Lois a bit. “What? She seemed cooperative.”

“Are you kidding me? First, she tells us ‘No Press’ then she’s sizing you up like a piece of meat and gives us an ‘I’ll see what I can do.’ What was up with that?”

“Are you jealous?”

“Not in the slightest! All I’m saying is it was very unprofessional and ...”

“Well, she’s very pretty. Young for a woman in her position.”

“Typical.”

“What?”

“Typical male response.”

“Lois, trust me on this, I am not your typical male.”

“No? Just because she’s okay looking...”

“Very okay.”

“You immediately assume she’s telling the truth.”

“And you assume she’s not? Does everyone have an angle?”

No honest people left in the world?” Lois shot him a look and he laughed. “That’s pretty cynical, Lois.”

“It’s realistic, Clark, at least I don’t go through life disappointed.”

“Seriously, though, her eyes did do a funny dance when we mentioned that report.”

“Let’s do a little digging.”

Lois sat at her desk on the phone, tapping her fingers against her desk as she listened to Mitchell go on about another horrible disease he could have because he got the sniffles. “No, Mitchell, I’m not mad. If you’ve got the sniffles, you’ve got the sniffles. Yes, that could lead to complications. No, don’t call me; I’ll call you.” She hung up the phone angrily and looked around the empty newsroom, daring anyone to challenge her. She had to attend Lex Luthor’s ball, but now she was without an escort. She scanned the newsroom for a possible stand-in. There was Allen from Research. She watched him bite into a salami sandwich and shuddered. The man was a poster child for obesity. Didn’t he know when enough was enough? There was Jimmy? No, he said he was trying to get Allison from the Archives to go with him. She didn’t want to be the reason he blew off a potential good girl. Then her gaze rested on Clark. He was more than okay looking, and he was probably planning on just working tonight anyway...

She counted to ten as she attempted to suck up her pride before approaching him. She made her way toward his desk. He was busy typing up their notes from the interviews they had had earlier today. She stood in front of his desk a moment, waiting for him to notice her presence. “May I help you?” he asked, looking up at her.

“I don’t suppose you own tuxedo?” She was looking everywhere but directly at him.

She hated this and he knew it. He continued to play along. He had overheard her conversation from earlier and knew she was looking for a date to Lex Luthor’s ball. He wasn’t sure about going to the function, but it looked like he didn’t have a choice now. Of course, he wasn’t going to make it easy for her. She had given him hell all day and he wasn’t about to just let her think all was forgiven. “I could get one,” he acknowledged.

“Oh, well, the man I was going to Lex Luthor’s ball with has the flu and...”

“Yes?”

“Well, I was wondering if you’d like to... Do you want to take his place or not?”

“Thanks anyway, Lois, but I already have plans.”

“Plans? Like what? You’ve been in Metropolis for ... What? A few days?”

“Is this how you asked your date out? If so I can see why he doesn’t want to go now.”

“What? Who wouldn’t want to go to this? It’s the social event

of the season! Anyone who's anyone is going to be there!"

"So, is this a date?"

"Don't flatter yourself, Kent, this is not a date! This is business! I'm going to land the first Lex Luthor one-on-one interview if it kills me!"

"No thanks." He shook his head.

"What?"

"You know what your problem is? You don't know how to be nice. See, if you asked nicely I might actually help you out, but that doesn't seem to be in your realm; so I'm gonna stick with my original answer."

He turned back to his computer and continued to type. Lois counted to ten under her breath before addressing him again, "Clark, I would really appreciate it if you would go with me to Lex Luthor's ball."

"Please?"

"What?"

"You didn't say *'please.'*"

"Please."

"Now was that so hard?" he asked. "Imagine how much easier this would have been if you had just asked nicely. Yes, Lois, I would be delighted to go with you to Lex Luthor's ball."

"Okay, meet me there at nine sharp."

"See you there." He watched her walk away and shook his head, laughing to himself. She certainly was something...

Clark sat around the table with his parents, discussing his new job at the Daily Planet. He made the mistake of mentioning the ball he was taking Lois to and now his mom was grilling him for details. "So, tell me more about this woman you're going to Lex Luthor's ball with."

"Lois is ... well, she's ... complicated. Domineering, uncompromising, pig-headed. ... brilliant." He surprised himself with the last description he had settled on. There was definitely something about Lois Lane that had sparked his interest. "And we're not really going out. It's business."

"Uh-huh." Martha's eyes twinkled back at him at the last comment.

He stood up and headed out, giving his mom a hug and a peck on the cheek. "I gotta go. Thanks for sewing my jacket, mom. That electrical storm over Cleveland was brutal."

"Maybe you should take another route. See you next week."

He walked outside with his father, staring up at the stars. "I forget how beautiful it is here. The only stars you see in Metropolis are riding in limos."

Jonathan just chuckled, shaking his head at the image Clark had painted. "You're the one that wanted the rat race. I couldn't live there. Not for a minute." Jonathan said.

"There's something about the city; the pace; everyone going somewhere..."

"Impatient, like you." He patted Clark on the shoulder. "Well, son, I guess you've finally found your niche. You can stop living out of that old suitcase."

Clark sighed, "I hope so, Dad. Being in Metropolis, working for the Planet, it's like a dream come true, but..."

"But you still don't feel like you fit in," Jonathan finished.

"I don't. I don't fit in. I have to control myself all the time."

He absentmindedly kicked a stray rock and watched as it ricocheted into space. "I can never use my powers because I might jeopardize my chance to lead a normal life."

"Whatever that means."

"Just being human like you and mom; living, working, meeting someone, having a family."

"Clark, we don't know if that's possible."

"But I can't hide forever, Dad. There has to be a way that I can be Clark Kent and still use what I've been given to do some good."

"You'll find a way, boy." He pulled Clark in for a hug.

"I hope so." He stepped away and floated up in the air, preparing to ricochet himself into the night's sky.

The room was filled with music and Metropolis wealthy. Clark had scanned the room for Lois but hadn't found her yet. He spotted Jimmy Olsen and approached him with a smile. "Hey, Jimmy, have you seen Lois?"

"No, she's probably gonna try to make an entrance, though; try and snag Lex Luthor's attention. This is my date, Allison. Allison, this is Clark Kent. He just started at the Planet." The young redhead blushed as she shook hands with Clark. "Come on, I'll show you around. This is Lucy, Lois' sister."

Lucy held her hand out to shake Clark's. "Pleased to meet you."

"Lucy, this is Clark; the Chief partnered him up with Lois on the space station story."

"I apologize in advance for my sister." Lucy smiled.

They shared a good-natured laugh and Jimmy continued to show Clark around; introducing him to key people. "Have either of you ever met him; Lex Luthor?"

"No, I've read all his unauthorized biographies, though. Rags to riches, wrong side of the tracks, self-made billionaire, owns dozens of companies, employs thousands of people, Man of the Year, every year, has his finger in every pie, but rarely in public. Won't give personal interviews." Jimmy smiled good-naturedly at Clark. "So, where are you from, CK?"

"CK?"

"Jimmy likes to nickname everyone," Lucy explained.

"Really?"

"Yeah, his nickname for my sister is Mad Dog Lane."

"Shhh, she might hear you!" Jimmy admonished.

"I'm from Smallville, Kansas."

"No kidding? I've lived in Metropolis all my life; I've never been out of New Troy. What's it like in Kansas?"

"Hey, there he is!" Lucy pointed to a tall man descending the staircase and mingling with the crowd.

"So, who all do we have in the crowds here?" Clark asked.

"Mostly upper class or dates of our upper class like with our dear Lucy Lane here. She's going out with the Governor's son," Jimmy explained. "Everyone else is press. Everyone has to have a date, though. It IS a ball; dancing."

"Ah." Clark realized now why Lois had to have a date.

Speaking of Lois, her voice echoed through the room as a bolt of lightning struck outside. "Lex Luthor, why haven't you returned my calls?" All eyes directed to her.

Clark spotted her across the room. She stood in a stunning blue gown with an impressive v-neck, her hair was pulled up and she wore a face of confidence as she addressed the man of the hour. He felt like he was floating. She was stunning. He looked down and realized that he WAS floating. He quickly floated back down before anyone was able to notice. He had to be more careful.

Lex Luthor approached her with intrigue; she held her hand out, introducing herself. "Lois Lane, Daily Planet."

Lex smiled, and took her hand in his own, intrigued by her. "I can assure you, I'll never make that mistake again."

Clark and Jimmy watched the scene unfold; Lucy had been stolen away by her date, leaving them to themselves. "She's something, isn't she?"

"Yeah..." Clark acknowledged, trying to find his voice. "She's something." He watched as Lois was led onto the dance floor by Lex Luthor. He wasn't sure what the proper protocol was. Did she need him to cut in after a certain point? She did say she wanted to nail the first Lex Luthor interview, but what was he supposed to do? Just stand here on the sidelines?

Meanwhile, on the dance floor, Lois was attempting to get Lex

Luthor to agree to an interview. “I hope you’ll forgive me for being so bold.”

“Boldness is a trait I find very attractive in a woman, Ms. Lane,” Lex replied. There was something intriguing about him. The way he held himself, the tone of his voice. Everything about him resonated with power.

“Thank you,” Lois blushed, “Anyway, I was wondering, Mr. Luthor...”

“Lex,” he corrected, spinning her around.

“Lex.” She smiled as the name resonated off her tongue. “I know you’re hesitant to give interviews.”

“I hope you can understand a man in my position. I wouldn’t want to be misinterpreted.” He pulled her close as they continued to dance. Lois hesitated slightly but allowed it, if only for a chance to land an interview with the man. “And I have had one or two bad experiences with the media.”

“But not with me,” she replied through a pasted-on smile.

He smiled back at her, leaning close. “Why don’t we make it dinner?”

She smiled back at him and nodded. She was about to speak when Clark’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “Mind if I cut in?”

Clark was rewarded with an angry glare, but Lois and Lex had stopped dancing at this point. Lois turned and grudgingly introduced Clark. “Lex, this is Clark Kent; he works at the Planet.”

“A pleasure.” Lex extended his hand to shake with Clark. He then turned to Lois. “Later then?”

Before she could protest Lex walked off and Clark had taken her into his arms, dancing with the music. Angry at the interruption, Lois turned on Clark. “Clark, you idiot; it’s taken me a year to get this close...”

“This close?” he asked pulling her closer to him.

Lois let out an involuntary shudder as she felt the heat of his body pressed up against hers. She met his teasing gaze with a glare. “I would have thought square dancing was more your style.”

“Wrong crowd for square dancing, Lois. I actually learned ballroom dancing from a Nigerian princess. She had studied the art of ballroom dancing in England,” he explained. Lois wasn’t really sure what to say at that. She didn’t have much of a comeback for that. He then surprised her by whispering in her ear, “I’m not as naive as I look. I have traveled outside of Smallville, you know.”

“I never said that you were,” she shot back, trying to remind her brain to continue working. Her mind seemed to only want to focus on the feel of his body pressed against hers. His hands rested on her back as they danced.

“See? Even the new kid can surprise you, Ms. Lane.” He winked at her.

“Yeah.” Lois felt her face flush. Why was she unable to concentrate? She needed some air. She waited for the song to end and broke out of his arms, heading for the nearest ladies room.

“Lois, where are you going?” Clark called after her. He stopped short when he noticed her entering the ladies room.

“What is wrong with me?” She shook her head as she stared back at her reflection. She had been dancing with Clark Kent and had enjoyed it. He was a hack from Nowheresville. Nothing compared to Lex Luthor whom she had just been dancing with; so why was dancing with Clark making her head swim? She could still feel the heat from where his hands had been resonating throughout her body. “Pull yourself together, Lois,” she muttered. “You’re a professional.”

The soft sobbing from underneath one of the bathroom stalls perked Lois’ interest. She recognized that sound. “Lucy?”

“Lois?” the door to the stall opened to reveal a sobbing Lucy Lane.

“Lucy, what happened?”

“Steven broke up with me,” Lucy explained in between her tears.

“Oh, Lucy, I’m so sorry.” She hugged her sister.

“I’m fine. It’ll be fine, Lois, really. I just need to focus on school. It’s not like I’m in danger of running into him at Metropolis University or anything like that.” It was clear that Lucy was plastering on a brave face, but Lois didn’t push.

“Do you want me to get you anything?”

“Do you have any makeup on you?”

Lois pulled out her purse which Lucy took gratefully.

“Thanks. You’re a lifesaver.” She walked over to the mirror and began applying the makeup to cover up her blotchy skin. “I met that guy you’re working with, Clark. He seems nice.”

“Lucy, don’t start,” Lois admonished. The last thing she needed was a lecture about her love life.

“What? I was just gonna say he seems nice. Pretty cute too.” She winked at Lois and handed her purse back to her. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Lois followed her sister out to join the crowd. After making sure her sister was okay she then began to explore the upstairs of LexCorp.

“Going somewhere?” Clark’s voice pierced through her mind as she reached the top of the stairs. She ignored him and opened one of the rooms only to find a desk with several windows behind it. The room had a collection of swords, rifles, and other weaponry. “Lois, what are you doing?” he asked when she began to look through the desk.

“Being a reporter. You should try it sometime.”

Clark sighed at the obvious lost cause. Lois was going to do what she wanted; whether he liked it or not. He turned around to find himself looking Lex Luthor in the eye and a sword at his throat. He looked down to study the sword and met Lex Luthor’s gaze with a fearless one of his own. “Macedonian?”

Lex Luthor pulled the sword back and smiled. “It belonged to Alexander the Great. A brilliant tactician. Alexander’s strategy was simple: always control the high ground. It was the sword that he...”

“Defeated Darius III and was proclaimed King of Asia,” Clark finished, recalling the story himself.

Lex eyed him with intrigue. “You surprise me, Mr. Kent. I’m not easily surprised.”

Lois noticed the exchange between the two men and decided to intervene, “I hope you don’t mind us looking around. You have a beautiful home, Lex.”

Clark watched Lex as Lois’ words registered. He saw a flicker of what appeared to be...something...he couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but he didn’t like it. Lex was quick to mask his feelings and instead showed them the balcony behind the desk. “Have you seen the view?” He opened the doors and allowed Lois and Clark to step out and absorb the view before them. “Tallest building in Metropolis. I must confess I enjoy the fact that everyone has to look up in order to see me.” He then ushered them out of the office. “Let’s get back to the party. I’m sure my announcement will interest you.”

They made their way back to the ballroom; a crowd began to form around a table in the middle of the room. Lois and Clark listened and watched as Lex revealed his plan for Space Station Prometheus. Clark wasn’t sure what it was about the man. Something about Lex Luthor rubbed him the wrong way. He didn’t think he was petty enough to not like someone because he’d felt a twinge of jealousy...No, it wasn’t jealousy. Something more was going on; he could feel it. He spoke about saving the space station by creating one of his own. On the outside, it seemed like a good idea, but who was it benefiting? Lex Luthor would be the one reaping all the benefits, patents and grants. All the cures developed would be in his name. It made him wonder how Lex had gotten this ‘*space station*’ project together so quickly.

Clark paced around his hotel room at the Apollo. Tonight had been...incredible. The feeling of Lois in his arms had been

incredible. There was definitely something there; he could feel it. Could she feel it as well? She had seemed content in his arms for a moment then he had picked up the hike in her heartbeat shortly before she stormed out of his arms. What had that been about? Lois Lane was definitely a force to be reckoned with. She was fiery, determined, intelligent, beautiful... Everything he'd ever wanted in a woman.

He laughed at himself. There was no way Lois Lane would look at him like that; not now anyway. They had just met and her impression of him right now was very poor. He had overheard her calling him a hack from Nowheresville to Jimmy earlier that day.

He could tell there was more to her than what met the eye. She seemed guarded; protecting herself with witty sarcasm. He should know; he'd been an expert at hiding himself from the world all his life. Hiding himself from others had become an artform over the years, but he still held out hope that one day he would meet someone he could share everything with.

"Lucy, where were you??" Lois pounced on her sister the minute she opened the front door. "Do you have any idea what time it is? I was worried about you. Nobody knew where you were. What if something had happened to you? You have got to be more responsible!"

"Sheesh, Sis, calm down. I had a drink with someone I met at the ball. Nothing big. Don't worry; I took a cab home." Lucy rolled her eyes and moved past her sister.

"Who did you have a drink with?"

"Oh, it was just some guy... I think his name was Les... I'm not sure. I guess I'll figure it out in the morning. I'm having dinner with him tomorrow night."

"Dinner? You just said you didn't know what the guy's name was. What if he's an axe-murderer?"

"I think I'll survive." Lucy sighed. "Give me a break would you, Lois? This is why you need to get a personal life; so you can quit butting into mine. What's wrong with Clark? You should go out with him. He's cute... and nice. He works at the Planet... so you have that in common."

Lois glared at her sister. Even in her half-drunken state, her sister was still able to hold up her end of an argument perfectly. "I don't have time to date," she harrumphed.

"Oh, yes, you're busy 'establishing' your career." Lucy did quote signs with her fingers as she spoke. "How long is that going to take? Another four years?" Before Lois could retort Lucy cut her off. "I'm beat. Where is the Aspirin?"

"Here." Lois handed her a bottle of Aspirin and a glass of water.

"Thanks," Lucy mumbled. "G'night." She headed toward the bedroom and collapsed, oblivious to her sister's concerned gaze still on her.

On his way to work the next day, Clark caught Lois coming out of a taxi. "Morning." He jogged up next to her.

"Maybe for you," she shot back. "I've been at it for hours."

"It's eight o'clock!" Clark exclaimed with a hint of admiration.

"So?" she shot back. "I went back to EPRAD and followed the truck with the wreckage from the Messenger inside. They brought it to this hangar. I tried to get inside, but your friend Dr. Baines threw me out."

An explosion in from a manhole distracted him from responding. "There's a man down there!" one voice called out.

Clark looked around nervously. He had to do something. He couldn't just let an innocent man die when he could help. His father's words played through his mind, 'dissect you like a frog...' He had to do something. Everyone seemed distracted enough. Surely he could get away with it. He slipped away from the crowd and made his way to a manhole on the other end of the street.

Checking to make sure no one was watching; he opened the manhole and crawled inside.

Once he was below ground, he super-spiced his way over to where the explosion had taken place. There was smoke everywhere. He used his enhanced vision to find the missing worker. He found the worker slumped over, struggling to breathe through the smoke. Without a word, he grabbed the man and lifted him up toward the opening of the manhole. He silently prayed the man hadn't seen him as he felt the man being lifted from his grasp.

He sighed in relief and made his way toward the surface. He replaced the cover to the manhole and rejoined the crowd. The man he had rescued was disoriented; he glanced through the crowd, trying to place his surroundings. Clark rejoined Lois in the same place he had been a few moments ago.

His nerves went on edge when he found himself to be the target of the disoriented man's statement, "That man... That man... he rescued me."

Everyone looked in Clark's direction. Clark laughed nervously, "What? The guy is delirious."

Lois looked back at Clark and rolled her eyes; "Clearly!" She took in his appearance and groaned, "What happened to your suit? You're a mess!" Before he could respond she interjected, "From now on, do what I do; bring a change of clothes to work."

Clark watched her leave, slightly amused. A change of clothes to work? Why would she bring a change of clothes? What was she doing that would require that? Going undercover... in disguise? The thought was amusing. He couldn't imagine himself in any kind of disguise... Maybe it was something to think about.

Catherine Grant, society columnist, approached Lois as she was pouring herself a cup of coffee. She wore an amused look on her face as she watched Lois pour all non-fat and low-sugar ingredients in her coffee. "Lois, you're going to have to do a lot more than that to regain your figure." She gave her a once-over. "If you even had one."

"Some of us prefer the natural look," Lois shot back. "The plastic look just doesn't work for me."

Cat was about to retort when she saw Jimmy showing a young man in his mid-twenties around the office. "The layout at the Planet's been pretty much the same since I started here two years ago. These four stations use the same printer. Any questions; just ask. She tries to give everyone issues every now and then." Jimmy patted the printer for emphasis. Clark just listened to the young man, amused.

Cat let out a wolf whistle. "Who's the new tight end?"

Lois glanced toward Cat's line of vision and spotted Clark and Jimmy. She rolled her eyes in disgust. "Why don't you throw your usual forward pass and find out?" She pushed her way past Cat and made her way towards her desk. She took a sip of her coffee and began sifting through her notes on Dr. Baines and Dr. Platt from yesterday.

"You'll get the hang of everything soon enough. Metropolis isn't anything like Kansas I'm sure, but it has its perks," Jimmy said.

Lois looked up from her notes, about to tell Jimmy to take his tour somewhere else when she realized they were at Clark's desk — his desk was right across from hers. Perry had moved him to the empty desk across the aisle from her. "Great," she muttered to herself.

Cat approached the two men with her usual stance. She wore a skin-tight leather outfit, showing off more than what anyone ever wanted to see. Clark turned to say something to Jimmy when he found Cat's hand held out for him to kiss. When he didn't respond she moved closer to him, moving her hands up and down his body. He seemed bemused by her ministrations.

Lois watched, intrigued, wondering what Clark's reaction would be. Most men were unsure of how to handle Cat's

forwardness. When she found someone she was interested in she made sure they knew it. “Catherine Grant, ‘Cat’s Corner’...” she introduced herself.

Clark took her hand and moved it away from his chest. “Yes,” he said, nodding. “I’ve read your column.”

“Then my reputation precedes me,” Cat remarked. She moved closer to him, attempting to run her hands up his chest. She frowned slightly when Clark caught her hands and moved them away from him.

“Among other things,” Lois muttered under her breath as she watched the scene unfold before her. Something about watching Cat come onto Clark just rubbed her the wrong way. She couldn’t put her finger on it.

“I know what it’s like to be new in town. I’d be happy to show you around.” Cat smiled her best megawatt smile at him.

Clark laughed lightly. “I’m flattered, Ms. Grant. That’s very nice of you, but I’m really not interested.”

“Cat...” she corrected him. “Are you sure? Being new in the big city can be very...lonely...I’m sure the need for...friends is there.”

“I’m really not interested, but thank you. Now, if you’ll excuse me?” He tried to move past her but she continued to block his way.

“I don’t think I will excuse you. I’m not used to having to ask a man more than once to do...anything,” she purred.

“I’m really busy this morning.” He smiled a megawatt smile at her and stepped away from her. “Lois and I are working on the space station piece, and I really just don’t have the time for distractions.”

She moved closer to him, once more tracing a finger down his arm. “Poor Lois, all work and no personality...I wouldn’t want to see you fall into the same trap.”

He gave a light laugh. “I’m really not interested, Cat.” He stepped away from her and followed Jimmy toward the conference room.

Cat wore a determined and curious look on her face as she watched him leave. “I love it when they play hard to get.”

Lois couldn’t believe what she had just witnessed. Cat had just been turned down by the hack from Nowheresville. Nobody had ever been able to resist her charms...Maybe there was more to Clark than what met the eye.

Lex Luthor stood on his balcony, taking in the rays of the sun. Antoinette Baines approached him from behind, wearing a silk robe. “It’s done,” she whispered, kissing him softly on the neck.

“Everything?” he whispered back, spinning around to fully embrace her.

“The Messenger’s at the hangar,” she replied, linking her arms around him, pulling him into a passionate kiss.

He pulled away. “Enough of that, my dear.” At her confused look, he walked her back into the penthouse and attempted to change the subject. “I knew I could leave everything in your capable hands.” He took her hand and kissed it, then looked up and noticed a large tattooed man standing in the doorway. “What’s he doing here?” he hissed.

“I have an errand for him to run,” Baines explained nonchalantly. “Platt has to be silenced...And those reporters, Clark Kent and Lois Lane, are becoming a problem as well. Lois Lane was there this morning. She took pictures of the Messenger, followed the truck to the hangar.”

Luthor wore a grim look on his face. “Do what you want with Platt but leave the reporters to me.”

Dr. Baines waved towards the tattooed man and watched him leave. She then turned toward Lex. “Tell me, Lex, do you have any special interest in those reporters? Clark Kent, for example?”

“Kent is nothing...a mere...giblet.”

“And Lois Lane?” She grew sterner in her tone.

The admiration came from his tone as he spoke, “Lois Lane is a very talented woman. Unfortunately, she may not be so easily seduced.”

“As ME???” She grew angry at his implication.

“Have I seduced you? I thought it was you who seduced me.”

“I’m warning you. Stay away from her.” Her eyes narrowed.

“Where were you last night? We had plans...” she challenged.

“Antoinette, that really is no concern of yours. Plans change... You know I don’t take well to threats, my darling.”

“I don’t care. Everything we’ve worked for...we’re so close. I won’t let her interfere.” Her eyes narrowed. “You know what I’m capable of.”

He smiled and took her in his arms. “Yes, Antoinette, I do. That’s part of the appeal.”

Clark sat down at his desk, grateful to find it empty of any sign of Cat Grant. He didn’t understand women that threw themselves at men like that.

He spotted Jimmy walking past his desk and caught his attention. “Hey, Jimmy, where you headed?”

“To pick up that report from Platt. He called earlier—said he ‘hoped we could read it.’ I’m also going to take a copy to my friend at S.T.A.R. Labs to analyze it.”

“Have you seen Lois?” he asked, looking towards her empty desk.

“Conference room.” Jimmy pointed to the glass doors across the newsroom.

Clark nodded. “Thanks.”

Clark took a seat next to Lois. “Anything?”

Lois looked up at him, annoyed with his presence. She still couldn’t seem to shake the bitter feelings she had had while watching Cat hang herself all over Clark earlier. She had gotten a small thrill at watching Cat get rejected, but she couldn’t seem to explain why she felt anything at all. He was her co-worker. That’s it. She wouldn’t even call him a friend...They had just met; so why the twinge of...jealousy?

“I’m surprised you were able to escape from Cat’s claws... What’d you do, give her some catnip to play with?”

Clark was a bit taken aback by the jibe, unsure of what had provoked it. He gestured toward the paperwork in front of her. “Can I help?”

“Grab a stack.” She handed him a stack of loose-leaf papers that had been crumpled.

“What is all this?” he inquired.

“Part of Platt’s report. Jimmy went to pick up the rest of it.” She let out a sigh of exasperation. “I must have called at least fifty different ex-employees that worked at EPRAD at the same time Platt did. None of them want to talk. I don’t know; maybe there’s nothing to talk about.”

“Or maybe whoever’s behind this is very powerful...people might be afraid of crossing him,” Clark added.

“Or her,” Lois added. “I still don’t trust Dr. Baines as far as I can throw her.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“First we try to piece what we can of Platt’s report together; then we try to find evidence that Dr. Baines did receive the said report...We then need to see if there’s any written evidence that they found coolant devices and Baines ignored it...” She sighed. “I hope you didn’t make dinner plans.”

Clark gave her a megawatt smile and simply said, “I am all yours.”

What was it about that smile that made her weak in the knees?

“This is impossible! Nothing matches. No dates...Nothing. We’re never going to get through this,” Lois complained, throwing a stack of papers down on the desk. “I’m starving! What we need

it some good Chinese takeout.”

“I know a place...” Clark said, standing up to grab his jacket. “Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t you want to know what I want?” she asked.

“I’ll bring an assortment.” He was gone before she could argue.

A few minutes later Clark reentered the newsroom, carrying several bags of Chinese food. “That was quick,” she commented.

“I took a short cut.” Clark winked at her.

Lois opened one of the containers and grabbed a Crab Rangoon. “Mmm...” She savored the taste in her mouth. “Still hot...this is out of this world.”

Clark watched her eat, bemused at the way she devoured her food. She had obviously been starving. He made a mental note to remember she liked sesame chicken. He ate with her silently, doing his best to keep from inhaling his food. It had become a habit at the farm over the years.

Lois pulled a fortune cookie out of one of the containers and opened it. She groaned in disgust. “It’s in Chinese.”

“Let me see it.” He took the fortune from her.

“Oh, don’t tell me that you read...”

“A good horse is like a member of the family,” Clark read.

“I hate that. That is not a fortune.” Clark laughed. Lois looked at him curiously,

“You are a strange one, Clark Kent.”

“Am I?” he asked, meeting her gaze.

She smiled at him, her eyes sparkling as she spoke, “Yeah, but I think I’ve got you figured out.”

Clark watched her curiously. There was something in her eyes. The heat between them was intense. He could feel it. He found his voice. “Really?”

“Uh-huh.” Lois smiled at him.

“Didn’t take you long...” he commented, bemused.

“Well, it’s my business, looking beyond the external.” She shrugged.

Their eyes met for a brief moment. The electricity between them...Yes, it was definitely there. He wondered for a brief moment what she would do if he tried to kiss her...

“Don’t fall for me, farmboy. I don’t have time for it.” Lois’ comment penetrated his thoughts.

“So much for that idea” he thought to himself. It was definitely too soon to be thinking about her like that.

Lois stood up and grabbed her jacket. “Come on, maybe Platt can help us decipher this.”

Clark stared at her empty seat for a moment before moving to follow her. The electricity that had just ignited between them... Did she feel it too?

They made their way to Dr. Platt’s apartment in silence. Clark wondered what was going through Lois’ mind right now. Her heartbeat had hiked up a bit since she had made the comment not to fall for her. He wondered why she had warned him off. Was she not comfortable with office romance for some reason? He knew she was attracted to him. He could tell by the way she looked at him...even when she was throwing sarcastic comments his way.

They made their way up the steps to Dr. Platt’s apartment. Lois knocked on the door; only to find it partially open. He cringed inward. This wasn’t a good sign. He noticed a flicker of light coming from across the room as they made their way inside. “Lois, let me look first.”

“Don’t be silly.” She walked into the room. “I’ve seen it all; war, crime, famine...” she found a light switch on the wall and tried to flick it on. Nothing happened. They looked across the room and saw Dr. Platt’s sitting in a chair with his back to them. “Dr. Platt...” She approached cautiously but found Clark’s hand holding her back.

“Wait, the water...” He gestured to the water all over the floor.

He maneuvered Lois so they walked around the water. He felt her tense up in his grasp when they saw Dr. Platt. He was sitting in his chair...He had been electrocuted. His feet sat in a bucket of water; electrical wiring was in his hands. A homemade electric chair. Clark wrapped his arms around her, shielding her from the sight. She turned her head into his jacket, avoiding the sight before them.

The echo of police sirens rang through the streets as officers pilfered through Samuel Platt’s belongings, surveying the scene. “Looks like a suicide to me,” Inspector Henderson commented dryly.

“Suicide? Henderson, that’s ridiculous!” Lois fumed angrily.

“He’s tried it before,” Henderson pointed out, “There’s no sign of forced entry, no sign of struggle, nobody saw anybody come in or out.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense,” Clark argued. “He had a family...A daughter...”

Lois noticed his distraught look and couldn’t help but feel for him. He obviously wasn’t used to covering stories like this. “We were on the verge of proving his theory...well, that something he was working on was right. There’s no way he...”

An officer walked by them, laughing. “Man’s gonna barbecue himself he oughta use sauce.”

Clark angrily stood up from where he was seated and got in the officer’s face. “The man’s name was Samuel Platt. He was brilliant, a scientist, and someone who cared about others. Under the circumstances, I don’t believe that kind of humor is appropriate.”

The officer could only stare at Clark in shock. Lois watched the scene unfold, mildly impressed with Clark’s assertiveness with the officer. There was definitely more to Clark than what met the eye. “Sorry...Sorry, buddy. Really, I’m sorry,” the officer muttered before scurrying as far away from Clark as possible.

“I guess I’d better track down his wife and daughter...I really hate this part of the job,” Henderson muttered grimly.

Clark interjected, “If you don’t mind I’d like to call them personally.”

Henderson nodded. “Check back with me after the autopsy.” Henderson walked away from them to join the rest of the forensics crew that was still surveying the scene.

“You okay?” Lois asked Clark.

Clark looked up at Lois with a sad look in his eyes. He felt so guilty over Dr. Platt’s death. If he had known; he could have stopped this. “We should have known. We should have protected him.”

“How?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know, but...” Clark was at a loss for words. How was he supposed to explain to her why he felt so guilty over Platt’s death? A normal person wouldn’t feel guilty because they would know there was nothing they could have done. He could have stopped this.

“Look, Clark, all we can do now is to try and prove him right. Whoever did this sabotaged Messenger and is probably planning the same thing for the colonist transport. We’ve got a lot of work to do.” Clark just stared at her numbly. “It’s only six. Why don’t we try and get a few hours of sleep? I’ll come by for you at nine.”

“Lois!” Lucy exclaimed when she saw her sister drag herself through the front door. “It’s like seven in the morning. Were you out all night? Where have you been?”

“Clark and I were working on the space station piece...” Lois groaned as she dropped her purse to the floor. “We followed up a lead...and...” she yawned as she sunk down on her couch.

“Clark again, huh?” Lucy asked intrigued.

“Don’t start,” Lois shot back. “I’m exhausted. How was your date?”

“Hmm...Oh, it was nice,” Lucy said wistfully. “Good night,

Lois.” She looked over at the couch and found Lois fast asleep. She smiled and laid a blanket over her.

Clark stood clad in a towel on the phone with his parents, explaining the events that had occurred the past few days. “I can’t help it, Mom. I feel responsible...I should have...”

He was cut off by his mother’s scolding tone. “Clark, you can’t take on all of the world’s problems. If you could have helped him, you would have.”

“I guess so, Mom, but...”

Jonathan interjected at that point, “Clark? What’s this about a worker caught in an explosion down a manhole? Your mother told me he recognized you...”

“Dad,” Clark sighed, anticipating the lecture Jonathan was sure to give him. “The worker was semi-conscious. Nobody believed him when he pointed to me.”

“One of these days you’re going to pull one of your stunts and some nut with a video camera is going to...”

“What was he supposed to do, Jonathan?” Martha grilled her husband. “Did you want him to let the man die? Clark, how’re your clothes holding up?”

“Don’t change the damn subject!” Jonathan argued.

“They’re fine, Mom, thanks.” Clark sighed. “I’ve been thinking about this...Maybe it’s a crazy idea, but ...Mom? How’s your old sewing machine? Still working?”

“I think so,” Martha replied, uncertainly.

“Well, I was thinking...maybe I need some kind of outfit...”

“Outfit?” Jonathan asked, bemused.

“Like a disguise. Something I could wear whenever I need to use my gifts...I could wear a disguise and still help out when things like that explosion happen...” A knock at the door interrupted his train of thought. He x-rayed the door and saw Lois on the other end of the door. “Mom? I have to go. Lois is here.”

The teasing in Martha’s voice was evident. “Oh, Lois again, huh?”

“Goodbye, Mom, Dad...” He hung up the phone and reached for his glasses. At her persistent knocking, he opened the door hurriedly, forgetting his lack of attire momentarily.

Lois stared at him in awe. Her face changed from admiration to surprise. “I said nine, and I thought you’d be naked...um, ready.”

Clark looked down at himself and blushed slightly. He’d forgotten he was still in his towel. “I was on the phone. I’ll be out in a jiff.” He grabbed his clothes and walked into the bathroom. He quickly dressed, combed and dried his hair within a few seconds. He found Lois rifling through his cabinets when he came out.

She did a double take when she saw him fully dressed, ready to go. He noticed she was unable to meet his eyes. He caught her gaze and she looked up at him, swallowing hard. “We’d better go.” He nodded in agreement and followed her out of the room. She then turned to face him. “So, explain this to me. You eat like an eight-year-old but you look like Mr. Hardbody? What’s your secret, and can I have it?”

Clark looked down at himself once more, blushing slightly. What was he supposed to say? I’m a freak of nature so calories don’t affect me the way they affect everyone else? She turned to leave once more and he followed her, unsure of what the day might bring.

Lois and Clark sat with Mrs. Platt in the newsroom. Telling her had been hard. Once Mrs. Platt had heard the news of her husband’s death, she had come down to the Planet to speak with Lois and Clark. “There is no other explanation. Samuel wouldn’t do something like that. He...he had to have been killed.”

Lois was unsure of what to do. This was the same person that had left Dr. Platt. “Mrs. Platt, when you and your daughter left

your husband...”

“No, no...We never left...He-he sent us away. He was so sure they would come after him...He was afraid Amy and I would get hurt.”

A young girl approached them in a wheelchair. “Mom? When are we going to leave? You promised I could go to Susan’s.”

“Uh, in just a minute, sweetie. Amy, this is Lois Lane and Clark Kent. Say ‘hello’.”

“Nice to meet you,” Amy said shyly.

“Why don’t you wait for me by the elevators, Amy?” Mrs.

Platt watched her daughter make her way up the ramp to the elevators. “I still haven’t told her yet. Everything we’ve worked for was for Amy. The space lab, Prometheus was the only hope...now...” She broke down in tears. “My husband was not insane.”

“Mrs. Platt, do you have any idea who might want to have your husband killed?” Lois asked.

Mrs. Platt shook her head. “All I know is that Samuel knew that Prometheus was being sabotaged and that knowledge got him killed.” She then pleaded, “Please help us. Don’t let Amy grow up believing her father committed suicide.”

Clark patted her arm supportively. “We’ll try. We promise.”

Lois looked back at him, skeptically. How could he promise something he wasn’t even sure of? A commotion over by the television monitors distracted her and she turned to see the chairperson of the Congress of Nation on the screen. “I am pleased to announce that we have unanimously decided that Space Station Prometheus will proceed as scheduled.”

Lex Luthor watched the monitor as the chairperson continued to address the press regarding Space Station Prometheus. “This body would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Mr. Lex Luthor for his generous offer, but it is our firm belief that the Space Station should go forward as originally planned: a project dedicated to global cooperation for the advancement of the sciences. We have suffered losses in the past, but we shall take extra precautions to ensure the safety of future space travelers. However, should any serious problems arise from this point on, we shall be forced to cancel the mission. We don’t anticipate that happening. We anticipate success.”

“NO!!” Lex smashed his hand through the glass case on his desk and tore apart the model of Luthor Space Station he had created for the purpose of replacing Prometheus.

“Well, there’s hope after all,” Clark said wistfully.

“I just hope we can stop whoever’s trying to sabotage the space station before the next launch,” Lois replied grimly. Jimmy came into the newsroom with a folder in his hands. Lois’ attention immediately perked up. Jimmy had been at S.T.A.R. Labs all morning trying to get to the bottom of the sabotage. “What have you got, Jimmy?”

He smiled and handed her the file in his hands. “I gave S.T.A.R. Labs Dr. Platt’s report...”

“And what did you find out?” Clark asked.

Jimmy couldn’t help the smile that had crept across his face. “Plenty! They recreated the launch in a hologram...it was really smooth...” When he noticed an impatient look from Lois he continued, “Anyway, they concluded that Platt’s theory was right on. There was deliberate sabotage. The transport explosion was no accident. Congrats.”

“Yes!” Lois excitedly turned to Clark on Jimmy’s exit and threw her arms around him. “We did it.” She caught herself after a moment and pulled away from him, confused at the electricity she felt when she had touched him. Something about being in Clark Kent’s arms felt so...right. How was that possible when they had only just met?

“Now we can write the story.” Clark tried to steer the

conversation back to Platt. He felt that jolt between them when Lois had hugged him as well, but the look on her face had told him she was definitely afraid of whatever was going on between them.

Lois seemed to recognize what he was saying and quickly covered up her emotions. "I can write the story," she corrected him.

"With my help," Clark added.

"With your help," she repeated softly. "And if we can convince people there was sabotage and who was behind it..."

"We can stop them," Clark finished for her. He watched her curiously. It was strange...the way they read one another's minds and finished one another's sentences. He wanted to ask her out. It would be so easy, but what would she say? She seemed to pull away every time they got remotely close to one another....

"So, who do think it is?" Clark asked.

"What?" she asked slightly dazed. Being this close to Clark was hard. Her head was still spinning.

"The sabotage. Who do you think is behind it? It'd have to be someone with a lot of power," Clark commented.

"I don't know. I guess maybe Dr. Baines?" Lois suggested.

"Still don't trust her?" Clark asked, amused.

"And you do?" Lois retorted. "The way she acted during our interview with her was very unprofessional..."

"What do you mean?" Clark asked. "I mean, I know her eyes did a dance when we mentioned Platt, but...How was she being unprofessional?"

Lois didn't want to bring up her real reasons for thinking the woman was unprofessional. The way she had been eyeing Clark was unprofessional in her mind, but she wasn't sure that was an appropriate conversation right now. She looked at her watch, "I have to go...I have an interview with Lex Luthor. I've got to get ready."

"Lois, wait..." Clark wanted to tell her about his suspicions with Lex but wasn't sure how to broach the subject. "Be careful. Lex Luthor is a powerful man...You could get hurt..."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Lois asked. "I can take care of myself just fine, thanks."

"That's not what I meant. What I meant to say...was well, he's building a space station at the same time Prometheus is sabotaged...Isn't that a bit convenient?"

"Clark, you're reading too much into this. Lex Luthor has his finger in every pie in this city...anything and everything. Why would he sabotage the space station?"

"Think about it, Lois. Whoever is providing the space station for this kind of research would also get the patents for all the cures that are discovered..."

"I think you're reading too much into it, Clark. I've been doing this a lot longer than you have. I think I can smell a skunk in a rose garden better than you can."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Clark asked defensively.

"It means I have more experience at being an investigative reporter than you do," Lois shot back. "Don't get all offended. It's natural, Clark. You're a rookie. You make the typical mistakes that any rookie reporter makes."

"Such as?"

"Such as, getting in over your head. You're looking for a story where there isn't one. It's a predictable rookie mistake."

"Predictable? How is my having suspicions of Lex Luthor predictable?"

"Because it just is..." Lois argued.

He was angry. He knew he was right and she was just ignoring him. On an impulse, he grabbed her and kissed her. He felt her body stiffen against him for a split-second, then succumb to the warm caress of his mouth. He slowly pulled away. "Exactly how predictable was that?"

Lois' head was spinning. He had kissed her. Where had he learned to kiss like that? She tried to regain control of her emotions as he pulled away from her. She caught her breath. That kiss...She had never been kissed like that ever.

"Exactly how predictable is that?" Clark asked, pulling away from her.

Her head was swimming with emotions. He had kissed her and she had liked it...Oh, God, how she liked it...Now he was acting like he was trying to prove something to her. Anger flashed through her and she lifted her hand to slap him. "Don't you ever try something like that again, *Kent!*" she stormed up the ramp towards the elevator. She couldn't believe he had done something like that. He had kissed her then practically bragged about it. Typical male...

She turned on her heel, noticing him following her. "Let's get something straight. I live by three rules: I never get involved in my stories, I never let anyone get there first, and I never sleep with anyone I work with." Before he could retort she was gone.

Clark sat on the bed in his hotel room staring at the ceiling in disgust with himself. He had screwed up. He knew it. Lois had pressed his buttons and he had given in. "Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!" He banged his hand against his forehead.

He sat up and reached for the phone. He had to apologize. Even though he didn't feel one ounce of regret for his actions...He had enjoyed every pleasurable second his lips had been caressing hers. He wasn't positive, but he could swear she had enjoyed it too. What had gone wrong? He dialed her number and silently cursed when her answering machine picked up. "Hi. Sorry, we're not home to take your call. If you'd like to leave a message for Lois or Lucy you can do so at the..." He hung up the phone.

She was probably interviewing Luthor right now. He wasn't sure what it was about the guy that rubbed him the wrong way. He had felt a twinge of jealousy when he had seen Luthor dancing with Lois. Ever since he had first spotted her across the ballroom, all he wanted to do was take her in his arms and never let go. She was magnificent. There was more to her than what met the eye and he could tell she was beginning to let some of her defenses down around him...The way she had hugged him earlier...He needed to see her. He got up from the bed and grabbed his coat, heading for the door. He wasn't sure what he would do or say, but he needed to talk to her.

Lois sat in an uncomfortable intimate setting with Lex Luthor. She was dressed in a black cocktail dress and him in a tux. She could tell Lex seemed to think more of their dinner than she did. He kept stealing glances and casual touches. She tried to remain business only with him but found it very difficult. She was treading on dangerous territory here. If she put him in his place the way she usually did, she could risk losing her chance at an exclusive with him. If she didn't stop him, he could perceive her as leading him on.

"Your parents died when you were fourteen, correct?" Lois asked.

"Why don't I have my office send you a biography?" he asked.

"Because I don't want the standard line. I want to know the real Lex Luthor. What makes you tick? What you want, what you strive for..."

"Pleasure. The pursuit of pleasure..." He pushed a strand of hair out of her face. "Does that surprise you?"

"I would have guessed you'd say 'power'," she remarked.

"Power is a means, not an end," he explained.

"But achieving power must give you pleasure," Lois deducted.

"Very good." He nodded, impressed.

Lois smiled, then turned back to the business at hand. "You took over your first company at the age of twenty-one, but there

were rumors that the buy-out was coerced.” She noticed Lex stiffen at that remark. There was a flicker of something behind his eyes. She briefly wondered if Clark may be right about him. “Is it true the Board of Directors was paid substantial, unreported fees?”

“Do you ever let your hair down?” he asked, amused. He reached across the table and took her hand in his. Lois watched him hesitantly. He was obviously flirting with her, but why? Was he trying to distract her? “All work and no play...your credo, Lois Lane?”

Lois took a breath. There was something not right here. She could feel it. “Lex, I think you have the wrong idea about this dinner.” She took her hand from his.

“I hope you don’t think we’re here merely because you’re a beautiful woman. That wouldn’t speak well for either of us.”

Lois cut him off, unwilling to listen to him any longer. It was clear she wasn’t going to get what she had come here for tonight. “I need to get going, Lex. I have a deadline.”

“No dessert?” he inquired.

“No thanks. I never have dessert,” she replied hurriedly.

“Really? You don’t know what you’re missing.” Lex smiled and stood up with her. “I’ll have Asabi bring the car around. Where to?”

“Uh, the Planet.” She held up her notebook and gave a weak smile. “Deadline.”

“Of course.” He smiled.

He didn’t know what had made him come to the Planet. Something about the place had called to him. Maybe he would get lucky and Lois would come here after her interview. He knew the chances of that happening were slim to none.

His super hearing picked up the hike in a very familiar heartbeat. He smiled to himself. It amazed him how Lois’ heartbeat had become something he seemed to tune into almost automatically. He x-rayed the outside of the Planet and watched as Lois stepped out of Lex Luthor’s limo. Luthor walked with Lois to the front door of the Planet. Clark tuned his super hearing into Lois and Luthor’s conversation as well.

He watched as Luthor took her hand and kissed it. “Thank you for a wonderful evening, my dear.”

“You’ve learned more about me than I have about you. That’s not how an interview is supposed to work...” she said ruefully.

“Well, we’re only scratching the surface.” Lex leaned in closer to her and she took a step back.

“I don’t believe this guy,” Clark muttered under her breath.

“I think you have the wrong impression of me, Lex,” Lois said slowly. Lex took another step toward her, leaning into her.

Clark continued to watch. She wasn’t going to kiss him, was she? What about her rules? “Don’t...” He watched in anticipation and sighed in relief when he saw Lois extend a hand to Luthor.

“Good night. As I said before. I have a deadline.” She stepped away from Luthor and pushed her way through the revolving doors of the Planet.

Clark waited for her to enter the newsroom, anticipating her wrath. He wasn’t completely alone. A few members of the maintenance crew and other reporters remained. Perry had already left. What would she do when she saw him? He really hadn’t thought this through at all.

The ding of the elevator announced her arrival. He nervously looked toward the elevator and saw Lois step off the elevator car. “What are you doing here?” the chill in her voice shook him to the bone.

“I...I, uh...” he wasn’t sure how to explain him being there.

“Were you following me?” Lois countered, crossing her arms across her chest.

“No. I was just kinda hoping I’d run into you...after your interview...” He stammered. How was it that her mere presence could send his mind into a jumble of chaos?

“Really? Well, you’ve got me here, Kent. What do you want?” Lois asked, eyes narrowing.

“I just wanted to say ...I’m sorry about earlier. I shouldn’t have done that. I was completely out of line.” Clark raked a hand through his hair nervously.

He was apologizing. Why? What exactly did he regret? Did he regret kissing her? Or did he regret what he had said after he had kissed her? She wasn’t sure. “You’re right. You were out of line.”

“I just wanted to say I’m sorry, Lois. I know we’ve just met, and I don’t want to give you the wrong impression of me. I don’t normally do stuff like that...”

“Then why did you?” Lois countered.

“I-I don’t know.” He shrugged. “I really don’t know.”

Lois eyed him critically. He was obviously apologetic. He wasn’t acting like he had gotten away with something. The look of sorrow in his eyes seemed to be genuine... “Okay.”

“Okay, what?” he asked, confused.

“Okay, I forgive you, but don’t let it happen again,” Lois warned, taking the seat at her desk. She was rewarded with a megawatt smile from him. She couldn’t help but smile back. What was it about this man that made her weak in the knees whenever he smiled at her?

“How’d your interview go?” he asked, cautiously.

“Terrible,” she muttered. “Lex spent the whole time dancing around my questions. It was weird. When I got into the questions about the rumors of coercion on the earlier buy-out of one of his companies...He got this look in his eyes...It was dark...kinda scary.”

“Just an uneasy look that made you get a...weird vibe from him?” Clark asked.

“Exactly.”

“That’s how I felt that night Lex caught us in his study....It got worse when he was giving his announcement about his space station...I thought it was a bit too convenient...His timing and all.”

“Well, I think I owe you an apology as well. You may be right about Lex.” She wore a look of determination on her face as she waved her notebook in front of him.

Lois drug herself through her front door at around midnight. Lucy unsurprisingly was still up. She had an array of textbooks spread out in front of her. “Hey, sis, what’s the excuse tonight?” Lucy teased. “No, don’t tell me another investigation...”

“Lucy, I’m investigating the sabotage at EPRAD....this could be the Pulitzer.”

Lucy rolled her eyes. “Everything could be the Pulitzer with you, Lois. When are you gonna quit focusing on your career so much? We get it. You’re the best...”

“It’s not just about being the best, Lucy. I want to make a difference.” Lois looked at her sister pleadingly. She wished she could get Lucy to understand the thrill she felt when she brought criminals to justice. “I wish I could make you understand, Luce... Understand what it means for me every time I help lock away criminals— whether it be no collar or white collar...I feel like I’m making a difference. I just hope you can find that kind of satisfaction too.” She began to brew some decaf in the coffee maker.

“I am going into law. I’m sure I’ll make a difference too, Lois, but I’m not going to let my job run my life the way you do. You have no life whatsoever. When was the last time you had a date?”

“Well...”

“And an interview doesn’t count,” Lucy interjected. “You’re so focused on your career you can’t see what’s right under your nose.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois asked defensively, pouring herself a cup of coffee.

“That partner of yours...” Lucy winked at her. “I’m pretty sure he likes you...”

Lois couldn’t hide the blush that crossed her cheeks. Ever since Lucy had met Clark at Lex Luthor’s ball she had teased her unmercifully about him. “So, what happened with your date the other night?”

Lucy smiled, laughing lightly at Lois’ obvious change of subject. “It was good. His name is Alexander. He’s actually a bit of a celebrity here in Metropolis.” Lucy sighed, “I really like him. He’s really sweet and he’s willing to take things slow.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “That’s translation for ‘if you won’t give it to them; they have women that will.’ I don’t know an Alexander. Are you sure he’s a celebrity?” She took a sip of her coffee.

“Oh, you probably know him as ‘Lex’...” Lucy explained.

Lois spat her coffee out. “Wh-What?” She couldn’t believe her ears.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, you’re, uh ...Dating...Lex?”

Lois nodded innocently. “Yeah. Lex Luthor. He’s really sweet.”

Lois started at her in disbelief. Less than three hours ago Lex Luthor had tried to hit on her during her interview with him. It had been obvious where he thought their dinner was going. He was dating her sister? “Lucy, are you sure about this?”

“Positive. He’s really supportive of my career in law too. He’s helping me get my foot in the door at the DA’s office.”

“Uh-huh.” Lois wasn’t sure what to say. “I-I think I’m going to go to bed...Long night, you know.”

“Good night, Lois,” Lucy called and turned her attention back to her textbooks.

The next day, Lois and Clark sat in Perry’s office as Perry read their article. Lois winced as she watched Perry mark up over half the article in red ink. He’s mad. She could tell he was trying to portray a calm he obviously didn’t feel at the moment. He laid the article and pen down on his desk and neatly folded his hands in front of him. “Let me see if I’ve got this right... You want me to publish a story that says Prometheus is being sabotaged; that the Space Transport Messenger exploded because instead of heating ion particles the ‘saboteurs’ and their ‘henchmen’ purposely cooled them.” Lois winced. Watching Perry use the finger quotes was not good. “And also the transport is carrying the habitation module to Space Station Prometheus, scheduled to be launched in less than three days is probably also going to ‘blow up.’ And all this information you got from interviewing Samuel Platt, a man who was banned from the scientific community, underwent psychiatric treatment and committed suicide—Oh, but he was ‘probably murdered.’ Does that about sum it up?”

“Perry...” Lois began.

Perry’s eyes bulged out as he threw a fist in the air. “Hard facts! That’s the name of the game, boys and girls. Now get out there and get me some!”

Lois and Clark didn’t need to be asked twice. They left his office hurriedly. Perry watched them leave and put a finger to his neck, checking his pulse. He sighed and pulled out a box of Paava Leaves from his desk drawer. He took a few leaves from the box and began to chew them.

“Well, gee, that went well,” Clark muttered sarcastically.

Lois rolled her eyes in frustration. “What we need is physical evidence.”

“So, what do you want to do?”

“I don’t know,” Lois said evasively.

Clark noticed a gleam in her eyes. “Yes, you do. Whatever you’re planning, I want in.”

Lois stammered, as she continued to deny his accusations. “I-I’m not planning anything. I’m just thinking aloud.”

“Uh-huh,” he countered, crossing his arms across his chest. “We’re partners; that means we work together on a lead.”

“What makes you think I’ve got a lead? I told you before, Clark, you’ve got a lot to learn about investigative journalism in Metropolis.”

“What is your problem, Lois?” Clark shot back at her. They seemed to constantly be going back and forth with one another. They liked each other; they didn’t. He didn’t understand the constant defensive act she put up.

“I don’t have any problem...”

“You have had a chip on your shoulder from the day I met you...”

“Well, I had an inexperienced, green-horned...”

“You resented the fact that Perry partnered...”

“...forced...”

“Snob,” Clark muttered, just loud enough for her to hear.

“Excuse me?” Lois countered in disbelief.

“You are a snob, Lois.”

“Well, coming from Mr. Green Jeans...that’s really...” Lois groaned in disgust.

“Is that how it’s always going to be, Lois? If I dare have an opinion against yours, then I’m not good enough?”

Lois glared at him. “You have a lot of nerve, Kent...I’ll give you that...”

Clark met her glare. “You push; I’ll push back.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “Whatever. I’m outta here. Don’t even think about following me.” She walked past Jimmy on her way to the elevator.

Jimmy caught the fire in her eyes. “Where are you going?”

“Nowhere!” she shot out.

“I’m coming too!” Jimmy called, following her.

Clark watched her leave. “Me too,” he muttered under her breath.

Lois and Jimmy snuck into EPRAD, careful to not draw attention to themselves. “Lois, what do you hope to find in here anyway?”

“I don’t know. Answers. Just take pictures of every inch of the wreck and we’ll have them analyzed later. Then, we’ll have to break into Baines’ office. I’m positive she’s lying about that report,” Lois explained in a hushed whisper.

“I don’t guess I need to point this out to you, but this is dangerous,” Jimmy said, pointing out the obvious.

“Fine. You go back to writing obituaries and I’ll grab the scoop of the century,” Lois shot back.

Jimmy sighed. “All right, I’m in.” He pulled out a pocket knife and worked on opening the door to the other half of the compound.

Lois watched in amazement as Jimmy opened the door without the alarm sounding. “You’re amazing. Where did you learn to do that?”

“Reform school.” Jimmy shrugged. “It was a bum rap.” He and Lois peered through the window of the hangar and saw the room was floodlit, inside and out. Scientists and armed guards were working on the transport shell. “Now what? We’ll never get inside.”

“We don’t have to,” Lois said. “I watched them load the Messenger wreckage onto the truck. The whole left side of the shell was bashed in—that one isn’t.” Realization dawned on her, “They’re working on a phony shell.”

Clark watched Lois and Jimmy from a distance, outside the gates of EPRAD. “What is she doing?” he muttered to himself. He had overheard her accusations toward Dr. Baines. He didn’t trust the woman either. He needed to get inside.

He focused his hearing on Dr. Baines’ office. “Your friend Lois Lane is here. I think it’s time we eliminated her.”

Clark tensed up. He had to get inside and warn Lois.

“I know Baines is lying. I never trusted her; not from the moment, I met her. The way she looked at Clark...very unprofessional,” Lois continued to explain as they watched the scene unfold before them.

Jimmy laughed. “Don’t worry, Lois. I’m sure he’s a bit distracted by someone else.”

“Like who?” Lois asked, curiously.

“Um...” Jimmy laughed lightly. “I’ll just let you figure it out on your own.”

“I really don’t care,” Lois explained hurriedly. “I mean, I’m focused on my career. I don’t have time to worry about dating.” She looked back towards Jimmy and found him on the ground unconscious. “Jimmy?” she knelt down next to him. A shadow crossed over her. She looked up and saw a large tattooed man standing over her.

He launched at her and she leaped out of his reach. She struggled to her feet and met him with a roundhouse kick in the abs. A few well-placed hits in the head, stomach and behind the knees sent the man to the ground in defeat.

“Very good, Lois.” Antoinette Baines approached her from behind, holding a gun. “These days a woman has to know self-defense.”

Clark lurked in the hallway of several offices in EPRAD. He had made his way down from the roof. He stopped in front of one of the offices labeled, “Dr. Antoinette Baines.”

“Bingo,” he said. He tried the knob of the door. It was open. He made his way inside the office and began to look around using his enhanced vision to help him find any sign of Platt’s report. A shredder by the desk caught his attention. He opened up the top and pulled out a large pile of shredded paper.

As super-speed, he began to piece the papers together until he was looking at a stack of papers put back together. The documents he was looking at were copies of a Platt’s report. The report Dr. Baines had denied ever receiving. The other documents were correspondences with LexCorp, discussing the materials needed in building the space station. It wasn’t enough evidence to nail Lex Luthor, but it was enough to bring Dr. Baines in.

His super hearing picked up the sound of Lois’ voice from below. “You won’t get away with this. Everyone at the Planet knows where I am.”

“What has she gotten herself into now?” he muttered. He folded the documents up and placed it in his wallet.

He made his way down to the hangar at super-speed. Without stopping to check the scene first, he knocked the door off its hinges to confront Dr. Baines. The barrel of several guns stared back at him when he entered the room.

“Mr. Kent, thank you for joining us.” Dr. Baines smiled at him, aiming the gun at him.

“Put down those guns or I’ll...I’ll...” He realized he had nothing to threaten them with; without revealing himself.

“Or you’ll what?” Dr. Baines countered.

Lois, Clark, and an unconscious Jimmy sat tied up, uncertain of their demise. Clark was playing with the padlock he had unlocked as Lois began a tirade. “I’m surrounded by amateurs. I still can’t believe you came barreling in here like some five hundred pound gorilla. If you really thought I was in trouble, why didn’t you call the police?”

“Look, I didn’t plan to...”

He was cut off by her before he could finish his sentence. “No, don’t tell me. I already know. You’re just like every other man in Metropolis. You’ve got this testosterone surplus that says, ‘I Can Do It Myself.’” She sighed, “Baines is going to kill us now. I don’t know why she hasn’t done it already.”

Clark lifted his hands up, trying to get her attention, but Lois was too busy rambling to notice. “Lois, I’ve somehow managed to...”

“...mess everything up? No kidding.”

That was it. “Now, hold on a minute here. I’m not the one who broke in here and...”

“What are you saying? That this is my fault? At least I had the guts to...” She stopped a moment, realizing what was coming out of her mouth. “What am I saying? This probably is my fault. I know that I sometimes do things...you know, jump into the pool without checking the water level?”

Clark couldn’t help but smile at that comment. That very type of attitude was what had gotten him caught with her. It was strange. The way they thought a lot alike at times.

“But, Clark, it’s the only way I know how to do it...to get the job done. To get the respect that I want...that I deserve.

Journalism is a man’s world...I’ve been clawing my way to the top for the longest time...” The tears were flowing down her cheeks freely as she opened herself up to him. Clark wasn’t sure what to say. He had never seen her so open with him before.

“Is that why you keep fighting me tooth and nail over everything?” he asked cautiously.

“Yeah. I guess I’m afraid of losing my edge,” she admitted guiltily.

“Lois, I don’t think you’re in any danger of losing your edge,” he replied.

“Oh, Clark, I’m so sorry...You didn’t deserve anything that I threw at you these past few days. I wouldn’t be surprised if you wanted Perry to partner you with someone else. I’m not a very good example. I mean, look at the mess I’ve gotten us into. Remember my three rules?”

He nodded. “Yeah?” he asked hesitantly.

“I’ve broken every one of them,” she remarked guiltily. “I seem to always get involved with my stories...”

“You slept with someone at work?” he asked in disbelief.

“Yeah.” She cringed.

“It wasn’t Jimmy, was it?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Lois scoffed. “It was a long time ago, when I first started at the Planet. Claude—he was French. He had an accent. I must have been in love with him—or thought I was. I was working on my first big scoop. Anyway, one night I told him about it and when I woke up the next morning he was gone. So was my story. He even won an award for that. Didn’t even thank me for my input.” She sighed. “Anyway, that’s my sad story.”

“I guess when you’re in love with someone...it doesn’t matter how smart you are or how many rules you’ve set for yourself. You’re still vulnerable.”

“We’re only human, I guess.” Lois sighed. “What difference does it make now? We’re all going to die.”

“Lois? What you said earlier, about respect? I just want you to know that everyone at the Daily Planet thinks you’re the best reporter they’ve worked with. Perry told me that the day I interviewed with him.”

“He did?” Lois was still crying.

“Yes.”

Dr. Baines entered the room, carrying her gun and a suitcase. “I hope you’ll forgive the accommodations, but then again, I’ve never been much of a hostess.” She disappeared behind one of the rocket shells and opened the valve in the rocket booster; a liquid spread toward another liquid substance, meeting in the sewer lines below. “Sorry you won’t be around to enjoy the rest of the evening, but accidents do happen.”

“Accidents?” Lois asked.

“Yes. You see, while dissecting the orbital maneuvering systems, the monomethyl hydrazine leaked and mixed with nitrogen tetroxide...Unfortunately, the blast killed three nosy reporters who didn’t bother to read the signs.” She pointed at the

'no trespassers' sign on the wall.

"Answer one question. Why?"

"It's very simple, Lois. Profit. Outer space is no different from any other new frontier. It will belong to those who get there first and seize the high ground."

Clark's eyes narrowed at the mention of 'high ground.' That phrase meant something... He watched as Dr. Baines turned to exit with the tattooed man. As soon as she closed the door he jumped up, freeing himself and Lois.

Lois looked up at him in surprise. "How did you...?"

"A missing link," he muttered as he freed Lois. They both rushed to Jimmy. He was still pretty groggy. "Come on!" Clark grabbed her by the waist and threw Jimmy over his shoulder. He threw the door open at the same time the mixture began to blow. The explosion was behind them as Clark flew them in the air and landed them a few feet away from the burning building. They landed face first in a large puddle of mud.

Lois looked back at the burning building in disbelief as chaos took over the scene. "What happened?"

"I'm not sure. I guess the force from the explosion must have carried us over here."

An explosion in the sky distracted her from thinking too much about it. "Look!"

In the sky, the helicopter Baines had escaped in had exploded. Jimmy stared at the scene in horror. "Do you think the explosion was an accident?"

"No, Jimmy, I think things went exactly as planned," Clark muttered as he stood up, brushing himself off.

MESSENGER SABOTAGED, SABOTEUR DIES IN FIERY EXPLOSION!

By: Lois Lane and Clark Kent

Special Contributions James Olsen

Jimmy stood, surrounded by several beautiful women from the secretarial pool. "Scared? No, not really. I was more concerned with the larger issue. Unless we got out of there alive the colonist launch could blow up as well."

Perry approached Lois. "I just spoke to the ground control at EPRAD. They went back over the colonist launch with a fine tooth comb... discovered the same coolant problem in the protective bands and fixed it. The launch is set for tomorrow evening. But it's a no go for you, Lois. No reporters allowed."

Lois wanted to argue but decided against it. "Another time then."

Perry nodded, not quite believing her, and then turned his attention to Clark. "Oh, Clark, you'll be pleased to know that Platt's widow and his daughter, Amy, is back on board."

"Thank you, sir," Clark replied.

"Ah, I told you already, Kent. Quit with the 'sir' business. It's either Perry or Chief. You hear?" Perry wagged his finger in Clark's face.

Clark laughed. "Yes, Chief."

"That's better." Perry smiled. "You two make quite a team. Your writing styles complement each other perfectly."

"I guess." Lois shrugged, not willing to show Perry she had enjoyed having a partner at all.

"We'll see how this one sells. We may have struck gold here."

Perry then turned to Lois, "See? Having a partner wasn't that bad..." He then laughed and before she could argue with him, he disappeared into his office.

Lois glared after Perry's retreating figure. "Oh, my God! He is just so..."

"What can you say?" Clark shrugged.

Lois nodded grudgingly. She then turned her attention to Clark. "Clark, I wanted to ... well, thank you for helping to get us out of there."

Clark smiled. "I'm glad it all worked out."

"One other thing... If you ever breathe a word of what I told you in there, I'll deny it and..."

Before she could finish her tirade he interrupted, "You can trust me, Lois." He smiled back at her.

"Right. I've heard that one before," she muttered.

"No, really. You can trust me." He brought his hand up to cup her cheek for a split second before removing it. "Why don't we have dinner? Celebrate surviving Dr. Baines' wrath?" he suggested boldly.

Lois looked at him suspiciously for a moment. "I don't know..." she began.

"It's dinner; not a proposal," he joked, trying to lighten the tension.

Lois smiled then nodded. "Okay. Dinner it is."

He couldn't hide the smile on his face. "I'll pick you up at eight?"

Lois was about to argue a moment then relented. "Sure. Why not?" She stared into his eyes for a moment before breaking the gaze. "I, um, I have to ... get some of this follow-up down to copy so..." she made random gestures with her hands as she backed away from him and headed towards her desk.

Clark watched her with a smile on his face. She had agreed to have dinner with him. This was definitely a good sign. He couldn't help it; he was entranced by Lois Lane. Everything about her enticed him. Things many people saw as her flaws were things he came to love about her. It was strange... this connection he felt whenever he was around her. It was frightening, but exciting all at the same time.

"You have a date with *who*?" Lucy practically squealed when Lois told her who she was getting ready to go to dinner with.

Lois sighed in defeat before repeating his name. "Clark... It's just dinner."

"Just dinner... yeah, sure. Do you want me to stay at Mom's tonight? I can find another place to be."

"Lucy, oh, my God!" Lois was horrified at the insinuation. It was just dinner.

"Yeah. How long has it been since you've had sex? Hmm... Dinner with a hot guy who *definitely* has a thing for you. Let's think here. Recipe for ... What exactly?"

Lois rolled her eyes as she began sifting through her closet for something to wear. She picked up a blue dress that came all the way to her ankles and had a modest neckline. Lucy shook her head and pulled out a black dress with a modest neckline but came up to her mid-thighs. "Sis, you've got legs; learn to use 'em."

"Lucy, I don't want to send the wrong message." She put the dress back and grabbed a green dress in her closet with a similar style.

"No way." Lucy put the dress back and pulled out a red dress that was full length as well but with a long slit.

"No." Lois put the dress back and pulled out a burgundy dress from the back of her closet. This one came up to her knees and still had a modest neckline.

"Okay. That one works," Lucy relented. "You should wear burgundy more often. It suits you."

"I cannot believe you are freaking out over this more than me." Lois rolled her eyes. "It's just dinner."

"With a hot guy," Lucy added. "Go ahead. Deny it. Deny you don't like him. Deny you didn't imagine tearing his clothes off him when you saw him at Lex's ball the other night. Deny it; I dare you."

Lois stammered, unsure of how to argue with her sister. Where had all that come from? "I-I..."

"You can't. I win; you lose. Game." Lucy smiled at her sister. "Deal with it, Lois, you have a date."

The realization began to sink in as Lois turned to face her reflection in the mirror. Date? She was going on a date with Clark?

“Hey, CK, here’s those ads for apartment listings you wanted.” Jimmy handed the paper to Clark.

“Thanks, Jimmy.”

“Another late night, huh?”

“No, I’ve got plans tonight.” Clark smiled.

“Smooth...” Jimmy winked at him. “Have fun. I’m taking Allison out to the movies tonight. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Sure thing, Jimmy,” Clark called after him.

Clark nervously stood outside of Lois’ door at precisely eight o’clock. He wasn’t sure what the proper etiquette was for this. He brought a bouquet of white roses with him. His dad had taught him you could never go wrong with white. They stood for purity. Yellow was friendship and red could be misinterpreted, but white always meant the same thing.

He knocked at her door. He heard her footsteps as she came to answer the door. She opened the door in one swift motion. “Hi, come on in.”

He took in the sight before him. Lois looked incredible. The burgundy dress she wore fit her perfectly. “You look...fantastic...” He handed her the roses. “These are for you,” he whispered quietly.

“Oh, Clark, you didn’t have to...”

“Hi, Clark. Nice flowers. Bye, Lois. Don’t wait up,” Lucy hollered as she pushed past Clark to leave.

“Where are you going?” Lois asked, noticing her sister’s formal attire for the first time.

“I have a date ...with Lex. Don’t wait up.”

Lois’ eyes narrowed as she watched her sister leave. Clark watched her leave and looked at Lois hesitantly, “Lex?” he asked. “Do I want to know?”

“My sister is dating Lex Luthor,” Lois remarked bitterly.

“What??” Clark couldn’t believe his ears.

“I know.” Lois rolled her eyes as she put the roses in a vase. She grabbed her purse and smiled hesitantly at him. “You ready?”

“Uh, yeah.” He opened the door for her and followed close behind.

“So, what made you want to become a reporter?” Clark asked cautiously as they waited for their food to arrive.

“Um, a lot of things,” Lois began cautiously. How much did she want to tell Clark about her family life? He already knew one of her most embarrassing secrets... She looked into his eyes; a quiver of delight went down her spine. She felt something ... There was something about him that made her defenses come down...no matter how hard she fought to keep them up. There was something different about Clark Kent. He was more than just a naïve farm boy. He seemed trustworthy and genuine; unlike the men she had surrounded herself with in the past.

“I know it’s not the most glamorous job, but I’ve always wanted to help people...to make a difference. That’s why I chose the investigative side of journalism. Plus I enjoy writing.” She smiled at him. It seemed like the most natural thing to do. “Uh, so, what about you?”

Her question was interrupted by the waiter bringing them their food. They took a few bites then turned their attention back to the conversation. “So, what made you decide to become a reporter?”

Clark was thoughtful for a moment. He wasn’t sure when exactly he had made the decision to become a reporter. He had always wanted to make a difference in the world with his gifts. He had enjoyed writing and meeting different people. A journalist had just seemed the way to go.

“I don’t know,” he began, “I guess it appealed to me because I could do a lot of the things I enjoy all at once. Meeting new people, hearing their stories and writing about them...It always

kinda appealed to me.”

“What made you choose the investigative side, though?”

Clark flashed her a smile. “I guess I’m a bit too curious for my own good.”

“Ah, common ground,” she joked lightly. “Who would have thought?”

“Yeah, I guess Perry was right, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess,” she said nonchalantly.

“So, truce?” he held up his wine glass.

She nodded and lifted her glass up as well. “Truce.”

Patience. That was the key. After hearing her history with Claude, Clark had decided to try and build a mutual trust between the two of them. There was a pull that he felt toward her. He couldn’t explain it. He found himself daydreaming what it would be like to kiss her again...to hold her in his arms.

He knew she didn’t think of him like that. They had just met. How was he supposed to explain that he felt like he was falling for her ever since she had stormed into Perry’s office during his first interview? Was it normal to become so consumed with someone based on a first encounter? Was this something else that made him different from everyone else? If they did get involved he would have to tell her everything.

They reached Lois’ door and she began to unlock the many locks on her front door. How many locks did she need on one door? “Well, we’re here,” she remarked nervously. “Uh, thanks for dinner, Clark,” she began shyly. “It was nice. I think after everything that’s happened the past few days...”

“...we both needed the distraction,” Clark finished for her.

“Uh, yeah,” Lois replied, slightly surprised.

He had done it again. He had finished her thought for her. He seemed to be able to read what she was thinking so clearly. Was this another power he hadn’t known existed yet?

“Uh, I had a good time too, Lois.” They stood in an awkward silence; neither sure of what to do.

‘Don’t push,’ his mind pleaded with him. ‘Just take it slow.’

He wanted to kiss her more than anything right now. The memory of their earlier kiss was seared into his mind; the way her body had melted against his and surrendered to his touch. A strand of hair fell across her face and he reached out to tuck it behind her ear. There was that spark again. It was a natural gesture. It seemed almost second nature. Her heart was hammering at his touch. She was as nervous as he was. He took a deep breath and leaned in closer.

Oh, my God, he’s going to kiss me. Do I want him to kiss me? Her heart was pounding in her chest as all nerves stood on edge, uncertain of what was to come. Their kiss from earlier had been incredible, but she wasn’t expecting it. Now she was. She’d be able to savor it more.

She was disappointed when he kissed her lightly on the cheek. “Good night, Lois.” He whispered, cupping her cheek lightly with his hand.

She couldn’t help but smile at the gesture. It was just so... Clark. She couldn’t tell if she felt relieved or disappointed. He hadn’t kissed her on the mouth, but he had kissed her. Maybe he was as nervous as she was? What business did they have kissing one another? They’d just met. Did she really want to deal with another Claude situation?

She reluctantly stepped into her apartment and closed the door behind her. She couldn’t help but lean against the door frame, “Wow...” she smiled to herself.

“Lois!?” Lucy screamed in surprise.

Lois looked towards her living room and saw her sister slightly disheveled with Lex. She narrowed her eyes as she marched towards them. “Out!” she pointed towards the door.

“Lois...” Lucy admonished.

“Don’t ‘Lois’ me,” Lois snapped at Lucy. She then turned to Lex. “You, Mr. Luthor, need to leave.” She proceeded to open the door for him.

“With all due respect, Ms. Lane, I don’t believe that’s your call,” Lex began.

“I believe it is. Should we call the landlord? Ask him what the laws are on trespassing?”

“Trespassing? Lois, come on…” Lucy argued.

Lex looked at Lois amused. “Ms. Lane, have I done something to offend you?”

“Try your existence.” She narrowed her eyes at him. “Get your paws off my kid sister and get out of my apartment or I will call the police. You don’t want a scene, do you, Lex?” she challenged.

“No, of course not.” He turned to Lucy and kissed her good night. “Till we meet again, my dear.” He then left. Lois rewarded him with the slam of the door right behind him.

“Good riddance!” she muttered.

“What the hell has gotten into you??” Lucy screamed.

“Me?? You’re the one that’s…”

“Having a little fun?? Wow, please rescue me, Lois. Lex was kissing me…”

“I don’t trust him.”

“Since when?”

“Since…just…forget it…I don’t trust him and I don’t want you seeing him anymore, Lucy.” Lois crossed her arms over her chest.

“Oh, gee, thanks…Last time I looked dad had gray hair,” Lucy snapped sarcastically.

“Oh, don’t pull that with me, Lucy.”

“Why not? You’re acting like him.”

“I am *nothing* like daddy. Don’t you dare ….”

“Right,” Lucy shot back sarcastically. She was about to say more but stopped herself. She stared Lois down with anger. “I’m going to bed,” she said suddenly. “Don’t talk to me,” she called over her shoulder, opening the door to the spare bedroom and slamming it behind her.

“Great,” Lois muttered to herself, slinking down to the couch, unsure of what to do about the situation with Lucy.

Clark leaned against the door frame for a minute. He had wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her senseless, but something had stopped him. The look of apprehension in her eyes. He knew she wouldn’t have fought it, but were they ready to move things this quickly?

“Wow…” he murmured under his breath. He had fallen for her. He knew it, but he wasn’t sure how she felt towards him. They had agreed to a truce. Ever since he had started at the Planet they had been fighting like cats and dogs. They needed to develop a more solid ground between one another, before trying to pursue a relationship. Patience. He needed patience. He sighed inwardly. How could he be so moved from just spending time with her?

He made his way down the hall and headed towards the alley behind her apartment building. He noticed a limo parked out back. It was strange to see a limo on this side of town, but stranger things had happened. He had told his folks he’d be stopping by tonight to go over costume designs. He ricocheted himself into the sky a few minutes before Lex Luthor left Lois Lane’s apartment.

“I’m still not so sure about this costume business,” Jonathan muttered. Clark and Martha had ignored his protests and moved forth with their plan. He was worried about someone recognizing his son on the six o’clock news. If someone recognized him, Clark wouldn’t be able to live any kind of a normal life.

“It’ll work. It has to,” Clark argued.

“Well, I have several different styles laid out on the bed. Go try ‘em on. See what you think. Then, we’ll go from there,” Martha said.

“Doesn’t anyone listen to me anymore?” Jonathan asked.

“Yes, Jonathan, but I don’t necessarily agree.” Martha smiled at her husband before heading upstairs to check on Clark.

Jonathan couldn’t help but smile at the comment. Leave it to Martha.

Clark had tried on about a dozen different costumes. All colorful spandex. None so far had kept his interest. He was now standing in the bathroom, looking down at himself skeptically. He was wearing a costume of red, yellow, and blue. It was mostly a blue spandex outfit with red briefs over them. It had a red cape attached and a yellow belt around the waist. He wore red boots to match the briefs and cape.

“What about that one?” Martha called out to him, exhausted.

“I don’t know, Mom… I mean, it’s certainly… colorful,” he said, stepping out of the bathroom. His mom lay on her bed, exhausted, surrounded by the rejected costume ideas. She stood up to get a better look at him.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“Well, one thing’s for sure; no one’s gonna be looking at your face,” she teased.

“MOM!!” He was mortified. He couldn’t believe she had just said that.

She laughed. “Well, they don’t call them tights for nothing.” She wrapped an arm around him and stared at his reflection a moment. “I don’t know… something’s missing. Something…” She moved toward the bed and pulled out an old trunk from beneath the bed. She opened the trunk and pulled out a blue baby blanket, holding it close to her.

“I’d forgotten about that.” Clark smiled.

“Yeah. The baby blanket we found you in so long ago.” She put the blanket back down and reached into the trunk once more. “And this…” she pulled out an ‘S’ shield emblem.

“That could work.” He nodded nostalgically. He went to go change out of the suit so Martha could sew the ‘S’ on the suit. Once she was done he donned the suit once more.

“Your parents would have been so proud of you. We sure are.” Martha hugged him.

“Thanks, Mom.” He hugged her back. He turned around and looked at himself in the mirror more critically. “I’m still not so sure about the cape.”

“Really? I love it. It’ll look grand when you’re flying.”

“I don’t know.” Clark sighed. “You’re sure I won’t look stupid?” he asked.

“Of course not.” Martha chuckled. “Now what are you going to do about your face?”

“What about my face?” he asked skeptically.

“Well, how are you going to keep people from recognizing you?”

“Well, people have only seen Clark Kent with glasses. I just won’t wear glasses when I’m in disguise.”

Jonathan came in the room to look at Clark. “That’s my boy.” He smiled.

“It’s perfect,” Martha agreed. “Let me write down these measurements so I can get some spares made.”

Clark groaned as his mother proceeded to poke and prod at him once more, making notes of all the measurements needed to make backup suits.

Lex Luthor angrily slammed the door to his penthouse; slamming inanimate objects in his wake as he made himself a drink. The nerve of that woman. He knew Lois Lane would have proven to be a far more skillful adversary than he had encountered before, but for her to humiliate him like that… She had gotten too close to the truth with Prometheus. He was afraid he would have to get rid of her, but he was relieved when he had been able to sidetrack her during their interview. She had obviously been

rattled by his forwardness.

He had done some checking on Lois Lane when she had begun persistently calling his secretaries for an exclusive interview with him. She had apparently not had the best of luck with men. Such a pity, a beautiful creature such as herself... what a waste. Once he had discovered the rumors that had flown around the office pool at the Daily Planet about Lois Lane being frigid... Well, his interest in her had severely declined.

If she couldn't please a man then what good was she? It was amusing to tease her, though. Make her think she would get what she wanted then treat her as if she were his date. Her reaction had been exactly what he had wanted.

At first, he thought Lucy would become just another companion, but her morals were much more solid it seemed than Lois Lane's. She had insisted on waiting to consummate their relationship. When he had discovered why, he, of course, being the gentleman, had agreed. Apparently, she was afraid of repeating her sister and her mother's mistakes.

Lucy was quite entertaining and very bright. She would come in handy once he was able to place her in the mayor's office. A few missing documents here. An inspection waived there. Now that he knew what bothered his relationship with Lucy was to Lois Lane he would make sure they became inseparable. She was Lois Lane's weakness. They always said 'keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.' He would do just that.

Clark looked around the apartment; it was a disaster. The walls were stained and discolored, the carpet was torn, the windows were filthy. If his mother had seen this place she would have fainted. The landlord, Floyd, continued to show him around as Clark looked around skeptically.

"Clinton Street is the quietest area in Metropolis. I own a couple of different buildings. This is the only one I have that doesn't get any complaints. You married?"

"No."

"Girlfriend?"

Clark sighed at that question. "No."

"Boyfriend?" Floyd ventured. Clark did a double take giving the pudgy man a once over along with a dubious look. "Me? I mind my own business. Where you from?"

"Kansas." He opened one of the kitchen cabinets only to have it break off. He looked at Floyd skeptically.

"Few screws is all." Clark turned on the kitchen faucet and brownish-orange water came out. He looked at Floyd once more. "Minerals. Good for the liver." Clark walked over to the balcony with Floyd in tow. "Nice view. You see out, no one sees in. Walk around in the buff. I do."

Clark looked at the man skeptically, shaking his head to rid himself of the mental image that had just invaded his mind. He needed a place and this looked to be the best he could get. "How much?"

"Nine-fifty."

"Nine hundred and fifty dollars? Are you out of your mind?" Clark asked, shocked.

"Hey, you want cheap. Go back to Iowa."

"Kansas," Clark corrected. He knew better. His dad had taught him better. "This place needs repairs..."

"Okay okay...Nine even?"

"Fine, but deduct the cost of whatever materials it takes to get this place in a livable condition."

"Done."

"So, when can I move in?" Clark asked.

"Soon as the check clears." Floyd grinned.

Clark laughed inwardly. The man was as smarmy as they came. He pulled out his checkbook and began to write the check. He handed it to Floyd who took it eagerly. "I'll have extra keys made. Just make me a copy of all the receipts and I'll knock it off

next month's rent."

"Great." Clark smiled.

"Welcome home." Floyd grinned, shaking Clark's hand.

Home. It felt good to hear that word. He looked around. This place definitely needed repairs, but once they were done he was sure the place would feel like home. Metropolis felt good to him. He felt a pull towards this city. He wasn't sure if it was the same pull he felt towards Lois, but he really didn't care. He was making himself a home. He had a job he loved; was starting to make friends and hopefully...one day...he could convince Lois to go out with him as more than just a friend.

Later that evening he sat with his parents in the living room of the farmhouse. The launch of the space shuttle was on television and they all watched eagerly. Clark couldn't help but feel a rush of relief that everything seemed to be coming together. A few days ago both he and Lois had feared whether the dream of Prometheus would even become a reality. Now here he was watching the space shuttle launch the first colonists into space.

"The colonists are just about all on board," Jonathan noted.

"We are T minus three minutes. All technical personnel should deplane at this time," the public affairs officer announced.

The module appeared to be ready for takeoff. They watched in anticipation. "Historic occasion," Jonathan mused. "Remember when you were little, Clark? We saw the moon landing?"

"How could I forget? It was the first time you guys let me stay up past my bedtime." Clark smiled at the memory.

Inside the habitation module, Lois found a seat in a dark corner. She began to settle herself in; strapping herself in for the launch. This was it. The exclusive of a lifetime. She waited patiently for the launch sequence to commence. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the door to the room open. She began to panic, fearing she had been caught, but the man that entered the room was far too preoccupied. He placed a device on the wall then left before he could notice her presence.

Lois unstrapped herself and stood up. She walked over to the device the man had placed in the room. "Oh, my God!" she gasped. The digital timer on the wall read one minute and thirty seconds. It was counting backward along with the announcer. She hurried over to the door and began to bang on it insistently. "It's a bomb! There's a bomb on the transport! Somebody help!"

"One minute and counting..." the announcer read off.

Back at the Kent farmhouse, the Kents watched the boosters ignite. "There she blows," Jonathan mused.

Clark looked up from the television with a faraway look on his face. Martha noticed the gesture. "What's wrong, Clark?"

"Something's wrong," he said grimly, getting up to change into his suit.

"What do you mean? Did you hear something?" Jonathan asked in concern.

"No. I sensed it...It's hard to explain."

Lois was desperate. She grabbed her purse and pulled out her Swiss Army Knife. She found a cabinet on the wall and tore off the casing. Underneath the plastic casing were a million different colored wires. "I have to warn them..." she muttered to herself. "Which one?" She began slashing the wires with her knife, unsure of what effect she would have on the space shuttle.

"Thirty seconds and counting..." the officer read off.

A technician waved at the officer. "Sir, we have a circuit failure in the main panel."

The officer nodded. "Due to a mechanical failure, we have suspended countdown at twenty-nine seconds. We will advise."

Jonathan and Martha looked up at Clark when he reappeared fully dressed in his disguise. “How did you know?” Martha asked in disbelief.

“I don’t know. I gotta go.” Clark sped out of the farmhouse at super-speed.

Outside of EPRAD, hundreds of spectators stood watching the launch. A red and blue blur passed over them.

“What the hell is that?” a man asked.

“Is it a bird?” another asked.

“Is it a plane?” someone else asked.

A man with a pair of binoculars shook his head. “Nope. Just some guy in a pair of tights and a cape.”

The crowd turned on him, throwing random items at him. “Oh, come on.”

The launch commander and other personnel gathered around the monitors as they tried to figure out what had gone wrong. They watched in amazement as Clark made his way down the corridors and into the main panel room where Lois had found the bomb.

“Are we scrubbing the mission?” the public affairs officer asked the commander.

Clark scanned the area, searching for Lois. He couldn’t explain it, but he knew she was here...and in danger. “Lois?” he whispered. He was about to call out to her once more when he looked down at his outfit. That probably wouldn’t be the smartest thing to do.

He picked up the sound of her voice from the Control Panel Room. “Help! Somebody! There’s a bomb! Please!”

He made his way to the door and pried it open. Lois looked towards the door; not really getting a good look at him. “Oh, thank God! We’ve got to get the bomb squad down here and...” she stopped when she noticed his attire.

He was slightly amused by her reaction but didn’t waste any time dwelling on that. He moved towards the bomb and grabbed it off the wall. “Hey, get away from that! Didn’t you hear me? I said that’s a bomb! What kind of lunatic...” She stopped when he put the bomb in his mouth and swallowed it.

The explosive exploded inside him, causing him to burp. “Excuse me,” he said.

Lois stared at him a moment. “What the hell are you?” she asked in disbelief.

All he could do in response was smile. Before he could say anything several colonists appeared in the doorway. Among them were Mrs. Platt and her daughter, Amy. Clark turned to face them.

The head colonist took a step inside and surveyed the damage. He looked from the torn circuitry of the panel to Superman. He appeared to have drawn the wrong conclusion, so Lois interjected, still stunned, “There there was ...a bomb.” She pointed at Clark. “He...he ate it.”

The colonists all appeared to be stunned by the news. Amy wheeled herself up to Clark, unafraid. He couldn’t help but smile at the young girl. The dream of Prometheus had been Dr. Platt’s dream for her. He knelt down to her level. “Hi.”

“Hi,” she responded. “I like your costume.”

“Thank you. My mother made it for me.” He smiled back at her. “What’s your name?” he asked, trying to keep up the pretense that he hadn’t met her before.

“Amy. Amy Platt. Who are you?”

Clark wasn’t sure what to tell her. He hadn’t really come up with a name for himself yet. “I’m...a friend.”

“Can you really fly?”

He nodded. “Yes, I can.”

“Can you teach me?”

“Not to fly.” He winked at her. “But once this lab is operational...walk...that’s very possible.”

The public address speaker crackled. The booster rockets were turning off. “Attention, colonists. The mission has been scrubbed. Prepare to disembark.”

The colonists all voiced their disappointment. The head colonist sighed, “It’s over.”

Lois didn’t understand. “Why?”

“Once the thrusters have been fired they have to be replaced,” Mrs. Platt explained.

“We’ll lose our launch window. We just have to forget about Space Station Prometheus,” the head colonist said in despair.

“No, you don’t. There’s nothing wrong with this transport or the station. You only need to get there,” Clark reasoned aloud.

“How are they supposed to do that?” Lois asked, exasperated.

“Easy. I’ll give them a boost,” Clark replied.

A few minutes later with Lois safely off the transport, he lifted it into the air and flew it into space. He returned shortly afterward to find Lois staring at the sky in disbelief. He found it amusing, the way she seemed speechless in his presence. He hadn’t seen her this speechless since...ever.

“Can I give you a lift?”

“What?” she asked, uncertainly.

“A lift.” He pointed upward.

“Uh, sure...” she said hesitantly.

“Where to?” he asked.

“The Daily Planet?”

He nodded and lifted her up in his arms. She clung to his neck as they ricocheted upward.

Perry walked through the newsroom in disbelief as Jimmy relayed the story to him. “And then this guy came in and...and he flew, Chief. He flew the transport up to the space station.” At Perry’s look, he added, “Lois was there.”

“A man who flies? I still don’t believe it,” Perry scoffed.

“But Chief, it’s all over the TV!”

“Don’t believe everything you see on TV, Jimmy.” Perry looked at the printouts in his hand for a moment. “I’ll tell you one thing, though, whoever pulled this hoax off is...” he stopped. Lois was outside the window of the newsroom...being carried by a man in a cape. Perry and the rest of the newsroom watched in awe as Clark flew in the newsroom with Lois and deposited her by her desk. Lois was still speechless. He had never seen anything like it in his life. “Great shades of Elvis!”

Cat watched in envy and awe as Lois stared, star-struck at the man in the red and blue suit. “I see it, but I don’t believe it.”

“What? A man who flies?” one of her co-workers asked.

“No, Lois Lane, finally...literally...swept off her feet. Too bad he’s an alien.”

Lois was dumbstruck. She had flown in the newsroom with this...man. This incredible man that had just saved her life. This was an incredible story. The story. She had to get the exclusive. “Uh, I think considering the fact that I saw you first you owe me an exclusive...”

“Is that a rule?” he asked, smiling back at her.

She was a bit flabbergasted. “Well, um, no, but...I’d appreciate it...very much,” she said.

He nodded and then began to float towards the window, preparing himself to take off once more. “Wait a minute; how do I find you?”

“I’ll be around,” he called over his shoulder.

“Smooth...” Jimmy called out. “Real smooth.”

Cat made her way up to Lois, who was still slightly dazed from her encounter with the flying man. “Did you find out what the ‘S’ stands for?”

“Super...” She wasn’t quite registering Cat’s question. Then it finally dawned on her. She didn’t even get his name. Maybe he didn’t have one? Super...That seemed to fit. His feats that day had

been extraordinary...super. "Superman," she whispered. "Superman..." she repeated.

Everyone seemed to be in shock for a moment before Perry hollered throughout the newsroom, "What the hell is this, the Betty Crocker bake-off? Get back to work! We've got a newspaper to run!"

Everyone scurried back to life as they continued what they had been doing before the intrusion of Superman into the newsroom.

A few hours later, Clark stood outside Lex Luthor's penthouse, fully donned in his Superman persona. He had spent most of the evening answering calls for help and making his debut as 'a friend to help.' Luckily, he hadn't had any bad experiences with anyone yet. He hoped everyone understood he was here to help and nothing more. He wouldn't want his intentions to come into question.

Lex turned around to face him. This was it. He had to remain in control. 'Seize the high ground.' The phrase had been running in his mind for the last few days. Lex Luthor had recited those words to him and Lois before; then Dr. Baines recited the exact phrase a few moments before her death. He was positive Lex Luthor had planned for her helicopter to explode. He was pretty sure he had also been behind the explosive device on the transport this evening as well.

Lex stood and began to clap as he stepped forward to face him. "An astonishing debut, Superman."

The name caught him off guard. "Super..."

Lex smiled at having a slight upper-hand on him. "Haven't you heard? That's what they're calling you. It's international honor. To what do I owe this honor?"

He took a step towards Lex. "I came to tell you that I know who you are...who you *really* are. I suppose on the face it was a good plan. Destroy Prometheus so you could put up your own space station in its place. Then not only would you make billions from the patents of vaccines developed, but you'd also be the supposed savior of the space program." The blood was in the water. He had thrown down the gauntlet.

If Lex was disturbed by his accusation he didn't show it. It didn't matter. He wasn't here for recognition; he was here to warn him...to make him aware that he hadn't fooled everyone. "A very interesting theory, Superman, but that's all it is."

"And profits aside, you are also responsible for the deaths of at least three people. Commander Laderman, Dr. Samuel Platt, Dr. Baines..." He narrowed his eyes at Luthor. "Those probably aren't the only skeletons in your closet."

"So, you become both my judge and executioner?" Luthor challenged.

"Like any other citizen of the planet, I must obey the law. I am not above it. You, it seems, believe you are."

Lex smiled back at him. "I hold a certain ...position in this city."

"Yes, and there is nothing that would please me more than to see you dethroned and thrown behind bars like any other common criminal. That day will come."

"I trust not. But then, as they say...let the games begin," Lex challenged.

He nodded at Luthor, then turned away. He began to float upward, then stopped a moment. "Oh, one other thing. If you ever need to find me, all you have to do is look up." He knew that knowledge would drive Luthor crazy. He had bragged about enjoying the fact that everyone had to look up to see him; now Luthor had to look up to see Clark.

He ricocheted himself into the sky and headed back to the Planet. He needed to change first, but afterwards he was looking forward to seeing Lois. He needed to see how his debut as Superman had been taken by the public...especially Lois.

Even for the evening time, the newsroom was a bustle of activity as reporters scurried about, "What's going on?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Clark! Where have you been?" Lois practically pounced on him.

"Around," he replied.

"Didn't you hear what happened?"

"I saw there was a problem with the launch, but everything seemed to have fixed itself. What happened?" he asked.

"Clark, I was there. I snuck into the launch and..."

"You snuck in there? How were you expecting to get back?"

Lois narrowed her eyes at him. He was pointing out the holes in her plan when she was trying to tell him what had happened. "I didn't say my plan was perfect," she harrumphed. "Anyway, this guy came into the control panel room...which is where I was ... and he put a bomb in there."

"Really?" Clark tried to sound surprised.

"Yes, really. And I wasn't sure what to do. I couldn't get anyone's attention so I began cutting wires to try and make someone notice something was wrong....That's when he showed up."

"Who?"

"Superman," she sighed dreamily.

"Superman?" he asked incredulously. He wasn't sure about the name. "The guy's name is Superman?"

She looked up at him a little guiltily. "No. I don't know what his name is, but it just kinda came to me. You know he's able to do all these super things..." She sighed. "He ATE the bomb, Clark."

"You don't say..." he said, trying to sound as surprised as he could. It was strange to listen to Lois recite her own version of the events.

"Yes. Then he lifted up the space station as if it didn't weigh more than this piece of paper." She held up a printout to illustrate her point. "I have never seen anything like it in my life..."

"Sounds like he made quite an impression on you," Clark remarked with a smile.

"The guy flew me into the newsroom, Clark. It's hard NOT to have an impression made on you after that." Lois pointed out.

Clark laughed, "True."

Jimmy approached them with a smile on his face. "Check these out, Lois. I just picked them up from the photo lab. What do you think?"

Lois looked at the photo layouts in front of her a moment. "Jimmy, I don't think Perry's gonna use any of these. They're all out of focus," Lois remarked apologetically.

"None of them?" he asked in disbelief.

She shook her head in sympathy. "I'm sorry, Jimmy."

"Aw, man..." he took a seat by her and Clark, crossing his arms across his chest in defeat. "I thought I'd finally be able to break out of this cycle as the office grunt," He muttered.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy," she said. "Maybe you'll get a better shot next time."

"Yeah right. Like that's gonna happen. What are the chances that Superman's gonna show his face back in the newsroom?"

"You never know," Clark said, patting the young man's shoulder.

Jimmy nodded and headed towards his desk in despair. "Poor guy" Lois sighed, turning her computer off and grabbing her coat. "Come on," she said to Clark, waiting for him to get the hint.

"Where are we going?"

"You are going to walk me home." Lois turned to him and laughed when she saw his stunned look. "You're a good friend, Clark...After everything we've dealt with the last few days... I'd like to think we're friends, right? I mean, we did call a truce, right?"

"Uh, yeah." He was surprised by her openness. Maybe the appearance of Superman had softened her up a bit.

They discussed the launch and the arrival of Superman to Metropolis. Lois seemed quite taken by his alter ego. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. He really cared about her. She was the first thing he thought of when he woke up in the morning and the last thing he thought of before falling asleep. He was definitely falling for her. He wasn't sure how she felt towards him. He was determined to build a solid foundation of trust between them before trying to ask her out again.

"Hi, Lucy," Lois called when she opened her door.

"Don't talk to me," Lucy shot back, still angry with Lois for what happened the night before.

Lois looked at Clark. "See what I mean? I almost get blown up and she's still holding a grudge."

"Shouldn't have been there, to begin with," Lucy called back. "And don't talk about me like I'm not in the room."

"Hi, Lucy." Clark waved, hoping Lucy's dark mood would soften a bit.

Lucy looked up for a brief moment and smiled at Clark. "Hi." She then turned her attention back to the courtroom law book she was studying.

Lois ignored her sister. "Do you want some coffee?" she offered.

"Uh, sure." Clark nodded, a bit uncomfortable with the obvious tension in the room between Lois and Lucy. He listened as Lois began banging pots around in the kitchen, preparing to make the coffee. He wondered a moment if she was making the extra noise on purpose.

He watched Lucy anxiously. She was counting under her breath until a large bang came from the kitchen. She cursed under her breath and slammed her book down. "How am I supposed to study with you making all this noise?" she snapped at Lois.

"There's a thing called a library," Lois shot back.

"You are unbelievable!" Lucy muttered, grabbing her books and carrying them into her room. She slammed the door behind her.

Clark noticed Lois watching Lucy's door wistfully then she turned her attention back to the coffee maker in front of her. "How do you like your coffee?" she asked.

The rest of the evening seemed to drag on. The conversation between them seemed to be everything but what had just happened. Lois was unwilling to talk about Lucy. She seemed determined to go after Lex Luthor and expose him as a criminal... even more so than before. He wasn't sure exactly what had happened between the two of them to make them so hostile to one another but whatever it was, it was big.

It was getting late and he knew he should probably leave, but he just couldn't. Lois seemed very vulnerable right now and he didn't want to leave her alone like this. "What a slime ball!" She threw one of her throw pillows to the floor. "Not only does he start dating my sister...but he has the nerve to try and hit on me during my interview with him....I didn't know they were dating then, but boy if I had...I would have creamed him. I don't care who the hell he is..." Clark watched amused as Lois paced around the living room angrily as she rambled on.

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I don't trust him either. I think there's more to the whole Prometheus thing than what met the eye," Clark remarked.

"I know." Lois nodded. "I'm sorry I brushed your warning about Lex off so quickly. I guess I learned my lesson, huh?" She glanced at Lucy's door, shaking her head. "I don't know what I'm gonna do."

"You and Lucy seem...close."

"We are." Lois smiled weakly. "When we're not fighting."

"Are you going to be okay?" he asked.

"Yeah." She nodded. "I'll be fine."

He grabbed a piece of paper and pulled out a pen. "This is my

new number. If you need to talk. Just call me...doesn't matter what time."

Lois smiled weakly at him. "Thanks, Clark."

"Goodnight." He gave her a peck on the cheek and left before she could react.

Lois sat awake for a few hours, staring at the blank screen of the television in front of her. Her fight with Lucy was wearing on her mind, along with her mixed feelings towards Clark. He was a great guy; anyone could see that. She definitely felt something for him, but she had also felt something when Superman had held her in his arms. She knew it was ridiculous to dream like this. He probably hadn't thought twice about flying her to the Planet.

Flown...They had flown into the newsroom. She had been so stunned; she hardly had been able to string two sentences together. Superman probably thought she was the biggest moron on the planet. Where did he come from? Were there more like him? Was he seeing anyone?

She snorted at that last thought. "Yeah, right, Lois..." she muttered to herself. He probably barely even noticed her. He probably wouldn't even remember her name. Had she given him her name? She couldn't remember...When they had been flying he seemed a bit nervous too. Was he not used to carrying someone with him while he flew? Or did she have an effect on him? He certainly had had an effect on her? How could he not? It was the most romantic thing...to be literally flown into the newsroom like that.

He made her weak in the knees. Nobody made her weak in the knees...Well, except for Clark...when he had kissed her...and what a kiss that had been. If she was perfectly honest with herself, he made her weak in the knees every time he smiled at her. "What am I gonna do?" she asked herself aloud. In the last week, she had had three men had come into her life. Lex Luthor had been charming and debonair, but he hid behind a mask of deception. There was more to him; she was sure of. He had tried to pursue her while dating her sister...What kind of man does that?

Then there was Clark. He was naive, charming, educated, and surprisingly trustworthy. He made her weak in the knees whenever he smiled at her and it scared her to death. He was gorgeous. She couldn't deny the feeling of relief she felt when she had watched him turn Cat down the other day. Cat never got turned down by any man.

When he had asked her to dinner she had been nervous. Lucy had insisted it was a date, but it hadn't felt like one. She had just been enjoying his company, and he had kissed her on the cheek. He had been the perfect gentleman, not pushing her or reading too much into their having dinner with one another...

She had wanted more. She had wanted him to kiss her...the same way he had kissed her in the middle of the newsroom. She couldn't deny the disappointment she had felt when he had only left her with a peck on the cheek. She wasn't sure what she felt for him, but she knew she was falling for him. How was that possible? They had just met and here she was dreaming about kissing him?

Of course, she also was daydreaming about kissing Superman too. What did that say about her? She was dreaming of being with more than one man? How did that work? What was wrong with her? She hated people who were unfaithful, yet here she was daydreaming about two different men. Not that she was being unfaithful...She wasn't in a relationship with either man. Not that she didn't want to be...or did she?

What was happening to her? She had gone from professional career woman to mush in a matter of a few days. "I just need some sleep," she muttered to herself. "It's just been a rough few days. I'm a professional; I don't have time to worry about men."

Jason Trask was a man on a mission. His sources had brought him to Metropolis after the situation at EPRAD. He had told his

colleagues for years that Earth was under attack and no one believed him. Now, this Superman as he called himself had made his first move. He had been contacted by Lex Luthor shortly after arriving in Metropolis. The man obviously didn't realize who he was dealing with; thinking he could order him around? "I want to make sure we're on the same page, Mr. Luthor. I find this Superman to be a threat to mankind. I am not looking to study him; I want to kill him!" he yelled into the phone in outrage.

"I understand that, Mr. Trask, but please understand where I'm coming from. I want to find out how this Superman has found it under his own power the ability to fly a spacecraft into outer space. I want his body brought to me. You can kill him however you like as long as I'm able to study him afterwards. Are we clear?" Lex asked.

"Perfectly," Trask spat before hanging up the phone. He then turned to his assistant. "We need to get moving. Superman could be planning his attack as we speak."

"Of course, Mr. Trask, but don't you think we should..."

"Who's in charge around here: you or me?" Trask sneered.

"Uh, you, sir."

"That's what I thought."

The next morning the Daily Planet was a bustle of activity. Reporters were scurrying about, chasing after their next lead. Lois made her way to the coffee pot and poured herself a cup. She discreetly stole a glance at her partner, who was already hard at work. She took a sip of her coffee savoring the taste as she watched him from a safe distance.

"Wow, that must be some coffee; you're practically drooling, Lois," Cat sneered, walking up from behind her. She caught the direction Lois had been looking and smiled, unable to resist teasing her. "Or are you drooling over ... other things. Maybe something or someone of the male persuasion? Tall dark, handsome ... wears glasses? Am I getting warm here?"

Lois rolled her eyes and walked away. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Uh-huh." Cat smiled. "Well, something's chipped the ice off of you.... The only thing that makes sense is your new partner..." Cat's expression changed to a devilish smile. "Of course it could be that Super-hunk that brought you back from the space station. Tell me, Lois, why exactly did you name him 'Superman'?"

Lois glared at her. "And you wonder why nobody ever takes you seriously?" She walked towards her desk, trying to ignore Cat, who was hot on her trail.

"Come on, give. You fly in here yesterday with the super hunk... barely able to talk... something had to have zapped you speechless."

Lois rolled her eyes. "I'm not having this conversation. None of your business. *Comprendre?*"

Cat was about to say more but Jimmy interrupted, "Cat, you've got a call on line one."

Cat scowled at Lois. "This isn't over." She marched over to her desk to take her phone call.

Lois shook her head and walked over to Clark. "Whatcha working on?"

"Adoptive kids finding their birth parents," Clark replied, not looking up from his computer screen.

Lois nodded and began listing off ideas on her hand. "Search for roots. Emotional roller-coaster. Unrealistic expectations. Tear-jerker reconciliations."

"Quick study," Clark noted, impressed.

Lois smiled. "Not really," she admitted. "I did it three years ago."

Clark smiled. "There are no new stories, Lois, just..."

"...new angles," they finished in unison. They caught one another's gaze, smiling at one another. They seemed to be finishing one another's sentences a lot lately.

"I've never really understood why people put themselves through all of that." She added, "It seems to me if your parents didn't care enough to raise you, then why give it a second thought?"

Clark turned to face her. "Because they had to have a reason for giving you up and it's that... not knowing... that kills you."

Lois noticed the emotion behind his statement. He seemed to be talking from experience rather than an un-objective reporter.

Lois shrugged, "I'm not really much for the touchy-feely stuff."

"Well..." Clark was interrupted by a commotion by the elevators.

She and Clark turned to see a man in the middle of a group of black-suited men. The man commanded the attention of the newsroom. "I have a warrant issued by Federal Court!" he held up a paper as he made his way towards them. The suits that surrounded him began to pan out and approach the work areas of everyone and securing the exits to the building. "Everyone: Step away from your desks!" he ordered.

Perry came out of his office to intercept the man. "Nobody comes busting into my newsroom like this!"

The man handed over the warrant. "Take it up with Washington."

Perry scanned the document. "Order to produce evidence... compel testimony... Lois Lane and Clark Kent!"

An agent began to search through Lois' desk. She approached the agent, trying to get him away from her desk. Nobody was going to go through her desk without her say-so. "Wait a minute!" She got in the man's face. A second agent approached her from behind, trying to pull her away. She struggled in the man's grasp as a third agent approached her. "Get your hands off me!"

Clark moved to help, trying to pull one of the agents away, but the man instinctively whirled around to confront him with a weapon. "Put it away!" the leader of the men ordered. "He's just a reporter." The agent stared Clark down for a moment before putting his weapon away.

Lois freed herself from the grasp of the other two agents. "Reporter. As in protected by the Constitution."

"Impressive document, the Constitution," the man sneered back at her. "It gives the courts the authority to issue warrants like this one. Which says I get what I want?"

"What exactly is that?" Clark asked, slightly ticked.

The man moved to confront him. "Mister Kent, I presume?" Clark nodded. "I want Superman. And I'm not leaving until you tell me where I can find him."

"What makes you think Clark or I know how to find him?" Lois asked, taken aback.

"Miss Lane, you flew back with him from the space station. He had to have divulged something to you," the man remarked. "The alien, Superman, is a part of a conspiracy to conquer Earth."

Lois turned to Clark. "This guy's a few popcorns short of a Cracker Jack box," she muttered under her breath.

"Go ahead and scoff." The man turned to one of the agents. "Get started with the screening of their computers."

"What!?" Lois asked in disbelief.

"And put them in the conference room. I don't want any more disturbances... from anyone." He gave a pointed look towards Lois. She just glared back.

"This is ridiculous," Clark muttered, throwing a wadded-up paper into the waste basket.

"I know. Talk about your bedside manner. Who does this guy think he is?" Lois rambled, pacing around the room. "I still cannot believe they pulled a gun on you... Why would they think we knew where Superman was? I mean, he just showed up yesterday... None of this makes any sense."

"I don't know." Clark sighed.

"Why would they be demanding information from you? I

mean, no offense, Clark, but I was the one that got the exclusive on Superman..."

"I don't know." Clark sighed again.

Perry walked into the conference room. "Okay, here's the deal. They want the two of you to take a polygraph..."

Lois and Clark were both thinking the same thing. *'No Way.'*

"*WHAT??*?" they interrupted Perry in unison.

"...limited to national security concerns about Superman..."

Perry finished.

"A lie detector??" Clark asked in frustration.

"...so I told them to stuff it. Not my reporters," Perry continued.

Clark visibly sighed in relief. "Right."

"Good for you, Perry. Tell them to take their warrant and shove it," Lois added.

"I told them if they're bound and determined to take your computers with your notes to just get it over with and get out of the office so we can start suing their butts off into the next century.

Lois was a bit taken aback. "Take my computer?"

"You talk, they walk. You don't they're gonna confiscate the whole shebang," Perry added, obviously angry about the situation as well.

"Perry, everything I've ever done or thought about doing is on that computer. All my contacts, all my research...my novel!"

"Novel??" Clark asked amused. What could she be writing a novel about? The idea intrigued him.

Lois shot him a look. "Don't start."

"Don't you back up onto floppy disks?" Clark asked, steering the conversation away from her novel.

"Clark, this is no time to discuss your compulsive behavior," Lois snapped.

Clark was about to snap back, but Perry interrupted, "So, what are we going to do, folks? I'm with you either way."

Clark still wasn't about to give up. Lois just shrugged. Clark began to get frantic. "What about the First Amendment, Lois?"

"Clark, they pulled a gun on you. To these guys, the First Amendment is a pesky little detail," Lois snapped back.

Clark shook his head. "I can't do this. We can't!" he argued.

"Normally I'd agree with you, Clark, but we don't know anything. This is like taking a polygraph about the ring-tailed lemur." Lois sighed. She was just as frustrated about the situation.

Perry nodded in agreement with Lois. "She's got a point. We don't know enough about Superman to lie." He looked towards Clark. He was obviously nervous and he knew he wouldn't be able to pull the wool over Perry's eyes. "Kent, you know something you haven't told us?"

Clark could only shrug when Lois and Perry turned to look at him. A polygraph? How was he going to lie on a polygraph and get away with it?

Lois tapped her fingers against the wood grain of the desk impatiently. She was hooked up to the polygraph machine while the mysterious man paced around her like a vulture circling its prey. The man seemed bent on finding Superman at all costs. She worried what he would do if he found him.

"You will answer 'yes' to these first two questions. We use this to calibrate the machine. Is your name Lois Lane?"

"That is what my by-line says." At the man's pointed look she rolled her eyes. "Yes."

"Are you also President of the United States?"

She rolled her eyes again. "Yes."

"Do you have any reason to believe Superman is an agent of a foreign power?" the man inquired.

"Yeah, and leprechauns are agents of the IRA," she snapped sarcastically.

"Is Superman from another planet?"

"If something looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and talks

like a duck, the chances are pretty good it IS a duck." He shot her a look, and she sighed. "I don't know. He looks like a man to me."

"During the time the two of you were alone, did Superman discuss his mission here on Earth?"

"Mission? What mission? We were five thousand feet in the air. I was more interested in trying to remain calm."

"Did he say anything to you while you flew?"

"No, we flew. We didn't talk," Lois said, exasperated with the line of questions. She was determined to make this as difficult as she could for this man.

The man turned to the polygraph technician. "Non-verbal communication." He then turned his attention back to Lois. "Does Superman have any telepathic powers?"

Lois laughed. "I hope not."

The man stared at Lois hard. He obviously didn't find the same humor Lois did in the situation. "Have you any romantic attachments to this Superman?" he inquired.

Lois stared back, meeting his gaze. "How exactly does that fall under national security Mister...?"

"Trask. National Security is everywhere, Ms. Lane. Now I'll repeat the question, Ms. Lane. Have you developed a romantic attachment to Superman?"

"No," she replied coolly. The monitor beside her began to beep.

Lois just shrugged. Trask glared at Lois. "Ms. Lane, procreating with the alien can be seen as treasonous?"

"Procreating? What planet are you from? Who talks like that?"

"Has the alien taken over your mind...or your body?" He sneered. "We are talking about national security and you're contemplating sleeping with the enemy...Or maybe you already have..."

Lois just glared at him. The man was obviously off his rocker. "You need to get a life. There is no national security threat or any other threat from Superman. He is obviously here to help."

"That's what they all say...before they take over," Trask muttered.

Clark sat nervously at the desk, tapping his fingers against the wood grain as he waited for Trask to begin.

"You will answer 'yes' to these first two questions. We use this to calibrate the machine." Trask said, "Is your name Clark Kent?"

"Yes," Clark responded coolly.

"Are you also Superman?" Trask asked.

Clark's heart rate went up slightly. He tried to calm himself down before responding. "Yes."

Trask looked at the read-out then turned to the technician. "Why isn't this reading as a lie?"

The technician slammed the polygraph machine on the side with his hand. "Either the machine's broken again or this reporter's so mild-mannered he hasn't got a pulse. Ask him again."

Trask turned back to Clark. "Remember to answer 'yes' now. Are you Superman?"

Clark looked towards the polygraph needle. "Yes." He shot a short burst of super breath at the needle, causing it to shoot up all the way.

The technician nodded at Trask. "Working."

"All right, Mr. Kent, let's proceed. Have you ever met Superman?"

Clark felt his face begin to flush as he stammered, "Met him? I've seen him in action if that's what you mean, but we haven't actually had a conversation..." Trask glared at him and he continued nervously, "I guess you could say we've met. Yes."

Trask turned his back to him, whispering something inaudible to the technician about watching the readouts carefully. He felt himself begin to levitate out of the seat. He pulled himself back down, gripping hard on the arms of the chair. He winced when he heard a slight breaking noise. He looked down at his feet and

noticed with relief that the chair was still intact; just slightly cracked in one of the feet to the chair.

“Is Superman from Earth?” Trask asked, turning back towards Clark.

“I don’t know,” Clark answered truthfully. He really didn’t know where he was from. His parents had said they had found him. He could be an experiment from the government or he could be an alien. He didn’t have a clue. He made a mental note to ask his parents more about when they found him. It might be important in stopping these men.

“Can you take us to Superman right now?” Trask asked.

“Take you?” Clark asked nervously.

Trask pounded his fists on the desk and stared Clark down.

“Can you contact Superman?”

Clark’s legs nervously intertwined around the chair legs, breaking the chair. He winced inwardly as he levitated himself in the air, keeping the appearance of sitting in the chair. “Uh, you mean by phone or something?”

Trask was exasperated with Clark’s diversion tactics. “By any means possible. Telepathy, for example. Can you contact Superman?”

“No,” Clark replied, nervously.

“Really?” Trask asked, staring him down.

An agent stormed in. “Perimeter’s been penetrated.”

Trask nodded and frowned. The agent disappeared once more. The technician began dismantling the polygraph machine, pulling wires off of Clark. Trask turned to Clark. “Mr. Kent, I don’t need a polygraph machine to tell me when I’m being lied to. I can see it in the eyes. We’re not finished.”

Before Clark could respond, Trask left. Clark sighed with relief and fell to the ground. The remains of the broken chair fell to the ground. He looked out the window to the newsroom and tuned in his super-hearing.

Trask and all the agents were headed towards the elevators in a hurry. Perry was trying to stop them. “What’s going on? I want an explanation!”

Trask ignored him and smiled behind the closing doors of the elevator. Clark opened the door to the Conference room and approached Lois and Perry. Cat walked up to them, miffed. “It was horrible the way they treated us. That agent frisked me twice!”

Perry allowed the situation to settle then began to bark orders, “Biderman, let’s get legal on this right away!” He then turned to Lois and Clark. “Lane, Kent, type up your notes and give them to Valdes. She’s writing this.” He clapped his hands together. “Rest of you, get back to it.”

“What do you mean, ‘type up your notes’? This is my story!” Lois snapped, intercepting Perry before he could enter his office.

“Our story,” Clark corrected.

“Whatever,” Lois snapped.

“Right now you two are the story. In case those goons come back with subpoenas I want you out of here ASAP,” Perry barked.

“Fine,” Lois sighed. “I’ll gather my notes at home...”

“Home???” Perry scoffed. “Anywhere but home. Don’t be anywhere they can serve you. Wear your beepers. We’ll call you.”

“Where are we supposed to go?” Clark asked.

A light bulb went off in Lois’ head. “I’ve got an idea.” She grabbed him by the arm and half drug him up the ramp to the elevators.

“Mind telling me where we’re going?”

“You’ll see.” Lois winked at him. “Don’t you trust me?”

She had a gleam in her eyes and he wasn’t sure, but he was pretty sure it spelled trouble.

“You cannot be serious. I cannot believe you talked me into this,” Clark muttered. They were sitting in the back of a taxi cab following the string of black sedans that had left the Daily Planet. Lois’ brilliant idea had been to follow them to wherever they were

going.

“Hey, they wanted to find out everything about us; I think it’s only fair we return the favor,” Lois sniped. She then turned to the cab driver. “Can you get a little closer? You’re gonna lose them.”

“Lady, if I get any closer they’ll get wise to my following ‘em,” the cab driver sniped.

“This is insane, Lois,” Clark continued.

“No, what’s insane is our government issuing a warrant out for this madman... They’re after Superman and I want to know why,” Lois said.

“Probably why any government agency wants to get a hold of an alien... to dissect him.” Clark shuddered at the last statement.

“Don’t be ridiculous. How do you know he’s an alien? He could be human... maybe he has mutations?”

“I don’t know,” Clark stammered. “I was just... guessing.”

“Which way do you want to go?” the cab driver interrupted. “One went left; the other went right.”

“I think we should take the right one,” Clark said, using his enhanced vision to scan the car that had gone right. Trask wasn’t in that car. Right now he wanted to be as far away from him as possible.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Lois snapped. “Go left,” she ordered.

“You’re the boss,” the cab driver said.

“Lois, please...” Clark urged.

“What is with you, Clark? Why are you so nervous?” Lois turned to confront him.

“I...” He couldn’t form a good response.

“What did they say to you?” Lois asked.

“Nothing...” he stammered. “It’s nothing. I just don’t think this is a good idea.”

“Here you go. They stopped,” the cab driver said, stopping in front of a furniture warehouse.

“What are they doing?” Lois asked, peeking out the window to see Trask shaking hands with an unidentifiable elderly gentleman. The men walked towards the building and closed the door behind them.

“What now?” Clark asked.

Lois scowled, trying to form a plan. “We’ll get the address and figure out what this place is... then we’ll come back when it’s not so crowded.”

“Lois...” Clark warned. He really didn’t want to do this. These people meant business. His father had warned him for years about government agencies coming after him. He had never paid the warnings any mind until now.

Their beepers went off simultaneously, interrupting his thoughts. Lois looked down at her beeper and grimaced. “It’s Perry.”

“Where to now, lady?” the cab driver asked.

“Daily Planet and step on it,” Lois ordered.

A traffic jam, an over-heating radiator, and broken air conditioner kept Lois and Clark from arriving at the Planet for over an hour. A slightly disheveled Lois and Clark entered the newsroom where Perry pounced on them the minute he spotted them. “Lois, Clark, where in the Sam Hill have you two been?? I’ve been paging you for over an hour!”

“Well, if the Planet would invest in cell phones for its reporters you might actually be able to get a hold of us,” Lois sniped back.

Cat walked up behind them, surveying the duo critically. “Well, it looks like someone’s been enjoying themselves,” she remarked with a wink.

Clark and Lois’ faces were aghast at her implications. “Get your mind out of the gutter, would you? What is going on?” Lois changed the subject, not giving Cat a chance for a comeback.

“What’s going on is the warrant’s phony,” Perry began.

“Phony??” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“Phony as a lock of Elvis’s hair from a Memphis souvenir shop. Our lawyers just called Justice, FBI, State, and CIA. They even called Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.” Perry sighed. “Nobody in Washington wants to claim those boys.”

“So, who are they?” Clark asked.

“We don’t know,” Jimmy interrupted. “All we know is they think their job is to hunt down Superman.”

“What? Why?” Lois asked, confused.

“I don’t know.” Perry said, “But if they’re interested in tracking down Superman, I want you to track *them* down. Find out everything you can about that leader... What’s his name?”

“All I got was a last name,” Lois said. “Trask.”

“Right. Trask. Find out everything you can about him and what kind of operation he’s trying to run...and, more importantly, *why* are they trying to track Superman down,” Perry ordered.

“Okay, we’re on it,” Lois said, turning on her heel to head upstairs, towards archives.

That evening, Clark flew to Smallville for dinner with his folks. He stared blankly down at his dinner that had been left untouched. Martha squeezed his hand gently. “You don’t like vegetarian, do you?”

Jonathan smiled when Clark didn’t answer, he joked, “He’s confused. He doesn’t know whether to plant it, or eat it!”

Clark smiled at his father’s joke. He looked down at his plate and began to eat at super-speed, cleaning his plate and emptying his glass in seconds.

Martha and Jonathan traded glances. “Looks like he’s missed your cooking,” Jonathan said, amused.

“Clark, honey, you just inhaled that,” Martha said, concerned. “Do you want to talk about it?” An impish grin crossed her face. “Is it, Lois?”

Clark laughed lightly. “No, Mom, it’s nothing like that.” He grew quiet a moment. “Something happened today at the Planet.”

“What is it?” Martha asked, concerned.

“These men came in with guns, claiming to be a part of some government agency...they had a warrant for Lois and my testimony...” Clark looked down at his empty plate, trying to form his words carefully. He was more than aware of his parents’ paranoia regarding the government.

“What kind of testimony?” Jonathan asked.

“About...me....Superman.” Clark replied solemnly. Off their concerned looks, he continued, “We found out their warrants were faked, but I need to know everything you know about how you found me.”

Jonathan sighed. “It was May 17th, 1966. We were driving past Schuster’s Field that night when we saw what looked like a meteor in the sky.”

Martha nodded. “At first we thought it was one of those ICBMs...”

“It came streaking across the sky in front of us.” Jonathan laughed. “It was hard to ignore.”

Martha smiled. “We found you and took you home. Your eyes were so big and wide, and that diaper-thing they had you in made you look so cute...”

“Martha!” Jonathan interrupted when he noticed Clark’s face turning red from embarrassment. “There were some men who were snooping around a few days later, asking questions.”

Clark perked up. “What kind of men?”

“They said they were with the space program. Said they thought some debris from a Russian satellite came down around here. Wanted to know if we knew anything about it,” Martha said.

“What’d you tell them?” Clark asked nervously.

“Nothing,” Jonathan replied firmly.

“There was something scary about them,” Martha added.

“We didn’t want people who’d shoot you into space to get their hands on you. We figured even if you were a Russian, you

were ours,” Jonathan said.

“Is that what you think I am, a Russian experiment?” Clark asked, uncertainly.

“Honey, we don’t care if you’re a Russian or a Martian. And we didn’t care then. You were ours. That’s all we knew and we weren’t giving you to anybody,” Martha said. “That’s why your father did what he did.”

“Did what?” Clark asked, curiously.

“Your mother had me go back to where we found you. We figured that your spaceship had to be destroyed so nobody would ever have any evidence how you got here,” Jonathan explained. “I planned to burn it, and then haul it to the dump.”

“It’s okay, Dad.” Clark smiled weakly. “Destroying it was probably the right thing to do.”

“Probably was,” Jonathan admitted, “but I didn’t.”

“Jonathan, why didn’t you ever tell me?” Martha asked.

“I couldn’t, Martha,” Jonathan apologized. “It was a part of you, son. I just couldn’t.”

“Were you successful with your findings, Mr. Trask?” Lex asked, pouring a glass of bourbon into a crystal glass.

“The investigation is still pending. Our parameter was breached by outside authorities so I wasn’t able to finish with Kent,” Trask remarked bitterly.

“Kent?” Lex asked, amused.

“Yes. I believe he has the means to contact the alien, Superman,” Trask explained darkly, “I want to exploit this so I can destroy Superman and all those like him. He will be a martyr to his people; that we will not bow down to aliens like him. We will triumph in this war for mankind.”

Lex stared at Trask hesitantly for a moment. He had heard the stories of the man’s delusions but hadn’t realized how true to form he was. Trask really believed there was a war between Earth and outside invaders? He had been ranting and raving his theories for the last six years; now that Superman had come to Earth, Trask was claiming him to be proof of a hostile takeover in the making. Lex wasn’t sure how true this theory was. If anyone would be implementing a hostile takeover it would be himself; not Superman, but Trask would be useful in bringing down his enemy.

Lex raised his glass in the air for a toast. “To mankind.”

“To mankind,” Trask echoed before taking a sip of his own glass.

Jonathan walked Martha and Clark through the woods counting his steps. “68 paces due north. Thirteen paces west.” Martha watched Jonathan uncertainly. “Are you sure this is the right place?”

“That’s the wagon wheel. Hasn’t moved in over twenty-five years,” Jonathan said.

Martha nodded, then turned to Clark who wore a worried look on his face. “Are you okay? I know this must be hard.”

Clark sighed and hugged his mom. “What’s hard is not knowing. My parents had to give me up. Why? I have no idea where I came from or why I can do the things I can.” He gently squeezed Martha’s arm when he noticed a hurt look cross her face. “You and Dad are my parents. You know that. Nobody will ever replace you.”

Martha smiled weakly. “Oh, we know that, Clark. You wouldn’t be human if you didn’t have questions.”

“Mom, what if I’m not human?” Clark asked hesitantly.

Martha sighed. “Maybe we shouldn’t have told you...you were adopted.”

“That would have been hard after I started bench pressing cars.” Clark smiled back at her.

Jonathan pointed at the ground. “Six feet down.”

Clark took off his jacket and handed it to Martha. He moved to where his father was pointing and began to spin in place, creating

a whirlwind of dirt. He found himself six feet underground, but there was nothing here. He used his enhanced vision to look around, but found nothing. No signs of his space craft were present. “Dad, are you sure about this?”

“Hundred percent. Right there. You don’t forget something like this,” Jonathan said. Clark floated up from the hole he had created and shook the dirt off of himself. Jonathan and Martha leaned down to look into the empty hole with him. Jonathan’s face grew grim and he pointed toward the hole emphatically. “It was here.”

Clark shook his head grimly. “Not anymore.”

His broad muscles held her securely as they continued their embrace. His hands roamed up and down her curves, and he captured her mouth with his. She ran her hands through his dark silky hair.

“I love you.” He whispered before devouring her lips once more. The feeling of his hands on her continued to fuel the fiery passion she felt within her.

“Cl-ark!”

Lois awoke with a jolt. Sweat was pouring down her forehead. Her heart was racing and her nightgown was soaked. She looked around the room and sighed in relief. She was in her room alone.

Clark? Why had she been dreaming about Clark? Dreaming of making love with Clark? She brushed the thought off as she snuggled back into her bed, willing sleep to come quickly. The less time she had to think the better. She had no intention of repeating her previous dream.

The next morning the newsroom was a frenzy of activity. A staff meeting had been called and everyone was scrambling around to prepare. Jimmy was looking at the pictures of Superman he had taken the other day in disgust.

“Jimmy, where’s the blow-ups I asked for?” Perry bellowed.

“Right here,” Jimmy said resignedly. He hung the blow-ups on the wall with regret. Lois had been right. The pictures hadn’t come out that well. Many of them had come out blurry and the blow-ups only made it worse.

Perry took a magnifying glass to the photos, “Jimmy, these are no good.”

“Chief, they’re okay,” Jimmy argued half-heartedly.

“Okay?! ‘Okay’ doesn’t cut it at the Daily Planet.” Perry sighed then turned to the conference table behind him. “Sit down, Jimmy.” He turned to the staff that was seated and sighed, “How did everyone sleep last night? I know yesterday was a bit stressful for everyone.” There was a murmur from the staff, agreeing with Perry. “I didn’t sleep well at all last night. Last night, our publisher called me into his office and asked me how come the Daily Planet hasn’t nailed down the Superman story after it literally dropped in our laps?” He looked around the room at the apprehensive faces. “Now I took this as a personal criticism and I assured him that each and every one of my staff would chip in. Would not rest until Superman was ours. Are we clear on this?”

Lois stood up, outraged. “No! Perry, you can’t be serious. I was the one Superman flew with. I wrote the original piece. I found him!”

“Actually he found you,” Clark remarked, teasingly.

Lois glared at him then turned her attention back to Perry. “Chief, this isn’t fair. I should have the exclusive on the follow-up. Those are the rules.”

“You and your partner,” Perry corrected. “I’m sorry, Lois, but the rules are off. This is too big.”

“But, Perry...” Lois argued.

“You’ve already got enough on your plate with the fiasco with that Trask that came in here yesterday. We don’t have time to wait for Superman to drop in our laps. Superman is fair game.

Every reporter for him or herself,” Perry said.

“All right!” Jimmy cheered.

Perry smiled at Jimmy. “Enthusiasm. I love it.”

Lois sighed as she sunk down in her chair. “We need to find him.”

“Is that really a good idea?” Clark asked. “I mean, with this Trask guy running loose...”

“That’s even more reason for us to find him and have him tell his story. We need to let the people know he’s not a danger to anyone, but here to help,” Lois argued.

“How do you know that?” Clark asked, awestruck.

“If he wanted to hurt us, he would have done it already. He told Amy he was a friend. Does that scream hostile takeover to you?” Lois asked.

“What if he doesn’t want to be found?” Clark asked. “What if all this media frenzy isn’t what this guy expected. Maybe he’s gun shy.”

“That’s ridiculous. He should know I...I mean, we...we wouldn’t do anything to hurt him,” Lois stammered.

“Maybe, but...” Clark was cut off by Cat’s intrusion in the conversation.

Cat held up a magnifying glass to the blow up picture of Superman and Lois Jimmy had taken. “Ever notice what bedroom eyes he has?”

Jimmy walked up behind her and laughed, “Well, if he is an alien... maybe he doesn’t get the ...you know...itch.” Clark visibly blushed, squirming in his chair.

“One way to find out.” Cat winked at him.

Lois rolled her eyes in disgust. “Possible visitor from another planet arrives here on Earth and all you can think of is dragging him off to your lair to try him out?” Lois didn’t notice Clark cringe when she voiced her disgust.

“Test drive, Lois. A couple hours behind the wheel and I’d know for sure if we’re talking imported or domestic.” Cat grinned.

“Is that all you can think about?” Lois asked in disgust.

“Hey, I’m curious,” Cat argued.

Perry’s voice interrupted Lois. “Okay, settle down.” He moved over towards the blow-ups and tapped the picture of Superman. “Think. What would draw Superman out? Use your instincts. Beat the bushes. Turn the stones. Get me Superman.” The staff got up and left the conference room.

“I’m with you, Chief,” Jimmy said, standing next to Perry.

Perry smiled and leaned in, whispering to Jimmy. “We’re a team?”

“Yes, sir,” Jimmy cheered.

Perry nodded, “Fine, Jimmy, here’s what I need from you.”

Jimmy pulled out a notepad and began to write. “Two...no...make that three...donuts. Jelly. Go to Lucille’s. Tell her they’re for me. Got it?”

Jimmy nodded, slightly defeated. “Got it.” He left the conference room to retrieve Perry’s donuts.

Perry caught Lois and Clark before they could leave. “Lois, Clark, I want to see you in my office with everything you’ve got on the raid from yesterday.”

Lex Luthor sat outside his penthouse, enjoying the view. Asabi, his manservant, stood by his side. Lex read the headlines in the various newspapers in Metropolis. All the headlines read “Superman.” “Superman...Superman...Superman,” Lex mused. “Soon your time will come.”

The phone rang and Asabi answered, “Mr. Luthor’s office.” He was quiet a moment then turned to Lex. “Mr. Luthor, a Jason Trask is calling for you.”

Lex nodded. “I’ll take the call in my study.” He walked into his office and waited for Asabi to depart before picking up the phone. “Mr. Trask, this is a surprise. I thought I told you never to call me directly.”

“You do want Superman eliminated, don’t you, Mr. Luthor?” Trask snarled.

“Of course.”

“I’ve got a problem. An old friend, George Thompson, is on my tail and could prove a threat to our deal. I need him taken care of,” Trask hissed.

“Oh, now I’m your maid? I don’t like cleaning up after other people,” Lex said.

“If he catches up to me, this whole operation could come crashing down, and if it does I won’t be the only one to be implicated,” Trask said menacingly.

“Enough said. I’ll have him taken care of,” Lex said.

“See that you do.” Trask hung up the phone before Lex could argue.

Lex hung up the phone angrily and stared at the phone a moment before composing himself once more. He picked up the phone and began to dial. “Nigel? Yes, I need a little problem taken care of... Your usual expertise will be required... Thank you.” He hung up the phone then turned towards his desk. His phone rang again and he picked it up, “Lex Luthor... Lucy?” His tone softened as his charismatic charm took over. “Yes, I’m looking forward to dinner...”

Perry sat back and listened to everything Lois and Clark had told him. He tapped his fingers against the desk for a moment. “So, pretty much what we have is this Trask... We still don’t know who he is or where he came from, is out to get Superman. Nobody wants to claim him. You...” Perry gave a short laugh. “...followed him to a furniture warehouse and nobody’s seen him since.”

“I’m still waiting to get a copy of the blueprints on the warehouse,” Lois added.

Perry sighed, raking a hand through his thinning hair. “All right, keep me posted.”

“Chief, about the Superman thing...” Lois began.

“I’m not changing my mind about this,” Perry sighed.

“There’s too much at stake here and I’m not just talking about the Daily Planet. After yesterday’s raid... Superman needs to be warned,” Perry remarked grimly. “Now, get to it!” he barked.

Lois and Clark exited the office, slightly stumped. “What are we supposed to do? Put a signal in the sky and hope he shows?” Lois asked, annoyed.

“I don’t know,” Clark sighed. He watched Lois closely. She seemed tired and very edgy today. “Are you okay?” he asked, placing a hand on her shoulder.

“I’m fine.” She brushed his hand off of her. He tuned in on her heartbeat with his super-hearing and was surprised to find her heartbeat was off the charts. She was obviously nervous about something, but what?

“You just seem a bit...” She glared at him and he wasn’t sure if he should continue.

“A bit what?” Lois pressed.

“Well...” He tried to change the subject. “How’s everything going with your sister?”

Lois sobered immediately. “She’s still seeing Lex,” she said briskly, taking her seat.

“Hey, Lois, I think I found something.” Jimmy handed her a file that was bursting out of the sides.

“What is this?” Clark asked.

“Bureau 39. They’re a secret government agency hell bent on tracking down unexplained phenomena in the United States,” Jimmy explained.

“What does this have to do with Trask?” Lois asked.

“Jason Trask,” Jimmy corrected, pulling an old newspaper clipping out of the file.

“Project Blue Book?” Lois squinted at the newspaper clipping skeptically. “Jimmy, the Air Force got out of the UFO business in

1969.”

“No, look!” Jimmy pointed at the clipping. “In the background.”

“I don’t see anything,” Clark said hesitantly, not wanting to appear too eager. He recognized the man in the background as Trask. The clipping identified him as ‘Jason Trask’ just as Jimmy had said.

Lois squinted. “Well, I have perfect vision. Superman doesn’t see like I do,” Lois bragged. She nodded. “Jason Trask.”

“He was in the Air Force, according to this article, but there’s no military service record. He disappeared into thin air in 1969,” Jimmy explained.

“What about the other men in the photo?” Clark asked.

“General Burton Newcomb...retired. Lives in Metropolis. Colonel George Thompson; whereabouts unknown. He’s probably still active,” Jimmy explained.

“I’d call that a lead,” Clark said. Lois stood up and grabbed her purse, heading to the elevator with Clark.

“Let’s hit it, rookie!” she teased. Clark shot her a look.

Jason Trask stood in the middle of a warehouse filled with filing cabinets and unidentified crafts. Many of them were covered in tarps. “Jason, glad we could catch up.” George Thompson’s voice echoed throughout the room as he approached Trask.

Jason Trask turned to confront Thompson. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to make sure Bureau 39 isn’t implicated in... whatever it is you think you’re doing here. You’ve gone astray from our mission, Trask,” George said menacingly.

“My mission is to identify alien threats to the security of this country.”

“Superman??” George Thompson scoffed.

Trask nodded. “The advance guard. If we don’t resist him, they send in others. All these years of waiting and now they’re here.”

“So, what’s your plan, Trask? You’re going to capture Superman and dissect him?”

“I don’t want to study him; I want to kill him.”

“Trask, your reckless freelancing is jeopardizing the entire Bureau 39 operation.”

Trask scoffed, “You don’t know anything about Bureau 39! I’m the one out in the field, while you sit with those gutless paper pushers in Washington! You’re too stupid to know we’re even in a war let alone how to fight it!” He slammed a fist down on the desk beside him. “Don’t you see what’s happening? Superman is trying to sway the public. We must draw the line! I will never submit...”

“I’m shutting you down, Trask,” Thompson interrupted.

“What??” Trask stared back at Thompson coldly. “Shutting ME down? I don’t think so.”

A man in black approached from behind, carrying a large weapon, pointed directly at the two men. Thompson followed Trask’s gaze and gasped in surprise when he was shot. Trask glared at the man in disgust. “Took you long enough.”

“I do apologize, but you really didn’t give me much to go on,” the man replied. “What do you want to do with him?”

“I don’t care. Just get rid of him,” Trask snarled.

The man nodded and began to drag Thompson’s lifeless body away.

Lois and Clark sat in General Newcomb’s den. He was an elderly man in his late sixties. The walls were covered with pictures of his activities in the Air Force and with influential men and women in the government. Medals were displayed in a tall cabinet.

“General Newcomb, thank you for seeing us on such short notice,” Lois began.

“Not a problem, Ms. Lane. I enjoy a visitor or two every now

and then.” General Newcomb smiled at her appreciatively. “What can I do for you?”

Clark laid a blown up copy of the photograph they had of Jason Trask on General Newcomb’s desk. “This man came to the Daily Planet under false pretenses, claiming to be working for the federal government.”

“He said he’s looking for information on Superman. Jason Trask?” Lois prompted.

General Newcomb sighed, leaning back in his chair as he stared at the photograph. “Jason Trask? I never thought I’d hear that name again,” he mused. “Have you ever had to keep a secret? A huge secret?” he asked, reaching for Lois’ tape recorder that was set to record on his desk.

“Sure.” Clark nodded.

“Like what?” Lois asked. Clark just brushed her off, unwilling to divulge into his private life with her.

General Newcomb ignored their encounter and began removing the tape from the recorder as he spoke. Lois was about to protest but Clark stopped her. “Keeping a secret eats away at you. It’s just a nibble at a time, but it adds up. And one day, you wake up and realize it’s consumed everything inside you.” He pulled out a nutcracker and placed the tape inside it, crushing it. “We were just a small group when we started, but we all took a special oath on the same day. August the second, nineteen-forty-seven. I was about your age.”

“Did you take an oath to protect people like Trask?” Lois asked.

“You don’t need me to find Trask. He’s probably hiding in plain sight.”

“Like a used office furniture warehouse on Bessolo Boulevard?” Lois asked.

Newcomb arched an eyebrow and she knew she was right. “Getting to him, though, that’s another matter. A man like Trask would no doubt be protected by an impenetrable security system.”

Lois scoffed, “Every system has a flaw.”

Newcomb smiled, removing a magnetic keycard labeled ‘3-9’ from his desk and placed it just within reach of Lois and Clark. “Not this one. I designed it myself. You’d need someone on the inside to help you out. Now, assuming you could find such a person you’d have to hope that person found a man like Trask so repugnant and his methods so . . . un-American . . . that he would choose to help you.” Newcomb wore a grim expression. “That’s a tall order.” He moved to his collection of military rifles, mounted on the wall, removing one of them. “I’m going to count to three. When I turn around, I expect you to be gone. One . . .” Lois and Clark looked at one another hesitantly, unsure of what to do. “Two . . .” Lois grabbed the card from the desk and hastily made an exit with Clark. “Three . . .”

“Well, that was hard,” Lois said sarcastically as she swiped the card at the entrance of the warehouse. Clark just smiled back and followed her into the warehouse.

The doors shut behind them, sealing them inside. They were in a secure chamber. The door on the other side of the room had a timer on it along with a combination lock. “Maybe the security system’s been updated since the General’s day, hmm?” Clark asked, kneeling down to work on cracking the safe.

“This is no time to get smug,” Lois said, indicating the time on the wall that read forty-five seconds. She watched him, annoyed. “Don’t tell me, safe cracker?”

She watched in amazement as the timer stopped and the door opened. She looked at him questioningly. He shrugged. “The General said August 2, 1947. Eight left, two right, forty-seven left.”

Lois just stared at him uncertainly. “You are so weird. Works for ya, though.”

Clark looked around the warehouse suspiciously. Nobody was around. He sensed trouble. “I don’t know about this, Lois. Where is everybody?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they’re out to lunch?” Lois offered. He stood by her as she pulled out a file from one of the cabinets. She laughed as she sifted through it. “Give me a break.” The file contained photos of what appeared to be space crafts. Each photograph was attached to a leaflet of reports, identifying the space crafts in question. “I’ve seen this movie,” she muttered, stuffing the file back into the cabinet.

“Lois, these look . . . genuine,” Clark said, looking through the file in his hands.

“They’re too good,” Lois argued. “It’s got to be a set-up.”

“What if it’s not? What if people actually traveled in these? People from far away . . .” He held in a gasp when he found a file labeled ‘Smallville. 1966.’ He noticed Lois was preoccupied looking at another file and stuffed the file into a small square, stuffing it into his wallet at super-speed before she was any the wiser.

“There’s definitely a story here, Clark, but I don’t think it has anything to do with UFOs,” Lois said.

“I thought you were the one that said if it walks like a duck . . .”

“Don’t quote me to myself, Clark,” Lois sniped. “How did you know I said that anyway?” she arched an eyebrow at him, impatiently waiting for an answer.

“Well, I . . .” He pointed at the area behind the cabinets with tarps over them. “What’s that?”

Lois rolled her eyes, following him. “I suppose you think we’re going to pull one of these off and find a UFO?”

“Honestly, Lois, I don’t know what we’re going to find,” Clark said apprehensively.

Lois smiled and pointed back and forth between the three objects in front of her. “Eeny, meeny, miny, mo . . .” She pulled off the tarp, revealing a collection of twisted metal and beams. “This is an Unidentified Salvage Yard,” she muttered, walking away from him.

Clark was still unsure. “This doesn’t look like any scrap metal I’ve ever seen.” He moved to one of the cages behind the tarps that was labeled, ‘Smallville, 1966 Incident.’ Clark inhaled deeply, stepping inside apprehensively. He reached for the tarp that was inside the cage and gingerly pulled it off. “Oh, my God . . .” he gasped quietly. He revealed a small space shuttle with the same ‘S’ shield his parents had found on him so many years ago.

Inside the ship, he found a small rounded ball with blue and red shapes on it. It appeared to be a replica of Earth’s globe. He held it gingerly, uncertain what the object was. He gasped when the object in question lit up in his hand. The globe changed shapes. A reddish tint overtook the globe, revealing peaks and valleys, ice caps.

He couldn’t explain it, but suddenly he knew what this place was. “Krypton,” he whispered in a hushed whisper. ‘*Where had that come from?*’ he asked himself. He stared at the globe before him. It had stopped illuminating and sat lifeless in his palm.

“Clark??” Lois called to him, approaching him from behind; He hurriedly stuffed the globe in his pocket and covered the spacecraft, turning to face Lois. “Somebody’s coming.”

Clark walked hurriedly with Lois towards the exit only to be met by Trask and his goons. “How did you get in here?”

“That’s your problem,” Lois said.

“That’s correct,” Trask replied smugly. “Getting out however . . . that’s your problem.”

Clark took a protective step in front of Lois. “People know where we are.”

“Like Superman,” Lois added smugly. Clark shot her a warning look. That was not the best way to scare Trask. The man was looking for Superman; why would he be afraid of him? “He’s going to come looking for us.”

“Oh, I hope so,” Trask barked back smugly. “In fact, I’m counting on it.”

Lois and Clark sat side by side on an aircraft. Men with weapons trained on them surrounded them. Out of the blue, Lois sighed, “It’s a romance novel.”

“What?” Clark asked, confused.

“The story I was writing. It’s a romance novel. It’s about a woman who dies without ever finding her true love.” She sighed.

Clark was a bit taken aback. Clearly, Lois thought this was going to happen to her, “That’s not going to happen to you, Lois.”

“Yeah?” she asked slightly hysterical. “Check it out, Clark. These guys look serious.”

“Lois, I’m not going to let anything happen to you.” Clark tried to reassure her.

“Oh, Clark, that’s very sweet, but there’s not a lot either of us can do here. No offense, but you’re not exactly Superman and I have no idea how to contact him. All he left me with was ... I’ll be around’ ... That’s not exactly a big clue.”

Her ramblings were cut short when Trask and a few other soldiers approached them. “I assume you two are familiar with the scientific method,” Trask asked.

“Advance a theory, submit it to a test,” Clark said.

Trask nodded. “My theory is that at least one of you knows how to contact this alien creature, Superman, probably through some form of telepathic communication.”

Lois looked back and forth between Trask and the surrounding soldiers. “And how do you plan to test this theory?”

One of the soldiers opened the door to the aircraft. “If you suddenly become airborne at twenty thousand feet without a parachute... I have to assume you will focus all your energies toward contacting Superman.”

“What if this theory of yours is wrong?” Clark asked apprehensively.

“Pushing back the frontiers of science is not without risk,” Trask replied smugly.

“What happens if Superman does show up?” Lois asked apprehensively.

“Does the worm need to know if the fish is going to be fried or charbroiled?” Trask asked. He nodded toward the two soldiers that stood next to Lois and Clark. They reached out to grab Lois.

Clark stood up and began to argue with them. “Leave Lois alone. Use me. I’ll go.”

Lois put on a brave face as they led her toward the open door. “No, I’ll go.” Lois nodded.

Clark tried to reach her, but the soldiers stood in his way. There was no way he could get to her without revealing himself. “Lois! You don’t understand.”

Lois turned to Trask. “I think I oughta get at least one last request.”

“Within reason,” Trask remarked.

“I want to kiss Clark good-bye,” Lois said apprehensively.

Clark’s eyebrows shot up at her request. She wanted to kiss him good-bye? Why? What could she accomplish from that? He had to figure a way out of this without revealing himself. Lois was standing in front of him, reaching for him. Just a simple touch from her sent a jolt of electricity through him. Did she feel that same spark every time they touched? “Lois...I...”

His thoughts were cut short when her mouth came in contact with his. Her warm lips caressed his, tugging his lower lip in between her teeth aggressively. He groaned in approval as she slipped her tongue in his mouth.

There was no way he could let it end like this. He had to get them out of here. The only question was how? She slowly broke away from him and whispered in his ear, “You take the one on the left.”

Lois turned around quickly, throwing an elbow in one of the

soldier’s abdomen, and then kicking Trask. Clark pushed the soldiers surrounding him against the wall. He turned to see Lois struggling with Trask. She was being pushed out the door.

On the other end of the aircraft, a soldier had a gun trained on him. He panicked momentarily but Lois’ screams distracted him from the soldier’s movement. “*HELP!!*” He moved toward Lois. The gun went off and a bullet bounced off of him. “Clark!” Lois screamed.

Trask took advantage of her distraction and pushed Lois out the door. “Lois!” Clark pushed his way through everyone else and dove out the door after Lois.

He zeroed in on Lois as he changed into Superman on his way down. He picked up Lois’ screams with his super-hearing. “*Superman!* If you can hear me, drop everything and get over here! *Superman!!! Help!!!*”

Once he had centered himself to where she was, he zoomed down to scoop her up. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“You really do read minds...” Lois said amazed.

“No, but I do have really good hearing.” He smiled back at her.

Back on the aircraft, Trask was hunched over the computer onboard. “Tracking. We’ve got both of them.”

“The guy’s hurt,” one of the soldiers said. “I shot him.”

Another soldier picked up a bullet from the floor. “Guess again.”

Trask looked at the bullet that had been flattened. “No trace of blood.”

“I shot him. I saw it,” the soldier argued, stunned.

“You missed,” Trask muttered

The soldier stared at the bullet in his hands in disbelief. The other soldier was hovering above the computer system. “Target acquisition. Zero-niner-five.”

“Execute,” Trask ordered.

“Missile lock in five, four, three, two, one.” The triggering mechanism fired. “Executing.”

Clark landed with Lois on the rooftop of the Daily Planet. “You’ll be safe here.”

Lois nodded, slightly frazzled. This was the second time he had saved her life in the last few days. He smiled at her warmly. The same way Clark always smiled at her. Clark! “*CLARK!*” she grabbed him by the cape before he could leave. “They still have him. He may be hurt. I heard a gunshot...”

“Don’t worry. I’ll go back for him,” Clark reassured her. “Are you going to be all right?” he asked. Lois stared at the missile that was heading towards them. Unable to say anything she pointed behind him. “Lois?” he asked again. He turned to see the missiles headed his way and skyrocketed towards them.

Lois watched in horror as she watched him rocket himself into the path of the missiles. Superman was thrown upward from the explosion of the missiles. “Superman...” she cried, bowing her head in despair. He had only been trying to help and now he was gone....

“Let’s get out of here,” Trask said. His surrounding soldiers nodded and they directed the aircraft away from the explosion. “Another job well done, gentlemen.”

“I still say I shot him,” one of the soldiers argued.

Clark. Had he been able to escape? Superman hadn’t had a chance to get to him yet. Oh, God, she’d only known him for a short time, but she’d grown to care about him as a partner... a friend... and possibly more.

Lois stepped off the elevator slightly dazed from her encounter. “Lois, what happened?” Perry asked, rushing to her side.

“Before or after we got thrown out of the plane?” Lois asked, slightly dazed. “Is he all right? Superman...”

“We don’t know,” Perry said. “We’re running down some witnesses. You know what happened to...”

Lois looked towards the elevator and saw Clark stepping off, adjusting his tie. “Clark!” she ran up to him, throwing her arms around him in relief. He was okay. She reached up and kissed him, surprising herself and him. Realizing what she had just done, she pulled away, but still had her arms around him, unwilling to let him go just yet. “You’re alive!” She mussed up his hair slightly.

“It would seem so...” he said apprehensively.

“Oh, Clark...” She turned to the rest of the newsroom. “Hey, everybody, Clarks’ alive!” She released her grasp on him for a minute. “Do you know what this means?”

“No...” Clark said.

“Perry, if Clark’s alive that means Superman’s alive. Superman had to have saved him.” She turned to Clark for confirmation. “Right, Clark?”

“Uh, yeah...” Clark said, nervously adjusting his glasses.

Lois grabbed him by the sides of his face, excited and kissed him once more. “What are we waiting for? Oh, God, this story is getting bigger and bigger every second.”

Perry watched the encounter slightly amused but turned away.

Inside the warehouse, Lois and Clark had been in a few hours ago they found emptiness. Everything that had been there before had been removed.

“Why am I not surprised?” Lois muttered. She turned to Perry who was right behind them. “It was all here, Perry.”

“UFOs ... bagged and tagged and processed. Right here, Chief.” Clark grimaced, looking around in disgust. “Well, there goes that story,” he sighed.

“What are you talking about?” Lois argued. “We can still write it. This is a cover up. A huge government conspiracy.”

“A cover-up?” Perry asked skeptically.

“This is bigger than Superman, Chief,” Lois urged. “We’ve got cosmic Watergate here.”

“Yeah, too bad we can’t write any of it,” Clark said.

“What? Why not?” Lois asked, “We can corroborate each other.”

“Where’s your evidence, Lois?” Clark motioned to the empty warehouse. “Gone.”

“Chief...” Lois pleaded.

“I’m afraid I have to agree with Kent, Lois. You’re talking UFOs. Your physical evidence is gone. Trask is missing. Thompson’s dead. General Newcomb says he’s never heard of you. We run this thing and we’ll look like the National Whisper. You could kiss your careers goodbye and take the paper with you. I just can’t let that happen. Sorry.” Perry walked out of the warehouse, leaving Lois and Clark to talk amongst themselves.

Jimmy patted Lois on the shoulder. “I believe you.” He then moved to follow Perry outside.

“Lois...” Clark placed a hand on her shoulder.

He was surprised to see her close to tears. “Do you realize what we’ve lost here, Clark?”

Clark nodded. “Yeah, I do.”

“Trask is missing. What if he comes back? What if he...” She gave into the emotions that had overtaken her. Clark hesitantly placed a supportive arm around her as she cried. She was obviously more rattled about her encounter with Trask than she let on.

Later that night, Clark sat at home on the phone with his parents. “I don’t know what to do, Mom. She’s really upset. I mean, that’s understandable. Trask threw her out of the plane.” Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair. “Mom, I want your opinion on something.”

“Is this about Lois? Yes, I think you should ask her out. It’s obvious you like her.” Martha’s voice was full of teasing.

Clark smiled at his mother’s insight. “That’s not what I’m talking about.”

“I still stand by it,” Martha argued. “What is it?”

“Perry has every reporter out searching for Superman... trying to get the scoop. I wanted to know what you thought about me giving an interview to someone.”

Martha twisted her face a bit, thinking before she spoke. “Who would you give the interview to?”

“I was thinking of giving it to Lois,” Clark began slowly.

Martha smiled on the other end of the phone. It was obvious to her that Clark was smitten by Lois Lane. “Are you sure you can trust her?”

“Yeah,” Clark said firmly. “I know I can trust her. She barely has any information to go by on Superman and she’s his number one supporter. I think it’s only fair she gets this interview. Especially after what she had to go through. She brought up a valid point.”

“What’s that?” Martha asked.

“Trask is still out there. What if he comes back?” Clark asked.

“I’m sure you’ll handle it the best you can,” Martha said soothingly.

“Yeah. Mom, do me a favor and double check the locks on the door and windows before you go to bed?”

“Clark, I’m a grown woman. I don’t need you worrying about me. I swear sometimes you are worse than your father.”

“Please?” he asked.

Martha immediately relented. Clark was obviously rattled about something. “Okay, but I promise I’ll be fine.”

“When does Dad get back in town?” Clark asked.

“He’ll be back tomorrow. Your Aunt Ida’s been nagging him to come visit her ever since she had back surgery last summer. Since we just finished with the harvest, he figured now’s as good as any to go visit.”

“Yeah,” Clark said sadly.

“Honey, cheer up. I’m sure everything will be fine. Why don’t you go see Lois? Give her that interview? Maybe that’ll help?” Martha suggested.

“I guess,” Clark said. He smiled and decided now was as good as any to say good night. “Night, mom.”

“Good night.” Martha hung up the phone and sighed, heading for the front door to double check the locks for her son’s sake.

Lois sat at her desk, typing away. “No...no.” she stopped, cursing at herself. She stared back at her computer menacingly. “Why can’t I put this into words?”

Clark swooped down, landing in the newsroom. Lois turned around to face him, a huge smile on her face. “I hear you’ve been looking for me,” he said.

Lois smiled back at him, trying to compose herself. “Everyone’s been looking for you...in case you haven’t noticed.”

Clark nodded. “I know.” He grew quiet a moment. “You almost died because of that. I’m truly sorry for that.”

Lois tried to brush it off. “Well, it did make that bungee jump I did last year seem pretty tame.”

Clark knew she was trying to cover up the real fear she felt over the situation. He had seen her just a few hours ago in tears over her fear of Trask returning. “I’m going to stop that man. That’s a promise, Lois.”

“You know my name.” Clark realized his slip and grew slightly apprehensive. Had he given himself up? Was this a good idea? “But I don’t know yours.”

Clark smiled. “Superman seems to have caught on.”

Lois blushed at the comment. “You didn’t give me a lot to work with, you know.” She pulled out a notebook from her desk. “Where are you from? I mean, you’re not from Kansas, that’s for

sure.”

Clark had to smile at that comment. If she only knew. “I’m from another planet. A place called Krypton.”

“Krypton?” Lois echoed. “Do you mind if I write this down?” she gestured to her notebook.

He shook his head, ‘no.’ “Not at all.”

He felt her eyes on him.; “You seem to have all the parts of a ...man,” she said, blushing.

Clark smiled back at her. “I am a man, Lois. Just like you’re a woman.”

Lois smiled back at him, blushing slightly. “So, you can fly, but what else can you do? I mean, those missiles hit you head on.”

She didn’t skirt around, getting down to the nitty-gritty. Yes, he’d definitely made the right choice. “I have enhanced senses. I can fly, see things other people can’t. I’m invulnerable. When I concentrate I can create a freezing blast with my breath. I can also create laser beams from my eyes as well.”

“I see. Enhanced vision. What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I can see through walls.” At her look of concern, he smiled politely. “Not that I make a habit of it. I try to keep from invading anyone’s privacy.”

Lois smiled. “So, no peeping tom?”

“No. I have my ethics.”

“I’m glad you’re here, but why are you here?”

“To help,” Clark said simply.

“To help?” she echoed. “You’re going to have to give me more of a quote than that. Like, ‘I have not yet begun to fight.’ Or ‘Damn the torpedoes.’ If you said you were here to fight for truth or justice”

“Well, truth and justice. That sounds good. You can use that,” Clark said.

“Okay, um, do you have a minute? I should probably call my...”

A cry for help distracted him. He looked towards the window. “I’m sorry. I have to go.”

“A job for Superman?” she asked, smiling at herself for coining the phrase.

Clark nodded. “I’ll be seeing you.” He left to answer the cry for help. He couldn’t help but smile when he heard her murmur ‘*I hope so*’ at his exit.

They floated in the air, clinging to one another. His hands roamed up and down her sides. His hard muscles beneath her skin...His skin against hers. His tongue caressing hers. His mouth on hers. She ran her hand through his hair.

“*Su-per-man!*”

Clark sat upright in his bed, hearing his alter ego’s name on Lois’ lips. He quickly changed and made his way over to her apartment. He was about to knock on the window when he realized what was going on. She was dreaming. His face reddened when he heard his alter-ego’s name on his partner’s lips once more.

She was in bed, dreaming.... Had he heard her right? She was dreaming of Superman? Why? He really didn’t understand the difference between himself and his alter-ego other than the powers.

Deciding that he’d intruded enough for the night he turned away only to hear her cry out a completely different name. “Clark!”

His eyebrows shot up at the implication of this. Was she dreaming of him? This was too much. He had to get out of here... now. He rocketed himself towards the Arctic. This was going to be a long night.

Lois Lane awoke the next morning feeling refreshed. She had been so happy when she had gone to bed last night. She had the

exclusive on Superman. Perry may have put the APB out for him, but Superman had come to her. That had to have meant something, right? Her by-line would show the world just how good she was. The first reporter to nail down the exclusive on Superman.

‘*What about Clark?*’ her conscience nagged at her.

Clark. She really wasn’t comfortable thinking about him right now. She had grown uncomfortable in his presence. She wasn’t sure what had come over her yesterday. She had been all over him. She had kissed him right in the middle of the newsroom for everyone to see. Sure that could be written off as relief that he was alive, but what about on the plane? She had kissed him as more than just a diversionary tactic. Did he know that?

This is ridiculous. Clark is my partner. I shouldn’t be thinking of him like that. Partner. The word rang in her ears. The word had so many double meanings. Partner could refer to a professional and personal aspect. What she wanted at this point she wasn’t sure yet.

‘*Partner.*’ Her conscience reminded her once more. She looked down at her notes guiltily. She had a partner now. She couldn’t write up an exclusive without him. He had definitely earned her respect over the last week. He definitely wasn’t just a hack from Nowheresville. They had agreed to a truce with one another, so she needed to work with him on this. No matter how much she really didn’t want to.

“Hello?” Clark mumbled incoherently into the receiver of his phone.

“Clark?” Lois’ voice echoed from the other end.

“Lois?” Clark squinted, looking around the room, adjusting to the light.

“It’s seven in the morning. Aren’t you up yet?”

“Perry did tell us to take the next two days off,” he mumbled in response.

“Yeah, but this is important. I got us the exclusive on Superman.”

“Us?” he asked bemused.

“*We are* partners after all, aren’t we?” she asked.

“Well, yeah...” he began. She was willingly sharing the byline on the biggest story of the year. He hadn’t expected that.

“Good. Since technically we’re supposed to be *not* working I thought we could work on the piece together. My place is off limit’s due to Lucy and...well; you don’t want a repeat of what happened last time, do you?”

“No.” Clark definitely didn’t want to be around Lois and Lucy when they were fighting. Being around anyone that was fighting made him uncomfortable.

“Good. I’ll need directions to your place. Where are you staying?”

“344 Clinton Street,” he said.

“Clinton Street? Oh, I know where that is. See you in a few.”

Before he knew what had happened he was listening to dead air. He hung up the phone and began to move at super-speed preparing for Lois’ arrival. He wasn’t sure where she was coming from or how long it would take her to get to his place.

Once he had finished getting dressed and tidying up the place he began to work on making breakfast. He was about to flip the last of the pancakes when an insistent knocking at his door caught his attention. “Oh, boy,” he muttered to himself. He quickly finished cooking the pancake with his heat vision then headed up the stairs to answer the door.

“It’s about time. How long does it take you to answer the door?” she asked making her way into his apartment. Clark watched her amused. “Not bad,” she said, examining the place. “I had a friend that stayed over here once. She said it was a dump, but this is actually pretty nice looking.”

“Well, it took a lot of repairs and paint,” Clark explained.

“You did all this?” Lois asked, gesturing to the apartment.

“Well...yeah,” he said. “You said something about an exclusive on the phone.”

“Oh, yes. You won’t believe who I ran into last night.” Lois beamed, holding up her notebook.

“Who?” Clark asked, humoring her.

“Superman.”

“No kidding,” Clark began hesitantly. “What’s he like?”

“Well, he didn’t stay long, but I got enough for an exclusive.” Lois smacked him lightly with the notebook. “We keep this up we may be looking at a Pulitzer next year.”

Clark smiled back at her. She was so beautiful when she was like this. Her face was flushed with excitement from landing the interview with Superman. He couldn’t suppress his own smile. He loved seeing her like this.

<<“Cl-ark!”>>

The memory of what he had heard at her apartment last night haunted him. He shook his head, trying to clear his mind of the memory before his body betrayed his emotions. “Hey, Earth to Clark!” She waved a hand in front of him. “Did you hear me? I said I just got us the exclusive of the century.”

“Uh, that’s great. I’m sorry. I’m just a little tired. It’s been a long week you know,” he said, walking into the kitchen. He offered her a plate. “Are you hungry?”

Lois eyed the ensemble of food on his counters. “Where do you put it all?”

“I wasn’t going to eat it all myself,” he explained. “I whipped up some extra when you said you were coming over.”

“Oh.” She eyed the food warily. “I guess it couldn’t hurt.”

He didn’t allow her a chance to argue, placing a plate of pancakes in front of her. “Enjoy. Do you want some coffee?”

“Please.” She nodded.

“Here. *Bon Appetit.*”

Lois took a sip of her coffee and was surprised to find it already sweetened to her liking. “How did you know how I like my coffee?”

“I’m observant,” Clark explained.

Lois smiled at him then turned her attention to the food in front of her. They ate in compatible silence, making occasional small talk. It was nice. Comfortable. It reminded him of the many meals he had had with his parents.

After breakfast, they began piecing together the story on Superman. It had been incredible; the way they bounced ideas off of one another. It was like they were reading one another’s minds. He kept catching her stealing glances at him. He tried to pretend like he hadn’t noticed.

“So, I think that’s everything. I’ll drop this by the Planet and Perry should have it in the next edition,” Lois said, gathering her things.

“Thank you for sharing the exclusive with me, Lois. You know you didn’t have to. I mean, Superman did come to you,” Clark said.

Lois smiled shyly at him, “I know, but after the way I’ve treated you this past week I kinda felt like I owed you one. We make a pretty good team.”

“Definitely.” He smiled back at her. He was surprised to find her heart rate picking up when he did so. Was something wrong? He watched her carefully as she grabbed her purse. She gave him a sideways glance as she made her way up the steps.

<<“Cl-ark!”>>

The memory was seared into his mind. He had a feeling she probably remembered it too by the way she was blushing. “So, I’m going to go now...” She smiled at him. “Thanks for breakfast.”

“Anytime.” He smiled. There went her heart rate again. “Hey, Lois?” He caught up to her as she opened the door.

“Yes?” she turned to face him.

“I was wondering...” he began slowly, “...if you had dinner plans.”

“Dinner plans?” she asked, confused.

“Well, I was wondering if you’d like to go to dinner...with me?” he asked cautiously. Her heart rate was going a mile a minute. “I know this new Italian place down the street...”

“I...I...I don’t know what to say,” Lois began. “You’re asking me out?”

“Well...yeah...” he said. “It’s just dinner.” He smiled again.

Lois bit her lip nervously, “Okay.”

He rewarded her answer with a megawatt smile. “Great. I’ll pick you up at seven?”

“Sounds good,” she said. With that, she was gone.

Clark sighed in relief when the door closed. “See, that wasn’t so hard,” he told himself.

The afternoon’s edition lay on Lex Luthor’s desk, relaying Lois’ exclusive interview with the Man of Steel. Lex scanned the article with a menacing glare. He had paid Jason Trask to eliminate Superman and the man had failed. He didn’t tolerate failure.

His phone rang and he answered it briskly. “Luthor.”

“I’m guessing you’ve seen the article?” Trask asked on the other end of the phone.

“Yes, I’m a bit surprised seeing as how I was promised just last night that you had eliminated Superman,” Lex said.

“I was mistaken. Clearly, the alien is more powerful than I anticipated.”

“Well, the phrase ‘*know thy enemy*’ comes to mind,” Lex said grimly.

“I don’t have time to study him! I have a war on my hands!”

“Maybe not, Mr. Trask, but if you plan to fight him it may be useful to discover his weaknesses.”

“I have,” Trask snarled. “I’ve been going through some old reports and I think I’ve found something that could give us the upper hand.”

“Fine. You do it your way; I’ll do it mine,” Luthor said.

“Very well, but I still want the first blow. I’ve waited years for this attack. I’ve prepared for him...I want to be the one to take the first shot. Are we clear?”

“Of course. This is after all *your* plan, Mr. Trask,” Lex said before hanging up. “And if anyone ever becomes the wiser it’ll be your head that is hung; not mine.”

Lucy sat in the living room, waiting for Lois, impatiently. She had heard what had happened with Lois and Clark from Jimmy. He had called to check up on her yesterday. She was still angry at Lois for interfering with her relationship with Lex, but she still felt guilty. Lois could have been killed yesterday, and they would never have been able to patch things up.

The locks to the front door began to turn and she moved to help her sister unlock the door. She was surprised to find Lois carrying several shopping bags from different department stores. Lois hated shopping. She was usually too busy. “What’s all this?”

“I have plans tonight. I wanted to get something appropriate,” Lois explained. “So, you’re talking to me now?”

Lucy smiled shyly at her. “I know I’ve been a real jerk lately, Lois. I’m really sorry. You made me really mad that night...” Lucy sighed, knowing this wasn’t helping things. “That’s not the point. I shouldn’t have been so...cold to you. You’re my sister and I care about you. If anything ever happened...I don’t know what I would do.”

Lois moved to hug her sister. “I’m okay. It’s okay. I’m not planning any escapades like that in the near future, and for the record, I didn’t jump out of that airplane. I was pushed.”

Lucy smiled weakly. “I figured. Skydiving without a parachute doesn’t really sound like your cup of tea. So, we’re okay now?”

“Yeah.” Lois smiled. “We’re okay.”

“Great. So, you never did tell me how things went with Clark that night...”

Lois laughed. “It wasn’t a date, Luce.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know.” Lois smiled.

“So, what are you up to tonight?”

“Tonight I have an actual date with Clark.”

“Oh, really?” Lucy smiled at her sister. “This is so cute. You’re dating.” She clapped her hands together. “Go with burgundy. You look good in burgundy.”

“Check.” Lois held up her bags for inspection.

Lucy pulled out one of Victoria’s Secret’s most famous items from one of the bags. “Lingerie?”

Lois snatched the item back. “Don’t you have a final to study for?” she asked, making her way to the bedroom.

“Don’t worry. Jimmy wanted me to go out with him and Allison for drinks. I’ll stay in a hotel room if I have to.”

“Lucy, it’s not like that.”

“Sure, keep telling yourself that, sis.” Lucy laughed as Lois stalked into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her. She hoped everything worked out for her. Lois had found it hard to trust men for a long time. She had been hurt countless times; she hoped Clark would be different.

Lex Luthor sat in a secluded area of LexCorp with the hired hands Nigel had summoned for him to start his ‘study’ of Superman. “What do we know about Superman?” Lex asked.

Jules was the first to answer. He was an African American man in his mid-thirties with gold teeth. “That he can really jump... for a white guy.”

“Yes, but how far? How high? Is he, for example, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound?” Lex asked.

Jules didn’t have an answer; he just shrugged. Nigel spoke up. “He’s immensely powerful.”

“How powerful?” Lex challenged. “More powerful than an avalanche? More powerful than a... locomotive?”

Monique spoke up. “He’s still a man. All men are weak,” she said seductively.

Lex smiled grimly. “Obviously we know very little. I have designed a series of tests for Superman. I’ll need your help.” Monique shook her head, annoyed, and raised a hand. “Yes, Monique?”

“Let me hire a couple of shooters, and I’ll turn Superman into a giant wet spot. Tests won’t be necessary,” Monique said, running a hand up and down her thighs.

Luthor ignored her obvious attempt at seduction. “Have you ever read the Sun Tzu’s ‘The Art of War’?”

“I’m waiting for the Reader’s Digest version,” she replied coolly.

“Sun Tzu was a general of ancient, Imperial China. He teaches us, I’m paraphrasing of course, that ‘knowledge precedes victory; confusion precedes defeat.’” Lex moved to face her, eyes narrowing. “Let’s do it my way, shall we? I am the one signing your payroll checks, am I not?”

Lois stood in front of her full-length mirror, examining her reflection critically. She wore a burgundy dress that came up to her knees, showing off her shapely legs. The neckline was slightly modest with a slight swoop of fabric across her breast line. The spaghetti straps hung loosely on her shoulders. She accessorized with a pearl necklace.

She had been blind-sided when Clark had asked her out. She had been enjoying his company so much lately, finding excuses to touch him. She had even begun to dream about him. She still couldn’t believe she had been dreaming of being with him like that. Thank God no one had heard her. Lucy would have never let her live that down.

She knew she felt something for Clark. He was charming, good-looking, educated...and boy could he kiss. Just the thought of his lips against hers made her weak in the knees. ‘Don’t go there,’ she told herself.

“Wow, sis.” Lucy whistled. “You look hot...”

Lois smiled nervously at her sister. “I’m not even sure why I’m doing this. This is a mistake. Dating a colleague. I mean, I barely know Clark...” she rambled, nervously pacing around her bedroom.

“What’s to know?” Lucy asked. “He’s hot. You obviously like him. He obviously likes you. I don’t see the problem.”

“We work together,” Lois argued.

“So, you have more to talk about.” Lucy shrugged. “Just enjoy yourself. You *need* to get out more.”

“I guess,” Lois said nervously, tapping her foot against the wood grain floor.

A knock at the door announced Clark’s presence. Lucy grinned at Lois. “I believe that’s for you. Don’t worry. I won’t be here when you get back.”

“Lucy...” Lois warned.

“I’ll be in my room for now.” Lucy winked. “Have a good time.”

Lois sighed and moved to answer the door. “Hi.” She smiled. “Come on in.”

“These are for you.” Clark handed her another bouquet of white roses. She took them gratefully. He stepped inside, taking a moment to gaze upon her. “Wow, Lois... You look... absolutely stunning.”

Lois examined her dress, blushing at Clark’s compliment. “Really?”

“Absolutely,” he said.

She smiled, watching him stare at her. It was obvious she had some effect on him. She moved to put the flowers in a vase, then gathered her purse. “Ready?”

He nodded numbly and followed her out the door.

Lois watched Clark from across the table appreciatively. He looked so good in that suit. The memory of what lay beneath that suit still haunted her at night.

<< “I said, nine, I thought you’d be naked...um, ready.” >>

He had the most gorgeous body she had ever seen. She had never seen a man so perfectly sculpted. Most men she had come in contact with that had an attractive body and build usually tried to show it off, but not Clark. He hid his body well under his suits and flashy ties.

“It’s been an interesting week,” Lois commented. “It’s not usually this crazy. I hope you’re not getting scared off.”

“Not at all.” He smiled warmly. “Metropolis is definitely unique.”

“There’s not a place like it.” Lois smiled back at him. She looked out the window, taking in the setting sun. “The view here is beautiful.”

“Breathtaking,” Clark said. Lois looked back at him and noticed he wasn’t looking at the horizon.

Lois caught his gaze and immediately felt the heat between them. How was it that she was able to come undone from just a look? She felt her knees weaken under his stare. “What made you come to Metropolis anyway?” Lois asked, trying to change the subject.

“Well, I knew I wanted to be a reporter. The Daily Planet is the best.” Clark shrugged. “I always strive for the best.”

“Ah, another common ground for us,” Lois teased.

“I guess. My parents were a bit disappointed when I chose not to follow in tradition and take care of the Kent farm, but they understood.”

“You close with them?” Lois asked, curiously.

“Yeah.”

“That must be nice,” Lois said sadly, remembering the fights she had had with her own parents.

“What about you? Are you close with your parents?”

Lois scrunched up her nose. “Not really. I had a falling out with my dad when I was seventeen; haven’t really spoken with him since.”

“And your mom?”

Lois sighed, trying to find the right words to describe her mother. “My mother is...well, you’d have to meet her in order to get a good grasp of who she is. She’s a piece of work.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Clark acknowledged with a chuckle.

“Lucy and I are pretty close. She’s the only family I need...or *want*,” Lois explained. “The Lanes aren’t known for their family skills.” She smiled regretfully at him. “Lucy and I grew up listening to *a lot* of fights.”

“That must have been hard,” Clark said soothingly.

“I guess.” Lois shrugged it off. It had been years since she had actually thought about her parents. She didn’t try to make an effort to see them. Her mother usually stopped by for holidays, but her father was usually too busy with work or his latest fling to bother.

“You know if you really think about it the only time people ever really seem to express themselves is when they’re passionate and the polite veneer of society drops off. You know like they’re fighting...”

Lois nodded. “...or make love.” She blushed, lowering her head, mortified at what had just come out of her mouth. “Oh, my gosh. I can’t believe I just said that.”

They were interrupted by the waiter bringing them desert. “Are you sure you don’t want any?” he asked.

Lois eyed the chocolate desert appreciatively. She loved chocolate, but chocolate had an effect on her that no one else knew. The taste of chocolate on her taste buds had the power to arouse her. That was the last thing she needed right now.

“I’m fine.” She shook her head. “No, I better not.”

“Are you sure?” Clark said, taking a bite. “It’s really good.” He held out a spoon filled with the enticing chocolate cake.

She eyed it appreciatively. She wasn’t sure which was more seductive: the chocolate or the man offering it to her. She hesitated for a moment then gave in. “Okay.” She took a bite, slowly savoring the bite. “Mmmm.” She closed her eyes, reveling in the taste of chocolate on her taste buds. “Mmmm.” She opened her eyes and realized Clark was staring at her awestruck with his mouth partially open. “I hate myself.” She laughed.

“You ready for another round?” he teased.

Lois arched her eyebrows at him. Was that a challenge? Did he realize what this was doing to her... what *he* was doing to her?

The way her mouth moved, savoring the chocolate cake. His mouth went dry, watching her. His super senses picked up a scent that was familiar to him. The scent he had inhaled when he had gone to check on her the previous night. When she had been dreaming of *him*...

He closed his eyes, willing the thoughts and images that had just entered his mind to go away. Just the idea of her... *like that*... sent chills down his spine.

He finished half the cake before asking her if she wanted another bite again. She caught his gaze. He was surprised when he looked in her eyes and saw desire reflected back. He held out another bite which she took gratefully, savoring the bite even longer than she had the first.

Did she know what *she* was doing to him? “I love chocolate,” she murmured.

He smiled. “I can tell.”

He looked around the restaurant and noticed the staff seemed to be getting ready to close the restaurant. “I think they’re about ready to close,” he said.

She nodded. “Yeah.”

They gathered their things. Clark paid the bill on the table and followed Lois outside.

They caught a taxi back to Lois’ apartment, continuing their friendly banter with one another. The sound of his laugh caused her heart to race. She loved the sound of it. She didn’t want the night to end. It didn’t have to.

“Do you want to come in?” she asked, boldly, unlocking her door. “I could make some coffee.”

“Sure,” he said, following her into the apartment.

“Don’t worry. No chance of running into Lucy tonight,” she reassured him. “She went out for drinks with Allison and Jimmy.”

“Ah, she and Jimmy seem pretty close,” he commented, following her into the kitchen.

“Yeah, I half expected them to start seeing one another but they’ve been friends for a while. I guess they just didn’t want to ruin a good thing,” she explained, pressing the brew button on the coffee maker. “Should be done in a few,” she said, nervously toying with a strand of hair.

“Sounds good.” Clark smiled at her. “So, are you two talking yet?”

“Yeah.” She smiled weakly. “She and I patched things up this afternoon. She’s still seeing Lex, unfortunately, but until I have proof that he’s dirty she’s just going to ignore me.”

“I’m sorry. This can’t be easy for you... watching your kid sister involved with someone like Luthor.”

Lois blushed. “Well, I don’t really know what kind of person he is. I mean, all I have to go on is an assumption and the fact that I really don’t like him seeing Lucy.”

“Over protective big sister?” he asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Something like that,” she said breathlessly. He was standing right behind her. She could feel the heat from his body. She inhaled deeply, turning to check on the coffee. It was just finishing. “Uh, coffee.” She gestured to the pot. She pulled out two cups from the cabinet and began to pour. “I don’t have regular creamer. You’ll have to manage with half-and-half. I hope that’s okay.”

“Sure,” he said, watching her prepare the cups expertly. “How did you know how I like my coffee?”

“I’m very observant,” she said, smiling back at him. They caught each other’s gaze a moment before moving into the living room. “Dinner was nice. How did you get reservations so last minute?”

“Oh, you know, the usual way. I begged the manager.” He winked at her.

“You didn’t.” She laughed.

“No, I told him I had a feeling he could do with some good press since their restaurant was new in town.”

“You learn fast,” Lois said, impressed, rewarding him with a smile. She watched him sip his coffee, placing it on the coffee table. He looked so good. The memory of his lips on hers played through her mind as she watched him. He had acted impulsively with her once before... Would he do it again?

<<“How predictable was that?”>>

“Well, I had good teachers.” He smiled back at her. They were sitting next to one another; a few millimeters away from one another. She could feel the heat from his body against her own. She wanted to touch him. Should she make the first move? Give him a sign that she wanted him to kiss her?

“Flattery will get you nowhere,” she said, patting his knee lightly.

“Oh, really?” he teased back. His tone was full of humor but his eyes were filled with something else. Desire? Her breath caught in her throat as she tried to continue the teasing banter between them.

“Yes. Flattery makes you think someone’s trying to hide something. Are you trying to hide something?” she asked. His eyes got a faraway look that seemed familiar to her, but then he turned his attention back to her. For a split second, she thought maybe she had imagined it.

“Well, you don’t know everything about me,” he admitted. “I still don’t know everything about you.” He patted her knee lightly.

Lois closed her eyes a moment, savoring the warmth from his touch. If only he would move his hand up a little higher... What was she thinking? Was she seriously considering sleeping with Clark on a first date?

Her heart was pounding against her chest as she watched him hesitantly. He seemed to be contemplating something as he gently squeezed her kneecap. Both coffee cups lay on the table forgotten... probably cold by now. He looked at her hesitantly, keeping her gaze. He seemed nervous.

She really wanted him to kiss her. Just one kiss. It wouldn’t hurt anything. They’d kissed quite a few times and it hadn’t hurt anything, had it? The world hadn’t ended. This was different, though. This was an actual date. She was on an actual date with Clark, her partner.

Could she do this? Could she have a relationship with him? Kiss him? And still, have a healthy professional relationship with him? She had to. She traced the outline of his hand with her own, anticipating his next move. She tilted her head towards his as he leaned in to kiss her.

This was it.

He felt her hand relax against his the moment their lips touched one another. He had only planned to kiss her good night, but she had pulled him in for a deeper kiss. He groaned in approval as she slipped her tongue inside his mouth. He could taste the chocolate from earlier on her tongue.

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

He allowed his other hand to explore the curves of her body. He was hesitant at first, but encouraged by her moans he grew more assertive. She felt so good in his arms.

She had turned to face him fully with one leg across his lap; the warmth of her skin against his continued to tease him as they continued their embrace. He ran his hand up and down her creamy thigh; kneading it gently. He was surprised to find her bare flesh beneath his touch. It intrigued him even more.

She had her arms linked around his neck as their kisses deepened. Every time he thought they would slow things down she grew more insistent, devouring him with her lips. It was evident now that the chemistry he had felt every time they had touched in the past week had not been one-sided. He continued to knead the flesh of her leg as they deepened the embrace. She pressed her body against his, deepening the kiss. She moved her hands up and down his chest, gently caressing him through his dress shirt.

“Lois...” he moaned. She didn’t give him a chance to say anything else, devouring him once more. She was now hovering above him as she straddled him. She supported herself on her knees as she devoured him.

He could feel his body throbbing as it responded to her touch. He needed to slow things down before they got out of control. She felt so good in his arms, but this was too fast. They were treading on dangerous territory here.

“Please...” she pleaded with him, moving his hand higher, towards her inner thigh.

He groaned when he felt the soft skin beneath his fingertips. “Oh, God...” he moaned, trying to string together a coherent thought in-between kisses. “Lois...are...you...sure...we

aren’t...moving...too ...” He was cut short when she glided his hand up higher. “Oh, God...” he moaned, capturing her mouth once more.

She moaned into his mouth as she deepened the kiss. She wanted this; that much was obvious. “Oh, God, yes...” she moaned, arching her back against him.

Did she know what that sultry moan was doing to him? He decided he didn’t care.

“Oh, God, yes...” she moaned. Her entire body ached for his touch. She wanted him. He captured her mouth once more, silencing her with his mouth. She whimpered against him, rubbing her hands up and down his chest, aching to feel his skin against hers.

They were wearing far too many clothes. She tugged at his tie, loosening it as their embrace continued. The things he was doing to her... She needed to feel his skin against hers. She pushed his jacket off then began to work on the buttons to his dress shirt. “Oh, God...” he moaned as she raked her fingernails up and down his chest.

She loved the sound of his voice aroused. “Yes...” she moaned as she brushed his dress shirt off his shoulders.

She felt his other hand slip to her thigh, kneading the flesh gently before moving daringly up the hem of her dress. He looked at her for approval. She nodded mutely, pushing his hand up her thigh invitingly. He moved his hand up her body, tracing every curve. He scrunched her dress up as he pushed it up her legs.

She ran a sultry finger down his chest, tracing random patterns in her wake until she rested her hand at his waistband.

“Are...you...sure...about...this?” he murmured in between open-mouthed kisses.

She didn’t give him a chance to question her further; recapturing his mouth eagerly, she pressed her body against his. He moved his hand to cup her cheek, meeting her ecstasy-induced gaze. She smiled back at him and he recaptured her lips.

She grinned against him as she felt him scoop her up and carry her into the bedroom. One by one each item of clothing fell to the floor as they lost themselves in one another’s arms.

The room was spinning. His heart was racing. A slow smile spread across his face as he looked down at the brunette in his arms. She offered him a lazy smile, resting her head against his chest.

It was incredible.

He’d never experienced anything like it in his life.

All his gifts and abilities seemed insignificant compared to what he’d just shared with Lois Lane. It wasn’t something from his alien abilities. It wasn’t something super. It was something normal. Something human. He’d done it. Him alone. Not Superman. Him, Clark Kent. It gave him a sense of awe to think that he could give her such pleasure without any of his ‘gifts’.

He rolled them over so they were on their sides, facing one another. She still had a glazed look on her face. He couldn’t help but smile. “You okay?” he asked.

“Huh?” she asked, slightly dazed. “Never better,” she said.

He pulled her to him. He leaned down to kiss her once more. To his amazement, he felt his body begin to respond to hers. A euphoric haze began to wash over him once more as the world around him disappeared. This was it. He knew it. There was never going to be anyone else. He loved her more than he could love anyone.

“I love you,” he whispered in her ear before recapturing her lips with his.

Never.

She’d never experienced anything like that in her life.

She’d had dates.

She'd had relationships.

She'd had a few less than satisfying experiences that had made her question if something was wrong with her as a woman.

As she lay in Clark's arms, reeling from the euphoric haze that had washed over her during their lovemaking, every doubt and question she had was answered.

There was nothing wrong with her.

Panic started to nag at the back of her mind.

He was her partner.

Her *work* partner.

She had to *work* with him.

She had to *work* with him after...

Two times in one night...

How was she supposed to do that?

Where did they go from here?

Would he leave like everyone else?

"I love you," he whispered in her ear. She felt her heart begin to hammer against her chest. Before she could respond he captured her mouth once more. She stiffened in his embrace and he pulled away, looking at her curiously.

The feeling of being with Lois had been exhilarating. He never wanted to part with her. He loved her. Every curve, moan, smile, and frown that was wrapped into Lois Lane. He loved everything about her. They had just made love twice. He knew after her history with Claude she might begin to question his motives with her. He needed to voice his intentions with her... what he felt for her. He should have said it earlier. Why hadn't he said it earlier? He knew why. He wasn't thinking. Stringing a coherent thought together was impossible with Lois wrapped around him.

"I love you," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her once more.

The minute the words were out of his mouth he regretted them. Her entire body stiffened in his arms. He broke off the kiss, looking at her curiously. Her heart rate was going a mile a minute; she moved at a record-breaking speed towards the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Clark wasn't sure what had just happened but it was obvious he had set her off. Telling her *I love you* was the wrong call. He got up from the bed and grabbed his trousers, putting them on before he moved to the bathroom. Lois was still barricaded inside, showing no intentions of leaving. "Lois?" He knocked on the door.

"Please...just...go..." Lois' muffled cries could be heard from the other side of the door. His heart wrenched. "Why did you have to ruin it?"

Ruin it? How was telling her he loved her ruining it? He sighed to himself, unsure of how to approach the situation. There was still so much he didn't know about Lois Lane. "Lois, I'm not going to go until we talk about this..."

"Clark, please...just go..." she pleaded in between cries.

"Lois...what's wrong? What happened?" Clark asked.

"Please, just go..." she cried.

Clark opened his mouth to argue once more but was interrupted by a cry for help. "*Help, Superman!!!*" He silently cursed his luck.

"All right, I'll go, but we *are* going to talk about this. You can't stay in your bathroom forever," he said. He quickly gathered his belongings and headed out the door, changing into Superman on his way. Hopefully, he would be able to talk to Lois about this tomorrow.

Lois heard the door shut. She cautiously opened the door to her bathroom, peeking her head out into the bedroom. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw no sign of Clark. What had he been thinking? Telling her he loved her?

That's what men say when they want something from you.

They never mean it. Her father had claimed to love her mother and look how great that turned out. He had stepped out on her mother

and left her to raise two kids by herself. Then there had been Claude. He claimed to have 'loved' her, but the minute he'd gotten what he'd wanted he'd been gone. No, she was safer staying out of those types of relationships.

"*Then why did you just make love with Clark?*" her conscience chided her.

Make Love? No, they hadn't made love, had they? It had been sex. Plain and simple. It had been fulfilling a mutual urge; nothing more. Well, it *had* been a little more than sex. It had been the most incredible, mind-blowing sex she'd ever had in her life. Where did he learn to do that? Just the memory of his hands on her skin sent a shiver down her spine.

This was probably just satisfying some itch to him. Nothing more. she thought to herself.

<<"I love you.">>

She swiped at the tears in her eyes, trying to bury the memory of what had happened between her and Clark. Another thought struck her mind. "Oh, God, how am I supposed to work with him now?" She groaned, burying her face in her pillow.

"Hey, Lois?" Lucy's voice echoed throughout the apartment. Lois groaned, grabbing a robe and wrapping it around her.

"Great," she muttered to herself.

"Well, it looks like someone had a good time," Lucy teased, picking up the lingerie from the floor by her bed. "Where's Clark?"

"Home, probably," Lois muttered, avoiding her sister's gaze.

"Home? What happened?" Lucy asked concerned.

"It's really late, Lucy. You should be getting to bed. Don't you have finals tomorrow?"

"That's not until Monday," Lucy said, crossing her arms across her chest. "What was it this time?"

"What are you talking about?" Lois asked, pretending to be dubious.

"You had what seems like an incredible time with Clark..." she said gesturing towards Lois' smeared makeup and tousled hair.

"Lucy, you've got the wrong idea."

"Really? Well, Clark doesn't really seem like the love 'em and leave 'em type, sis. What happened? And don't try and deny that something happened again. Your clothes have been flung all over the room. Your hair and makeup are a mess..." Lucy pulled Lois' robe open, "...and that speaks for itself," she said, pointing to the hickey that had begun to form above Lois' collarbone.

"Okay, fine. You're right. Clark and I had sex..." Lois sighed. "There? Are you happy?"

"Just sex?" Lucy challenged. Lois looked away. "Uh-huh. Like I said, what did you do?"

"I didn't do anything..." Lois argued, "...exactly."

"Oh?"

"I told him to leave."

"*Why??*" Lucy asked, confused. "Look, I don't work with you or anything, sis, but from what Jimmy's told me, there are girls that would kill to have a chance with Clark... Why would you...?"

"He told me *'he loved me!'*" Lois cried.

"*So?*" Lucy asked, confused. "How is that a *bad* thing?"

"Oh, just forget it. You wouldn't understand," Lois said, grabbing her clothes from her closet. She hurriedly began to get dressed.

"Where are you going?"

"I can't be here right now. No offense, Lucy. I just...I need some space." After packing her essentials into an overnight bag, Lois grabbed her purse and headed out the door, leaving a very confused Lucy in her wake.

"The Honeymoon Suite?" Lois echoed the receptionist.

"That's *all* you have available?"

"I'm afraid so, ma'am," the receptionist apologized. "Would you like me to book it for you?"

Lois chewed on her lip a moment, contemplating. It was only for one night. She really didn't need to deal with Lucy right now...or Clark.

She nodded at the receptionist. "I'll take it."

"Very well. Cash or charge?"

"Charge." She handed the receptionist her credit card.

"Okay. Enjoy your stay, Ms. Lane."

Lois took her keycard from the receptionist, ignoring the bellboy's attempt to help her with her bag. "Do I look like I need help?"

"Uh, no, Miss...I was just..." the bellboy stammered.

Lois didn't give him a chance to finish his sentence. She stepped into the elevator, allowing the elevator doors to close behind her.

She made her way to her room, looking forward to a night of rest and relaxation away from all the stressors of her life. She ran the bathtub, adding the bubbles and bath salt.

<<"I love you.">>

<<"How did you know how I like my coffee?"

"I'm observant," Clark explained. >>

She slipped her clothes off and stepped into the tub.

<<"I was wondering...if you had dinner plans."

"Dinner plans?"

"Well, I was wondering if you'd like to go to dinner...with me? I know this new Italian place down the street..."

"I...I...I don't know what to say...You're asking me out?"

"Well...yeah...It's just dinner."

"Okay.">>

She swiped at the tears that began to fall down her cheeks.

<<"I love you.">>

<<"These are for you...Wow, Lois...You look...absolutely stunning."

"Really?"

"Absolutely.">>

The way he had looked at her. She should have known...

<<"I love you.">>

<<"I said, nine, I thought you'd be naked...um, ready.">>

<<"I love you.">>

How could she be so stupid as to fall into the same trap again?

<<"The view here is beautiful."

"Breathtaking.">>

<<"I love you.">>

No, not the same trap. There was something different about Clark.

<<"You know, if you really think about it the only time people ever really seem to express themselves is when they're passionate and the polite veneer of society drops off. You know like they're fighting..."

"...or make love...Oh, my gosh. I can't believe I just said that.">>

<<"I love you.">>

<<"I love chocolate."

"I can tell.">>

He hadn't made fun of her when she had made a complete fool of herself at the restaurant. Other men would have used that as an opening to make some kind of lewd comment or gesture. Clark hadn't.

<<"I love you.">>

<<"How predictable was that?">>

<<"I love you.">>

<<"Well, you don't know everything about me. I still don't know everything about you.">>

She didn't know everything about him. What if he was different? What then? She couldn't say for sure if she was in love with him. She definitely was attracted to him; that much was for sure. He was definitely attracted to her. Why had he allowed things to get so out of hand?

<<"I love you.">>

<<"Oh, God...Lois...are...you...sure...we aren't...moving...too ...Oh, God...">>

No, he didn't allow things. She had pushed things. She had pushed the envelope with him. Diving in without looking just like she always did.

<<"I love you.">>

<<"Are...you...sure...about...this?">>

<<"I love you.">>

She had urged him on every step of the way, then run the second he made it clear he wasn't like her previous lover.

<<"I love you.">>

The tenderness in his eyes when he had been concerned about hurting her. Claude had never cared. He had hurt her a few times. Even in his frenzy, Claude still was never able to accomplish even one-quarter of what Clark had tonight.

<<"I love you.">>

He said he loved her. Did he mean it or was he really just saying something in the heat of the moment?

<<"All right, I'll go, but we ARE going to talk about this. You can't stay in your bathroom forever," he said. >>

<<"I love you.">>

Was she willing to take the risk of getting her heart broken again? She had survived Claude's betrayal ...her parents....Linda, her ex-best friend...

She liked Clark. They worked well together; in and out of the office. Was she willing to sacrifice a possible friend and partner for great sex for a few months? No.

She sank into the tub, leaning towards the faucet to turn the water off when something caught her eye. Congressman Harrington stood in the window across the street with an unfamiliar man, looking over a calendar. They seemed to be involved in a very heated argument. Lois' eyes widened and she reached for her purse outside the tub. Inside her purse, she pulled out a small camera. She began to take shot after shot of the congressman and unidentifiable man. She wasn't sure what was going on here, but something was up.

The next morning, Clark stood outside Lois' door with a bouquet of white roses. "Lois?" He knocked on the door insistently. "Open up; I know you're in there. We need to talk about this."

He was surprised to find Lucy on the other side of the door. "Clark, it's seven in the morning. Don't you have a home?"

"I need to talk to Lois," Clark said.

Lucy sighed. "She's not here. She left right after I got home. I guess she didn't want to be around me."

"Where did she go?" Clark asked.

Lucy shrugged. "I don't know. She probably got a room at one of the thousands of hotels around here." She moved to close the door. "Now, if you don't mind I'd like to get some sleep."

"Sure. I'm sorry I woke you," he apologized, moving away from the door.

"I'm sorry for...whatever happened between you and my sister last night. If it's any consolation; I do know she really likes you."

Clark gave Lucy a weak smile. "Thanks, Lucy. I'll see you around."

Meanwhile, Perry sat at his desk, outlining the front page for the next edition when Lois burst into his office. "I need a new partner."

Perry slammed his pen across the room. "I knew it! One bad date! There goes my whole newsroom. Why don't you just shoot me now? Send me up to Elvis?"

"How did you know Clark and I went out?" Lois asked, surprised.

“Lois, I didn’t become Editor-in-Chief because I can yodel. I’ve seen the way you’ve been looking at your partner...and the way he’s been looking at you.” Perry sighed. “Lois, I don’t care what kind of problems you have in your personal life; you’re not going to bring it into the newsroom. You and Kent are partners. You work well together. Now, if you choose to work together outside the office...that’s your business, but I will not have my newsroom disrupted over a lovers’ quarrel. Are we clear?”

“But Perry...”

“No!” Perry slammed his fist against the wood grain on his desk. “Lois, do you have any idea how much our circulation has risen over the last week?” She shook her head. “For your information, it’s tripled. Subscriptions have risen 45%! That’s unheard of! Do you know why?”

“The Superman exclusive?” Lois guessed.

“No, because we have a writing team that works well together and it shows in the pieces they write! Now, I want you to go WORK with your partner and hash out whatever it is that’s made you think you can decide who I team you up with. Now, is that all, or is there another reason why you burst into my office on a day I specifically told you to take off?”

Lois pulled out the 4x6 photos she had printed and threw them on his desk. “I found these guys across the street from my hotel room last night.”

“Hotel room?” Perry asked amused.

“I needed to get away from my sister. She was driving me nuts.”

“Uh-huh,” Perry said, flipping through the photographs.

“Well, something is definitely up here. What’s this briefcase Harrington’s handing this joker?”

“Money?” Lois guessed. “I’m not sure. I did find out the building is leased to ‘Apocalypse Consulting.’”

“Well, it looks like an undercover assignment to me,” Perry drawled.

“What does?” Clark asked, entering the office hesitantly.

“Kent? I thought I told you to take today off.” Perry shot Clark a threatening look. “You’re starting to remind me of someone else I know.”

“Sorry, Chief. I guess this place kinda grows on you.” Clark smiled.

“Now, you’re really sounding like someone I know.” Perry sighed. “Well since you’re here, I guess Lois can catch you up to speed. You guys’ll have three nights.”

“Guys?” Lois asked, concerned.

“You and Clark.” Perry pointed towards Clark. “Now, which room were you in, Lois?”

“Um...” Lois began, uncertain if she wanted to tell Perry which room she had been staying in.

“In order to set this up, I need the room number,” Perry explained impatiently.

“It was the ...honeymoon suite...” she dropped her voice an octave on the last two words.

“Pardon?” Perry asked, amused.

“I was tired and impatient. That’s all they had available,” Lois sniped.

“Okay, I guess you two should pack.”

“Wait a second, Chief, this is really...I can’t stay in the *honeymoon suite* with Clark,” Lois argued, desperately. “How will that look?”

“Lois, it’s the perfect cover. Two honeymooners in the honeymoon suite,” Perry explained.

“Lois, relax. It’s just business,” Clark interjected.

“Exactly,” Perry said. “Now, go pack.”

“But...” Lois began.

“No, buts,” Perry said. He pointed to the door. “Go.”

Why was it that whenever you mentioned the word

‘honeymoon’ everyone thought they had *carte blanche* to make innuendos about your sex life? Between the receptionist, the bellboy, and not to mention her fellow colleagues that had gotten wind of the investigation...Everyone had something to say about her and Clark staying in the Lexor’s Honeymoon Suite.

“That’s it; hoist her up, big fella. Smile! Great!” the bellboy, Phil was taping Clark carrying her over the ‘threshold.’ It was the first time he had even attempted to touch her since last night. She didn’t blame him. She wasn’t sure if she really wanted him to. “Hey, you’re stronger than you look! That’ll come in handy tonight, eh, big fella?”

Annoyed, Lois struggled out of Clark’s arms and moved towards Phil to teach him some manners. “Listen here, you...”

Before she could even start her tirade Clark had grabbed her from behind, restraining her from moving. “She’s a little shy,” he explained.

“She’ll get over it,” Phil said, winking at Clark.

“Why you little...” Lois struggled in Clark’s arms to get a swing at the man, but Clark tightened his arm around her. She watched in fury as Phil moved towards the bedroom. Clark let her go and she straightened her jacket. “That man gets NO tip!” she hissed.

“Lois, calm down. We’re supposed to be keeping a LOW profile. That won’t happen if you send the bellboy back in a body cast,” Clark admonished.

She scowled at him. She knew he was right, but she didn’t like it. Right now, being around Clark was the last thing she wanted. A knock at the door distracted her. Jimmy opened the door, loaded down with a large canvas tote bag. “Can I kiss the bride?” Jimmy teased. “No tongue. Scout’s honor.” Lois glared at him. “Of course a handshake will work too.”

“The next person who makes a newlywed joke gets fitted for a body cast!” Lois hissed, glaring at Jimmy, daring him to make another comment.

“Hey, I just brought the surveillance equipment,” Jimmy said, patting the bag on his shoulder.

The bellboy entered the room once more. “Hanging garments in the closet. Toiletries in the bathroom.” He turned towards Lois. “You’re in the drawers on the left.”

“You unpacked my stuff?” she asked, asked, astonished.

“This is a full-service hotel,” Phil said. He held out his hand for an expected tip. She just glared at him. There was no way she was going to tip the man after the way he had acted earlier. He cleared his throat, holding his hand out even further. Clark glared at her from behind, motioning for her to give him a tip.

Grudgingly, she pulled out a dollar and placed it in the man’s hands. He looked down at it disapprovingly then turned to leave.

“I told you...no tip...” she hissed at Clark.

A maid came into the room, carrying a large stack of white, fluffy towels. “Extra towels, yah?” She placed the towels on the table next to the door then looked around the room, noticing Jimmy, and gave her and Clark a dirty look before turning away.

“What was that about?” Jimmy asked. Clark just laughed then turned towards the bedroom, not saying a word. “Okay, you’re all set,” Jimmy said. “See you later,” Jimmy called over his shoulder, leaving her alone with Clark for the first time since last night.

“Harrington’s been paid. Roarke isn’t any the wiser, sir. Is there anything else I can do?” Nigel asked.

“No, that will be all, Nigel,” Lex instructed. “Such a tragedy what happened to Roarke’s family. Ever since then he’s had this grudge against me. Especially now with Project Shockwave performing a demonstration for the Naval Department. A perfect time to ‘test’ our friendly neighborhood alien, wouldn’t you say?”

“Absolutely, sir,” Nigel agreed.

“Superman will be helping to solidify my contract with the Naval Department and he doesn’t even know it yet,” Lex mused.

Clark sat on the bed in the Honeymoon Suite, dressed in sleeping shorts and a gray t-shirt, staring at the ground. He hadn't moved from the room since the bellboy had left. Lois had knocked on the door a few times, attempting to get a response from him, but he hadn't had the heart to talk to her. Earlier, he had thought he was ready to talk to her, but after seeing her earlier and overhearing her argument with Perry over changing partners... He wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

<<“Don't fall for me farmboy.”>>

What had possessed him to become intimate with Lois on the first date? Was he out of his mind? He'd never gone past heavy petting with anyone before, yet here he was the day after losing his virginity...barely speaking to the woman he was in love with. Why had she run out of his arms when he told her he loved her? She needed to know he wasn't thinking their lovemaking was just sex, didn't she? After her history with that Claude guy, he wanted to reassure her that he was with her because he loved her, not to satisfy some urge. He'd be lying if he'd said he hadn't been hurt when she hadn't returned his declaration of love. He knew it was too soon. He should have listened to his gut instead of throwing caution to the wind like that. She'd been hurt before and had obviously been scared off by his declaration of love.

What a mess. Lois was barely talking to him. He really wasn't sure what to say to her. They were supposed to be working together undercover and they couldn't stand to be in the same room with one another. What was worse was his mind constantly replaying that night over and over, taunting him with the memory of their lovemaking. He could recall every sound, taste, and smell from that night.

The memory of her body intertwined with his was seared into his mind for all eternity. As painful as it was to remember, he wouldn't have it any other way. He loved Lois and he wanted to be with her. He just wasn't sure if she wanted to be with him.

He x-rayed out into the main room where Lois was. He groaned. She was setting up the surveillance equipment. He should probably go help. After all, they were supposed to be working together on this....She wore a silk robe. He didn't dare check what she was wearing underneath. What was she thinking wearing something like that? Was she trying to torture him?

He sighed. “Well, here goes nothing,” he muttered to himself. He knew this was going to be awkward. Perry probably knew this would be awkward and was forcing them to investigate together just to spite Lois for trying to tell him otherwise. The old editor seemed to have a soft spot as far as Lois was concerned, but he wasn't putting anything past the man. He knew Perry White hadn't become Editor-in-Chief without being able to judge a situation properly. He had to be careful around him or risk blowing his cover.

“Just rip the Band-Aid off,” he muttered to himself. “Same result either way.” He took a deep breath before opening the door to join Lois. She was busying herself with setting up the camera when he approached her from behind. “Do you need any help?”

Lois spun around, surprised by his presence. “Clark, you scared me!”

“Sorry,” he apologized.

“I think I've just about got it,” she said, gesturing toward the camera and tape recorder. “Decide to join the land of the living I see. I thought you were going to stay holed up in there all day.”

“Well, I did sort of,” he said with a teasing smile. “It's night,” he said, pointing towards the sky.

The soft murmur of a couple's spat played in the background. Lois rolled her eyes as she listened to the conversation. “Yeah,” she muttered, not looking at him. She turned to take a seat on the couch.

She knew what he was thinking. She had anticipated it. Things

had been awkward all day. She had been half grateful and half annoyed with him holed up in the bedroom. She wanted him there to help keep tabs on the comings and goings across the street, but she didn't want to talk about what had occurred between them last night.

Honeymooners. They were supposed to be honeymooners. She had gotten a long lecture from Perry about keeping up appearances during the investigation. Then Cat had taken her out to purchase appropriate attire for a honeymoon with the company credit card. Never in her wildest dreams had she ever thought she would be shopping with Cat Grant. She had been mildly surprised to discover her taste in lingerie wasn't *that* terrible....well, once you got past the cheap leather she had tried to push on her.

The camisole she wore was a deep violet and had come with a matching robe that covered everything. It was beautiful. Surprisingly, she felt sexy while wearing it. Although sex was the last thing on her mind...well, sort of. She couldn't deny the fact that she had imagined Clark's expression when he saw her wearing this. Or the fact that she had imagined him ripping it from her body as he pressed her up against the wall and had his way with her...

“We need to talk.” Clark's voice invaded her thoughts. He took a seat next to her. “What happened...?”

What is wrong with me? She flushed at the fantasy that had just run through her mind. She turned to look away from him. “...don't worry. I'm not holding you to anything you said.”

“What? Lois, no, that's not what I mean...”

“It was just sex, right? We just got caught up in the moment...”

“Is that all it was to you?” Clark asked, hurt.

“Are you saying it wasn't?” Lois challenged. Please don't let him see how badly I want him. He didn't mean it. I know that. He just got caught up in the moment. I'll sort out my feelings later.

Feelings? her conscience chided her. *What feelings?*

The feeling of his breath against the nape of her neck; his solid form against her back...

She shuddered involuntarily at the memory. What was happening to her? Just being in the same room with Clark seemed to trigger memories of last night....fantasies of what she wanted to do to him...Oh, boy, she was in trouble. What was wrong with her? Was it just physical?

Clark's jaw hardened. What kind of game was she playing here? “I think you've got the wrong idea about me, Lois.” Clark stood up and walked over to the window where the video camera stood, positioned toward Apocalypse Consulting across the street.

“Look, you can quit trying to coddle me. I know it probably just slipped out. You know...heat of the moment. Like I said, I'm not going to hold you to it.”

Clark turned around to face her, anger and hurt evident on his face. “Is that what you think, Lois? That it just slipped out? I meant what I said, but before I could talk to you, you bolted into the bathroom and barricaded yourself in there.”

Lois looked down at her hands, nervously wringing them. “I really don't want to talk about this.”

“Of course not,” he muttered under his breath, turning to face the window again. A dark figure dressed in black caught his eye. He lowered his glasses, trying to get a better image of the new visitor across the street.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois challenged, standing up, hands on her hips.

Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair. “Can we talk about this later? There's something...”

“No, I want to talk about this now. You're the one that started this conversation and I think it's only fair that...”

Annoyed with her ramblings, and looking for a quick way to silence her, he grabbed her around the waist and pulled her to him,

kissing her passionately. Any argument she may have had died on her lips; he felt her succumb to him, moaning against his lips. The sound of her moan caught him off guard. He wasn't trying to recreate the events of last night. He slowly pulled away from her, trying to recollect his thoughts. He looked across the street and spotted the man in black once more. Recalling his original train of thought, he pointed across the street and gasped out, "That man."

"Huh?" Lois tried to assess what had just happened. She had been arguing with Clark and he had silenced her with a kiss. She never thought she would be the type of person to be silenced like that, but she was learning something new every day. Last night, she learned over and over how wrong Claude had been about her performance in bed. For a long time she'd thought there was something wrong with her. She had thought she was incapable of enjoying sex, but Clark had proven that theory wrong over and over last night.

"He looks familiar. Where have we seen him before?" Clark asked.

Lois peered across the street, looking through a pair of binoculars and gasped in surprise. "That's Lex Luthor's man servant."

"What?" the chill in Clark's tone was evident.

"Well, this just got interesting," Lois commented. They watched in rapt attention as Lex's man servant began turning the lights on in the building and setting up a display for what appeared to be a formal meeting. The man turned towards the door on the other side of the room, out of her and Clark's vision. The unidentified man from last night appeared and shook hands with Lex's man servant.

"You think this is a coincidence?" Clark prompted.

"No way," Lois said eyes narrowing as she watched the scene unfold. She pointed to the audio dial. "Turn that up." Clark nodded and turned the dial.

Congressman Harrington's voice filled the room. "That's the last of the system specs. I'll have the information on the testing for you tomorrow. Dates, procedures, the whole thing."

The unidentified man's voice came in. "Good. What about a new vote?"

"I can't initiate a re-vote until after the test results are analyzed and the plan rejected. Hopefully."

"Hopefully' isn't good enough."

Lex's man servant interrupted, "Our silent partner is very interested in making sure these tests go off without a hitch. You wouldn't want to disappoint the boss, would you, Congressman?"

Harrington sighed, "No...No, of course not, but I can't change the rules..."

"Rules?" the unidentified man interrupted. "The rules are: There are no rules. I didn't buy you into office so you could sing-song your way out of our deal."

"You don't own me, Roarke!" Harrington argued.

Roarke grabbed Harrington by the collar and pulled him down to his level. "I own you lock, stock, and re-election fund, Mr. Chairman!"

"How do you expect to pull this off? I mean, what happens to me...if you...you know...fail?"

"Pray, you never find out," Lex's man servant interrupted. "The boss doesn't take too kindly to failure."

"And neither do I," Roarke interrupted. He laughed. The three men left the office without another word.

Lois stared at the office building in confusion. She put her binoculars down and turned to him. "Clark, what would you say if I said that I don't have a clue what they're talking about, but that whatever it is, it's even bigger than I originally thought."

"I'd say...you're absolutely right," Clark answered. He moved to turn the volume down. "I think we definitely need to do a little research on Luthor's manservant. Who do think this 'boss' he's

talking about is?"

"I don't know. What 'test' are they talking about?" Lois asked. She sighed in relief as she sank down into the couch. It appeared they were falling back into their normal routine; bouncing ideas off one another. It felt good; comfortable. Now if she could just quit fantasizing about him she'd be able to concentrate.

"I don't know. It could be anything. He could be talking about Luthor..."

"...or someone else. Who is this Roarke guy?"

"Never heard of him." Clark grew quiet, taking a seat next to her. He pulled out a paper and pen and began jotting down a list of all their questions. He finished and placed the pen and paper on the table in front of them. "I meant what I said earlier, Lois." Lois swallowed the bitter bile that began to form in her throat. "You still haven't answered one question. Why did you bolt like that?"

He meant what he said earlier?

<<"I love you.">>

"I..." She didn't want to do this. She couldn't do this. Not now. She wasn't sure how she felt or what she wanted right now. Couldn't he just back off? "I can't do this right now." She got up from the couch and headed to the bedroom.

"Wait, Lois..." before she knew what had happened she had run straight into Clark's chest. She looked up at him angrily. He was blocking the bedroom door. "We need to talk."

"No, we don't," Lois said, moving to push past him, but he stood firmly in place.

"Yes, we do," Clark argued. "There is no way either of us is going to be able to work together until we talk about this. I just want to know...why?" The hurt in his tone was obvious. Had she hurt him? How had she hurt him? It was just sex. She had given him what every man in Metropolis wanted: sex with no strings attached. She would be fine with that. She had to be. She wouldn't have her heart broken by another Claude.

Her heart broken? Where had that thought come from? Could she actually be...falling for him? They'd only known each other for a week. They barely knew one another. How could she possibly be falling for him? Hell, how could he possibly claim to love her? He didn't know her.

<<"Is that all it was to you?"

"Are you saying it wasn't?"

"I think you've got the wrong idea about me, Lois."

"Look, you can quit trying to coddle me. I know it probably just slipped out. You know...heat of the moment. Like I said, I'm not going to hold you to it."

"Is that what you think, Lois? That it just slipped out? I meant what I said, but before I could talk to you, you bolted into the bathroom and barricaded yourself in there.">>

This was dangerous. She had come to think of Clark as a friend. He was easy to talk to and even after she had treated him so horribly, he still was there for her. She'd never had someone take to her so quickly. She didn't have many friends. She had many unflattering nicknames flowing through the newsroom thanks to her ex, Claude, and his friends.

<<"Ice Queen.">>

<<"Cold and frigid.">>

<<"Mad Dog Lane.">>

Did she think of last night as just sex? No, not just sex. She definitely felt something every time Clark looked at her or touched her...or kissed her. She definitely felt *something* for him. She just wasn't sure how she felt. He was her friend. That much she was sure of.

'How many friends have made your toes curl like that?' her conscience chided her. None. She'd never experienced anything like what had happened last night with anyone. Why was she so scared? She felt her tear ducts close to overflowing. She swallowed hard, trying to suppress the impending waterworks that were sure to come.

“Clark, I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but…”
 “But what?” Clark asked, hurt. “Why? You owe me that much.”

“I don’t know,” Lois managed weakly. That was it. She felt the hot moisture hit her cheeks as she felt herself fall apart. The tears overtook her. She felt his arms come around her, trying to comfort her. Why was he being so nice to her? She was a basket case. Hot one minute, cold the next.

<<“*Cold and frigid.*”>>

Claude’s words rang in her ears, causing her to cry even harder. She buried herself in Clark’s chest, finding comfort in his arms. This wasn’t her. She was Lois Lane, tenacious no-nonsense businesswoman, three-time Kerth award winner...a professional. What had happened to her? A few near-death experiences, an intoxicating evening with a gorgeous man and she was falling apart.

She felt herself sink to the floor as she continued to cry. Clark held her firmly against his chest, sinking down with her. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled against his chest. “I just don’t know.”

Clark held her tightly against his chest, soothing her soft cries. What had happened? She had been arguing with him one minute and the next she was curled up in his arms crying, apologizing to him. “Hey, it’s okay,” he soothed.

“No, it’s not. I keep on hurting everyone around me...” she sobbed.

“Lois...” Clark tried to soothe, “that’s not true.”

“No? My sister and I hardly talk anymore...You’re supposed to be my partner...and friend...I hurt you...” She gave into hysteria once more.

“Lois, please don’t cry,” he pleaded. It broke his heart to see her so upset. “Look, what do you want me to do here? I’m at a loss...”

“I don’t know. I really don’t want to talk about last night...”

“I know you don’t want to, but we need to. I’m not asking for a lifetime commitment here or anything. I just wanted to make sure you understood last night wasn’t just a fling to me.”

Lois looked up at him hesitantly, fear and hurt evident on her face. “It wasn’t?” she asked.

“No.” He cupped her cheek, lifting her chin to look at him. “I meant what I said. I love you.” He felt her tense up. “If that scares you...I’ll back off...whatever you want, but I need to know where I stand with you...I know last night was more than just sex to you...Nobody is that good an actress.”

Lois swallowed hard, allowing everything to digest. The sincerity in his eyes as he spoke and the obvious hurt in his tone, along with his confession of love for her. He was willing to back off? What did that mean?

How could he claim to love her? They barely knew each other. “I...Clark, this is crazy. You can’t love me. If you really knew me, you wouldn’t love me at all.”

“What are you talking about?” Clark asked.

“I’m rude, selfish, I can’t cook...I’m a mess...My parents split up when I was twelve...and it wasn’t pretty...Lucy and I still have to deal with the aftermaths from that...I’m a workaholic...”

“I know. You’re stubborn, pigheaded; you always think you’re right...” Clark ticked off points on his hand.

“I am right.”

“...domineering, headstrong...and brilliant.” He finished.

There was that look. The same look he had given her a dozen times over the past week. The look he’d given her at Lex Luthor’s ball. The look that made her weak in the knees...

She felt herself begin to cry again. “Why are you being so nice to me? I was so awful to you earlier...after last night...” She sobbed.

“Okay, let’s just forget about last night for a minute okay? Will that help?” She looked up at him questionably. “Now, you want to tell me what’s wrong? And don’t feed me that ‘I don’t know’ line again either.”

Lois sighed. He wasn’t going to let this go. What was wrong? What was wrong was that every man she’d ever gotten close to had betrayed her. The last time she’d gotten involved with a colleague her reputation had nearly been ruined, and she was still suffering from the remnants of that mistake. “I don’t know.”

“Wrong answer.”

“No, I really don’t know. This...This isn’t me.” She stood up and began to pace in front of him. “I don’t fall apart like this.”

“It’s been a stressful week. You were nearly killed...what? Two? Three times?” Clark gave her an amused smile, trying to lighten the mood. He stood up from the floor, crossing his arms across his chest, leaning against the door frame as he waited patiently for an answer from her.

“Three,” she said numbly. “I don’t know what has gotten into me. This...” She waved a hand in the air, gesturing towards Clark and herself. “...Whatever it is between us...it scares me.”

“I noticed,” he said, bemused. “Why?”

“I don’t know. My parents’ divorce?” She shrugged. “I’m not used to losing control, Clark. I...I always have control over what happens in my life.”

Control? When had she lost it? The night of Luthor’s ball? Or maybe when they’d gone to dinner before and she had been left feeling disappointed at him not kissing her good night? He claimed to love her... She felt something for him that was for sure. She definitely lusted after him. What woman wouldn’t? He probably would give Superman a run for his money. She’d never seen a man so perfectly built. The way he touched her...kissed her...made her toes curl...

“You had control when Trask was throwing you out of an airplane?” Clark asked.

“Okay, I have control of my personal life,” Lois argued defiantly. ‘Yeah right,’ her conscience chided her. “Last night...I don’t know what happened...there was no control...”

“I know,” Clark said, blushing at the memory of last night. He sighed. “I was there too.” Lois wrung her hands nervously and gave him a weak smile. “Lois, what do you want me to do here? What do you want?”

“I don’t know,” she sobbed.

Clark took a breath. “Ah, there’s that phrase again,” he said, taking a step towards her. “What do you want? Do you want to pretend like last night never happened?”

Pretend like it never happened? How was she supposed to do that when every time she closed her eyes she imagined his hands and mouth on her? She had never understood women that talked about craving sex until now. Before now, sex had never been a pleasant experience for her. She noticed he was still looking at her for an answer. What was the question? ‘Did she want to forget last night?’ Immediately, she knew the answer. She shook her head no.

Clark sighed in relief. “Okay, then we’ll try to pick things up where we left off...only this time we’ll take it slow.”

“Slow?” she echoed uncertainly. He definitely knew how to take things slow. The way he slowly rasped his tongue against her body... Oh, God...She could feel herself getting hot and bothered just thinking about it. She needed to quit thinking like this... If they were taking things slow then they probably wouldn’t be repeating last night’s activities anytime soon. The familiar tightness in her belly pulsed as she fought to suppress the tingling in the pit of her stomach.

‘Don’t. You don’t want another Claude situation, do you?’ she reminded herself.

Claude had claimed to love her. She had been scared then too but had allowed him to coax her into a relationship with him. He had swept her off her feet, then tossed her aside like yesterday’s

garbage after he'd gotten what he'd wanted from her. Her reputation had been ruined. He had bragged to fellow colleagues about how fast he had bedded her, then had called her "*cold and frigid*" behind her back. She had ignored the lewd comments from her male colleagues over the years. She had been asked out several times by fellow colleagues before. She suspected many of them asked her out solely on trying to see if she really was an easy lay.

Would Clark add fuel to the fire? Once word got out about their night together gossip was sure to follow. He probably would expect sex from her ... just like Claude had. Sure he claimed to take things slow, but how long would that last? He now knew every spot to touch and caress to drive her crazy. She had promised herself she wouldn't allow herself to get involved with a colleague at work again. Dating in the office was a dangerous situation. If things didn't work out...

"Slow," he repeated. "I promise not to use the L-word until you're ready if you promise not to run off on me like that." Lois smiled weakly at him. "Why don't you take the bedroom tonight? I'll sleep on the couch and..."

The couch? He wasn't going to insist on them sharing a bed? She looked up into his deep brown eyes and felt herself come undone. No, Clark wasn't like Claude.

Where Claude had been selfish, Clark had been giving. She felt like she was going to cry again. All her fears of Clark being just like Claude had taken a toll on her. He wouldn't do what Claude did. He wouldn't steal her story then act like nothing had happened. He wouldn't spread ugly rumors about her in the office to make sure she didn't fight him on stealing her story. He wouldn't be selfish in bed, causing her to hate sex.

She wasn't sure what had possessed her to do it. Maybe it was the fact that he had proved to her once again that he was nothing like Claude? Maybe it was the act of chivalry he had performed... offering her the bedroom and not assuming they would be sharing the same bed? Maybe it was just the fact that he was willing to take things slow with her? Whatever it was, something had compelled her to pull him to her and kiss him.

She moaned against his lips as she felt his arms encircle her waist. A shiver of delight ran down her spine as she felt his tongue dip inside her mouth. As soon as it entered her mouth, it left. He slowly pulled away from her. "Lois, what...?" She pulled him down to her level once more, tugging at his lower lip with her teeth. He moaned against her lips.

She felt her knees begin to weaken as the kiss deepened. She wrapped her arms around his neck for support. He continued to caress her mouth with his tongue as they deepened the embrace.

What had just happened? One minute they had been talking about taking things slow and the next she had thrown her arms around him and kissed him. He needed to stop this. She wasn't sure what she wanted and he needed to put the brakes on this before things got out of control.

"Lois..." He slowly pulled away. "Slow," he repeated. He pulled away and kissed her lightly, cupping her cheek for a minute. "Good night." He then moved towards the couch and began to make himself comfortable. He was unaware of Lois' gaze on him.

Lois watched Clark as he made himself comfortable on the couch. 'Slow.' He was taking things slow with her. She couldn't help but feel a little disappointed but liberated at the same time. There was no pressure. No expectation. She still was disappointed at the loss of body contact, but she knew he was right. Slow was the way to go...for now.

"Lex Luthor," Lex answered his phone briskly.

"Mr. Luthor, I've just spotted a problem across the street," Nigel said. "We have a few spies across the street from the office

we're using to organize our first test."

"Spies? Who do we have, Nigel? James Bond?" Lex asked, half joking.

"No, a couple of reporters," Nigel said grimly.

"Hmmm...Let me guess, Lois Lane and Clark Kent?" Lex asked.

"Yes."

"Keep an eye on them, but just be careful. Are you sure they're spying?"

"They *are* in the Honeymoon Suite, sir," Nigel said, slightly amused.

"Hmmm, maybe congratulations are in order?" Lex asked.

"Perhaps, sir."

"Keep me posted. Are we all set for the first test tomorrow?" Lex asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well," Lex said, hanging up the phone.

Clark lay awake, staring at the ceiling. He was in a living hell right now. Listening to Lois, calling *his* name out in her dreams and there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

"*Cl-ark!*" Her cry echoed from the bedroom. This was torture. Absolute torture. He waited, listening for any other sounds, but it appeared she had stopped. Her breathing had gone back to normal. He sighed in relief.

He rolled over on the couch, trying to readjust the pillows. Now, for some reason, he just couldn't get comfortable. He grabbed the pillow from behind him and began to fluff it up.

POW.

Feathers began to fall all around him. He grimaced. It was going to be a long night.

The next morning, Lois awoke to find herself wrapped in the satin sheets. She recalled the dream she'd had last night and blushed. Hopefully, Clark hadn't heard her. That would have been embarrassing.

She slipped out of bed and grabbed the silk camisole from the floor and slipped it on. She then wrapped her robe around her and made her way into the main room where Clark was. He lay asleep on the couch. She gasped when she saw him. He lay on the couch with his arms crossed across his chest. His chest...He wasn't wearing a shirt. He looked...*really* good. His face looked so relaxed. He had a certain boyish charm about him. Without his glasses, he looked...different...but somewhat familiar.

"Coffee," she muttered to herself, moving away from Clark's sleeping figure and headed back towards the bedroom to call room service. She heard a noise out in the main room and went to check on it.

The sight she found wasn't something she had expected. Clark was on the floor doing push-ups. She watched in rapt attention as his muscles moved up and down in a fluid motion. He seemed to notice her presence and stopped, turning around to face her. He was still in his sleeping shorts, but he had put his glasses on. She blushed slightly, realizing she had been staring. He was staring too. Feeling self-conscious she looked away, "What?"

Clark just stared back at her, "Nothing."

She looked around, trying to see if there was something out of place behind her. Seeing nothing, she crossed her arms across her chest, feeling bashful. "What?"

"Nothing," he said. "You just look...pretty decent...first thing in the morning."

"Oh." She suddenly felt self-conscious. "Well, you're not so bad yourself." She caught his gaze a moment then looked away.

"Uh, I ordered some coffee."

"Uh, great," Clark said, standing up. A knock at the door

caught their attention. He smiled at her. "I guess that's the coffee."

"Yeah." Lois smiled back at him. She moved to open the door.

Phil, the bellboy, pushed the cart of coffee in the room. “Early to bed, early to rise.” He noticed the feathers scattered on the floor and the pillow on the couch. “Whoa! Rough night?”

Clark blushed and hurriedly grabbed his wallet from the side table, pulling out a twenty dollar bill. He hurriedly pushed Phil out the door and handed him the money. Once Phil was out of the room, he turned to face Lois, who was looking from him to the feathers on the floor curiously. “Uh...I’m...a heavy sleeper,” he said hurriedly. Not giving her a chance to think too hard about the situation, he moved past her to the bathroom to get ready for work.

“Attention all units. Code four. Possible jumper, LEXOR Hotel. Crowd control and negotiation teams to the Emergency response requested.” The police dispatcher’s voice echoed throughout the newsroom off the police radio.

Perry poked his head out of his office. “Lois! Clark!”

“CK’s down at City Hall, Chief,” Jimmy interrupted.

Lois grabbed her purse and headed towards the elevator. “I’m on it!”

Perry smiled. “That’s my girl.” He then walked out into the bullpen. “All right, we need a photographer down there now! Olsen!”

“I’m on it, Chief!” Jimmy said, approaching Perry with his camera bag in tow.

“No, I’ve got an even bigger project for you.” Perry turned to Myerson. “Myerson, get your butt down to the LEXOR Hotel now. I need some page one photos.”

“What about me, Chief?” Jimmy asked.

“Ah, follow me.” Perry wagged his finger at Jimmy to follow. Jimmy closed the door behind him and Perry pulled out what looked like a foot massager. “Mr. Foot.”

“Mr. Foot?” Jimmy asked, confused.

Perry handed the device to Jimmy. “I need it back by five.”

Jimmy sighed and nodded. “Yeah. Sure, Chief.” He gave Perry a weak smile and left.

On top of the LEXOR Hotel, the police negotiator stood behind Jules, who was standing on the ledge. The building was surrounded by police officers and firefighters. “It’s always darkest before the dawn, son,” the police negotiator soothed.

Jules balanced on the narrow parapet, drumming his right hand idly on the brick chimney beside him. He appeared totally at ease. “Is that so?”

“Come down. We’ll talk it through.”

“I don’t know. I kinda like it up here. Fresh air.” Jules spread his arms out, taking the view in. “Great view.”

“Well, can I get you something?”

Jules grew thoughtful for a moment. “Cappuccino?”

“Whatever you want.” He nodded.

“Make it decaf,” Jules added with a wink. “Caffeine makes me jumpy.”

“Whatever you want.”

Jules took a step away from the chimney and pretended to lose his balance. He teetered on the edge. The negotiator moved to grab him but missed. Jules leaned forward on the rooftop, waving his arms dramatically in the air for the crowd below.

A red and blue streak flashed across the sky. Clark landed behind Jules. “The S-man,” Jules remarked, looking up at Clark.

“You don’t really want to do this,” Superman said.

Jules contemplated a moment and sighed. “You know, you’re right.” He moved away from the ledge. “I’ve seen the error of my ways.”

Clark was slightly surprised by how easily Jules had given in but didn’t allow Jules to see his surprise. He gave the man a warm smile and helped escort him into police custody to get the help he needed.

Lex Luthor sat, watching Jules’ rescue on a video monitor. There were several monitors in front of him, showing different areas of Metropolis. Asabi stood behind Lex, monitoring the electronic timer. Lex was on the phone. “Ready?”

Across town, Nigel stood on the top of a skyscraper, holding Monique by the ankle. Monique stood on the ledge, terrified.

Nigel was on a cell phone, speaking with Lex. “Confirm.”

“Please, be careful,” Monique pleaded.

“Don’t worry, lovey, I’ve got you.” Nigel grinned at her.

“Execute,” Lex said into the phone.

“Roger that,” Nigel said. “Sorry, lovey.” He let go of Monique’s ankle and pushed her off the ledge with a cane.

“Wha-? No!” Monique screamed as she fell from the skyscraper.

Across town, Clark heard Monique’s screams and moved at super-speed to intercept her mid-air. Monique was clinging to him, crying against his shoulder. “It’s okay. I’ve got you,” he reassured her.

Lex and Asabi watched as Superman intercepted Monique mid-air. “Mark,” Lex said. Asabi stopped the timer. The digital indicator blinked, 2.1191416 seconds. Lex smiled, impressed. “Faster than a speeding bullet.”

Lois made her way through the crowd of media, ambulatory workers, and on-lookers. “Excuse me, Lois Lane, Daily Planet. Can anyone tell me what happened?”

“Lois, you just missed it. Superman caught that woman in midair.” Clark said from behind her, “She’s okay. She left in an ambulance a minute ago. I got us the exclusive.” He gave her a megawatt smile.

“That’s great.” She smiled, giving him a warm hug. She pulled away and noticed a look of tenderness in his eyes. That spark was still there. She took him by the arm and began to walk towards the next block where the police were. “Were you able to talk to Superman? Get a quote?” she asked.

“Yeah.” He held up a notebook and gave her another smile. “I may be new, but I do know how to conduct an interview on my own,” he teased.

“Just checking,” Lois teased back. “Let’s have a talk with Henderson and then we’ll head back to the Planet to regroup.”

“We still need to do some more research on Lex Luthor’s manservant,” Clark said.

“Yeah,” Lois said as they rounded the corner, “Hey, how’d you get here so fast? Jimmy said you were at City Hall.”

Clark got a panicked look on his face, “Uh, I was, but, uh...I heard...the...uh, the story...the story on the radio of...one...one of the units at City Hall...and...I...I came here.”

“Oh,” Lois said. There was something off about his story, but she decided not to give it too much thought at the time.

Later that afternoon, Lois and Clark sat in the conference room with Jimmy and Cat, going over the research they had come up with on Roarke. Lois began ticking points off on her fingers, “Who’s Roarke? What ‘system’ are they talking about? And what ‘test’?”

“Don’t forget the ‘vote.’ We should get our hands on every available record of every vote taken by Harrington’s committee for the past...”

“Six months?” Jimmy asked, with a smile. “Already on it.”

“It’s gotta be something big. Congressmen don’t sell out for less than ‘big’.”

“Well, I ran Roarke...his name and picture...through every program the Daily Planet has access to...the man’s a ghost,” Jimmy said a bit defeated.

Lois noticed Jimmy's forlorn look. "Jimmy, what's wrong?"
 "Nothing. I'm just kinda tired. All these assignments the Chief keeps sending me on...I guess it's just getting to me."

"Well, Jimmy, we all have to pay our dues in order to move up the ladder," Cat said.

"Oh, yeah? You had to go on donut runs, fix foot massagers and reorganize Elvis plates?" Jimmy asked. He sighed. "You know, I'm a journalist."

"Why don't you talk to him? Let him see that?" Clark asked. "Stand up to him."

"Stand up to Perry White? No way. I'd be out of a job," Jimmy said.

"That's not true, Jimmy, and you know it," Lois said. "Clark's right. Stand up to Perry and make him see you're more than just the Mr. Fix-it of the office. Show him what you're made of."

"Yeah right," Jimmy muttered.

Cat interrupted, "Excuse me, can we get back on track here? I have a luncheon at two."

Lois rolled her eyes. "So, what about Apocalypse Consulting?"

Jimmy sifted through his notes. "No bank accounts or transactions I can trace. Apocalypse moved in a couple months ago. Paid off a five-year lease on the offices in advance."

"Business must be good," Clark mused.

"Yeah, but what business?" Lois asked.

"Thaddeus Roarke. International arms dealer, electronic weapons system analyst, entrepreneur, and general bad boy. Last known base of operations: Beirut." Perry laid a photo of Roarke and a file folder on the table in front of them.

"How did you?" Lois asked at the same time Clark asked, "Where did you?"

Perry just smiled and gave them a wink. "Sources, boys and girls, sources. The lifeblood of journalism."

Cat lifted the photo of Roarke and read the copyright stamp on the back, "People Magazine."

"By the way, great work you two on that double suicide attempt," Perry interrupted. "You see? I told you, the two of you... we've struck gold."

"Thanks, Perry." Lois gave him an uneasy smile.

"So, can I assume that ...whatever it was...has been dealt with?" Perry asked. Cat and Jimmy gave both Lois and Clark a curious look.

Clark cleared his throat nervously. "Uh, yeah..." He began sifting through the file in front of him. "Uh, arms dealer, House of Defense Committee. Makes sense."

Perry realized he wasn't going to get any further information from them and moved on. "Now team, we should talk about this. A scoop's a scoop, but if we're into something that impacts national security, we have to notify the Feds."

Lois looked at him a bit dismayed. "Now?"

Perry sighed, thinking for a moment. "No. When the time's right. So far we have more questions than answers. Let's hear some theories."

"Okay," Jimmy began, preparing to make an impression with Perry. "The Defense Department is about to test some new weapons systems and Roarke wants to know about it."

Perry grew thoughtful a moment. "But why would he bribe Harrington for just information?"

"Well, I..." Jimmy began a bit defeated.

"Big picture. Think. You have to look at this from all angles," Perry said.

"Harrington's afraid of Roarke. That begs the question, 'why?'" Clark said.

"Maybe Harrington's afraid of what Roarke will do when he gets the information." Lois shrugged her shoulders.

Perry grew thoughtful. "Hmm, seems to me we still got more questions than answers. Let's strategize, do some legwork to back

up our surveillance. Cat, do you think you can find Congressman Harrington and stick with him?"

"Like super glue." Cat smiled, intrigued.

"Jimmy, next time Roarke shows..." Perry began.

"Got him!" Jimmy said excited at the prospect of a real assignment.

"Aw, now, Jimmy, would you hold your horses and let me finish?" Perry scolded. "I want you to keep track of Roarke's comings and goings. Take photos. The whole shebang." He wagged his finger at Jimmy. "This time I want photos I can actually use."

"Right." Jimmy nodded.

"You two need any help?" Perry asked, looking towards Lois and Clark.

"No," Lois said rather quickly. "We're fine. I mean..."

"Absolutely," Clark added, equally nervous.

Perry, Cat, and Jimmy looked at them with broad smiles on their faces. "We should get going," Lois said, standing up from her seat.

"Yeah," Clark said, following her lead. The duo left the conference room in a hurry, leaving an intrigued Editor in Chief in their wake along with Jimmy and Cat.

"I smell dirt," Cat whispered conspiratorially.

"What are you talking about?" Jimmy asked, confused.

"Oh, Jimmy, don't you see it?" Cat asked, pointing at Lois and Clark in the bullpen. "Watch Lois. See how she keeps watching Clark. And there. She just looked away when he turned around."

"Yeah, so?" Jimmy asked.

"So, somebody has the hots for somebody," Cat finished.

"No way!" Jimmy said, shaking his head.

"Jimmy, the key to a good newspaperman is he always keeps his mind open," Perry interrupted.

"Are you saying...?" Jimmy asked.

"I'm not saying anything," Perry said, yodeling a short tune as he left the office.

Lois and Clark sat on the couch, dressed for bed. Lois wore a pink negligee with a matching robe, while Clark wore a pair of sleeping shorts and a gray robe over it. Perry had reiterated with them to keep up appearances and dress as if they were on their honeymoon.

"Okay. Here's what I've got." Clark opened a file and laid it out for Lois to see. "Nigel St. John. He was an agent with Her Majesty's Secret Service gone bad."

"Really?" Lois asked in disbelief. "Is he still wanted? If he is Lex could be charged with harboring a fugitive."

"No. He already served his time," Clark said, shaking his head. "But it definitely says a lot about the type of company Luthor keeps around."

"How is Nigel mixed up in all this?" Lois asked, confused.

"I don't know," Clark said. He gestured toward the window. "When do you think they'll show?"

Lois shrugged, suddenly realizing how intimate the setting was. Clark sat next to her, his leg barely touching hers. The fireplace was lit with a roaring fire. "Yeah," she said, swallowing hard. "Uh, what should we do to kill time?"

Clark smiled at her a moment and pulled out a deck of cards. "We could play Old Maid."

Lois couldn't help but smile at him. Leave it to him to take the stress out of what was a stressful situation. "How about Gin?"

"Loser buys dinner?" He challenged.

She laughed, "You're on."

The night had been uneventful so far. No sign of Roarke or Harrington across the street. They had played three rounds of Gin so far and Lois had won them all. Lois grinned mischievously as she looked at her cards. "Gin!" she called out.

“No way,” Clark groaned.

“Read ‘em and weep,” she said, showing him her cards. He shook his head and she laughed triumphantly. “Wanna try your hand at something else?” she asked.

“There’s a closet full of games in there.” He pointed at the closet shelf with several board games.

“Hmm, Metropoly?” Lois asked, pulling several games down. “And we also have Scrabble and Trivial Pursuit.”

“We’ll start out with Metropoly and work our way through the rest of the games.”

“Okay, but remember. You lost; so you’re buying dinner,” Lois teased.

“Where’s the dinner menu?” Clark asked, looking up from the cards he had just put back in the box.

Lois reached for the menu on the nightstand. “Here.”

“What do you feel like?” he asked.

“Something light...just as long as we get chocolate for dessert,” Lois said.

Clark laughed. “Chocolate it is.”

About an hour later Lois was eating the remnants of her dinner, sitting across from Clark during a game of Metropoly. Clark winced when he moved his piece on the board. “I can’t make the rent.”

Lois held her hand out. “Give me everything you’ve got and go directly to the poor house.”

She couldn’t believe how at ease she felt with Clark. They had built a good rapport with one another. After clearing the air with they had gone back to joking and teasing each other as they had all week. It felt good to be herself with Clark. After everything they’d gone through, it was nice to relax and have fun.

An hour later, they were playing Scrabble. Clark was proving to be quite the adversary. She placed her word on the board, triumphant at her creativity.

Clark looked at her critically. “What is that?”

“It’s my word,” she said defensively.

Clark shook his head. “There is no such word as ‘chumpy.’”

“Of course there is. Somebody’s a chump. Therefore he’s chumpy,” she reasoned.

“Try again,” he said, narrowing his eyes at her.

“Are you challenging me?” she asked, astonished.

“You bet your sweet little chumpy I am,” he said, leaning over to grab the dictionary. He sifted through it and shook his head. “Told ya.” He handed the dictionary back to her, smiling.

Lois grabbed the dictionary from him and looked for chumpy herself. Unable to find it, she grew indignant. “You call that a dictionary?”

Clark laughed. “Lois, you are the most competitive person I’ve ever met. What is it about you that makes you need to win all the time?”

“I don’t need to win all the time,” Lois harrumphed.

“Yeah, and I’m the Jolly Green Giant,” Clark said with a smirk. “Face it, Lois, you are a perfectionist.”

“Sometimes that’s a good thing,” she reasoned. “How about Trivial Pursuit?”

“Sure,” he said and pulled out the game, beginning to set the game up.

“This is fun. The Planet should have an hour for just playing games...such a good stress relief,” Lois said, taking a sip of her milkshake.

Clark laughed. “Somehow I don’t think the publishers will see the logic of that.”

Lois gave him a weak smile. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. Still, it’s kinda fun...”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “...and the company’s not that bad either.” He smiled at her, causing her to blush. They turned away for a moment before Clark announced the game was all set up. They were tied neck and neck. Each was able to answer the question

correctly.

“What was the name of Jerry Lewis’ suave alter ego in the Nutty Professor?” Clark read off the question.

Lois couldn’t think of the answer. Jerry Lewis? Nutty Professor? She hadn’t seen that movie in forever...Her mind couldn’t think of the name. She knew this. She knew she knew it...and Clark had such a smug look on his face.

“Time’s up,” Clark said.

“No it’s not. Come on; just give it to me again. Just give it to me,” Lois pleaded.

Clark sighed. “The name of Jerry Lewis’ suave alter-ego in the Nutty Professor is...?” Lois still couldn’t think of it. “Tick tock tick tock...” he teased. “Buddy Love,” he said smugly.

“Oh, I knew that,” Lois ranted. “I knew that.”

“Oh, no, you didn’t,” he teased. “See, Lois? You’re right. You don’t have to win all the time.” Lois just glared at him and threw a pillow at him.

Lois and Clark stood by the window later that night, setting up the spotting scope on a tripod. Tonight had been fun. Clark had enjoyed seeing Lois so relaxed. No pressure. She was just herself. Her humor and gentle bantering with him had been refreshing after last night. He still had to catch himself every once in a while when he would catch her gaze. She would catch him watching her and blush. He was doing his best to take this slow. He couldn’t afford to screw this up. He had to build up a mutual trust with her. She had to know she could count on him. Once he was able to develop a mutual trust between them...then MAYBE...just maybe he could share his secret with her. The idea of leaving himself open to anyone still scared him, especially after the fiasco with Trask.

“It’s a game, Clark. Are you telling me, when you play a game you don’t play to win?” Lois asked.

“I play to play,” Clark said simply.

Lois rolled her eyes at him. “Well, this is just perfect. I win; you lose. We’re both happy.”

Clark was about to retort, but his super hearing picked up the click of the door to the living area. He x-rayed through the wall and saw the maid, carrying an arm full of towels. He panicked a moment, looking around the room. He grabbed the surveillance equipment and folded it up then laid it on the bed. He then lifted up the bedding, hiding the equipment.

“Clark, what are you doing? Are you insane?” Lois asked. The door to the bedroom began to open. He quickly grabbed Lois by the waist and flung her on the bed. “Clark, what has gotten into you? This isn’t funny!”

Without a word, he lay on top of her, capturing her mouth and silencing her protests. Immediately, he felt Lois give into him. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him in for a deeper kiss. He moaned in pleasure as he felt her lift her right leg up, gliding it against his back.

The maid poked her head into the bedroom, “Extra towels, yah?” She noticed Lois and Clark in a steamy embrace and immediately ducked out. “Oops. Sorry,” she apologized, closing the door behind her.

The heat between them was beginning to ignite into a dangerous inferno. He continued to try and keep the kiss slow and sensual, but Lois kept pushing for more, dipping her tongue into his mouth. He moaned in pleasure as he felt her grind her hips against him. He slowly pulled away from her. “I, uh, heard the maid coming,” he tried to explain.

“Doesn’t anyone knock around here?” she muttered. Clark was still lying on top of her. Her leg was still wrapped around him, keeping him from moving.

“I should get up,” he whispered.

“Yeah.” She nodded. He pushed himself up off of her. “But what if I don’t want you to.”

Clark looked at her skeptically. “What?”

Before he could say more she pulled him down into her arms, capturing his mouth. He felt her left leg move up his back, interlocking her ankles against his backside. He moaned against her. The slow sensual movements of her tongue against his mouth created a ripple effect down his spine.

<<“Slow.”>>

He stilled his ministrations. This was what had gotten them into trouble the last time. Giving into their impulses and not thinking. He pulled back a bit, trying to slow their pace down. “Loi—Lois...we...we need...we need to...slow down...” he said in between short kisses. He lifted himself off of her, standing up and taking a step back.

“You want to stop?” she asked him incredulously. Her face was flushed and she was breathing just as heavily as him.

“No,” he replied honestly, “but we said we were going to take things slow, remember?” he asked between ragged breaths.

<<“Slow.”>>

Lois sat up and looked at him quizzically. It was clear their embrace had had just as much an effect on him as it had her. Slow? Was this how it was going to be every time they kissed? The spark between them was incredible. All it took was a kiss and they both seemed to lose control. She really didn’t want to spend another night dreaming of the idea of being with Clark. She wanted him. They had given up the idea of taking things slow the night they had made love. He’d already proven he wasn’t like Claude. What more did she need?

Clark was leaning against the frame of the window, arms crossed, trying to regain control of his breathing. She smiled inwardly when she noticed the obvious effect she’d had on him. Oh, yeah. She wanted this. She wanted him. “What if I don’t want to take this slow?” she asked, trying to keep the pretense of complete innocence in her tone. She stood up from the bed and walked over to him slowly. “I mean, we’re both adults...and we’re both willing...” She cast a longing look over him as she stepped closer to him.

“But last time you bolted...I don’t want a repeat of that,” Clark argued.

“Fair enough,” Lois said. “We’ll take this slow...but I can’t help it if every time we...” She closed her eyes a moment, trying to calm the fire burning in her abdomen, “...it gets out of control.” She took a step closer to him and linked her arms around his neck. She noticed him swallow hard. “I’ll tell you if I want to stop...” She leaned up to capture his mouth.

She felt the vibration of his moan as she dipped her tongue into the warm crevices of his mouth, exploring his taste. He pulled away, stroking her cheek. He was a mere millimeter from her, “Are you sure about this?” She nodded mutely then leaned up to recapture his mouth. He moaned against her lips. She felt his arms encircle her waist and pull her to him. She let out a guttural moan, feeling his hard frame press against her. She reached for the knot on the front of his robe and swiftly undid it. She shuddered involuntarily at the sight of him.

One kiss became two, then eight became twelve...until she lost count. She sighed his name as their embrace continued and the world around them shattered into oblivion.

Neither of them noticed the red light blinking on the telescopic camera from the floor where it had landed during Clark’s hurry to hide it from the maid.

“Wow...” Lois stared at the ceiling with a happy grin. Clark let out a light chuckle and she rolled over, nestling herself in his arms, resting her head against his chest. Her chest was still hammering and the room still felt like it was spinning.

A knock at the door to their room brought them out of their reverie. “Oh, you have got to be kidding me...” Lois muttered. “Now the staff decides to knock?”

Clark laughed. “Maybe it’s the maid again.”

The knocking was persistent and whoever it was was not going away. Lois groaned against him. “We’re going to have to get that,” he said, slowly pulling out of her embrace.

“Why?” she pouted.

Clark reached for his boxer shorts and pulled them on, hurriedly dressing himself, so he was decent enough to answer the door. After making sure everything was covered, he went to the living area to see who was at the door.

Lois grudgingly picked up her negligee from the floor and slipped it back on. She then wrapped herself in the silk robe and followed Clark out into the living area of the suite. Sure enough, it was more hotel staff at the door. Clark was trying to argue with the Phil, the bellboy, that they really didn’t need their bed sheets changed.

“Sir, we are a full-service hotel,” Phil argued. “It is our job to make sure our guests have a first class experience!” He made his way into the suite and began to tidy the room.

“It’s really late though and we were in the middle of...” Clark quit trying to argue when he noticed Phil entering the bedroom. “...something.” He sighed and turned toward Lois. “Is the you-know-what covered up?” he whispered in her ear.

Lois nodded. After a few minutes, Phil left the bedroom with a broad smile on his face. “You’re all set. Enjoy your evening.” He winked at them and closed the door behind him.

“That man’s bedside manner is atrocious...” Lois groaned as she walked into the bedroom. “Now, where did I put...?” She looked around the room for the camera.

Clark leaned down and picked up the camera bag that had been strategically placed over the telescopic camera. “That was close,” he muttered.

“Tell me about it,” Lois muttered. She looked at the camera critically, opening the tape deck and finding it empty. “I could have sworn I put a new tape in here. It’s empty.”

Clark shrugged and handed her a new tape. “Maybe you forgot. Here.” Lois put the tape in the camera and Clark worked on setting up the tripod. “Okay, we’re all set,” he said, positioning the camera towards the building across the street.

“I guess we just wait,” Lois said.

“Yeah,” Clark said. “We should probably kill the lights so the staff doesn’t get any more bright ideas of stopping in.”

“Good idea.” Lois nodded. Clark shut the lights off in the main room and placed a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on the door. He then came back to the bedroom and turned the lights off in there as well. Lois was standing at the window with her binoculars out watching the scene across the street.

Roarke’s voice echoed through the room. “...no possible way the test will be postponed?”

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

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

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

“No.”

“We have to go through the process, Roarke.”

“After what happens at that test, no one will be interested in ‘modification proposals’.”

“What exactly will happen?” Harrington asked, apprehensively.

“Why don’t I show you? We had a video made from the computer model. Bart, get the lights and the shutters.”

A man in a dark green suit moved towards the shutters and closed them.

“Rats!” Lois fumed.

Clark tried to x-ray the shutters but found his vision blocked. The only thing that he couldn't see through was lead. "Lead-lined..." Clark muttered under his breath.

Lois turned to the microphone behind them. "Lead Lined? Is that what they said? What does that mean?"

Clark shrugged, hoping she wouldn't realize he was the one that had said it. "Uh, beats me."

Lois turned back towards the shuttered office window. "Come on, this is torture!"

They both sighed in relief when they saw Bart opening the windows. Harrington's voice echoed through the room once more. "Roarke, you can't! Millions of people..."

Roarke just patted Harrington on the back. "In for a penny, in for a pound."

Harrington continued to struggle to voice his protest as they left the office. Lois turned back towards Clark. "What do you think they just showed him?"

"I don't know, but whatever it is, it's bad," Clark said glumly.

The sound of a knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. "Great. Now what?"

"What is their deal? Hello? Honeymoon Suite? Do not disturb?" Lois followed Clark out into the living area. Clark flicked the lights on and answered the door.

"Hey, CK!" Jimmy bounded up to him cheerfully with a huge stack of files in his hand. "Sorry. I know it's late, but here's the report on those votes you guys wanted."

"Uh, thanks, Jimmy," Clark said, giving the young man a smile.

"So, what's the deal with the 'do not disturb' sign?" Jimmy asked, giving Clark a wink.

"We've had the staff here interrupting us every half hour," Lois answered from behind Clark.

"Oh, uh, hi, Lois. I, uh, didn't see you there," Jimmy stammered.

"Uh-huh." Lois arched her eyebrow at him. "Anything else?"

"Uh, no. I'll see you tomorrow," Jimmy said, closing the door behind him.

Lois sighed. "I nicknamed him '*Jimmy Interrupt-us Olsen*' because every time I'm in the middle of putting the pieces to an investigation, talking to a source...there he is!"

Clark laughed. "He means well."

"I know." Lois sighed. "Well, we know they're gone from across the street. Why don't we go over there and see if we can find that tape?"

"Breaking and entering?" Clark asked, incredulously. "No way." He shook his head defiantly.

"Come on," she argued. "Please..." she gave him her best sad puppy dog look. He continued to try and fight.

"No..." he said firmly.

"Pretty...pretty...please..." She leaned in closer, trying to get him to relent. "...it'll be fun..." Her voice took on a sing-song tone as she continued to plead with him.

Clark arched an eyebrow at her. "How is breaking and entering fun?"

"Come on..." She leaned up to whisper her lips against his. "...please..."

He knew this was a bad idea, but he couldn't resist her. "Fine..."

"Yes!" she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him more thoroughly and then pulled away before he could distract her. She ran into the bedroom to get dressed. "I'll be out in five," she called out behind her.

"Did you get it?" Nigel asked.

"Piece of cake!" Phil said, handing Nigel the videotape.

Nigel handed Phil an envelope of cash. "The boss appreciates your loyalty."

"As long as 'the boss' keeps rewarding me with the green, I'll be his biggest fan." Phil grinned happily.

"Just keep an eye on them," Nigel muttered, putting the videotape in his jacket.

"You got it!" Phil nodded as he patted the envelope in his jacket pocket. Nigel turned on his heel and left. Phil tucked the envelope of money in his jacket and smiled. "Easiest thousand dollars I've ever made."

Lois and Clark made their way through the double doors of the hotel, drenched in water. "I cannot believe this!" Lois hissed, trying to wring out her dress shirt.

"You okay?" Clark asked, tentatively.

"I'm fine," she said hurriedly. "I'm just cold...and wet...and really ticked off! What kind of fire alarm system do they have over there? I mean, for the sprinklers to go off like that..."

"Well, at least they went off when they did; if not we could have gotten caught," Clark reasoned, pushing the call button for the elevator.

"Don't remind me," Lois muttered, stepping on the elevator. Clark followed close behind. A middle-aged couple was in the elevator with a bellboy.

The lady was in her late forties and the man looked to be a few years older. She turned to Lois with a smile. "Which floor, dear?"

"Oh, um, the Penthouse," Lois said hurriedly.

"Which section?" the lady asked. "Left or right wing?"

"Uh, right..." Clark said hurriedly.

The woman's eyes twinkled as she hit the button for their floor. "The Honeymoon Suite?" She turned to the man standing beside her. "Oh, look, honey, she's blushing..."

"Gretta..." the man warned.

"You two are absolutely adorable. I can tell you'll last..." Gretta gushed.

DING.

The elevator stopped at the 16th floor. "This is our floor," the man said, hurriedly, tugging lightly at his wife's arms. "It was nice to meet you both. Enjoy your honeymoon." With that, the middle-aged couple left Lois and Clark alone in the elevator with the bellboy, who was trying hard not to say anything.

Lois and Clark hurriedly closed the door behind them and locked it. "What is it with everyone around here?" Lois asked incredulously. "Where does it say that you can make sexual innuendos about people's sex lives just because they're on their 'honeymoon'?"

"I don't know." Clark sighed and laid the keycard. "I'm sure the bellboy meant well..." he tried to reason.

"Ha!" Lois said mockingly. She took the soaking wet files she and Clark had swiped from the file cabinets and placed them on the coffee table to dry. She turned toward the fax machine to check if they had missed anything while they had been out. "Here's a fax from Jimmy. It's the background check on those jumpers from earlier today."

"Why don't you go ahead and start going through it? I'm going to take a quick shower," Clark said.

"Okay." Lois nodded, reading through the report in front of her. The report gave a detailed description of each jumper's life, job, friends, family, and the condition they had been in both before and after their suicide attempt.

The sound of the shower starting broke Lois' concentration. She looked up. Where was Clark? The sound of the curtain being pushed back in the bathroom caught her attention. Shower. He was in the shower. She sighed inwardly. She could almost picture the water dripping down his hard, chiseled body. She shuddered involuntarily. She was half tempted to join him in there...

What was the matter with her? Join him in the shower? Would he even want her to? No, he wouldn't mind. She sure wouldn't

mind an encore performance of their earlier activities either. There was something about the idea of making love in the shower. Maybe it was the idea of being so close to one another; skin on skin...or just the idea of seeing those perfectly sculpted muscles in the wet, soapy...

She quickly began peeling her clothes off, preparing to join him for an encore performance of earlier. She grabbed one of the fluffy bathrobes from the closet and slipped it on, then headed towards the bathroom.

RING

"Of course," she muttered. She turned on her heel and stormed over towards the couch where the phone was. "Hello?"

"Hello? Is Clark Kent there?" an elderly feminine voice hesitantly asked.

"Who is this?" Lois asked accusingly. After the evening of interruptions they'd had, she wasn't sure what to think anymore.

The elderly woman spoke with a hint of humor in her voice, "Uh, this is Martha Kent...I was looking for Clark..."

"Oh, um..." Lois felt the heat rush to her cheeks immediately. "I...I'm sorry. I'm Lois."

"Uh, Martha." There was laughter on the other end of the phone. "Is Clark around?"

"Uh, you just missed him. He's in the shower. He should be done in a few," Lois explained.

"Uh-huh," Martha said skeptically.

"How'd you get the number here?" Lois asked.

"Oh, your boss, Mr. White, gave me the number," Martha said. "So, uh, just tell Clark to call me when he gets a chance."

"Uh, sure," Lois said.

"Well, it was nice talking to you, Lois."

"Uh, you too, Mrs. Kent," Lois said.

"Good night," Martha said.

"Night." They both hung up their respective phones. Lois stared at the phone tentatively for a moment before remembering her reasons for stripping down. Clark was still in the shower. She couldn't help but grin at the prospect of surprising him. She got up from the couch and made her way to the bathroom.

RING

The phone rang again. Lois blew at the stray hair that had fallen in her face. "What is it with everyone tonight?" she muttered, stalking over to the phone once more and sharply picked up the phone. She really wanted to curse into the phone, but recalling who the last caller had been she figured it wasn't a good idea. "Hello?"

"Lois?" Ellen Lane's voice echoed through the phone line.

Lois cringed at the sound of her mother's voice. "Hi, mother."

"Lois Lane, what in the world are you doing in the honeymoon suite? Do I mean that little to you that you wouldn't tell me you were getting married...let alone invite me to the wedding? You are just like your father...*inconsiderate*."

"Mother, it's not what you think..."

"What I think? What I think is my eldest daughter's run off and gotten herself hitched to some man I've never met...How well do you know him? He could be a career criminal for all you know. Oh, knowing my luck he probably is. Why can't you date someone sophisticated like your sister is? Did you know she's dating Lex Luthor?"

"Well, that remains to be seen..."

Ellen ignored Lois. "I just found out tonight. I ran into them at the Country Club. Oh, they are just adorable together. I can tell he *really* cares for her..."

"Mother..."

"Your father never liked the Country Club. I always had to go alone. So, who is it you married?"

"Mother, I'm not married..."

"You better be careful, Lois. Your father and I got married in the heat of the moment and look how well that turned out. Pretty

soon he'll be having flings behind your back. You'll find phone numbers in his jacket pocket. How do you know you're not the other woman? I've heard of those cases...Men marrying more than one woman at time..."

"Oh, my God, Mother...Wha-How did you get this number?"

"Your Editor, Perry White gave it to me. He's such a gentleman. Quite a rarity in men these days."

"Was there a reason you called in particular?"

"Well, Lucy said you were staying in the honeymoon suite for a few days and I needed to talk to you about your cousin Cindy's wedding..."

Lois groaned, "I'm not going."

"Lois, you have missed two of her weddings thus far. You should go...She's always spoken so highly of you ...even if you never cared to settle down..."

"Mother, would you please just stop it?" Lois felt her temper begin to flare as her mother's tirade continued.

"Lois, that is no way to speak to your mother. I raised you better," Ellen scolded. "Anyway, about Cindy's wedding..."

Lois heard the bathroom door shut and looked up. She let out a low whimper when she saw Clark walk out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. He was reaching for the knob of the bedroom door when she called him over. "Clark!"

He looked over at her questionably and she motioned for him to come towards her. He seemed hesitant but came willingly. "What?" he asked.

"*HELP!*" she said in a frantic whisper, handing him the phone. "It's my mother..." She got up from the couch and headed toward the bathroom for her own shower. All ideas of surprising Clark in the shower had gone out the window when her mother had called. All thanks to Lucy and her big mouth. She was going to get her back for this.

Clark took the phone hesitantly, unsure of what exactly Lois wanted him to do. "And another thing, Lois, don't you think it's time you moved out of that horrendous apartment and invest in a home to call your own?" Ellen seemed to notice Lois' lack of response. "Lois? Lois are you there?"

"Uh, she's in the shower," Clark said hesitantly.

"In the shower? Who is this?" Ellen asked suspiciously.

"Uh, Clark Kent. I'm your daughter's partner at the Planet."

"Partner?" she asked dubiously. "Young man, you have a lot of nerve whisking my daughter off without even talking to her family. That doesn't bode well for you in my eyes at all."

"Uh, Mrs. Lane, I think you have the wrong idea here..." Clark began.

He was cut off by Ellen once more. "*MISS* Lane. I haven't been *MRS.* Lane for several years, young man."

"I apologize, Ms. Lane."

"Now, what exactly do I have the wrong idea about? You are in the honeymoon suite with my daughter, are you not?"

"Yes, but..."

"No, buts. And you have yet to have introduced yourself to me or her father..."

"Ms. Lane, if you would just let me talk..."

"I think it is just atrocious the way young people have relationships these days. In my day, you couldn't get married without having family present. Now, there's drive-thru wedding ceremonies. It's a shame really. People cheating on one another. No respect for the institution of marriage; not that my ex-husband had any respect for our marriage... You better not even think about hurting my daughter like that, young man, or I will find you and hunt you down..."

Clark sighed. "Ms. Lane, you really have the wrong idea here. Lois and I aren't married..."

"Oh, really?" she challenged. "Then what in God's name are you doing with my daughter in the honeymoon suite?"

“Well, I’m...”

“Are you married?”

“No...”

“What are your intentions with my daughter...?”

Clark was growing very impatient with this woman. “What exactly did Lois tell you she was doing here?” Clark challenged.

Ellen stopped a moment. “Wha? I’m not sure. She said something about not wanting to go to her cousin, Cindy’s wedding...”

“Ms. Lane, I’m Lois’ work partner. We are in the middle of an investigation. Undercover. That’s it. We’re not married. Believe me, if we did get married my parents would wring my neck if I even tried to elope without inviting family.” Clark sighed in relief once he had gotten his statement out.

“Hmmm...sounds like your parents and I would get along,” Ellen mused. She was quiet a moment before she spoke again. “You said you’re her work partner?”

“Yes.” He sighed.

“Oh...and nothing more?”

“I, uh...” He wasn’t sure how to answer that question.

“Uh-huh.” Ellen’s tone dripped in enthusiasm. “It was nice talking to you, Clark. Tell Lois I’ll call her later.” With that, she hung up.

Clark sighed, hanging his head in defeat. The whirlwind that was Lois’ mother was definitely a force to be reckoned with. He ran a hand through his hair and couldn’t help but laugh. Now he knew where Lois got that fiery spirit.

A sound from the bathroom caught his attention. The shower was running and he could feel

his body immediately responding to the sounds coming from the bathroom. How would she react if he just slipped back in the shower with her?

No, she definitely wouldn’t mind.

Lois threw her head back against the cool tile of the bathroom wall. She was frustrated. How was it that her mother could find new ways of torturing her without even being in town? Between the interruptions with the staff and the phone tonight it was a wonder how they’d be able to continue their investigation in peace.

‘Investigation.’ She reminded herself.

There hadn’t been much investigating going on for the last hour. That was definitely the last thing on her mind earlier. She pulled the shower head down to help rinse the soap off her back as images from the last few days with Clark raced through her mind.

What would it have been like...to surprise him in here?

“Lois?” Clark’s voice intruded on her thoughts.

Gasping in surprise, she replaced the shower head back on its stand then cautiously poked her head out from behind the shower curtain. Clark was standing there with his arms crossed still dressed in a towel. “Yeah?” she asked.

“Mind telling me why you left me to deal with whirlwind Lane while you’re having all the fun?” he asked amused.

Lois blushed slightly, recalling where her train of thought had just been. “Sorry...” she apologized. “My mother can be a bit of a handful at times...”

“You think?” he asked, pushing back the curtain. He wore an amused expression on his face. “Why are you so skittish?”

Lois gave him a shrug. “No reason...”

“Uh-huh...” he countered, not believing.

“It’s nothing,” she said, closing the curtain.

“Hey, wait a minute...” Clark argued, pushing the curtain open. He watched her with an amused look on his face. “I think you owe me. I just had to defuse a very serious situation out there.”

“My mother is always a serious situation,” Lois shot back.

Clark took a step inside the shower. He still had the towel

wrapped around his waist and he still wore his glasses. “Exactly. Which is why you owe me. Where in the world does your mother concoct such crazy ideas?” he asked, pulling Lois to him.

“Mmm, I blame Lucy,” Lois said, linking her arms around his neck. She leaned up to kiss him.

“Mmm...” he moaned against her mouth. “Lucy?” he asked quizzically.

“She’s the one with the blabbermouth,” she whispered against his lips.

“Ah...” he sighed, leaning down to capture her mouth. “So, what was it?” he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

“What?” she asked slightly distracted.

“Your fantasy...your daydream that had you so...*startled* when I came in here,” he prompted.

“Huh?” She looked down at the knot where his towel was tied around his waist. He had to be uncomfortable with that towel on.

“Nuh-nothing...” she stammered, feeling the heat rise to her cheeks. “What makes you think I was...?” She swallowed hard as she felt his chest against hers.

His hands roamed up and down her sides, sending a shiver of delight down her spine. His hands rested on her hips and his mouth was a few millimeters from hers. She wanted to kiss him. She wanted to...

“Nothing?” He echoed in a seductive tone.

This was torture.

He was a few millimeters away but he continued to tease her. Every time she turned her head to capture his lips with hers he turned away. Why did he have to be so frustrating?

“..Please...” she pleaded, reaching out for him. He grabbed her wrist, shaking his head.

“Ah ah ah...” he warned. “Say it...”

“Fine...I was fantasizing about making love in the shower...” she stammered out hurriedly. His face broke out into a wide grin. “Clark, please...” she pleaded with him, reaching her hands out to cup his face.

“You are so impatient...” he murmured against her lips.

“Clark...” she whimpered.

“See? Impatient...” he grinned back at her before lowering his mouth to capture her mouth with his. “I thought you said you wanted to take things slow...” he murmured against her lips as her hands roamed up and down his chest.

“Too slow,” she said, shaking her head. “Just...please...” His mouth came crashing down on hers and the world around them slowly faded away.

CRASH!

“What was that?” Lois asked, looking towards the door.

“I don’t know,” Clark said, releasing her from his arms. He stepped out of the shower, grabbing a fresh towel to wrap around himself. He turned back toward her. “I’m going to check it out. Stay here.”

Lois turned the water to the shower head off and stepped out of the shower, grabbing her own towel from the rack. She picked up the robe from the floor and securely wrapped it around her body then grabbed another towel and wrapped her hair in it. She then turned toward the door and stepped out of the bathroom and into the suite where she found Clark already dressed for bed, checking the tape in the camera.

“That’s odd,” he said with a confused expression.

“What?” Lois asked.

“The tape we had in here is gone,” he said confused.

“Gone?” Lois asked.

Clark nodded, pulling open the camera for her to see the missing slot where the videotape had been earlier.

“What about the audio?” she asked, referring to the audio tapes they’d been recording along with the videotapes.

He turned to check and sighed. “They all seem to be here,”

“Think someone’s onto us?” Lois asked.

"I don't know." He shook his head. "Whoever has the tapes knows we're undercover, though." He put the camera down and sighed.

"Well, there's not much we can do at..." She glanced at the clock, "eleven at night." She tugged on his hand and pulled him towards her. "Come on..."

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"Bed..." she responded. "This way we can finish our discussion earlier on those...ahem...fantasies..." She didn't get a chance to finish her sentence. Clark had already scooped her in his arms and carried her into the bedroom to finish what they had started earlier. She had a feeling the haunting dreams she'd been having would be long gone by morning.

Downstairs in the lobby, Phil shakily recounted his break-in to Lois and Clark's suite to Nigel. "Yeah, you were right. They broke into that building across the street from the Lexor."

"Yes, I'm familiar with it," Nigel said, obviously bored.

"Yeah, well, anyway, I followed them in there and set off the fire alarm to make sure they didn't find anything just like you said."

"Were you able to see if they had gotten their hands on any of the documents?" Nigel asked.

"No. I tried to break into their room later, but I wasn't on duty so I couldn't use the master key..." Phil explained. "I was able to get in, but when I got in I heard 'em in the shower. Man, he was really giving it to her if you know what I mean..."

"Intriguing," Nigel said, undisturbed by Phil's interest in Lois and Clark's sex lives.

"Anyway, I kinda knocked the coat hanger over and the guy almost caught me. I don't think they saw me." Phil sighed.

"Hmmm, don't worry. We'll take care of it. Just keep monitoring."

"You got it," Phil said with a grin.

The next morning, Clark awoke to the sound of a police radio describing a ten-car-pile-up on the Metropolis Bridge. Looking down at his sleeping partner, whose body was still intertwined with his, he grudgingly pulled out of her embrace to attend to the wreck. He stopped at the last minute to jot down a quick note for Lois and left.

"It seems one of our labs received a very interesting deposit over the weekend, Nigel," Lex said, puffing at his cigar. "A piece of a meteorite...from Smallville, Kansas...Ring any bells?" Nigel stared blankly at Lex, waiting for him to continue. "The same place where Lois Lane's partner, Clark Kent is from. Now, call me a paranoid person, but it seems a bit too coincidental for my liking. Mr. Trask was convinced Kent could contact our friendly neighborhood alien...I think he would be interested in this information, wouldn't you think?"

"Yes, sir," Nigel nodded.

"Now, are you sure they don't have any tapes left of these meetings? Remember, Nigel, evidence is the only thing that separates the criminal from the law abiding citizen..." Lex asked.

"I've had the bellboy sneaking in their room and swapping out the tapes. We actually came across something very...interesting during our...ahem...trade." Nigel moved towards the flat screen on the wall and inserted a videotape into one of the many slots on the wall. He grabbed the remote and pressed play.

The image showed Lois pinned to the wall with Clark pressed against her. The soft cries of pleasure echoed through the room as Lex watched with interest. Nigel paused the footage. "So, Ms. Lane does have dessert it seems."

"Repeatedly, sir," Nigel said, smiling to himself.

"Yes, so it would seem," Lex said. "This kind of footage could be very damaging to both of their careers...Their reputations as

professionals could be ruined if the world knew they were the type to tape their sex lives."

"Shall I leak it to the press?" Nigel asked.

"No, Nigel, I think this kind of leverage should be saved for... just the right moment," Lex said. "You know I'm quite disappointed. I thought for sure Ms. Lane would have better taste...It's a shame."

"Should I put this up for safe keeping?" Nigel asked.

"No, Nigel leave it. I'll take care of it."

"Of course, sir," Nigel said, nodding at Lex.

He then turned to leave. Lex leaned back in his leather chair, puffing on his cigar. With one swift motion, he lifted the remote and pressed play. "And she said, she never had dessert..." he mused.

"Clark?" Lois looked around the room, frowning at the absence of his warm body next to her. She sat up and noticed the note lying next to her on the bed.

//Lois,

I had to run by my apartment real quick. If I'm not back in time, I'll meet you at the Planet.

Yours, CK//

Lois smiled at the note. Last night hadn't been a mistake. He had left a note. He hadn't just left her to wake up by herself... alone in an empty bed. She blinked away the stray tears that had escaped from the corner of her eyes. What was the matter with her? She and Clark had only been on one date. Two if you count the time after their escape from Dr. Baines' clutches. The sex was definitely incredible, but wasn't it too soon to be feeling this way?

Could it be possible? Could she be falling for him this quickly? Was her mind just turning her lust after Clark into love or was there more to it than that? Lois sighed, getting out of bed; she made her way to the bathroom to take a shower and get ready for work. "It's too early to think about stuff this complicated," she muttered.

Clark smiled when he spotted Lois coming out of a taxi cab in front of the Planet. She was loaded down with a stack of files in her arms. "Here. Let me get that." Clark grabbed the files from her and gave her a smile.

"Thanks." She smiled at him. She was looking at him with such wonderment. He really wanted to kiss her. She looked so beautiful...but how would she react? He still wasn't sure what the protocol for office romances at the Daily Planet, let alone in the world of Lois Lane. She seemed to have a rule for everything, but she didn't have a problem breaking any of her rules either.

Throwing caution to the wind, he leaned down to kiss her. "Morning."

"Morning." She returned his kiss enthusiastically. Delighted by her response, he placed a cautious arm around her waist, deepening the kiss.

"Hey, lovebirds, I don't have all day," the cab driver called.

"Oh!" Lois pulled away from him a bit embarrassed. "The fare. I almost forgot."

"Here. I got it." Clark pulled out his wallet. "How much?"

"Clark, you really don't have to..."

"Twelve fifty," the cabbie said.

Clark paid the man and then turned back to Lois. "What is all this?" he asked, gesturing to the files in his hands.

"Well, some of it is the files we got from our escapade last night. The rest is from the fax Jimmy sent about the two jumpers. We got a bit sidetracked last night and didn't get a chance to go through it," Lois explained, lightly bumping his hip.

"We also need to find out who broke in and stole that tape," Clark added.

"I know. Given that Roarke is working with Nigel it's not a huge leap that Luthor would be involved but..." At Clark's

questioning expression she sighed. “I just know I don’t trust him,” Lois said as they stepped into the crowded elevator.

“Nigel or Luthor?”

“Both,” Lois said, shooting him a smile.

DING.

The elevator arrived on the newsroom floor and they both departed to their respective desks. Clark watched Lois as she began to sift through the files, trying to figure out where to begin. Noticing she hadn’t gotten her coffee yet, he went toward the coffee maker to begin making a cup for himself and Lois. Never taking his eyes off Lois as he prepared the cups, he smiled to himself as he recalled his and Lois’ recent lovemaking. Yesterday, they had been so cautious around one another, afraid to upset the other one by saying the wrong thing. Now, they were in a different place. A better place.

“Forget it, Kent. The Ice Maiden ain’t worth your time.”

Ralph, one of the reporters from Gossip approached him from behind.

“*Ice Maiden?*” Clark’s eyes narrowed at the man for using such a description for Lois. She was anything but. She may seem tough on the outside, but on the inside, she was the most incredible, compassionate person he had ever known.

Ralph laughed, not noticing Clark’s tone of disdain. “Yeah. I heard she ain’t nothing but a frigid Ice Queen. If you get her drunk enough you’d probably get her in bed, but...” Clark wasn’t sure what had come over him. He just wanted the man to stop talking. Describing Lois...or any woman for that matter... in such a degrading manner was unacceptable. How the man could sit here and talk this way about her he had no idea.

He placed the coffee mugs down on the counter in front of him, then got right in Ralph’s face, “Do *NOT* talk that way about my partner.” When Ralph seemed undeterred by the threat, Clark grabbed him by the collar. “If I hear you talk that way about Lois, or spreading any more lies about her again, I will make your life a living hell,” he hissed out.

“Okay, man, just take it easy, Kent. I...I didn’t mean anything by it. I was just telling you what I’d heard,” Ralph stammered.

“Who exactly did you hear this *garbage* from?” Clark asked.

“Uh, Claude...Claude Cluny...” Ralph stammered. “I ran into him at the Metropolis Press Club last night.”

Clark stared him down coldly for a minute, then let him go. “Yeah, well, you can tell your friend, Claude, I’ve got his number. If I hear any more rumors being spread around I’m coming to you. Got it?”

“Absolutely. Sorry,” Ralph stammered. “I didn’t know it was such an issue for you, Kent.”

“Talking about *any* woman like that is *always* an issue for me. Don’t let me catch you doing it again.” He then turned to grab the two coffee mugs he had set down and made his way toward Lois and his desk.

“Damn. He’s got it bad,” Ralph said, adjusting his jacket.

“Here.” Clark handed Lois a cup of coffee.

“Thanks,” Lois said, taking a sip.

“Any luck?” Clark asked.

“I’m going over the background check on Jules Johnson. It’s so weird. The mental evaluation reads like he didn’t even mean to jump,” Lois said, pointing at the report in front of her.

“Well, he did seem pretty quick to change his mind about jumping when Superman arrived.” At her questioning look, he covered hastily, “Um, according to the police and Superman... Where’s the report on Monique Kahn? Maybe we can cross reference their backgrounds? See if they may have crossed paths?”

“Ah, you think it’s a conspiracy too,” Lois said, poking at his chest in triumph.

“Well, Inspector Henderson did say it was suspicious to have two people jump at the same time like that.” Clark shrugged.

“Clark, you’ll learn this pretty quick. Inspector Henderson is

suspicious of the lady that serves hotdogs on 3rd Street. He trusts no one...nothing...nada...”

“You two must get along perfectly,” Clark replied jokingly.

“Oh, so funny,” Lois rolled her eyes, “That man is the most irritating man in the world. Everything by the book. No loopholes. Nothing. Never...not once can he bend the rules for the greater good.” At Clark’s questioning look she continued. “I was working undercover on that car theft ring story and he tried to charge me with accessory before the fact. Perry pulled some strings with the Chief of Police and got them to back off.”

“Ah.” Clark nodded, understanding Lois’ upset with Henderson a little more clearly.

“Don’t get me wrong. Henderson is a good cop. He’s one of the few we have left in Metropolis. He just doesn’t know when to quit...you know. There has to be the balance between doing your job and the rest of your life. I mean, face it. Nobody can save the world 24/7. I don’t even think Superman could. He’d probably get burnt out. Henderson seems to think he has to *be* a cop all the time. You can’t live like that.”

“I guess that makes sense. I never really thought about it like that,” Clark said, thoughtfully.

“Here’s Dr. Newman’s report on Monique Kahn,” Lois said, handing him the report. Lois was still scanning the report on Jules Johnson.

“Thanks.” Clark took the report from her; his hand brushed against hers for a second. He caught her gaze. Yep, that spark was definitely still there. She looked away hurriedly. He turned his attention to the report she had just given him. “This is odd. She was admitted to Metropolis General Hospital. She’s still there. Was Jules Johnson admitted?”

Lois shook her head, “No. He was released almost immediately.”

Clark pointed to the notes at the bottom of the report, “This says Monique Kahn was hysterical. She was ranting and raving about her fear of heights...”

“She’s afraid of heights, but she jumps off a thirty-story building?” Lois asked.

“Doesn’t make sense, does it?” Clark asked. “She was also mumbling something about a test when she was sedated.”

“Test? Think it has anything to do with the test Harrington and Roarke were talking about?” Lois asked.

“Anything’s possible,” Clark muttered.

Lois flipped to the next page of the report. “Okay, Jules Johnson went to school at Stanford...”

“Monique went to Harvard,” Clark read off.

“Grew up in New York,” Lois read.

“Lived in Boston her whole life until she moved to Metropolis three years ago to work at LexCorp.” Clark’s facial expression grew grim as he read her workplace.

“Moved to Metropolis three years as well to work for LexCorp.” Lois grinned at him. “I think we found our connection.”

“Too bad it’s not much. We’re grasping at straws here. We need something more solid,” Clark argued.

“Maybe if we ask nicely we could get Superman to hang Lex from the roof of his Penthouse and get a confession out of him...” Lois said half-jokingly.

“I don’t think that would work, Lois,” Clark said.

“You never know unless you ask,” Lois said with a teasing smile.

“Lois, Clark, Conference Room!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom. “Bring me everything you’ve got thus far!”

Lois and Clark grabbed the files they had on their investigation along with the files they had taken from Apocalypse Consulting the night before and headed toward the conference room.

Three hours later, Lois, Clark, Perry, Jimmy, and Cat sat at the conference table going over the files in front of them. One file labeled 'Tsunami' was smeared and looked mostly damaged. Cat looked at the file critically a moment. "Tsunami? Is that the one with the avocado and crab?"

Lois stared at Cat dumbfounded a moment then managed an exaggerated smile. "Yes, Cat. That's the one."

Cat grew thoughtful. "Why would they keep a file on Japanese seafood?"

Clark rolled his eyes. "Cat, 'tsunami' isn't what you think it is."

"It's a giant wave," Jimmy explained patiently. "Like a tidal wave."

"Wave?" Cat asked, uncertainly. She seemed unsure of who to believe.

"Wave? I've got a wave here too." Perry held up a file labeled, 'Shockwave/ Preliminary Analysis.' It's just a list of reports on the activity of the Metropolis Bay. Nothing really important there."

"Shock Wave?" Jimmy pulled out a report from a stack of papers in front of him. "Harrington's committee voted on something called Project Shock Wave not too long ago." He began to read, "'Appropriation approval for system test installation.'"

Lois leaned over Jimmy's shoulder. "This vote was taken five weeks ago." She took the report from Jimmy and laid it on the table.

Clark picked up the report and scanned it. "Passed eight to zero with one abstention. Congressman Ian Harrington."

"There's nothing here about what Shock Wave is, though," Lois said, "This must be what Roarke and Harrington were talking about. Roarke wants Harrington to have the vote reversed."

"Yeah, and have his own system approved instead," Perry mused. "Whatever that means."

"How did it go with Harrington yesterday?" Clark asked Cat.

Cat smiled, flipping open her notebook. "One-thirty: lunch with a semi-attractive blonde. Three o'clock: haircut and manicure. Four thirty: drinks with a so-so redhead."

"Nice to know our tax dollars are being spread around," Perry mused.

Seven p.m. Dinner with a mousey brunette," Cat continued.

"Spread around what?" Lois asked. "This guy's got more comings and goings than the Metro Train Station..."

"Lois, I'm hurt. I thought that insult was reserved only for me." Cat gave a fake pout.

Lois glared at her. "Would you just finish?"

"You are so impatient," Cat muttered. She didn't notice the blush that had crept in Lois' cheeks at that remark. "Ten o'clock: drinks with an auburn-haired beauty."

Jimmy smiled. "Finally, a little class. Who was she?"

"Me." Cat grinned mischievously. When she noticed everyone's disapproving looks she continued. "Like Super Glue. ...Anyway, then he came back here to meet Roarke."

"What about you, Jimmy?" Lois asked.

"After last night's fire drill, Roarke and Bart drove to Pier 31 and went into a warehouse. They were still there this morning when I left to come back here. Warehouse leased to ...Apocalypse Consulting." Jimmy handed his notes to Lois.

"Did you get a look inside?" Clark asked.

"No windows," Jimmy said, defeated.

Lois sighed, frustrated. "We're spinning our wheels. Some test, monitored by Naval units is taking place tomorrow at dawn, and Roarke is planning on sabotaging it."

"We interrupt your regular programming to bring you this breaking new story..." Everyone turned towards the radio that was set to low. Jimmy leaned over to turn the volume up. "We have just received word that there has been a bomb threat made to the Carlin Building."

"Aw, scooped..." Perry muttered. Clark quickly stood up and

headed for the door. Jimmy and Lois were close behind. "Lois, wait!" Perry called. "Don't forget to take Schwartz with you. I need some page-one shots. Olsen, you stay here and keep at it."

Lois gave Jimmy a sympathetic look, then grudgingly turned to Schwartz who had appeared at her side. She looked around for Clark. Not finding him, she asked, "Where's Clark?"

"He must have already left," Jimmy reasoned dejectedly.

"Don't just stand around here. Get!" Perry hollered. With that everyone scurried off, leaving Perry standing in the middle of the newsroom filled with a frenzy of activity. He wore a small smile. "I love the smell of fear in the newsroom."

Outside the Carlin building, a large crowd mixed with the press and passers-by stood outside watching the scene unfold. Lois exited the taxi cab and made her way through the crowd. Linda Montoya stood in front of her cameraman reciting the events. "If you've just joined us, the original report of a bomb planted in the lobby of the Carlin Building has now been confirmed. Currently, the Bomb Squad is awaiting the arrival of what they term a 'containment blister' as well as a team of deactivation specialist. Once the blister is in place, they'll attempt to neutralize the threat. Meanwhile, the building has been evacuated and we're being told to move back..."

The resounding sonic boom echoed through the sky, announcing Superman's arrival. Lois looked up in the sky to see Superman land. "Superman's here! Superman is here and about to enter the building... Can we get a shot of that?"

Lois watched in anticipation as Superman brushed past them hurriedly.

"Superman, Superman, could we get a statement?" One of the reporters for LNN called out after him.

"Uh, not right now." He continued making his way toward the crowd, then stopped and turned to apologize. "Sorry," He then bounded up the steps of the Carlin Building. Lois held her breath in anticipation.

Across town, Lex Luthor watched the scene unfold on his private surveillance monitors. He watched Superman enter the building, then nodded to Asabi who held a handheld remote control. "Now."

Lois watched in horror as Superman entered the building only to be met with a fiery explosion. Debris from the explosion flew through the air. She ducked, but to no avail. A small piece of shattered glass struck her forehead. She winced in pain, dabbing at the cut on her forehead with a napkin. "Oh, my God... Superman..." She sighed in relief when she saw the Man of Steel walk out of the building seemingly unharmed, but covered in smoke and soot from the explosion. "Thank God," she muttered under her breath.

Lex stared at the television monitor with admiration. "Invulnerable."

"A man of steel," Asabi remarked.

Lois walked through the area of the explosion, examining the site carefully. There were injured people everywhere being tended to by ambulatory workers. She shook her head in disgust. This had been no accident. There was no way it was a coincidence that Superman walked through that building at the same time the bomb exploded. Where was Clark? She hadn't seen him anywhere. She looked over toward the police cars were lined up around the building and spotted Inspector Henderson talking to Clark.

As she approached she noticed the table in front of them with melted bomb components laid out on it. "...somewhere within a two-mile radius, but that's all we..."

"What's all this?" Lois asked, interrupting.

Clark smiled up at her; obviously glad to see her. His expression changed from joy to despair when he looked at her, however. “Lois, you’re hurt...” He moved to look at her injury more closely.

“I’m fine.” She tried to shrug him off. She could worry about her injury later. Right now she was more interested in finding out what Henderson had to say about the bomb.

“Let me see,” Clark pleaded.

“Clark, I’m fine. It’s nothing,” Lois said.

“You guys want to hear this or not?” Henderson asked, amused.

“Yes,” Lois said enthusiastically, brushing Clark away from her.

Henderson sighed. “The explosion was radio-controlled, activated from an unknown point of origin within a two-mile radius of this site. Also, there were video cameras installed in the lobby that were not a part of the building’s security system or any other system that the management company knew about. We think the two are connected.”

“So, what you’re saying is someone watched Superman walk into the building, then blew it up?” Clark asked.

“That’d be my theory,” Henderson said dryly. “These are all preliminary estimations right now. Hopefully, we’ll be able to recover enough from these pieces here to try and track down the source of this.” He gestured to the table in front of him.

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, rubbing her arms slightly to ease the sudden chill she felt. She looked across the street to watch an ambulance pull away, siren wailing. She felt Clark’s arms wrap around her from behind; the warmth of his embrace seemed to help drown out the chill she felt from the scene that had unfolded in front of her. Henderson watched them with an amused look on his face before excusing himself. “That poor man,” Lois said, shaking her head.

“What man?” Clark’s tone seemed confused.

“Superman,” Lois said, turning around to face him. “He comes here to help us... Can you imagine how he must feel?”

Clark nodded. “I think so.” His tone was thoughtful.

“It doesn’t make any sense. Who would want to kill Superman?” Lois leaned her head against his chest for a brief moment before pulling away from him. “This is getting out of hand. We have to find out who is behind this ...and...and stop them...”

“Lois, it’s not like they’ll be successful in trying to kill Superman,” Clark reasoned. “Superman isn’t the issue here...”

Lois nodded. “I know. I know that. It’s everyone around here that gets caught in the cross fire.” Her determined fire back, she grabbed Clark by the tie and tugged him along with her. “Come on, we’ve got work to do.”

They came back to the newsroom to find Perry and Jimmy poring over the notes they had left. “Perry?” Lois knocked at the Conference Room door.

“Ah, Lois, Clark, come on in.” Perry motioned for them to have a seat. “We got a little more information on Shock Wave.” He motioned to the handwritten notes in front of him.

“How?” Lois asked.

“Hey, I may not be on the beat anymore, but I still got sources...” Perry grinned. “According to my source Project Shock Wave is an experimental coastal defense network. Apparently, our Navy began lobbying for its own version of a Star Wars system a couple years back. Proposals were made. Guess whose system was runner-up?”

“Roarke,” Clark replied flatly.

“Bingo.”

“Did you find out who’s behind Shock Wave?” Lois asked curiously.

Jimmy pulled out a page from his notebook. “Luthor

Technologies.”

“Luthor?” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“Well, you know, Lex Luthor’s always trying to do something with the military. He’s had the experience working with them before. He probably knows what they’re looking for in these proposals,” Perry reasoned.

“So, what does this Shock Wave do?” Lois asked.

“It’s designed to automatically analyze any foreign object within its sensory range and calibrate an appropriate response. A sonic curtain, if you will? No matter what you tried to throw at it, the sonic vibrations would protect you with an impenetrable barrier,” Perry explained.

“Yeah, Roarke had millions tied up in his own system... He’s close to bankruptcy right now. Paying off Harrington used up his last ten thousand,” Jimmy said.

“Sounds like the actions of a desperate man,” Clark mused.

“So, what do we do?” Lois asked.

“Well, we were recommended to get out of town,” Jimmy began.

“No,” Lois and Clark said in unison.

“Why don’t we go over those tapes one more time? Head back to the hotel and grab them for me, but first... Go ahead and write that piece up on the explosion from today,” Perry instructed.

“On it,” Lois said, heading for the door. Jimmy followed close behind. Clark got up to leave as well, but Perry stopped him.

“Clark, can I have a word with you, son?” Perry drawled.

“Uh, sure,” Clark said hesitantly, unsure what Perry wanted to talk to him about.

“I had an interesting conversation with Ralph earlier... told me you threatened him.”

Clark’s face fell in shame. “Uh, yeah.” He winced. “...about that.”

Perry patted Clark on the shoulder, “It’s good to see someone finally put that man in his place. The trash that man talks... Boy, if he wasn’t so good at digging up the dirt on these politicians I’d...”

Clark gave him a weak smile. “I stand by my partner, Chief.”

Perry’s head did a double take. “What in the Sam Hill is he spreading about Lois?” The fatherly concern was evident in Perry’s tone.

“I really can’t say, Chief. It’s personal and *private*...” Clark explained.

Perry watched him for a minute critically then extended his hand out to Clark. “You’re a good man, son. Don’t let the vultures pull you down, ya here?”

“Yes, Chief.” Clark nodded.

“Good,” Perry said gruffly. “Now, get out of here.”

Lois and Clark finished writing up the story on the explosion then headed back to the hotel room. “I think we should just print what we’ve got. Once news leaks out about this test being sabotaged the Navy will have to cancel it.”

“Yes, but then we could get charged with espionage,” Clark said. “Military. Top Secret?” He prompted.

“Well, Roarke has to be stopped; he...” she stopped cold in her tracks when she opened the door. “Clark?” The room had been completely destroyed. The audio/video equipment had been smashed to pieces, tapes destroyed, furniture overturned, sofa cushions torn, wallpaper peeled off the walls.

Lois walked into the bedroom and gasped at what she saw. ‘*DIE!!*’ had been stabbed through the linens and all over the walls. A muffled sound came from the other room. She came out of the bedroom to find Clark sitting on the couch. “Did you hear something?”

“No,” he responded.

Lois stared at Clark for a moment. There was something off. She could have sworn she’d heard something out there. She turned to go back into the bedroom. A bulk of cotton at the entrance of

the bedroom caught her attention. “Oh, no,” she said, leaning down to pick up the object. It was the stuffed bear Lucy had given her for her sweet sixteen. It had been stabbed and unstuffed.

“What is it?” Clark asked from behind her.

She turned to him, brushing a few tears out of her eyes. “I’ve had him since I was sixteen.” She stood up and turned toward him. “Well, Roarke knows we’re on to him.”

Clark nodded. “Worse than that, he’s destroyed all our evidence.”

“He’s probably cleared out across the street too,” Lois reasoned. “We have to find him. That man is capable of anything.” She handed Clark the unstuffed bear then turned back to the bedroom to begin sifting through the destroyed room.

Lois curled up in front of the TV with a tub of chocolate ice cream and a tape of Ivory Towers. The show just didn’t draw her in the way it had before. The show was entertaining and she enjoyed the plot twists, but she didn’t really connect with the characters the way she used to.

Lois sighed. “Yet another thing that’s changed,” she murmured, clicking the TV off. She and Clark still hadn’t gotten any further on their investigation and they were running out of time. Perry said he would check with all his sources in Washington to see what he could find out about warning the Navy without incriminating themselves legally. The mysterious disasters around Metropolis were beginning to worry her. It seemed like she was missing something, but she couldn’t put her finger on it.

The only thing she had been able to really focus on today was Clark. She felt like she had just been going through the motions while discussing the case with Perry and the rest of the gang. Every time she looked at Clark, her mind kept flashing back to the hotel room and all the wonderful things he had done to her repeatedly the night before. Little everyday things would trigger a memory: the way he bit his lip when he had been making love to her, the way he had teased her about being impatient, and the way his body felt pressed up against hers.

All she could think about all day was repeating last night’s activities. She had been so tempted to just lure him into one of the many supply closets, or the darkroom, or even one of the upstairs offices, but she hadn’t had the nerve to follow through with it. They were dating, but she wasn’t sure what the protocol was on something like this. She’d never felt like this with anyone. It felt like a floodgate had been opened and no matter how much she tried to suppress the urges, they continued to tease her with every pleasurable memory from the past few days.

She felt a familiar tingle in her belly and winced. Was it always going to be like this? Every time she thought about Clark she would get the urge to jump into bed with him? If only they were still at the Lexor. The manager had said he’d be in touch about their room, but they hadn’t heard anything. It appeared that they wouldn’t be sharing a bed tonight. She had felt so at peace in his arms last night. She had been disappointed when he hadn’t been there to wake up with. She knew he probably had to have had a good reason for leaving, but it still didn’t squash the disappointment she had felt when he hadn’t been there.

She really missed him. Would it be in horrible taste if she just showed up at his apartment? Not necessarily. Did she really care? No. She just needed an excuse to drop by. She looked over at the files on her desk. Perfect. Now, if she could just find something to change into...

Clark stood in the kitchen scrubbing at his Superman suit that was covered in black residue. The phone on the wall next to him rang. He put the suit down and answered the phone. “Hello?”

“Clark?” His mother’s voice echoed through the phone lines. “We saw the news...”

“Hi, Mom.” Clark rested the phone in between the crook of his

neck and shoulder as he continued to scrub at his suit once more.

“Are you all right, son?” his dad asked.

“I’m fine... Sorry, I didn’t call you back yesterday. Lois and I have been swamped at work...”

“Oh...” his mom was quiet before prodding. “Is there something you would like to tell us?”

“Not really...” Clark sighed, putting the suit down. “Mom, how do you clean spandex?”

“Well, first you need to soak it then work on trying to get the stain out...” his mom said.

“Clark, about Lois...” his dad interjected gruffly.

“It’s not coming out,” Clark said defeated.

“Is it a dirt stain or an oil-based stain?” his mom asked.

“I don’t know, Mom. It’s a ...bomb stain...” Clark said frustrated.

“Oh, honey...” his mom began soothingly. “You sound so sad...”

“Clark, are you sure you’re all right? We saw the explosion on TV. That was no nickel popper,” his dad interrupted.

Clark sighed. “I’m fine, Dad.” He continued scrubbing at the stain on his suit. “Now if I can only get this...”

“The important thing is blot, don’t rub,” his mom suggested.

Clark stopped scrubbing at the stain and looked closer at it. The stain had spread even more. “Great.” He sighed and threw the suit into the sink with frustration.

“Will you two forget about the laundry for a minute?” his dad interrupted. “We’ve got a serious problem here.”

“Jonathan, it isn’t certain the explosion was aimed at him,” his mom said.

“Aw, bull. Somebody’s gunnin’ for our boy,” his dad muttered.

“Dad, I’m fine.” Clark sighed. “It’s not me I’m worried about. It’s everyone else in Metropolis...Lois and I have a few leads, but nothing concrete. Now that the hotel room was destroyed...most of the evidence we’ve got is gone too...”

“Your hotel room was destroyed?” his mom asked aghast.

“Yeah, and now an entire weekend of undercover work is gone...down the drain,” Clark muttered in disgust.

“So, you and Lois were...working...undercover?” his dad asked hesitantly.

“Well...yeah,” Clark said, still not picking up at what his parents were hinting at. “The honeymoon suite was right across the street from where the meetings were being held... Wait a minute, you guys didn’t think that Lois and I...?”

“No, of course not,” his mom said. He could hear the defiance in her tone.

“We trust you, son,” his dad added.

“So, you and Lois are getting pretty close, huh?” his mom added conspiratorially, trying to change the subject.

“Uh, yeah, I guess you could say that...” Clark felt the blush creeping up his neck. He wasn’t really comfortable discussing his relationship with Lois with his parents. He was ashamed of himself for letting things get so out of hand on their first date. He had been raised better than that.

His dad seemed to sense Clark’s hesitancy in discussing Lois. “So, any ideas on who is behind the explosion?”

“Uh, I’m not really sure. There was something about those suicide attempts...and the explosion... One of the jumpers said something about a test when she was sedated...”

“Test?” his mom asked, concerned. “What does that mean?”

“I don’t know, but I’m gonna figure it out...and soon...before any more people get hurt,” Clark said. A knock at his front door caught his attention. He x-rayed the door and smiled. “Uh, Mom, Dad, I’ve gotta go. Lois is here.”

“Goodnight, Clark...have fun,” his mom said with a slight sing-song to her tone.

“Call us,” his dad added.

“I will. I promise.” Clark hung up the phone then turned to the

sink where his suit was. “Forget it,” he muttered, grabbing the suit and stuffing it into the trash can below his sink.

“Clark?” Lois’ voice echoed from the other side of the door. “Are you home?”

Clark jogged lightly up the steps and opened the door. “Lois, what are you doing here?”

Lois brushed past him, dressed in a white cotton pullover and shorts, loaded down with the files they had been going over earlier. “It’s about time. I thought we could sort through these some more. There has to be something that we’re missing....”

“Great. Come on in.” He gestured towards the couch. Lois sunk down on the couch and laid the files on the table in front of her. “So, where do you want to start?” he asked, taking a seat next to her.

“I thought we could take another look at those suicidal attempts. It’s too coincidental...and what about that explosion today?” Clark watched her with a smile. She stopped talking, seeming to notice him staring at her. “What?”

“Nothing,” he said, looking away.

Lois looked behind her curiously, then turned back to him. “What?”

“Nothing.” He shook his head. “You’re just... kinda babbling.”

Lois smiled at him. “I don’t babble. I think aloud.”

“You babble,” Clark said, shooting her a smile. Lois gave him a crooked smile back, catching his gaze for a brief moment before turning away.

“Uh, so, I was thinking we should try and figure out what all these incidents have in common. Maybe it’ll help us narrow down what these tests are on...or for...” Lois still wasn’t looking at him. She just stared blankly at the file in front of her. Clark had to suppress a laugh. She was holding the file upside down.

“Okay, well, let’s start with the suicide attempts,” Clark began, hoping once they began bouncing ideas off one another she would loosen up a bit.

“Yes,” Lois nodded, putting the file down on the table. She turned to face him. “Both jumpers came to Metropolis at the same time...working for the same company.”

“But before then they’d had nothing to link them together,” Clark pointed out.

“LexCorp is one of the largest companies in the world. They employ over half of Metropolis...It could be just coincidental that they work at the same company,” Lois reasoned.

Clark nodded. “Okay, but they both were on a direct line across town from one another when they performed their suicide attempts.”

“Yes, Jules Johnson never jumped, but Monique Kahn did.” Lois crinkled her nose. “That’s an inconsistency, isn’t it?”

“Well, if Superman hadn’t have shown up, Jules Johnson could have jumped,” Clark added.

“I doubt it,” Lois muttered. She grew thoughtful for a minute, then snapped her fingers. “Superman showed up to rescue both of them. That’s another commonality between them.”

“I think that’s everything on the jumpers,” Clark said. “What about the explosion?”

“That was weird, wasn’t it?” Lois mused. “Superman walks in and the building explodes. Henderson said the explosive pieces they’d analyzed weren’t any use; they’d been damaged too much.”

“So, what have we got? Two incidents where Superman showed up to rescue...” Clark sighed, “That still doesn’t explain the test.”

“Maybe they’re testing the police’s response time?” Lois reasoned. “To plan for something bigger...”

Clark’s eyes narrowed. “Or Superman’s.”

“But what’s the point in testing Superman?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know.” Clark shook his head. “We didn’t go into specifics about Superman’s abilities in that article. Maybe someone wants to find Superman’s weaknesses and exploit them?”

Clark reasoned. He tried to push the fears he had of someone using Lois to get to him. Little did anyone know, as of right now Lois was his only weakness.

Clark seemed upset about something. They seemed to be getting somewhere with the research and then Clark’s tone had gotten very solemn. “Are you okay?” Lois asked, pushing a strand of hair out of his face.

He gave her a weak smile. “I’m fine, Lois. It’s just a bit disconcerting....”

“Disconcerting?” Lois asked quizzically.

“I mean, the guy just wants to help...that’s all; and instead he’s getting attacked....and there’s even more problems out there than there were to begin with.” Lois watched him vent his frustrations with an amused smile. He was so cute when he got worked up about something. “People were hurt today. Thank God, no one was killed, but...”

She couldn’t resist. He just looked so darn cute when he was this worked up. She leaned up and kissed him. It wasn’t like he hadn’t done the same thing to her when she got into ramble-mode about something. At first, he seemed too stunned by her actions to respond, then slowly she felt him begin to respond. His hand moved to cup her cheek as he continued their kiss. It wasn’t heated or frantic like their kisses over the past few days had been. It was more slow and sensual. She could feel her body temperature slowly begin to rise when Clark pulled away.

Resting his forehead against hers he smiled at her. “What was that for?”

“No reason,” Lois teased, linking her arms around his neck. “You seemed like you needed a distraction,” She reasoned, tracing a seductive finger down his chest. “You were getting pretty worked up there...”

“Oh...” He gave her a sheepish expression. “I didn’t mean to get carried away...”

Lois leaned up to kiss him once more. “I think it’s sweet that you care so much,” she whispered.

“You do?” he asked cautiously against her lips.

“Mmm hmm,” she nodded, lowering her lips to trace along his neckline.

“Oh...” She grinned against the nape of his neck when she heard him groan. She had him exactly where she wanted him. She moved to straddle him as she continued her torture. She nibbled lightly on his ear. “Oh, God, Lois...”

“You know, it wasn’t very nice of you to leave me all alone this morning...” she whispered against his skin. She tugged at the hem of his shirt, slipping her hand upward to trace his perfectly sculpted chest. He squirmed beneath her touch; she smiled against his skin and pushed his shirt up over his head. He disentangled himself from the shirt, giving her the perfect opportunity to move her ministrations downward.

He gasped as she moved her hands up and down his now bare chest, feeling the powerful muscles beneath his chest. Her lips moved down his collarbone and he let out a soft moan against her. “Oh, yeah...” She felt his hands slowly moving up the back of her thighs, kneading the flesh as he did so. “I had to grab another... Oh, God, Lois...you are killing me...” he hissed out as she readjusted herself on his lap.

“Not yet...” Lois moved back up his chest, leaving a trail of feather light kisses in her wake. Clark’s hands rested on her, kneading the flesh through the cotton shorts she wore. She nibbled at the arc where his shoulder and neck connected, and he let out a soft moan.

“Loiss...” he hissed. She moaned against his neck. He pulled her closer, slipping his hand up the back of her sweatshirt. “Do you have any idea what that does to me?” he murmured before capturing her mouth with his.

“I have a pretty good idea,” she whispered against his lips. She

watched his face change from confusion to intrigue and then desire. “Looking for something?”

Clark smiled against her mouth. “Not anymore...” he whispered back. He lifted the pullover above her head and helped her disentangle herself from it. She felt his hands move up her body. “You are so beautiful...” he murmured, placing a kiss along her collarbone. “...and gorgeous...” Another kiss at her throat. “...and incredibly sexy...”

“Oh, Clark...” she murmured, raking a hand through his hair. “You are *so* sexy, Lois Lane...” he whispered in her ear.

She smiled back at him as he leaned over her, caressing her cheek. “Not so bad yourself, farmboy...” she murmured. “Farmboy?” he asked.

She nodded breathlessly. “It suits you.” He smiled back at her, capturing her mouth with his once more.

The distinct knock at his front door caused them both to look up. “What the...” Clark turned toward the front door, unsure of who could be visiting him at this time of night.

“No, no, no...” Lois murmured. “We were so close...” she whimpered.

Clark winced, turning back to Lois. “Tell me about it...” Clark whispered, through gritted teeth as he glared at the front door.

She pulled his face to hers. “Just ignore it. Whoever it is can wait till tomorrow.” The knocking grew more insistent and Clark glared at the door. They were so close. She felt so good in his arms. She let out a frustrated growl as the pounding on the door grew louder. “Whoever it is is going to be murdered in about two seconds if they don’t...”

“CK? Hey, are you home?” Jimmy’s voice echoed through the room.

“I’m going to kill him,” Clark muttered, looking down at his half-naked partner still straddling him. He let out a frustrated sigh and pushed her off of him as he muttered, “A slow and painful death...”

Lois groaned. “Crap.”

“CK? Hello?” Jimmy’s voice echoed through the door again.

“Just get rid of him,” Lois whimpered. He nodded his agreement as he turned toward the door.

“Don’t move,” he whispered, then answered the door. “Jimmy, it’s...very late.” He partially opened the door, not allowing Jimmy to see behind him into his apartment. He had every intention of picking up where he’d left off with Lois before Jimmy had shown up.

“Yeah, I know, CK, but I don’t know what to do. I lost Roarke. I can’t figure out where he went. I went into the warehouse and no one was in there. I didn’t see him go anywhere... The Chief’s gonna kill me if he finds out I lost him...” Jimmy whined.

The door swung open from behind him and Lois, dressed back in her sweatshirt and cotton shorts yelled, “What do you mean you *lost* Roarke?”

“Uh, well, I...” Jimmy looked between the two of them with an amused look on his face. “Lois, what are you doing *here*?”

“Come on in.” Clark gestured for him to enter. It didn’t look like they were going to be picking up his and Lois’ earlier activities anytime soon.

“I still don’t get it.” Lois sighed, pacing around the apartment. “How did you lose him?”

“Well, Allison and I...”

“Allison?” Lois asked, raising her eyebrow. “Jimmy...”

“I know. I know.” Jimmy sighed, raking his hand through his hair. “Believe me, I know.”

Clark sighed. “I’m sure it’ll be okay, Jimmy, just leave a message for Perry and explain what happened. I’m sure he’ll understand.”

Lois nodded. “Just call him. He’ll get mad but he’ll get over it.

He’ll understand, I promise.”

“Okay,” Jimmy sighed. “I’ll go ahead and give him a call.” He tried to change the subject, looking back and forth between Lois and Clark. He noticed the look between them. “So, you guys seem to be getting along better. Chief was right about partnering you up, huh?”

“I...” Clark began at the same time Lois said, “Well, I...”

Jimmy laughed. “Goodnight, guys.” He closed the door behind him. There was something definitely starting between them for sure. At least he thought so.

He sighed in relief, closing the door behind Jimmy. He had been ready to push the young man out the door but Lois, upon hearing he’d *lost* Roarke, had had other ideas in mind. Lois. He looked around the living room. She had just been... Where could she have gone? He walked over toward the kitchen where he had last seen her. He couldn’t find her. “Looking for something?” Lois whispered from behind him. She leaned against his back. He groaned when he felt the skin-to-skin contact pressing against him.

He turned in his arms to face her, cupping her cheek in his palm. “I was looking for this gorgeous partner of mine...”

“Is that so?” she teased, raking her hands up and down his chest. He slowly walked them back towards the table, allowing his hands to roam up and down her sides.

“Yes, too bad I don’t have a chance with her. I hear she’s dating her partner...” he teased, kissing her collarbone. She moaned as he pressed her against the edge of the table.

“Mmm...He’s pretty gorgeous himself...got a body to die for...and a killer smile...” she whispered in-between heavy breaths. “Oh, God...” she moaned as he pressed her back against the table. “I didn’t think he’d ever leave.”

“Thirty minutes and seventeen seconds.” He lowered his mouth to hers, caressing her cheek lightly. “Where were we?” he murmured against her mouth.

“I think we were right...”

‘I love you’

They were three simple words he was fighting saying every second of every day for fear that he’d send Lois back into panic mode. He felt it. He’d felt it more and more every day. She’d come to his apartment tonight.

From the time she’d walked in she’d been nervous. He could tell her mind was anywhere but on the investigation she claimed to be there for. He hadn’t said anything.

He’d been so close to saying it.

He looked over at Lois curled up against him so perfectly—almost as if she was made to fit right there in that crook of his shoulder forever. It warmed his heart to be this close with her but tore him in two feeling like he couldn’t say what he felt.

She had to feel it too.

There was no way that...

He moved to cup her cheek. “Why don’t you spend the night?”

She seemed to contemplate the suggestion for a moment before nodding. “Only if we stay like this all night.”

Clark nodded and picked her up, walking them into the bedroom. He lowered them to the bed and kissed her on the cheek. “Do you want your pullover? Or you could borrow one of my old shirts...”

Lois shook her head sleepily, curling up with him. “No, this is fine.” Clark pulled the covers over them and held her close. This was like a dream come true, falling asleep together with the woman he loved and waking up with her in the morning.

“Lois?” he called out her name hesitantly.

“Hmmm?” she asked sleepily. He could tell she was barely conscious. He wanted to say it. He’d been holding back saying it since the night she had bolted out of his arms.

“I love you,” he whispered and kissed her on the forehead.

Her response was barely audible, but he heard it. “I love you too.”

He smiled and kissed her forehead once more. No, nothing more perfect than this.

“Is everything all set?” Nigel asked.

“Roarke doesn’t suspect a thing,” Harrington said, puffing at his cigar. He looked at his watch and grimaced. “It’s show time.”

“Don’t forget, if Roarke tries to kidnap you, let him,” Nigel instructed. “We’ll handle Roarke.”

“I better be getting paid extra for this,” Harrington snapped.

“Of course,” Nigel said.

An echo of a shutter from a camera going off caught their attention. “What was that?” Harrington asked. He nodded toward one of his men to investigate. A burly man in his late thirties moved toward the crates on Pier 31, investigating the source of the distraction.

Jimmy Olsen, who had been hiding behind the crates, held his breath, willing the man not to see him. He had only been able to see Harrington. He hadn’t seen who he was talking to. He had thought taking a photograph would help. He could always enhance it to bring out the image of Harrington’s unknown accomplice. Unfortunately, taking that photo had drawn attention to himself.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here?” Jimmy looked up at the burly man apprehensively. This was not good.

Lois frowned as she woke up. It was still dark out. Clark wasn’t next to her. Where had he gone? She looked around the room and pouted. Why was he always leaving her to wake up alone?

“You still haven’t heard anything?” Clark’s voice echoed from out in the hallway. Lois smiled to herself. He hadn’t gotten too far away.

She lazily stretched her arms and leaned over to look at the clock. It read five a.m. She groaned. It was early and she was still tired and sore. Grudgingly she got out of bed and wrapped Clark’s comforter around her. She walked into the living room, where Clark stood fully dressed for work, with his back to her on the phone. “Any word about Shockwave?” Clark asked. She walked over to him and gave him a kiss from behind. He didn’t seem to be startled at all. He turned to kiss her back and wrapped an arm around her as he continued his conversation. “Okay, well, keep me posted, Chief. Yeah, I will.” He hung up the phone and smiled at her. “Good Morning.” He leaned down to kiss her.

“You’re a spoilsport,” she murmured, eyeing his body, which was fully clothed.

Clark laughed and kissed her once more. “As much as I would love an encore of last night, we need to get going.”

“At five in the morning?” she asked incredulously.

“Well, Shockwave is supposed to begin at dawn. We’ve got ...” he looked at his watch, “...maybe two hours if we’re lucky. We’ve got to stop by your apartment, get you a change of clothes...”

Lois winked at him. “You don’t like what I’m wearing?”

“I never said that. It’s just *very* distracting,” Clark said. “Then we’ve got to get to the Planet to meet Perry. He just got out of a meeting with his contact in Washington. He said he tried calling Jimmy but got no answer. He’s going to swing by his place and pick him up and meet us at the Planet.”

Lois nodded. “Okay, let’s go.” She headed for the door still wrapped in his comforter.

“Uh, Lois...”

“What?” Lois asked.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” He held up her clothes from last night.

Lois blushed, then grabbed the items from him. “Oh...almost forgot.”

At the Planet, Lois and Clark entered the newsroom to find a distraught Perry and an impatient Cat waiting for them. “It’s about time,” Cat muttered when she saw the duo enter. “Time is money...”

“Cat, it is too early for you to be this perky,” Lois groaned. “What’s going on?”

“Well, for starters Perry lost Jimmy,” Cat explained.

“What?” Lois asked.

“He called me last night; said he had lost Roarke. I told him I’d meet up with him this morning and now I can’t find him...He’s not at his apartment, his car’s missing, and his cell is off,” Perry explained.

“What time was that?” Clark asked, apprehensively. He thought he’d been able to get through to him last night but he was concerned Jimmy had done something stupid... Like try to solve the case by himself... The same thing Lois would have done.

“That was about two hours ago...” Perry explained. “I just... Well, I hope he’s all right. I know I’ve been giving him a hard time lately, but I’m trying to get him ready for the real world of journalism.... That boy’s kinda become like a son to me.”

“We’ll find him, Chief,” Lois said.

“I’m starved,” Cat interrupted.

“What about Washington?” Lois asked.

Perry sighed. “I called everyone I know in Washington. No one’s interested. And as far as the Navy’s concerned, there is no test.”

“It’s the military, Chief. They’re not going to go broadcasting their business to anyone, especially reporters,” Lois said. Clark shook his head and moved towards his desk. He picked up his phone and began to dial. “Who are you calling?” Lois asked.

Clark held up his index finger, signaling for her to wait. He then spoke into the phone, “Yes, hello. This is Clark Kent of the Daily Planet. I’d like to speak to Lex Luthor.”

Lois gasped, “Clark, hang up that phone right now! Are you out of your mind? We do NOT need his help! He’s probably involved in this!”

Clark ignored, her. “Yes, it’s important.”

“Well, this is a surprise,” Roarke said, watching Bart tie Jimmy up to the pole on the Pier. “I would have expected much better from the Daily Planet.”

“You’re not going to get away with this,” Jimmy said.

“I already have,” Roarke said. “It’s been a pleasure, but I have a plane to catch. I hope you enjoy the show.” He laughed, then turned to leave.

“Enjoy the show?” Jimmy asked in disbelief. “What does that mean?”

“Jimmy doesn’t know what he’s doing as a reporter,” Lois said sadly. “What if he did something stupid?” At Clark’s look of disapproval towards her, she got defensive. “I’m not that bad...”

“Not that bad?” Clark echoed. “You are always jumping in without checking the water level first.”

“I’d describe you as impetuous,” Perry added with his own look of disapproval.

“Headstrong,” Clark added.

“And you’re always getting yourself into dangerous situations,” Perry and Clark finished in unison.

“And to make matters worse that boy’s been learning the ropes from you,” Perry added.

“Is anyone else hungry?” Cat asked.

“No, thank you,” Lex Luthor said, walking down the steps into the newsroom.

Perry looked over at Luthor. “Lex, what are you doing here?”

Lex Luthor nodded at Perry. “Mr. White.” He turned to Lois and Clark, who were standing near their desks. “Mr. Kent, Ms.

Lane.” He gave a smile in their direction, but neither seemed moved. “Luthor Technologies has approximately a billion dollars in research and development tied up in a project code named ‘Shock Wave’; even the name is top secret. Yet, Mr. Kent, you call me to tell me not only do you know of the project, but you suspect Thaddeus Roarke, a man with whom I’ve had previous unsatisfactory dealings, is intent on sabotaging the impending test. Under the circumstances, I might have elected to stay home and watch reruns of Flipper on the all night cable channel. Instead, I decided to come here. What is going on?”

Clark was hesitant a moment but then decided to just bite the bullet. “We’ve had Roarke and Congressman Ian Harrington under surveillance. Roarke is positive your system will fail its test, leaving the door open for his system to be adopted instead.”

Clark watched Luthor’s facial expression. He seemed a bit rehearsed. “Roarke and Harrington. I should have known. You say Roarke is positive?” Clark nodded. “That would imply sabotage. No one ever described Thaddeus Roarke as an incurable optimist.”

Cat had pulled out a phone book and was looking for restaurants. “What about some Danishes?”

“Is sabotage even possible with your system?” Lois asked.

“So far as I know it isn’t.” Luthor gave her a warm smile.

Clark noticed Lois step closer to him.

“But Roarke is a weapon system expert,” Clark pointed out.

“I know it’s early, but we could order a late dinner. How about Italian? Oooh! Or Mexican?” Cat asked.

“What about power failure?” Perry asked.

Luthor shook his head. “Too many backups.”

“Roarke hinted at something more simple than a simple breakdown. Something... bigger,” Clark said.

They all seemed at a loss. “Oh, I know. How about some sushi? Japanese would really hit the spot. Hey, how about some ‘tsunami?’” Cat said.

Realization dawned on Clark. “Tsunami. A giant wave caused by an undersea tremor.”

“Shockwave,” Luthor murmured.

“Apocalypse Consulting has a warehouse on Pier 31,” Perry said with realization. “Great shades of Elvis!” Without a second thought, Clark headed for the stairwell. “Where are you going?” Perry hollered.

“To try and find Superman!” Clark hollered at him.

Lois went after him. “Clark, why are you taking the stairwell? The elevator’s faster?” By the time she had reached the stairwell, he was gone. “Great.” She turned on her heel toward the elevator and pressed the call button.

Neither noticed Lex watching them with a smug smile on his face.

Lois hadn’t found Clark when she had reached the lobby. She shrugged it off and headed for Pier 31 to try and find Jimmy, knowing he might have tried to do something stupid. She approached the warehouse Jimmy had told them about the day before. Seeing no sign of danger she cautiously entered. “Jimmy?” she whispered. “Jimmy?”

Her leg bumped into something. She looked down. “Oh, my God!” Lois screamed. She was staring at Congressman Ian Harrington’s dead body.

“Lois?” Jimmy’s voice echoed from the other room.

Lois tried to calm her breathing down a bit. “Just get a grip,” she muttered to herself. “Jimmy?” She opened the door and found she was now outside on the deck of the pier.

“Lois!” Jimmy gave a lopsided grin. “You have no idea how glad I am to see you.”

Lois immediately went to his aid. “How in the world did you get yourself into this mess?” she asked, pulling out her Swiss Army knife. She began to cut the ropes frantically.

“Need a hand?” a familiar voice asked.

“Superman!” Jimmy’s voice rang in admiration.

The Man of Steel landed before them and with one swift flick of the wrist broke the rope into shreds. “Uh, thanks,” Lois said. “I guess Clark was able to find you?”

“Yes, you both need to get out of here...before...” Clark looked up at the waves in the water that were beginning to form. “Get out of here, now!” With that, he dove into the water.

Lois stared in shock as the water rose up into a gigantic tidal wave that appeared to be headed for them. Her mind was telling her to move, but her body couldn’t seem to respond.

“Totally cool!” Jimmy said, flicking photo after photo.

She was sure they were going to die. The wave was too high. There was no way Superman could stop it in time; could he? Why hadn’t the wave dropped yet? It was already higher than all the buildings. It was almost touching the sky. Or was it? It ... It was getting smaller. She watched in admiration as the wave began to shrink. Superman was shrinking the wave? How was that possible? She squinted her eyes. It appeared that Superman had created an undersea trench. She watched in rapt attention as the wave began to fold itself until it was merely a shadow of its former self.

“That was awesome!” Jimmy said enthusiastically.

Lois gave him a weak smile and nodded. “Yeah. Jimmy, did you see Superman come out of the water?”

“Uh, no,” Jimmy said, “but he’s pretty fast. I’m sure he’s okay.”

“I hope so,” Lois said.

“Impressive,” Lex Luthor said, folding up his paper and laying it on his desk. “Who would have thought Superman would be able to defeat Mother Nature at her finest?” He turned toward his window and found himself facing his subject of discussion. He pressed a button on his desk to open the window. “Superman, what do I owe this pleasure?”

Clark stared him down coldly. He looked around the room and grabbed Lex’s prized sword of Alexander the Great. “You want to know how strong I am, Luthor?” He bent the sword in half. “You want to know how fast I am?” He pulled out a pistol from the case on Luthor’s desk, loaded a single bullet inside the chamber and aimed it directly at Luthor. A momentary look of shock and genuine fear crossed Luthor’s face. He fired the gun, but before the bullet reached Luthor’s chest, he grabbed the bullet at the last minute. Luthor visibly sighed in relief. He crushed the bullet in between his forefinger and thumb then placed it in Luthor’s hand, causing him to wince in pain. He strode over to the window and gave a warning glare in Luthor’s direction.

Luthor seemed to have regained his wits. “Does that conclude your demonstration?”

“The tests stop...now,” Clark warned.

“That would be nice, but what if they don’t?” Luthor asked menacingly.

“If I were you...” Clark began.

“Me?” Luthor scoffed. “I admit nothing; however, let’s assume that these tests continue. You can’t be everywhere at once Superman. As long as you stay in Metropolis, innocent people will die.” The gauntlet had been thrown. Clark narrowed his eyes, understanding Luthor’s veiled threat. “Are you willing to accept that responsibility? If I were you I’d think about it.”

“Think about this, Luthor. I can’t be everywhere at once. If someone happened to throw you off a building? I may or may not be able to catch you in time.” They were staring one another down, a few inches from one another.

“Why, Superman, is that a threat?” Luthor asked mockingly.

“I’m just pointing out the obvious.” Clark narrowed his eyes. “Like I said before. I know who you are and I will bring you down. Don’t get too comfortable.” He moved past him towards the window once more. “And another thing, don’t make threats when

you have so much to lose.” He gestured towards the now-destroyed sword of Alexander the Great. With that he was gone, leaving a smiling Lex Luthor in his wake.

“Round one...” Luthor murmured, taking a puff of his cigar.

The approaching police cars echoed in the background. Lois stared blankly at the waters. She and Jimmy still hadn't seen Superman emerge from the water. She wasn't sure what to do. Should she say something? Try and yell for help to try and get his attention? There was something off about this whole thing. The water hadn't begun to turn until Superman had shown up; just like the explosion from yesterday. Could this test have been another way of testing Superman?

“Lois? Lois, are you all right?” Someone was calling her name. She looked toward the source of the voice and smiled. It was Clark. “Lois?” Clark knelt down beside her and put an arm around her.

“I don't think that test was all Lex made it out to be...” she murmured quietly.

“I ...I know,” he said, helping her to her feet.

“Kent, I told you to stay back and let my men survey the...” Henderson stopped when he saw Lois. “I should have known...” Henderson smiled at Lois. “You just can't stay out of trouble, can you, Lois?”

Lois just glared at him. “Henderson, you have more important things to worry about than me and Clark. There's a dead body in the warehouse.”

“What?” Clark asked aghast.

“It's Harrington,” Lois said grimly.

“He's dead?” Jimmy asked in disbelief.

“Yeah, I tripped over the body,” Lois explained.

“Stay back.” Henderson wagged a finger at them then turned back towards the warehouse. “I want to talk to you two before you leave.”

Lois sighed and leaned her head against Clark's shoulder. “Here. Let's go sit down.” Clark guided her over toward one of the benches on the pier. Lois nodded and sat down next to him. She sighed in relief at his touch.

Someone was testing Superman. Someone was putting people's lives in danger just to test Superman. Who? Lex? Trask? Who would do such a thing? “Clark, he never came out of the water...” Lois said solemnly.

“Who?” Clark asked.

“Superman...” she turned to face him, tears falling from her face.

Clark wasn't sure what to do. Lex Luthor had made his intentions clear. If Superman stayed in Metropolis, innocent people would get hurt, killed even. He hadn't known what to say to Lois when she had asked about Superman's disappearance. Should he just let the world think Superman died trying to stop the Tsunami wave? Maybe if he just kept a low profile for a few days, he'd be able to think more clearly.

He wasn't sure where his and Lois' relationship was headed right now. He loved her more than life itself and he had heard her repeat the declaration of love to him last night, but she hadn't mentioned it again. He wasn't sure if he should bring it up again or wait for her to say something. How had his life gotten so complicated? He knew he needed to tell her about himself, but first, he needed to talk to his parents about it. Before he did that though he needed to know she felt the same way about him that he felt about her. Once he was sure of that he would work on letting his parents get to know her and hopefully warm them up to the idea of sharing his secret with her. After all, it was their secret too.

Three Weeks Later...

The next few weeks had been disturbing. The follow-ups on

Roarke's attack had been all over the news. Roarke's body had been found in the bay later that evening. The police were convinced both Harrington and Roarke's murderer was a professional, but nothing had shown up to give them any clues. To make matters worse, Superman hadn't shown up since the fiasco with Shock Wave.

“Clark, do you think Superman's okay?” Lois asked.

“Uh, what do you mean?” Clark asked, opening the door to the conference room. They stepped down.

“It's been three weeks since anyone's seen or heard from him. Do you think he could have been hurt? Oh, my God, what if the person that was testing him... What if they found out a weakness? He could be hurt or dead or...” She stopped to catch her breath. “Something is wrong, Clark. I can just sense it.”

“Lois, Metropolis doesn't own Superman. Maybe he went out of town,” Clark suggested, avoiding eye contact with her.

“Or maybe whoever tried to scare him off succeeded?” Lois shot back.

“I wouldn't call it ‘scared off’,” Clark began evasively.

“Oh, really?” Lois crossed her arms and cornered him. “Then what would you call it? Because by all appearances it seems to me that Luthor or Trask or Roarke or whoever it was that was so determined to test Superman and scare him off has succeeded.”

“Maybe it's for the best,” Clark said.

“What?” Lois' eyes narrowed at him. “How can you say that?”

“People were getting thrown off buildings, half of Metropolis was almost destroyed, a bomb was set off in the middle of the city....Is having Superman around really worth it?” Clark asked.

“Yes,” Lois said firmly. “Clark, how many stories have we written about drive-by shootings or...or muggings...rape...murder...armed robbery...How many in the last week has Perry sent us out on stories like that as...as filler for the City Section?” Lois was near tears as she spoke.

“Too many,” Clark replied solemnly.

“Exactly.” Lois poked his chest for emphasis. “When crimes like that are considered filler because they happen too much, there is a problem. God, don't you see? Clark, Metropolis needs Superman.”

“Why?” Clark asked. “Do you really think he could stop all of the crime in the city?”

Lois shook her head. “No, I told you before. Superman can't rescue everyone 24/7. He'd get burnt out. But it's the little things he does. That little bit of help that we didn't have before. Someone to look up to and build a few hopes around. That's what Superman is to Metropolis...”

“I never thought about it like that,” Clark said.

“Yeah, well, now it may be too late. He never came out of that water, Clark. I think we should have Henderson send some divers...”

“Lois, you said yourself he was invulnerable,” Clark argued.

“There's a ‘first time’ for everything isn't there?” Lois asked.

“Guys?” Jimmy poked his head into the conference room.

“The Chief wants you two down at the press conference pronto.”

Lois groaned. “I guess that's our cue.”

Lois stood in the crowd anxiously waiting for the mayor to begin. The mayor had called a press conference to address the public's concern over the recent disasters addressing the city. Lex Luthor stood behind the mayor along with Inspector Henderson and the Chief of Police. Clark was making his way through the crowd, gauging the crowd's reaction to the mayor's speech while she took notes on the speech itself.

“Thank you all for coming here today. It has been a trying few weeks for us all. We have endured more than what this city is used to. We were blessed with a friend that for all appearances sake, sacrificed everything to save us.” Mayor Berkowitz dabbed at his eyes a moment. “We've had divers in the waters for the last forty-

eight hours. No sign of Superman has been found. It is with great displeasure that I declare Superman to be..."

A whooshing sound interrupted the Mayor's speech. "Look, up in the sky!"

"Oh, my God, it's Superman!"

"I thought he was dead!"

"I told you he wasn't going anywhere!"

Superman landed next to the mayor, who was in a state of shock. "Su-Superman! How is this possible? You are a sight for sore eyes."

"I apologize for just dropping in on you like this, but I overheard you talking and wanted to set the record straight, Mayor Berkowitz," Superman said.

"Yes, of course." The mayor nodded enthusiastically.

Lois closed her eyes and said a silent prayer, thanking the Gods that Superman was all right.

"As you, all know I've been out of commission for the last few days. It appeared to me that my presence in Metropolis was causing more havoc than good, so I had decided to stay away." There was a murmur of protest against Superman's words. "I know now that was the wrong approach. I want you all to know I am here to help in whatever manner that may be. I know I haven't been here long, but I think of this city as my home and I want to make it clear that I am here to help. Metropolis is my home and I am here to stay."

Lois noticed as Superman stepped away from the podium he gave Lex a menacing look before turning back towards the crowd. She wasn't sure what to think of the gaze the two men had just exchanged, but it was clear Lex had been rattled by Superman's glare. She looked around the crowd and decided it was time to find Clark.

After writing up the story on Superman's speech and following up on the articles regarding Harrington and Roarke's autopsy reports Lois and Clark finally made it to a late dinner. Clark noticed Lois seemed much more upbeat than she had the last few weeks. They still hadn't discussed the whole 'I love you' thing and he wasn't about to bring it up again. He didn't want to scare her again.

"So, how are you feeling?" Clark asked as he walked her back to her apartment.

"Better. I feel like all is right in the world...well if you don't count the whole Lex and Lucy dating thing." She crinkled her nose. They walked up the steps to her apartment.

"I still don't understand that," Clark said.

"I don't think anyone but my parents actually approve of her relationship with Lex," Lois said as she began to unlock her door. "My parents have always been into the whole status thing. Which never made much sense to me because my dad was always off with his floozies making a mockery of my mother..." Clark gave her a sympathetic smile. "Anyway, my parents seem to think because Lex looks like a decent guy on the outside then he must be *perfect* for Lucy. Never mind the fact that neither of them have actually know anything about the man."

Lois opened the door and they stepped inside. She looked around the apartment. "Where is Lucy? I haven't seen her in almost a week."

"Well, we have been pretty busy," Clark said.

"I know. I just miss her." Lois sighed. A knock at the door caught her attention. "What in the world?" Lois opened the door and came face to face with a very intoxicated Jimmy being supported by a very ticked-off Lucy.

"I found him at the Metropolis Pub like this," Lucy said, dragging Jimmy into the apartment.

"Oh, my God..." Lois groaned, stepping back for Lucy to bring Jimmy inside. Clark moved to help Lucy escort Jimmy to the couch.

"Can he stay here tonight? I don't want him going home alone like this. I've heard horror stories," Lucy explained.

"Yeah, sure." Lois shrugged. "Why not?"

"What happened?" Clark asked.

"Allison dumped him and he decided to celebrate by getting plastered," Lucy explained grimly. "Don't ask me why. I haven't been able to decipher that out of his drunk moaning yet."

"Well, this oughta be an interesting night," Clark said.

"You're staying?" Lois asked, surprised but equally pleased.

"Sure. Why wouldn't I?" Clark asked.

Lois smiled and gave him a peck on the cheek. "Thank you." She didn't notice Lucy, who was watching them with a huge grin on her face.

Sitting on the couch, Clark held Lois against him, listening to the sounds in the bathroom. Jimmy sounded like he was having another binge. He would never understand what it felt to be completely plastered like that. Alcohol didn't affect him, and he hoped he never had to experience what his young friend was going through right now. He lifted himself up out of Lois' arms and headed to the bathroom to help Jimmy.

"That's the fifth time tonight," she murmured. He smiled apologetically towards her.

"I know, I'm sorry." He gave her a peck on the cheek before leaving to tend to Jimmy.

"When I pictured you spending the night with me, babysitting Jimmy wasn't exactly what came to mind," he heard her whisper. He sighed and gave her another apologetic smile. It had been three weeks since she had spent the night at his apartment. Three weeks since they'd made love and his body was aching to be with her.

The past few weeks had been exhausting. He and Lois had hardly been able to spend any time with one another. Between the follow ups on Roarke and Harrington and Lois' insistence in investigating LexCorp more thoroughly, they had been lucky to leave the Planet before midnight. They both had been too exhausted for anything but a good night sleep.

The stress from trying to tune out the cries for help over the past three weeks had begun to take a toll on him. He still couldn't believe he had let Luthor get to him like that. People had been injured because he hadn't shown up to rescue them. It could have been worse. He tried not to let his mind dwell on that.

"Come on, Jimmy, sit up." He lifted his young friend up from the floor. Jimmy made a muffled gagging sound and Clark directed him towards the open toilet bowl. "You won't be doing this again anytime soon."

After making sure Jimmy had relieved himself as much as he was able to, Clark helped him to the other sofa. Jimmy passed out immediately. Clark sighed in relief. He looked down at himself and grimaced. "Shower," he muttered, heading for the bathroom once more.

Lois lay on the couch, listening to the heaving sounds coming from the bathroom. "How many times is he gonna do that?" she muttered. She was exhausted. After the all-nighters she and Clark had pulled these past few weeks, it had been difficult to get any time together outside of the office. Everything seemed to be working against them having one night alone together. Given her current state of exhaustion from the past few weeks' long nights of research and follow-ups on the Roarke scandal, she would settle for a good night's sleep. Unfortunately, Jimmy wasn't allowing that to happen. She grabbed her pillow and headed to the bedroom. She had tried to stay up, hoping to spend some time with Clark, but that wasn't happening.

The heaving stopped and she sunk her head deep into the pillow and mattress. "Finally. Maybe now I can get some sleep." She rolled over, wrapping her arms around her pillow, trying to will sleep to come.

It wasn't coming.

Where was Clark? He should be done with Jimmy by now. She heard the bathroom door open a few times and then heard the shower turn on. Clark must be taking a shower. The very thought of Clark in the shower sent chills down her body.

Clark stood in the shower letting the water beat on his back as he tried to release the tension that had been building up over the last few weeks. His mind filled with the memories from the past few weeks. It had been such a hard first month at the Planet. Creating Superman and saying goodbye to his alter-ego. It hurt.

<<“The tests stop...now.”

“That would be nice, but what if they don't?” Luthor asked menacingly.

“If I were you...” Clark began.

“Me? I admit nothing; however, let's assume that these tests continue. You can't be everywhere at once, Superman. As long as you stay in Metropolis, innocent people will die. Are you willing to accept that responsibility? If I were you I'd think about it.”>>

No. He shook his head. It was the right thing to do...bringing Superman back.

<<“Exactly. When crimes like that are considered filler because they happen too much, there is a problem. God, don't you see? Clark, Metropolis needs Superman.”

“Why? Do you really think he could stop all of the crime in the city?”

“No, I told you before. Superman can't rescue everyone 24/7. He'd get burnt out. But it's the little things he does. That little bit of help that we didn't have before. Someone to look up to and build a few hopes around. That's what Superman is to Metropolis...”

“I never thought about it like that.”>>

She had saved him from himself without even realizing it.

She was so frustrated. It had been a long three weeks and she really missed Clark. All she could do right now was imagine him in the shower and let her imagination go wild. She could hear the sound of the water from the shower beating against the tile walls. It had been three weeks...

She bolted out of bed and grabbed her bathrobe, wrapping it tightly around her. She opened the bathroom door and smiled. Clark had cleaned up after Jimmy's latest binge. That was for sure. She locked the door behind her and slipped out of her bathrobe, letting it pool to the floor around her feet. She kicked it aside and tiptoed over toward the shower. She pushed back the curtain and smiled at the sight she was met with. Clark had his back turned to her, and he had his eyes closed.

Without a word she slipped inside the shower and wrapped her arms around him from behind, pressing her small frame against his back. “Need a hand?” she asked, running a hand down his chest.

Clark turned his head to look at her and smiled. “Always.”

He turned around in her arms. She watched with intrigue as several water droplets fell down his face and began a path down his body that she hoped to explore soon. There was something different about the way he looked at her. Glasses. He wasn't wearing his glasses. It was strange. She hadn't seen him without his glasses but a few times, but without them, he seemed so familiar. She just couldn't put her finger on it.

All coherent thought was lost on her when his mouth came crashing down on hers. She felt him press his body against hers, slowly pushing her back against the tile wall. She giggled in anticipation as her back hit the cold surface.

“Shhh...” he whispered. “You're gonna wake Jimmy up.”

Lois laughed. “It'll serve him right for disturbing my quiet evening at home...”

Clark dipped his head down to trace the path between her shoulders and neck. He nuzzled the more sensitive spot against her

neck. “Who said anything about quiet?” he murmured against her skin.

She giggled. “Shut up and kiss me.”

Lois let out a shaky breath as Clark scooped her in his arms, wrapping a towel around himself and handing her her bathrobe. He reached for his glasses and change of clothes, then carried them back into her bedroom.

Lois let out a shuddered breath as they lay down on the cool sheets of her bed. Clark wrapped his arms securely around her, pulling her against him. She smiled when she felt the familiar weight of his body against her. “These long hours are killing us.”

“I know,” he whispered, kissing her cheek. “It took all my willpower these past few weeks to refrain from whisking you off to the darkroom.”

“Why didn't you?” she teased.

“I didn't know how you'd react ... I kinda got burned after the last time I gave a public display of affection in the middle of the newsroom.”

Lois sighed as she thought about what he'd said. The last time he'd shown any public display of affection towards her in the newsroom was the time he'd kissed her in an attempt to show her he wasn't predictable. She smiled lazily at the memory. She had tried so hard not to let him see how his kiss had affected her.

“Well, things are different now... I mean, we are different.”

“True.” He nodded. “But I wasn't quite sure how Perry would react either.”

“He probably already knows...” She sighed, not willing to divulge her conversation with Perry after their first date when she'd demanded a new partner. She was so glad Perry didn't listen to her. “You haven't heard his famous coined phrase?” Clark shook his head no. Lois did her best voice impression of Perry complete with a fake southern accent: “I didn't become Editor In Chief of this great metropolitan newspaper because I can yodel.” She gave into a fit of giggles.

“I'm surprised he hasn't said anything,” Clark mused.

“He's probably waiting for one of us to say something.” Lois yawned.

He kissed her forehead. He was quiet a moment then he spoke up. He seemed really nervous about whatever he was about to say. “Lois, there's something we should probably talk about...”

“What?” She asked, turning to face him.

“Well... We kinda rushed into things... relationship-wise.” Clark seemed *really* nervous.

“I'm not complaining,” Lois teased, leaning up to kiss him.

“No, neither am I. It's just there are things we haven't talked about that we should probably talk about...”

She knew this conversation was coming. Well, might as well just bite the bullet. She wasn't sure if she wanted to know how many people Clark had been with. He obviously had *some* experience.

“It was only one,” Lois interrupted.

“What?” Clark asked.

“You were about to ask how many people I've been with. One. It was terrible. And I regretted it afterward for more reasons than one as you already know,” Lois explained.

“That's not what I was going to say.” He gave her an apologetic smile.

“Oh. Well, I told you; so now you tell me.” Lois said briskly.

“What?”

“I know it's probably been more than me and I'm perfectly okay with that...”

“Lois...”

“I mean, you're an attractive man. Women are always throwing themselves at you...”

“Lois...”

“I can't really blame you. I mean, I guess you didn't get that

good from reading books...”

“You’re the only one.”

“I mean, it’s only natural that you’d be curious about other women. I mean, neither of us was born the day we...you know...”

She felt his lips press against her mouth, silencing her in an instant. She let out a soft moan and he slowly pulled away from her. “You babble too much.”

“Sorry.” She smiled up at him.

“Now as I was saying ... You’re the only one I’ve been with, but that’s not what I was talking about.”

“You what?” Lois squeaked out.

“What I was talking about was protection. We’ve been *really* active and neither of us seemed to think long enough to discuss precautions ...”

“Oh...Oh!” Lois shook her head. “No, I’m on the pill....Really? I never would have guessed...”

Clark blushed. “Books and instinct. That’s it.”

“If you waited so long, then why did you let things get as out of control as they did that night?” Lois asked.

Clark sighed. “I don’t know. I can’t really control myself when I’m with you. You seem to bring out a part of me that I didn’t know existed.”

“You don’t regret it?” Lois asked hesitantly.

“Never.” He kissed her cheek. “I could never regret anything I did with you, Lois. Being with you makes me feel more alive.”

“Oh, Clark...” Lois felt the tears welling up in her eyes. “That is the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me.” She leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arms around his neck as she deepened the kiss.

The next morning Clark awoke, holding Lois securely to him. He heard some noise out in the living room and looked regretfully down at his sleeping partner. “Lois?” he asked gently, recalling her resentment at being left in bed alone.

“Hmm?” she asked sleepily, not quite coherent.

“I think Jimmy’s awake. I’m gonna get some breakfast.”

“Mmmm hmmm.” She wasn’t showing any signs of waking up any time soon. He sighed. Well, he’d tried. He got out of bed and quickly changed into the change of clothes he had retrieved from his apartment last night. He then moved into the living room, where he spotted Jimmy trying to sit up on the couch.

“OW. My head...” Jimmy muttered.

Clark went into the kitchen and began to brew a pot of coffee. Jimmy was still making inaudible noises of pain when he handed the young man a cup of coffee. “Here.”

Jimmy winced as he sat up. “Thanks, CK...Oh, God...” He took a sip of the coffee gratefully. “What happened?”

“According to Lucy, she found you at the Metropolis Pub completely plastered and brought you back here,” Clark said. “You want to tell me what happened?”

“I take too many risks,” Jimmy said solemnly. “I am a danger to myself and others and it’s not safe for me to be in a relationship.” Jimmy held up air quotes as he spoke. “At least that’s what Allison told me before she dumped me for the new head of research, Randy.”

Clark patted the young man on the shoulder. “I’m sorry, Jimmy.”

Jimmy began to survey his surroundings then looked at Clark curiously. “So, CK, not that I don’t mind you being here or anything, but what are you doing here? I mean, this is Lois’ apartment...”

“He stayed the night,” Lucy explained, emerging from her bedroom. “Somebody had to help you to the bathroom to puke your guts out all night. I know I sure as hell wasn’t going to do it and neither was Lois.” Lucy then narrowed her eyes at Jimmy. “And haven’t I told you before to keep your nose out of other people’s personal life?” Clark took advantage of Jimmy’s

distraction and moved toward the kitchen to begin preparing breakfast.

“What did I do?” Jimmy asked defensively.

“What did I do?” Lucy mocked, “How about a ‘thank you, Lucy, Clark, Lois, for saving me last night and keeping me from choking on my own vomit because I was too plastered to sit up?’”

“Could you lower your voice? I’m still getting echoes...”

Jimmy winced, rubbing his head. “And how is my asking CK what he’s doing here so early nosing into anyone’s personal life?” he retorted bitterly.

Lucy rolled her eyes. “I mean this in the nicest way, Jimmy, but you are as dense as a rock sometimes.”

“Lucy...” Clark did his best to suppress the chuckle he had to choke down. One thing was certain: Lois’ sister didn’t mince words and was very...blunt. “A little harsh, don’t you think?” he asked, handing them each a plate. He handed Jimmy a plate of dry toast, aspirin and a glass of water, then handed Lucy a plate of scrambled eggs, crepes, and bacon.

“Jimmy knows I love him,” she teased with a smile.

“Hangover and all.”

“Gee thanks...” Jimmy muttered.

“You brought this on yourself, Jimmy,” Clark reminded him.

Jimmy nodded resignedly and took a couple aspirin and swallowed them. He then looked skeptically at the toast. “I don’t usually eat breakfast.”

“Mmmm, this is to die for...” Lucy moaned, taking a bite.

“Did you make this?”

“Uh, yeah,” Clark said.

“Marry my sister, please,” Lucy said. Jimmy spewed his water out everywhere at that statement. “Jimmy, are you okay?”

Jimmy coughed as he tried to talk. “Yeah, I just....That was... You do realize... You’re talking about Mad Dog Lane...”

“I heard that,” Lois said from behind them, walking out of her room, fully dressed and ready to go.

“I meant it as a compliment...” Jimmy smiled at Lois.

“Breakfast?” Clark offered her a plate.

“You have got to try this, Lois. It is to die for,” Lucy said, placing a fork full of food in Lois’ mouth. Clark watched in pure agony as Lois took a bite, savoring the taste on her taste buds just as she had done the night of their official date.

“This is incredible,” Lois said, turning to Clark. “Where did you learn to make this?”

“Uh, some of it’s just some of my mom’s recipes and the rest is just stuff I picked up from traveling,” Clark explained nonchalantly.

“Yeah, so Lucy’s making wedding plans for you,” Jimmy added with an evil grin.

Lois glared at Lucy. “Can’t you keep your mouth shut? I don’t need you broadcasting my private life all over the place...”

“I didn’t say anything...but you just did,” Lucy replied with a smile.

“Wait a minute, you two are...” Jimmy’s eyes doubled in size.

“Jimmy, I swear to God, if I hear this in the Planet’s gossip grapevine I will...” Lois was cut off by Clark clamping his hand over her mouth before she could threaten him any further.

“Jimmy, if you could just keep it to yourself?” Clark asked.

“Yeah, no problem,” Jimmy said, “but I think the Chief already suspects something’s up.”

Lois shared a look with Clark. She knew Perry more than suspected. She’d confirmed their relationship status when she’d gone barreling in his office the morning after their first date.

“All right, well, I have to go. I have a ten a.m. appointment to take the bar exam.” Lucy gave Jimmy a glare. “And thanks to someone I didn’t get to sleep until two a.m.”

“Hey, I was drunk,” Jimmy argued.

Neither Lois nor Clark said anything. Had she heard? Lois wondered. She looked at the floor, avoiding eye contact for a

moment. She took a bite of her breakfast then allowed what Lucy had said to sink in. “Wait a minute! Bar Exam? You haven’t even graduated yet.”

“I know. I don’t graduate until next week, but Lex pulled some string and got me a spot,” Lucy explained.

“How convenient,” Lois muttered dryly.

“Don’t start,” Lucy warned. “I have to go.”

“Oh, man, I’ve got to call Perry...” Jimmy moaned. “There’s no way I’m going to be able to go into work today.”

“Already done last night,” Lois said. “We told him you’d been pulling some long shifts and needed this morning off. You’ve got until noon to become coherent.”

Clark handed Jimmy a cup of coffee. “Drink up.”

That afternoon, Lois and Clark sat in the conference room going over everything they had on Roarke and Harrington. “So, both Roarke and Harrington were drugged,” Clark read off the autopsy reports in front of him.

“Yeah, and they were also shot...but the autopsy says they were poisoned before either of them were shot...begging the question ‘Why bother shooting them?’” Lois drummed her fingers impatiently against the wood grain of the conference table.

“Maybe it has something to do with that ‘silent partner’ Nigel St. John was talking about,” Clark suggested.

“Maybe we have more than one killer.”

“Anything’s possible,” Clark said.

“A lovely touch drugging and shooting Roarke and Harrington,” Lex said, puffing his cigar.

“Yes, I figured it would give the police a bit more to question,” Nigel said with a smile. “Our police department is so easily confused. It’s a shame really.”

“Yes, but do you know what else is a shame?” Lex asked angrily.

“What is that, sir?”

“This.” Lex lay the morning edition of the Daily Planet on his desk. The front page read, “Superman to Receive Key to the City.”

“Yes, it’s tragic how Metropolis seems to be opening itself up to Superman...an alien,” Nigel mused.

“No, what’s even more tragic is I have to give him the key,” Lex said in disgust.

“Are you sure you don’t want to go with me to the ceremony?” Clark asked.

“Right now if I’m within two hundred feet of Lex Luthor I might strangle the man. It’s safer this way. I’ll work on these background checks and see what I can find out about Roarke and Harrington’s silent partner. I’m sure you can handle a simple ceremony by yourself.” Lois teased.

Clark gave her a peck on the cheek. “See you later.”

Lois let out an exhausted sigh. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The only thing either of these two men had in common was Shockwave and Nigel St. John. She knew Nigel had a history with espionage, but she wasn’t sure he was really what you would call a professional killer. “What am I missing here?” she muttered.

The phone in the conference room rang and she moved to answer it. “Lois Lane, conference room.”

“Guess who has a job at the district attorney’s office starting a week after graduation?” Lucy squealed into the phone.

“Lucy, that’s great. I’m really proud of you,” Lois began hesitantly. “I thought it took them weeks to get you your results from the bar exam.”

“It’s all done on computers now. You get a preliminary result, then the actual results are mailed to you. I should get my test score by next week, though. Technology is a wonderful thing.”

“I’m really happy for you, Lucy. You’ve worked really hard

for this.”

“I know. I feel like I’ve been in school forever.” Lucy sighed. “We have to celebrate...Girls night? Tonight?”

Lois pulled out her organizer to double check her schedule. “Sure. I’m free.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll get back in time for you to have some ALONE TIME with your boyfriend...” Lucy teased.

“Lucy...” Lois warned.

“Hey, it’s okay. You’re young and in love. If you need me to go stay at a friend’s for the night just let me know,” Lucy teased. Lois felt her cheeks redden at her sister’s teasing. “It’s okay, Lois. I’m just glad you’re finally living a little bit. All work and no play make a very dull sister. I’ll see you tonight. Someone’s calling. Bye.”

Lois shook her head as she hung up the phone. “My crazy little sister.” She smiled. She was looking forward to a night out with her sister. She hadn’t had a night out like that for a while, and ever since Lucy had begun her courtship with Lex Luthor she saw her less and less.

That evening, Clark headed to Smallville for a much-needed visit to his folks. He hadn’t seen them since his encounter with Trask. Between the rescues, his budding relationship with Lois and the stress with Luthor’s threat he just hadn’t had the time. He knew he was going to miss Lois tonight, but he also knew she had missed spending time with Lucy.

He landed quietly behind the barn, spinning from his Superman suit to a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. He then headed towards the old farmhouse he had come to know as home for so long. “Clark!” Martha moved to embrace him when she saw him enter.

He smiled warmly and hugged her tightly. “Hi, Mom.”

“How’ve you been, son?” Jonathan asked, patting him on the back.

“Uh, busy,” Clark said, taking a seat at the dining table.

“We saw the press conference. What happened?” Martha asked, confused.

“Uh, I let my insecurities get the better of me. Luthor had implied that people would continue to be put in danger as long as Superman remained in Metropolis,” Clark said. “I thought lying low would help, but it didn’t. Ignoring all those cries for help...” He shook his head.

“You can’t give into threats, Clark,” Martha said.

Clark gave his mother a weak smile. “I know.”

“Have you been able to find anything to pin on this Lex Luthor?” Jonathan asked.

“Not yet, Dad. He conveniently has all the evidence lying on someone else’s doorstep. He’s always one step ahead of the law.” Clark sighed, letting out his frustrations.

“You and Lois haven’t gotten any leads?” Martha asked, concerned.

“No.” Clark sighed. “I just hope we’re able to find something. We just found out her kid sister is dating Luthor...”

“What?” Jonathan asked, obviously upset.

Clark’s expression was grim. “That’s why Lois is so gung-ho about exposing Luthor as a criminal. She doesn’t want him anywhere near her sister. I don’t blame her. I mean, the guy is more than twice her age...”

“So, how are things between you and Lois?” Martha asked mischievously.

Clark smiled. “We’re good.”

“Just good?” Martha winked.

“Well, there is one thing I wanted to talk to you about...” Clark began hesitantly.

“What is it?” Jonathan asked.

“I’m thinking about telling Lois about myself...everything about myself.”

“Are you sure?” Jonathan asked. “This isn’t something to just rush into.”

“I trust her, Dad. She’s not going to do anything with the information. I need to tell her,” Clark finished quietly.

“Boy, things must be getting serious,” Jonathan mused.

“Yeah, they are. I love her,” Clark smiled shyly at them.

Martha smiled at him, patting his hand across the table. Jonathan was quiet a moment. “It’s your secret, son, but I think it would be better for us to meet her first before you tell her.”

“The Corn Festival is in a few months. Bring her down here then,” Martha said.

“I’ll talk to Lois and find out when she’d be open to the idea,” Clark said.

“Okay, well, how about some pie?” Jonathan asked, turning towards the stove that had a fresh apple pie on top of it.

“After dinner. I already told you,” Martha scolded.

“Isn’t this place cool?” Lucy asked. “It’s really classy.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that. We are talking about the Metro Club. The Metros? Gang?” Lois prompted, looking around the room skeptically. “Nice to see how our tax dollars are being wasted, though.” She pointed towards the mayor, who was sitting by the stage, handing one of the singers some money.

“Isn’t he married?” Lucy asked in between bits of laughter.

“Not for long,” Lois said, pointing at a large woman who was headed towards the mayor and the dancer.

They shared a laugh as they watched the mayor’s wife beat him with her purse repeatedly. “A sample of our feature fragrance?” one of the waitresses asked, spraying spritz of perfume in their direction.

“Oh, no thank you...” Lois waved her hand in front of her nose, trying to get rid of the smell.

“Oh, God!” Lucy scrunched up her nose. “What died?”

“This is a top of the line fragrance from ‘Miranda’s Fragrances’ and is very expensive,” the waitress sniffed.

“Yeah, well it still smells like road kill if you ask me,” Lucy sniffed.

“Come on, Lucy, let’s get something to drink,” Lois said, heading toward the bar.

After dinner with his folks, Clark headed back to Metropolis. After doing a quick patrol over Metropolis, he headed home where he found a note taped to his door. “Clark, I want you to meet Lois and me at the Metro Club for drinks. I think she’ll have a better time with you there. Thanks a lot! Lucy.”

Clark smiled at the note. Leave it to Lucy to be thinking about what Lois wanted rather than herself when celebrating. He grabbed a black dress shirt and slacks from his closet, then headed for the bathroom for a quick shower.

“So, what is the deal with you and Clark?” Lucy asked.

“Clark?” Lois smiled. “He’s gorgeous, isn’t he?” Lucy nodded. “Got a body to die for...” She shuddered involuntarily. “...and boy can he kiss.”

“Ah, someone’s been bit by the love bug,” Lucy teased.

“We’re not using that word,” Lois said cautiously.

“Why not?” Lucy asked. “He loves you. He’s so much as told you. I know you don’t think of him as a brother.”

“Definitely not,” Lois blushed.

“Okay, so what’s the problem? You’re not still holding onto that crap that Claude put you through, are you?” Lucy asked in concern. “Clark is a really great guy. All you have to do is say the word and he’d probably whisk you off to Vegas no questions asked.”

“Hey, quit trying to plan a wedding before the engagement,” Lois scolded. “I do love him.”

“Ha! I knew it,” Lucy gloated.

“But I also don’t want to get my heart broken again,” Lois added.

“The guy’s in love with you and agreeing not to use the L-word until you’re ready. If anyone’s heart is breaking, it’s his.,” Lucy said, taking a sip of her margarita. “This is really good. You should try it.”

“One of us has to remain sober tonight, Lucy.”

“Come on, just a sip,” Lucy pleaded.

Lois rolled her eyes and took a sip. “Mmmm. It is good.”

“See? Told you.” Lucy grinned. “Anyway, back to Clark.”

“Why are you so insistent on talking about Clark?” Lois asked.

“Because you’re dating a hot guy that’s in love with you... I think Clark is good for you. You’re more relaxed... But you’ve got a guy that is way off the radar on the hotness scale who also happens to be in love with you...and he just happens to be your work partner. What is the problem?”

“That’s it. That’s the problem right there,” Lois said. “We’re partners. We work together. Actually, we work too well together... and he’s gorgeous and ...every time I see him all I can think about is dragging him into the nearest closet and having my way with him...” Lois flushed. Where had that come from?

“And?” Lucy prompted.

“And I’m completely in love with him,” Lois finished meekly.

“I know you are,” Lucy finished smugly. She looked up behind Lois and smiled. “Hi, Clark.”

“Just imagine the possibilities, Mr. Luthor. A criminal organization as powerful as the Metros combined with your power and we’ll be unstoppable. We can finally get rid of this reputation as street thugs and be respected as proper business owners,” Toni related emphatically.

“Ms. Taylor, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you are preaching to the wrong choir. I don’t do business with hoodlums,” Lex remarked dryly.

“Hoodlums??” Toni asked, outraged.

“Your father ran a good show in his time, but it’s time to let the big fish take over.” Lex smiled at her.

“You will regret this.”

“I doubt that.” Lex pulled out a cigar and lit it. Toni turned on her heel in disgust.

“Clark, what are you doing here?” Lois asked, embarrassed.

A soft song began to play and Lucy jumped up. “I’ve got to head to the ladies room real quick. I’ve got to check on Natalie and see where she is. I’ll be right back.”

I don’t wanna rush this thing

I don’t wanna jump the gun

I really wanna say those three little words

But I’m gonna bite my tongue

Yeah, I’m just gonna lay on back

Leave it on cruise control

I’m gonna hold it all inside

Till the right time comes down the road

Clark smiled at Lois. “Do you want to dance?” he asked.

“Sure.” She took his hand gratefully and allowed him to walk her to the dance floor.

I got a feelin’

My head’s a reelin’

My heart is screamin’

I’m about to bust loose

Bottled up emotion

It’s more than a notion

It starts with an “I”

And ends with a “U”

I got a feelin’

Are you feelin’ it too

Lois sighed as she rested her head against his chest. There was something so comforting about being in Clark's arms. She felt so safe and loved. Why was she so afraid of telling Clark the scary three words?

"I get the feeling Lucy ditched us," Clark whispered in her ear.

"Probably," Lois sighed. "Not that I'm complaining or anything, but what are you doing here?"

"Lucy left a note on my door telling me to meet you two here to celebrate her passing the bar exam," Clark explained.

"Hmm..." Lois nodded. She fell forward into his arms, allowing him to catch her at the last minute.

*I guess I've all but said it now
So much for hopin' you'd go first
Don't leave me hangin' out here on a line
Baby, it's your turn
Say you couldn't sleep last night
Swore that you could feel me breathe
Had you wantin' me there by your side
Yeah, baby I know what you mean
"You okay?" he asked.*

"Fine. Why?" Lois asked. She began running her hands up and down his chest seductively.

"How much have you had to drink tonight?"

"What? No, I only had a sip of Lucy's margarita. Other than that I'm completely sober."

"Are you sure?" Clark asked.

"It's so cute that you worry about me. I worry about you too. Because I love you. I really do. I don't know why I..." She was cut off from her rambling by Clark's lips crashing down on hers.

*I got a feelin'
My heads a reelin'
My heart is screamin'
I'm about to bust loose
Bottled up emotion
It's more than a notion
It starts with an "I"
And ends with a "U"
I get a feelin'
You're feelin' it too*

"You have no idea how happy I am to hear you say that," he whispered.

*Bottle up emotion
It's more than a notion
It starts with an "I"
And ends with a "U"
I got a feelin'
You're feelin' it too
You're feelin' it too
Yeah, you're feelin' it too
Feelin' it too
Oh, Yeah*

Lois smiled up at him. "If I knew I was going to get that kinda reaction I'd have said it the day we met." She leaned up to kiss him. "Clark, can we please get out of here? There are things I want to do to you that I really can't do here..." she whispered in his ear.

"What about Lucy?" he asked.

"Okay..." She shuddered against him. "We'll find Lucy and then we'll go back to your place."

"What happened?" a male voice asked.

"I dunno. I just kinda found her out here like this," another voice said.

"Are you sure this is how that drug was supposed to work?" the first man asked.

"Look, take it up with the boss. Just help me load her up into the truck."

"Where's Lucy?" Clark asked.

"I dunno..." Lois said, turning in his arms to face him once again. "Can't we just go? I really...really need...I really need you, Clark."

"Lois, your sister's been drinking..." Clark pointed out. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine. I'm perfectly fine...levelheaded and..." She leaned up to kiss him once more, pressing her body up against him once more.

"Lois... Get a grip..." He gently pushed her away from him.

"Believe me, I'd love to, baby," she teased, running her hand seductively down the front of his chest.

"Lo-is!" he hissed.

"What?"

He looked at her more closely. Something was definitely wrong. "Where did Lucy say she was headed?"

"To call Natalie," Lois said matter-of-factly.

Clark scanned the room with his enhanced vision, and then cursed under his breath when he still saw no sign of Lucy. "Lois, I think something's happened to your sister."

"What?" Lois asked, confused. "No..." She tugged at his tie, trying to loosen his collar.

"Lois, would you cut it out? There is something seriously wrong here," Clark scolded.

"But, Clark, I just...I need..." There was definitely something wrong here. She couldn't string a single sentence together.

"Lois, I'm taking you to the hospital," he said, scooping her into his arms.

"Oh, no see I don't like hospitals..." She scrunched her nose up. Her eyes lit up as she came closer. "You know what we should do? Go swimming! Maybe the beach?" She lost her balance as she was talking and he caught her at the last minute.

"Lois..." he warned as he pulled out his cell to call the police. As he spoke with the operator, he helped Lois into the cab that had just pulled up. "Metropolis General Hospital," he ordered. Then he turned his attention to the person on the other end of the phone line. "Inspector Henderson? Yes, this is Clark Kent. There is something very strange going on at the Metro Club. You need to send a couple officers down here pronto...yes...Okay. Also, I need you to keep an eye out for Lois' sister. Yes, Lucy...She's missing...I appreciate it...No, I'm headed to the hospital...I think Lois was just drugged."

The body of Lucy Lane was laid on the ground roughly. Sgt. Jeremy Jenkins stood at attention, waiting for further instructions. "What are you doing, Sergeant? This isn't the army," Trask muttered.

Sgt. Jenkins moved to an at ease position and nodded. "Just as you instructed, sir. Kenn and I brought the subject in question."

"You idiots!" Trask slapped Jenkins across the face. "I said bring me, Lois Lane! This..." he said, gesturing at Lucy's body, "isn't her. Do you realize what you've done?"

"Uh, not really...She looked just like the picture you gave us in the club...well, sorta," Jenkins began.

"How am I supposed to cover this up?" Trask fumed. "You've jeopardized our entire operation, Jenkins!"

"Look, sir, I'm sorry," Jenkins began.

"Sorry won't cut it. Take her back to Metropolis, then get rid of her. We can't afford for this to be linked to us...or better yet...make it look like a petty crime attempt," Trask ordered. "Then I want you to bring me Lois Lane and Clark Kent. Are we clear?"

"Completely," Jenkins answered. "Are you sure that stuff is gonna kill Superman?"

"I'm confident the meteorite will eradicate the alien and any others like him," Trask remarked smugly. "I'll be in touch. Don't disappoint me," he ordered. With that, he was gone.

Clark stood in the corner of the hospital room as far away from Lois as possible. Every time he had tried to sit next to her she had taken it as an opportunity to try and feel him up and start something. He silently prayed for the doctor to get there as soon as possible. He hoped it wasn't anything lethal. He had gotten her here as fast as possible. There was no way he was going to leave her to change into Superman, especially after Lucy had been kidnapped. Hopefully, the police would be able to find Lucy. Who would want to kidnap Lucy?

"Clark, I *hate* hospitals..." Lois whined. "No privacy... And why won't you sit next to me?"

"Because every time I do, you *attack* me," Clark answered. "I told you before. There's something wrong with you and I'm not going to take advantage of you when you're like this."

"How exactly is it taking advantage when I want you to..."

The door opened, stopping Lois mid-sentence. A tall man in his mid-thirties entered. "Hi, I'm Dr. Robertson." He held his hand out to shake both Lois and Clark's hand. "I understand you've been drugged, Ms. Lane?"

"Oh, my God! I have not been drugged. I am just free to express my feelings..." She held her arms out to emphasize her freedom. She then pointed to Clark. "Isn't he gorgeous? We're dating... He's even more gorgeous when..."

"Lois..." Clark groaned. He knew he was probably doing a really good impression of a tomato right now. What was going on with Lois? It was almost like she was drunk on love. Could Lucy be going through the same thing? He really needed to get out of here and help with the search.

"Uh-huh. Well, why don't we take a look at your blood and see how free your feelings really are," Dr. Robertson said. "How much have you had to drink tonight?"

"I'm not drunk!" she snapped between gritted teeth.

"She had a sip of her sister's drink, but that's it," Clark explained.

"Okay, I'll send the nurse in. We'll do a full work up on her blood and see what exactly in her system." Dr. Robertson made a beeline for the exit leaving Clark alone with Lois once more.

"Clark..." she crooned, "why does everyone think I'm drunk? I'm not drunk. I'm perfectly fine. I mean, it's a perfectly normal reaction. Whenever a girl gets around a gorgeous man..." Clark felt his cheeks begin to burn as she spoke. He really needed to get out of here. Lois was making it very obvious what she wanted, and he wasn't about to give in. He was afraid to leave her alone. Something had happened to Lucy and Lois at that club and he needed to figure out what.

"Clark, are you listening to me?" she pouted, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Yes, sorry." Clark gave her an apologetic smile.

"I still don't understand why you insist on staying on the other side of the room," she pouted, sticking her lower lip out for effect.

"When whatever that is that you were drugged with wears off, you'll be happy I stayed over here," Clark said.

"No I won't. I don't understand. It's not like we've never had sex before. I just really want to..."

Another knock at the door interrupted her tirade. "Mr. Kent?" the nurse asked. Lois glared at the petite blonde.

"Yes?" Clark asked apprehensively.

"Inspector Henderson is here to see you," the nurse said, shooting Clark a generous smile before leaving.

"Okay thank you." Clark nodded then turned to Lois. "I'm going to talk to Inspector Henderson. Stay put."

"She likes you," Lois remarked angrily.

"Lo-is..." Clark sighed, exasperated.

"Didn't you see the way she smiled at you?" Lois added.

"I don't care. You're the only one I want to be with, but right now I need to talk to Inspector Henderson and find out what's going on with your sister. Now, promise you won't do anything

adventurous?"

"Fine," Lois retorted crossly.

"Thank you." He gave her a peck on the cheek before leaving the room. He closed the door behind him and sighed in relief. This was too much. He may be Superman, but even he had his limits, especially when it came to Lois Lane.

"Kent?" Henderson approached him hesitantly. "You okay?"

"I've been better," Clark said.

"How is she?"

"Not... herself," Clark said evasively, not wanting to go into detail about the side effects of Lois being drugged with Henderson.

"That's a bad thing, how exactly?" Henderson joked. Clark glared at him. "Sorry. I'm kidding."

"Have you found Lucy yet?" Clark asked.

"No. We've got a road block around the entire perimeter, but no sign yet," Henderson said. "What would really help is having Superman look for her."

"Yeah," Clark sighed. "Listen, I've got to get out of here. Maybe I can find Superman and get him to help with the search."

"Anything would help," Henderson muttered.

"Can you stay here with Lois?" Clark asked.

Henderson glared at him a moment. "She's driving you crazy, huh?" He asked. "Sure. I need to get her statement anyway."

"Thanks." Clark patted him on the shoulder and left.

"The things I do..." Henderson said, shaking his head.

Clark was in the sky within a few seconds, headed towards Luthor towers. If anyone had a grudge against Lucy it would have to have something to do with Luthor. It wasn't any secret about their courtship and if someone had hurt Lucy as a way to get to Luthor... He squashed the fears that began to run through his mind. *'She's okay. She's okay.'* He kept telling himself.

He hated having to turn to Luthor for help, but if it meant finding Lucy any sooner then he would do whatever it took. Lois would never forgive him if anything happened to Lucy and he could have prevented it. He still didn't understand how Lucy had been kidnapped without his being aware of it. He'd heard no cry for help, no screams. 'Lucy. Just remember you're doing this for Lucy,' he told himself as he landed on the balcony of Lex Luthor's penthouse.

"Are you sure this is a good idea? I mean, this is the Metros. I've heard stories," Jeremy Kenn said.

Sgt. Jeremy Jenkins glared at Kenn. "Exactly. The Metros are known for their petty crimes throughout Metropolis. This warehouse is owned by the Metro Club. All we have to do is make it look like an assault..."

"We're not gonna..."

"What do you think?" Jenkins asked.

"Right," Kenn gulped.

"Well, Superman, this is a surprise," Lex said, turning to face Clark.

Clark glared at him. "You've made some serious enemies, Luthor."

"I'm a businessman. I didn't get here by being friendly, but I assure you I am innocent of whatever crimes you're accusing me of."

Clark arched an eyebrow at him. "Then why don't you tell me who would be kidnapping Lucy Lane from the Metro Club and why?"

The blood drained from Lex Luthor's face. Under any other circumstances, Clark would have enjoyed leaving the businessman speechless. "What is it, Luthor? Money? Revenge? Who did you piss off?"

"Wha—When... When did this happen?" Lex stammered.

“Earlier tonight,” Clark said.
 “You said she was kidnapped from the Metro Club?” Lex stammered.
 “Yes. The police have been all over the place but to no avail. You still didn’t answer my question. Who did you piss off tonight?”
 “Toni Taylor. She wanted me to finance the expansion of the Metro Club, but I declined,” Lex remarked solemnly. “Oh, God...I hope she’s all right.”
 “Okay, so assuming this Toni Taylor kidnapped Lucy... where would she take her?” Clark asked.
 “There’s about seven different warehouses on the Pier along with real estate up north...” Before Luthor could finish Clark was gone.
 “Well, I believe I have some calls to make,” Lex mused, picking up his phone. “Asabi, round up the boys. It’s time we teach the Metros a lesson in respect. No, I want to make sure I get Lucy back unharmed. Yes, that’s perfect.”

Clark flew toward Hobbs Bay. He scanned all the warehouses, carefully looking for any sign of Lucy. Every warehouse had a lead-lined roof, so he had to float down and scan through the walls. Nothing. He moved on to the next warehouse. He noticed two men standing in front of the next warehouse on Pier 21. They seemed awfully suspicious. They kept staring at him. He turned to address them. “Excuse me, have either of you seen a young woman in her early twenties with brown hair?”

“I don’t know. I’ve seen a couple of broads tonight if you know what I mean, but I don’t really remember...” one of the men slurred.

“Thank you anyway,” he said, then moved toward Pier 21 to examine its content. He gasped when he saw what was inside. As super-speed, he turned to grab the two men that had begun to run away from the scene. After securely tying them to one of the beams on the dock behind the pier, he went inside the warehouse.

“Lucy?” he called.

“Who’s there?” Lucy called.

“It’s Superman...” he stated firmly. He began to detach his cape from his suit to use as a cover for Lucy. She had been tied up and stripped. He didn’t even want to imagine what she must have been through.

Lucy began to cry. “They took my clothes...” He laid his cape over her.

The echo of a siren from the distance could be heard. “The police are on their way. I think I caught the people who did this to you.”

“I want my sister...” she cried, wrapping the cape more securely around her.

Several hours later, Clark reentered Lois’ hospital room to find her fast asleep. Henderson sat in the chair against the wall. “She’s been out for hours. The doctor slipped her a sleeping pill,” Henderson remarked dryly. “By the way, you owe me.”

“For what?” Clark asked.

“I don’t know, stud muffin...” Henderson teased. Clark groaned, feeling the blood rush to his face. “I had to listen to lovey-dovey talk for two hours straight until that drug kicked in. You’re lucky I consider you and Lois friends, or I’d charge her with assault. Cruel and unusual punishment on my mental state.”

“Uh, I’m sorry, Inspector. She was drugged and I’m not really sure what’s wrong with her,” Clark explained.

“Well, the doctor should have something soon. I heard they found Lucy,” Henderson said, pointing to his radio.

“Yeah,” Clark said solemnly.

“Uh-oh. I’m guessing that face means something bad happened to her.”

“I’m not sure,” Clark said.

“I’ll check it out.” Henderson stood up and stretched. “I’ll be in touch. Keep an eye on her,” he said, pointing at Lois.
 “I will,” Clark said, watching Henderson leave. He pulled up a chair and sat next to Lois, waiting patiently for the doctor to return with the test results.

“Lucy, I was so worried about you,” Lex crooned, placing a supportive arm around her.
 “Can you please not do that, Lex?” Lucy cringed. “I really...I just need some space...”

“Certainly,” Lex said, stepping back. “What happened?”

“I don’t know. I woke up blindfolded and...”

A knock at the door interrupted her. “Lucy Lane?” At Lucy’s nod the nurse entered. “I’m Nurse Lowe. The police are going to need to get your statement along with the doctor. Would you care to do this alone or...?”

“I want my sister. Where is my sister?” Lucy cried.

“What’s your sister’s name? Perhaps we can contact her?” the nurse prompted.

“Lois Lane.”

“Lois Lane? From the Daily Planet?” Nurse Lowe looked at her for recognition, then laid her clipboard down. Lucy nodded. “I’m sorry, Ms. Lane, but your sister was admitted to the ER earlier tonight.”

“What?” Lucy asked in disbelief.

“I can stay with you, my dear,” Lex soothed.

“What happened?” Lucy asked.

“I’m not sure. We really need to get started with the rape kit,” Nurse Lowe prompted.

“Rape kit?” Lex’s eyes narrowed.

“We’re not certain. It’s just a precautionary. If you’re uncomfortable, Ms. Lane...”

“No, no. I want Lex to stay,” Lucy said emphatically.

“Okay, let’s get started,” Nurse Lowe said.

“Pheromones?” Clark echoed.

“Yes, a very large dosage of pheromones was found in her blood stream,” Dr. Robertson stated. “It looks to be a diluted solution. Just make sure she stays hydrated. I’m guessing she should be better by morning.”

“What do we do if it isn’t?” Clark asked.

“Make her sweat it out?” Dr. Robertson shrugged. “Just let it run its course. I’m prescribing a mild sedative and some antibiotics to help counteract its effects. She’ll wake up with a killer migraine and she’ll probably be achy once this stuff wears off. Don’t let her go back to wherever it was that she was exposed to this.”

“How did it get in her system?”

“Through her nasal passage,” Dr. Robertson said.

“Pheromones are hardly used in liquid forms other than fragrances. I’d say someone sprayed her with something. I’m releasing her...”

“You’re releasing her? You don’t even know if this stuff is going to wear off,” Clark argued.

“If it does then you can bring her back. We have to make room for more patients,” Dr. Robertson sniffed before turning to leave. “I should have her discharge papers ready within the hour.”

“Clark? What are you doing here?” Martha asked in concern, seeing Clark’s look of worry.

“Mom, I need your help,” Clark said hurriedly. “Lois was drugged.”

“Oh, my word! That’s awful,” Martha said, placing a hand over her mouth in shock.

“Any idea what it was?” Jonathan asked.

“The doctor said something about ‘pheromones’ but I’m not really sure. Mom, I need your help. I can’t handle her like this by

myself and the hospital is releasing her and..."

"I'll get my coat," Martha said.

"See, darling, everything's fine. They didn't do anything," Lex soothed.

"But they tried," Lucy cried.

"But they didn't," Lex reassured. "Rest up. We'll handle this tomorrow." He kissed her forehead, then turned toward the door to leave.

"Lex?"

"Yes, darling?"

"Thank you." She wrapped herself more securely in the hospital blanket; Lex closed the door behind him.

"They will pay, my darling. They will pay," Lex muttered, heading toward the elevator.

Her head was pounding. The pressure against her skull was excruciating. Lois slowly lifted her eyelids and squinted at the bright rays of sunlight streaming through the windows. She slowly sat up, rubbing her head in an attempt to ease her throbbing head. "Oh, you're up." A familiar feminine voice said.

Lois turned to face the source of the voice and saw her sister sitting next to her, handing her a cup of coffee. "Whoa... Wha... OW!"

"Here." Lucy handed her a cup of coffee. "Have some coffee. It'll help with the pain."

Lois was willing to take anything to make the pain go away. She took the cup from her sister gratefully. The hot liquid hitting her throat was soothing and the aroma of the coffee did wonders for clearing her nasal passage. She still had a bit of a headache, but it seemed to have subsided to a dull ache. She reexamined her surroundings, recognizing that she was in Clark's bedroom; she smiled. "Where's Clark?"

"Oh, he's probably hiding," Lucy said with a smile. "After you threw your arms around him, telling him you wanted to have your way with him on the kitchen table, he darted out of here real quick..."

"Oh, God..." Lois moaned, burying her face in the comforter.

"He mentioned something about swimming laps in the Arctic," Lucy added.

"I want to die. Can I die?" She asked.

"Hey, no one's judging. You've probably already had him on the kitchen table, haven't you?" At Lois' blush, Lucy laughed. "It's okay. You're in love..."

"Where did you get that idea?" Lois asked defensively.

"You told me, Clark, the bartender, Inspector Henderson, Clark's mother, and the doctor at the hospital... all about how much you *love* Clark and wanted him bad," Lucy listed off.

"Clark's mom?" Lois echoed.

"Yeah, Clark needed reinforcements in resisting you last night," Lucy explained. "Superman flew her here as a favor."

"That was nice of him," Lois mused. "I need a shower." She looked down at the old worn shirt she was wearing. Still a bit woozy, she hobbled toward the bathroom and began to get herself cleaned up. She stared at her reflection in horror once she entered the bathroom. "Oh, my God!" Her makeup was all smeared and dried on. She apparently hadn't even taken the time to remove it. She definitely wasn't wearing the same thing she had worn last night. It looked like one of Clark's old college t-shirts. It was extremely comfortable, but she wasn't sure how she had ended up wearing it. Had Clark undressed her last night or had she changed herself? They hadn't... He wouldn't... Not when she wasn't herself... would he? Clark wouldn't do that. He just wouldn't.

She stepped into the shower and enjoyed a hot shower, praying the hot water would do some good for the dull ache still teasing the back of her head. No, Clark would most definitely not have taken advantage of her when she was that far gone. What was

it Lucy had said? He mentioned something about swimming laps in the Arctic. He wouldn't ever do something like that. He may have been tempted, but he would never ever do something like that. Would he?

"Lois? Do you need some clothes?" Lucy called from the other side of the door.

"Um..." Lois hesitated. She hadn't brought any clothes with her. "Maybe."

The bathroom door opened and Lucy handed her one of her outfits. "Here. Clark brought this by earlier." Lois noticed that Lucy hadn't poked her head in the bathroom, just laid the outfit on the floor.

"Thanks, Luce," Lois said gratefully. She quickly dressed, lightly combed her hair with her fingers then headed back to join Lucy.

When she emerged from the bathroom she found Lucy sitting at the kitchen table, idly stirring her coffee. "Lucy?" Lois asked hesitantly.

Lucy looked up sharply and Lois gasped when she got her first look at Lucy's face. "Lucy! Oh, my God, what happened?"

Lucy stroked the swollen side of her left eye tenderly. "I guess I pissed the wrong person off. I just wish I knew what I did."

"Lucy, I am so sorry."

"It's not your fault. You were drugged. I was too... or at least I think I was. I remember watching you leave to dance with Clark, then I had stepped outside... I don't know. It's all blank after that. Superman found me several hours later... Who knows what would have happened if he hadn't found me when he did."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, Lucy," Lois said, sympathetically.

"Yeah. Superman was really nice. He didn't even look at me. Just took his cape off and covered me so I didn't have any perverted cops ogling me."

"Lucy, what you were wearing last night wasn't that bad," Lois argued.

"Well, what I wasn't wearing later was," Lucy said bitterly.

"What?"

"I really liked that dress too. I bought it special for yesterday and they cut it up," Lucy sniffed, wiping a few tears out of her eyes.

"They didn't..."

"No... but they might as well have," Lucy sniffed. "The police and doctors kept asking me all these questions that I didn't have any answers to. I know Lex was mad about what had happened, even if he didn't say anything. He was really great, but I really wanted you there, but you had been drugged, and I hate that this happened..." The tears were flowing freely down her face as she rambled on. Lois leaned up and hugged her sister.

"Hey, it's okay. We'll find the creeps that did this to you and make 'em wish they never crossed us."

"Yeah," Lucy sniffed.

"Where is Clark anyway?" Lois asked, looking around.

The front door opening caught their attention. "That's probably him," Lucy said.

Clark came into the room with an elder woman carrying a couple of white paper bags. "You're awake." Clark entered the room and handed her one of the bags. "Breakfast," he stated simply.

Lois smiled at him and took one of the fluffy croissants out of the bag gratefully. She took a bite and moaned, "These are to die for."

"I got them at this little French bakery I know," Clark said hurriedly. "I know this isn't the introduction everyone hoped for, but Mom, Lois... Lois, Mom."

"It's nice to finally meet you," the woman said, giving her a light hug. "I'm Martha."

Lois gave a light laugh and blushed. "Uh, Lois."

Toni Taylor was fuming when she left the Metropolis P.D. Someone had the nerve to try and set up the Metros? She would find out who was behind this and make them pay, no one crossed Toni Taylor and got away with it.

“Are you sure that’s Lane?” Kenn asked.

“Yeah, but just to be sure we’ll keep a twenty-four-hour surveillance to make sure we don’t have a mistaken identity again,” Jenkins retorted. “I’m not interested in making enemies with Colonel Trask.”

“Yeah. You don’t think those kids’ll squeal, do you?” Kenn asked.

“Nah. They know what’ll happen if they do.”

“I want the Metro Club and any other property owned by the Metro burned to the ground. Nothing should be repairable. Is that understood?” Luthor snarled.

“Completely, sir.” Nigel nodded.

“Good. It’s time these hoodlums understood who they’re dealing with. Also, I want Toni Taylor brought to me. We have some unfinished business to discuss...and send a large bouquet of flowers to Ms. Lane. It’s important that she knows I’m still thinking of her.”

“Sir?”

“What is it, Nigel?”

“Are you sure you’re not getting too...involved with Ms. Lane?”

“I’m in complete control, Nigel. Never question my judgment,” Lex retorted.

“Of course.” Nigel nodded. “Will that be all, sir?”

Lex nodded and waved for him to leave.

After a morning of embarrassing stories of Clark when he was younger and a full stomach, Lucy had taken Martha to go shopping in Metropolis Square, leaving Lois and Clark some time alone. Lois watched as Clark studiously worked on washing the breakfast dishes. “So, your mom seems nice.”

“Yeah. I didn’t mean to blindside you or anything. It’s just last night I wasn’t sure what to do,” Clark explained apologetically.

“So, I heard. Was I really that bad?” Lois asked.

“Not entirely...” Clark managed.

“I guess it must have been hard to listen to and not be able to do anything about it...Most guys would have taken advantage. Thanks for that, Clark.” She smiled up at him. “You didn’t have to call the police or take me to the hospital.”

“Of course I did.” Clark turned to face her. “I didn’t know what had happened to you. All I knew was you weren’t yourself. It scared me. And as far as Lucy’s concerned...there’s no way I could just leave knowing she was still missing.” He moved to cup her cheek.

She smiled up at him. “So, Lucy told me a little bit about what happened last night...” Lois began, looking away.

“Yeah, it’s okay. I know you weren’t yourself,” he said hesitantly.

“Well, that’s only partly true,” Lois said nervously, holding up her right index finger a few inches away from her thumb.

“What do you mean?” He asked.

“I meant what I said last night,” she said, taking a step closer.

Clark looked back at her apprehensively. “What exactly are you referring to? You said a lot of things last night.” She didn’t blame him for being cautious. She had definitely given him more than enough reason to be fearful of taking big steps in their relationship. It looked like she was going to have to say the scary words this time.

Without a word, she linked her arms around his neck and pulled him in for a passionate kiss. She felt him begin to respond

to her and slowly pulled away. “I love you, Clark Kent.”

He smiled back at her. “I love you, Lois Lane.” He lowered his mouth to hers.

The sound of the front door closing forced them to pull away from one another. “Am I interrupting something? If so I can come back. What do you need, two...three hours?” Lucy teased.

“Very funny,” Lois snapped, throwing a towel at her sister.

“Hey, is that any way to treat your favorite sister?” Lucy retorted.

“You’re my only sister,” Lois added.

Martha wore an amused expression. “Clark, I’m going to head to the airport. My flight leaves in an hour and a half and I don’t want to miss it.” Martha and Clark shared a knowing look and Clark nodded. What was she missing? Martha turned to Lois.

“Lois, it was wonderful to meet you. I hope you’ll come to Smallville to visit. I know Jonathan would love to meet you too.”

“Sure.” Lois nodded. “I’d like that, Mrs. Kent.”

“Martha,” she corrected.

“Martha,” Lois echoed. Martha moved to embrace Lois then turned to leave.

“Here. I’ll walk you out.” Clark followed Martha out.

“I hear wedding bells. Let’s see. Mother seems to like you... hot guy...from what I heard the other night...”

“Lucy!” Lois admonished.

“Yep, definitely a future,” Lucy teased.

“We should get going,” Lois said. “You have to go to that police line-up.”

“Don’t remind me,” Lucy groaned.

“Come on,” Lois said, dragging her sister along.

They left the apartment and Lois waved a final goodbye to Martha before hailing a cab to the Metropolis P.D. After the cab pulled away the echo of a sonic boom could be heard on Clinton Street.

“I don’t know. Do you think it could be Lex Luthor?” Toni asked, pacing around the board room. “I mean, he was pretty disturbed about my offer yesterday...”

“Yeah, what was up with that? Didn’t you pack your secret weapon?” Johnny Taylor asked.

“I was wearing the pheromone, but it still had no effect on him,” Toni said crossly.

“Maybe you’re not Mr. Luthor’s type,” Johnny said smugly. “Either way we need to plan our attack.”

“He’s pretty fancy about this Lucy Lane...maybe we can try her,” Toni suggested.

Johnny shook his head. “No way. Don’t go after his dame like that. He already thinks we were behind her kidnapping. That’ll only stoke the fire.”

“Speaking of fire...do you smell something?” Toni asked, sniffing the air.

After dropping his mother off back in Smallville, Clark headed back to Metropolis to start investigating the Metros. Last night had scared him. Lois had been completely out of control and he hadn’t known how to handle it. He had had women throw themselves at him before in which he had politely declined, but Lois had never acted that way before. The fact that she had been exposed to this pheromone by simply being at the Metro Club with Lucy was unnerving. How many other women had been exposed to this drug? What was the purpose of exposing someone to a pheromone...other than the obvious reason? As he approached the Metro Club he noticed several warehouses on the Pier was on fire. Changing direction, he zoomed down to help the fire department extinguish the fires. It seemed like the entire line of warehouses along the pier was on fire. This was obviously no accident.

“Superman!” the Fire Chief turned to face him in awe.

Ignoring the man’s expression, Clark got down to business.

“What can I do to help?”

“I’ve got all my men spread out. We’re trying to contain the fire, but it’s spreading too fast... I’ve never seen anything like it before. Thirteen warehouses set fire to at the same time.”

Clark moved toward the water in Hobbs Bay and lightly blew. His freezing breath froze the bay rock solid. He moved at super-speed to drill a place inside the frozen bay. Once he was below the bay, he lifted the part of the bay he had drilled and flew it over the stretch on the Pier that was currently in flames. The frozen bay quickly melted as it came in contact with the flames, extinguishing the fire as it did so. The echo of cheers from the firefighters could be heard as the last of the flames flickered out. Clark sighed in relief when he scanned the buildings. No one had been inside.

“Attention all units; we have a fire on Southside Pkwy...”

“How are you feeling, Luce?” Lois asked.

“How do you think I’m feeling? This has got to be the single most degrading moment of my life. Can we please get out of this place? I want to go home,” Lucy snapped bitterly.

“Fine,” Lois said. “Taxi!” She waved at the cab, passing by.

The cab stopped and the driver rolled down his window.

“Where to?”

“Carter Avenue,” Lucy said, climbing in the backseat with Lois.

As the cab pulled around the corner the news broadcast on the cab’s radio caught Lois’ attention, “All units are fighting to keep the fire under control...”

“Turn that up,” Lois asked.

The driver obliged. “The entire Southside has been attacked by raging fires that appear to be arson. We have never seen anything like it...”

“Lois, don’t...” Lucy warned.

“As of right now all units are fighting to keep the fire at the Metro Club from spreading, but it seems to be a losing battle. Even Superman seems to be...”

“How fast can you get us to the Metro Club?” Lois asked.

“No way. There’s gonna be cops all over the place and I can’t afford another soliciting ticket...” The cab driver argued.

“There’s a fifty in it for you,” Lois added.

“I’ll have you there in ten minutes,” The cab driver replied.

The flames were overpowering her. Which way was the exit? She turned toward what appeared to be an open door when a large beam came crashing down. She screamed. A sonic boom announced the arrival of Metropolis’ newest superhero. “It’s going to be all right.” He picked her up and carried her out of the burning building. This was going to be some story...

Clark carried the young woman out of the Metro Club and handed her to the awaiting paramedics. “Superman, I think we’ve got everyone out. Can you see anyone else inside?” the Fire Chief asked.

“No, sir.” He shook his head.

“Excuse me, Lois Lane, Daily Planet...” Lois’ voice echoed through the crowd.

Clark couldn’t help but smile. “Figures...” he muttered. He put on his best poker face as Lois approached him.

“Superman, can I get a statement?” Lois gave him her best smile.

If only she knew what that smile did to him. “The fire department seems to have been able to get the fire under control finally.” He began walking through the crowd with Lois as he subtly guided her away from the damaged building that had just a few minutes ago been filled with flames. “The smoke inside was very intense. Visibility to the human eye was probably close to zero. I’m just glad we’ve been able to get to everyone in time without having any serious injuries.”

“Any idea who could be starting the fires?” Lois asked.

“It’s hard to say. There have been rumors about a rival gang since the property that has been attacked is all owned by the Metros, but nothing has been confirmed.”

The woman he had rescued earlier approached them. “Excuse me, Superman, could I...”

Lois turned to face the woman. Her eyes widened. “What are YOU doing here?”

“Lois, it’s nice to see you too,” the woman said. “I was working undercover for the Metropolis Star, but I guess that story’s been killed...”

“The Metropolis Star? Well, Linda, it figures, you’d be working for a rag like that... knowing your expertise is sleaze...” Lois snarled.

“Well, I tried to get a job at the Daily Planet, but for some reason, after I gave my name your editor refused to speak with me. I wonder why that is...”

Clark noticed the tension between the two women and it was making him very uncomfortable. “I have to go...” he muttered.

Linda noticed his departure. “Wait, Superman, could I get a statement...”

“I gotta go... rescue someone or something...” he stammered, taking off into flight before either could argue with him further.

Linda turned to Lois. “See what you did!”

“Why should I care? I’ve already got what I need for my story,” Lois replied smugly.

“Yes, you always get what you want, don’t you, Lois?” Linda remarked bitterly. “Like blacklisting me at the Daily Planet?”

Clark walked up to Lois and Linda; neither seemed to notice his presence. Lucy was standing on the sidelines watching the encounter amused. “What’s going on here?” Clark whispered to Lucy.

“Linda is Lois’ ex-best friend from college; a royal pain. They had a falling out in case you couldn’t tell,” Lucy whispered back.

“It wasn’t that hard. Everyone’s heard of your reputation, Linda,” Lois snapped back.

“Speaking of reputations, I’ve heard a lot about yours going up in flames a few years ago. Claude Cluny?” Linda had stuck in the knife.

“Time to intervene. That was below the belt,” Lucy whispered to Clark then spoke up, approaching Lois, “Lois, we really need to go...” Lucy attempted to drag her sister’s arm away from Linda.

“You don’t know anything...” Lois snapped back.

“Lois, don’t...” Lucy warned.

“Well, according to my sources... the synopsis on you in college wasn’t that far off.”

“Don’t use big words you don’t understand, Linda. You might bust the last few remaining brain cells you have.” Lois wagged her finger in Linda’s direction.

Two strong arms pulled her back, away from Linda. “Don’t do something you’ll regret,” Clark whispered in her ear.

She turned around to face him. “When did you get here?”

“A few minutes ago,” he replied, leaning down to kiss her. It wasn’t a total lie. Clark Kent had just gotten there a few minutes ago. He wasn’t sure what was going on between her and Linda, but he really didn’t like the way it was upsetting Lois.

Lois wrapped her arms around Clark, pulling him in for a deeper kiss. The sting from Linda’s words a few seconds ago still ran through her mind. No, don’t think about that right now. Think about kissing Clark. He was definitely making the kiss last longer than usual. She suspected he was trying to help give Linda a bit of a show to put her in her place a bit. Who was she to complain? She loved kissing Clark. She could feel the pent up frustration behind his kiss. He had good reason to feel frustrated, after she tortured him mercilessly all night.

“It was nice meeting you again, Linda, but next time just stay

away from my sister's personal life or you'll have me to answer to," Lucy warned, ignoring the show Lois and Clark were putting on.

"Lucy, you haven't changed a bit," Linda chided, patting her on the head.

"I know you did not just *pet* me..." Lucy huffed. "I can still kick your butt from here to Central City..."

Clark slowly broke away from the kiss, eliciting a groan of disapproval from Lois. "Thank you," she whispered in an inaudible tone, knowing full well he could read her lips.

"No problem," he whispered in her ear.

"So, are we done here? Can I go home yet?" Lucy asked impatiently.

"I don't think we were formally introduced." Linda held out her hand towards him. "Linda King."

Lois looked at him warily. In college, Linda had always been the girl the guys had gone after. She was blond and beautiful. She hoped Clark wasn't going to be another man to be swayed by Linda's conniving. "Clark Kent," Clark said, hurriedly, extending his hand to her. He then began moving them towards the waiting cab on the curb. "Excuse me, but we've got a deadline." He opened the cab door for both Lois and Lucy then climbed in next to them. The look on Linda's face was priceless. She had never seen any man rebuff Linda ever. "You wanna tell me what that was about?" Clark asked, interrupting her thoughts.

"Not now," Lois said shakily. "Thank you...by the way."

"No problem," Clark said. He gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

"Haven't you two had enough, yet?" Lucy asked; the teasing in her tone was evident.

They pulled up to Lois' apartment and Lucy handed the cab driver money for the fare. Lois turned to Clark with a gleam in her eyes. "I'll be right back. I need to change. I smell like smoke."

"Okay," Clark said.

"Meter's still running, lady," the cab driver hollered.

Lois waved, acknowledging the comment, then hurried inside to hop in the shower. "What's the hurry?" Lucy called after her. "You usually don't care if you smell like smoke when you cover stories like this."

"I'll be out in a few," Lois called.

True to her word, Lois emerged from the bathroom wrapped in a towel a few minutes later. She then ran into her room to change. Lucy eyed her suspiciously. Lois reemerged fully dressed, her hair still slightly damp. She was wearing a black suit with a dress skirt. Lucy eyed her suspiciously. Lois was going out of her way to dress sexy. She noticed the silk thigh-highs Lois was wearing.

A small smile crossed her face. Poor Clark wasn't going to know what hit him. Lois moved back into the bathroom to dry her hair and style it for the day. She then reemerged from the bathroom fully dressed, makeup applied and hair done. She waved a final goodbye to Lucy, then left.

At the Daily Planet, Lois and Clark emerged from the cab and paid the remainder of the fare. Clark decided to take this opportunity to question Lois about Linda King. "So, you gonna tell me what was up with you and Linda King back there?" Clark asked as they pushed open the lobby doors to the Daily Planet.

"What's to tell? A hideous part of my past has reared its ugly head," Lois muttered as she took a sip of her coffee.

Clark laughed at her description. "Well, never let it be said that Lois Lane doesn't have a flair for exaggeration."

Lois turned on her heel to face him. "You don't know this woman, Clark. She has no conscience. She can't even spell it."

Clark laughed, taking on a melodramatic tone. "It was a dark day for the Daily Planet when Linda King rode into town."

"Go ahead, mock me," Lois sniped. "You don't know the

depths to which this woman will stoop to get a story...or anything else for that matter."

"Ah, now we're getting somewhere," Clark said pointedly. "Do I detect the scent of jealousy?"

"Jealous, hah!" Lois mocked. Just as she opened her mouth to speak the sound of Linda King's voice interrupted.

"Lois, hi. I thought we could catch up." Linda held out her hand for Lois to shake. Lois just glared at her. "Or not."

Lois scoffed and turned to Clark. "Come on, Clark, we've got a story to write."

"Lois, don't you have time to catch up with an old friend?" Linda asked.

"Funny, I don't see an old friend here," Lois said dryly. She then turned toward the elevator and hit the call button. Clark followed her close behind. "Stay out of my way, Linda," Lois warned before stepping into the empty elevator car with Clark.

As the doors to the elevator closed, Clark asked, "What was that about?" Her answer was launching herself into his arms, giving the lobby of the Daily Planet and Linda King an eyeful of their embrace before the elevator doors closed.

The elevator doors opened at the mailroom to face a very angry mail clerk. "Finally! What the heck? I've been pressing the call button for over half an hour. What happened?"

Lois and Clark avoided looking at one another. "Elevator stopped," they replied in unison.

"Uh-huh." The clerk pushed his cart onto the elevator car and pressed the floor for the newsroom, unaware of the heated glances being exchanged between Lois and Clark.

"Olsen!" Perry's voice echoed through the newsroom. "Has anyone got the story on these fires? Mitchell? Newman?" The reporters shook their heads 'no' and Perry let out a frustrated yell. "Doesn't anyone know how to chase a story anymore?" Lois and Clark smiled at one another as they stepped out of the elevator car after the mail clerk. Perry looked up at the duo and hollered, "Lane, Kent, what in the Sam Hill are you doing here? I thought I told you two to take the day off."

"Oh, so you don't want the piece on the fires?" Lois inquired innocently.

"Wha...? How did you...? Never mind, I don't want to know. Write it up, then I want to see both of you in my office pronto."

"Someone's edgy this afternoon," Lois noticed.

"I heard that," Perry shot back.

"We're moving," Lois said, sitting down at her desk.

"Okay, the piece has been written. The copy's on your hard drive. What's up?" Lois asked, closing the door behind herself and Clark as she entered Perry's private sanctum, also known as the Editor's office.

"How's your sister doing, Lois?" Perry asked.

"She's fine...you know...considering..." Lois said evasively.

"And you?" Perry asked, eyes narrowing. "Henderson called me this morning to tell me what happened."

Lois groaned. "Great. Remind me to thank him later. What is this all about?"

"I want to make sure I'm not putting you under any undue stress," Perry replied. "It's been a hectic few weeks..."

"I'm fine, Chief. We're fine," Lois argued.

"Good. So, why don't you explain something to me?" Perry remarked, leaning back in his chair to reflect a calm aura about him.

"Explain what?" Lois asked.

"How exactly did the elevator get stuck for half an hour then magically go back to working?" Perry's eyes wore a glint of humor behind them.

"I don't know," Lois lied. Clark looked down at the floor,

avoiding eye contact with Perry.

“Uh-huh. Well, I’m just throwing it out there. If you need to take a long lunch to take care of ...things...do that...I’m not above giving a little...just keep it professional in the office, ya hear?”

“Uh, got it, Chief,” Clark said, trying to keep the blush from creeping into his cheeks.

“All right, get out of here. Enjoy the weekend and the rest of your day off,” Perry said.

“Bye, Perry,” Lois said.

“Take care, kids,” Perry laughed. “Oh, by the bye...since your articles are beating the pants off the Metropolis STAR, the publishers want to run some ads. So, rest up and look pretty come Monday morning.”

“Perry...” Lois began to argue.

“Bye, Chief. We’ll see you Monday,” Clark said hurriedly, pulling Lois out of the office before she went into a full tirade against Perry.

Later that evening, Lois and Clark went back to Clark’s apartment for dinner. “So, what do you feel like for dinner?” Clark asked. “We can do Italian, Chinese, or Mexican...?”

“How many different dishes can you cook?” Lois asked curiously.

“I can cook roughly about 1,200 different dishes,” Clark stated proudly. “I picked a lot of it up from traveling.”

“Wow. I can only make three things. Only one of them doesn’t involve chocolate.” Lois laughed.

“Oh, and what is that?” Clark asked.

“Tuna salad,” she replied bashfully.

“Oh, no. Come on, I’ll teach you how to make pasta Alfredo. It’s really simple.”

“No, no.” She shook her head. “You haven’t seen me try to cook. I can burn water,” Lois joked.

“Everyone can burn water if they try,” Clark said, pulling her to him. He positioned her in front of the stove and pulled out a large pan. He then turned to pour some flour, milk, different cheeses and other seasonings she didn’t catch into the pan. “Just stir the sauce.” He placed a kiss along her collarbone, sending a chill of delight down her spine. He turned away to begin chopping the vegetables for the sauce. She looked down at the sauce skeptically. Could she really do this?

“Here.” He poured a handful of vegetables into the sauce. “Just keep stirring,” he said, placing a kiss on her neck.

“Mmmm...you sure I won’t burn it?” she asked quizzically.

“Positive,” he whispered against her skin. He wrapped his arms around her from behind as she continued to stir the sauce. “Under proper instruction, I’m sure you’re an excellent cook...” he murmured, running his hands up her sides.

“You’re very distracting...” she murmured, arching her back against him.

“Good,” he whispered. “Keep stirring.” He moved away from her for a split second to fill a pot of water, then placed the pot on the stove and poured the noodles in. He then turned the burner on the stove on and returned his attention back to her.

“Clark, this is crazy,” Lois murmured as Clark pressed his body against her from behind. “I’ve never been able to cook.” She moaned in pleasure as Clark ran his hands up and down her back, kneading the tender muscles in her back. “Mmm, that feels good.” She felt a warm sensation wash over her lower back and just as quickly it was gone. “What was that?” She asked, turning to look at him.

He shrugged innocently, “Uh, what was what?” She eyed him for a minute, watching him fidget with his glasses before he replaced her hand on the wooden spoon. “Keep stirring.”

“I’m a terrible cook,” she reminded him.

“You just need the proper instruction...” Clark murmured in

her ear, tugging at her earlobe with his teeth.

“Sir, we have a bit of a situation,” Nigel said hesitantly.

Lex looked up from his desk. “A situation, Nigel? What kind of situation?”

“Well, sir, it appears that when we sent our men to destroy the Metros...they were beaten to the punch...” Nigel explained.

“What do you mean?” Lex inquired.

“Someone else had already set fire to the entire strip on the Southside, owned by the Metros,” Nigel remarked.

“Hmmm, well, perhaps we should find out who it was and ... thank them,” Lex suggested.

“Perhaps.” Nigel nodded then turned to leave.

Two Months Later...

The next few weeks, Lois and Clark still hadn’t gotten any closer to solving the mystery of the attack against the Metros. Although Clark had suspected Lex Luthor might be behind it, he could never prove it. They also continued to working longer hours, keeping them from picking up where they had left off.

“It’s been two months since these fires have started, Henderson. Are you telling me the police don’t have any leads?” Lois inquired impatiently.

“I never said that. We’ve been getting reports every day and we’ve been following them up, but nothing has panned out,” Henderson explained grimly.

“What about the rumors that these fires are an attack from a rival gang? Is there any merit to them?” Clark asked.

Henderson sighed. “I haven’t gotten anything concrete, but there is SOME merit to the rumors...That’s all I can say, and what I just gave you is off the record...”

“Oh, come on, Bill, you’ve got to give me something...” Lois argued.

Henderson looked around nervously then jotted down a name and number on a piece of paper. “If anyone will know anything he will.”

“The homeless shelter?” Lois asked.

“Bobby Bigmouth?” Clark read the name skeptically.

“He’s trustworthy and eats like a horse,” Henderson whispered in a barely audible tone.

“Why are you giving us your snitch?” Clark asked.

Henderson jotted a note down on another piece of paper and handed it to them. “Metropolis P.D. can’t be trusted. Bobby knows why. Don’t ask any more questions. People are watching.”

Lois and Clark read the note and nodded. “So, that’s it?” Lois asked.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t help,” Henderson said, standing up to shake their hands.

“Excuse me?” Lois asked.

“Food for information.” The skinny man said in between bites. “That’s how it works. I don’t work for free.”

“Fine.” Lois pulled out her cellular phone. “What do you want?”

“Mexican!” Bobby’s eyes got big as he spoke. She could practically see the drool coming out of his mouth.

“Cuernavaca Grill, how may I help you?” The receptionist answered the phone.

“Yes, I want to place an order for to-go...”

Within a half hour, Lois and Clark had watched Bobby Bigmouth put away enough food to feed a family of six. “That’s what I’m talking about.” Bobby leaned back, rubbing his stomach.

“Okay, you got fed. Now talk,” Lois said.

“Henderson said you wanted to know about the fires in Southside?”

“Do you know who’s behind it?” Clark asked.

“You sure you want to know? Because once you’ve crossed

into this, there's no going back... People have been killed over this information..."

"Would you just spill it!" Lois snapped.

"Somebody's crabby... Okay, I've got a buddy that works in Judge Chamberlin's office. The other night, he found this floppy disk in the judge's trash. Being curious he looked to see what was on it." Bobby pulled out a floppy disk from his coat pocket. "It's got some interesting stuff on it."

"Okay, what about the police? Henderson said we couldn't trust the Metropolis P.D... Why is that?" Clark asked.

"That's how it all starts. They buy politicians, the D.A., judges, cops... they're all paid to look the other way while they try to move in."

"While who tries to move in?" Lois asked.

"All I know is the FBI's code name for them is 'Intergang' and there's a coincidental connection between Intergang and a certain chain of department stores. That's all I got, but I'll keep you posted. Next time, get me some Italian..." Bobby got up and headed out, leaving Lois and Clark to ponder over the new information.

The crackling of lightning struck the ground. The rumble of the storm echoed in the night sky. Another bolt of lightning struck a tall oak tree, splitting it in two. Under the rubble of the broken tree limbs and burnt debris, an eerie green light was emitted.

"What in the world is this?" Wayne Irig pulled a glowing green rock from the rubble and looked at it curiously. "This is the second one I've found in the last month." He took the rock and carried it over to his neighbor, Jonathan's. Maybe he would have an idea about what it could be...

Lois sat at her computer with Clark, looking over the information Bobby Bigmouth had given them. "Look at this. He wasn't kidding when he said this was big. If these reports are true, half the major cities in the world might've been infiltrated by this... Intergang."

"Look what happened to the reporter that last reported on it... fatal car accident," Clark pointed out grimly.

"Something tells me it wasn't an accident," Lois said. "Why hasn't anyone busted these guys?"

"I don't know, but it looks to me like they are trying to push the Metros out of Metropolis so they can move in," Clark said grimly. "As if we don't have enough problems here already with Luthor."

"Tell me about it," Lois remarked grimly.

"Did you ever figure out what Linda was going undercover at the Metro Club for?" Clark asked.

Lois glared at him. "No, and I am not going to ask her."

"So, when exactly are you going to tell me what is up with the bad blood between the two of you?" Clark asked.

"She's a conniving rat that needs to crawl back in the sewer she came from," Lois snapped. "That's all you need to know. Can we please talk about something else?"

"Okay, I think you need to find out what she was investigating."

"Why?" Lois glared at him.

"Well, Johnny Taylor is missing, Toni Taylor is in intensive care... I don't think there's anyone left that we know of from the leadership of the Metros."

"I am not calling her," Lois glared at him.

"Fine." Clark reached over and picked up her phone.

"What are you doing?"

"Metropolis Star please," Clark said into the phone.

"Clark!"

Clark waved her off. "I'd like to speak with Linda King. Tell her it's Clark Kent. Thank you."

"Are you crazy?" Lois hissed, trying to grab the phone from

him.

"You said *you* wouldn't call her, so I'm doing it for you," Clark remarked. He then turned his attention to the voice on the other end of the phone. "Yes, Linda, hi. This is Clark Kent. Listen, Lois and I had a few questions and were wondering if you'd be willing to meet us for coffee... Great. Thanks... Bye." He hung up the phone. "It's for the story, Lois."

"I don't have to like it," Lois snapped.

"Lois, this is a surprise. I thought you hated me." Linda smiled as she sat down across from Lois and Clark.

"I do," Lois said.

"Lo-is..." Clark warned.

"Fine. I don't hate you... I dislike your choices of behavior..." She turned towards Clark, "Better?"

Linda was watching them, amused. "So, what's this about?"

"We need to know what you were investigating at the Metro Club before the fire," Clark said.

Linda laughed, "Why would I tell you that?"

"Because the entire Southside has been turned into a barbeque and we're trying to figure out why," Lois snapped.

"If I help you; I want shared by-line," Linda said.

"What?!?" Lois hissed.

"We'll talk to Perry, but we can't promise anything. We can at least add you as a special contribution," Clark said.

Linda contemplated for a moment, then nodded. "Fine. I was investigating the use of drugs on customers in an illegal prostitution ring. From what my source was able to tell, the drug was given to customers and then within an hour they were begging for sex, willing to pay anything and everything for the relief..."

"Oh, my God..." Lois gasped, covering her mouth in shock.

"Lois..." Clark put a supportive hand on her shoulder.

"You know what they were using?" Linda inquired with an arched eyebrow.

"Maybe," Clark said grimly. "The night before the fire Lois was drugged..."

"Interesting," Linda said with an arched eyebrow.

Lois glared back at her and Clark cut in, "I took her to the hospital before anything got out of hand, but..."

"This doesn't make sense. Why would they target you?" Linda asked. "The usual targets are men."

"I don't know," Lois said sharply.

"Well, keep me posted. This was fun. We should do it more often." Linda smiled as she stood up. "Later, Lois..." She gave a long glance up and down Clark's body. "Clark..."

Lois watched her leave in disgust. "She makes me so sick..." she muttered.

"Who would do such a thing?" Clark muttered. "Could Lucy have been exposed to the same drug as you?" The idea of Lucy being exposed to the type of thugs associated with the Metros made Lois' skin crawl. She felt a wave of nausea wash over her. "Lois?" Clark looked at her, concerned.

Lois clamped her hand over her mouth. "I think I'm gonna hurl," she muttered, dashing for the ladies room in the small café.

The remainder of the week, Lois' nausea had gotten worse. She tried to continue working on the investigation with Clark from home, but it had gotten tiresome and near impossible. She had thought her nausea had subsided and had come over to Clark's to work on the investigation, only to end up getting another wave of nausea when she smelt the dinner he had been cooking. She now lay on his bed curled up into a ball, willing the pain throughout her body to go away.

"Lois, are you sure you're okay?" Clark asked, concerned, handing her a cup of tea.

"No..." Lois said, shaking her head.

"You have been sick the last two days," Clark pointed out.

“You need to rest.”

“I’ve been resting,” she argued, pushing herself up from her bed.

“Working from your bed isn’t resting. Have you seen a doctor yet?”

“No...It’s probably just the flu or something. Lucy had it last week,” Lois mumbled, taking a sip of her tea. “Have you found anything out about the drugs the Metros were using?”

“There’s no sign of any drugs in the wreckage of the club or any of the warehouses,” Clark said grimly.

“Doesn’t necessarily mean anything,” Lois said dryly.

“I know,” Clark said. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll be fine.” At his concerned look she sighed. “Look, if I’m not better by the end of the week I’ll go to the doctor. Okay?” He nodded, seeming to accept that answer. “You are such a mother hen. Haven’t you ever had the flu before?”

“It’s...been a while...” he said evasively. “Look, why don’t you stay the night? I’ll fix you some soup. In the morning I’ll take you to the doctor...”

“Clark...” she groaned. “I don’t *need* to go to the doctor. My father is a doctor. My mother was a nurse. I know what flu symptoms are. I don’t want to waste the time going to the doctor’s only to be told the same thing I already know. There’s nothing they can do for it anyway. It just has to run its course.”

Clark gave her a weak smile and lay down on the bed next to her, wrapping a protective arm around her. “I just hate to see you hurting,” he whispered, placing a kiss on her forehead. He lightly stroked her hair and within a few minutes, she had fallen asleep.

One Week Later....

As predicted, Lois’ flu symptoms had passed within the week. Once her illness had passed she dove back into the investigation into Intergang with Clark, but they still hadn’t made any headway. Lois was still feeling a little under the weather but didn’t let Clark know for fear that he would try and coddle her even more.

Lois woke up feeling slightly chilled. She looked around at her surroundings and groaned when she saw Clark wasn’t in bed next to her. “Clark?” she called. Seeing his dress shirt from the night before on the floor next to her, she reached down and put it on, leaving it partially unbuttoned. She then went into the living room to look for her missing boyfriend. “Clark?”

Clark was just coming in the door with a bag of pastries from the deli down the street. “You’re up. I got some breakfast.” He handed her the bag and gave her a quick good morning kiss.

“I thought we discussed this whole *you leaving me alone in bed* thing.” She pouted linking her arms around his neck and pulled him down for another kiss.

“Sorry. I didn’t want to have to dash out for breakfast later.” He leaned down to kiss her once more. He looked down to get a better look at her and smiled. “You’re wearing my shirt.”

Lois grinned up at him. “I think it looks better on me,” she teased.

“I’d have to agree, but I’m going to have to get my shirt back,” he said, lowering his mouth to hers once more. He wrapped his arms around her as he walked them back into the kitchen to put the pastries on the counter.

“Clark...what about breakfast?” Lois asked as he began his assault on her neckline.

“Later,” he murmured, tossing the bag of pastries on the counter as he focused on anything but breakfast at the moment.

Oh, God, Clark...” She moaned as he trailed a path of open-mouthed kisses along her collar bone.

The ringing of the phone next to them broke the moment. “You have got to be kidding me,” Clark muttered, reaching for the phone. “Hello?”

“Who is it?” She mouthed to him.

“Hi, Dad...” Lois grimaced as she looked down at their

current state of undress. Not exactly the ideal situation to be talking to your parents on the phone. He loosened his arms around her as he continued the conversation. “Wait, slow down. Okay okay okay...I get it. Yeah...We’ll check it out. Okay, thanks, bye.”

“What was that about?” Lois asked.

“My dad said their neighbor, Wayne Irig got pushed off his property in the middle of the night by some government agency, waving warrants and wanting information on Superman,” Clark replied grimly.

“What?” Lois turned on her heel to face him.

“Sound familiar?” Clark asked.

“The only government agency that’s had any interest in Superman was...”

“Bureau 39,” Clark finished grimly.

“Trask,” Lois muttered grimly.

“I think we better plan a trip down there and check it out.”

Lois gave him a wayward smile. “Chasing after Trask wasn’t exactly what I imagined when your mom had invited me to come visit.”

One Week Later...

Lois glared at the train as it continued to run across the track in front of her, showing no sign of ending. “How long is this going to take?” She glared at Clark who seemed perfectly at ease.

Clark sighed, shooting her a megawatt smile. “It takes as long as it takes.”

“I didn’t realize Zen was so popular in the country,” Lois remarked.

“It always takes people from the city a while to decompress. Fortunately for you this weekend Smallville’s hosting the annual Corn Festival,” Clark said happily.

“This is a *good* thing?” Lois asked skeptically.

“Sure. We’ll see the Corn Queen Pageant. The Husk-off. The Corn-o-rama. Popcorn, creamed corn, corn on the cob. We’re in luck.”

Lois sarcastically placed a hand over her chest. “Be still my heart.”

Clark laughed. “No, seriously, it’s a lot of fun. You might even enjoy yourself.”

“Whatever.” Lois shrugged. “As long as we can catch Trask this time. I want him bagged and tagged and sent down to the nearest funny farm.”

“You and me both,” Clark said.

Clark pointed to the farmhouse at the end of the dirt road that was swarming with activity. Men in protective suits were everywhere, coming in and out of the two large tent structures that had been set up on the property. “Dad wasn’t kidding when he said they tore Wayne’s property up.”

Lois glared at the site in disgust. “I swear, government agencies make me sick...”

They exited the rental car and approached the gate where an African American woman stood, giving orders to one of the men. “Excuse me?” Lois waved to get the woman’s attention.

“Sorry. Off limits to the public,” the woman said.

Lois and Clark simultaneously pulled out their press passes. “We’re not the public. We’re the press,” Lois said.

“We’ve already issued a statement to the local paper...” the woman began evasively.

“I’m Clark Kent; this is Lois Lane. We’re with the Daily Planet.” Clark gestured to Lois.

“I’m Carol Sherman, EPA Field Liaison.” Sherman extended her hand to shake both Lois and Clark’s which they both took.

“What’s a newspaper like yours doing here?”

“Well, that’s why we’re called the Daily Planet.” Clark smiled. “We cover the world.”

“Like Smallville.” Lois smiled, her eyes narrowing as she

sized Sherman up.

"Well, what you're seeing here is an ecological risk assessment." Sherman pointed behind her. "During the sixties, the owner used a lot of pesticides and we're concerned about the seepage into the local ground water."

"Giving people more than what they bargained for at the dinner table?" Lois asked.

"That's it. Public safety. No big story I'm afraid."

"We'll need to speak with Wayne Irig," Clark said.

"Mr. Irig's been given relocation money during testing. He didn't say where he went."

"Well, I'm sure you've got that information somewhere," Lois said pointedly. "We'll check back."

"Ms. Sherman, are you sure this is just EPA's doing?" Clark asked pointedly. "I find it hard to believe they would go to all this trouble..." He gestured to the construction behind her and said, "...and not even bother any of the surrounding neighbors. If the ground was exposed to pesticides here, wouldn't it make sense to check the neighbor's property as well?"

"Well, we only just now received a call from the Smallville sheriff about the ground..." Sherman was cut off once again by Clark.

"Also, Mr. Irig wouldn't be able to go anywhere this weekend. The hotels have been booked months in advance for the Smallville Corn Festival...and no government agency would pay the money to relocate a man outside of the parameter of the city his property's in."

"The government has pull..." Sherman snapped.

Clark narrowed his eyes at her and began scanning the property. Nothing in the house. The tents seemed to be lined with lead. "We'll be back," Lois said, pulling Clark away from Sherman.

"I know you want to find Trask, Clark, but you can't go around threatening the EPA," Lois hissed.

"I don't buy the smoke she's trying to blow up our..." Clark muttered.

Lois sighed. "Okay, fine, she's lying. What are we gonna do about it?"

Clark got thoughtful a moment. "I don't know. I've just got an eerie feeling..."

"Yeah..." Lois nodded, reaching for the handle of the car door. Missing the handle, she tripped slightly. "Whoa..."

Clark caught her before she hit the ground. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah...I just got a little dizzy there for a second..." Lois said sheepishly.

"You wanna go lie down?" he asked, concerned.

"No. I'm fine." Her stomach growled a little. "I think I'm just a bit hungry."

"Well, we have been on the road for hours..." Clark said, climbing into the driver's seat. Lois nodded. He tried not to let her see the occasional glances he kept stealing at her. She was looking really pale....

"Where are we?" Lois asked, looking at the farmhouse they had just pulled up to.

"My parents' farmhouse. I figured we could get settled, get you something to eat, then meet them at the festival," Clark explained, grabbing the bags from the trunk of the car.

"Okay." Lois nodded, following Clark inside. She examined the simple décor of the farmhouse. It had a warm, welcoming feel to it. She spotted an easel with a canvas of colorful shapes painted on it.

Clark walked up behind her, placing two supportive arms around her waist. "Mom's artwork," he said simply, as if that explained everything. "I put your bags in my room. Now, what do you feel like eating? I'm pretty sure Mom's got stuff for a turkey sandwich."

"Yeah, a sandwich sounds good." Lois nodded.

"Here." Clark poured her a glass of water. "Sit down and drink this. You really don't look good."

"Gee thanks..." she muttered sarcastically. She sat down at the table and took a long sip of the water. "It's probably just some aftereffects from the flu."

"You ready for something to eat?" Clark laid a plate with a turkey sandwich and a few crackers in front of her.

Lois nodded. She hadn't felt hungry earlier, but now she was famished. She took the sandwich gratefully and devoured it within a few minutes. Once she had finished she noticed Clark watching her with raised eyebrows. "What?"

"Nothing," he murmured. "You ready?"

"Yeah. Thanks. I feel a lot better." Lois smiled gratefully.

"You really think Sherman was lying completely or just partially? Irig could be somewhere around town," Lois reasoned.

Clark shook his head. "If Wayne went anywhere, he'd go to my parents. Ever since his wife died he's been kinda a hermit. He doesn't really socialize that well."

"That's so sad," Lois said mournfully.

"Yeah, I remember before she died they used to make the best caramel apples every Halloween..."

"Mmmmm...Caramel apples sound good," Lois said wistfully.

"Did you actually eat anything before we left?" Clark asked.

"I was in a hurry," Lois said briskly. "Oh, look, there's your mother. I think I'll go say 'hi.'" She brushed past him to go greet Martha.

Clark watched her leave and shook his head. "I will never understand her..." He moved to join Lois and Martha who were standing over by the corn dog station. Lois had bought three of them and was scarfing them down as she and his mother walked.

"I'm sure we'll be able to get to the bottom of this. We just need to find Trask..." Lois was saying as he approached.

"I know. A man that powerful and that crazy is a deadly combination....Hi, Clark." His mom turned to greet him.

"Hi, mom..." Clark hugged his mother.

"Oh, my God...These are to die for. You have got to try one." Lois turned towards Clark as she finished the last of the corn dog.

Clark smiled. "I'm sure they are."

"Have either you or Jonathan seen Mr. Irig since the construction started on his property?" Lois asked.

Martha shook her head. "No... We last saw him last weekend; he came over for dinner," Martha said. "He and Jonathan had talked for a bit out in the barn. You can ask him about it. He may have an idea what is going on..."

"I still don't understand why Trask is looking for Superman in Smallville. It doesn't make any sense..." Lois said.

Clark gave Martha a pleading look. "Well, dear, never try to make sense out of a mad man's mind. You'll drive yourself crazy. Why don't we check out the pies over at the bake sale..." Martha steered Lois away, giving Clark an opportunity to look for his dad.

"Colonel Trask, I just spoke with a couple of reporters. Lois Lane and Clark Kent from the Daily Planet. They were asking quite a few questions and they weren't buying the EPA story you instructed me to feed the public," Sherman said, entering the tent behind the Irig property.

"Well, of course, they didn't buy the story. They are Metropolis' best reporters, are they not? Well, if they're in Smallville then that means Superman must be close by." Trask turned to face Sherman. "Make a call to the boss and instruct him to take care of Jenkins and Kenn. They have outlived their usefulness to Bureau 39."

"Yes, sir." Sherman nodded.

Jonathan was taking his apron off after being relieved as cook

for the festival by Mark Walden. He turned to scan the crowd for Martha when a familiar face appeared behind him. “Clark, when did you get here?”

“A couple hours ago,” Clark said, giving him a hug.

“So, how are you doing?” Jonathan asked as they walked towards a more secluded area of the festival.

“I’d be better if Trask was behind bars. You and mom haven’t heard anything from him?” Clark asked.

“No,” Jonathan shook his head. “Did you come alone?” he asked in a hushed whisper.

“No, I came with Lois. Mom’s showing her the pies...” Clark rolled his eyes. “She didn’t eat anything before she left and she’s recovering from the flu, so her appetite’s been kinda in overdrive today.”

“Ah...” Jonathan nodded. “Well, I have something Wayne gave me for safe keeping that I need to show you in private... In case you haven’t figured it out already, they’re not digging for pesticides at Wayne’s.”

“I figured as much. What are they looking for?”

“A rock.”

“A rock?” Clark asked, confused.

“Clark!” Martha’s voice echoed across the aisle. She motioned for him and Jonathan to follow.

“I guess that’s our cue, huh?” Jonathan chuckled. “Your mother seems to have taken to Lois quite well.”

“Yeah,” Clark nodded. “I need to tell her, Dad.”

“Well, I’m never one to argue with your mother. If she trusts her, and you’re sure... I still don’t like the idea of...”

“I know, Dad,” Clark cut him off, “but Lois is trustworthy and I need to tell her.”

“Okay. It’s your secret.” Jonathan patted his shoulder as they approached Martha and Lois.

Martha and Jonathan were enjoying the festivities while Lois and Clark stole some quiet time away from the crowd. They watched everyone enjoying the attractions a bit secluded from the rest of Smallville’s crowd. Clark was nervously threading his fingers in between Lois’ as he tried to figure out the best way to tell Lois about Superman. “Is it always this hot here?” Lois asked, fanning herself with her notebook.

“It’ll cool down once the sun sets,” Clark smiled at her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders as they walked.

Lois leaned against him. “How do you put up with it? Not a single drop of sweat,” she noted, looking up at his forehead.

“Good genes?” he suggested. Lois gave him a questioning look and he sobered. “There is a reason and I do want to tell you... in private.”

“What is it?” Lois asked, turning to face him.

“Clark?” A female voice behind them caught Clark’s attention, distracting him from a much-needed conversation.

He smiled when he saw the source of the interruption.

“Rachael?” He turned to give his old friend a hug.

“Hey, I thought I recognized you over there,” Rachael said. She glanced up and down his figure a minute. “Boy, you haven’t changed a bit.”

Clark took Lois’ hand and pulled her to him. “Rachael, this is Lois Lane... Lois, this is Rachael Harris.” He looked more carefully at her uniform and smiled. “I guess it’s Sheriff Harris now, huh?”

“Hey, don’t let this uniform fool you. I can still Tush Push better than anyone in this town.” Rachael grinned.

Clark laughed. “I’m sure you can.”

“It’s nice to meet you. I was wondering if Clark would ever bring you down here. Martha’s been talking nonstop about you for the past month,” Rachael said, extending her hand for Lois to shake.

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” Lois asked skeptically.

“If Martha thinks enough of you to talk about you, it’s a good thing,” Rachael assured her. “So, you two came down to see the Corn Festival? It’s been a few years since you’ve graced us with your presence in time for the festival, Clark.” She wagged her finger at him.

Clark blushed. He had quit coming to the Smallville festivals when he had been traveling. “I’ve been a little busy...”

Rachael shot him a generous smile. “I hear that. So, what’s it like in Metropolis? I’ve only visited a couple times...”

“Busy,” Clark answered.

“Chaotic,” Lois added.

“I bet it was incredible meeting Superman...” Rachael’s eyes took on a dream-like state. “I would love to meet some of the celebrities that come in and out of Metropolis.”

“You get used to it after a while,” Lois said. “So, how do you two know each other?”

Clark picked up the edge of hesitancy in her tone. “Rachael and I went to high school together.”

“Yeah, we’re just old friends. Don’t worry, I ain’t gonna snag your man. He’s more like a brother to me than anything.”

“Gee thanks,” Clark said sarcastically.

Rachael punched him jokingly. “You know what I mean. Now, Lana Lang on the other hand...”

“Rachael,” Clark gave a warning tone. He really didn’t want to discuss Lana. They had dated off and on during high school but it had never been anything serious. She seemed to think more of their relationship than he had.

“Snobbiest girl in the Midwest, I’m telling you... Look out...” Rachael said.

“I’ll keep my eye out,” Lois said with a smile. “So, as Sheriff, you know everything that goes on around here, right?”

“Pretty much,” Rachael nodded.

“Did Smallville request the EPA to come out there on Wayne Irig’s land and survey it?” Clark asked.

Rachael shook her head. “No. They just showed up; said their orders came from Washington.”

“I told you she was lying,” Clark said. “What about Wayne? Has anyone seen him?”

Rachael shook her head. “No, I haven’t seen him, but you know how he likes to keep to himself.” Just then her radio began to beep. “Duty calls. I’ll ask around about Wayne. Lois, we’ll catch up later and trade Clark stories... away from the subject of discussion, of course.” She winked at them as she left.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Clark said, pulling Lois to him.

“What? You don’t want me to learn all the dirt on you?” she teased, turning around to face him.

“That’s not what I meant... I just might not live through the embarrassing stories that get shared,” Clark said miserably.

Lois leaned up to kiss him. “That’s what makes them fun to listen to,” she teased, linking her arms around his neck.

“Maybe I should ask Lucy all the embarrassing stories about you. It’d only be fair.”

“Who’s Lana Lang?” Lois asked pointedly.

Clark sighed. He knew that was coming. “Uh, just someone I dated in high school.”

“An ex-girlfriend?” Lois teased.

“Sorta. It wasn’t really that serious but she seemed to think it was. I only went out with her a couple times. She wasn’t really my type. As Rachael said... snobby.”

“You called me a snob,” Lois reminded him.

“I was trying to get your attention. You are nowhere near the realm of snobby as Lana and her family are.” Clark sighed. “Her mom’s some big wig with the fundraisers in town and tries to push her way on everyone. Lana kinda inherited that trait. I’d only gone out with her three times. At this point, I hadn’t seen the real Lana. Rachael kept telling me Lana was trouble and I could do better... I

didn't listen...young, naïve, that sort of thing. Rachael was always a tomboy and she got teased a lot about that. Anyway, I overheard Lana spreading a rumor about Rach liking girls around school... Needless to say, I quit seeing Lana after that."

Lois seemed to squirm slightly at the mention of Lana spreading rumors about Rachael. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I just... I really don't like people that gossip... or worse yet slander someone's reputation just because they don't like them," Lois fumed angrily.

"Why do I get a feeling this isn't about Rachael and Lana?" he inquired.

Lois shrugged. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm hungry. Let's grab some barbecue." She headed towards the barbecue pit, dragging him along.

"So, Lois, Clark tells us you two have had quite a busy couple of months," Jonathan began as they entered the farmhouse later that night.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that." Lois sighed. She was really tired.

"I feel like I know you already." Jonathan smiled. "Between these two talking nonstop about you..."

"Dad..." Clark was doing a really good impression of a tomato right now. His face was almost completely red with embarrassment.

Martha chose this moment to chime in, "Yes, his first week he kept telling us how pretty you were and what a talented writer you were..."

"Mom!!" Clark was rolling his eyes in embarrassment.

"What?" Martha asked, innocently. She gestured around the living room. "It's just an old farmhouse, but it's home." Lois nodded politely. Had Clark told them that they had stopped by here earlier? Martha turned to the painting on the easel. "It's my latest. What do you think?"

"I like it," she said politely. She turned her head, to see if she could make out the shapes better. "What is it?"

"It's a bowl of fruit," Martha said.

"Mom, we're going to be receiving a fax tomorrow. Is it okay on paper?" Clark asked.

Martha pulled the cover off the fax machine in the front room. "I think so." She pressed a few buttons on the machine and wrinkled her nose. "I think it needs more toner."

"I've got an extra cartridge in the den," Jonathan said.

Lois watched in amazement. Smallville certainly wasn't what she had expected. She had expected a bunch of farmers in their overalls discussing hog futures, not the welcoming faces and knowing glances she had received. "I already unpacked everything earlier when we stopped by," Clark said. "Dad, you said you had something on the tractor you needed help with?" Clark asked.

Jonathan looked confused for a split second, then recognition struck him. "Oh, right. Yes, come with me."

Martha pulled Lois along with her upstairs and showed her around the necessities. "If you need any extra blankets, they're in the hall closet. There's a bathroom in the bedroom." Martha pointed to the door on the other side of the room. "I'll let you get settled in for the night." She gave Lois a quick hug. "I'll see you in the morning."

Lois nodded and watched Martha leave with a smile. She closed the door behind her and sank down onto the bed. It was comfortable. She looked around the room to examine the décor a young Clark had chosen so many years ago.

She noticed the bathroom across the hall. Thankfully it was nearby. She'd had to dash to the bathroom twice without Clark noticing. She wasn't sure what was going on. She just couldn't seem to shake this flu bug. Lucy seemed to have gotten over her sickness pretty quickly. She wasn't sure if it was an aftereffect of the drugs she had been exposed to or what, but the nausea was

definitely getting old really quick.

In the barn, Clark stood behind his father as he pulled out a large lead box. "You said something about a rock..."

Jonathan nodded. "Wayne Irig found this rock on his property last month. He sent it to the lab for testing. Never heard back. Then after that electrical storm last week he found the same rock. He sent it over for testing again. This time the feds show up."

"But that doesn't make any sense. Why go to all that trouble for a rock?" Clark asked.

"Because the preliminary report that came back from the second analysis said it was some kind of meteorite. Wayne wasn't sure what to do with it; so he gave it to me for safe keeping. He's a good judge of character, you know. He knows when someone's feeding him a line. He thought the meteorite could be worth some money, but I figured since it was found a few miles from where we found you that it was probably related." He lifted the lid of the case and an eerie green light emitted across the room.

Clark stared at the rock uneasily. A painful feeling of nausea swept over him. "Dad, I'm feeling kind of strange." He took a few steps back. The rock... meteorite... whatever it was. It hurt. His insides felt like they were on fire. He leaned against the wall for support.

"My God, do you think it could be from this?" Jonathan asked. He still hadn't turned around.

"Da..." It was no use. He collapsed to the ground with a large crash.

"Clark?" Jonathan spun around and immediately was at Clark's side. "Clark, what is it?" No answer. "Answer me!" He looked around the room desperately and his eyes rested on the glowing meteorite. He stood up and closed the lid to the meteorite then turned back to Clark. Clark's facial features seemed to have relaxed. "What's happening?" He then shouted out for help, "MARTHA!!" He cradled Clark in his arms, listening the best he could for a sign that he was going to be okay. "Oh, my boy... my boy..."

Lois came out of the shower dressed in her pajamas and a bathrobe when she heard the shout. The bedroom door across the hall opened in a hurry and she heard the frantic footsteps afterward. Curious as to what was going on, Lois went to the window to see what the fuss was all about. She looked out the window to see Jonathan struggling to carry Clark to the house. Clark didn't seem to be moving. "Oh, my God..." She flung the door open and was right on Martha's heels as she went to help Clark.

"Lois, stay back," Martha said, opening the front door for Jonathan.

Lois watched as Jonathan entered the farmhouse with Clark. She'd never seen him look so pale in her life. "Oh, my God, is he all right?"

"I don't know..." Jonathan stammered.

"Here. Get this coat off of him; he's sweating bullets..." Martha said. "Let's get him over to the couch." Clark still lay motionless when they laid him on the couch. "Lois, could you get me a damp cloth?" Martha asked.

Lois nodded mutely, grabbing one of the kitchen towels and dampening it in the kitchen sink. She handed the cloth to Martha. "What happened?"

Martha and Jonathan exchanged worried glances, "Uh, he fell off the ladder in the barn." Jonathan said.

Martha felt his head. "He's burning up. I think he's probably got an attack of those allergies again too."

"Real bad this time of the year," Jonathan added.

Their story seemed almost rehearsed, but Lois tried not to think too much about it. "Mmmm..." Clark groaned, trying to move around a bit.

“Clark?” Martha’s face was filled with relief when his eyes opened, blinking repeatedly.

“Wha... What happened?” Clark asked, rubbing his neck as he tried to sit up.

“You fell off that old ladder,” Jonathan said. There seemed to be some unspoken message between the glance between Jonathan and Clark.

“I what?” Clark croaked. He pushed himself up on the couch shakily.

“You scared me out of my mind,” Martha added. “You have got to be more careful.”

Clark seemed to register a hidden meaning behind her words then nodded. “I’m sorry, mom.”

“Are you okay?” Lois asked.

Clark nodded. “I think so.” He caught her gaze. She could see an emotion she had never seen in Clark Kent’s eyes before. Fear. It was unnerving, to say the least.

The sound of the fax machine humming distracted her. She looked up. “I’ll be right back.” She went into the next room to check on the fax.

Clark watched Lois leave and sighed in relief. “What happened?”

“That rock...it...it made you pass out,” Jonathan said grimly.

“How do you feel?” Martha asked.

“Better. I think I feel better,” Clark said thoughtfully.

“What do you mean you think you feel better? Don’t you know?” Jonathan asked.

“He’s never been sick before. It’s a new experience for him,” Martha chided.

“I don’t understand. How can a rock that came from the same place as Clark make him sick?” Jonathan asked.

“Because it’s poison. That’s all we need to know....and we’re never letting it near you again,” Martha said sternly.

Lois reentered the room carrying a stack of papers. “The fax from the EPA. It’s a working list of clean-up sites ...Smallville’s not on the list.” She took a seat next to Clark. “Are you feeling any better?”

Clark gave her a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll be fine.”

“We should get to bed,” Jonathan said. “Do you need some help climbing the stairs, son?”

“No, I’m fine, Dad,” Clark said. He stood up to prove his point. “Go on to bed.”

“Okay.” Jonathan patted him on the arm then left. Martha gave him a quick hug then headed upstairs.

“You sure you’re okay?” Lois asked hesitantly.

“Sorta,” he said sheepishly. Lois stood up and wrapped her arms around him, giving him a long kiss.

“Better?” she asked.

“Mmmm hmm, much. I should get sick more often,” he teased.

“Come on, let’s get to bed,” Lois said, tugging on his arm gently.

Clark sank shakily into the mattress, wrapping his arms protectively around Lois. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you,” he murmured, placing a kiss on her head.

She stifled a yawn. “It’s okay. She looked up and down his frame questioningly for a minute. “You sure you want to sleep in this?”

“I’m too tired to change,” he mumbled.

“Here.” Lois rolled over to help him out of his clothes. “You are kinda warm. What are you allergic to?”

“What?” Clark asked.

“Your parents said you had bad allergies that kicked in this time of the year,” Lois said as she finished unbuttoning his jean shirt. She tugged his arms out of the sleeves then threw the shirt to

the ground.

“Lois, I don’t have allergies,” Clark said, taking a deep breath. He needed to tell her now before the lies got out of hand. It was one thing to omit the truth from her, but to blatantly lie...he wasn’t comfortable with that at all.

Lois unbuttoned his jeans and lowered his zipper, then turned to tug the jeans off of him. “But...Why would your parents say you had allergies if you didn’t?” Lois asked confused.

“There’s something I need to tell you, Lois, but before I tell you anything you have to promise you won’t tell anyone. No matter what. You can’t even tell Lucy.”

“Ooh, this must be good,” Lois said, lying down next to him. He rolled over so that he was facing her as he spoke.

“I’m serious,” he said, cupping her cheek with his hand.

“Okay. I won’t tell anyone. What’s going on?”

“The best way to explain this I guess would be to start at the beginning. I want you to understand my sharing this with you is a huge risk. Trask is just one example of what could happen if this got out.”

“Clark, you’re starting to scare me. What’s going on?” Lois asked, moving his hand from her cheek to hold in her own hand.

“Okay, I never told you this, but I’m adopted.”

“That’s why you were doing that story about the adoptions?” Lois asked.

“Partially. It was an assignment and I had a curiosity about it, but I wasn’t your typical adoption.”

“What do you mean?”

“My parents found me in Schuster’s Field roughly twenty-eight years ago...in a space ship. Neither of them knew where I had come from. They had a friend of the family create a birth certificate for me, telling everyone I was the child of an unwed teenage relative...” Clark sighed as he continued. Lois was listening with rapt attention. “I had it drilled into my head from the time that I was five years old not to tell anyone or I would be dissected like a frog by a government agency.”

“Oh, Clark...” Lois reached up to stroke his cheek.

“As I got older I started developing different abilities ...heat vision, x-ray, the power to defy gravity...Lois, I’m Superman.”

Lois stared at him for a minute. For a minute he thought she was going to slap him. He knew he would deserve it. Instead, she erupted into peals of laughter. “That’s funny. You’re Superman? You almost had me there for a minute, Clark. I think you hit your head harder than you thought.”

“Lois, I’m telling the truth. I am Superman,” Clark argued.

Lois just laughed. “Sure. You’re Superman?” she asked skeptically. “Do something super. Fly.”

“I can’t,” he said solemnly.

“You can’t?” Lois asked.

“Well, there’s this rock...meteorite...they think it came from the same planet as me...it makes me sick and it took away my powers,” he explained hurriedly.

“How convenient,” Lois said sarcastically. She didn’t believe him. Here he was pouring out his heart, revealing himself to her and she didn’t believe him. “Clark, just try and get some sleep.” She gave him a peck on the cheek and rested her head on his chest. This was going to be harder than he thought.

She couldn’t sleep. What in the world could possibly make Clark think he was Superman? And what was up with that story about Schuster’s Field? She lifted her head from Clark’s chest and looked over at him. She crinkled her nose. He wasn’t wearing his glasses. She hadn’t seen him without his glasses but a few times. Her gaze fell on the impressive build of his chest down to the rest of his perfectly sculpted body. She ran a hand through his hair a moment and frowned. If he had fallen off the ladder wouldn’t he have a bump on the back of his head?

<<“Lois, trust me on this, I am not your typical male.”>>

She squinted through the darkness, trying to get a better look at Clark in the moonlit room. He kinda looked like Superman, she supposed. "This is ridiculous," she muttered to herself. "There is no way Clark is Superman..."

<<"See? Even the new kid can surprise you, Ms. Lane." He winked at her.>>

<<"That man...That man...he rescued me."

"What? The guy is delirious."

"Clearly! What happened to your suit? You're a mess! From now on, do what I do: bring a change of clothes to work.">>

Could that man have been telling the truth? She leaned up to get a better look at Clark's facial features. He did look a lot like Superman, but the story he had told her was just too far-fetched... and he had just hit his head.

"Maybe. There's no bump," she reminded herself.

<<"I hope you didn't make dinner plans."

"I am all yours.">>

<<"That was quick,"

"I took a short cut.">>

Could he really be Superman? She'd never really seen him do anything out of the ordinary...well, aside from his ability to make her weak in the knees from just a kiss.

<<"You are a strange one, Clark Kent."

"Am I?"

"Yeah, but I think I've got you figured out."

"Really?"

"Uh-huh."

"Didn't take you long..."

"Well, it's my business, looking beyond the external.">>

<<"So, explain this to me. You eat like an eight-year-old but you look like Mr. Hardbody? What's your secret and can I have it?">>

<<"Hi, I like your costume."

"Thank you. My mother made it for me. What's your name?"

"Amy. Amy Platt. Who are you?"

"I'm...a friend.">>

That smile. Clark had graced her with it so many times...She reached up to push back his hair. She gasped. "Oh, my God..." She wanted to cry. Clark had been lying to her this entire time... He'd made love to her every night and he'd...*lied* to her about who he was.

'Well, not exactly...He hadn't come out and denied being an alien...' her mind reminded her.

No, he'd just omitted that part. He was Superman...How had she missed that? No one had that great of a body...Not without surgery anyway...

<<"Have you any romantic attachments to this Superman?"

"How exactly does that fall under national security Mister...?"

"Trask. National Security is everywhere, Ms. Lane. Now I'll repeat the question, Ms. Lane. Have you developed a romantic attachment to Superman?"

"No."

"Ms. Lane, procreating with the alien can be seen as treasonous?"

"Procreating? What planet are you from? Who talks like that?"

"Has the alien taken over your mind....or your body? We are talking about national security and you're contemplating sleeping with the enemy...Or maybe you already have...">>

<<"Clark! You're alive!"

"It would seem so..."

"Oh, Clark...Hey, everybody, Clark's alive! Do you know what this means?"

"No..."

"Perry, if Clark's alive that means Superman's alive. Superman had to have saved him. Right, Clark?"

"Uh, yeah...">>

<<"You're the only one.">>

Because he was Superman. He couldn't risk someone finding out about him. She had been sleeping with Superman and hadn't even known it. She felt sick to her stomach. How could he have done something like this to her?

<<"We've been REALLY active and neither of us seemed to think long enough to discuss protection for pregnancy."

"Oh...Oh! No, I'm on the pill....Really? I never would have guessed..."

"Books and instinct. That's it." He sighed.

"If you waited so long then why did you let things get as out of control as they did that night?" Lois cornered.

"I don't know. I can't really control myself when I'm with you. You seem to bring out a part of me that I didn't know existed."

"You don't regret it?"

"Never. I could never regret anything I did with you, Lois. Being with you makes me feel more alive."

"Oh, Clark...That is the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me.">>

She'd opened her heart up to him. Why had he waited so long to tell her? Did he not trust her? The tears began to fall of their own accord. Suddenly she felt very cold.

<<"I want you to understand my sharing this with you is a huge risk. Trask is just one example of what could happen if this got out.">>

<<"I had it drilled into my head from the time that I was five years old not to tell anyone or I would be dissected like a frog by a government agency."

"Oh, Clark..."

"As I got older I started developing different abilities ...heat vision, x-ray, the power to defy gravity...Lois, I'm Superman.">>

Why did he choose now to tell her? She felt a wave of nausea overtaking her once again and dashed for the bathroom. After what felt like an eternity of vomiting everything she had eaten that day up, she felt two strong arms encircle her from behind.

"You're still sick," he murmured.

Lois looked up miserably at him. "You're Superman," she said matter-of-factly.

"You actually believe me this time?" Clark asked, amused.

Lois felt the tears begin to overtake her once more as she nodded mutely at him. "I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Lois asked in between tears. Clark held her firmly against his chest as she cried. She was furious. She needed to understand. She had to. She couldn't allow Clark to fall into that category of bad relationships...her heart couldn't take it.

"Because it wasn't just my secret to tell, Lois. This affects my parents just as much as it affects me. I'm invulnerable; they're not...or at least I was," he said grimly.

"What are you talking about?" Lois asked in between sobs.

"They're not looking for pesticides; they're looking for a meteorite from Krypton," he said grimly. "It's lethal to me."

"What?" Lois didn't understand how a meteorite could be lethal to him.

"I don't have any of my powers anymore, Lois. I was only exposed to that meteorite for a few minutes and it knocked me out," Clark explained shakily.

"Oh, God..." Lois felt another wave of nausea wash over her and moved toward the toilet once more.

"Lois, you need to see a doctor," Clark said, rubbing her back.

Lois sighed against the tile wall of the bathroom. "I don't understand why it's not going away. Lucy's flu came and went within a week..."

"Maybe it's not the flu," Clark suggested.

"What else could it be?" Lois cried.

"I don't know. That's why you need to see a doctor," Clark

said pointedly. He looked at her cautiously. “Are you going to be okay to move?”

Lois nodded mutely. Clark lifted her up and carried her back to bed. He wrapped a protective arm around her and held her close. “Clark?”

“Hmm?”

“If you hadn’t have had to worry about your parents, when were you going to tell me?” Lois asked.

Clark sighed. “I probably would have told you around the same time of our first date, but like I said...it wasn’t just my secret. I couldn’t risk my parent’s lives without their input too. I never meant to hurt you, Lois. I hope you can believe me.”

Lois squeezed her eyes shut, trying to will the tears that were threatening to overflow her system to stop. She let out a shuddered breath and began to cry. “I don’t know what to do...my head and my heart keep telling me two completely different things...I don’t feel good...and you’re Superman...and you lied to me...and I never thought you’d lie to me...and I can’t stop crying...”

Clark pulled her more tightly into his arms, allowing her to let her emotions out. “I’m sorry,” he whispered hoarsely.

“I know, but it still hurts,” she mumbled.

The next morning, Clark awoke feeling a bit more energized than he had the night before. He wasn’t achy like he had been, but he was still without his powers. “I don’t know if they’ll ever return,” Clark muttered grudgingly to his parents over breakfast.

Jonathan patted him on the back. “It just doesn’t make sense. You can’t go your whole life with super powers then ...Poof... they just vanish...How could a rock do that?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said.

“How’s Lois?” Martha asked. “I heard her getting sick last night.”

“Yeah. She’s been sick for the last few weeks off and on,”

Clark said. “I told her last night.”

Martha and Jonathan exchanged a glance. “How’d she take it?” Martha asked.

“She laughed and told me I’d hit my head too hard.” Clark smiled at the memory. “It wasn’t until later in the night she put the pieces together...and finally believed me. She’s mad. I know she is.”

“But?” Martha prompted.

“I don’t know. She was too hurt last night to really talk about it.” Clark sighed.

“You really love her, don’t you, son?” Jonathan asked.

“Yeah.” Clark nodded. “I want to marry her...I know I have to wait until she’s ready...”

“You may not have to wait too long,” Martha said. “She may surprise you.”

Lois awoke the next morning to find not to her surprise that Clark had already gotten up and was gone. “Figures,” she muttered to herself. “No wonder you always woke up alone. He was out being Superman.” She headed for the bathroom to begin taking her shower and got dressed for the day. She chose a sleeveless cotton dress in lieu of the usual business suits. She was after all in the sweltering heat in Smallville.

Lois came down the stairs and was surprised to see Martha sitting at the dining room table waiting patiently. “Good morning, Lois. So, Clark said he told you?” Lois nodded, recalling the revelation last night.

“Yeah.”

“Are you hungry?” Martha moved towards the kitchen. “I can whip up some breakfast or some coffee?”

“Coffee’s fine.” Lois nodded.

“You know when Clark was a very young boy he was told about how we found him...he was also told never to tell anyone,” Martha began slowly as she poured the coffee grinds into the filter.

“This mess with Trask was a nightmare come true for him. Scared him to bits. Even though he was invulnerable, the people he cared about weren’t. Sharing this secret...it wasn’t really something we even thought about. We’d hidden it for so long...I knew the time would come eventually, but I didn’t know it would come this soon.”

“He said he was told he’d be dissected like a frog,” Lois said.

“Jonathan’s phrase; not mine,” Martha answered. “Clark has always been alone...When Clark first started developing his powers...when he first became really, really strong...he never told his friends...He never even thought about telling anyone. It broke my heart having to watch him have to hide so many things...He just wanted to be normal, but of course, he couldn’t...not really.” Martha swiped at the tears that began to fall down her face.

Lois felt her own tears begin to overtake her as well. “You know I do love him...”

Martha nodded. “I know...and I know he loves you too. He wouldn’t have risked telling you if he didn’t.” Martha sighed. “Now it may not matter.”

“What do you mean?”

“His powers are gone. We don’t know if they’ll ever come back,” Martha said. “That meteorite...”

Lois nodded. “Clark told me.” She looked around. “Where is Clark, anyway?”

“Went to feed the chickens with Jonathan,” Martha said.

Martha noticed Lois relax a bit. “Gives you some time to think.”

Lois smiled, taking a sip of the coffee. “Yes.” She grimaced, then set the cup down as a wave of nausea hit her.

Martha looked at her in concern. “Lois?”

Unable to say anything she sprinted toward the bathroom, slamming the door behind her. Martha watched her, then headed toward the chicken coop where Jonathan and Clark were finishing up feeding the chickens.

Jonathan laughed. “She didn’t believe you,”

“Would you have?” Clark asked. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. She’s angry...and hurt.” He kicked a few pebbles in front of him...and thanks to that...” He pointed at the barn. “On top of everything else I don’t have any powers,”

“Clark?” Martha walked up behind them.

“Hey, Mom.” Clark gave his mom a half-smile.

His mom looked at him with worry on her face. “Clark, how long has Lois been sick?”

“I don’t know...a few weeks. I told her to go to the doctor, but she refused...said it was the flu. Her sister had it for a week too but seems to have gotten over it. I just found out last night Lois was still getting sick.”

“Any mood changes?” Martha asked.

“I guess she’s a bit more sensitive lately, but she’s been sick...” Clark said, shrugging. “Why?” Martha and Jonathan exchanged glances.

“I have to go to the store...” Martha said.

“Wait a minute, you’re not going to tell me what this is all about?” Clark asked.

“We still need to confirm it, son, but it sounds to me like Lois might be pregnant,” Martha said.

“Pregnant?” Clark echoed in disbelief. The information hit him like a ton of bricks.

“I’ll be back with a test. Keep an eye on her. She’s in the bathroom...I guess the coffee didn’t sit too well on her stomach,” Martha instructed.

Lois finished heaving in the bathroom, resting her head against the tile as she cried. Why was she still sick? Her head was throbbing. She stood up to open the door and found Clark on the other side with a glass of water and some Aspirin. At her surprised look, he explained, “Mom said you got sick...”

"Thanks," she said, taking the Aspirin and water from him gratefully. After swallowing the Aspirin and drinking the water, she placed the glass down on the counter, then took a step out of the bathroom. She took a step into the hallway with Clark and winced when the throbbing headache she'd had earlier seemed to spread into her eyes.

"Are you okay?" Clark took her hands, helping guide her to the kitchen.

"It hurts..." she mumbled, leaning against him as she walked back to the kitchen.

"I'm right here..." he whispered, helping her into her seat. "Just lean on me."

"I just seem to be getting worse. These aren't flu symptoms..." Lois said, taking another glass of water that Clark handed her.

Clark grew quiet a moment. "Yeah, about that. Mom has a theory on that..." At Lois' confused look he continued. "Mom thinks you might be... pregnant."

Lois stared at him a moment, then broke into peals of laughter. "Pregnant? How can I be pregnant? I'm on the pill..."

"Lois, it makes sense. She went to get a test from the drugstore..."

"In this small town? It'll be everywhere before noon..." Lois groaned. "I can't be pregnant... I can't..." She shook her head adamantly. "There has to be some other reason."

The sound of Jonathan's old pickup truck pulling up in the driveway announced Martha's arrival. "Well, Mom's back, so I guess now we can find out."

Clark leaned against the old oak tree on his parents' property where he had built his Fortress of Solitude so many years ago. He stared out into the open space, not really looking for anything. He was going to be a father. Was he ready? Lois had taken the test three hours ago. After reading the test results she had pushed him out of the bathroom and locked herself in. He looked down at the small jewelry box in his hand. Things certainly hadn't turned out how he had planned.

He had planned on telling Lois about Superman. He had planned on trying to earn her trust back. He had planned on eventually proposing when she forgave him. He hadn't planned on being exposed to that meteorite and losing all his powers. He hadn't planned on Lois being pregnant. He hadn't planned on having to track down Trask while he was powerless to stop him from hurting the people he loved.

"Penny for your thoughts?" his father's voice interrupted. Clark looked up at his father and gave a weak smile.

"Just trying to make sense of things..." he said.

Jonathan smiled at him. "I knew you were planning on asking her to marry you, but I didn't know you'd already bought the ring."

Clark smiled. "I bought it about a month ago." His face sobered. "Now if I propose Lois is going to think I'm only asking because she's carrying my child."

"It's tricky..." Jonathan reasoned, taking a seat next to him. "How are you feeling?"

"Numb?" Clark said uncertainly, "I don't know, Dad. I've lived my whole life wishing I could be normal. Now I am... normal... I don't know what to think. It just doesn't feel right. I wish I had some answers."

"I know." Jonathan patted him on the shoulder. "Your mother and I are headed over to the festival. You two gonna join us?"

"Maybe later. I need to talk to Lois first," Clark said, standing up.

"Don't be long." Jonathan reached over to give him a hug. "Don't push things. Just take it a day at a time. We'll figure this out. If your powers never come back, then you'll adjust."

Clark gave a weak smile and nodded. "Yeah. I'll see you

later."

Numb. That's how she felt. This morning she'd been feeling better than she had in a few weeks, then she'd had the coffee... That was what had done her in. She loved coffee, but now the thought of it made her want to hurl. That should have been a sign, right? How had this happened?

She wasn't sure what to think about anything. Clark wasn't who she thought he was. Over the last few months they had known one another, she had formed an opinion about who Clark was. He was a farm boy from Kansas who was well traveled and educated, gorgeous, honest, and trustworthy. Now she had no idea who he really was. Was it all an act? Had he been acting the way he thought she wanted him to?

Martha had said Clark had always been alone, unable to open himself up to anyone. He had seemed perfectly open with her. She kept replaying the last few months over in her mind. Clark had made a few comments during the early days of their partnership that had hinted at something more. Why had she been so blind? She had melted every time she had seen that smile. How could she not have figured it out earlier?

'Because you were too busy trying to deny your feelings and squashing the fact that you were attracted to Superman.' Her conscience chided her. She had been horrified when she had realized she'd been fantasizing about both Clark and Superman. Now it made sense. Her subconscious must have picked up on it. Why hadn't she seen it? Clark had always kept his glasses on. She'd hardly ever seen him without his glasses. They'd only made love one time without him wearing them; the night she had surprised him in the shower. Even then she had noticed he looked familiar, but she'd been too distracted to give it a second thought.

Now she was pregnant. She didn't know what to think or do. She wasn't ready to be a mother. She knew that much. Clark would certainly be a great father; he was great with kids... as Clark... and as Superman.

She looked down at the test in front of her for the millionth time. "How had this happened?" she muttered to herself.

Her body was going to be changing. She was going to have to cut back on her career and focus on her baby. She could pretty much kiss the idea of a Pulitzer goodbye. She stood in front of the bathroom mirror, looking at her reflection. She had a small pillow tucked under her dress, fingering the bump gently, imagining a child growing there. "Not exactly mother material," she muttered to herself. She wasn't showing yet, but she knew sooner or later she was going to.

"Lois?" Clark's voice echoed from the other side of the bedroom door.

"Just a minute," she called. "Shoot." She pulled the pillow out from under her dress and threw it back on the bed. She turned to check her reflection in the mirror once more. She looked a lot better than she felt. She opened the bedroom door. "Hi."

He looked so forlorn. Was he upset about the baby or losing his powers? It was hard to say. "Hi. Can I come in?" he asked.

"Yeah," Lois said, stepping back. "It is your room."

"Mom and Dad already left for the festival," Clark said. "I told them we'd meet up later. What's your plan with Sherman? Should we keep looking for Wayne or go confront her?"

Lois shook her head. He was trying to stick to safe topics. That was okay. It was probably better this way. "If we confront her she'll just feed us the same line. We should probably check around town. Maybe see if anyone's seen signs of Trask..." Lois took a seat next to Clark on the bed. "Kinda scary, huh?"

Clark let out a light laugh. "You can say that again. I spent most of my childhood in this room wishing I was normal and now here I am wishing I had my powers back. Kinda ironic, huh?"

"Still nothing?" Lois asked hesitantly.

Clark shook his head. "This isn't exactly how I had planned

for the weekend to go.”

Lois gave a weak smile. “Yeah, well, it’s not exactly how any of us really planned anything.”

“Are you still mad at me?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I mean, I’m trying really really hard to stay mad, but it’s not easy when my emotions are all over the place like this.” Clark shot her a light smile. “I’m an investigative reporter. How did I not figure this out?”

“It wasn’t easy staying one step ahead of you, Lois. You kept me on my toes from the beginning. I thought for sure when I flew you back to the Planet you were going to figure it out,” Clark said. “I don’t know if you noticed, but I landed us right by your desk.”

Lois shook her head. “I think I was still in shock,” Lois reasoned.

“You know you can hit me if you want. I won’t take offense. Just let your anger out...it’s free for all...” He gave her a megawatt smile.

Lois laughed. “I’m not going to hit you, Clark.”

“What can I do? Please tell me. I hate seeing you like this. Tell me what to do.”

“I don’t know. I mean, I’m trying to wrap my mind around all this. I mean, you lied to me and...”

“Hey, I never actually lied. I was very careful about that,” Clark corrected.

“Omission is lying,” Lois said. “I understand why you did what you did”

“You do?” he asked hopefully.

“But I don’t like being lied to. I mean, I thought I knew you, then all of a sudden everything I thought is wrong.” The tears began to fall down her cheek all at once. Clark pulled her to him as she continued, “You were the only one I could trust and now that trust is broken.”

“I’m sorry,” Clark whispered, holding her close.

She involuntarily shivered against his touch. Even when she was angry and hurt she couldn’t hide from the obvious effect he had on her. “I never meant to hurt you, but you do know me. The only thing I left out was the whole superhero thing. Everything else was the truth.”

“You were taught to dance by a Nigerian princess?”

“Yes. You remember that?”

“That night’s kinda been seared into my mind for more reasons than one,” Lois said shyly.

“I’m hoping you remember that night for good reasons.”

“The jury’s still out on that one,” she said. “You do realize this means you owe me an exclusive, right?”

“Exclusive?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yes, exclusive. Whenever your powers return I want every exclusive on Superman.”

Clark let out a light laugh. “How did I know that was coming?”

“Hey, I should get something out of the deal,” Lois said. “I want that Pulitzer by the time I’m thirty. Sorry, ‘Clark Kent is Superman’ just won’t sell papers as good as a ‘Superman helped put Lex Luthor behind bars’ story.” Clark let out a hearty laugh.

She knew he had been afraid of exposure. That was probably why he had kept moving around. “I love you,” he said, cupping her cheek.

“I love you too, but I reserve the right to be mad at you as long as I want whenever it suits me.”

“As long as you don’t hate me, I don’t care. You can be mad at me as long as you want,” Clark said. She caught his gaze. There was that look. He blushed, then looked away for a minute. “How are you feeling? Have you gotten sick anymore?”

“Not since this morning. I can’t believe coffee made me sick,” Lois said.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

She patted his leg lightly, then stopped when she noticed the

heated gaze she received. She watched him as he silently counted to ten under his breath. It was amusing to watch the effect she had on Clark. “Are you okay?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he said hurriedly. “So, you want to head out to the festival or...”

This was ridiculous. They were acting like a pair of teenagers that hadn’t ever been past first base. She loved him. She wasn’t completely over him lying to her, but she wasn’t going to walk on eggshells around him either. She reached up and grabbed both sides of his face, pulling him down to kiss her mid-sentence.

She leaned back against the mattress as she pulled Clark on top of her. She moaned in approval as she felt his hand cup her face, tracing the outline of her jaw. She loved kissing Clark. She lightly traced a path through his hair with her fingertips, enjoying the feel of his hair against her hands. He moaned into her mouth as she lightly tugged on his bottom lip with her teeth. She lightly teased him with the tip of her tongue; inviting him to explore her mouth. “Clark...” she moaned against him.

Oh, God, she needed this. She needed to lose herself in his arms. It didn’t matter how mad she may still be. She needed to feel his skin against hers. She was hurting. She was scared. The only thing she knew was how good it felt in his arms.

He slowly broke off the kiss. “Are you still mad?” he asked. She looked away, unable to form a response. “I’m sorry.”

“I know,” she whispered hoarsely, unable to hide the tears. Why did he have to stop? If they’d just kept kissing...she wouldn’t have had to think about her anger. She looked up at him sorrowfully. “I just have to work through it.”

He sighed, pulling away from her. “Well, how about we head into town. Maybe a little research will help you work through it.” Clark smiled as he got up from the bed and began to get dressed, silently willing his body to calm down.

Lois sighed. She didn’t know how long it was going to take to work through her anger and hurt, but it was worth a shot.

Trask stared down Wayne Irig, who was sitting handcuffed to a chair. “Mr. Irig, do I look like a five-year-old?”

“No...no...no, sir...” Irig stammered.

Trask slammed his hands down on the table in front of Irig. “Then why do you insist on telling me fairy tales. A meteorite doesn’t just leave a small chunk in the ground. Where is the rest of it?”

“I...I...I don...I don’t know...”

“Did you give it to someone?”

“No...”

“Bury it?”

“No...”

“There wasn’t any more. That was it...”

“Don’t lie to me!” Trask slammed his fist down on the table.

Irig jumped, startled by the power behind Trask’s fist. “I don’t know wh...what...to...tell...you...There isn’t...anymore..”

“Do you love your country, Mr. Irig?”

“Of course.”

“Then I suggest you figure out where the rest of that meteorite wandered off to.”

“You hungry?” Clark asked as they walked through Smallville’s Town Square.

“A little,” Lois acknowledged.

“Maisie’s is just around the corner,” Clark said, pointing at a small café. “I figured after last night you’re probably sick of barbecue.”

Lois gave a light grimace. “How’d you guess?”

Clark wrapped a protective arm around her and they took a seat at one of the outdoor tables. “So, you think Trask has Irig in one of those tents or maybe somewhere away from Smallville entirely?”

Lois sighed, pulling out her notes from the day before and her cell phone and placing it on the table. “I don’t know. Knowing Trask he could have Irig thousands of feet up in the air about to throw him out of a plane.” Lois noticed the solemn look on Clark’s face. “I’m sorry, Clark. I wasn’t thinking. I haven’t heard any planes or anything. I don’t think he’d try that again..”

Clark placed his hand over hers. “It’s okay.”

Maisie, the owner of the café, approached them with a huge smile. “Clark Kent! Your mom said you were here for the Daily Planet. So, this must be Lois?” She held a hesitant hand out for Lois to shake.

“How’d you guess?” Lois asked, resignedly.

“I’m Maisie. How is the writing coming? I love to read a good romance novel,” Maisie said.

Lois glared at Clark, who had the decency to blush. “I must have accidentally mentioned it to my mother. She must have...”

“...accidentally mentioned it to the whole town?” Lois prompted.

Maisie just laughed. “Oh, that’s just Smallville for you. Everybody knows everything about everybody else.”

“Oh, really? Then how come I haven’t heard any dirt on Clark here yet.” Lois glared at Clark from across the table.

Maisie gave a light laugh. “With Clark here? What you see is what you get.” She handed them two menus. “Here you go. I’ll be back in a jiff.”

“What you see is what you get?” Lois asked. She opened the menu and muttered, “Yeah, right. If she only knew...”

Clark laughed then reached for the legal pad Lois had on the table. He flipped the page to review the notes they had taken thus far when a sharp pain hit his finger. “Ow!”

“What?” Lois asked, looking up from the menu.

“I’m...bleeding.” He looked at his finger in astonishment.

Lois glanced at his finger and shook her head. “Clark it’s a paper cut. Just stick it in your mouth and suck on it.” Clark did as instructed.

Lois’ cellular phone rang; both reached for the phone, causing a glass of water to get spilled in Clark’s lap. “Ah!” Clark stood up, brushing the ice water off of him.

“Sorry,” Lois apologized as she answered the phone. “Lois Lane.” The voice on the end of the phone was unfamiliar.

“Yeah, I got a call saying Clark Kent was looking for me... This is Wayne Irig.”

“Mister Irig!?! Where are you?” She motioned for Clark to listen in on the call. He took a seat next to her and she positioned the phone so he could hear.

“I think I’m just outside of Salt Lake City.”

“Salt Lake City?!?”

“I just got in my Winnebago and decided to visit my sister. Been on the road so long, hardly know where I am.”

Lois glanced at Clark. He shook his head no. Something was definitely up. “Mr. Irig, I’m going to put you on the phone with Clark.” She handed Clark the phone.

“Hello, Wayne?” Clark spoke hesitantly on the phone. “Can you give me a phone number where I can call you back?”

“I can’t see one here. I’m at a truck stop.”

“What did the EPA guys tell you about the work they’re doing on your property?” Clark asked. He may not be able to hear anything with his super-hearing but he could pick up on the nervous tone in Wayne Irig’s voice.

“Just that they needed to do some digging.”

“Wayne, is everything okay?” Clark asked.

“There’s no problem...Listen, it looks like somebody else needs to use the phone. Goodbye, Clark.”

“Wait! Wayne!” The line was cut off. He put the phone down. “Salt Lake City?”

“That’s where he said he was calling from. But it could’ve been anywhere,” Lois reasoned.

“All right, you two ready to order?” Maisie asked, walking up to their table.

Lois placed her menu down. “Yes, I’d like a chicken breast sandwich, on sourdough with a slice of onion...” Clark stared in horror as she listed off her complex order. In the several months they had been working together, he had never seen her put away that much food, “...also extra mayonnaise and some Dijon Mustard on the side. ...and lots of dill pickles. Oh, and some chocolate cream pie...and a basket of fries...”

“And to drink?” Maisie asked.

“Sweet tea, lime if you have it. If not, lemon is fine,” Lois said sweetly.

“Clark?” Maisie asked, amused.

“Uh, just a burger and fries,” Clark said, dumbfounded.

“Soda.”

“Sure thing,” Maisie said. She left to go put their order in. He couldn’t suppress the smile that spread across his face.

“What?” Lois asked.

“Nothing. It’s just nice to see you’ve finally kicked that diet.” Lois smacked him lightly.

They walked through the attractions, eating caramel apples. “Not as good as Mrs. Irig’s.” Clark sighed.

“If you won’t finish it, I will,” Lois teased, reaching for his apple.

“Here.” Clark handed her the apple.

Lois took the apple gratefully, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. These are delicious!” She took another bite of the apple. Clark watched her with an amused look.

“Lois, can I borrow you for just a sec?” Rachael asked, approaching them from behind.

“Depends...where am I going?” Lois asked suspiciously.

“You ask too many questions. Come on, it’ll be fun.” Rachael tugged on her arm.

Lois looked at her suspiciously then back at Clark. He just nodded. “Go on. You might surprise yourself and actually have fun.”

“Fine.” Lois rolled her eyes. “Let’s go.” She followed Rachael to the booth marked, “Husk Off,” unsure what the term really meant.

Clark took a seat at one of the picnic tables with his parents. “How’s Lois doing?” Martha asked.

“She’s fine. She’s getting a taste of Smallville hospitality from Rachael,” Clark said.

“How’s she taking everything?” Jonathan asked.

“She’s fine. She’s still a little hurt I didn’t tell her before but she understands.” Clark sighed, “She’s not going to tell anyone if that’s what you’re worried about, Dad.”

“I was talking about the baby,” Jonathan said. “This can’t be easy for either of you.”

Clark sighed. “We haven’t really talked about it. She kinda shoved me out of the room before I could even open my mouth to say anything once the test read positive.”

“I guess your mother should go into the medical field,” Jonathan mused.

“Nah, I’d get bored after a month.” Martha laughed. “How are you feeling, Clark? Any sign of your powers returning?”

“No.” Clark sighed. “I’m starting to wonder if they’ll ever return.”

Martha and Jonathan glanced at one another, worry written on their faces.

“He didn’t!” Lois laughed as she walked with Rachael through the crowd. The Husk Off had actually been fun. Rachael was good company. She understood now why Clark was friends with her.

“Yep, dumped her right in the middle of the Pep Rally for

everyone to see. You should have seen the look on her face. She still tries to maintain that Clark was in love with her and just couldn't handle the commitment. Yeah, right." Rachael snorted.

Lois gave a weak smile. Clark seemed to be committed to her, but how long would that last? Would he still be committed to her when she was as big as a whale? "Um, Rachael, I think I'm going to go find Clark."

"Okay. Thanks. That was fun. We'll catch up later," Rachael said.

Lois scanned the crowd for Clark but didn't find any sign of him. She looked around at the various booths and still saw no sign of him. Then she spotted Martha around the corner at the "Test Your Strength" meter. She turned the corner and approached her. Sure enough, Clark and Jonathan were with her. The top of the meter read, "Superman" and the bottom read, "Wimp." Clark had just struck the meter with the mallet and the ball had reached "Very Strong." Clark was obviously trying to test to see if his powers were returning at all.

"Want another shot?" Barker, the attendant, asked.

"No." Clark sighed resignedly.

"Maybe you just need a bit of good luck. Come on, that was so close." Lois handed Barker another ticket. "Here."

"Okay. Here goes nothing." Clark took a step back and hefted the hammer up, giving it a good swing before he brought it down. He and Lois watched in anticipation. The ball moved up...up...almost. He was just a hair off of reaching 'Superman.'

"All right, Clark, let's make this a day to remember." She pulled out another ticket and handed it to Barker, then leaned over to give Clark a kiss for good luck.

Clark hefted the hammer up once more, giving it a little more swing, then slamming down once more. The ball moved up...up...DING. Superman! Clark lifted his arms in triumph, turning to face Lois, who wrapped him in an enthusiastic hug. She leaned up to kiss him, eliciting a moan from him.

"Ahem," Barker interrupted, holding two stuffed dolls before them. "You get your choice." A teddy bear with an arrow running through it and a plush Superman doll. Clark looked at Lois expectantly. She hesitated for a moment, then reached for the bear.

They walked through the crowd, arms around one another. "He is so cute," Lois crooned, hugging the bear to her chest.

"Yeah, I don't think you have to worry about him being stabbed. He's already got an arrow through his chest," Clark teased.

Lois smacked him with the bear. "That's not funny."

Clark laughed. "Hey, you do have a knack for trouble."

"Trouble, huh?" She leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arms around his neck, allowing him to deepen the kiss. He reluctantly pulled away, reminded that they were still in public. The strands of Brooks n' Dunn's "Boot Scoot n' Boogie" began to play. Lois noticed everyone lining up to dance. "Give it a whirl?" she asked.

"You sure you can keep up?" he teased.

"I'm sure if I can't you can teach me..." Lois said, tugging on his arm. "Come on, it'll be fun."

"Lois, I haven't Tush Pushed in years..." he began.

"Come on!" She pulled him to her. "You were the one telling me to have fun. Now I want to dance."

Clark sighed and lead her out on the dance floor. "Okay okay. Just kinda watch what everyone else is doing." He pointed.

They began to move to the music. He watched in amazement as Lois' hips moved in perfect rhythm with the music. "You know how to do this?"

Lois blushed, looking up at him as she spun around. "Last year I had a friend convince me it was a great way to meet guys."

"Was it?"

"Define guys..." She laughed.

The end of the song was announced with the applause from the dancers in the crowd. The band changed tempo and began

playing a softer melody. Clark pulled her to him as many of the dancers began finding partners to dance with.

Dancin' in the dark, middle of the night

Takin' your heart and holdin' it tight

Emotional touch, touchin' my skin

And asking you to do what you've been doin' all over again

Oh it's a beautiful thing, don't think I can keep it all in

I just gotta let you know what it is that won't let me go

Lois rested her head against Clark's chest, listening to the words as their bodies swayed in tune with one another. "I love this song," she murmured. She felt his arms tighten against her waist.

"So, Smallville isn't what you expected, huh?" Clark asked.

"No, definitely not," Lois said, linking her arms around his neck.

It's your love

It just does something to me

It sends a shock right through me

I can't get enough

And if you wonder

About the spell, I'm under

Oh it's your love

"Clark?" Lois looked up at him hesitantly.

"Hmm?" he asked.

"How do you feel about everything? I mean, are you happy about..." she lowered her voice as she whispered, "the baby?"

He pulled her to him, kissing her soundly. "It was a bit of a shock, but I am happy about it. You kinda pushed me out of the room before I could say anything," he pointed out.

Lois blushed. "I'm sorry about that. I kinda freaked." She then pulled him down to her level, "You're sure you're not still freaking out? Because it's okay if you are," she asked hesitantly. "Because I'm feeling I don't know...a bit taken aback. I mean this is huge. We didn't plan this and I have no idea what to do. I mean, you haven't met my parents..." She rambled on. Clark leaned down to kiss her.

"We'll be fine," he whispered against her lips.

Better than I was, more than I am

And all of this happened by taking your hand

And who I am now is who I wanted to be

And now that we're together,

I'm stronger than ever

I'm happy and free

Oh it's a beautiful thing,

Don't think I can keep it all in

If you asked me why I've changed,

All I gotta do is say your sweet name

"I love you, Lois Lane," he whispered, holding her tightly against him. They were hardly moving; just swaying to the music as one.

It's your love

It just does something to me

It sends a shock right through me

I can't get enough

And if you wonder

About the spell, I'm under

Oh, it's your love

The song finally ended and they reluctantly pulled apart, moving off the dance floor. "I'm a little tired. Dancing takes a lot out of you." Lois sighed, nestling herself up against his chest.

"Here. Let's sit down," Clark pointed out. Lois took a seat on the bench; Clark sat behind her on the edge of the table. "Better?" He asked as Lois leaned up against him.

"Mmm hmm," Lois said.

"Hey, you two, I think I got something on the mess at Irig's," Rachael said, approaching them with a stack of folders. She took a seat next to them and laid out the papers she had.

"What's this?" Lois asked.

"This is a copy of the order we were given. They're claiming to be from a Federal Agency called 'Bureau 39'...whatever that is." She pulled out a copy of the government I.D. "This is the guy in charge. Jason Trask. No one's seen Wayne since Friday. My guess is he's with these guys."

Clark grimaced. "Rachael, you need to get some officers down to Wayne's property. Trask is bad news. Don't go in there unarmed. He's a loose cannon."

"I thought Bureau 39 was shut down," Lois said, confused.

"Maybe Trask is acting on his own," Clark mused, "From what those reports in Washington said, they were getting rid of Trask when he shot George Thompson."

Rachael frowned. "So, what? He's impersonating a federal agent? That's against the law."

"Last time we dealt with him we were thrown out of a plane," Lois added.

Rachael's eyes widened to the size of saucers. "*WHAT???*"

"Yeah, thank God Superman showed up when he did," Lois said, patting Clark's leg as she spoke.

"Okay, I'm gonna get on this," Rachael said, standing up to leave. She stopped cold when she saw a certain blonde standing behind her. "Great."

"Clark, I didn't know you were back in Smallville." Lana pushed past Rachael and took a seat next to Clark.

"Uh, hi, Lana." Clark made sure he kept his arms wrapped securely around Lois from behind; sending the message loud and clear that he was with Lois. He leaned down to whisper in Lois' ear, "Get ready for fireworks." Lois nodded, turning back to look at him.

Lana seemed to notice Rachael standing next to them. "Rachael, don't you have a pig to untie or something?"

Rachael glared at Lana. "Let me check." She walked up to Lana and began to circle her. "No, you don't look tied up to me."

Lana rolled her eyes and turned her attention back to Clark. "I haven't seen you for so long. What have you been up to? You hardly ever come to Smallville anymore..." Lana patted his knee lightly; Clark stiffened.

Lois glared at Lana. Who did she think she was touching Clark like that? Only *she* was allowed to touch him like that. She glanced up at Clark who was looking very uncomfortable. Maybe she should try to make him relax and maybe put Ms. Lana Lang in her place as well...

"Uh, Lois and I are here on assignment from our paper," Clark began uneasily. He bit his lower lip when he felt Lois lightly trace the muscles of his inner thigh with her thumb. He glared at her; she just smiled up at him innocently. What was she doing?

"Oh, that's right, you're working for the Daily Planet." She patted him on the chest, earning her a glare from Lois. "What's it like living in Metropolis?" She patted his knee again, causing him to stiffen once more. This time she left her hand there a little longer. He shifted away from her. Lana really wasn't getting the hint. He really didn't understand why she couldn't just leave him alone. Avoiding her was one of the reasons he'd avoided the town festivals while he'd been traveling.

Lois took this opportunity to speak up, "Excuse me, Lana, is it?"

"Yes." She smiled sweetly.

"Hi, Lois Lane." She held her hand out for Lana to shake.

"And I care because?" Lana prompted with a smirk.

"Yeah, see, I come from a family of very possessive women. If you don't keep your hands to yourself, you're going to pull back a nub...Got it?" Lois snapped between gritted teeth. Clark had to fight to control the laughter that had threatened to overtake him. "It was nice meeting you, though." He couldn't believe what Lois had just said. The look on Lana's face was priceless and the possessive tone Lois had taken on was intriguing.

Lana glared at Lois for a moment. "Excuse me?" She half laughed. "I'm just being friendly."

"Oh, is that what they call it now?" Lois challenged. She moved her hands up behind her. Clark's eyes widened as he fought to suppress a moan, covering it up by coughing. What was she doing? Didn't she know what that would do to him?

"Loiss..." he hissed in a hushed whisper.

Lana didn't seem to notice his outburst. "You're not from around here. You wouldn't understand," Lana reassured. "Clark and I...we go way back."

"Really?"

This was torture. She was trying to kill him...

"Clark never mentioned you." Lois tip-toed her fingers against his kneecap, sending goosebumps down his spine. Clark rolled his eyes at that comment. She knew exactly what she was doing.

"Well, we dated in high school," Lana replied coolly. Lana was oblivious to what Lois was doing to him. He bit his lower lip as he fought to suppress a deep moan. There was no way he could... "So, Lois Lane? You're Clark's *work* partner?"

"Oh, we're a lot more than that," she crooned seductively, rubbing his thigh with her other hand. He gave Lana a weak smile and nod. Oh, yeah, they passed that threshold a *long* time ago.

Lana gave a weak smile. "Well, hopefully, you have better luck than I did." Nice. Lana was making digs now. He felt Lois' press against him. He let out a shuddered breath. He gave her a warning glare and she looked back at him innocently. He didn't think he could talk if he tried right now.

"Oh." Lois gave a shy smile. "Well, we've only been going out for a few months... Well, wait, almost four, isn't it?" She looked back at him for recognition. He nodded. She was definitely putting on a show.

Lana laughed nervously. "Four months?"

"Yeah, I've learned a lot in the last few months..." She gave a wicked grin to Lana. "I never knew cooking could be so much fun." Clark felt the blood rushing to his cheeks as Lois continued. He remembered how their 'cooking lessons' had always ended up. "So, what exactly was it you wanted?"

"Never mind. I can see you're busy." Lana left in a huff.

"Bye now," Lois called after her. She then turned back to face Clark. "Was it something I said?"

"You are a minx," he whispered, lowering his mouth to hers. He was dying here. All he really wanted to do right now was find the nearest secluded area and have his way with her.

"You love it..." she teased back. Oh, yeah. He loved it; he couldn't deny that.

Rachael, who had watched the exchange in silence approached them trying to hold in her laughter. "Oh, my God! I have never seen her so angry in my life! That was..." Her radio went off, distracting her. "Great. Duty calls. I'll catch you later." She then disappeared into the crowd.

Lois pulled Clark down for another kiss. "I'm hungry..." she moaned against his mouth.

"I can't move without seriously embarrassing myself," he whispered back.

Lois turned in his arms. "Let's get out of here. I want to get something to eat."

"Let's head back to the farm," he muttered in between gritted teeth. "Don't move," he warned as he held her in front of him and made his way toward the parking lot as fast as humanly possible.

"Where did we park?" Lois asked innocently.

"Hopefully nearby," Clark said in between gritted teeth.

"I still can't believe you did that," Clark muttered under his breath as they drove down the road towards the farmhouse.

"Oh, you enjoyed every minute of it," Lois teased.

"Hands to yourself," he warned as they parked.

"Fine." She sat back and leaned against the seat. "I'll behave."

“Is that possible?” he asked, opening the door. Lois noticed with amusement that he was doing everything in his power to stay as far away from her. She had to laugh. Clark was pretty cute when he was frustrated.

They entered the farmhouse and found a table full of food attached with a note. “Lois, I thought you may get hungry. Enjoy, Martha.” Lois smiled at the note. “Your mom is so sweet,” she said.

“Uh-huh.” Clark nodded, taking a seat across from her.

Lois gave a fake pout. “You don’t want to sit next to me?” she asked innocently.

He unwrapped one of the plates on the table and handed it to her. “Here. Chicken salad.”

Lois opened up one of the containers in front of her. “Brownies...” She took a bite. “Mmmmm, these are to die for,” she murmured with a soft moan.

Clark just groaned. “Lois...” he warned.

Lois pushed the plate back. “On second thought, I’m not really that hungry.” She stood up and headed for the stairs. Clark just stared at her dumbfounded for a minute. “I think I need a shower after walking all over Smallville today...” She was cut off by him grabbing her from behind, carrying her the rest of the way upstairs as she squealed in laughter.

“What do you want to do, Jonathan? I don’t even know how we’d even begin to destroy this thing. What if one of the slivers from the meteorite falls somewhere and Clark or Lois accidentally get exposed?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know. I just know we can’t keep this here. We can’t let Clark get hurt like this ever again. Clark has always been super. Ever since he was a teenager he always had these gifts...and he’s done an extraordinary thing with them...until I opened this box. Now his powers are gone. If that Trask ever got a hold of this...”

“You want to melt it down or just beat the hell out of it?” Martha asked, holding up a sledgehammer.

Lois lay against Clark’s chest, arms wrapped around him. “I should tease you in public more often,” she whispered against his lips.

“Don’t even think about it,” Clark muttered. “That was not funny.”

Lois leaned up to capture his mouth. “I thought it was very funny...Did you see the look on her face? I’m *very* possessive.”

Clark moaned against her lips as she dipped her tongue inside his mouth. “Mmmm.” His hand moved to cup her cheek as he deepened the kiss.

She always felt like she was floating when she was in his arms. She slowly broke off the kiss and began to explore the muscles of his well-defined body. Her body was beginning to feel very heavy. She moved to readjust herself then frowned when she moved to adjust her legs and didn’t feel anything beneath her.

“Clark?”

“Hmmm?”

“Um, we’re floating...”

Clark’s head jerked up and looked down. “*What??*” With a jolt, they came crashing down on the floor. “Oops!” He stopped a few millimeters away from the floor.

Lois grinned. “I want my exclusive,” she reminded him.

Perry slammed the phone down in irritation. “What in the tarnation is going on out there?” he muttered. “OLSEN!”

Jimmy raced into the office. “What’s up, Chief?”

“Any word on Lois and Clark?” Perry asked.

“Nope,” Jimmy replied, “I’ve been calling all day.”

“Oh, this isn’t good... You know how Lois’ nose for trouble is...”

“Well, her nose for trouble is usually linked with an exclusive.

Maybe you should...I don’t know...send a photographer down there ...just in case,” Jimmy suggested, hoping Perry would pick him.

“Good thinking, Jimmy. Where’s Robertson?”

“Utah.”

“Johnston?”

“City Hall covering the scandal in the mayor’s office.”

“Sevison?”

“Winnipeg.”

“Arg! Photographers! Just when you need one, you can’t find one.”

“Maybe there’s a new guy looking for an opportunity.”

Perry looked at Jimmy hesitantly. “No, Jimmy, I can’t take the chance.”

“Somebody had to take a chance on you once, didn’t they, Chief?” Jimmy pleaded.

Perry sighed, then grunted. “All right. All right. You go.”

“Yes!” Jimmy did a fist of triumph in the air. At Perry’s amused expression he straightened up. “Thanks, Chief!” He then instinctively reached over and gave Perry a hug then left.

“Jimmy!” Perry hollered.

“Yes, Chief?”

“Don’t you ever...*EVER* hug me again!”

“Yes, Chief.” Jimmy nodded with a smile then turned to leave.

“We’re tracking Irig, sir, he’s headed north towards a farmhouse .it’s owned by a Jonathan Kent,” one of the soldiers informed Trask.

“Kent?” Trask’s eyes narrowed. “How convenient.”

Martha and Jonathan stood in a secluded part of the woods with the meteorite that had caused their son so much trouble. Jonathan was beating at the rock with all his might, but it was barely phasing it.

“Nothing seems to be phasing this,” Jonathan muttered. “Hand me that ax.”

“Maybe we should try melting it again? Or maybe...I don’t know...What do we do if we can’t destroy this thing?” Martha asked as Jonathan lifted up the ax for chopping wood.

“I don’t know. I gotta try something to get rid of it. This rock could kill not only Clark, but our grandchild too. I’m not willing to risk ...”

Jonathan’s words were cut off by two armed guards approaching them from behind with their weapons drawn and aimed on them. “Oh, my!” Martha looked around trying to assess the situation. “What do you want?”

“I believe you have something that belongs to me,” Trask said.

“Everything in working order?” Lois asked nervously. She and Clark were out in the barn where Clark could test his powers out without any witnesses.

“Yeah, it looks like it.” Clark nodded. “I’m going to head over to Wayne Irig’s and see what I can find out. Stay here until my folks get back.”

“Oh, no you don’t!” Lois argued. “You are not going to leave me here while you chase the story...”

“Lois...” Clark said exasperatedly.

“We are partners. Just because I’m a little inconvenienced doesn’t mean I can’t chase the bad guys as well as you.”

“Inconvenienced?? Lois, we’re not talking about your petty criminals here. These guys have guns and could do some serious damage and...”

“Jonathan, open up!” A knock at the door interrupted their argument. Clark looked over towards the door and scanned it. “It’s Wayne Irig.” He moved to open the door. “Wayne, come in.”

“Clark! Oh, my God! We’ve got a problem...Where’s your father?” Wayne asked, looking around.

“Um, I think they’re still at the festival,” Clark said hesitantly. He wasn’t really sure where his parents were. He took a look at Wayne as he sat down. His fingers had been broken. His mouth was swollen and he had cuts and bruises all over. “My God, what happened?”

“Does he need a doctor?” Lois asked.

“Probably,” Clark said, shaking his head in disgust.

“Clark, there’s men...at my place...men with guns... They’re looking for that rock I gave your father. We’ve got to get the police. They nearly killed me. I got away...” Wayne slurred.

“We’ve already warned Sheriff Harris about Trask. Is he still over at your place?” Clark asked.

“Why don’t you ask him yourself?” a voice from behind them called out.

Clark turned around to face Trask, taking a step protectively in front of Lois. “Trask.”

“What do you want? What are you doing here in Smallville?” Lois asked.

“So many questions...I think you already know the answers to them don’t you, Ms. Lane?” Trask asked. “Where’s Superman?”

“I told you before Superman hasn’t ever been in Smallvi...”

Trask slapped Irig across the face.

“Don’t lie to me!”

“That’s enough!” Clark hissed. “This ends now!” Clark took a step towards Trask.

“You know for someone in such a precarious predicament you talk a mean game, Mr. Kent. That almost sounds like a threat. Would your parents approve of you threatening a Federal Agent?”

“My parents?” Clark asked slightly taken aback.

“You’re not a federal agent, Trask. You’re a fraud, a phony! You’re insane! That’s why they kicked you out!” Lois snapped.

“You are really starting to piss me the hell off,” Trask warned. “Get her out of my sight,” he ordered.

“No!” Clark blocked the agent from moving towards Lois.

“Ah, protecting your girlfriend. Very noble of you.” Trask nodded. “Take the old man out back. Wouldn’t want to traumatize him any more than absolutely necessary.” Clark watched nervously as two guards grabbed a hold of Wayne Irig and drug him out of the barn.

“Leave him alone. He hasn’t done anything,” Clark pleaded.

“Oh, but he has. Protecting you and your girlfriend...that’s treason, Superman.” Trask’s eyes narrowed as he advanced towards Clark. Clark stood firmly in place, not showing any emotion to give himself away to Trask.

Jimmy pulled up to what appeared to be the residence of Wayne Irig. He pulled out his camera and strode up the dirt road, looking around. Ready himself to take some shots of the scene before him, he knelt down and began snapping shots.

“Hey, you can’t be here!” an officer approached him.

“I-I’m looking for my friends Lois Lane and Clark Kent...” Jimmy stammered.

“This is private property. We’re in the middle of an investigation,” the officer sneered. “No press.”

“Hey, Dwayne, cool it.” Rachael approached them from behind. “Did you mention Clark Kent?”

“Yeah, I’m trying to find them. We haven’t heard from them and we started getting worried. That usually means trouble...”

Rachael laughed. “Well, from what I saw at the festival earlier they may just be preoccupied.”

“You don’t know Lois,” Jimmy said, shaking his head.

Rachael sighed. “You’re welcome to take a look around and see if you can find them here, but I think they’re probably at Clark’s parents’ house. It’s just up the road.”

Jimmy nodded. He sniffed the air, smelling smoke. “What’s that smell? You guys barbecuing?”

Rachael shook her head. “No.”

“Help!” A cry for help reached their ears.

Rachael noticed the smoke coming from the wooded area on Irig’s property. “Call the fire department NOW!” Rachael ordered.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Trask!” Lois snapped, trying to move forward to face him, but she found herself blocked by Clark’s arm.

“Oh? Well, according to your parents’ little heart-to-heart out in the woods while they were attempting to destroy the meteorite I’ve been searching for; both Clark here... and ... What did they say? Oh, yes, their *grandchild*... could be affected by the meteorite. No one else seems to have any adverse effects to it. My only conclusion is that you *are* Superman... and Ms. Lane here has committed treason by procreating with an *alien*...” Trask sneered.

Clark got a faraway look in his eyes, as his super hearing picked up his mother’s cry for help. “Where are my parents?” Clark hissed out.

“Enjoying some quality time together by the fire.” Trask grinned, taking another step forward. “Shall we test it out?” He pulled out the lead box of Kryptonite he was carrying behind him and set it down. Clark stared at the box nervously, anticipating the worst.

“Martha, Jonathan, are you all right?” Rachael asked, wrapping a blanket around them.

“Clark! We have to get to the farmhouse. That man... Trask... he’s going to try to kill Clark!” Martha cried.

“WHAT??” Rachael asked confused. “Why?”

“He’s insane,” Jonathan added.

“Lois get out of here, now!” Clark pushed her down to the ground. Lois found herself on the ground near the doorway. She watched in horror as Clark leaped forward to tackle Trask to the ground. The lead box fell open, exposing him to the lethal rock. Lois felt the wave of nausea hit her. She had to get out of here. As Trask stood up, brushing himself off, Lois inched her way out the door away from the lethal rock. She sighed in relief as she rested her head against the wall of the barn.

“Please no...” She pleaded silently to no one in particular. She had to do something. She couldn’t just leave Clark to fight Trask by himself. She couldn’t go back in the barn. There was no way she could handle the pain from that meteorite. She spotted the two soldiers guarding Wayne Irig by an unmarked white van. They were trying to push Wayne Irig into the van. She may not be able to help Clark right now, but she could help Mr. Irig.

“You think you’re better than human, son. Flying around, oh-so-perfect and superior. But those days are over now, aren’t they?” Trask moved the meteorite towards Clark.

Clark yelled out in pain, “Go to hell!”

Trask laughed. “Oh, this is terrific. You’re dying and still fighting me tooth and nail. It’s over. This little piece of home is going to be the death of you, Superman,” he taunted. “I’ve already taken care of the traitors that sheltered you all these years; now to take care of the bastard spawn growing inside your girlfriend.” Trask moved towards the door.

Lois...

“NO!” Using up every reserve he could find he moved to tackle Trask once more, knocking him to the ground. Trask pushed him off.

“You’re going to regret that,” he warned. He moved towards the meteorite.

Clark struggled to find the strength he needed to fight Trask. He reached for the meteorite and yelled out in pain as the rock touched his skin. He had to do this. Had to get rid of it. With all his might he threw it in the air. A loud blast could be heard from outside.

“That was very foolish, son,” Trask warned as he advanced towards Clark. “Do you really think that’s all I have?” He laughed and lunged forward towards Clark. Clark struggled to remain in control, keeping Trask at bay. A hefty punch was thrown in his direction, knocking him down once again. Trask stood up and reached for his gun. “Now to take care of unfinished business...”

At first, he thought Trask was going to shoot him. He winced, anticipating the worst, then froze when he saw Trask advancing towards the door. Lois. He was going after Lois. Summoning up all his strength, he shoved Trask to the ground, wrestling with him as they fought outside the barn. He couldn’t let Trask win. He couldn’t let him near Lois. He didn’t see her anywhere near the barn. Hopefully, she was safe.

Clark struggled against Trask, continuing to throw punches in order to fight this madman. They were getting awfully close to that pond. He stood arm against arm with Trask, facing him down as he struggled to remain standing against him. He felt his left arm begin to go. NO. He fell forward, pushing Trask with him as he fell into the water, struggling against Trask. The resistance against Trask was becoming less and less. He had him. He held Trask against the large rock that stood in the middle of the pond, throwing punch after punch. The rage inside him was overtaking him. He hated this man. He had attacked everyone he loved, then tried to kill his unborn child.

“Go...ahead...kill me...” Trask stuttered. “I want to kill you, Superman...”

“Kill!” He couldn’t kill. This wasn’t him. He couldn’t kill. He stopped. He grabbed Trask by the collar. “That’s not how I work!” The sound of sirens approaching in the background echoed through his mind as he threw the madman against the rock.

“Clark!” Lois called out, running up to him with open arms. He breathed a sigh of relief as he waded through the water, reaching down to grab the glasses that had fallen off his face during his struggle with Trask. Lois’ face changed from relief to horror. “Look out!” He turned around to see Trask holding a gun aimed at him. He held his breath, preparing for the oncoming pain.

BANG

A shot rang out. Clark turned to see Rachael at her squad car, gun aimed at Trask. “Oh, my God!” Lois ran up to him throwing her arms around him. “Are you okay?” She showered his face with kisses as he struggled to catch his breath.

“I’m fine. I’m fine. Are you...?”

“A little shaky, but that’s it,” Lois answered, holding him firmly against her.

“Clark!” His mother’s voice rang in the air. He turned to see his parents running toward him, brushing off the blankets the officers had given them. He turned to embrace his mother, who was in tears. “Oh, thank God!” she cried.

“I’m okay, Mom,” he reassured her. “I’m okay.”

He looked over at Rachael, who had just saved his life. She looked shaken. Officers were moving around the property surveying the scene. A familiar face came out of one of the squad cars. “CK! Lois! Are you okay?” Jimmy ran up to them, camera bag in tow.

“I...I’m fine, Jimmy,” Clark stammered.

“Man, CK, that was so cool! I didn’t know you had it in you!” Jimmy complimented, patting Clark on the back.

“Jimmy, what are you doing here?” Lois asked.

“The Chief thought you might need a photographer,” Jimmy said. “I ran into Sheriff Harris over at Mr. Irig’s property and...”

Wayne Irig. He remembered Trask had had him drug out of the barn by those two officers. “Wayne!” He scanned the area for his father’s friend.

“Over here!” Wayne Irig waved, walking up to them from the farmhouse.

Jonathan and Martha moved towards Wayne to check on him. Clark let out a shaky breath, holding Lois tightly against his chest,

saying a silent prayer that everyone was safe. Rachael walked up to them. “Anyone want to tell me what just happened here?”

“Sir, we’ve just received a call. Apparently, Mr. Trask suffered a fatal wound this evening,” Nigel informed Lex.

Lex puffed at his cigar. “Mmmmm, has his package arrived yet?”

“Yes. We have a large specimen of this meteorite Mr. Trask is certain will kill Superman. Where shall I store it?”

“Take it to the safe house and keep it under lock and key. I want it kept with my most prized possessions,” Lex instructed.

“Certainly,” Nigel nodded.

“I think we should use the information we acquired during testing to implement the ultimate test for Superman, don’t you, Nigel? Experiment with our new discovery. I’ve always been a fan of the scientific method.”

“Of course, sir.”

Lois lay curled up on Clark’s bed, numbly staring out the window. She had never been so scared in her life. What would possess a man to actually contemplate killing an unborn child? Her hand rested protectively over her abdomen as she struggled to fight the tears. Clark was Superman...an alien...but he was still a person. Would her child suffer from the same hatred? What if someone found out about the connection between Clark and Superman? Had Trask told anyone?

She let out a shuddered breath. Was this what it was going to be like? Worrying about Clark when he left to go rescue someone? Could she live like this? She looked down at the blood stains on her dress from where Clark had bled on her after his fight with Trask. She sat up and moved toward the bathroom. Maybe a shower would help clear her head...make her feel more alive.

“How’s Lois?” Martha asked, handing Clark a glass of water.

“She’s resting,” Clark said. “I think that exposure to that meteorite took more out of her than she’s willing to admit. I guess with the pregnancy...it affects her too.”

“I still can’t believe she was able to knock those men unconscious like that...I mean, they had *guns*,” Jonathan said, shaking his head in amusement.

Clark gave a light smile. “That’s just Lois for you.” His tone grew solemn. “Are you sure you guys are all right?”

“We’re fine, son. I’m just glad you’re okay,” Jonathan said. He noticed a far-off look in Clark’s eyes. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“When I threw that meteorite out of the barn and it exploded like that...Trask said something that kinda unnerved me.”

<< “Do you really think that’s all I have?” >>

“He indicated that there was more of that meteorite somewhere,” Clark said.

“Did he say where?” Martha asked concerned.

“No.” He shook his head. “He wanted to kill Lois because she was carrying my child,” he said hoarsely. “All I ever wanted was a normal life. Is that too much to ask for?”

“I’m afraid your life will never be normal, but you can make the most of what you do have,” Martha said, patting his shoulder.

Clark smiled weakly at his parents. “I guess. How’s Rachael? I know she was a bit shaken earlier.”

“She’s showing Jimmy around Smallville. I think she needs the distraction,” Jonathan said. “Jimmy wanted to get some shots of the festival. Something about a before and after shots.”

“I think I’m gonna try and get some rest too. It’s been a long day,” Clark said, heading towards the stairs.

Martha and Jonathan watched him in concern. “He’ll be okay,” Jonathan reassured her. “Maybe we can catch the final show at the festival. Give these two some time alone.” Martha nodded and headed out with Jonathan.

Lois stepped out of the shower, wrapped in a white towel. She wiped the steam away from the mirror with her hand. She felt a little better physically, but emotionally she still felt numb. Pregnant. She was going to be a mother. She had never pictured herself as a mother. Watching her parents' relationship deteriorate over the years had made her vow never to get married. She had been grateful that Clark hadn't tried to propose for the baby's sake. It wouldn't have been fair.

<<“Alien..”>>

Trask's words from earlier still stung. She was carrying an alien's baby. But to look at Clark you never would believe it. He seemed more human than many of the men she had encountered over the years. She lightly placed her hand over her abdomen, feeling for some kind of sign from the life inside her that everything was okay. The tears she had been suppressing overtook her. She slowly lowered herself to the floor as she gave into the tears. The pain and fear she had during their encounter with Trask had not buried itself as well as she had hoped. She silently rocked herself as she fought to remain as quiet as possible. She didn't want Clark to see her like this.

Before she knew it, two strong arms came up behind her, enveloping her in their embrace. “Shhh, it's over,” Clark whispered in her ear. She turned to face him, burying her face against his chest.

“Clark...” she cried against his chest.

“I know...” He held her close, allowing her to release whatever emotions she needed to. Her hands roamed up and down his chest as she slowly got control over her emotions. He lowered his head to rest his forehead against hers.

She let out a shuddered breath. “Every time I close my eyes I keep seeing Trask there with that rock...”

“Shhh.” He moved his hand to cup her cheek. “It's over,” he whispered.

She moved her hand up his chest and took a hold of his collar, fisting it in her palm. He moved his hand to cover hers. She looked up at him; a shuddered breath escaped her lips. She lifted her head to meet his gaze. He lowered his mouth to meet hers. She moved her hands up to pull him closer, deepening the kiss. “Clar...” she moaned against his lips.

She allowed her hands to roam up and down his chest.

“Lois...” He held her close as she pulled away, resting her head against his chest. “It's over,” he said, holding her close. “It's over.”

Later that evening Clark went to go check on Jimmy. He found him sitting on the porch swing watching the fireworks. “Hey, Jimmy.”

“Hey, CK, how you doing?” Jimmy asked. “I still can't believe the way you creamed that Trask guy.”

Clark gave a weak smile as he sat down. “The key is to keep swinging until the other guy stops.”

“Hey, CK, can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure.” He sighed.

“When do you find the time to work out? I mean, between the long hours at the Planet and...ahem... dating...Lois...How do you keep up?”

“Huh?” Clark looked down at his lightly bruised figure back up to the expectant eyes of his friend. The bruises that had been more prominent a few hours earlier were now a mere shadow of their former selves. “I don't know, Jimmy. I guess following Lois around Metropolis is enough workout for me,” Clark said.

“Yeah. She can be a handful I guess,” Jimmy said. “I still have a hard time wrapping my mind around the idea of you and Lois together...I mean, take a look at her track record...”

Clark narrowed his eyes at Jimmy. “What are you talking about?”

“Well, you know what happened with Claude, don't you? The

entire staff is always talking about it.” Jimmy sighed.

“I really don't think Lois appreciated people talking about her private life, Jimmy...especially her friends...” Clark said hinting at the dangerous territory Jimmy was treading on.

“I know I know. I never believed the garbage he spread around. What really sucked was no one could do anything about it because he was spreading it around the Press Club, not at the Planet.”

“The Press Club?” Clark winced. “So...”

“Every reporter in Metropolis heard the story. Some chose to believe it; some spread it around.”

“Why???” Clark asked furiously. “Why the hell would anyone do something like that to Lois?”

Jimmy shrugged. “I don't know. Claude was a stud and a slime ball. If you disagreed with him or tried to challenge him, he made your life hell. You know how Lois is...” Jimmy smiled. “I got a taste firsthand what it feels like to be on his bad side.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was a little drunk at the Press club and overheard Claude and his buddies talking. They were being really, really cruel and disgusting...like I said I was drunk...anyway, I went over there and got in Claude's face...called him a yellow-bellied chicken and a cheater...I got kicked out.”

“That's not good,” Clark sympathized.

“It gets better. I got to walk home with an escort...getting my ass kicked all the way home...Ever since then I haven't had the nerve to stand up to anyone else.”

“You mean Perry?” Clark asked.

“Yeah...but I think he's finally starting to see me as a real journalist. I mean he trusted me enough with this assignment.”

Clark patted him on the shoulder. “You'll get there, Jimmy. Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For being a good friend to Lois even when she didn't know it,” Clark said.

“You really care about her, don't you?” Jimmy asked.

“Yeah. I love her, Jimmy,” Clark said. “And I won't tolerate anyone mistreating her no matter what.”

Jimmy smiled at Clark. “That's good to hear. Because I don't think I could take you. If you hurt her, I'd be forced to try and kick your butt.”

Clark let out a low laugh.

Lois stood by the front door in shock. She had overheard Clark and Jimmy's entire conversation. The Press Club? That was where he had been spreading rumors about her? No wonder she'd had such a hard time containing the gossip mill. Poor Jimmy. He'd tried to stop the gossip...

Anger pulsed through her as she recalled the pain and torment she had been forced to suffer as a result of Claude's slander. She had challenged him when he had stolen her story and slander had been her punishment. No one had believed her when she had told them he had stolen it. It had been years since the incident. Why was she still crying about it? She turned to head upstairs. It was time she quit acting like a victim to Claude. She was going to be a mother. She had a man that loved her and a great career. What more did she need?

“How about a sign of commitment?” her conscience chided. She squashed the doubts down as she climbed up the stairs. This was enough. It had to be.

Lois hovered above the toilet as the nausea she had thought was gone had come back with a vengeance. “Oh, God...” she moaned, leaning her head back against the wall behind her.

“Sick again?” Clark asked, hovering by the doorway.

Lois nodded. “I was fine...” she whimpered. “Why am I sick again?”

Clark sighed. "I don't know. Morning sickness? You could actually have the flu too. You need to get in to see the doctor."

"Don't remind me." She groaned, resting her head against her knees as she let out a shaky breath.

Clark knelt down next to her and pulled her to him. "You okay to move?" he asked hesitantly.

Lois just nodded, resting her head against his shoulder. Clark slipped his arms behind her neck and knees, then lifted her up and carried her over to the bed and laid her down. He lay down behind her, wrapping a protective arm around her. "Do you think it could be a side effect of that meteorite?"

"I dunno." She sighed. "I'm too tired to think and...oh, God, we still have to write the story before we head back home tomorrow."

"Lois, calm down. We've got all day to write the story. I'm sure if you're still not up to it Perry will be a little lenient considering everything we had to deal with this weekend." He gave her a peck on the head. "Worst-case scenario we wait a bit before trying to head back to Metropolis and just email the story. Try and get some rest," he whispered.

"Mmmm hmmm," she murmured, starting to give in to the much-needed sleep she had been evading the last few days.

One Week Later...

The next week, Lois, Clark, and Jimmy sat on Lois' desk as Perry read the piece they had written on Trask's raid on Smallville. "And in the end, Jason Trask's obsession caused him to search for a mystical rock he alone imbued with destructive powers, and to confuse one reporter with the target of his fixation, Superman. He came to see this strange visitor from another planet where he was not, and to see enemies where there were none. It was an obsession that for Jason Trask would prove fatal." Perry put the paper down and shook his head. "You know I've been in the newspaper business thirty-five years, and this is the damndest story I ever heard."

"Chief, you should have been there," Jimmy said proudly. "He was beating all up on CK and they ended up in the pond duking it out..."

"Trask was so out of his mind he started beating on Clark to get to Superman," Lois said grimly, tightening her grasp on Clark's hand.

Perry nodded. "Now, Kent, I usually tell my reporters to stay out of their stories, don't get involved. But since you got into a fight with this nutcase, Trask... Well, I'm just glad you came out on top."

"Thanks, Chief," Clark said.

"He did more than come out on top, Chief. He creamed him!" Jimmy announced excitedly.

Perry shook his head. "Jimmy, you did a good job with those photos. That was good stuff."

"Really?" Jimmy beamed. "You really liked 'em?"

"Oh, yeah. Now, I need you to do something for me," Perry drawled.

"Anything," Jimmy said.

"Go down to Mazik's. Pick up my watch. They said they'd have it fixed by three." Perry handed him the company credit card. "Don't get any ideas." Jimmy nodded, his mood slightly deflated; but he did as he was asked. Perry then turned his attention back to Lois and Clark. "Now, Clark, are you sure you don't want to share the by-line on this one?"

Clark shook his head. "No, I'm too close to it. I want Lois to tell it the way she sees it."

"Well, then, Lois, I just got one note for you. This rock that Trask convinced himself was gonna hurt Superman. What's it called?"

Lois grimaced. "You want a name? Nobody can even find it. Even the sample Irig sent to the labs disappeared. I'm not sure it

existed anywhere except in Trask's mind."

"Even so, this copy'd sing a whole lot sweeter if you gave it a name," Perry said.

"Trask thought it was from the planet, Krypton... Maybe Kryptonium?" Lois suggested.

Perry shrugged. "Okay by me."

"Well, wait a minute, it's a meteorite. What about... Kryptonite?" Clark suggested.

"You two fight it out," Perry instructed. Sensing the tension between them rising, Perry headed for his office.

Lois turned around to glare at Clark. "Do you have to edit *everything*?"

"Okay, fine. I'll tell you what. Next time, you can fight the bad guy and I'll write the story," Clark shot back playfully.

Lois groaned, rolling her eyes. "Fine, Kryptonite."

"You still feeling nauseous?" he asked cautiously.

"No. It seems to have subsided, but I have an appointment next week with the doctor."

"That's good." Clark nodded. "You feel up to dinner tonight?"

"Why? Are you asking me out?" she teased, seductively running her hand down his tie.

"Yes." He grinned back at her. "So, you want to have dinner with me?"

Lois smiled back at him. "Sure. It's not like I have any huge plans tonight."

"I'll pick you up at seven," he whispered, leaning in for a kiss.

Brian, one of the Planet's researchers, approached them.

"Ahem..." He cleared his throat, trying to get their attention.

Reluctantly, they pulled away from one another. "Yes?" Lois turned to face her intruder impatiently.

"Perry said you guys were supposed to cover the opening of that new supermarket on Third." He handed her a file. "Have fun."

Lois took the file grudgingly, "A supermarket opening?" Brian left, leaving Lois and Clark to go over the file in peace.

"They can't all be big stories," Clark said reassuringly.

"Cost Mart?" Lois read the file. "Why does that name sound familiar?"

"I think it was..." Clark grabbed a paper from his desk. "Here. It's on the list of department stores we were researching in possible connection with Intergang."

Lois smiled. "This is more like it. I knew Perry wouldn't assign us to something unworthy of our time..." The sound of the silent alarm at a nearby bank reached Clark's ears and he got a far-off look in his eyes. "Clark?" She waved her hand in front of his face. "Hello? Earth to Clark!"

"Sorry," he whispered. "I gotta go, Lois. Bank alarm." He gave her a quick peck on the cheek and left.

"But..." she sighed, watching him leave. She turned to the folder on her desk. "Well, I guess it's just you and me."

"What's wrong? Your boyfriend getting bored with you already?" Ralph teased, sauntering up to her desk.

"What do you want, Ralph? I'm busy," she said gesturing to the stack of papers in front of her.

"Yeah, yeah. All work and no play, right? Listen, I was wondering if you wanted to go out for drinks at the Metropolis Press Club?" Ralph asked.

"I have plans," Lois replied coolly.

"Plans? Oh, you mean a romp with your partner?" Lois' head shot up and she glared at Ralph. Ralph had been one of Claude's friends during his time at the Planet. He had made no attempt to have conversations with her unless he was trying to ask her out. He was one of the many men she had shot down over the years after the fiasco with Claude.

She could feel her blood boiling. Maybe he just needed a good punch in the gut to shut up. "Did you really think nobody had noticed? I mean, I figured it was only a matter of time. I mean, how long had it been since you had yourself some fun anyhow? I

mean, from what Cluny said you didn't know how to ..." He ignored the look of death Lois was shooting him and continued, "I mean, come on, everyone knows you were throwing yourself at Cluny. How long did it take you to jump Kent? OW!!"

"Oh, whoops! Sorry, Ralph." Clark accidentally spilled the cup of hot tea in his hand on Ralph. "Didn't see you there."

"Man, don't sneak up on a guy like that, Kent!" Ralph snapped, brushing the coffee off his jacket.

"That looks pretty bad. You should get that looked at," Lois said, eyeing the redness on Ralph's hand.

"Yeah," Ralph muttered, stalking off.

"So, Cost Mart is owned by Bill Church. That's one of Perry's golfing buddies. He could probably set up an interview for us," Lois said, turning to the assignment on hand as she tried to brush off Ralph's lewd comments towards her.

"Lois..." Clark placed a hand on her shoulder.

"I don't know how much good it'll do. I mean, it's hard to read criminals in an interview... Sometimes they're too good at hiding... others... they hide their guilt really well..."

"Honey..." Clark pulled up the chair next to her desk, taking a seat next to her.

Lois looked back at him. "What did you just say?"

Clark grinned back at her. "Lois," he repeated slyly.

Lois smirked at him. "After that,"

"Honey," he whispered softly, cupping her cheek.

She smirked back at him, forgetting her tirade temporarily. "That's the first time you've ever called me that." She placed a finger on the knot of his tie, tracing the length of it to his belt. "Say it again." She grinned impishly up at him.

Clark looked at her with a huge grin on his face. "Honey," he repeated.

She grinned, tracing the outline of his tie. "That's amazing. I like it." She leaned up to kiss him, forgetting temporarily they were in the middle of the newsroom. After hearing the whistling from the on looking co-workers she pulled away slightly.

"Ooops," Clark said.

She grinned, unfazed by the stares as she toyed with the left lapel of his jacket. "I never thought of myself as a 'honey.' What is happening to me?" She pulled him closer. "So, you got any other names in mind?"

Lois seemed unaffected by the audience that was watching them, but Clark wasn't. He whispered back, cupping her cheek as he traced her jaw with his thumb. "Sweetheart... Darlin... My little... tornado..." he whispered huskily. She'd definitely forgotten about Ralph and his tirade, but having so many people watch him and Lois...

She leaned up to kiss him again, slipping her tongue inside the inner confines of his mouth. "That's original..." she whispered.

"So are you..." he whispered against her lips. "Lois..." he pulled away slightly. "Everyone's watching..."

She smiled impishly up at him. "Yeah, who cares..." she recaptured his lips once more. If this last week had taught her anything it was to live life to the fullest. She wasn't going to let Ralph or the Daily Planet gossip grapevine keep her from kissing Clark when she wanted or touching him when she wanted. She loved him and he loved her.

The past week had been spent trying to come to grip with the fact that Clark Kent was the same superhero that had saved her so many times, but after the incident with Trask, none of that seemed important anymore. She'd almost lost him.

"Are you okay?" he asked, concerned as they slowly broke off the kiss.

Realizing he was referring to Ralph and his tirade earlier, she pulled away slightly and shrugged. "I'm fine." She laughed lightly to prove her point.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I'm fine, really, Clark. I quit letting people like Ralph get to

me a long time ago," Lois said.

"But the things he was saying..."

"It comes with the territory, I'm afraid," Lois said. "I told you before. Claude ruined my reputation..."

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"You didn't do anything," she reassured him. "But thank you for shutting him up for me."

"My pleasure," he replied grimly.

"Everything go okay at the..." She gave a flying symbol with her hand. "You know..."

"Yeah. A couple of petty thieves," he replied. "So, let's get started on this piece." He indicated the folder in front of them. Lois nodded, grateful to be turning back to a safe topic.

Clark stared at his screen grimly. Claude Cluny was becoming a menacing shadow in his and Lois' lives. He pulled up the story he had stolen from Lois so many years ago. It was a piece on gun-runners in the Congo. The entire style of writing just screamed Lois. He looked over Cluny's other work and found no sign of extraordinary pieces by the man. Lois would probably kill him for meddling in her life like this, but after listening to Ralph speak to Lois like that... He couldn't sit back and do nothing. Claude Cluny was going down.

He scanned the newsroom for Lois. She still hadn't gotten back from lunch with Lucy. He spotted Perry in his office. He made his way over to Perry's office, knocking lightly on the door. "Chief? You got a minute?"

"Sure, son, come on in." Perry waved him in. Clark nodded, closing the door behind him. "What's on your mind, son?"

"An article that was written a few years back..." Clark said grimly.

"An article?" Perry's face scrunched up in confusion. "What article?"

"This one." Clark laid the copy of Claude's article on Perry's desk. "I've been working with Lois for months, Chief. I'd know her writing style anywhere."

Perry picked up the paper and began to scan it. "Yeah, I remember this. It was when Lois first got promoted to the city beat."

"Chief, he stole her story and then won an award for it," Clark muttered grimly.

Perry's expression grew sour. "It definitely would appear so... This was during the time Alice and I had taken a trip up to Graceland. Phil Roland was filling in for me at the time... Why didn't Lois ever say anything to me?"

Clark's eyes narrowed. "Because she didn't want to make things worse than what he'd already done to her."

"What are you talking about?" Perry asked, confused.

"Chief, I just walked in on Ralph making jabs at Lois... talking about how Cluny had..." He closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose as he tried to suppress his anger.

"You talking about all that garbage being spread around the Press Club?" Perry asked.

"Yeah," Clark nodded.

"He stole her story?" Perry shook her head. "I'm ashamed I didn't pick up on it before now. What do you want me to do?"

"I want Lois to be given the credit for that story and Cluny to be exposed for the lying mongrel he really is," Clark said.

Perry smiled, "You know she's going to kill us both when she finds out we're meddling in her business."

"I know," Clark said.

"You really love her, don't you, son?"

"Yeah," Clark smiled. "I do."

"I'll make some calls... try to be discreet about it," Perry said.

"Thanks, Chief."

"You're pregnant?" Lucy echoed her sister's revelation.

“Yeah.” Lois let out a shuddered breath.
 “Does Clark know?” Lucy asked.
 “Yes.” Lois nodded with a slow smile.
 “How’s he taking it?” Lucy asked hesitantly.
 “Fine. We’re fine. We haven’t really talked that much about it...after that fiasco with Trask and all...”
 Lucy nodded. “So...How far along are you?”
 “I don’t know yet. I have an appointment next week.”
 “Well, I have to say it was only a matter of time. I mean, the way you guys were going at it...”
 “Lucy!” Lois hissed.
 “Sorry.” Lucy shrugged. “You guys are loud... Anyway, so, when are you going to tell Mom and Dad?”
 “Why should I tell Daddy?” Lois asked coolly. “He was never around as a father. I don’t want him scarring my child too.”
 “Ouch.” Lucy winced. “Someone’s got a bit of ice on that bite. You know Mom’s gonna tell him whenever you tell her.”
 “I know, but I’m not ready to tell her and listen to her lecture about how Clark is going to leave me,” Lois said.
 Lucy laughed. “That’s funny. I don’t think he even sees any of the other women in the room when you’re around.”
 Lois gave a light smile. “Really?”
 “He’s got it bad...you both do...” Lucy said. Her cell phone rang. “Just a minute...Hello? Oh, hi, Lex... Yes, dinner sounds great... Okay, I’ll see you then...Bye.” She hung up her phone. Lois simply stared coolly back at her. “Don’t start. He’s been really supportive ever since that whole fiasco at the Metro Club. Did you know he’s paying to rebuild that whole area in Southside?”
 “I didn’t say anything, Lucy. You never listen when I do say what I think so why should I bother,” Lois snapped.
 “Don’t get snippy with me, Lois. You have your life; I have mine,” Lucy shot back.
 “Yeah,” Lois said flatly. “I need to get going. I’ll see you later.”

“So, Mr. Luthor thinks he can just push us around Metropolis?” Bill Church asked, looking over his reports. “Martin, I want you to make sure Mr. Luthor is sent the proper message. Let him know Intergang doesn’t back down to anyone.”
 “Of course, Mr. Church. Should this be discreet or are we letting someone go?” Martin Snell asked.
 “Have one of the local gangs handle it. I don’t like too much publicity on such...sensitive matters. There’s no need to be vain.” Bill smiled.

Lois stormed back into the newsroom in a huff. “Hi, Lois... Whoa! Who’d you run over?” Jimmy joked when he saw the expression on her face.
 “Leave me alone, Jimmy,” she muttered, pushing past him. She took a seat at her desk, throwing her purse down.
 Clark, who had been watching her from the time she entered the newsroom, approached her hesitantly. “Let me guess, Luthor?”
 “How’d you guess?” she asked, dabbing at the corners of her eyes with a tissue. “I hate being so emotional.”
 “I’m sorry,” he apologized, kissing her lightly.
 “Hey, check it out!” one of the Daily Planet staffers pointed to the screen on the television.
 “At this time it appears the entire block nicknamed ‘Southside’ has been set to flames by one of the local gangs. Police have reprimanded those responsible, but fire departments are still struggling to keep the fire at bay.”
 Lois looked back at Clark but found he had already left. “I want my exclusive,” she muttered dryly, turning back to the story she and Clark had been working on earlier.

It was ten o’clock. Clark was still fighting to control the fire in

Southside. The fire workers and rescue teams were growing tired. Lois watched the footage from home. There had been a few fatalities and many injuries. The look on Clark’s face when the television crew had closed in on his face had been heart-wrenching. Somehow watching Superman in action and knowing it was Clark... It seemed so surreal. She had admired Superman’s integrity and the way he had chosen to help others. Now knowing it was Clark—the father of her child—pulling out the injured... That changed the way she looked at the scene. Was this how a police officer’s wife felt? Watching the man she loved go to the rescue... watching the torment in his eyes...

He may be invulnerable. Well, aside from Kryptonite, but he wasn’t invulnerable emotionally. He was just as affected by this tragedy as the men and women he worked beside trying to put the fire out.

The front door swung open and Lucy closed it behind her, sinking down into the couch next to her. “I thought you had a date with Clark.”

“Something came up,” Lois said, motioning to the footage on the screen.

“Is Clark covering the fires? I heard about that. Lex was pissed. All the money he’s spent on rebuilding the area down the tube.”

“Well, we need to try and figure out who’s behind this,” Lois said sadly.

“Are you okay?” Lucy asked.

“Yeah. I’m fine,” Lois said briskly.

“You don’t seem fine,” Lucy said.

“I’m going to bed. I’ll see you in the morning,” Lois said, brushing her way past Lucy. Lucy narrowed her eyes in disgust as she watched the scene continue to unfold on the screen.

At around two a.m. Clark finally walked up to his front door. The fires had finally been put out and all the injured had been taken to the hospital. He hated rescues like this. Physically he was fine other than being a bit smoky and dirty, but emotionally it drained him. He opened his door and stepped inside only to be greeted by Lucy Lane sitting impatiently on his couch. “Lucy, what are you doing here?”

“I think we need to talk,” Lucy snapped irritably.

“Can’t it wait until morning? How did you get in here, anyway?” Clark asked as he made his way into the kitchen for a glass of water.

Lucy followed him. “I found Lois’ key. That’s not the point. We need to talk about your priorities.”

“My what?” Clark asked, turning to face her.

“You blew Lois off tonight for a story! I mean, how cold can you be?”

“I didn’t blow her off. She knew exactly where I was. You don’t understand...”

“No, I don’t understand. I don’t understand why my sister’s having your child and yet you two aren’t even talking about it. Or why you’ve left her to question the stability of your relationship with her... I mean, you should at least make an honest woman out of her... That’s the least you could do.”

“Lucy, this is none of your business,” Clark said curtly.

“Lex would *never*...”

“You don’t know Luthor as well as you think, Lucy,” Clark snapped.

“What is that supposed to mean??” Lucy asked.

“My advice? Stay the hell away from him. His day will come and I’d hate to see you caught in the crossfire.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. Lex is a perfect gentleman. He’s done so much to help this city. If you and Lois would get your blinders off you’d see that.”

“I’m not the one with blinders,” Clark snapped.

“Oh, and I am?” Lucy mocked. “I’m not blind, Clark. I know

Lex didn't get to the position he is in by being nice, but that's no reason for you to lead a witch hunt against him."

"I am not doing this. I'm exhausted. Now if you don't mind, I've had a very long night and I would like to get some sleep...in peace," Clark spat out irritably.

"Oh, that is so typical!" Lucy snapped. "Just run away like every other man does..."

Clark turned on his heel. "I am not running away."

"Oh, really? Sure looks like it to me. You blow off a date with my sister to chase a story until two in the morning. Who does that? Do you even care about how this is affecting Lois? What she must think about the fact that she's pregnant with no sign of commitment from you?"

"This is none of your business," Clark hissed out. "You need to leave."

Lucy was quiet for a moment then finally spoke. "I don't want to see Lois get hurt again."

Clark sighed. "I'm not going to hurt her. This is between Lois and me. I appreciate that you're worried about her, but breaking into my apartment to fight with me isn't going to solve anything. Please leave." He opened the door.

"You still never answered my question; are you going to marry Lois or not?"

"Good night, Lucy." Clark closed the door behind her.

Exhausted. That's how she felt. She'd tried to fix coffee again this morning, hoping she'd be able to handle it this morning, but once she'd gotten a whiff of the smell it had been too much and she'd spent half an hour hovering over the toilet. Thankfully, Lucy had removed the smell from the apartment and gotten rid of the pot of coffee for her. After brushing her teeth and showering she finished getting ready for the day, lacking the usual spark she usually had in the mornings.

She was just finishing buttoning her blazer when she heard a knock at the door. "Lucy?" she called. No answer. "Fine. I'll get it." She made her way to the living room and unlocked the door. "Clark!" She gave him a good morning kiss. "I thought we were meeting at Cost Mart."

He stepped inside the apartment. "I thought you might want some breakfast." He handed her a cup of hot tea and a white pastry bag. "I wasn't sure if you were doing any better with the coffee ... hot tea and a plain croissant..."

Lois gave him a slow smile. "Thanks. How are you doing? That fire was pretty intense." She took a bite of flaky croissant he had given her. "Mmmm..These are to die for. Where did you get them?"

"Uh, a little shop in Caen." At her dubious look, he prompted, "France?"

"Oh." Lois gave him a light smile. "Well, thanks. You didn't have to go to all that trouble." She sat down on the couch, enjoying the rest of the pastry. After emptying her stomach all morning it felt good to put something on her stomach. Clark took a seat next to her.

"It wasn't any trouble. It only takes me two seconds to fly over there," he explained.

Lois shrugged shyly. "Yeah, well, still. Thanks." She leaned over to kiss him. "So, you never answered my question. How are you?"

"I'm fine. It was tough, draining, and...intense, but I'm fine. I'm sorry about our date," he replied.

"We'll reschedule. No big deal." She shrugged it off.

"You haven't had any more nausea?"

"No." She shook her head, finishing up the pastry. "I need to finish getting ready then we can head over to Cost Mart." She patted his knee lightly, heading for the bedroom.

"What a waste of time." Lois groaned, pushing the elevator

button in the Daily Planet lobby.

"Well, we learned how much Mr. Church loves to talk about golf," Clark said sarcastically, walking into the elevator with Lois. He pressed the button for their floor then turned his attention back to Lois.

"Clark, I know there's more than what meets the eye here. I can feel it...I mean, Cost Mart is the only store that is everywhere Intergang has shown up. That's not a coincidence. That has to be the same store Bobby was talking about."

"Even so." Clark shrugged, "We can't write anything until we have proof. Being a complete bore isn't reason enough to suspect Mr. Church."

Lois rolled her eyes. "I will never understand men's fascination for *golf*."

DING

The elevator chimed, announcing the arrival on the newsroom floor. They stepped off the elevator and made their way to their respective desks. "Well, everyone has their hobbies," Clark reasoned. "So, what's the angle? Department store tries to run small businesses out of Metropolis?"

Lois sighed. "I don't know," she remarked bitterly. "There's something we're missing here. What's been going on lately? Drugs at the Metro Club. Unexplained fires. Lucy kidnapped."

"Don't forget the mess with Harrington and Roarke," Clark added. "They were drugged too, remember?"

"Oh, I almost forgot about that," Lois said, jotting some notes down on her pad.

"So, we should probably have the coroner check to see if there was any sign of this pheromone in their system as well. If there was, we may have found our connection," Clark said.

"But what about those fires?" Lois asked.

"I don't know," Clark said. "A competitor maybe? My vote is on Intergang."

"You don't think Lex is behind it?" Lois asked.

"No. It doesn't seem like his style," Clark said. "Burning down just the Metros property...maybe, but not the entire Southside district."

"Intergang?" Lois prompted.

"Maybe or maybe someone entirely different," Clark reasoned.

"CK, this fax just came in. I thought you and Lois might want to see this." Jimmy handed him the papers.

"What is it?" Lois asked as Clark scanned the fax in his hand.

"LexCorp's entire stock of shipments was blown up last night."

"So, Southside was a diversion?" Lois guessed.

"Somebody's after Luthor," Clark said grimly.

"But who?" Lois asked.

"I was very impressed when I read over your résumé. We are always looking for new people," District Attorney Ryan Knox said, extending his hand to the young blonde across from him.

"Well, I've been working at the DA's office in Smallville for four years now. I decided it's time to spread my wings a bit and branch out," the woman replied.

"Well, I'm sure you'll find Metropolis is a good fit for you. You'll be working with Lucy Lane. She just started about a month ago, but she's really good." Ryan gestured towards Lucy's desk. "Lucy, I'd like to introduce you to the newest member of our team. This is Lana Lang."

"Please to meet you," Lucy said, extending her hand to shake Lana's.

"Likewise," Lana gushed.

Ryan left them to get more acquainted. "I guess I'll show you around," Lucy said.

One Week Later...

Lois sat in the waiting room, impatiently tapping her foot against the carpeted floor. Clark still wasn't there. He said he wanted to go with her this morning. Then this morning he'd left a message that he was running late and would meet her at the doctor's office. Hopefully, whatever had delayed him it wouldn't take too long. She looked nervously at her watch again. He promised he'd be there. Hopefully, Superman wouldn't get in the way. She still didn't know how she felt about the pregnancy. The wave of emotions she'd been on the last few weeks were a roller coaster.

She looked over towards the television set in the waiting room where LNN was reporting on a plane in Paris that was having trouble landing. She moved closer to the television set so she could get a better idea what was going on. A familiar red, yellow and blue figure appeared on the screen. "This just in. Superman, the famed Man of Steel from Metropolis, is flying alongside the stricken airliner."

Lois crinkled her nose, a bit taken aback. "How did he hear a cry for help all the way in Paris?"

"Superman is setting the big aircraft down, gently as a feather. It's almost on the ground...and now...he's done it! The plane is safe. Superman saved the day!" Lois breathed a sigh of relief as she watched the scene unfold. Clark had done it again.

Just then Clark entered the waiting room. "Hey, honey, sorry I took so long. There was a wreck on I-9 and... I'm sorry I'm late." He gave her a peck on the cheek. Lois did a double take, looking from the television screen to Clark...then back again. "What?" he asked.

"Lois Lane?" the nurse called.

"Uh, nothing," she said. "Come on."

Once she had undressed and wrapped the thin hospital gown around her, she made her way back into the room where the Ultrasound technician was waiting by the hospital bed with Clark. "Ready?" she asked.

"I guess," Lois replied skeptically, lying back on the bed.

The technician lifted up her gown and pulled out a white tube of gel. "Now, this is going to be a little..."

"Ah!" Lois cried out when the cold gel hit her skin.

"Cold," the technician finished.

"No kidding," Lois muttered dryly. Clark let out a low laugh. She held his hand as the technician took a small tube and began rolling it against her abdomen. She clicked a button on the machine and a loud thumping could be heard throughout the room. "What is that?" Lois asked.

"That's the baby's heartbeat," she answered. "We're definitely pregnant and..."

"It's so fast," Lois commented in wonderment. She looked over at Clark, who was watching the screen the technician had just pulled up with intrigue. She squeezed his hand and he looked down at her, giving her a supportive smile.

He then turned his attention back to the screen. "Okay, it looks like you're about twelve and a half weeks along..." the technician said, looking at the screen. She pointed at the middle of the screen where an object seemed to be pulsating. "There is your baby's heart." She pointed at another part. "Your baby's head..."

Lois stared at the screen in wonderment. This was her baby. The little parts the technician was pointing out seemed lost on her. She couldn't really tell what she was talking about. Did that make her a bad mother? She felt the tears falling down her cheeks at their own accord. Clark leaned down next to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. She noticed the technician had left the room. Where did she go? She looked at Clark expectantly. He seemed able to read the question in her eyes.

"She went to print off copies of the ultrasound for us. I'm not really sure what she was pointing at either...even with my enhanced vision. I can make some of it out, but with the baby

constantly moving the way it was...it's hard to make out."

She smiled up at him. Even Superman couldn't see everything the technician had pointed out. "I love you," she whispered, leaning up to kiss him.

Clark placed a protective hand over her abdomen in awe. "Pregnant,"

"Pregnant," Lois repeated shakily.

After finishing up with the ultrasound technician, Lois was moved to an exam room where they waited for the doctor. Clark sat in a chair next to Lois, who was waiting on the exam table nervously. "I wonder what's taking them so long..." Lois sighed, looking around the room. She stared at the poster on the wall describing the different stages of pregnancy, uncertain of how to imagine herself going through everything depicted in the diagram.

A knock at the door announced her doctor's arrival, and she gave a weak smile when she recognized Dr. Reeve come through the door. "Everyone decent?"

"If you count a hospital gown as decent," Lois muttered with a half smile.

She smiled warmly and extended her hand to Clark. "I'm Dr. Reeve,"

"Uh, Clark Kent," he said, shaking her hand nervously.

"Nice to meet you," she said, taking a seat on the stool across from Lois as she pulled up the chart on the screen in front of her. "So, it looks like you're around twelve weeks, is that right?"

Lois nodded. "Yeah, I'm still a bit...stunned. I hadn't missed a pill...I'm trying to figure out how..."

Dr. Reeve seemed to sense the impending babble of questions Lois was trying to find a way to ask and stopped her. "I know. I know, but according to your medical chart you were on antibiotics a few months ago..."

"So?" Lois shrugged, not seeing the point.

"Antibiotics can decrease the effectiveness of birth control," Dr. Reeve explained with a smile.

"Oh," Lois said softly as she recalled every time over the course of that week she'd been on antibiotics that could have resulted in her pregnancy.

"So, you told the nurse you were having morning sickness..." Dr. Reeve prompted.

"Whoever came up with that name for it is a liar," Lois muttered bitterly.

Clark laughed, taking her hand and giving it a squeeze as he added, "She also hasn't been able to eat a lot."

Lois nodded. "Apparently coffee doesn't agree with the baby..."

"First trimester is like that. You actually lose quite a bit of weight during the first trimester. Are you able to keep anything down?"

"Yeah," Lois nodded. "It's just...constant nausea,"

"I can prescribe you something for that," Dr. Reeve said. "Any other symptoms?"

Lois shook her head. "No."

"Well, you're almost out of the first trimester. You should start to feel a bit more like yourself in a few weeks when the hormone levels adjust. I'm writing an anti-nausea prescription along with a prenatal vitamin for you to take once a day. If you have any concerns, just give me a call." She handed her a business card.

"Uh, thanks," Lois said softly as Dr. Reeve turned to leave. She glanced over at Clark who was watching her with a smile.

"Lucy, you have a call on line one," the receptionist called.

Lucy smiled apologetically at Lana. "Excuse me, I have to take this." She picked up the phone, "Hello? Hi, Lex, how are you? Yes, that sounds terrific. Okay, I'll see you soon. Bye." She hung up the phone and stared at it slightly dreamily.

"Boyfriend?" Lana prompted.

“Yeah. We’ve been dating for a few months now.” Lucy sighed.

“Lucy, I want you and the new girl consulting on the Southside fire case.” Mayson Drake, the assistant DA, said, laying a stack of files on Lucy’s desk. “I can’t afford for any screw ups when we take these characters to court.”

“Were there any witnesses?” Lucy asked, sifting through the files.

“Yeah, a Michael Lane. Some restaurant owner...”

“What?” Lucy’s face drained in color. “He didn’t get hurt, did he?”

“No. He was the one that called the police,” Mayson replied. “Why?”

“That’s my uncle,” Lucy said a bit taken aback. “I thought he was out of town...”

“Well, apparently not. Are you going to be okay handling this?” Mayson asked, concerned.

Lucy’s eyes narrowed in determination. “You bet.”

“Good. I’ll give you two a couple days to go through all this. We have three guys claiming to be a member of some street gang... The Skins... Monday morning is the arraignment,” she instructed.

“Not a problem, Ms. Drake, we’ll be ready,” Lucy said confidently.

Mayson nodded, then left. “Your family’s from Metropolis?” Lana prompted.

“Yeah, my sister and I have lived here all our lives,” Lucy said, opening the first file up to begin scanning. She handed Lana a file.

“Must be nice...having family close by.” Lana smiled.

“Eh.” Lucy shrugged. “We don’t really talk with our family that much. I mean, except for Uncle Mike. The chocolate mousse he makes at his restaurant is to die for. You should try it sometime.”

“Maybe I’ll try it sometime.” Lana nodded.

“Close your eyes,” he had instructed her after they left the apartment. He had changed into his Superman suit and scooped her up in his arms.

“Clark, where are we going?” she asked impatiently.

“Just close your eyes,” he whispered.

She sighed, closing her eyes. “Fine,” she gasped when she felt the cool air hit her face. “Cl...”

“You can open them now,” he whispered.

She looked around and saw they were flying up above the clouds. “Clark!” she whispered, looking around at the stars. “It’s beautiful,”

He nodded, wrapping his cape around her. “I used to come up here a lot by myself and just...drift. Not part of the stars, not part of the Earth. Not knowing where I fit in...until I met you.”

“Oh, Clark...” she cupped his cheek. “You’re not alone anymore,” she whispered, leaning up to kiss him.

“I know,” he said softly. “I’m not going anywhere. You mean everything to me...you and ...our baby...” He couldn’t hide the smile on his face.

She smiled up at him. “Our baby,”

One Week Later...

“Hey, kids.” Perry handed them tickets to the Planet’s Charity Ball. “Here’s the tickets for the ball. Invite people with money to spend and who know how to dance.”

Lois smiled, taking the tickets from Perry. “Thanks, Perry.”

Perry then moved on to his next set of victims. “Charity Ball?” Clark inquired.

“The Daily Planet throws one every year. All the proceeds go to a charity of Perry’s choosing each year.”

“I never knew the Planet did all that,” Clark said in

admiration.

“The Planet does and it doesn’t...Perry’s the one that pushed for these things. He organizes it every year. The board is just impressed with the circulation improvement, so they’ve made it an annual thing.” Lois winced slightly, rubbing her temples.

“I never knew Perry was such a softie,” Clark said in wonderment as he watched his editor in a new light. He noticed the expression on her face. “Are you okay?”

“Headache...” she said weakly. “And don’t let anyone know I told you that. You’re not supposed to know that any more than I am,” Lois whispered. “I found out by accidentally overhearing a conversation between a couple of the bigwigs at last year’s Christmas party.” Lois wagged her finger at him. “You know nothing.”

“Got it.” Clark nodded, rubbing her shoulders softly.

“Anything I can do?”

“Just a side effect of the pregnancy...” Lois sighed.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized.

“It’s fine. I think I need to try and eat something...” She smiled up at him. “How’d the fire go last night?”

Clark sighed and shook his head. There was a war going on between the criminal element for territory and so far Southside seemed to be where everyone was trying to stake their claim. He’d fought to keep arsonist attempts at bay but last night had been hard. The fire seemed to take over the entire business district in a matter of seconds. “It was...”

“Lane, Kent, what’s the status on that Southside fire piece?” Perry bellowed across the newsroom.

“We’re still on it, Chief,” Lois called.

“Well get to it!” Perry hollered gruffly before turning to go back into his office. “The paper won’t print itself!”

Lois let out a low laugh. “Come on.” She stood up, gathering her things.

“Where are we going?” Clark asked.

“Well, Perry wants us to work on the Southside fires. We should probably track down Superman, don’t you think?” She winked at him.

Still not understanding, he followed her up the ramp. “What?”

Lois pressed the call button. Once the elevator arrived they entered and Lois continued, pleased to see they were alone in the elevator. “We can’t very well write the article with an interview with Superman without at least *pretending* to look for him, can we?” she reasoned.

“Well, no...”

“So, we get lunch...you give me a couple Superman quotes... then we’ll finish up the article...” She shrugged as they stepped off the elevator.

“Shouldn’t we also talk to the fire department, the police, and ...oh, I don’t know, the DA about who started the fire?” Clark asked.

“Yes, and we will...” Lois said, pushing the lobby doors open. “After I eat.” Clark just rolled his eyes, shaking his head as he followed her.

Clark gave Lois an incredulous look after poking his head in her refrigerator. “Pickles and ice? Really? Do you actually grocery shop at all? How do you expect to eat six small meals a day on pickles and ice?”

“It’s been a busy couple of weeks and Lucy doesn’t really cook. I haven’t felt up to grocery shopping lately. We’ll order take out,” Lois said, picking up the phone.

Clark took the phone from her and put it down. “What do you want?”

“I was just going to order Chinese.” At super-speed, he flew out of her window and returned with a bamboo box in his hand and a twelve pack of cream soda. “You didn’t even ask what I wanted,” Lois pouted.

“Chicken Lo-Mein, six egg rolls, pot stickers, and vegetable fried rice. If you don’t want it...” he teased pulling the box away.

“Give me that!” She grabbed the box from him. She looked at him appreciatively. “You fly in your business suits often?” she asked, opening the first container and pulling open the lid. She reached for a fork and sighed when she took a bite. “This is so good!”

“Well, I changed on the way,” he explained. “I used to fly in just about anything before I came up with the idea for Superman,” he explained, opening one of the containers and beginning to eat his own lunch. Lois handed him a cream soda. “Thanks.”

“What made you come up with the idea anyway?” Lois asked.

“Well...do you remember when I first got partnered with you...that morning there was a man trapped in the manhole because of an explosion?”

“Yeah...” She recalled the incident vividly. She had thought the man must have been out of his mind at the time. “He pointed at you and said you had rescued him...You said he was delirious.”

“And then you told me to bring a change of clothes to work...at the time I was trying to figure out what in the world you would need a change of clothes for. Then it kinda dawned on me...Undercover assignments...you don’t want to be recognized. I figured if you could go undercover as a reporter and not be recognized I could probably go in disguise as someone that helped out.”

Lois grinned at him. “Did Martha really make your suit?”

Clark grinned sheepishly. “You should have seen the reject pile.”

Lois laughed. “There’s a reject pile?”

Clark nodded. “I’m surprised my mom didn’t pull it out while you were visiting over the weekend.”

“No, she was too busy going through the embarrassing baby pictures.” Lois laughed.

“Oh, God...” Clark hung his head in shame.

“Oh, come on, it wasn’t that bad. I like your mom. She’s very...” Lois struggled to find the right word.

“Mom?” Clark suggested.

“Well, she’s more than that,” Lois admonished. “I don’t know. I can’t really think of the right word. She’s really down to earth...easygoing. It must have been nice growing up with that kind of support.”

Clark nodded. “Yeah, it was. I mean, they’re the only parents I’ve ever known. I still don’t know why I was sent to Earth.”

“How do you know where you came from? Was it on your ship or something?”

“No.” Clark shook his head. “I don’t know where my ship is. Dad had buried it after he and Mom found me. Then when I went looking for it...when Trask raided the Planet?” Lois nodded in recognition. “It wasn’t there.”

“Oh, Clark, I’m sorry. That must be horrible...knowing someone has a possible key to something that’s a part of you.”

“I know who has it...or had it. When we broke into the Bureau 39 warehouse I found it. I found this globe that had all these maps on it. When I touched it, it changed and suddenly I just knew what I was looking at was Krypton. I hid it in my jacket pocket when Trask came in.” Lois was quiet for a moment. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” She nodded. “It just kinda makes me mad...Trask took so much from you and...”

He put an arm around her. “Hey, don’t dwell on that.” Clark gave her a peck on the forehead. “He’s gone. Hopefully, that Kryptonite is too. I’m not really that attached to the missing ship. It’s just a pile of metal.”

Lois gave him a twisted smile. “I guess.” She sighed. “That’s the last of the egg rolls. We should probably get to work on that Southside article.”

“What do you want to know?” Clark asked.

“Well, where did the fires start? How many were injured?”

What do you think caused the fire? That sorta thing,” Lois said, pulling out her notebook and pen.

Clark sighed. “Okay, but it’s not really that cut and dry,” he warned, leaning back against the kitchen counter. Lois pulled out her notebook, preparing to take notes. “Okay, the fire started from the beginning of Southside district and moved down to Hobb’s Bay. Every building was set fire to. There were...” He took a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose. “A lot of injured...and some...fatalities.”

Lois noticed his change in tone. “Clark, are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” he said, shooting her a small smile. “It was just a very long night...Anyway, the firefighters were completely outnumbered with the fires. They had every man out there and still weren’t able to keep up. I was barely able to keep up. It’s really sad. I mean, you take your family out to dinner and then you end up trapped in the middle of a chaotic fire...”

“Clark...” Lois put down the notebook. He was definitely not ‘okay.’ He was brooding over what had happened last night.

“You’re not okay.”

“Lois, I’m fine. I’ll just be glad when we can catch whoever’s behind this. Enough people have been injured...” Clark said solemnly.

“You don’t have to put on the invulnerable act with me, Clark. I know it must have been hard pulling out all those people.” She noticed Clark squint his eyes as he pinched the bridge of his nose. He was fighting whatever emotions were festering within him. Without a second thought, she grabbed both sides of his face, pulling him into a passionate kiss.

“Lois...” he moaned against her lips. She moaned against him as he devoured her lips hungrily. His arms tightened around, pulling her into his arms. She squealed in delight when he picked her up in his arms, sitting her down on the edge of the counter. She linked her arms around his neck, enjoying the feel of his body against her own. “I love you...” he whispered, intertwining his fingers with hers.

She smiled up at him, resting her forehead against his. “I love you too.” She leaned up to kiss him lightly, then pulled away. “Come on, we still have to talk to the DA.”

Clark groaned, following her as she gathered her things. “All right, let’s go.”

They reached the District Attorney’s office in record time, thanks to Superman Express. Clark spun back into his suit and followed Lois up the steps to the courthouse. “I could get used to this way of travel,” she murmured. “Sure saves on cab fare.”

Clark laughed. “Well, now you know why I never bought a car,” he said.

Lois groaned. “I’m saving up.”

“For what?” Clark asked.

“A Jeep,” she said simply. She pressed the call button for the elevator. “You never wanted to get a car?”

“I never really needed one. By the time I was old enough to drive I had my own way of transportation,” he whispered, following her onto the elevator.

“Ah.” Lois nodded, pressing the button for their floor.

“Hopefully, Ryan Knox is in a good mood and feeling charitable to us hard-working journalists.”

“Well, I’m sure if we explain to him that we’re looking to solve the mystery with these fires as much as he is, he’ll be cooperative.” Clark reasoned.

“Not always,” Lois whispered as they stepped off the elevator. Clark opened the door to the District Attorney’s office and Lois smiled her thanks to him as she entered; Clark followed close behind.

They approached the front desk receptionist. She was a young twenty-something with blond hair and blue eyes and way too big of a smile for Lois’ taste. “Hi, can I help you?” she asked sweetly.

“Yes, I’m Lois Lane. This is Clark Kent. We’re from the Daily Planet. We need to speak with Mr. Knox concerning the fires in Southside.”

“We’re not supposed to release any information to the press,” she said hesitantly.

Clark flashed her a megawatt smile. “Excuse me, Miss...?”

“Lennon,” she supplied, smiling flirtatiously back at Clark. Lois rolled her eyes but allowed it. If flirting would get them in to see Knox, she was all for it.

“Ms. Lennon, we just need to ask Mr. Knox a few questions and get the office’s official statement on why these fires keep going on. If we could just get five minutes?” he prompted.

She seemed to hesitate a bit, then Clark gave her another megawatt smile. “I guess it couldn’t hurt. I mean, after all, we’re all on the same side, right?” She shrugged.

“Right.” Clark nodded.

She blushed, pushing back a strand of hair. “Is there anything else I can help you with?” She shot Clark a bright smile. Clark wrapped an arm around Lois, sending the silent symbol that he was with her.

“No, that’ll be all,” Clark said, walking with Lois through the doors Ms. Lennon had just opened for them. “Thank you.”

The young receptionist watched them leave, leaning back to get a better look. “Some girls have all the luck,” she murmured, turning back to her desk.

Lois and Clark reached Mr. Knox’s office and knocked on the door. After a few minutes, Mr. Knox answered the door. “Yes, can I help you?”

“Mr. Knox?” Lois asked, holding out her hand for him to shake.

“Yes?”

“Lois Lane, Daily Planet. This is my partner, Clark Kent. We’d like to ask you a few questions about the fires in Southside,” she said, stepping inside the office.

“Our office isn’t prepared to release an official statement to the media, Ms. Lane.”

“So, you haven’t got any leads?” Lois inquired.

“We are conducting an internal investigation into the matter. That’s all I can tell you.” Mr. Knox gestured towards the door.

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a luncheon.” He exited the office, heading towards the exit.

“Gee, that went well,” Clark said sarcastically.

Lois glared at him. “An internal investigation, huh?” She turned to walk down the hallways, looking for Lucy’s office. “I guess it’s a good thing I know someone internal.”

“Lo-is...” Clark warned. “You can’t use your sister like that.”

“Why not?” Lois asked. “She uses my name all the time to get free stuff at the Planet. I’m just returning the favor.” She looked at the office, labeled ‘Lucy Lane,’ in front of her. “Come on.” She opened the door.

“Lois? What are you doing here?” Lucy asked.

“I just wanted to stop by and say ‘hi’...” Lois smiled sweetly at her sister.

“Uh-huh.” Lucy nodded, not believing her for a minute.

“What do you want, Lois?”

“What’s the deal with the fires?” Lois asked.

“We don’t know. They arrested some street gang members, but I’m not sure if they’re the ones responsible or not. I’m still going over everything. Plus, there’s Uncle Mike...”

“Uncle Mike? What does he have to do with it?” Lois asked.

“He was one of the witnesses,” Lucy explained. “You don’t know this.” She wagged her finger at Lois. “Mr. Knox is releasing a statement at a press conference in about an hour.”

“Hmmm, well, I guess that gives us a jump start before deadline,” Lois reasoned.

“What do you guys know about the explosion on the LexCorp freighters?” Clark asked.

“What?” Lucy asked aghast.

“They exploded at the same time some of these fires were going on a few weeks ago. Didn’t you know that?” Lois asked.

“No.” Lucy shook her head. “Oh, my God! That’s horrible.”

“We were thinking the fire was just a diversion... maybe someone’s after Luthor.” Clark guessed.

Lucy nodded mutely. “Anything’s possible. Listen, I should know more later tonight. We can compare notes and see what else we can find. Three heads are better than one... you know.” Lucy suggested.

“Sure.” Lois nodded, looking around. “Looks like you’re adjusting well.”

“Yeah. I’ve been training this new girl all day. This is my first break. She went to go grab us some lunch.” She gestured at the files in front of her. “Most of these guys have got a rap sheet a mile long.”

“Sometimes it’s not always the one with the rap sheet you have to look at,” Clark pointed out.

Lucy glared at him. “If this is another dig at Lex...”

“I’m talking about Trask. He was a federal agent and look how that turned out,” Clark said.

“Oh.” Lucy nodded. “Well, I guess I can see that. I’ll see you guys later. I have to get back to work.”

Lois nodded. “See you later, Lucy.”

“I want an explanation for this! Who dares to attack *me*???” Lex ranted as he paced around his boardroom. “I built this company up from *nothing*!!”

“We are still working on our investigation, Mr. Luthor,” Mrs. Cox reassured him. “I am doing everything in my power to find the person responsible. I have a few sources indicating a possible gang relation...”

“*GANG???*” Lex threw a stack of papers on the table in his fury. “You mean to tell me that almost \$100,000 *blew* up because of a...a...a...*GANG???* No, Mrs. Cox... This is something... much...much...more than a gang attack. This is a fight...for power... Very well, if it’s a war they want, it’s a war they will get.”

“Shall, I send out the usual suspects?” Mrs. Cox inquired.

“No.” Lex’s eyes narrowed. “This is something that needs to be handled with the utmost care. Track down the person responsible and take care of it personally. I have a pressing engagement.”

“With Lucy Lane?” Mrs. Cox inquired, obvious jealousy rose within her gaze.

“Yes.” Lex nodded. “Take care of it.” He glared at her before leaving.

The next evening, Lois, Clark, and Lucy sat at the dining room table, going over their notes as they tried to piece everything together. “So, you think the drugs Lois and I were exposed to are the same drugs Harrington and Roarke were given?” Lucy inquired.

“That’s our theory,” Clark said, taking a bite of the pizza they had ordered. “Nothing’s been confirmed yet.”

Lucy let out a shuddered breath. “Kinda scary.”

“Well, according to Linda...” Lois began.

“Linda King? Don’t tell me you’re talking to that tramp...” Lucy cringed.

“She was investigating a story on those drugs when the fire to the Metro Club was set,” Lois explained.

“Yeah right.” Lucy snorted. “She was probably one of the hookers.” Clark looked at Lucy questionably. “Don’t look at me like that. That’s Lois’ story to tell; not mine.”

Clark turned his attention to Lois. “Ahem.”

“No,” Lois said shaking her head. “I don’t want to talk about it.” She winced slightly and felt a wave of nausea coming over her.

“Lois?” Lucy looked up at her in concern. “Do I need to...”

She began to move so Lois could make a dash for the bathroom. Lucy sighed, watching Lois head to the bathroom with Clark right behind her. Unfortunately, Lois slammed the door closed and he stood outside, unsure of what to do. Lucy sighed, unsure of what to do herself. She had to admit, seeing her sister suffering through the ‘morning sickness’ of this pregnancy was hard to watch. It made her wonder why anyone would go through this more than once.

Clark stood outside the bathroom door, waiting for Lois to let him in. She’d clamped her hand over her mouth after dinner and had been camped out in the bathroom for over half an hour, “Lois?” He heard a quiet sob from the other side of the door, unlike the heaving sound she’d been making earlier. “Lois?” Deciding not to wait any longer, he opened the door and saw Lois curled up on the floor in tears. He knelt down next to her and wrapped an arm around her waist, holding her to him. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

She looked up at him in tears. “Something’s wrong...” she managed in between tears. “I’m bleeding...”

He did his best not to betray the emotions he was feeling at the moment when he landed with Lois outside the hospital. He allowed the emergency personnel to take over as they began hounding her with questions over and over regarding the pregnancy.

*When did you last eat?
How far along are you?
Where is the father?*

He hated to leave her. He had to in order to change. It wouldn’t do anyone any good to see Superman sitting by Lois Lane’s bedside at the hospital. The paparazzi would eat that up and it would be on every network within the hour.

He tried to make it as quick as possible and was able to find his way back to Lois within about ten minutes after filling out paperwork after paperwork with the nurse’s station. Was this going to be what it was like when they had the baby?

“Lois?” Clark took a seat in the makeshift room she was in that was divided by curtains in an open floor on the Labor and Delivery floor of the hospital. It unnerved him to no end to be here with Lois only being a few months pregnant. What if something was wrong? What if she lost the baby?

“Clark!” Lois cried, pulling him to her as he took a seat next to her bed. She was hooked up to an IV and there was a strap wrapped around her abdomen with a monitor reading the heart rate of the baby and her.

Before he could voice his concern over her and the baby a nurse stepped in with Dr. Reeve. “Living a little dangerous tonight aren’t we?” She smiled, trying to keep Lois at ease as she stepped into the room, pulling up a stool. She rolled over to the monitor to read the printouts. “Everything looks normal...”

“The blood...” Lois began cautiously.

“Sometimes it just happens, but from the urine sample we collected when you checked in it doesn’t seem to be a whole lot. Just spotting. I know this is scary, but you did the right thing...” she reassured, patting Lois on the knee. Clark sighed in relief when he heard Dr. Reeve tell them it was normal. He’d been so scared. “Now, I’m not going to do an exam because I don’t want to aggravate anything. For now, we’re going to put you on high-risk treatment...”

“What does that mean?” Lois asked nervously.

“Taking it easy...No overdoing it. You can still do your job... just take a few extra precautions...Less bungee jumping with no parachute and more looking before you leap.” Dr. Reeve smiled. “For now, no intercourse. We’ll take a look at everything in a few weeks and go from there,”

“Whatever we need to do,” Clark said, intertwining his fingers

with Lois’ as he gave her hand a supportive squeeze. “We’ll do it.”

Lois gave him a weak smile. “Absolutely.” She put a hesitant hand on her abdomen.

The soft drumming of the rain against the glass pane of the window in Lois’ bedroom filled the room. Lois had fallen asleep hours ago after they’d gotten home from the hospital. Even when he was battling Trask after his Kryptonite exposure he’d never been as scared as he was tonight. There was no power he could use to protect Lois from losing their child. He was different. An alien. It was a miracle in itself that they’d even been able to conceive a child, but the thought of losing everything like this shook him to his core.

<< “What did you just say?”

“Lois.”

“After that.”

“Honey.”

“That’s the first time you’ve ever called me that. Say it again.”

“Honey.”

“That’s amazing. I like it.”>>

<< “We need to talk about your priorities.”

“My what?”

“You blew Lois off tonight for a story! I mean, how cold can you be?”>>

<< “No, I don’t understand. I don’t understand why my sister’s having your child and yet you two aren’t even talking about it. Or why you’ve left her to question the stability of your relationship with her...I mean, you should at least make an honest woman out of her...That’s the least you could do.”

“Lucy, this is none of your business.” >>

<< “How do you feel about everything? I mean, are you happy about...the baby?”

“It was a bit of a shock, but I am happy about it. You kinda pushed me out of the room before I could say anything.”

“I’m sorry about that. I kinda freaked. You’re sure you’re not still freaking out? Because it’s okay if you are. Because I’m feeling I don’t know...a bit taken aback. I mean this is huge. We didn’t plan this and I have no idea what to do. I mean, you haven’t met my parents...well, not really...”

“We’ll be fine.”>>

<< “Oh, that is so typical! Just run away like every other man does...”

“I am not running away.”

“Oh, really? Sure looks like it to me. You blow off a date with my sister to chase a story until two in the morning. Who does that? Do you even care about how this is affecting Lois? What she must think about the fact that she’s pregnant with no sign of commitment from you?”

“This is none of your business.”>>

<< “That’s the baby’s heartbeat. We’re definitely pregnant and...”

“It’s so fast.”>>

<< “Something’s wrong...I’m bleeding...”>>

<< “You don’t have to put on the invulnerable act with me, Clark. I know it must have been hard pulling out all those people.”>>

<< “No overdoing it. You can still do your job...just take a few extra precautions...Less bungee jumping with no parachute and more looking before you leap. For now, no intercourse. We’ll take a look at everything in a few weeks and go from there.”

“Whatever we need to do. We’ll do it.”

“Absolutely.”>>

Two Weeks Later...

It had been two weeks since their scare that had ended them in the hospital in the middle of the night. Sure enough, the spotting seemed to have subsided along with the nausea. Lois had had the

restrictions on her pregnancy lifted but they were both still very cautious, unwilling to take a chance until Lois started the second trimester.

“Lois, CK, you’ve got a visitor,” Jimmy pointed out when they walked down the ramp to the newsroom the next morning.

“Linda, what are you doing here?” Lois asked coolly.

“Well, I haven’t heard back from you; I thought you’d forgotten about our deal. You are still investigating the Metros, aren’t you?” Linda inquired.

“Yes, we are, Ms. King. It’s been a busy few weeks,” Clark explained apologetically.

Linda smiled, giving Clark a once over. “I understand.” She smiled at them. “I got a guy that’s willing to talk about what’s been going down over at the Metro Club...I can bring one of you...He’s kinda skittish.” Linda shrugged. “Clark, what do you say?”

Lois’ eyes narrowed. Clark looked between Lois and Linda skeptically. “I don’t know.”

“You either want the scoop or you don’t. My guy says he’s got the inside track on the Metros. No offense, Lois, but you might scare him off.”

Clark gave a pleading look to Lois, unsure what to do. He was a bit surprised when she just nodded. “You sure?” he asked.

“Yeah, we don’t want to lose a possible lead on this.” Lois sighed. “I’ll see you later.”

“Okay.” Clark leaned in to give her a kiss on the cheek before leaving.

Lois watched him leave with Linda, trying to squash the inner doubts that kept trying to surface. “It’s just business.”

“Hey, Lois, I got that coroner report you and CK wanted,” Jimmy said, laying a file on her desk.

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Lois nodded, brushing him off.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine.” Lois glared at him.

“Okay.” Jimmy backed away from her desk.

“Clark, this is Bibbo Bibbowski. He knows everything that happens around here with the Metros,” Linda said, introducing him. “Bibbo, this is Clark Kent.”

“From the Planet?” Bibbo asked.

“Yes.” Clark nodded.

“Yeah, I’ve read your stuff. What can I do for you?”

“Ms. King said you had information about the Metros... concerning the drugs they were dealing with?” Clark asked.

“Yeah...That Toni Taylor...she’s an evil one. She and her brother took over their dad’s business a few years back. They got mixed in with this doctor that created these drugs...messed with the mind. Because of the Club’s...ahem...recreational activities... they used ‘em for kinda...eh...forcing the customer’s hand...if you will.”

“How did you find out about it?” Clark asked.

“I know a few guys that got hit real hard with the stuff...”

“And this doctor?” Clark asked.

“Name starts with a ‘M’. That’s all I know,” Bibbo said, holding his hands up.

Clark nodded. “Okay, thank you for your time.”

He followed Linda out of Bibbo’s club. “He didn’t seem skittish to me,” he said, cornering Linda.

Linda shrugged. “Hey, I don’t get along with Lois. I’m willing to share leads...but I don’t like spending any more time with her than necessary.” Linda smiled, running a finger down his arm. “I’m not that bad of company, am I?”

Clark shrugged his arm out of her reach. “I don’t appreciate what you’re trying to do,” he said coolly.

“Clark, I’m just teasing, sheesh,” Linda said, opening the door to the cab that had just pulled up. She looked at him expectantly when he didn’t get in with her. “Aren’t you coming?”

“I’ll walk, thanks,” he said, closing the door behind her. He then turned on his heel towards the remnants of the Metro Club. If there had been drugs in there, maybe he could try and find some clues to who this mystery doctor was.

“I thought you said Southside would be burnt to the ground, Martin. Half of it is still standing. I don’t like disappointments.” Bill Church glared across the table at Martin Snell.

“My apologies, Mr. Church. Superman showed up and ended up dousing out a majority of the fire. It...took us by surprise,” Martin said.

“It took you by surprise?” Bill Church mocked. “How’s this for a surprise? If you don’t have Southside under Intergang’s control by the end of the week, your face will be the next one everyone sees on the milk carton, got it?”

Martin nodded. “Got it, Mr. Church.”

Lois drummed her fingers impatiently on her desk as she waited for Clark. It had been two hours. Something probably came up. A Superman emergency? She sighed, looking across the aisle at his empty desk once more.

“Boyfriend problems?” Cat sneered, as she approached Lois.

“What do you want, Cat?” Lois glared.

“I’m just stopping by to say, ‘hi.’” Cat smiled at her. “How’s the sex?” she whispered.

Lois’ eyes widened. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh, come on, don’t act coy. You have *never* been this relaxed in your life.” At Lois’ blush, Cat continued. “Don’t worry I’m not saying anything. Some things are better left private. I figure you suffered enough a few years back. It’s good, isn’t it? Makes you wonder why you waited so long, huh?” Cat grinned impishly at Lois.

Lois glared at her. “You can go, now, Cat.”

“So, tell me, I’m dying to know. Are you two just having fun or is there more to it than that?” Cat asked.

Lois spotted Clark coming down the ramp and gave him a pleading look when he met her gaze. “Clark, what’d you find out?”

“Plenty,” he said, sitting down next to Lois. They both shot Cat a look.

“Okay, I get it. Three’s a crowd. We’ll talk later.”

Cat left and Clark gave her questioning look. “What was that about?”

“Nothing. She just surprises me sometimes,” Lois replied sweetly. “Where’s Linda?”

Clark shrugged. “I’m not sure. I went investigating around Hobb’s Bay and the wreckage of the Metro Club after she left in her cab. What is up with her anyway? I mean, she acts like there’s no such thing as boundaries.”

“Linda’s always had a problem with boundaries. Let me guess, she tried to hit on you?” Lois asked.

Clark nodded. “Her source did have some good information, but she was taking advantage of the situation if you ask me.”

“You’re the one that wanted to include her in the investigation.” Lois reminded him.

“I know.” Clark sighed. “Anyway, I found a clue in the wreckage of the Metro Club.” He pulled out a slightly burnt bottle marked ‘Revenge’ and handed it to her.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It’s got a very distinct scent to it,” he explained. “I think it may be animal based...which is what chemists use with pheromones. I think this is the drug being used by the Metros.”

Lois looked at it skeptically. “Not much to go on...”

“Oh, and I found out one other thing.” He pulled a paper out of his pocket. “Two soldiers were found in Hobb’s Bay last night. Henderson said it looked like they’d been there since last month.”

Lois nodded. “What’s the connection?”

Clark shook his head. "I'm not sure, but they had the same drug in their system...along with ID...for Bureau 39."

"WHAT??" Lois' eyes widened at the implication.

"Henderson said he'd fax us the autopsy report when it's ready," Clark said. "Meanwhile, I got us an appointment with the DA, Mayson Drake, that's covering the case on Southside. We're meeting her for lunch."

"Nice." Lois handed him the file Jimmy had given her.

"Roarke and Harrington were drugged with the same drug."

"The connection." Clark nodded.

"Yep." Lois nodded.

Clark glanced at the clock on the wall. "We better get going. We'll be late for lunch."

"I'm coming," she muttered, following him up the ramp to the elevator.

"Ms. King, excellent work." Martin Snell handed her an envelope filled with cash. "Keep them distracted. We can't afford to have Lane and Kent on our tails. You will be compensated fully for your efforts."

"So, I keep them looking at the Metros while you guys move in? What do I do if they don't want to work with me? I mean, Lois and I don't exactly get along." Linda said.

"Get inventive. You're an attractive woman. I'm sure you can figure something out," Martin sneered.

Linda rolled her eyes. "Yeah." She nodded then headed out.

"Nice doing business with you, Mr. Snell."

"Ms. Drake, this is my partner, Lois Lane." Clark introduced the two women as they took their seats.

"Nice to meet you." Mayson nodded. "You said you had a few questions about the case against the Skins," Mayson prompted.

"Well, yes and no," Clark began. They were interrupted by the waiter coming by with the menus. After pouring them all glasses of water and handing them the menus, the waiter left. "We're investigating a possible connection between the fires that have erupted in Southside and a criminal organization..."

"Intergang," Lois finished for him. Mayson seemed to tense up at the mention of Intergang.

"Tell me what you've learned," Mayson said, taking a sip of her water.

"It's a worldwide organization; been in existence for almost twenty years..." Clark began, glancing at Lois.

Lois nodded and continued, "All they seem to do is acquire. Companies, other criminal organizations, even governments..."

"They just swallow them whole and start running them, always from a distance." Clark narrowed his eyes. "You think they're funding the Skins, don't you?"

Mayson shook her head. "I can't officially comment on what I think, but my gut does tell me Intergang is connected."

"In the last month, the police department has slowed down... criminals have been getting away unless Superman apprehends them... What is your office doing about it?" Lois asked.

"Well, Superman apprehending criminals isn't exactly a comfortable situation for me," Mayson said with a chill in her tone.

"Well, if he's the only one willing to stop the criminals..." Lois pointed out.

"He's a vigilante," Mayson snapped.

"That's not necessarily true..." Clark argued.

"He's trying to help," Lois cut in. "Something the Metropolis P.D. has no problem taking advantage of, might I add."

Mayson shrugged her off. "Look, I have my opinion, you have yours. We'll leave it at that."

"Ms. Drake, two soldiers' bodies were found in Hobb's Bay last night..." Clark began, trying to change the subject. "The same drug was in their system that several other victims have been

attacked with."

"Revenge." Mayson nodded. "It's Intergang's calling card. They leave it on their victims. A small exposure just increases the endorphins in your body, heightening your hormone level to the extreme. A lethal amount will kill you."

"Wait a minute. You're saying Intergang is behind Revenge?" Lois asked, confused.

"We had a source implicating the Metros in this," Clark said.

"The Metros are a small-time gang compared to Intergang," Mayson said. "They could never get their hands on Revenge without the help of Intergang."

Lois and Clark looked at one another in confusion. The pieces were beginning to fit.

"I say we go back and talk to this Bibbo Bibbowski without Linda King interfering," Lois said, sitting down next to Clark as they entered the conference room for Perry's weekly staff meeting.

"I'll make some calls and see if I can hunt him down," Clark promised, giving her hand a gentle squeeze.

Perry entered the room, reminding them all of the Charity Ball the next night. Clark watched Lois as she took notes on the meeting. It still amazed him that Lois was carrying his child. He had finally gotten everything he'd ever wanted: someone to love and a child to call his own. He wanted to ask Lois to marry him, but he wanted to give her a proper proposal, not some spur-of-the-moment proposal based on a pregnancy test. Lucy had gotten under his skin a few weeks ago when she had attacked him for not putting a ring on Lois' hand after finding out she was carrying his child. He hadn't known what to say when she'd compared him to Luthor.

She had insinuated Lois was having doubts about the stability of their relationship. He hadn't seen any sign of her supposed doubts. Part of him suspected it was more Lucy's insinuation, not necessarily Lois' feelings. He had everything set. He just had to keep cool until tomorrow night.

The next day, Lois and Clark spent the day hunting down Bobby Bigmouth after having no luck in finding Bibbo Bibbowski. Bobby had only been able to point them back to the club, leading them in a huge circle. Lois was glad Perry had given them the freedom to leave early to prepare for the Charity Ball. She had picked out the perfect dress, confident that Clark would love it. Even though her body was changing shape, she still had her slim figure.

"So, who usually comes to these things?" Clark asked, walking Lois up to her apartment.

Lois shrugged. "Everyone, really. A lot of Government officials, politicians, anyone who's anyone usually shows up trying to get on the good side of the Planet. A lot of the Planet's competition usually shows up too." They reached Lois' apartment and she turned around to give him a peck on the cheek. "I'll see you in a few," she whispered.

"What? You're not going to invite me in?" he asked, pretending to be hurt.

"Later," she said. "I worked really hard to find this dress. I don't want you to ruin the surprise. I'll see you at six." She pulled him to her for a long kiss before breaking away. "Don't be late," she whispered before sashaying into her apartment. Clark watched in amusement as she closed the door. Tonight was going to be a night neither of them would forget.

Later that evening, Lois was finishing getting ready at her apartment. She examined herself in the full-length mirror. She wore a pair of thigh highs with a garter belt and lace black panties with matching bra. She slipped on a long black dress with an open back with a zig zag design on the back and halter neckline with just enough cleavage showing to be sexy without being too

revealing. Thankfully she still wasn't showing yet, so she was still able to pull off an a-line dress without any baby bump showing.

The last few weeks had been hell in regards to her body adjusting to the pregnancy. She'd finally stopped having as many food aversions. Clark had found a blend of decaf coffee she'd been able to tolerate without getting sick, making mornings a bit easier. It had been hard...not being able to do what she was used to doing due to the sickness that came with the pregnancy. It had also been hard not being able to be with Clark like she was used to. After jumping the gun and making love on their first date they'd gotten used to the physical side of their relationship. It had been hard to refrain from sex for the last couple of weeks. The last time they'd made love had been when they'd been in Smallville, and it felt like torture to her to wait this long. Now that she was feeling better she had every intention of making up for lost time. She'd been cleared by her doctor to resume sexual activity and was now well into her second trimester, so there was less of a chance of something going wrong.

In the Honeymoon Suite at the Lexor Hotel, Clark was finishing up setting everything up. He laid petal after petal around the living room. He had a basket of wine, food, and champagne glasses on the coffee table. Candles were set up around the hotel room, ready to be lit when he brought Lois back here for a romantic picnic.

He wrapped his hand around the small jewelry box he'd been carrying for the last few weeks, saying a silent prayer. A knock at the door caught his attention and he went to open it. "Thanks for coming."

Lucy smiled, handing him a small overnight bag. "You have no idea how hard it was to sneak this out without her seeing me." She glanced around the room and smiled. "So tonight's the night, huh?"

He just smiled. "Yeah."

"Good luck...and hopefully congratulations," Lucy said. "Do you need anything else?" she asked.

"No." He shook his head. "I've got it from here. Thanks for your help."

"You kids have fun," Lucy teased as she closed the door behind her.

Clark looked around the room, making sure everything was perfect. He glanced at his watch and then headed out to pick up Lois.

After doing a quick check over the city, he headed back to his apartment. He stopped at one of the florist shops on his way to purchase a bouquet of roses.

It was seven o' clock on the dot when he knocked on Lois' door. "Coming," Lois called, rushing to open the door for him. "Hi."

Clark struggled to find his words as he drank in the sight before him. Lois was dressed in a long black dress with spaghetti straps. The gown came down to the ground, covering her ankles. It had a neckline that accented her body in just the right way. The lace front had small beads sewn into it. She had her hair permed. She looked incredible. "Wow..."

"Is that translation for 'I like the dress?'" Lois asked flirtatiously.

"Lois, you look absolutely gorgeous!" he said, handing her a bouquet of white roses. "These are for you."

"Thank you." She leaned up to give him a kiss. "I'll put these in some water and we can go."

He held his arm out for her and they headed out. "Shall we?"

After changing back into his tux and arriving at the Lexor, where the Charity Ball was being held, Lois noticed Clark seemed awfully nervous. She eyed him suspiciously as he readjusted his

tie for the tenth time as they entered the Lexor. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'm fine," he said, opening the door for her. "Shall we?" he asked.

"Sure," Lois said, wrapping her arm around his. They made their way inside where they were greeted by their colleagues at the Planet who had already begun in the festivities. Many of the bigwigs of Metropolis were there as well. Ryan Knox, the mayor and his girlfriend, and many others were there along with journalists from other papers and news stations.

"Nice turnout, eh, kids?" Perry asked with a beaming smile.

"Very nice, Chief," Clark said impressed, looking around.

"Enjoy the food. The band's already started playing. Go have fun," Perry said, patting Clark on the shoulder before turning away.

They made their way into the main room, where several couples had already begun dancing. After checking in her purse, Lois and Clark began to mingle with a few co-workers, discussing various stories.

"Hey, kiddo, I thought I recognized you," a familiar voice from behind her said.

Lois turned around and saw her Uncle Mike standing there.

"Uncle Mike, what are you doing here?" She gave him a big hug.

"Catering. I gotta do something while I'm waiting to rebuild." He shrugged.

"I heard what happened," Lois said solemnly. "Um, Uncle Mike, this is Clark Kent, my partner."

Mike took Clark's hand and shook it. "Pleased to meet you. I've heard a bit about you from Lucy."

Lois rolled her eyes. Leave it to Lucy to blab her personal life around. "You didn't happen to bring that chocolate mousse that I love so much, did you?" Lois asked, changing the subject.

Mike shrugged. "I'm all out, kiddo. I'll tell you what: I'll make some later and bring it by for you sometime next week."

"Deal." Lois nodded.

A shout from the kitchen caught Mike's attention. "I gotta go. Duty calls. We'll catch up later."

"He seems nice," Clark commented.

"He is." Lois nodded, "I still can't believe someone tried to burn his restaurant down like that. He's had it for almost fifteen years." Her eyes took on a dream-like expression. "You have got to try his chocolate mousse, Clark. It is to die for."

"Well, since you can't have chocolate, will you settle for a dance with me?" he asked, holding his hand out for her.

Lois smiled up at him. "Anytime," she whispered, following him onto the dance floor.

"Those two look like they were made for each other," Alice White commented, gesturing to Lois and Clark's dancing figures.

Perry smiled. "I've never seen her so happy in my entire life."

Alice nodded. "She's glowing."

Perry turned to face his wife. "May I have the honor of this dance, Mrs. White?"

"I don't know. My husband's a very jealous man. He might come after you," she teased.

"Well, then we'll have to be quick, won't we?" Perry teased back, walking her out to the dance floor.

"You know, this isn't what I call real dancing," Clark murmured in Lois' ear as he held her against his chest.

"Me neither." Lois winked at him, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"That's not what I was talking about," he said. "I'll show you later," he promised.

"I'll hold you to it," she teased. "It feels like ages ago since we shared our first dance." She sighed, reminiscing.

"You stormed out of my arms that night," Clark recalled.

“You were beginning to get to me,” Lois admitted sheepishly.
 “Oh, really?” Clark asked as he dipped her in his arms, eliciting a squeal of laughter from her.

“Yes, really,” she admitted, pressing her body against his. “Hasn’t the past few months taught you anything about the effect you have on me, Mr. Kent?” she asked, seductively running her hand down his chest.

“All too well,” Clark said, holding her close.

*Dancin’ in the dark, middle of the night
 Takin’ your heart and holdin’ it tight
 Emotional touch, touchin’ my skin
 And asking you to do what you’ve been doin’ all over again
 Oh it’s a beautiful thing, don’t think I can keep it all in
 I just gotta let you know what it is that won’t let me go*

Lois immediately recognized the song playing as the one they had danced to in Smallville at the Corn Festival. “I made a request with the band,” he whispered, resting his hands on the small of her lower back as they swayed to the music.

Lois gave him a light smile, lifting her arms up to link around his neck. “I love this song.”

“I know,” he said, leaning in to kiss her.

*It’s your love
 It just does something to me
 It sends a shock right through me
 I can’t get enough
 And if you wonder
 About the spell, I’m under
 Oh it’s your love*

“I think this song speaks perfectly for us. I mean, I still can’t describe the way you make me feel,” Clark whispered, holding her close. “All I know is I just can’t control myself when I’m with you. You’re everything I’ve ever wanted.” He gently brushed a stray strand of hair out of her face.

“Oh, Clark...” The emotion behind his words was not lost on her.

*Better than I was, more than I am
 And all of this happened by taking your hand
 And who I am now is who I wanted to be
 And now that we’re together,
 I’m stronger than ever
 I’m happy and free
 Oh it’s a beautiful thing,
 Don’t think I can keep it all in
 If you asked me why I’ve changed,
 All I gotta do is say your sweet name*

They had stopped moving. Both were staring into one another’s eyes as the song continued to play in the background. Neither were aware of the set of eyes that remained on them.

*It’s your love
 It just does something to me
 It sends a shock right through me
 I can’t get enough
 And if you wonder
 About the spell, I’m under
 Oh, it’s your love
 Baby, Oh oh, oh,
 Oh it’s a beautiful thing,
 Don’t think I can keep it all in
 I just gotta let you know what it is that won’t let me go*

“Lois,” Clark knelt down before her, pulling out a small jewelry box from his pocket.

“Clark...” Lois gasped. She felt like she was going to cry.

“Before you say anything, I want you to know this has nothing to do with what we found out in Smallville. I’ve been trying to get the nerve up to ask you for the last few months. I love you more than anything. You mean everything to me. You are the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing on my mind when I

fall asleep. These past few months have been a dream come true. I want to spend the rest of my life making you as happy as you’ve made me, if you’ll let me.” He opened the box, revealing a three-stone, diamond ring. “So, Lois Lane, will you marry me?”

*It’s your love
 It just does something to me
 It sends a shock right through me
 I can’t get enough
 And if you wonder
 About the spell, I’m under,
 Oh it’s your love
 It’s your love, it’s your love, it’s your love*

Lois bit her lip, fighting the urge to cry. Marriage? Could she do this? She knew she loved him, but her track record with relationships hadn’t been that great. Everyone she had ever thought she could count on had lied and betrayed her.

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“You’re the only one.”>>

<<“I can’t really control myself when I’m with you. You seem to bring out a part of me that I didn’t know existed.”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

She looked into his eyes and saw the vulnerability she had only seen in the beginning of their courtship. Any other time he had been so self-assured and confident. Even when challenged by Luthor with a sword to his throat he hadn’t shown any signs of hesitation—If Lex had tried to hurt him, his secret would have been exposed and his life over... But now, Clark was on his knee in front of everyone asking her to be his wife. He claimed it wasn’t because of the baby...

<<“I’m feeling I don’t know...a bit taken aback. I mean this is huge. We didn’t plan this and I have no idea what to do. I mean, you haven’t met my parents ...well, not really...”>>

“We’ll be fine.”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“Slow. I promise not to use the L-word until you’re ready if you promise not to run off on me like that.”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“Clark is a really great guy. All you have to do is say the word and he’d probably whisk you off to Vegas no questions asked.”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“Clark?”>>

“Hmm?”

“If you hadn’t have had to worry about your parents, when were you going to tell me?”

“I probably would have told you around the same time of our first date, but like I said...it wasn’t just my secret. I couldn’t risk my parent’s lives without their input too. I never meant to hurt you, Lois. I hope you can believe me.”>>

She did believe him. She trusted him more than she had trusted anyone in her life. He had captured her heart before she had even realized it. Somehow he had wormed his way through all the barriers she had built around herself.

<<“Clark?”>>

“Hmmm?”

“Um, we’re floating...”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“Every time I close my eyes I keep seeing Trask there with that rock...”>>

“Shhh, it’s over.”>>

<<“I love you.”>>

<<“Lois...Honey...Get a grip...”>>

“Believe me, I’d love too, baby...”>>

Any other man would have taken advantage of her that night, but not Clark. He had seen something was wrong with her. Instead of being worried about his own physical needs he had taken care of her...just as he always had.

<<“I love you.”>>

“Yes,” she whispered. In one fluid motion, Clark stood up, wrapping his arms around her. He slipped the ring on her waiting hand then leaned in to kiss her.

*Every little thing that you do
I'm so in love with you
It just keeps getting better
I wanna spend the rest of my life with you by my side
Forever and ever
Every little thing that you do*

“Oh, boy...” Perry shook his head as he watched the scene unfold.

“What’s wrong?” Alice asked.

“Nothing.” He sighed. “I’m just gonna have to learn to live without my favorite duo in the newsroom when they start having kids.”

Alice smiled. “It may be too late,” she murmured. “Look at Lois...She has that motherly glow about her.”

“Oh, honey, I think you’re reading too much into that...”

Perry admonished.

“You never know.” Alice shrugged.

Another surprise. That’s what Clark had said when they’d left the ballroom. Knowing him, they could be anywhere. The elevator dinged and Lois stepped off with Clark covering her eyes to make sure she didn’t peek. “Okay, I know we’re somewhere with an elevator. Are we at the Planet?” she asked.

“Nope.” He smiled. “Keep them closed,” he instructed as he pulled the keycard out of his pocket to open the door. He guided her in the room.

She smirked as she heard the door close behind them. “Now, can I open them?” She heard a click and a song came on the stereo and smiled when she heard the music begin playing.

*I remember trying not to stare
The night that I first met you
You had me mesmerized
And three weeks later
In the front porch light
Taking 45 minutes to kiss goodnight
I hadn't told you yet
I thought I loved you then*

Clark wrapped his arms around her waist. “Okay, now,” he whispered.

She opened her eyes and looked around. “When did you...?” She looked around the room, candles were lit all around the room. Rose petals laid all around the ‘picnic’ he had set up on the floor with a bucket of ice with wine and two long-stemmed glasses in front of it. Gourmet truffles and Chinese food sat in the center.

“I thought a picnic would be a fun way to celebrate,” he acknowledged as he swayed with her to the music.

“The Honeymoon Suite?” she asked, tightening her grip around his waist.

*Now you're my whole life
Now you're my whole world
I just can't believe
The way I feel about you, girl
Like a river meets the sea
Stronger than it's ever been
We've come so far since that day
And I thought I loved you then*

“When Roarke destroyed the room, the hotel manager had a reservation on call for us as a way of making up for any inconvenience during our stay,” Clark explained.

“And you never told me, why, exactly?” Lois asked.

“I wanted to save it for a moment like this,” Clark whispered, cupping her cheek.

Lois gave him a light smile, lifting her arms up to link around his neck. “I love it,” she whispered.

“Good,” he said, leaning in to kiss her.

*I remember taking you back
To right where I first met you
You were so surprised
There were people around
But I didn't care
I got down on one knee right there
And once again
I thought I loved you then*

“So, when are we getting married? I don’t think I can have a long engagement. I’m really not patient enough,” she said, rubbing her body against him, seductively.

“Why so impatient?” he murmured against her lips.

“Let’s see, where do I start? I want you to be legally mine as soon as possible so that when certain women start eyeballing you they can feel guilty for hitting on a married man...I want to have the excuse of being newlyweds as a reason to drag you into the storage closet and have my way with you.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to just fly home?” He laughed.

“Maybe...maybe not,” she murmured.

*Now you're my whole life
Now you're my whole world
I just can't believe
The way I feel about you girl
Like a river meets the sea
Stronger than it's ever been
We've come so far since that day
And I thought I loved you then*

“Our parents are going to have a field day,” Lois whispered, linking her arms around his neck.

“I still haven’t even met your mother,” Clark whispered. “Is she like that all the time?”

“Mostly, but she means well,” Lois said, nibbling at his neck.

*I can just see you
With a baby on the way
I can just see you
When your hair is turning gray
What I can't see
Is how I'm ever gonna love you more
But I've said that before*

“I told you earlier, this isn’t dancing,” Clark whispered as he held her close.

“Oh, really? Then what *is* dancing?” She gasped in surprise when he floated them above the ground, continuing the rhythm of the dance they had begun as if nothing had happened. “Oh, my...”

*Now you're my whole life
Now you're my whole world
I just can't believe
The way I feel about you girl
We'll look back someday
At this moment that we're in
"This is dancing," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.
And I'll look at you and say
And I thought I loved you then
And I thought I loved you then*

Jimmy looked around the party that had picked up its pace a bit. He watched as Lucy and Lex danced on the floor. He wasn’t sure what it was about the guy, but he just didn’t like seeing Lucy with him. If he was perfectly honest with himself, he really didn’t like seeing her with anyone. He really cared about her, but she had never seen him as more than a friend.

“What’s wrong, son?” Perry asked, taking a seat next to him.

“Aren’t you having a good time?”

“Yeah, it’s great, Chief. I just wish I had a date,” Jimmy said

glumly.

“A date or a certain date?” Perry inquired, following Jimmy’s gaze. “Try opening your mouth once in a while. You may be surprised what you hear back.” Perry patted Jimmy on the back. “If Kent was able to take a risk like he did tonight, there’s hope for you..”

“What risk?” Jimmy asked confused.

“You didn’t see?” Perry asked. “The boy got down on one knee in the middle of the ballroom and asked Lois to marry him.”

“You’re kidding,” Jimmy said. “I must have missed that.”

“Well, you just missed ‘em when you came in. They left a little while ago. I think they wanted to celebrate in...uh, private.” Perry winked at him. “I’ll see you around, kid.”

That evening after the Charity Ball Jimmy had decided to visit Lucy with some Chinese food and a movie. She’d welcomed him in with a hug and now they were seated on the couch, watching “Die Hard.” Jimmy noticed Lucy wasn’t really focused on the movie. “So, Lois Lane engaged...never thought I’d see the day,” Jimmy said, passing her the bowl of popcorn.

“I know,” Lucy said, grabbing a handful from the bowl. “I know she has her hang-ups with relationships. I’m happy for her, though. She deserves to be happy.”

Jimmy smiled, watching Lucy’s expression change to sadness. “You do too,” he reminded her.

“I am happy, Jimmy.” She gave him a big smile. “Really,”

Jimmy wasn’t sure if he believed her.

“So, what’s the deal with Allison?” Lucy asked, tossing popcorn at Jimmy’s head. “You over her or are you trying to get her back? Dish.”

Jimmy shook his head. “She wasn’t right for me. She’s happy with her new boyfriend and I’ll find the right girl one day.”

“You deserve better. Cheating should never be the way a relationship ends. If you’re unhappy, you leave. Cheating hurts everyone for no good reason. You lose trust,”

Jimmy nodded. “Yeah, I could have done without being cheated on. That’s for sure.”

“I’m sorry.” Lucy patted his hand. “I don’t know what I would ever do if Lex ever cheated on me. I really don’t. I saw how it tore my mom up when I was growing up and I never understood why my dad did that to her...to us.”

“Selfish,” Jimmy muttered. “That’s the only explanation.

“Yep,” Lucy muttered, glancing at her phone. “She still hasn’t called me,” she asked worriedly.

Jimmy shook his head, “I’m sure they’re ‘celebrating’...and she will call you later.”

“Jimmy!” She smacked a pillow against his head.

“I’m just saying ...” Jimmy shrugged. “They’re spending the night in the Honeymoon Suite.”

Lois opened her eyes as the sun shone through the bedroom window. She lifted her hand up to block the sun but felt her arm getting tired, so she dropped it and opted to roll over. She was stuck. She looked down, Clark’s arms were wrapped securely around her, just below her breast line and his chin rested on her shoulder.

She grimaced as she stretched her leg to move. She was so sore. She had definitely overdone it last night, but she just couldn’t stop. After not being able to do anything for the past month... She winced as she peeled herself out of his arms to sit up. Her muscles were so sore. She looked down at Clark who was still sleeping. ‘Totally worth it,’ she thought.

She looked down at her left hand, smiling to herself. Engaged. She was engaged to Superman...Clark Kent, her partner. She was getting married...

“Oh, my God!” she gasped, “Lucy...” she grimaced as she wrapped her robe around her body.

She’d forgotten to call her sister.

Clark woke when he heard Lois dart out of bed, “Oh, my God! Lucy...” He laughed to himself as he watched her grab the overnight bag he’d had Lucy bring over, searching for her phone.

He grabbed his boxer shorts from the floor of the living room and put them on, then walked over to her, wrapping his arms around her from behind. “Morning...fiancée” he whispered in her ear.

“Morning, fiancé,” she whispered back. “I need to call Lucy,”

“We’ll tell her together,” he whispered, kissing her neck, “in person.” He took the phone from her. “Right now I want to enjoy the last few hours we have here before we check out,”

He scooped her up in his arms and carried her back into the bedroom, kicking the door behind him as Lois giggled. “If you insist...”

“Oh, I insist,” he whispered.

The whispers in the Daily Planet lobby were the last thing on either Lois or Clark’s mind when they arrived at work the next morning...three hours late. “We’re late,” Lois murmured as they stepped into the elevator.

“Who cares?” Clark whispered, leaning down to kiss her, holding her against his solid frame as he reveled in the feeling of knowing Lois would soon be his wife.

DING

The elevator doors opened and neither one of them seemed inclined to separate. “What do you two think that is, a kissing booth?” Perry’s voice bellowed over the whistling and cat calls from their colleagues. Reluctantly they pulled away, stepping into the newsroom to get down to business. “Judas Priest, you two come in three hours late then you finally show up acting like you’re the stars of some romantic television sitcom. Get to work!” Perry ordered.

Lois and Clark nodded, moving towards their desks to pick up on the investigation into Intergang. Jimmy walked up to them with a note. “Lois, CK, you had a call from a guy named Bobby about fifteen minutes ago.”

“Thanks, Jimmy,” Lois said, taking the note from him.

Jimmy spotted the ring on Lois’ hand and beamed. “So, when’s the wedding?”

“We haven’t even started planning it yet, Jimmy, but don’t worry, you’ll be one of the first to know,” Lois promised. “Now get, before Perry starts yelling at you for hovering.” Lois brushed him off. She picked up her phone and began to dial the number Bobby had left. A loud smacking noise could be heard on the other end of the phone. “Bobby?”

“Hey, Lois, I heard you and Kent are getting hitched. Congrats. I got some information for you, but it’s gonna cost you.” Lois caught Clark’s gaze and motioned for him to listen in. He nodded approaching her desk.

“What do you want?” Lois asked.

“Pasta!” Bobby said, enthusiastically.

Lois rolled her eyes. “We’ll meet you at Alberto’s in twenty minutes. This better be good.”

“Oh, believe me, you’ll love it,” Bobby said before hanging up.

“Let’s go,” Clark said, holding her coat up for her.

“Where are you two going now?” Perry asked.

“We’ve got a lead, Perry. See you later,” Lois called over her shoulder as they made their way up the elevator ramp.

Perry nodded, watching the young couple leave. He just smiled then turned back to his work.

“Okay, so, my guy down at City Hall says there’s a particular lawyer that Intergang hires for the thugs that get caught with their hands dirty. I don’t got a name, but I got initials. ‘MS.’ Word is

he's pretty high up in Intergang..." Bobby took another slurp of his pasta then continued. "Oh, and your guy, Bibbo...he usually plays cards at the Press Club on Friday nights...but he has been out of pocket the last few weeks. Some personal issues..."

"What do you know about Linda King?" Lois asked.

"All I know is she's trouble. Something about a deal with the devil," Bobby said, taking a sip of his soda. "Man, this stuff is delicious. You sure you guys don't want some?"

"No thanks, I'm good," Lois said. Just watching Bobby eat was making her stomach churn.

"You sure? I heard you had some stomach issues earlier in the month. Pasta always helps," Bobby said.

"I'm fine," Lois reassured him.

"Thanks for the information, Bobby," Clark said, laying the money for the food with the bill on the table. He waved at the waiter and handed the money to him. "Keep the change," he said before helping Lois to her feet. "We'll see you later, Bobby."

"See ya. Congrats on the engagement. I'm happy for you," Bobby said, taking another bite. Lois and Clark gave him a smile before leaving.

"Okay, I have run every single variation of the initials 'MS' in this database and have come up with about five hundred thousand different possibilities. Is there anything that can help us narrow it down?" Lois asked, exasperated as she gestured to her screen.

"I'm not sure, I..." Clark's super hearing picked up the sound of screams for help.

"What is it?" Lois asked, recognizing the expression on his face.

"Someone's in trouble," he whispered.

Lois nodded. "Go. I'll keep at this." She gave him a quick peck on the cheek and he nodded, heading for the exit.

"Let go of me!" Mike Lane screamed, struggling beneath the weight of three thugs who had grabbed him from behind. The edge of a baseball bat was at his neck as he struggled to breathe.

"Where should we start?" One of the thugs asked, pulling out a knife. The blade of a knife edged towards Mike's ear, scraping against the skin. "Should we start with the limbs..." He moved the knife to Mike's throat.

"Go to hell, you unruly thugs!"

"Oh, we got a feisty one here, eh?" another thug asked, tightening the grasp on the bat against Mike's neck.

Mike delivered a hefty kick in the direction of the thug holding the knife. "OH!" The thug fell back. The other two thugs were startled, causing them to loosen their grip on Mike, allowing him to squirm free of their grasp.

"Grab him!"

They chased after him as he ran towards the street. A sonic boom could be heard as the thugs grabbed Mike again, flattening him to the ground. "You're gonna pay for that one, old man!"

"Let him go!" a stern voice from behind them said.

The thugs turned around only to come face to face with Superman. "Holy...!"

Clark grabbed them by the collar, tossing them to the ground. "I said, 'let him go!'" he snapped. The thugs struggled to stand to their feet but were met with Superman's boot on their backs.

"You're not going anywhere!" He turned his attention to Mike who was standing up, rubbing his neck. "Sir, are you all right?"

"I'm fine now. Thank you, Superman."

The echo of sirens from a distance approaching fast could be heard as Clark secured the thugs in between the metal of a partially burnt road sign. "That oughta hold you," he said sharply, "What happened here?"

"I got jumped..." Mike said, pointing at the three thugs.

"Man, you don't know what you talking about," one of the thugs said.

Mike's eyes narrowed as he stepped towards the now secured thug. "Listen here, you ingrates, you may get away with your games with your family and gang friends, but you aren't getting away with it this time! I didn't spend ten years of my life fighting against terroristic bastards to only come home and deal with the same terroristic assholes in my own country!" He wagged his finger in their direction. "Listen here, you, you think you're tough. You think you've seen it all? You don't know shit!"

The thugs just laughed. "You're the one up for a rude awakening, Grandpa!" one of the thugs sneered. "People like you is easy to get rid of...you got weaknesses...family...friends. Me? I ain't got nobody but the Skins!"

"Are you threatening me?" Mike glared.

"Don't give in to them, sir," Clark warned.

"You son of a ... you come anywhere near my family I'll rip you limb from limb..." Mike warned.

"Yeah, you got what? A sister? Two nieces right? Lois Lane, the reporter? Lucy Lane, the new kid at the DA's office. Shame if anything happened to 'em."

"All right, what's going on here?" Officer Zymack asked, exiting from his patrol car.

"Attempted murder," Clark added. "And you can also add a threat against at least three other people."

The thugs just grinned.

"Lois!" Ellen Lane stormed into the newsroom. "Where have you been? I have been calling you since last night!" she huffed as she took a seat next to her daughter.

"I was at a Charity Ball function for the Planet with Clark, Mother. What's up?" Lois asked.

"Lucy called and said you had something you needed to tell me...Oh, my!" Ellen spotted the ring on Lois' hand. "Is that what I think that is?"

Lois nodded, pleased to see her mother at least partially speechless for once. "Clark asked me to marry him last night."

"Wait, last night?" Ellen asked. "What was it you needed to talk to me about then? Lucy called me a few *days* ago."

"Mother, I'd really rather talk about this in private. Can we meet for lunch sometime? I'm really busy..." She spotted Clark coming down the ramp of the elevator towards her desk and smiled.

Ellen followed her gaze. "Is that him?" she asked critically.

"Yes. Be nice," she warned. "Or so help me God I will never give you grandchildren." Lois tried to squash the little bit of guilt she felt at threatening her mother like that. The point was kinda moot anyway. The fact was she was going to have a baby, but her mother didn't know that.

Ellen scowled at Lois. "I am always nice."

"Since when?" Lois asked dryly.

Ellen stood up to greet Clark. "You must be Clark. I'm Lois' mother. We spoke on the phone..."

Clark seemed a bit taken aback for a split second but quickly recovered. "Oh, yes, hi, Ellen." He took her hand. "I guess Lois told you?"

"About the engagement? Yes, I'm thrilled! I can't wait to start planning!" Ellen beamed.

"Planning?" Clark echoed uncertainly.

"The wedding. The shower. Everything. Oh, I can't wait!" She grabbed Clark and planted a big wet one on his cheek. "You have no idea how happy you've made me!" She beamed. "I have to run. I'll see you later. Lois, call me about lunch," Ellen said before turning to head towards the elevator. "I'm going to go find a coordinator ASAP!"

Clark watched Ellen leave, completely dumbstruck. "What just happened?"

"You just became my mother's favorite person," Lois said in between fits of laughter. Realization dawned on Lois a moment.

“Clark!” She slapped his chest. “I haven’t even told Lucy yet!”

“Somehow, I think she already knows...” Clark warned, watching Ellen leave. “Or if she doesn’t, she will soon.”

“That’s not funny!” Lois said, “Come on, we need to go tell her before hurricane Lane does.”

“Lois, hold on,” Clark warned. “I need to tell you something. We probably do need to see your sister, but not about the engagement.”

“What happened?” Lois asked, noticing the look in Clark’s eyes.

“Superman just stopped a bunch of thugs from attacking a restaurant owner in Southside...your Uncle Mike,” he whispered.

“Oh, my...Is he all right? Oh, my God...I have to go see him...” Lois rambled grabbing her purse and half dragging him towards the elevator.

“He’s at the police station right now giving his statement,” Clark said.

“Let’s go!” Lois said, pressing the call button for the elevator. She swatted at a fly that flew in her direction. “OW!”

“What happened?” Clark asked concerned.

“A bug just bit me.” She pouted, looking down at her hand.

“Are you all right?” Clark asked, looking down at her hand in concern.

“It really hurt,” she said.

They stepped into the elevator car and Clark kissed her hand. “Better?”

“No,” she said, pouting as she pulled him in for a kiss. “I think I need a bigger dose.”

Lois glared at Mayson as she walked up to them. “What the hell is going on? My uncle gets attacked and all these cops are too busy stuffing their faces with doughnuts to realize what’s going on before it’s too late...If it wasn’t for Superman...”

“Honey, calm down...” Clark said, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder.

“I’m sorry about what happened to your uncle, Ms. Lane, but there’s not much I can really do. I’m already overbooked on these cases against the Skins...” Mayson argued. “I can only stop them when the police actually do their job...”

“What about them threatening Lois? Or Lucy? Or their mother?” Clark asked.

“When was this?” Mayson asked.

“It was when Superman tied them up. They were talking about me having weaknesses in my family. If they hurt Lois or anyone...I’ll...” Mike’s anger began to boil to an extreme high as he fought to control his emotions.

“Unfortunately, it’s your word against theirs, Mr. Lane,” Mayson argued.

“No, it’s not! Superman was a witness. You can call him in. I want their asses nailed to the wall!” Lois argued angrily. “Why are you being so...so...*calm*?”

Mayson glared at Lois a moment then looked around, noticing the looks she was getting from the officers. “Come upstairs with me,” she said quickly, motioning for them to follow. “Mr. Lane, I’ll have my assistant come down to get your statement, then you’ll be escorted home.”

“Thank you.” Mike nodded.

Lois and Clark followed Mayson upstairs to the DA’s office. Once they reached her office she closed the door behind them then locked it. “I can’t have you making outbursts like that, Ms. Lane. You could get yourself killed.”

“So, Lois’ life IS in danger?” Clark asked concerned.

“I don’t know,” Mayson acknowledged. “It could just be thugs talking trash or it could be a real threat. What I do know is this screams Intergang. Southside was supposed to burn down to a crisp. Every other business owner was killed except your uncle. My guess is, the Skins were hired to finish the job.”

“So, what do we do?” Lois asked, concerned.

“Stay out of trouble?” Mayson suggested. “Intergang is a powerful organization and if they think you’re a threat then you will be targeted. Many journalists and investigators have been killed over the years.”

“How do you know so much about Intergang, Mayson?” Lois asked, eyes narrowing.

“I’m afraid that’s all I can help you with. I’m sorry I couldn’t be of more help,” Mayson replied briskly, opening the door for them.

Taking the hint, Lois and Clark left. “I don’t trust her,” Lois muttered. “Let’s find Lucy. I need to tell her about Mike.”

“Okay.” Clark nodded, following her down the hall.

“Lucy?” Lois asked, knocking on her sister’s door.

“Just a sec!” Lucy called. The door opened and Lucy gestured for them to come in. “Come on in, Lois. What’s up?”

“Did you hear about Uncle Mike?” Lois asked apprehensively. “No,” Lucy said. “Why?”

“A bunch of thugs from the Skins jumped him earlier and tried to kill him,” Clark said, placing a protective arm around Lois.

“They threatened you, Lois, and your mother’s lives as well.”

“What?” Lucy asked dumbstruck. “Is he okay?”

“Yeah.” Lois nodded. “He’s giving his statement right now.” She sat down next to her sister taking a shaky breath.

“Are you okay, sis? Is it the baby? Oh, my God! Do I need to call an ambulance??” Lucy asked, noticing the pale look in Lois’ eyes.

“I’m *fine*, Lucy.” Lois glared at her. “I do have a bone to pick with you, though,” she said, wagging her finger in Lucy’s face. “Why did you call Mom and tell her I needed to tell her something?”

“Because you do...” Lucy said with a smile, patting the small bump on her sister’s abdomen as Lois tried to remove her hand. Lucy grinned when she saw the sparkle on her sister’s hand and teased, “What is this?” She grabbed Lois’ hand and brought it closer to her for inspection. “Did you forget to tell me something?”

Lois smiled. “I was going to call you this morning...but we were already running late...”

“Oh...I already knew. Jimmy told me last night...along with everyone at the Charity Ball...I’m so happy for you...” Lucy said sighing. “When’s the wedding?”

Lois laughed. “Lucy, you are the third person to ask us that...”

“Let me guess, Jimmy was the first, right?”

“How’d you know?” Clark asked.

“He’s always impatient,” Lucy said, rolling her eyes. “You did good, Clark. Very nice,” she said, examining the ring on Lois’ hand more critically. “I always hate those people that think they have to do some extravagant thing for an engagement ring. I mean, it is just so unrealistic to have a gawky ring like that. This is perfect. Not too big, not too small. Perfect. Congratulations, sis. I’d keep him,” she joked.

Lois let out a light laugh. “You’re so funny.”

“I try.” Lucy grinned. “Guess who’s arguing her first case? Well, it’s an arraignment...” Lucy shrugged.

“Nice...” Lois nodded. “The case on the Skins?”

“Yeah. Mayson will be supervising. I’m a little nervous, but I’m so excited. I love the thrill of throwing the bad guys in the slammer where they belong. Justice, you know?” Lucy asked.

“Speaking of Mayson, what is up with her? She seems kinda standoffish...” Clark commented.

“Really? I don’t see it,” Lucy commented.

“Yeah, she made some really rude comments about Superman the other day that kinda caught me off guard,” Lois added.

“Who knows?” Lucy shrugged.

“Hey, Lucy, Mayson wanted you to consult on this new...” Lana stopped cold in her tracks when she saw Lois and Clark.

“Oh, Lana, hi. This is my sister, Lois Lane, and her fiancé, Clark Kent. They work at the Daily Planet. I’m sure you’ve heard of them,” Lucy said, introducing them. “Lois, Clark, this is Lana Lang. She just started here.”

“We’ve met,” Lois said coldly, narrowing her eyes at Lana.

Lucy noticed the chill in the air. “Am I missing something here?”

“Oh, it’s nothing Lucy. Your sister’s just threatened by me,” Lana added sweetly.

Clark rolled his eyes. “Threatened?” Lois scoffed. “Get real!”

“Oh, come on! You seriously want me to believe you act like that in public all the time?” Lana sneered.

“If you’re talking about them not being able to keep their hands off one another then ...yeah...believe it. I’m a witness to it,” Lucy interjected.

Lana rolled her eyes. “Well, I’ll be seeing you around,” Lana said, dropping the files on Lucy’s desk and left.

“You’re working with *her*?” Lois asked aghast.

“Yeah... You know it’s weird. They don’t really ask the new employees if they’ve had any past relationships with current employees’ relatives. They should really add that question on the application, huh?” Lucy asked sarcastically.

Lois glared at her. “Be careful, Lucy.”

“Lana has a very strong vindictive streak. She nearly ruined one of my good friends’ reputation a few years back,” Clark added.

Lucy sighed. “Whatever. She seems nice enough to me.” She shrugged.

“She’s up to something. It is no coincidence that your ex-girlfriend just happened to get a job at the same place my sister works,” Lois said grumpily as she pounded on the call button for the elevator in the Daily Planet lobby.

“I don’t know. It could just be a coincidence, Lois,” Clark reasoned.

“Give me a break!” Lois scoffed, stepping into the elevator car. “And don’t think I didn’t see the way she kept sizing you up...” Clark leaned in to capture her mouth, ending her tirade as the elevator doors.

“I think that’s enough of that,” he murmured against her lips.

“But...”

He leaned in to kiss her once more. “No ‘buts,’” he whispered.

“You don’t play fair,” she murmured against his lips. “How long until we can go home?” she asked.

Clark glanced at his watch. “Assuming Perry doesn’t make us work late for coming in late...two hours.”

DING

The elevator doors opened and he tugged at her arms lightly, guiding her out of the elevator car. They arrived at her desk and found a mysterious package marked in black ink.

//LOIS LANE: SPECIAL REGARDS...THANK YOUR UNCLE MIKE. BOOM!//

“Oh, my God!” Lois stepped back from her desk.

“I’m gonna get the police,” Clark said, dashing towards the nearest stairwell to change. At super-speed, he moved through the newsroom to get rid of the package. Once he was in the air he found the package exploding in his hands. He moved higher and higher to assure himself the explosion wouldn’t affect anyone around him. After assuring himself the bomb had been disposed of, he returned to the newsroom to address the broken glass window he had broken in his haste to get rid of the bomb.

“Is everyone all right?” he asked, looking around.

“Superman!” Jimmy beamed, looking at Clark in awe.

“Superman, what happened?” Perry asked, coming out of his office to discover what the commotion had been about.

“Mr. White, an unmarked package was left on Ms. Lane’s desk...” he explained, showing Perry the remnants of the

explosive device.

“Lois, are you all right?” Perry asked, concerned.

“I’m fine Perry,” Lois said nervously.

“I think until whoever’s behind this is caught you should double-check the employees that come on this floor,” Clark said sternly. “I’m going to take this to Inspector Henderson. He should know what to do with it.” With that, he left to head over to the police station.

Jimmy looked around the room. “Where’s CK?”

“Oh, he ...uh, went to get the police. We had a bit of a break in the story. He’s probably at the police station,” Lois stammered. Perry and Jimmy just looked at her dubiously. “Don’t just stand there. Move! I have work to do,” she huffed, pushing past them.

“You say this was on Lois’ desk?” Henderson asked, looking skeptically at the burnt explosive device Superman had laid in front of him.

“Yes. I barely got to it in time before it exploded,” Clark said as he paced around the inspector’s office. “Inspector, these people are dangerous. They nearly killed my fiancé...*FRIEND*.”

“I understand that Superman, but like I’ve told Lois and Clark, until I can get some REAL officers on this force I’m stuck with dead weights that refuse to do their job.” Henderson sighed when he noticed the superhero’s disconcerting look. “Listen, I’ll do a drive by Lane and Kent’s apartments. I’ll keep an eye on them. I know she’s your friend. I promise I’ll do everything I can to protect her.”

“Thanks, Inspector that mean a lot...” He stopped.

“Superman!” The sound of a male voice with a Brooklyn accent reached his ears.

“Superman?” Henderson asked, noticing the superhero’s attention was elsewhere.

“I’m contacting you on a hypersonic frequency that only you and a few bats can hear. I don’t know where you spend your off hours, but if I were you, I’d be at the Arboretum, east gate, inside of three minutes...or someone is going to die.”

“No...” he whispered before jetting off into the air, leaving a very confused Inspector Henderson behind.

Clark landed in front of a bench where a oily looking man sat with what looked like a small tape recorder in his hands. “Hey, there.” He smiled, looking up at Clark. Clark moved to approach him. “Martin Snell, good to meet you.” He waved the tape recorder looking device in his hand. “Some little piece of equipment...” He pressed a button and spoke into it, “Superman, let’s talk.” Clark heard the echo of it in his head. “Neat, huh?”

Tired of the man’s games, he grabbed him by the collar and hoisted him up. “If this is your idea of a joke, you’re going to need a lawyer.”

“No, I won’t. Because A, I am a lawyer. And B, this is no joke. I’ll even give you the name of the person who’s going to die. I think you know her...Lois Lane?” Clark glared at him, tightening his grip on Martin Snell’s neck.

“If you so much as touch a hair on her head I’ll...”

Martin smiled, looking at his watch. “Well, then you’d better hurry. I’d say she’s got about, ohhhh, ten seconds? Think you can get there in time?”

He dropped Snell against the bench and rocketed in the air towards the Daily Planet. For the second time that day, he crashed through the Daily Planet windows. “Oh, man!” the window installer yelled when glass flew everywhere.

Without a second thought, he flew through the newsroom, scooping Lois into his arms as he flew her out of the newsroom. “Clark, what...?” Lois stammered, looking down at the shrinking city below. “Clark?” He wasn’t listening. He watched with his enhanced vision as a missile headed towards them. He grabbed it

at super-speed, stopping it in its tracks. “Clark, what’s going on here?” Lois asked.

Clark winced as he crushed the missile. “Paint...” he muttered. “I’ll explain later,” he said, flying her back down to the newsroom. They landed in the newsroom in time for Clark to see another missile headed towards Jimmy. He lunged for it, intercepting it before it hit his young friend.

“What the...?” Jimmy asked.

Clark broke it in half. “More paint,” he muttered grimly.

“HEY!!” Ralph screamed across the newsroom when a missile hit him in the chest, splattering yellow paint all over his chest. Lois had to suppress a laugh.

“What’s going on?” Lois asked.

“Somebody’s idea of a sick joke,” Clark said grimly. “Don’t worry. They won’t bother you again.” With that, he flew out of the newsroom leaving a very confused Planet staff behind.

“This is silk!” Ralph cried out, trying to get the paint off his shirt.

Back at the arboretum, Snell was still sitting on the bench, waiting patiently. Clark zoomed down at super-speed, landing in front of him. Without a second thought, he grabbed Snell by the neck and hoisted him up, “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t take you downtown right now!”

“Easy...easy...I just wanted to get your attention, Big Guy,” Snell wheezed out. Clark threw him against the bench.

“Well, you got it! If you ever come near her again I’ll...”

Snell laughed, “Whoa! You get that look on your face you remind me of a few judges I know.” Clark crossed his arms over his chest, giving Snell his best stare down. “Okay, cut to the chase: like everybody else on Earth, you’ve got me dazzled. I’m a big fan—numero uno. So, I don’t want you to stop being the Man of Steel. It’s a beautiful thing, it gives us all hope. But what my partners and I want is for you to stay out of our business.”

“I don’t take orders!” Clark glared.

Snell shrugged. “Fine. Call it a suggestion. A very strong suggestion.” Snell took on a sinister tone. “Face it, you got your little red shorts caught in a bad combo of high-tech and close friends. Even you can’t be two places at once, but our bullets can. So, where does that leave us?”

Clark grabbed him by the arm. “Let’s ask the DA.”

Snell nodded. “Sure, you could take me in, you’re Superman and I’m just a guy from Paramus. But do that and two things happen—A, someone you care about dies...” He pulled his arm free, “...and B, my replacement steps in. Now, you don’t want ‘A’ and I don’t want ‘B’ so I think what we need is a little attitude adjustment. By that I mean, be the best Superman you can be. Street crime? Wipe it out. Terrorists? Kick their butts. Carjackers? Hey, I drive a Ferrari myself, put those guys in orbit...But you stay out of the Southside. I don’t care if it’s a cat chasing a mouse, you flash cape in that part of town, you’re looking for an all-expenses-paid education in bereavement. Are we clear?”

“On one thing. This is not over,” Clark hissed before flying into the air once more.

“Clark, what happened?” Lois asked. He hadn’t said a word since he entered the newsroom. He had led her to the conference room then began closing the blinds. “Clark, you’re starting to scare me.”

He pulled her close against his chest. “I almost didn’t make it.” He let out a shuddered breath, pulling her close to him.

“Clark, honey, what is going on?” Lois asked exasperated. She’d never seen him so shaken before.

“I found the lawyer Bobby warned us about,” he said slowly. He held her close to him as he recited everything that had happened from the time he had left. “I don’t know what to do, Lois. If I show up over there trying to put out a fire they’ll try to

kill you...or Jimmy...or Perry...or Ralph.”

“Clark...” Lois leaned up to kiss him. “Calm down. We’ll figure this out.”

“You need to tell your Uncle Mike to stay out of Southside. I can’t protect him otherwise. Scratch that; he just needs to get out of town period.”

“Clark, I think you’re overreacting. Just take a deep breath...”

“What if those missiles had been real, Lois? You could have died...our baby...” he whispered hoarsely as he held her close against his chest. “I don’t know what I would do if I ever lost you.”

“Well, you won’t have to find that out,” Lois said, leaning up to kiss him. She grabbed his hand and pulled him with her as they exited the conference room. “Jimmy!”

“What’s up?” Jimmy asked.

“Get me everything you can on Martin Snell and have it couriered over to my apartment. We’re calling it a day,” she said, guiding Clark over to the elevator after gathering her things. “Let’s go.” She pulled Clark into her arms as they entered the elevator car. “I refuse to let that man ruin what started out as a perfect day for us.” She then leaned up and kissed him with all her might. “And don’t you dare let him either.”

The drumming of rain against the windows whined in the background throughout the night. Lois lay curled up in Clark’s arms as they sat in bed after their recent lovemaking, going over the files on Martin Snell. “So, five years ago Martin Snell was a staff council for Bill Church,” Lois read off the report.

“Cost Mart again.” Clark shook his head. “Keeps popping up. It’s hard to believe someone that senile could be behind one of the world’s largest crime organizations.”

“Well, it’s probably an act,” Lois said.

“Like Luthor’s act of being an honorable citizen?” Clark asked.

“Something like that,” Lois whispered, flipping the page.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here. Worked in corporate acquisitions. Responsible for buying up overseas companies.”

“Maybe Snell was doing Church’s dirty work?” Clark asked.

Lois nodded. “That’s what I’m thinking. I mean, we already know that Cost Mart has shown up everywhere Intergang’s gotten a foothold...Where’s that report on the history of Cost Mart?” Lois asked, craning her neck to look through the stacks of papers lying on the floor by the bed, yet not wanting to move out of Clark’s arms just yet.

“Right here.” Clark handed her the report.

“Okay, let’s see here.” Lois scanned the report. “Denver, 1975 is when the first Cost Mart opened its doors.”

Clark nodded, picking up another report. “And in the same city, same year, the first police report on Intergang showed up.”

“First overseas Cost Mart: Australia.”

“First overseas Intergang activity: Australia.”

“And Bill Church doesn’t have any type of record. Not even a parking ticket.” Lois pouted grumpily.

“Well, neither does Luthor, but we both know he’s guilty as sin,” Clark pointed out.

“This is so frustrating,” she muttered. “I mean, it’s not like we can drag Snell into the DA’s office. We’d need more than just Superman’s word to get Mayson to even listen...”

“I know,” Clark said softly, running his hands through her silky hair. “Did you call your uncle?” he asked.

Lois nodded. “He’s going to stay with Mom for a few days,” Lois said, laying the papers back on the night stand. “So, what’s the plan for tomorrow?”

“Work on nailing Snell to the wall, then see what we can find out about Bibbo. I’ve got a few feelers out trying to find out when he’ll be back at the Press Club. So far nothing.” Clark sighed, wrapping his arms around her. “I just don’t understand these

people. I mean, I was so scared I wasn't going to get to you in time."

Lois leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arms around him as she straddled his waist. "But you did," she whispered, brushing feather-light kisses along his jaw line. "I'm fine." She guided his hand to her abdomen. "Our baby is fine." She leaned down to nibble at his neck. "So, stop brooding."

"I'm...not...brooding," he said half-heartedly. She inched her way beneath the covers, nibbling at his collarbone as she moved herself lower. "Oh, God, baby..."

Lois lay in the aftermath of their lovemaking, her mind in a dream-like state. "Clark?"

"Hmmm?" He lazily turned to look at her.

"When do you think it was?" Lois asked quietly, wrapping her limbs more securely around him.

"When was what?" he asked, confused.

"When we made our baby..." Lois asked.

"I don't know." Clark sighed. "I mean, it could have been the elevator, kitchen counters..." He wore an amused expression as she lightly smacked him. "We were pretty active that week..."

"I'm not complaining," she whispered, seductively.

"Definitely not," Clark murmured, leaning down to kiss her. "I've missed this," he said softly.

"Me too," she said sadly. "Kinda scary, huh?"

He let out a shallow breath. "Yeah, knowing I have all these powers but couldn't do anything..." He shook his head and Lois placed a hand on his chest. He wrapped his hand around hers. "I'm not used to being helpless."

"Me neither," she sighed. "I'm so glad that's all over. We can start trying to plan everything...baby and wedding..."

"You said you didn't want to wait long..." Clark recalled.

"Yeah, I think we can probably get something together in about a month. I'm almost five months now... I want to try and have the wedding before I have the baby. That way we're able to get settled in as husband and wife before the baby comes. Because once it does I know it's going to be hectic."

Clark nodded. "Yeah, but in a good way." He smiled at her. "I'm looking forward to finding out what the baby is."

"One of the perks of the second trimester." She smiled at him. "I'm so glad all that morning sickness is done. Now, we can start enjoying the pregnancy advantages..." She slipped a hand down his thigh seductively. He let out a soft groan and she laughed. "Increase in sexual drive, check." She laughed when he rolled them over so she was beneath him, intent on repeating their earlier activities well into the night.

"Over half the Skins have been released on bail," Jimmy said, laying the file on Lois' desk.

"What? How did that happen?" Lois asked.

"An OR bond?" Clark asked, reading the copy of the report from the detention center. He scanned the papers Jimmy had given them and grimaced. "Look at this. Every one of them has been assigned Martin Snell as their legal counsel."

"There's over fifteen defendants. How can he represent them all?" Lois asked.

"This reeks," Clark muttered bitterly, sifting through the papers. "What I want to know is what the connection is with Intergang and Southside. Why the interest in that property?"

"Well, it used to be owned by the Metros...Maybe they just want to push them out?" Jimmy suggested.

"We don't know for sure *what* the Metros were running, to begin with," Lois pointed out. "For all we know, the line Linda was feeding us was just a bunch of crap. It wouldn't be the first time she tried to interfere in one of my investigations."

"What do you mean?" Clark asked. Lois sighed, giving him a pointed look. "Okay, fine. I get it. You don't want to talk about it."

He then turned to Jimmy. "Jimmy, get everything you've got on the properties the Metros own, Bill Church, Martin Snell, and Lex Luthor."

"Why Lex Luthor?" Jimmy asked.

"Well, his shipments were attacked at the same time those fires were set. Maybe there's more to it than that," Lois said. "Get!" She said pushing him off the edge of her desk.

Lois and Lucy sat at a small table outside their Uncle Mike's café. "I am still in shock," Lucy said, examining her sister's ring. "You...engaged."

"I know." Lois grinned. "I never thought of myself as the marrying type...but...there's just something about Clark."

"Yeah, I'll bet..." Lucy teased, wiggling her eyebrows. Lois blushed, laughing. "You're happy?"

"Very." Lois smiled.

"Good." Lucy grinned. "We're going to have to get this wedding planned before Mom gets wind and starts taking over."

"Oh, God..." Lois groaned. "It may be too late. She cornered me at the Planet..."

Lucy nodded. "That's mom for you..."

"She loves Clark."

"Poor Clark," Lucy sympathized.

"Poor everyone," Lois corrected.

"I think the sooner the better, but I just want small and simple...just family and close friends," Lois said.

"Yeah, Mom will love that." Lucy laughed. "No, you and I both know how this is going to go. She is going to try and take control like always...You may just want to elope," Lucy teased.

"We should begin testing with Dr. Leek's latest subject. I want to be kept up to date on all the developments. You say the subject shows no signs of being affected by this...Kryptonite?" Lex asked.

"No, Lex. The subject has all the powers of Superman and not the weaknesses," Mrs. Cox said. "Should make for an interesting fight."

"Yes, well, we'll broach that bridge when we get to it. First, I need to test its morals and ethics. Make sure we share the same ideals."

"But, Lex, you don't have any morals or ethics," Mrs. Cox pointed out.

"Precisely." Lex smiled.

"Mr. Church?" Martin knocked at the door of Bill Church's office. "Everything's all set. No sign of Superman in Southside thus far," Martin Snell said reassuringly.

"Excellent. Have you sent the men out on the Scavenger Hunt?" Church asked.

"Already done," Martin Snell reassured him.

"Once we've gotten a stronghold on Metropolis we can start showing these people who's in charge around here. It certainly isn't Mr. Luthor." Church grinned, taking a puff of his cigar.

One Week Later...

Clark watched as Lois grabbed an outfit and headed for the bathroom to get ready. She seemed to be more and more tired lately as the pregnancy progressed. Thankfully the nausea had subsided but the exhaustion had kicked in full-force. When he'd arrived at her apartment this morning she was just waking up.

He headed for the kitchen to try to fix something for them for breakfast and laughed when he saw the slim pickings that were in her pantry and refrigerator. Three eggs, half a gallon of milk and flour and sugar and some butter. He sighed, looking at the time. At super-speed, he mixed up a batch of dough for biscuits and began to cook them with his heat vision. Just as he finished the phone rang and he sighed, reaching for the phone. "Hello?"

“Who is this?” Ellen Lane asked on the other end of the phone.

“Oh, hi, Ms. Lane. This is Clark Kent.”

“Clark? Where’s Lois?” Ellen asked accusingly.

“Uh, she’s in the shower.”

“In the shower? Always running late I tell you,” Ellen muttered. “I think she does it on purpose. She never called to schedule lunch. How am I supposed to start planning everything when I don’t have a clue when you two are planning on getting married? You ARE getting married, correct?” Ellen asked, accusingly.

“Um, yes...” he began hesitantly, unsure of what to make of Ellen’s tirade.

“Then why hasn’t Lois called me? It’s been over a week! Oh, that is just so like her. Always leaving me out of everything...”

“Ms. Lane, it’s been a busy week at work. She probably just forgot...” Clark tried to reassure her.

“Forgot? Do I mean that little to her?”

“That’s not what I meant...”

Lois stepped out of the bedroom, fully dressed. “Who is that?”

“Your mother,” he said, “You know what? She just stepped out. Let me hand the phone over to Lois. It was nice talking to you.” He shoved the phone in front of her and Lois took it reluctantly, rolling her eyes at him.

“Hi, Mother.”

“Lois! What in the world is going on? It’s six in the morning...I’m trying to get a date from you on when you want to have this wedding and you’re not home all night...”

“I’m sorry, I’ve been a bit preoccupied lately...”

“Yeah, I’ll bet...Everything else comes before me...” Ellen added.

Lois sighed. “That’s not true. We’ve been trying to figure out who is after Uncle Mike...and this new gang that seems to be involved...”

“When were you planning on calling me about lunch?” Ellen asked.

Lois sighed. “I’m sorry, Mother.”

“Never mind. I’ve hired a wedding consultant, Beverly...She’s a genius. You’re going to love her.”

“Can we afford that?”

“It’s cheap. Your father will be paying for it. He has years of indifference to atone for...”

“Mother...”

“What?”

“Please, no fighting...”

“Who’s fighting?” Ellen asked. “We’ll meet for lunch. Mike will cook. I told him to make that chocolate mousse you love so much.”

“Mom, Uncle Mike doesn’t really like Daddy. Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Well, I can’t have him getting beaten up by some hoodlums again, can I? Have the police caught those cretins yet?”

“We’re working on it.” Lois sighed.

“Well, when exactly are you two planning on getting married?” her mother echoed through the phone.

“Um, sometime soon.” She looked at Clark pleadingly. He just mouthed, ‘Sooner the better’ to her. “What about the end of the month?”

Her mother seemed to choke on the other end of the phone. “Excuse me? Please tell me you’re joking.”

“No,” Lois said, more determined. “I want to get married at the end of the month. Something small.”

“But...”

“No buts. If you won’t do it, I’ll do it myself,” Lois added.

Ellen sighed. “Fine. I’ll meet you both for lunch at one with Beverly and your father. Don’t be late.”

“Goodbye, Mother.” Lois hung up the phone.

“End of the month?” Clark asked amused.

Lois laughed, leaning up to kiss him. “I’ll tell her about the baby at the reception.”

Mrs. Cox stood in a secluded alley with Nigel, shaking her head. “He’s on a downward spiral. He says he’s in control but he doesn’t see it. He’s lost it.”

Nigel nodded. “Yes, he seems to be getting deeper and deeper with Ms. Lane than he originally intended.”

“What are we going to do?” Mrs. Cox asked.

“Wait until he’s vulnerable and take control of the empire we helped build,” Nigel said firmly.

They sat at the table of a small café across the street from the Daily Planet. “I’m so thrilled to at last be able to give my princess the big wedding she’s always dreamed of. It’ll be a bit of a stretch on such short notice, but we’ll manage...”

“Mom, I really don’t need a big wedding...” Lois began.

“After her second cousin Martina married that jockey, it’s all she talked about. She’d walk around all day holding a bunch of flowers, with my slip on her head,” Ellen gushed, laughing.

“Mother, I was six,” Lois said in between gritted teeth.

“Beverly should be here any minute. Don’t be shy about picking her brain for ideas.”

“Beverly?” Clark asked, confused.

“Beverly Lipman, acclaimed bridal consultant,” Ellen beamed.

“Mom, is that really necessary? I mean, we’re trying to keep this simple,” Lois said.

“Nonsense. It’s your wedding, you should go all out. Besides, I’ve already sent the bill to your father.”

“Mother...” Lois sighed.

“What?” Ellen shrugged, “I told you before, it’s cheap, considering the years of indifference he’s got to atone for.” Ellen turned to Clark. “You know, I raised Lois and Lucy by myself for the last fifteen years. He didn’t even bother to show up for holidays. Just washed his hands of us.”

Clark wasn’t sure what to say to that statement. “I’m sorry, Ms. Lane. That must have been...hard.”

“You seem to have your head on straight, Clark. When will I be able to meet your parents?”

“My parents?”

“They are coming to the wedding?” Ellen inquired.

“Yes. They should be coming to Metropolis by that Friday,”

Lois cut in. “Mother, could we try and focus here?”

An auburn in her late forties approached them. Her entire attitude was complete no-nonsense. “I’m sorry I’m late.” Clark stood up from the table to pull a chair out for her. “Don’t stand.” She took a seat and Clark reclaimed his seat next to Lois. Beverly turned to one of the waitresses, “Miss? I’d like a bourbon on the rocks.” The waitress nodded and turned to place the order. “Have we picked a color palette yet? I’ve done quite a bit in tangerine...”

“Color pattern?” Lois asked, skeptically. “Ms. Lipman, we’re trying to keep this small and low key.”

“She’s kidding,” Ellen said. “They want to get married by the end of the month. I told them you could do it.”

“In a hurry for the honeymoon, aren’t we?” Beverly noted, ignoring the flush that crossed over Lois and Clark’s faces. “Well, Mrs. Lane told me if she could hold a beautiful wedding for her favorite daughter, she could die happy.”

“Mother!” Lois admonished.

“What? It’s true. Lucy won’t hardly talk to me anymore.” Ellen shrugged.

“We just don’t want this to be too complicated,” Clark explained.

“What do you mean by complicated? You do want this affair to say something, don’t you?” Beverly asked.

“I just want it to say ‘I love Lois,’” Clark said, gently

squeezing her hand. Lois smiled up at him and nodded.

“That will be doves. Three hundred. White,” Beverly said.

Lois closed her eyes a moment. “Mother, could I speak with you...in private?” She motioned for Ellen to follow her towards the ladies room of the restaurant, leaving Clark alone with Beverly.

“She’s going to be difficult, isn’t she?” Beverly asked.

“Lois just wants this to be perfect,” Clark said.

“No wedding is ever perfect,” Beverly said. “I remember this Thompson wedding I did once. The groom tried to take the plunge literally off the bell tower of the church. It was horrible...”

“Lois, what is it?”

“Are you crazy? This woman is going to bankrupt us before I even walk down the aisle. I told you I wanted something small and simple. I don’t want a big to do,” Lois hissed.

“Lois, it’s your wedding day. I thought this day would never come. You won’t have to do a thing. I’ll take care of it. You just approve or disapprove what you and Clark want.”

“You better keep a leash on Beverly or I’m going to elope,” Lois threatened.

“They had the fire department out there along with a couple of squad cars. Someone told the officers he was trying to jump... literally. So, then I had to clear up that mess with the officers...” She noticed Clark’s bored expression. “Are you listening to me, young man?”

“Yes, Ms. Lipman. That sounds...uh, very...complicated...” Clark said, uncertainly.

“Hi. Sorry about that,” Lois said, reclaiming her seat next to Clark. Clark gave her a questioning look. She just smiled, giving him a peck on the cheek. “I’ll tell you later,” she whispered.

“Now where were we?” Beverly asked. “Oh, yes, a theme. We were talking about doves...”

“Please please please don’t ever hire that woman for planning anything else in the near future,” Clark said as they headed back to Lois’ apartment. “I don’t think they’ve invented a word to describe that woman.” Clark gave a shudder.

Lois laughed. “What? You weren’t totally entranced by ‘L F and G’ and what was it? She said something about an ice sculpture.”

“Lois, I don’t care if we get married in a yurt...as long as it’s you I’m marrying, I’m happy,” Clark said.

“So, the crazy mother of the bride fiasco hasn’t scared you off?” Lois asked apprehensively as they walked up the steps to her apartment.

“No way,” Clark whispered, leaning in to kiss her. He outlined her jawline with his palm, cupping her cheek as he deepened the kiss.

Lois leaned back against the unlocked door, linking her arms around his neck, “I can’t wait ...until we are done... with all this planning...” She managed in-between heated kisses. She gasped in surprise when she felt his palm slip up the back of her blouse and unhook her bra from beneath it. She could feel her body responding to his soft caresses as they deepened the embrace. “Bedroom, now...”

He nodded, opening the door as he wrapped an arm around her waist. “I love the way you think...”

“Lois! Good, you’re home!” Ellen’s voice echoed from the kitchen as they opened the door.

“No, no, no, no...” Lois whimpered. “Please, no...”

“You’ve got to be kidding me...” Clark muttered under his breath as Ellen entered the room with a tray of snacks.

“Don’t just stand there! We’ve got work to do!” Ellen said.

“Miranda, you’re a sight for sore eyes,” Lex crooned as the

young blonde stepped into the penthouse.

Miranda smiled slowly. “Lex, always a pleasure.”

He kissed her hand and smiled. “Speaking of pleasure...” He picked up a file off his desk and handed it to her.

She opened it. “What is this?”

“The ultimate testing ground for ‘Revenge’ and a way to bring my own revenge on a certain man of steel at the same time. Can it be done?”

“I’ll have to run some tests...It may take a while,” she warned.

“Just do it,” Lex ordered.

Lois looked next to her on the couch. Clark looked absolutely bored out of his mind. If her mother hadn’t interrupted they’d probably be in the bedroom by now...Or the dining table. Or even on the ceiling. Why had her mother chosen now to come over with all these samples? Who knew there were so many different shades of white? An involuntary shudder ran through her as she imagined just what she and Clark would have been doing if they hadn’t been interrupted. She could still feel his arms around her...his lips on her...

“Lois? Hello? Are you listening to me?” Ellen Lane’s voice penetrated Lois’ daydream. She looked back at Ellen and Beverly, who were sitting across from them poring over the book of wedding themes. She glanced at Clark, who had an expression of pure torture on his face. If only...

Things had begun to heat up the minute she and Clark had gotten to her apartment, but the mood was quickly spoiled. Now she was stuck sitting here with Clark as they listened to Beverly and her mother plan their wedding.

“Rose petals strewn by a small child as you come down the aisle. Do you know any small children? If not, we’ll provide one,” Beverly was saying to her. She glanced at Lois and Clark, waving a hand in front of them. “Hello? Anyone there?”

“Sorry,” Lois apologized. “You were saying?”

Ellen shot her a look, but she ignored it. Choosing instead to move closer to Clark, resting her head on his chest as they listened to the never-ending list of wedding details to iron out before the end of the month.

“Now, invitations...My printer can do something real stylish on Japanese linen. You get a price break when you order in lots of five hundred,” Beverly said.

“Five hundred???” Lois asked, aghast.

“It’s cheaper. We have plenty of family and friends, Lois,” Ellen sniffed.

“I understand that, Mother, but this is supposed to be small,” Lois countered.

“Twenty hundred has been budgeted for L, F, and G; and I have a small gazebo at the local church we can look at tomorrow for the ceremony...” Beverly rambled.

Lois rolled her eyes. “Isn’t that a bit much for just...flowers?” Lois asked.

She noticed Clark had chosen to just let the women talk, not adding a comment unless he was addressed. It was probably the safest venture, but she couldn’t let her mother turn their simple ceremony into a circus. She wanted something small and quaint. She didn’t need five thousand strangers staring at her as she recited her vows to Clark. All she needed was her friends and family and the man she loved, but her mother seemed to have jumped on the bandwagon with these wedding preparations. She wasn’t sure if her thoughts were even registering with her mother.

“They’re not just flowers. They’re loose flowers and greens...” Ellen corrected.

“Do we absolutely need them? Because I really...”

“Well, you don’t absolutely need shoes. But sooner or later your feet are bloody stumps,” Beverly sniffed. She then flipped the page in her book. “Does anyone here have a serious objection to white Polonaise sauce with shiitake mushrooms? I need to

know.”

“Pardon?” Lois asked, confused.

“I guess we’ve pretty much given up on the idea of those little hot dogs, huh?” Clark whispered in her ear.

“Mother, how exactly are you all going to get all this by the end of the month? I mean, can’t we just stick to something simple? Our friends don’t really have such...complicated tastes,” Lois tried to reason.

“There’s nothing wrong with them broadening their horizons,” Ellen sniffed. “Trust me. You’ll love it.”

Lois rolled her eyes. “If you say so.” She then turned her attention to Clark, who was still scanning the file they had on Martin Snell and the various files they had on him from the investigation into Intergang. It was going to be a long night.

“Finally!” Lois groaned, closing the front door and locking it behind her mother. “I thought they’d never leave.”

“Tell me about it.” Clark groaned. “Are you hungry? I could make some pasta...or a ...” He was cut off by Lois launching herself into his arms. “Lo-is...” Clark hissed as Lois nibbled at his ear. She let out a low giggle as she tugged on his earlobe. He slowly walked them back towards the bedroom.

“Oh, God, I can’t believe they took three hours to go over everything...” Lois grumbled as she pushed Clark back onto the bed, climbing on top of him as they continued their embrace.

“I know,” He whispered. “I didn’t know there were so many different shades of white...”

Lois laughed as she tugged at his tie. “My mother, the perfectionist,” she whispered, unbuttoning his dress shirt. “Clark...” She gasped in surprise as he flipped them over.

He captured her mouth as he allowed his hands to roam up and down her body, pushing her skirt and panties down her body as she pushed his dress shirt off his shoulders. “I love you, Lois...” he whispered.

She smiled up at him. “I love you too, Clark.” She let out a small moan as he pressed his solid frame against hers.

One Week Later...

As the week progressed, more and more wedding preparations began taking shape as Lois and Clark juggled their time between their Intergang investigation and the wedding preparations.

“What a week,” Clark murmured.

“And it’s not over yet,” Lois continued. “I have to go shopping with my mother...” She gave a shudder at the thought.

Clark laughed. “I’m sure everything will be fine. I’m glad Perry’s been so lenient with the wedding plans.”

“I think he’s afraid of telling my mother ‘no’ and releasing hurricane Lane on the newsroom,” Lois explained wryly.

Clark gave a weak smile. “She is a handful.”

Lois nodded, curling up against him. “Yeah.” She leaned in to kiss him. “She’s a stickler for details.” She smiled against his lips when he pulled her onto his lap, deepening the kiss. “I wish we could just do this all day.” She sighed as he whispered a kiss along her neck.

“Mmmm hmmm.” He nodded, nipping at her earlobe. “How long do we have until you have to leave?”

Lois glanced at the clock on the wall. She could feel the familiar tightening in her abdomen as his lips moved up and down her neck. She could feel her breath catch as he ran his palms down her sides.

“Enough time,” she whispered, tugging on the knot of his tie.

This was everything he could imagine and more. For so many years he had longed to fit in and have a family to call his own. He could hear the rhythmic beating of his and Lois’ child’s heart as they held one another. He never wanted to stop loving her and their child...their family. This was why he had become Superman.

To protect this. He couldn’t help but smile at the small gap that was between them. Lois’ once flat abdomen was beginning to form a slight bump, keeping them from having the contact they were used to in this position; but reminding them of what their love had created.

Lois sighed happily as Clark pulled her to him, wrapping his arms around her. Their limbs were still intertwined together as they lay together with a silly grin on their faces, recalling their recent lovemaking on the bed...the couch...and the shower when she’d been trying to finish getting ready. Her hair was still wet from her attempt at a shower...

“Your couch is so much more comfortable than mine,” Lois sighed, wrapping her arms more securely around Clark.

“Well I usually shop based on comfort, not style,” Clark explained.

“Mine was a gift,” Lois said dryly. “I don’t want to move,” she whined. Clark leaned down to capture her mouth. “I love you, Clark Kent. I can’t wait until we’re officially married and can take a vacation for the sole purpose of making love day and night.”

Clark groaned his approval, recapturing her mouth with his own. She squealed in delight as he scooped them into his arms and carried them back towards the bedroom. “Wait...I have to get ready...” Lois argued as he walked them into the bedroom. “Clark!”

Clark’s head jerked up and he stared in awe in the direction Lois’ arm was pointing. The entire room was illuminated by a light streaming from the wooden box on his bookshelf, the locked, wooden box that was now floating in mid-air. He lowered Lois onto the bed and grabbed a small key from his side table.

He moved cautiously towards the floating box and floated up to reach for it and unlock its contents. The globe he had taken from the Bureau 39 warehouse floated into his grasp. He felt his knees begin to weaken at the contact, and floated himself back down, allowing his feet to make contact with the carpeted floor of his apartment.

“Clark?” Lois’ voice penetrated through his reverie, placing a supportive hand on his shoulder.

The globe began to change shape. A brilliant white light flared through the room. A life-size hologram of an elderly man wearing a white tunic with Clark’s “S” shield on the chest appeared from the light. Clark stared in awe, holding Lois close to him as he allowed his mind to take the implications of the image before him in. Who was this man? Why was he wearing the same “S” shield that his mother and father had found on him so many years ago?

The man spoke. His voice was calm. “My name is Jor-El. And you are Kal-El, my son. The object you hold has been attuned to you. That you hear these words now is proof that you survived the journey in space and have reached your full maturity. Now it is time you learn our heritage. To that end, I will appear to you five times. Watch for the light, listen, and learn.”

There was another flash of light as the image showed the man standing beside a young woman. Machinery surrounded them as they looked at what appeared to be some sort of advanced computer system. The man’s voice narrated the scene as it unfolded. “Time grows short and we continue to search. The immensity of space is that near infinite variety there must be some place suitable. Hope and desperation drive us in equal measure.” The young woman beside him gestured towards a capsule; its contents were invisible to them. “Lara works by my side. She is tireless and endlessly patient. Considering what is soon to come, that is my great consolation: that we are together.” A tremor shook the lab; indicators on the console flared. Jor-El took Lara in his arms. The tremor subsided.

The flash of light diminished back inside the globe and disappeared. The globe now retained the different form it had taken during the message. Clark stared at the globe for a long

moment.

“Clark?” Lois placed a cautious hand on his cheek. What had just happened? She was surprised to find a stray tear falling down his cheek.

His expression was numb as he continued to stare at the globe. “Kal-El?” He seemed to pull himself out of his daze and looked towards her. “Are you okay?” He placed the globe on the bookshelf and turned to face her. She smiled at him.

“I’m fine. A little overwhelmed. You?”

“All my life I’ve had all these questions; now I’m finally going to get some answers.” He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close against his chest.

Realizing his need for comfort, she leaned up to wrap her arms around him. The echo of insistent knocking reached their ears and she sighed. “Who is that?”

Clark scanned the front door and grimaced. “I guess your mother’s looking for you.”

“Great.” Lois groaned.

“Lois, you look so beautiful!!” Ellen gushed.

“Mom, I don’t know about this...” Lois eyed herself critically in the full-length mirror. She had never seen so many ribbons in all her life.

“But, Lois...” Lois was already walking back towards the dressing room. “She never listens to me,” Ellen muttered.

“Mom, relax,” Lucy said soothingly. She headed towards the dressing room to check on Lois. “You need some help?”

Lois poked her head out of the dressing room. “Find me a dress with no bows or ribbons or...MOM...”

“Got it. Nice and simple.” Lucy turned towards the racks of wedding gowns behind her and began going through them. Lois and Ellen had been arguing over the wedding gowns all afternoon. It was obvious when they had tracked her down to Clark’s apartment that they had interrupted something. Lois was wearing one of Clark’s sweatshirts and a pair of jeans that fit a bit too loose around her hips—Obviously not hers. Her hair was soaking wet and she had a reddened mark on her neck—Obviously, *something* had been going on. She hadn’t said anything when Lois insisted on stopping by the apartment to change.

Lace, silk, beaded fabric. No ribbons. Hopefully, Lois would like these. Their mother’s taste in clothes left a lot to be desired. She didn’t blame her for refusing to wear that awful dress. It looked like a nightmare prom dress rather than a wedding gown.

“Here you go, Lois.” Lucy handed her an armful of gowns. “Try these on.”

“Thanks,” Lois called out through the door.

“Lucy, look what I found!” Ellen showed her a pink dress with several ribbons and bows along the waistline. “Isn’t it perfect for a bridesmaid dress?”

“No...” Lucy shook her head. “Mom, I think Lois should be the one to decide on some of this stuff. She is the bride...”

“But...”

“No, please, just relax ...”

“Okay, what do you think?” Lois asked, walking out to the waiting area.

Lucy looked towards Lois. She was wearing a long white gown with lace beaded along the waistline, sheer fabric along the train of the gown. The sleeves were a simple spaghetti strap with a lace pattern along the front.

“Wow, Lois, you look beautiful...” Lucy surveyed her sister, walking around her so she could get a better view.

“Are you sure?” Lois asked, looking at herself critically.

“This is the one.”

“But it’s...” Ellen pointed out. “It’s too...”

“Simple?” Lois and Lucy asked in unison.

“Yes.”

“We’ll get this one,” Lois said to the saleswoman.

“Wonderful,” the saleswoman gushed.

One Week Later...

The LNN newscaster showed images of a plane flying in the air over a map of Italy. “We are now getting a report that the Seven-Ninety-Seven is making its last circle before it attempts a landing at the Florence International Airport. It’s a giant airliner with its landing gear and wing flaps inoperative.”

Perry looked around the newsroom as Lois and Clark stepped off the elevator. He waved them over. Lois nodded, noticing the uneasy silence in the newsroom. “Airliner is trying to land in Florence,” he said gruffly.

“Oh, my,” Lois gasped, watching the scene unfold in front of her. She glanced back at Clark and he nodded, heading for the stairwell. At Perry and Jimmy’s look, he said, “I forgot to grab my ...Apricosa...”

“Uh-huh,” Perry nodded, giving her an odd look like he knew she wasn’t telling the whole story.

“It’s a new diet,” she explained with a smile, hoping she could charm her way out of the ridiculous excuse she just gave.

“...and instead of a lone American pilot, there are 120 passengers and a crew of ten living this last hour in the cold fear of a possible violent death. They’re only three minutes from touchdown,” the LNN newscaster continued with the report. “We now have an LNN reporter on the scene. Let’s see if we can go to their satellite feed.”

Lois held her hands together, praying Clark was able to get there in time.

Clark soared through the sky, rocketing himself towards the plane as it made its final circle. He slowed himself down as he approached, grabbing the left wing as he tried to slow the plane down to help steady it.

All of a sudden he felt a jolt and suddenly the plane felt lighter...almost like someone was helping him.

“Look!” Jimmy pointed at the screen excited as Superman was on the screen, grabbing the left wing of the plane.

“Thank God!” Lois gasped.

“I don’t believe it,” Perry sighed. “Great shades of Elvis!”

“What’s Superman doing in Florence?” Jimmy asked.

“This just in. Superman, the famed Man of Steel from Metropolis, is flying alongside the stricken airliner...” the LNN newscaster continued. “Superman is setting the aircraft down, gently as a feather. It’s almost on the ground...and now...he’s done it! The plane is safe! Superman has saved the day!”

The newsroom erupted in cheers as the screen then went back to the newscaster, reporting on the coverage.

“All right, everyone, get moving! Robins get on with Florence International and let’s get a follow-up on the save for the afternoon edition. Jimmy grab a copy of this coverage and get me stills for page one! Ralph, get in contact with your guy at the Federal Aviation Administration and see what you can find out on why the plane had issues. Who is at fault? Lois, you and Clark get in touch with Superman and get me an exclusive. What was he doing in Florence?”

He smiled as everyone scrambled to begin getting on top of the story. “I love the smell of fear in the newsroom!”

Lois sighed, taking Clark’s hand as she leaned back in the hospital bed with Clark next to her. “Ready?” the Ultrasound Technician asked.

“Yep,” Lois sighed, nervously. They were going to find out what their baby was today. She looked down at her abdomen. She still wasn’t growing at nearly the rate she thought she should. She was just a few weeks past twenty weeks and she was nervous. The

doctors had reassured her everything seemed normal but both she and Clark were nervous about the anatomy scan.

The technician lifted up her gown and pulled out a white tube of gel and rubbed it on Lois' abdomen. "Cold?" she asked when she saw Lois jump.

"Just a little." Lois smiled. She was getting used to the cold gel.

The technician took a small tube and began rolling it against her abdomen. Immediately the room filled with the loud thumping. "Good heart beat." She smiled at Lois.

Lois looked over at Clark, who was watching the screen the technician had just pulled up with a broad grin. That was their baby. Their beautiful little baby. It was amazing. Even though she didn't show very much on the outside their little Lane-Kent was definitely growing. You could clearly see the head and arms and legs as the baby moved on the screen.

"I wouldn't worry too much about the growth. Some women don't gain that much weight when they're pregnant... especially with a first pregnancy," the technician said. "It looks like everything's developing normally. All the tests have been passed with flying colors, so I don't think we have anything to worry about," the ultrasound technician said as she looked at the screen. "I think we might even be able to tell what it is." She looked back at Lois and Clark. "Do you want to know?"

"Yes," Lois said impatiently. Clark smiled down at her and nodded his agreement.

"Well, let's see here." She squinted at the screen and smiled. A moment later she pressed a few more buttons to zoom in. "It looks like you are the proud parents of a baby boy. Congratulations. I'll be right back." She left the room, leaving Lois and Clark to their privacy.

"A boy?" Lois asked in a light whisper. Tears escaped from the corners of her eyes. She looked down at her goo-covered abdomen and smiled.

"I love you so much, sweetheart," Clark whispered in her ear. She turned to face him, capturing his mouth with a passionate kiss.

The technician cleared her throat when she reentered the room. "I have your sonogram prints right here." She handed them the prints. "Just get dressed and the doctor will meet with you shortly."

"Thank you," Lois said.

The technician nodded and then left. Lois sighed, resting her hands on her growing abdomen. "You okay?" Clark asked.

"Never better," she whispered. "I just...wow." She gave him a lopsided smile.

He leaned down to kiss her. "I love you."

"I love you too," she whispered.

"I don't know," Clark sighed, walking with her to her apartment door, carrying the bakery box she'd picked up on the way home to the kitchen. "It was almost like there was someone... helping me."

"Helping you?" Lois asked quizzically, following him to the kitchen. "What do you mean?"

"All of a sudden the plane got lighter." He sighed, raking a hand through his hair. He looked down at the box. "What is this?"

"Wedding cake samples." She smiled.

"Cake samples?" Clark asked curiously. "I thought we decided on chocolate."

"There is more than just one kind of chocolate..." She whispered a kiss against his lips. "...milk...dark...mint..."

"Did you pick out a dress?"

"Maybe," she teased. "It was...a challenge, but we finally got mom on board...I think." She laughed, "If Lucy hadn't have been there I'd have lost it."

"Thank God for Lucy, huh?" Clark smiled.

"You don't know the half of it," Lois said, popping a square

sample in his mouth.

"Mmmm..." Clark moaned when the chocolate cake hit his taste buds.

"Good, isn't it?" Lois asked, licking the frosting off his fingers.

"Mmm hmmm..." Clark leaned in to kiss her.

"Mmmm... Delicious," Lois whispered against his lips. "This is a good way to sample the cake."

"Mmmm... Which flavor was that?"

"Simply Chocolate," Lois replied. "Twenty-two more flavors to go."

Clark walked up the steps to his apartment slightly deflated. He had gotten used to coming home with Lois; either to her place or his. Once they were married they would be coming home to their place. When he had returned to the Planet she had left to run a few errands with her mother.

His apartment seemed darker without Lois. It was strange. There was nothing obvious that made the apartment less livable; or uninviting. Where ever he was, without Lois, it seemed smaller or darker in some way.

He sank onto the bed. The pillow smelled of her perfume. He smiled wryly. There was no going back. He was madly in love with this woman and he wouldn't have it any other way. Their wedding was in two days. He would be married to Lois Lane in two days.

A bright light illuminated the room, catching him by surprise. He looked towards the source. The globe. He reached up for it as the object hung midair, floating above him. The familiar man that had introduced himself as Jor-El, his father, appeared once more.

"This is the second of the five times I will appear. You may wonder that I speak your language and not my native Kryptonian. I don't. That is another property of this object. Unmanned Kryptonian probes have explored every corner of the known galaxy and beyond."

A flash of white light illuminated the room once more, revealing Jor-El next to the woman he had identified as Lara. They are standing side by side working over a very familiar-looking capsule.

"For thousands of centuries, we have received data back from those probes. I have every confidence that, given enough time, we can achieve the conversion to a manned vessel. But will we have the time?"

Another tremor with more intensity and duration than the last one that had been shown in the previous message rocked the room. Jor-El and Lara held onto one another for support until the shaking ended. When it finally stopped, Lara moved towards the capsule to glance inside. There was a familiar expression on her face. He had seen that look before. It was the same look Lois had when she was anguishing over decisions regarding their child.

"The pattern of core disintegration continues to accelerate. Even I cannot predict when it will end. There is an ancient Kryptonian saying: 'On a long road, take small steps.' Precision and care are our watchwords. Yet, we still have far to go." The pained expression in Jor-El's eyes rocked Clark to the core. This man that was his father cared so deeply about telling him about his heritage. He still was unsure what Lara and Jor-El were working on in the hologram. Was it an experiment to try and stop the core disintegration, or was it an escape plan?

He felt fresh tears fall down his face when the hologram stopped. He dropped the globe once more on the bed. Hesitantly he reached out to touch the globe once more. Nothing. It was cold to his touch, just as it had always been.

"We've already picked out a minister, the location for the ceremony, the cake..." He wiggled his eyebrows at the mention of the cake. Her cheeks flushed at the memory of how they had tested

each sample of chocolate cake the night before. “You have your dress. I’ve already got my tux. My parents are coming in next week...”

Lois smiled sadly. “Perry said he’d step in since mom wasn’t able to get ahold of daddy.”

“I’m sorry,” Clark sighed, taking a seat next to her.

“His loss,” she sighed. “It’ll be perfect without him anyway. Less drama.” She leaned up to kiss him. He was just about to pull her down to deepen the kiss when a bright light shone through the room.

Lois looked up and saw the box that held his globe floating above them. Clark floated them upward to retrieve the globe, removing it from the box. “Which one is this?” Lois asked.

“Number five,” Clark whispered.

A flash of white light emitted through the room and Jor-El appeared once more. “We have installed the hyper-light drive and tested it as best we can. So much is unknown.”

The image showed Jor-El and Lara placing the globe on the console that looked familiar from before. “Contained within the sphere is the navigational computer that will guide the ship through the maze of hyperspace, as well as this account of our final days.” The image showed Jor-El and Lara looking down at a young baby inside the console of what now appears to be a ship. “All is in readiness. We have selected the ship’s exact destination on Earth and programmed it into the computer.” Jor-El’s face softened. “We give you to Earth, to a realm called America, and a place called Kansas. Remember us, but do not regret our passing, my dear son. I try to picture where you are now as you hear this last chapter. What you must look like? Are you alone? What have you become? Lara and I will never know. But that you should live to experience this ...that is enough. We are content.” The tears in Jor-El’s eyes broke Clark’s heart. How a parent could say goodbye to a child like this he didn’t know. He didn’t know how he would ever find the strength. “Kal-El, our child. Under Earth’s sun, your Kryptonian heritage will give you powers and abilities no Kryptonian has ever had. You are the last of Krypton. The last of the house of El. Carry this with you in your heart; hopefully one day a child of yours may know where it all began.”

With that the globe fell from his hand, resting on the bed in front of them. “Clark?” Lois placed a hand on his shoulder.

“I have no idea how...” His voice cracked. “How do you record a message like this, knowing you’re saying goodbye to your child. I don’t know that I would have that kind of strength. All these years I thought I was abandoned. They saved me.” He wrapped his arms around Lois, pulling her to him.

Two Days Later...

Clark awoke early. He made sure to begin patrolling Metropolis early to assure his attention would not be on Metropolis rather than Lois during the ceremony. He returned back to his apartment to find his parents dressed and finishing up breakfast.

“Hi, honey, do you want some breakfast?” Martha held up a plate of French toast.

Clark smiled at his mother. He couldn’t even contemplate eating right now. His stomach was a bundle of nerves. This was his wedding day. He was marrying the woman he loved and the mother of his child. He couldn’t seem to wipe the grin off his face.

“Can’t stop smiling, huh?” Jonathan asked, bemused.

Clark laughed. “No. I...” He smiled. “I’m getting married today.”

Martha smiled proudly at Clark. “It seems like just yesterday we found you in Schuster’s Field...”

Clark smiled at his mother and gave her a hug. “It’ll be okay, mom.”

“I always cry at weddings,” Martha explained, brushing away a few stray tears.

“We know,” Jonathan and Clark said in unison.

Martha smiled. “You couldn’t have found a better woman. I’m so happy for you, Clark. I was afraid you’d never find someone to settle down with.”

“Lois is definitely one of a kind,” Clark said. “She’s...” He stopped short when he saw the familiar glow illuminating the room. He looked up and saw the globe floating above him.

“What in the world?” Martha asked.

“Just...watch,” Clark instructed. He reached up to capture the globe and was rewarded by a flash of light. The man that had identified himself as Jor-El reappeared once more.

“There is no longer any doubt. The chain reaction has begun. As panic spreads, the population awakens too late to its fate. Our future is inevitable.”

Jor-El and Lara held each other close as another tremor shook around them. An alarm began to sound and Jor-El moved towards the console in front of him to turn it off. Lara stood behind him with a look of sadness and remorse on her face. The emotion on her face rocked Clark to the core. These were his parents suffering from these tremors and facing a dying planet while they said goodbye to him.

“At last the computers have located a suitable destination: a planet physically and biologically compatible with Krypton whose inhabitants resemble ours, and whose society is based on ethical standards which we too, embrace in concept, if not always in deed. The inhabitants call it, simply Earth.” The image showed Earth from outer space, floating amongst the many planets and stars.

The light that had dispersed into the room moments before was swallowed up by the globe. It sat in his palm, lifeless as it had times before.

“Wow,” Jonathan said, breaking the silence. “That’s something.”

Lois eyed herself critically in the mirror. She wore a long spaghetti strap gown with beaded crystals sewn into the fabric. The top of the gown was white lace while the bottom half flowed into a bell shape. Her hair was pinned up with a white rose intertwined between a few strands of hair. She rested her hand protectively on the growing bulge that just barely poked out from beneath the fabric. It was simple, nothing outlandish or extravagant. This was the perfect dress to get married to Clark in.

They had flown to a small out-of-the-way resort where ‘Superman Express’ had flown everyone out. It was the perfect place to get married.

The tradition was to be given away by her father in front of all her friends and family. She couldn’t do tradition. She’d never done anything the traditional way, so why start now? Her father had never shown up so it was her, Clark, his parents, her mom, Lucy, Jimmy, Perry, Alice and the minister.

She smiled back at her reflection. She was getting married today. “Mrs. Clark Kent...Perfect.”

Ellen lightly knocked on her door. “Lois?”

Lois smiled, turning to her mother as she opened the door with Lucy behind her. “They’re just about ready...” Ellen smiled, looking at Lois. “You are so beautiful...I still can’t believe we got this planned in such a short amount of time...” Ellen was dressed in an elegant cream suit with sequins embedded into the fabric. Lucy was in a strapless red dress with a sheer, sequin-covered fabric along the back.

Lucy laughed, hugging her sister. “You look gorgeous, sis. I love you so much!”

Ellen hugged Lois and Lucy. “My girls...I was afraid I screwed you both up so much...I thought you’d never have your perfect wedding day...”

Lois smiled. “Mom, I’m marrying the man I love. It is perfect.”

“Ladies?” Perry knocked on the door. “It’s about time,”

Lucy opened the door and smiled when she saw Perry in his tuxedo, ready to walk Lois down the aisle. Sam had never shown, but Perry had graciously stepped in to give Lois away. “Let’s go,” Lucy said, grabbing her bouquet.

Lois took a deep breath as the doors to the wedding hall opened. Clark stood next to the elderly minister with Jimmy standing next to him and his parents behind them. Lucy stood on the other side with her mother and Alice. She felt the tears in her eyes begin to flow. She was so in love with this man. He caught her gaze and she smiled. So much had changed over the last few months. She had always thought she would never meet the man of her dreams. She had given up on love a long time ago. Now, she had Clark. He was everything she’d ever wanted and more.

“You ready?” Perry asked, patting her arm. She nodded, smiling as she walked down the aisle to the man of her dreams. Clark took her arm. They turned to face the minister. He smiled at them.

“You look beautiful,” Clark whispered. She smiled at him, gently squeezing his hand.

“We are gathered here to celebrate one of God’s many gifts: Love. A gift bestowed on you. What is life worth living if you don’t have love? So, today we celebrate your love by unifying you as one for all to see.” The minister handed Lois her ring. “Ms. Lane.”

They had decided to write their own vows. Lois smiled shyly up at Clark. “Clark, you’re my best friend. Until I met you I never had a best friend. You make me laugh when I need to and hold me when I cry. I was fighting falling in love with you from the first time you smiled at me, but I think it was too late, because I was already halfway in love with you. I don’t know why I fought it so long. You have such gentle grace, and such quiet strength, and mostly such incredible kindness. I’ve never known anyone with as pure a heart. Today, I give you everything I am. I give you my heart, my honor, and our life together.”

She slipped the ring on his finger, smiling shyly up at him. The minister handed Clark the ring. Clark took her hand in his. “Lois, I have been in love with you from the moment you stormed into Perry’s office demanding attention. I love everything about you. I love your humor, your passion, the way you just dive right in...” Lois couldn’t help but smile at that. “...even when you shouldn’t. You’ve saved me from myself so many times because you refuse to just watch injustice. You demand that the world be a better place and because of you, it is. That fire inside you is what made me fall in love with you in the first place. You mean everything to me and I promise to protect you and our family for as long as we both shall live. Today, I give you my heart, my soul, and our future.” She smiled as he slipped the ring on her finger. With that, she leaned up to kiss him.

In the back of her mind, she seemed to register the minister saying, “By the power vested in me ...I now pronounce you man and wife. You may now ...continue kissing the bride.”

She smiled up at Clark, wrapping her arms around him as she deepened the kiss.

“I love you, Clark,” Lois whispered, leaning up to kiss him as he carried her inside their hotel room. The room was lit by candlelight, the lights were dimmed.

“You like?” he asked, gesturing towards the bedroom. The bed was covered in white rose petals and had two long candlesticks lit by the bed. A bottle of sparkling champagne sat in the ice bin at the end of the bed.

“Very nice,” Lois murmured. “Six weeks...Hmmm. What to do?” Lois teased, fingering the collar of his dress shirt seductively.

“Yes, what to do...” He murmured brushing his lips against hers.

Clark lay her on the bed then began moving at super-speed to

unpack their things. The candles in the living area were put out and he returned in front of her a few seconds later, having discarded his jacket and tie with a proud smile on his face. “All done.”

“I knew there was a reason why I kept you around,” Lois teased, pulling him onto the bed with her.

He kissed her softly, cupping her cheek gently as his lips caressed hers. “I love you, Lois Lane Kent,” he whispered.

“I love you, Clark Kent.” She gently stroked his cheek. “Husband...I love the sound of that.”

“Mmmm hmm.” He lowered his mouth to hers. “Wife doesn’t sound too bad either,” he whispered. His thumb stroked her hip, grazing lightly against her growing abdomen. He looked down at the evidence of their unborn child growing inside her and smiled. “Amazing...” he murmured. He looked at her in concern. “How are you feeling?”

“Like it’s Christmas morning and I have everything I wished for plus more.” She kissed him lightly.

“All I’ve ever wanted was for us to be together; start a family. You’ve made me the happiest man alive. God, I can remember a time when I thought I’d never have any of this.” He laid a protective hand over her abdomen. “Everything else, it doesn’t matter.”

“Oh, Clark...” She linked her arms around his neck, pulling him in for a kiss. “I love you so much,” she murmured against his lips. He recaptured her lips once more, allowing his hands to roam up and down her body.

“Six weeks?” Jimmy asked dumbfounded.

“Well, you know Lois never really used up any of her vacation time.” Perry smiled at Jimmy. “After the chaos they’ve been through in the past few months, I figure they both need the time off.”

“Dang. So if I get married, I get a six-week honeymoon too?” Jimmy asked.

“We’ll talk about it when you have a girlfriend,” Perry said, swatting him with a folder.

“Fair enough.” Jimmy sighed. “I doubt it’ll be happening anytime soon.”

Six Weeks Later...

The honeymoon was over. Lois lightly bumped Clark’s hip in the elevator as they waited for the elevator car to arrive on the newsroom floor. She had to fight the urge to fling her arms around him and have him take her right here in the elevator just as he had a few months ago.

She rested her hands on her growing abdomen. Even at almost seven months pregnant she was hardly showing. With the right jacket and skirt she was able to pull off professional attire without drawing too much attention to the growth that was inside of her.

She was a bit concerned with the lack of growth the baby was showing. Her doctor’s appointment was this afternoon and hopefully she’d be able to find out what was going on. They’d had one visit during their honeymoon. The baby had appeared to be growing perfectly.

She hadn’t told Clark about her concerns. He was already enough of a mother hen as it was. He’d only left her side to do his patrols, but otherwise was by her side 24/7. Their honeymoon had been spent at a remote resort in the mountains away from the chaos of Metropolis. Besides the obvious lovemaking activities they had busied themselves with exploring the resort and just enjoying one another’s company outside of the chaos their jobs put them through.

The elevator was so slow and Clark was so close. She could smell his cologne...

If only they were alone in the elevator. Why had that mail clerk gotten on the elevator with them?

DING

Lois breathed a sigh of relief when the elevator arrived at the mailroom. The mail clerk left, rolling his cart with him off the elevator. Lois waited patiently for the doors to close then turned to Clark, who met her just as eagerly as she wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him in for a passionate kiss.

"Finally," Lois murmured, arching her neck to allow Clark better access as he nibbled at her neckline. "Oh, Clark right there..."

"I don't know how we're going to make it through the day..." he whispered, tugging at her earlobe. He held her tightly to him as he continued his ministrations.

"I don't know..." He recaptured her lips, holding her securely against his solid form. "Oh, Clark..."

DING

All too soon, they arrived at the newsroom floor. Unembarrassed, Clark slowly broke off the kiss, ignoring the cat calls from the newsroom as they stepped off the elevator.

"Well, look who finally decided to show up to work," Ralph teased. "Damn, you two not get enough? You've been gone for six weeks!"

"Don't you have a politician to investigate or something?" Lois asked as she walked towards her desk with Clark.

"Lois, CK, great to see you!" Jimmy cheered when he saw them at their desks.

"Hey, Jimmy." Lois smiled at him, happy to see a friendly face. It was time to get back to work.

"Lois?" Clark called from the living room, "we've got to get going."

"Just a sec!" she called. She eyed herself critically in the mirror. In the past month, she had had to go up a few sizes in wardrobe in order to accommodate the changes her body had taken on. She hadn't seen a huge change to her abdomen but her breasts had definitely doubled in size, warranting larger tops, bras, and dresses. She wore a long burgundy dress with spaghetti straps and a criss-cross design along the open back with spaghetti straps as well. The neckline dipped down just enough to show the swell of her bust and the dress had a long slit up to her knee. The small bump was only noticeable when you looked for it. She was still a bit nervous about telling everyone. She couldn't put her finger on it but something scared her about telling everyone. They still hadn't even come up with a name yet. They hadn't found a place yet. There was so much left to do...

"Lois?" Clark's voice echoed through the bedroom door once more.

"Well, this should do," she said, turning towards the living room to answer the door. "What do you think?" she asked, opening the door as she brushed past him to gather her things.

Clark stood outside the bedroom door, dumbstruck. "Wow... Lois, you look...incredible."

She blushed at the compliment. "You sure it's not too tight?" she asked, tugging at the waist.

"No." He shook his head, stepping into the bedroom to get a better look. "You look gorgeous."

She eyed him appreciatively. He didn't look too bad himself. He wore a dark charcoal suit. He seemed to fill it perfectly in all the right places. "Not so bad yourself." She winked. "We should get going."

"So, what exactly does this 'Bibbo' look like?" Lois asked as they walked through the Press Club doors. She checked her purse in and headed towards the dining area with Clark on her arm.

"You'll know him when you see him," Clark said. "He's a short guy with a round belly and he's got a mouth on him."

"So, pretty much most of the guys that work at the National Inquirer would fit the bill?" Lois joked.

Clark laughed. "Probably."

Lois examined the surroundings more critically. "It's been ages since I've been here. They've certainly lived things up since then."

"Well, I've never been here before," Clark said. "The membership here was just another part of the huge stack of paperwork Perry gave me to fill out when I started."

Lois groaned. "You're not missing much. It's just where all the guys go to get trashed at the end of the week and compare how horrible their lives are. You wouldn't fit in." She laughed.

He eyed her appreciatively. "No, definitely not," Clark whispered, leaning in to kiss her. She smiled against his lips, tracing the outline of his mouth with her tongue as she deepened the kiss.

He slowly broke off the kiss. "You know the baby's heartbeat races whenever we do that," he whispered in her ear.

Lois looked down at the shadow of a bump on her abdomen. "Is that normal?" she asked, concerned.

"I think so," he said reassuringly. "I read somewhere that the heart rate of a fetus fluctuates throughout the different stages of pregnancy, especially in the third trimester." Lois gave him a curious glance. "I've been reading a few books," he explained.

"Lois, Clark, this is a surprise," Linda King said, walking up to them.

"Linda," Lois said coolly, turning to face the blonde. She kept a possessive hand on Clark's shoulder as they spoke. Lois noticed with disgust Linda was wearing a designer dress showing off way too much bust and leg for her taste and she really didn't like the way Linda kept eyeing Clark like a piece of meat.

Linda offered them a smile. "I would have thought you'd never come back here after what happened."

Lois just stared coldly at Linda. "I don't know what you're talking about. What are you doing here? Trying to interfere in another investigation?"

"No. It just so happens I'm here with my date," Linda replied coolly.

"Really? Is he invisible?" Lois asked sarcastically.

Linda sighed. "I'll introduce you. Follow me." She gestured. Lois rolled her eyes as she and Clark followed Linda towards the bar. "I love your dress, Lois. You're so lucky. I can never wear anything off the rack," Linda said casually as she led them through the crowd. Lois glared at her. Clark placed a reassuring hand on the small of her back.

To their surprise, Linda stopped in front of Martin Snell. "Linda." He beamed.

"Martin." Linda gave him a peck on the cheek.

Martin Snell smiled, placing an arm around her waist. "I am at a loss for words to describe her."

"Oh, I could help you there," Lois said.

Linda glared at Lois then turned to introduce them. "Martin, I'd like you to meet Clark Kent, a reporter for the Daily Planet. And Lois Lane, his date. Clark, Lois, Martin Snell."

"Pleasure to meet you," Martin said, shaking Clark's hand.

"Likewise, but Lois and I are actually a reporting *team* for the Planet," Clark clarified, mildly ticked at the way Linda had downplayed Lois' credentials.

"And much more I see," Martin said, eyeing the ring on Lois' hand. Linda arched an eyebrow as she examined Lois' wedding band critically. "Congratulations," he said, lifting up a glass of bourbon to toast.

"Uh, thank you," Lois said hesitantly.

The band began to play and Martin led Linda towards the dance floor. "Martin Snell?" Clark asked.

"Could be just a coincidence," Lois reasoned skeptically.

"Maybe," Clark said, turning back towards the bar. "But there is Bibbo Bibbowski," he said, pointing towards the other end of the bar.

Mrs. Cox sat outside the Metropolis Press Club dressed to kill...literally. She wore a black evening gown with a small knife strapped to her inner thigh and several other blades strapped beneath her dress. Her information regarding Intergang had led her to Martin Snell. Mr. Luthor had told her to take care of this personally. So she was taking care of him personally.

“Damn! What’d I do to get a look from someone like you?” Bibbo asked when Lois took a seat next to him.

She held out her hand for him. “Lois Lane. Daily Planet.” She gestured towards Clark behind them. “I believe you’ve already met my partner, Mr. Kent.”

“Oh, yeah,” Bibbo recalled. “You was with that dame...uh, Leona...or Lisa...” He trailed off confused.

“Linda King,” Lois supplied. “Mr. Bibbowski, we need some information.”

“Look, I told you everything I knows,” Bibbo said, holding his hands up in defense.

“Intergang is known for using that drug, ‘Revenge,’ not the Metros,” Clark said, taking a seat. “Are you sure you don’t have anything else to tell us?”

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “I heard a lot of my information from my regulars. You know how they likes to share their stories...who banged who. That sorta thing...You know, guy stuff.”

“Who gave you the information about the Metros?” Clark asked.

“I don’t know...My guys...they expect me to keep tight-lipped...you know.”

Lois placed a hand on his arm. “Please, Mr. Bibbowski? It would really mean a lot to us.”

He caved. “You’re good,” he said, wagging a finger at her. “Red Dixon...He’s a regular. He comes in at my bar at least once a week.”

Lois pulled out her card. “The next time he comes in, give us a call.” She stood up from her seat then leaned over to whisper to Clark. “I’ll be right back.”

Clark nodded and followed her with his eyes. “Ah, young love.” Bibbo sighed. “Hold on to that one. You got a keeper there.”

“I plan on it.” Clark smiled.

“What? Are you following me?” Linda asked when Lois exited from one of the stalls.

Lois rolled her eyes. “You are not worth my time, Linda.” Lois sighed, leaning against the vanity to wash her hands.

“So, married, huh?” Linda continued. “What makes you think he won’t dump you like yesterday’s news when he finds something better?”

Lois glared at her. “Jealousy is so unbecoming, don’t you think?” She spotted the red stain on Linda’s dress. “What happened? Can’t balance between drinking and dancing?”

Linda laughed. “Now I’m jealous? You know, I’m surprised you were even able to get a guy like Clark. I mean, face it, Lois. You don’t exactly scream sex appeal...Now, Clark on the other hand...”

“I’m warning you, Linda, you stay the hell away from him...” Lois turned to face her.

“I’m not going anywhere near your husband, Lois, but if you remember I didn’t have to go near your boyfriend last time...He came willingly.” Linda sneered. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to get back to my date.” With that, she left Lois to ponder what she had just said.

Outside the Metropolis Press Club, Mrs. Cox loaded Martin Snell’s unconscious body into the trunk of her car. “Piece of cake,” she muttered. “Like taking candy from a baby.”

With that she slammed the trunk closed and slipped behind the wheel, pulling away from the club and headed towards Southside district.

Monday morning Lucy sat impatiently in the courtroom waiting for the defense counsel to show. She threw Mayson a questioning look. She just shrugged.

Judge Stevens sighed, looking at his watch. “Ms. Drake, does your office have any idea when Mr. Snell will be gracing us with his presence?”

“No, your honor. My office is trying to track him down, but I haven’t heard anything thus far,” Mayson said, standing to address the judge.

Judge Stevens seemed to be debating something in his head. “We’ll recess until noon. If Mr. Snell still is missing I’m putting a bench warrant out for his arrest.”

“Understood.” Mayson nodded.

“All rise!” The bailiff called out as Judge Stevens headed towards his chambers, obviously ticked.

“What just happened?” Lucy asked.

“We can’t have the arraignment without Martin Snell present. Nobody’s been able to track him down,” Mayson explained. “I’m gonna drive by his place. See if I can find him. Stay here in case Judge Stevens comes back in.”

“Got it.” Lucy nodded, watching Mayson leave.

Mayson approached the duplex of Martin Snell with apprehension. Why were all these police cars here? She pulled out her ID and headed towards the police tape where Inspector Henderson stood. “Mayson Drake, Deputy DA. What’s going on here?”

“The DA?” Inspector Henderson asked, skeptically.

“Mr. Snell was supposed to be in court this morning. He never showed. What’s going on?” She noticed the body bag being carried out of the duplex.

“It looks like a crime of passion,” Inspector Henderson replied grimly. “Mr. Snell had to have made somebody pretty mad. The coroner said it appears like he’s been dead at least since Friday night. The neighbors were complaining about the smell and finally called the police. I guess Mr. Snell didn’t have too many friends.”

Superman landed in the middle of downtown where an armored car heist was ensuing. “Freeze!” an officer called out as the suspects attempted to get away.

Superman advanced towards the criminals, ripping the door of the car off and tossing it to the ground. He reached in and grabbed the suspects from the vehicle by the collar and hoisted them up.

“HEY!!”

“Put me down!”

Noticing the police van nearby, Superman tossed the suspects into the air where they landed on the van. With that he flew off, leaving a bewildered group of police officers to deal with the aftermath.

Lois leaned back as the doctor rolled the Doppler monitor on her small bump and the room filled with the familiar thumping heartbeat of her unborn child. She smiled up at Clark who was beaming back at her happily. “Everything sounds great, Lois,” the doctor said.

“Are you sure?” Lois asked nervously. “I’m still so small...”

“It’s your first pregnancy. Usually, when you’re active and petite you don’t show that much. Why do you think there are so many cases of women not realizing they’re pregnant? You should get a bit bigger once you get more into the third trimester, but everything looks great.”

“I was wondering how long it was going to take you two to

come knocking on my door,” Henderson remarked, dryly.

“We were a bit tied up earlier,” Lois said briskly. “Your office said there was a murder?”

“Yeah, a real gruesome one too. We’re having to match dental records in order to identify him, but we’re pretty sure it’s that missing lawyer, Martin Snell,” Henderson said, shaking his head.

“Martin Snell!?” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“You heard of him?” Henderson asked.

“Yeah. We ran into him at the Press Club Friday night,” Clark explained.

Henderson pulled out a notebook. “Really? Do you know if he was with anyone?”

“Uh, his date was Linda King from the Metropolis Star,” Lois supplied. “We only saw him for a few minutes.”

“Okay. I’ll check with her. Find out what exactly went on during their date.” Henderson nodded, “Thanks for the info.”

“Superman!” Lana beamed as she watched the Man of Steel float down at the scene of a bank robbery. She watched as he apprehended the suspects and handed them over to the police. One of the suspects tried to escape and Superman grabbed him and threw him into the waiting police van. She smiled. What a show of strength. After checking her reflection in her compact, she jogged up to the Man of Steel, hoping to grab his attention.

A striking blonde with a tape recorder in hand approached him. “Superman, Linda King, Metropolis STAR. Could I get a statement from you?”

Superman eyed the blonde appreciatively and nodded, walking her away from the crowd of people. Lana followed. What she saw....

Superman was in a clinch with that reporter! This was good. She pulled out her phone and began recording. This would definitely make some money.

“So, what do you think this means?” Lois asked. “I mean, could Snell have crossed Intergang and they just took him out?”

“Henderson mentioned a crime of passion,” Clark said. “Maybe he picked up someone?”

“Anything’s possible. As much as I hate to say it, Linda’s capable of a lot of things, but murder isn’t one of them,” Lois said grudgingly.

“Do you think you and your family are safe now?” Clark asked.

“I don’t know.” Lois sighed. “I mean, I really don’t understand any of this. I mean, how are they even able to track where any of us are? That missile was flying after us like it knew where I was.”

Clark swatted at a fly in his direction. “I don’t know.”

“Careful, that sounds like the same bug that bit me. It really hurts,” she said, rubbing her hand at the memory. The fly flew in his face once more and he grabbed it. “Nice get!” Clark lowered his glasses to look at the bug in question. “What is it?” Lois asked.

“Not a bug. I’ll be right back.” He kissed her lightly and then headed towards the stairwell.

Lois sighed and headed towards her desk. “Lois!” Perry hollered across the newsroom. “My office!”

Lois rolled her eyes and headed towards Perry’s office. “What is it, Chief?”

Perry pulled out a copy of the Metropolis STAR. “How in the hell did we get SCOOPED???”

The paper read, “Superman Stops Bank Robbery With Force!” “What?” Lois grabbed the paper confused. “This doesn’t make any sense.” The article had been written by Linda King and described how earlier that afternoon Superman had thrown a suspect into the police van, knocking him unconscious. “This doesn’t make any sense. He wouldn’t...”

“I don’t care about your opinion on the matter, Lois. What I want to know is why my star reporters weren’t there to grab the

scoop. Where have you been all morning?” Perry asked.

“I had something personal to take care of, then Clark and I went over to see Henderson. There was a murder Friday night. They think it was that lawyer, Martin Snell.”

Perry’s eyes grew as big as saucers. “Murder?”

“Yes. And why are you reading that rag anyway? All they print is trash!” Lois huffed.

“Well, I do have to keep in mind what the competition is up to, Lois,” Perry said dryly. “As long as you’ve got a better scoop...” He gestured towards the STAR’s front page.

“Superman wouldn’t do that, Perry. That is...it’s slander!” Lois fumed. “It wouldn’t be the first time she fabricated a story to get a headline.”

“Are you, uh, speaking from experience?” Perry asked with an amused expression.

“I have to get to work,” Lois said, turning to leave the office.

“Lois?” Perry called after her. “Next time you have a doctor’s appointment, just tell me. I HAVE had kids of my own you know.”

“How did you...?”

“Alice figured it out the night of the Charity Ball. Don’t worry. I’m not saying anything until you’re ready. I’m happy for you,” Perry said. Lois nodded apprehensively then left the office.

“We keep breaking needles on this guy, Kent,” a technician said. He pressed a few keys on his keyboard. “Now, I can’t get the probe to fly.”

He pressed a few more buttons. “Wait, the probe’s heading this way...but I haven’t called it.”

The concrete wall blasted open and the technicians turned to face a very angry Superman. Superman advanced towards them, showing them the small bug in his hand, giving it a tight squeeze. The ‘bug’ had been reduced to small metal disc the size of a dime. He threw it at the technician.

“So, that’s how your bullets always find their targets...a genetic tag, injected by needle. What is it, a radioisotope?” Superman glared at the technicians who were only able to nod, terrified.

Bill Church sat at his desk, on the phone with one of his partners. “Any word on Martin Snell? There’s been no contact for the past seventy-two hours...”

An alarm sounded and Church turned his attention to one of the screens where Superman had broken in. “Stop bugging people!” Superman roared on the screen as he put his fist through the computer monitors.

“I’ll call you back. I’ve got an extermination problem.”

“Where’s the gun?” Clark’s face was fierce as he advanced towards the terrified technicians. The technicians pointed towards the shrubs outside with a shaky hand.

“Okay, Superman wants to butt heads, here comes a migraine.” Church pulled out a remote control from his pocket. “Let’s see...eenie meenie...minie...mo...Which one should I kill today?” He smiled, hovering his thumb over one of the buttons. “Boom!”

The rifles were raised to aim and fire. Clark moved at super-speed, crushing the rifles, but not before one missile had escaped. He flew at super-speed, trying to stop the missile from impacting its target.

Jimmy stepped out onto the crosswalk in front of the Daily Planet. Clark grabbed him at super-speed flying up into the air. “Superman...What?” The missile was close to follow. He wrapped his cape around his young friend, protecting him from the impact. The missile exploded against him. He looked cautiously at Jimmy who seemed unharmed. “Uh, Superman, what just happened?”

“Don’t worry about it, Jimmy. They won’t be bothering you or anyone else again,” he remarked bitterly as he flew them back down to the streets of Metropolis.

Lois sat at her desk going over the files she and Clark had been searching through the past few days regarding Intergang, Lex Luthor, and the Metros. Bibbo Bibbowski still hadn’t called them about this Red Dixon yet and she was beginning to lose hope of it ever panning out.

The loud voice of the LNN newscaster interrupted her thoughts. “Superman’s activities have come into question these past few days. He’s been seen roughly interacting with criminals. Earlier today he was seen throwing a criminal in the air and knocking the man out cold. We have also found footage of Superman acting precariously. Here in the footage, you can see he is being interviewed by this reporter. Then you see him grabbing her and kissing her. We are unsure of the relationship between the Man of Steel and this reporter thus far.”

Lois stared in horror as she watched the scene unfold. The footage showed Clark dressed as Superman kissing Linda King. Don’t cry. Don’t cry. Don’t cry, she told herself. There is no reason for this to affect you. You have no relationship with Superman.

“How could he do something like that?” Lois was steamed. She scanned around the newsroom, looking for any signs of Clark. Nothing.

A stack of papers was laid in front of her. The letterhead read from the Kerth Award Board of Administration. A familiar voice hissed in her ear, “So, Cherie, I’m thinking I didn’t make myself clear enough three years ago, no?”

She held her breath as she scanned the paper before her. “Dear Mr. Claude Cluny, It has come to our attention that the article submitted under your by-line was the result of forgery and it is this office’s position to conduct a full investigation into the matter. You will be required to submit all notes, witnesses, contacts, and prove to this board that your article on the gun-runners was, in fact, your writing. Thank you for your cooperation. You will be contacted by our legal office at the earliest convenience.”

“Oh, my God,” Lois muttered breathlessly. When? How? Clark. That was the only way she knew of. She hadn’t told anyone else about Claude stealing her story.

“Did you think I wouldn’t come and protect my good name? You didn’t get enough embarrassment before?” Claude asked, turning to face her, grabbing her forcefully by the wrist. She winced in pain, trying to free it of his grasp.

“Let go of me...” she said between gritted teeth as she fought to free her wrist.

“Hey, what the hell are you doing?” Jimmy asked, approaching Claude from behind. “Leave her alone.”

“This is none of your business, you copy boy. Go.” Claude tried to wave him off.

Jimmy stepped into Claude’s face. “When you start messing with my friends, it is my business.”

Claude laughed, turning to face him. “You are so naive.” He waved a finger in Jimmy’s face. “Do you really want to threaten me?” He grabbed Jimmy by the collar.

“Leave him alone!” Lois argued.

“I am simply teaching some manners to this...”

“Get your hands off my wife or so help me God I will mop the floor with you.” Clark, who had walked in when Jimmy had gotten into the man’s face after he had grabbed Lois. He wasn’t exactly sure who this man was, but he didn’t like what he saw.

“And who are you to...?” Claude stopped short when he saw the firm look in Clark’s eyes. Claude released his grip on Lois and Jimmy. “This copy boy was giving Ms. Lane a hard time. I was simply helping diffuse the situation.”

Clark noticed the red hand marks around Lois’ wrist. “Lois,

are you all right?” She nodded and he then turned his attention to the man in front of him, “I don’t know who the hell you think you are, but you just stepped over the line...” His eyes narrowed as he advanced towards the cowering man.

“What in the Sam Hill is going on out here??” Perry’s voice boomed across the newsroom.

Clark glared at the man in front of him, “Yes, what *IS* going on?”

“Claude?” Perry wrinkled his nose when he recognized the man standing before Clark.

Clark’s eyes narrowed in a look of determination. Claude seemed to recognize the recognition in Clark’s eyes. “So, you’ve heard of me, no?”

“Oh, I’ve heard of you,” Clark said grimly. “You owe Lois an apology. *Now.*”

“I believe that is the other way around,” Claude said, handing the paper from the Kerth Administration to Clark. “I believe this is what you call, slander?”

Clark scanned the paper with a smile. “No, it’s called justice.” He glared at Claude. This man had taken so much from Lois there was no way he would let him continue.

Perry interrupted, “Claude, why don’t you come with me into my office?”

“Very well,” Claude harrumphed, following Perry into the editor’s office.

“Are you okay?” Clark asked, kneeling down in front of Lois to examine her reddened wrist.

“I’m fine,” she said, roughly pulling her wrist from Clark’s grasp. Clark looked at her questionably, but she seemed to be avoiding his gaze.

“I, uh, found out how they were tracking everyone,” he said.

“Fine,” Lois muttered emotionlessly.

“They were injecting people with a genetic tag...radioisotope. The bugs that have been flying around haven’t been bugs,” he explained.

“Uh-huh,” Lois said, still no emotion.

“Lois, are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m *fine*,” she said exasperatedly. With that, she got up and headed for the ladies room. Clark shook his head, unsure of what to do. He turned back to his desk and took a seat, beginning to go through his files on Luthor. She was obviously *not* fine.

What the hell was going on here? Why was Clark kissing Linda King of all people? Heck, why the hell was he throwing criminals into police vans? She wiped at the tears that had escaped from the corners of her eyes.

‘Clark wouldn’t cheat on me,’ she told herself.

What about that footage? That left little room for arguing...

<<“*I love you.*”>>

“What now?” She muttered to herself, resting her hand on the growing bulge in her abdomen.

Superman entered the darkened laboratory, closing the door carefully behind him. A light switched on, revealing Lex Luthor sitting in the corner, waiting for him. “Do you have any idea what time it is?”

“Sorry, father, I was just...practicing—like you told me. My ‘out of town’ tryout. I think I did good,” Superman said.

Lex nodded, “Yes, I saw you in Paris.”

“And I saved that sinking ship in Rio. That was fun,”

Superman added, trying to appease his ‘father,’ who seemed mildly ticked.

“All well and good, but when I say 10:00, I mean 10:00. You haven’t been flying around Metropolis, have you?”

“Oh, no, father, you told me not to,” Superman said.

Lex stood up and hugged him. “Come along. Time for bed.”

Superman climbed on Lex’s back. “Read me a story?”

“Maybe. If you’re in bed quickly with no fuss.” Lex carried him over toward the center of the lab.

Superman stood inside the vat, monitors hooked up to him; testing his vitals. The machinery hummed in the background as Lex read his ‘story’ to Superman. “...and then the Wolf said to Red Ridinghood. ‘Are you sure the policy is in your name?’ And Red Ridinghood said, ‘Yes. Grandma said when she passed away I would inherit everything.’ So, the Wolf said, ‘Let’s pay grandma a visit.’ And so Red Ridinghood took off her hood and cape and gave it to the Wolf.”

Superman finished the story for Lex, having heard it before. “And the Wolf went through the forest to Grandmother’s house and ate her, and he and Red Ridinghood split the money.”

“That’s right, as it should be. The grandmother was old and it was time for the younger, stronger generation to take over.” Luthor pressed a few buttons on the computer desk. A hissing noise echoed. “And so it is with you and the old Superman. You and I are destined to control this city and eventually the world.” A cover slowly lowered over Superman. “Remember: All that ultimately counts is winning. All that satisfies is power. Might is Right. Obey me in all these things and we shall realize our dream.” The cover sealed in Superman, letting out a low hiss from the air pressure being released. “To destroy Superman. He is my enemy. Therefore, he is your enemy. You will be the instrument of our victory, then you will be the one, the only Superman. *My* Superman.”

Clark stared grimly at the empty ceiling as he floated up and down from the couch. Something was definitely wrong. Lois wouldn’t talk to him. She had gone home early saying something about needing some air. He wasn’t sure what to make of it. He’d offered to fly her home, but she’d flat out refused. What was going on? Could it have something to do with Claude showing up? Maybe she was mad at him for interfering?

The phone beside the couch rang and he lunged for it. “Lois?” “Clark?” His mother’s voice rang on the other end of the phone.

He fought to hide his disappointment. “Oh, hi, mom.”

“What’s wrong? You two have a fight?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know. I haven’t been able to get Lois to talk to me all afternoon....” he replied glumly.

“Well, she may just be having a bad day. Hormone changes can mess with your emotions,” Martha said.

“I guess.” He sighed, not really believing that hormones were the source of Lois’ bad mood.

“Clark, I wanted to talk to you about something I saw on the newsstands about....”

“*Help, Superman!*” a cry for help penetrated his thoughts.

“Uh, Mom, I gotta go. Someone’s calling for help,” Clark stammered, putting the phone down. He spun into the suit and ricocheted into the air.

“You gonna talk about it?” Lucy asked.

“Nope,” Lois said flatly.

“Are you mad?”

“Hmmm.”

“Did you two have a fight?” Lucy prodded.

“Nope,” Lois said curtly.

“Lois?” Lucy waved a hand in her sister’s face. “What’s wrong???”

“Nothing,” she said flatly. “Absolutely nothing.” She stabbed her fork into the plate of food in front of her. “I’m *fine*.”

“Uh-huh.” Lucy sighed. “Well, when you’re Un-fine, let me know.” Lois turned away from her sister and Lucy sighed, “You can’t avoid me forever...and whatever it is...you need to go home and talk to Clark...”

“I’m not talking about it,” Lois said bitterly.

“Okay. You know it’s not uncommon for newlyweds to fight about stuff that seems really important at first but really silly in reality. Between being newlyweds and impending parenthood with the hormones making your emotions go on an all-time high and then the guy doesn’t know what to do...”

“What makes you think it’s MY hormones?” Lois glared across the kitchen counter at her sister.

“No reason.” Lucy smiled. “I’m going to leave now. I’ll see you later...hopefully in a much better mood?”

Superman landed on the roof of the Metropolis STAR only to find a woman dressed in black waiting for him. “Is there a problem, miss?” He asked hesitantly. Before he knew it the woman launched herself into his arms. “Miss, please!” He pushed her back and was shocked to see it was none other than Linda King. “Ms. King?”

“Oh, Superman, you don’t have to be coy!” Linda purred, running a seductive hand up his chest. “If I’d known you felt that way I would have said something before...”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you have me confused with someone else,” he said, stepping away from her. With that he ricocheted himself into the night’s sky; even more confused about the day’s events than he had before.

Clark landed in the back alley behind Lucy’s apartment, spinning back into his suit he was in earlier. He wasn’t sure what was going on, but he knew he needed to talk to Lois. They hadn’t spent a single night apart since they said ‘I do’ and he wasn’t going to start now.

“Lois?” he knocked on the apartment door. No answer. He x-rayed inside and saw Lois curled up on the couch angrily flipping channels. He sighed, raking his hand through his hair. “Please let me in...we need to talk...”

The door flung open. Lois’ face was blotchy and her eyes red. It looked like she had been crying.

What was going on?

He entered the apartment slowly, closing the door behind him. “Lois?”

“What?” Lois asked bitterly, wiping at her moistened cheeks.

“Are you okay?” he asked, pulling up a chair beside her.

“I’m *fine*. Why does everyone keep asking me if I’m okay? I’m FINE. This is me just FINE.” She glared at him, crossing her arms across her chest.

“Fine. I get it. What are you crying about then?” Clark asked.

A look of rage crossed her face. “Oh, I don’t know. Maybe the fact that I don’t know anyone anymore?” She stood up and began pacing around the room. “You know you think you know someone...”

“Lois, what are you talking about?” Clark asked.

“As if you didn’t know!” Lois glared at him.

“No, I don’t know!” he shot back, getting equally angry at her. “All I know is you’ve barely said two words to me since this afternoon. What the hell is going on?”

“*This!*” She slapped a copy of the National Inquirer with a photograph of Superman and Linda King in a clinch on the front cover.

Clark stared at the cover in horror. “Lois...I...”

“Don’t!” She held up a hand for him to stop. “I already checked. It’s a screen shot from the *video* they had.” She slammed her fist against his chest. “How could you...?”

“Lois, I didn’t do this. I don’t know what the hell is going on here, but that isn’t me. I would never...”

“Really? You know of someone else that flies around in a cape and a big ‘S’ on their chest?” She hissed.

He moved to cup her cheek. “I would never...ever...”

She brushed him off of her. “What the hell am I supposed to

think? I look up at the screen and see you in the arms of that... that... ARGH! I mean, I know I don't have the same figure I had when we started going out, but I never thought I was that bad to look at..."

"Lois... don't..." Clark placed an arm around her waist. "I'm telling you this is all a big mistake." The look in her eyes was killing him. She'd never looked at him like that before. He just wanted to make the pain go away. He leaned in to kiss her. She seemed to surrender in his arms for a split second before pushing him away. "Please... you have to believe me... I would *never*... ever do something like this."

The tears were flowing down her cheeks as she shook her head, "I... I can't do this... I... I need to think..."

"Lois..."

"I need time to think and I can't do it with you here. So, please just go..." She opened the door.

Unable to think of anything else to say, he nodded and left.

"Please... don't shut me out," he pleaded. She winced, trying to hold back the tears. He kissed her on the forehead before leaving.

Clark flew through the air, unable to comprehend what had just happened. Lois had pushed him away, unwilling to listen to anything he had said. He really couldn't blame her. It didn't look good. The man in the photo looked exactly like him, but he would never do something like that. He headed towards Smallville to talk to his folks. Maybe they would have some insight on what to do. As of right now, he was clueless.

Clark stared at the newspapers on his parents' dining table. "So, you're saying you were never in Paris... never in Rio... none of this was you?" Jonathan asked.

"No," Clark said, shaking his head. "I was in the doctor's office with Lois when some of this happened."

"So... What?" Martha asked. "There's someone impersonating you?"

"I don't know. Whoever it is... They're making my life hell." He ran a ragged hand through his hair. "Lois hates me. People are beginning to doubt Superman. Lois hates me. Crazy people are attacking me, crying wolf. Lois hates me." He pounded his fist against his forehead. "We just got married, then something like *this* happens. Lois hates me."

"You mentioned that," Jonathan said.

"And it's not true," Martha added. "She wouldn't get upset if she didn't care."

"You didn't see her face," Clark muttered bitterly.

"This is unbelievable." Jonathan sighed. "Maybe you should make a public statement, get this out in the open, and let the world know there's an imposter out there."

Clark shook his head. "I need to know what I'm dealing with here. I mean, none of this makes any sense..." Martha placed a supportive hand on his shoulder.

Clark soared through the air, heading back towards Metropolis. The sound of childish laughter caught his attention. He x-rayed one of the Metropolis Tunnels below him and saw what looked like his double. He ricocheted down to confront this 'double' and have him answer some questions.

The double turned to face him. Clark stared in shock as his double wore a mocking grin. "Who are you?"

"I don't want to talk. You're my enemy!" his double roared.

"Why would you say that?" Clark asked.

"I am the most powerful man in the universe. You've outlived your usefulness."

"Who told you these things?" Clark asked, dumbfounded.

"My father," his doppelganger said proudly, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Who's your father?"

"I promised never to tell."

"I'm not your enemy," he began cautiously. "I want to be your friend. I want to know more about you, where you come from."

"I was born in the womb. My father took me out."

"Okay. How old are you?"

"As old as you are!" the double snapped, letting out a mocking laugh. "Catch me if you can." With that he flew off, leaving a very confused Clark behind.

The next day, Lois sat at her desk, avoiding any and all contact with Clark. He finally took solace in the conference room to let out a yell of frustration. He needed to tell her what was going on, but she wasn't even giving him the time of day.

Perry knocked lightly on the door. "Everything okay in here, son?"

Clark's head jerked up. "Wha? Yeah, sorry, Chief. I'm just..." He waved his hands helplessly in the air. "I don't know what to do."

Perry smiled knowingly. "Son, I've seen her like this before. Her doors are locked. Her alarm's on. And you ain't getting in."

"So, what am I supposed to do?" Clark asked.

Perry shrugged. "Women are fragile creatures. Whatever it is you've done..." At Clark's aghast expression, he hastily added, "...or she thinks you've done... You just got to let her work it out." He put a supportive hand on Clark's shoulder. "You gonna be okay, son?"

"I don't know." He sighed. "I guess giving her some space won't hurt." He headed towards the elevator. Perry just shook his head.

"Dr. Leek, I'm telling you there's something seriously wrong here. So many of these frogs have gone missing. I think someone is breaking in and stealing them," Dr. Klein argued with his superior.

Dr. Leek just smiled. "Dr. Klein, I would know if S.T.A.R. Labs had been broken into. Leave the management responsibilities to me, would you? You've obviously just miscalculated somewhere..."

Dr. Klein sighed, nodding at Dr. Leek and turning back towards his work. He didn't believe Dr. Leek for a minute.

"Lois! Robbery and hostage situation at the Metropolis Merchant's Bank. Shake a leg!" Perry hollered across the newsroom.

Lois nodded, grabbing the fax in Perry's hand. "I'm on it."

She raced out of the newsroom, heading towards the elevators. Hopefully, a good juicy headline would get her out of this rut she was in. This wasn't her. Crying at work. Unable to dig into the story she'd been working on all these weeks. She needed to take charge and get a hold of herself. She was Lois Lane, independent career woman. She would be damned if she was left crying over any man again... even Superman.

Lois exited out of a cab, approaching one of the officers who stood writing the report. "Lois Lane." She showed her press ID to the officer. "Daily Planet. What happened?"

"Tense stand-off until Superman got here," the cop said.

"Really?" she said, trying to squash the knot that was forming in her stomach.

"He flew in the top window, apprehended the perp, freed the hostages. He's over there." The cop pointed. Superman stood by a Metropolis P.D. van watching the cops load the perp into the vehicle.

Lois watched emotionlessly. She really didn't want to have to deal with Clark right now, but her hand had been forced. She was still a professional. She advanced forward, "Superman!" She

waved her hand towards him. He caught her gaze but seemed a bit hesitant.

At that moment the perp broke free of the two policemen and tried to run off. Superman took after him, grabbing him by the collar. He lifted the perp into the air then tossed him twenty feet away into the awaiting police van. The policemen smiled, then shook Superman's hand, offering thanks.

Lois stared in disbelief as she advanced towards him. "Superman?"

He looked at her slightly confused. "Yes?"

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." He smiled. His eyes ran up and down her body. She tugged her jacket more securely around her. "Do I know you?"

She looked at him slightly concerned. "It's me... Lois."

He smiled as if recognizing her for the first time. "Oh, yeah." He nodded, then without warning, he grabbed her around the waist and pulled her towards him.

"Get off of me, you jerk!" She slapped him across the face. She stared at Superman in shock. He may have looked and sounded like Clark, but this wasn't Clark. She took a few steps back, keeping some distance between her and this imposter.

"You know that doesn't hurt," he said mockingly.

"Don't you dare try something like that again!" she hissed, turning on her heel to get as far away from him as possible.

"Women," he muttered under his breath before taking off.

The LNN newscaster's voice echoed through the halls of the District Attorney's office. "As you can see here. Even Superman's supposed close friends aren't safe from his destructive behavior. Here in this footage, you can see where he is forcibly grabbing Lois Lane and trying to kiss her. She has most recently married her partner, Clark Kent, another close friend of Superman's. Her reaction?" The footage showed in slow motion how Lois pushed him away and slapped him. "Well, let's just say, Superman has found one woman that doesn't give into his charms. Metropolis still is baffled by the recent behavior change in our formerly friendly superhero. That's all for now."

Mayson clicked the television off. "Enough of this. I knew he was a criminal before. Now he's forcing himself on women?" She rolled her eyes. "Somebody's got to stop this."

"I don't know, Ms. Drake. Superman's always seemed like a generally nice person. I don't think he would do something like that," Lucy argued.

"I saw him making out with that reporter the other day," Lana added. "He's just a player that thinks he can get whatever he wants because he's Superman."

"I agree," Mayson said firmly.

"I don't. My sister has a pretty good judge of character. There are some people she's been a little off on, but I don't think she's wrong about Superman. Something else is going on here," Lucy said.

"Whatever." Mayson rolled her eyes. "I have to go get this warrant signed. Let's see Superman try and stop Justice from coming after his girlfriend."

"Lois, what in the Sam Hill happened?" Perry asked, taking in Lois' disheveled appearance as she stalked into the newsroom.

"I don't want to talk about it, Perry," she hissed. "I'm going home." She grabbed her things then headed for the elevator.

He looked at the clock on the wall. "But it's only three!"

"I don't care!" she called. "I'll see you tomorrow." With that, she was gone.

Lois sat in the back of the cab, going over what had just happened in her mind. Clark had never acted like that. He had always made sure she was a willing participant whenever he

kissed her...made love to her...touched her. What was going on?

She had said so many awful things to him yesterday. He'd been telling the truth. That hadn't been him. Why had she been so easily fooled? She knew Clark. She knew him better than anyone. Why had she for a moment doubted his love for her?

She needed to see Clark.

Clark stood in the shower stall, staring blankly at the porcelain on the walls as the water beat against his back. It had long since turned ice cold, but he didn't care. He felt like hell. He had gone out on a few rescues only to be met by angry faces, blaming him for the out-of-control Superman in Metropolis. Then there were the crazy women, throwing themselves at him. He shook his head in disgust. The only woman he wanted wasn't even speaking to him.

A knock at the door caught his attention. He drug himself out of his self-despair and turned the water off, pulling on a pair of jeans and heading for the door. The knocking got more insistent. "That has to be Lois," he muttered. Out of habit, he reached for his glasses. He opened the door only to find Mayson Drake on the other end.

Mayson gave him a once over, then looked back up. "Hi. I need to talk to you about something."

"Uh, sure. Just give me a minute to put on a shirt," he said, turning back towards the bedroom.

"Oh, no! Actually, it's really really warm in here." He watched in amusement as she brushed her jacket off. "Mmmm hmmm, much better."

Clark rolled his eyes and headed towards his bedroom. "I'll just be a sec." He put on his black button-up shirt that Lois liked so much. He was just buttoning it up when he heard an insistent knock on the front door. "Grand central station," he muttered. He reached for the knob and opened the door.

"Hi," Lois said, eyeing him appreciatively. "Can I come in?"

"Yeah." He opened the door and Lois stopped cold for a minute when she saw Mayson sitting on the couch.

"Mayson." Her breath caught. "What are you doing here?"

"I needed to discuss this Superman fiasco with the two of you. You two are both his friends. You know how to contact him. I need to bring him in for questioning." Mayson said.

"Excuse me?" Lois said, accusingly.

"Are you honestly going to just let him continue to get away with what he did today?" Mayson asked. "It was all over the news, Lois."

Lois was seething. "I really don't think that's any of your business."

"I have the tape," she said, waving it in front of them before laying it on the table.

Tape? What exactly had happened? Had his double hurt Lois? He looked at her in concern.

"In order for you to do anything, I have to be willing to press charges, which I'm not," Lois replied coldly.

Mayson rolled her eyes and stood up, gathering her things.

"Look, I'm not trying to step on your toes or anything, but he does have to be stopped. That perp he threw into the police van today had to have stitches. This is what I was talking about. He's a vigilante. Just because someone commits a crime doesn't mean Superman has carte blanche to beat the hell out of them. We have a justice system for a reason."

"A corrupt one," Lois corrected.

"And I still need to speak to him about destroying evidence in our investigation with Intergang. Those rifles were damaged beyond repair along with the computer systems. I can't get anything off of them," Mayson griped.

"Ms. Drake, I'm sure Superman didn't mean to destroy the evidence. He was just trying to keep the rifles from going off and killing people," Clark interjected.

“Well, he needs to find another way,” she replied coolly. “Think about what I said. I don’t want to be forced into taking drastic measures.” With that, she left.

“I don’t want to be forced into taking drastic measures,” Lois mimicked as the door slammed shut. “Who does she think she is, Perry Mayson?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said, flopping down on the couch. He picked up the tape Mayson had left. “So, what was she talking about?”

“What the hell is going on, Clark?” Lois asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

Clark sighed. “I don’t know. There’s someone who...looks *exactly* like me...has all my powers...but obviously is *not* me.” Lois took a seat next to him, staring hesitantly at him as he spoke. “I ran into him last night after I left you at Lucy’s. From what I’ve been able to gather, he’s been performing a bunch of rescues here in Metropolis and overseas over the past few months...showing up more and more.... Lois, I promise you I never kissed Linda... Never ever ever...I would never do that to you.”

Lois sighed. “I know. I think part of me knew...knew you wouldn’t do that...That’s why it hurt so much...I *knew* you wouldn’t do that, but the video footage.... I mean, what was I supposed to think when I had that image staring back at me like that?”

Clark sighed. “I know. I’m sorry.” He leaned in to kiss her.

“No, I’m sorry. I should never have doubted you.” She leaned against his shoulder.

“Hey, it did look bad. How many times do you think, ‘Hey, is this an evil double doing this or not?’ I didn’t know what to think about it myself.” He wrapped an arm around her cautiously. “So, what happened earlier?”

Lois took a deep breath. “I went to cover an armed robbery/hostage situation. I was interviewing one of the officers. They said Superman had shown up and diffused the situation. I went to go interview you — or him...I then saw the assailant trying to get away. ‘*Superman*’ stopped him by throwing him twenty feet away into a police van. It had to have knocked the guy out cold. That’s when I knew something wasn’t right. I then approached him. He didn’t recognize me. Then before I knew it he grabbed me and tried to kiss me.”

“He *what*??” Clark could feel his anger beginning to boil.

“I pushed him away and slapped him. He said something about it not hurting him and I walked away. After that, I knew something was up because I knew you’d never act like that.” Lois sighed. “Clark, I am *so* sorry I blew up at you yesterday. I really...” He leaned in to capture her mouth.

“Enough of that,” he whispered against her lips. “I forgive you. Does this mean we’ve made up?” he asked cautiously.

Lois nodded, wrapping her arms around him, as she leaned in to kiss him. “Yes. I’m sorry for blowing up at you.”

He sought her mouth out eagerly, as he tightened his arms around her waist. “It’s okay.”

“Oh, one more thing!” She traced the outline of his nose with her index finger. “What were you thinking; calling the Kerth Award Board of Administration? And don’t try to deny it? You were the only one I’ve ever told about him stealing my story.”

Clark laughed. “That was Perry...”

“What?” Lois was aghast.

“Hey, all I told him was I’d been browsing through some old stories in the archives and come across this article that looked like your work. He said it had been printed while he’d been out of town, so he’d never seen it. I told him I knew your work pretty well after working with you so long. I’d found no record of Mr. Cluny writing ever reaching the expertise it had in that one article. Perry agreed with me and said he’d look into it. I guess the Kerth Administration agreed as well since they’re investigating it.” He offered her an apologetic smile. “I didn’t mean to upset you,

Sweetheart. I just hated that he was getting away with taking so much away from you.”

Lois’ face seemed to soften. “I just wish you’d told me. I was taken completely by surprise.”

“I’m sorry,” he whispered leaning up to kiss her. He felt her arms tighten around his neck as he deepened the kiss.

She moaned in pleasure against his lips, pressing her body against his solid frame. “I missed this,” she murmured, running a seductive hand down his chest as she brushed the shirt off his shoulders.

“Mmmm hmmm,” he murmured his agreement as he lifted her sweater above her head. She laughed in response as she disentangled herself from the shirt, tossing it on the couch.

“Oh, Clark...” she moaned as he buried his face into the nape of her neck.

God, he’d missed her. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her more securely against him. He felt her back arch against his touch as she fisted his hair. “Loiss...”

“Clark!” she yelled when he scooped her up in his arms, carrying her towards the bedroom.

“Need more...room...” he murmured as he walked determinedly towards the bedroom with her wrapped around him.

The phone from the kitchen rang, causing him to stop dead in his tracks. “If that’s Jimmy...” Lois began.

“I think he knows better,” Clark muttered. He changed direction, carrying her towards the kitchen. He set her down on the counter, then turned around to reach for the phone, “Hello?”

“Kent?” Perry White’s voice echoed from the other end of the phone.

“Oh, hi, Chief...” He held in a gasp as Lois wrapped her arms around him from behind, pressing her body against his back.

“Listen, Lois kinda cut out of here early and I wanted to make sure everything was okay... Well, I’m just checking to make sure everything’s okay.” He held in a moan as her lips grazed against his neck.

‘Oh, God, she’s killing me.’

“Clark? Everything okay, son?” Perry’s voice intruded on his reverie.

“Mmmm hmmm.” He suppressed a groan as her hand moved up his chest and began to draw random patterns on his it. Her other hand seemed to be at work against his lower back as she fumbled with the fasten to her own jeans. “Ev...everything is just... perr...fect...Chief...” he managed to squeak out.

“Well, I know you two have had a rough couple of days... what with the changes that come with the baby...the wedding... this Superman fiasco...I heard what...” He bit his lower lip, as her warm breath teased his ear.

“Loiss...” he hissed in a hushed whisper. “Stop...”

She placed a kiss along his collarbone. “You don’t mean that.”

“I heard what happened earlier today. Clark? Son? Are you there?”

He let out a shuddered breath. “I...I...I’m here, Chief. Yeah, I...” She tugged at his earlobe with her teeth, gently pulling on it as she wrapped her legs around him from behind. “I...I really... ahem...really got to go. Can we talk about this tomorrow? I...”

“Okay, sure, son. You sure you’re all right?”

“Never better,” he managed to squeak out before hanging up the phone.

“Finally...” Lois purred wrapping her arms around his neck as he turned to face her. “You are too nice.”

“You are in *sooo* much trouble, Mrs. Kent,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her as she wrapped her legs around his waist.

Lois let out a light giggle. “What did I do?”

He gathered her up in his arms, raining a trail of heated kisses along her collarbone. “You know exactly what you did,” he murmured, leaning in to kiss her.

“We were interrupted... Oh”

The next morning, Linda King sat at her desk, sipping a cup of hot coffee as she prepared her next scoop on the Man of Steel's recent activities. She wasn't sure what to think of the recent occurrences in the last week. At first she had thought the Man of Steel had been unable to resist her charm as many other men had in the past; now she realized he was just a skirt chaser.

"What a pity," she muttered to herself, glancing at the front page photograph of herself and Superman in a passionate embrace. "Oh, well..." She shrugged, turning her attention back to her computer.

"Ms. King?" The familiar voice of Inspector Henderson drew her attention away from her computer once more.

"Yes?" Linda turned to face Inspector Henderson and the two officers accompanying him. "What can I do for you, Inspector?"

"Ms. King, I'm afraid you'll have to come downtown with us," one of the officers said.

"Pardon?" Linda asked aghast. "Listen, I've already told you everything I know."

"Ms. King, you're under arrest. You'll have to come with us," Inspector Henderson said quietly, trying to avoid as much of a scene as he could.

"What?"

"You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney..." Linda was dumbstruck as Inspector Henderson began reading off the Miranda Rights to her. She stood up from her desk numbly as one of the officers placed the handcuffs on her.

"What is this?" Lucy asked, looking at the warrant Mayson had just laid on her desk.

"A warrant."

"For Supeman's arrest? Are you crazy?" Lucy asked.

"He's out of control."

"But..."

"No buts. Send it through now," Mayson ordered.

"This bed is so comfortable." Lois grinned up at Clark.

"You're not even lying on the bed." Clark noticed mildly amused that she was lying mostly on him.

"You're comfortable," she said, snuggling up even closer to him.

He sighed. "I aim to please."

"Mmmm, that you do," she whispered seductively, leaning up to kiss him.

"Mmmm." Clark moaned into her mouth. "We need to get a move on. You need to get dressed..."

"You don't like what I'm wearing?" she teased.

He gave her nude body a once over and smiled. "I like it very much, but I think the rest of the male staff would enjoy it a bit too much for my taste."

"Fine. Let's get moving," Lois grumbled, reluctantly climbing out of the bed.

"You know, we probably should start looking for a place to live," Clark commented, watching her appreciatively as she walked towards the bathroom.

"I know," Lois sighed, "It's all happening so fast..."

"Well, when the baby comes we're gonna need more room... and you just hit the third trimester so..." Clark glanced around the current apartment. "My apartment may be bigger than yours, but we're still going to need more room."

Lois sighed. "I know. We'll take a look at places this weekend..." She grabbed an outfit from the closet and headed to the bathroom to get dressed. "I'll just be a sec," Lois called from the bathroom.

Clark glanced at the clock. "That must be a new record," he muttered as he heard the shower from the bathroom start and decided to make himself useful, heading towards the kitchen to

whip up some breakfast. After scanning the cabinets he was relieved to find groceries there. They'd both been a bit preoccupied the last few days. He moved at super-speed, using his heat vision to cook everything faster than the normal stove.

He flipped several pancakes, whipped up some scrambled eggs, grilled some bacon, and lay the plates on the table. He then turned to grab some juice from the refrigerator when two petite arms wrapped around him, kissing him from behind. "Showoff," Lois whispered, leaning over him to grab a piece of bacon.

Clark laughed and leaned back to kiss her. "Breakfast is almost ready."

"What?" Lois asked, dumbfounded. The minute they'd arrived at the Planet, Perry had summoned them into his office.

"Your friend Linda King was arrested for the murder of Martin Snell this morning," Perry said, handing them a fax.

"You've got to be kidding me," Lois said in disbelief, scanning the fax.

"Check it out," Perry said, wagging his finger at them.

"Something tells me this is gonna be a long day," Clark said.

"You don't know the half of it. Investigate a murder and investigate this mysterious double of Superman..."

"Let's get going," Clark said, guiding her towards the elevator.

"What else could go wrong?" Lois sighed.

Superman watched from a distance as Clark held the door open for Lois, following her out of the cab and into the Metropolis P.D. What was it about this intriguing woman that captivated his attention? He continued to watch with his enhanced vision. His father had warned him about approaching her. She was very intelligent and capable of ruining his plans to overpower the old Superman. He would claim his place in society soon. When that day came he would have this woman...this Lois Lane with him.

"King! You got a visitor!" the officer called. A resounding blare could be heard echoing through the halls as Lois and Clark sat in the visitor's room waiting for Linda to appear.

"So, who do you think is trying to set Linda up?" Clark asked in a hushed whisper.

"I don't know. Snell was involved with a lot of high rollers... He could have created enemies with any number of people. We need to know what happened that night at the Press Club," Lois whispered. Linda came into the room, taking the seat the guard had guided her to. "Hi."

Linda groaned, narrowing her eyes at Lois. "What are you doing here?"

"We heard about what happened," Clark said, trying to ease the tension between the two of them.

"Nice. Come here to gloat?" Linda sneered.

"Believe it or not, Linda, I can be a professional. It just so happens I don't think you killed Martin Snell," Lois said, crossing her arms over her chest. "You're capable of a lot of things, but murder isn't one of them."

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?" Linda scoffed.

"Could you two just hold off on the cat fight for a little bit?" Clark asked. "This is serious."

"No kidding," Linda sneered. "I'm looking at twenty-five to life for going to dinner with a friend." Linda rolled her eyes. "The cocktails weren't even that great."

"Okay, so, what exactly happened that night? We ran into you and Martin at the Press Club at around nine. What happened that night?"

Linda seemed to be contemplating something in her head for a moment then sighed, rolling her eyes. "Whatever. I guess it can't get any worse than this." She leaned back to cross her arms over her chest. "We had dinner, drinks...Martin disappeared later in the night. I couldn't find him. I figured he'd just had too many drinks

and was passed out somewhere. He's pretty well known for not being able to hold his alcohol."

"Okay. What time was this?" Clark asked.

"It was about ten thirty."

"That was a little after we left," Lois said.

"Did you see anyone after that?"

"The bartender? I have a few drinks with a few gentlemen at the bar...I took a cab home."

"Couldn't get your claws deep enough into them to get one of them to take you home?" Lois asked.

Linda rolled her eyes. "I was a little... preoccupied."

"I can imagine. What happened? Neither one of them like what you were offering?"

"Oh, get off your high horse, Lois!"

"And get down in the gutter with you? No thanks," Lois snapped. "I think we're done here. Whatever you do, don't drop the soap in the shower," Lois said, standing up to leave.

"Lois, was that really necessary?" Clark asked as he handed back the visitor badge to one of the officers as they left the visiting room.

"She gets on my nerves," Lois said.

"Gee, I hadn't noticed," Clark said, sarcastically as he opened the door for her.

"I'll call Jimmy and have him run a complete background check on Martin Snell. My guess is he's crossed the wrong person. We should also check with my friend Louie. He's pretty familiar with that part of town."

"Okay. I'll also put a call into Bobby...but who's Louie?" Clark asked curiously.

"A source," Lois said teasingly, running a hand up his chest seductively. "Why? Are you jealous, Mr. Kent?"

"You bet," he whispered, leaning down to kiss her.

"So, where do we stand on this Superman double?" Clark asked as they sifted through the stacks of research on the conference room table.

"Well, I have one theory, but it's kind of a long shot," Lois said, pulling out an old article from the Metropolis Science Magazine. "This Dr. Fabian Leek is talking about cloning human cells..."

"Clones?" Clark asked in disbelief. "Lois, they aren't even that technologically advanced yet."

"Maybe they are. You know the government is always hiding things from the public. Look at Bureau 39..."

"But in order to make a clone of me they'd have had to have gotten a piece of my DNA. I'm invulnerable," Clark pointed out.

"Most of the time," Lois said with a smile.

"Well, Kryptonite's got nothing on you," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

"Guys?" Jimmy opened the conference room door. "Errr... sorry," he apologized, noticing Lois and Clark shooting him begrudging looks.

"Nice timing," Lois snipped.

"Sorry, but your mother's on line one," Jimmy said, pointing to the phone.

"Oh, my God!" Lois winced, reaching for the phone. "What now?" She picked up the phone. "Yes, hello, mother? No, I didn't forget. We just got back...Uh-huh. Okay, that's fine. All right, well, tell him he needs to make time. Uh-huh...Well, I'm not going to plan my life around whether or not he has a medical breakthrough, Mother. Yes, I know. I know. Fifteen years. Yeah. No, it's fine. If Daddy can't make it...Okay, well, I'm sorry you have a migraine. Yes, I know. Feel better. How about we swing by after work? Okay, you do that. Bye." Lois rolled her eyes, hanging up the phone.

"What was that about?" Clark asked.

"Trust me, you don't want to know." Lois sighed, resting her head in her hands. Clark gave her a sympathetic smile and she elaborated on the problem at hand. "I wanted to tell both of them about the baby at the same time. I set up lunch, but it doesn't sound like that's going to work out."

"Why not?" Clark asked.

"My mother is trying to track down my father...who seems to be too busy with his latest fling to be bothered by little inconveniences like family," Lois said bitterly.

"Too busy? He didn't even show up for the wedding..." Clark pointed out.

"I know. I guess worst case scenario we just tell my mother and she'll pass along the good news..." Lois muttered sorrowfully. Clark looked at her skeptically and she sighed. "I know it's a little hard for you to understand because your parents are so wonderful, but my father isn't exactly the model father." She sighed, running a hand through her hair. "Do you want the short version or the long?"

"Whatever you want to tell me," he said, resting a hand on her lower back as he lightly rubbed it.

Lois sighed. "Okay. Short version it is. My father was a workaholic who didn't understand the meaning of the word commitment. Every one of us was considered a disappointment to him. Me and Lucy, because we weren't boys. My mother...well, I tried not to listen when they had those fights. Anyway, after my mother caught him cheating for the billionth time they got divorced. Mother began drinking. She became an alcoholic. Lucy and I became inseparable..."

"I can't even imagine having to go through something like that," Clark said, shaking his head. "I guess that explains why he didn't show up..."

"Yeah, well, we haven't exactly been on speaking terms for the past...Oh, I don't know...fifteen years."

"Ouch." Clark winced. "That's a long time."

Lois pushed a strand of hair out of her face, tucking it behind her ear as she tried to recompose herself. "Yeah, well...that's my sad story. You sure you don't want to back out?"

"No way," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

Superman flew through the air, enjoying the flight. He loved the freedom that came with flying. He had no rules. He was free to be himself. He didn't have a bedtime. He could be whoever he wanted to be. He landed in an open airfield that appeared to be abandoned.

"Hi." The stern voice of his doppelganger sounded behind him.

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you."

"And why would I want to do that?" Superman asked, smugly crossing his arms over his chest.

"Because we're more alike than you want to admit. I know you've been following Lois."

"What's it to you?"

"You attacked her." Clark's face grew grim. "You attacked her and made her think it was me. You are out there acting like you're some playboy.... You don't just grab women like that..."

"They didn't exactly complain," Superman pointed out.

"But Lois did," Clark corrected.

"Hey, I stopped."

"After she slapped you."

"It didn't hurt," Superman said mockingly.

"No, but you hurt Lois." Clark took a step forward so he was a mere millimeter away from Superman. "You listen to me very carefully. If you ever...ever hurt her I will come after you."

"Is that a threat?"

"That's a promise," Clark said, slamming his arm against Superman's chest. "Stay away from her." With that Clark

ricocheted into the air, leaving Superman to contemplate the recent encounter.

“Whatever. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” Superman said to himself.

Clark stepped off the elevator, only to be greeted by Lois, shoving a file in his hands as she pushed him back into the elevator car. “Come on. We’ve got an interview with Dr. Fabian Leek.” She pressed the call button. “Jimmy found this article on that auction from last month? You remember? The one where you donated a lock of your hair? Or Superman did anyway...”

“Yeah, I remember...” Clark sighed. “You still working on that clone theory of yours?”

“You know me so well.” She beamed. “Dr. Leek is the only known expert in the field of cloning. He’s in Metropolis. Whoever pulled this off had to go through him first.” She pointed to the article inside the file. “I called Mrs. Doyle... She’s the one that bought the lock of hair... Sweet old lady. Kinda weird, though. Anyway, she said there was a break-in at her house the day after the auction. The lock of hair was stolen. Never found who took it. Never got it back.”

“Something tells me they weren’t your average hoodlum thieves.” Clark sighed. “Okay. So, let’s say for argument’s sake that there is a clone... Why would someone make a clone in the first place?”

“Blow-up dolls weren’t working?” Lois joked.

Clark rolled his eyes as they stepped into the lobby. “Seriously?”

“Seriously. I don’t know. That’s what we need to find out.”

Lois tried to suppress a cringe as she inched closer and closer towards Clark, attempting to avoid Dr. Leek’s obvious advances towards her. Had he no shame? She was wearing a wedding ring and he still was undressing her with his eyes. ‘Men!’ She thought, disgusted at the doctor’s behavior.

“You see, my dear, Ms. Lane, it’s child’s play to clone individual cells. As simple and natural as the reproductive act itself.” Dr. Leek smiled broadly at her.

Lois nodded. “But you wrote an article in Metropolis Science stating that an entire human being could be cloned if the right genetic material were available.”

“Well, I was young and unfortunately overly optimistic. It’s taken me thirty years to clone a simple frog. The process is much more difficult than I imagined. We’re years away from successfully applying the technique to human beings.” He took a step towards Lois, leering at her.

Clark placed a protective arm around Lois’ waist, then picked up an enclosed glass specimen box that contained a very dead frog. “That process isn’t exactly foolproof, is it, doctor?”

Dr. Leek’s face changed from pleasant to a bitter dark tone as he addressed Clark. “No, unfortunately, you’re correct, Mr. Kent. I’m sorry I can’t be of greater assistance.” Clark narrowed his eyes at the doctor. Lois noticed the expression of mistrust cross his face. She didn’t believe him either.

“Well, thank you for your time, doctor,” Clark said, moving towards the door with Lois.

Dr. Leek followed them, then turned to address Lois. “I would, however, be honored to take you to dinner, Ms. Lane. We could discuss the miracles of life in more, shall we say, tangible terms.”

Lois stared blankly at him, scanning the room full of dead frogs that were locked in glass confined boxes. “I’ve got a better idea. I’m a bit busy this weekend, so I’m REALLY not available, but you could do me a huge favor...”

“Anything...”

“Why don’t you go home, change into something more comfortable, pack an overnight bag and then come back here... and release all these poor frogs to the the nearest lily pond.” With

that, she turned on her heel. “Imbecile.”

“How are his vitals doing?” Lex asked, puffing at his cigar.

“Everything seems to be stabilized. I was a bit worried at first. He seems to be staying strong,” Dr. Leek said.

“Excellent. Soon he will destroy Superman and take over Metropolis,” Lex said. “It’s time everyone realized who was running things around here.”

“We’re going to need a new lawyer,” Bill Church said, puffing at his cigar. “Someone as good as Martin was.”

“Who do you suppose would be stupid enough to mess with a well known Intergang lawyer?” Bill Church Jr. asked.

“I don’t know, but whoever it is has just thrown the red flag for a war. I don’t like having to work any harder than I need to. I have to do everything Martin was doing plus more. It’s not good for my stress level.”

“Dad, maybe you should take a vacation. Get some rest. Leave Intergang to me.”

“Are you sure you can handle it?” Bill asked. “It’s not like running the Cost Mart stores. It takes finesse and ...”

“I know. I know. Trust me, Dad. You need to rest. Remember what your doctor said.”

“Stress levels down. I know. I think I’ll take a cruise through the Bermuda Triangle.”

“That’s the spirit. Add a little spice to your life.” Bill Church Jr. smiled at his father as he took a long puff at his cigar.

“Sheldon Bender, I’ve heard some good things about you,” Bill Church Jr said as he took a puff of his cigar. “You do understand any information you become privileged to is under attorney-client privilege. You can’t share this information with anyone. Correct?”

“I’m aware of the background your company has, Mr. Church. I have no problem with your stipulations. As long as the number on my check is filled out and signed I don’t care,” Sheldon Bender said smugly.

“Well, then, Mr. Bender. Welcome to Intergang.”

Lex Corp stood in the middle of the city. Once the center of the business world. Now, its owner feared the worst as the blaze from the fire enveloped everything he had worked so hard to build.

“Father!” Superman’s face fell when he saw his home in flames. He flew down to the scene and addressed the officers. “Any survivors?”

“We’re unsure,” the officer said. “We’re not sure who was in the building at the time.”

“Mr. Luthor?”

“We don’t know.”

He had no father. He had searched high and low. His home was destroyed. His doctor was missing. Everything he had known had vanished before him. His father had told him of his hated enemies; now he knew the true extent of which they would go to destroy his father. They would pay.

Superman’s eyebrows furrowed in anger. His father’s enemy, Superman, would pay dearly for this.

Something was wrong. Clark lay in bed, holding Lois close to him, listening intently to the sound of her and the baby’s heartbeat. He had appeared at the scene of the fire at LexCorp. The entire building had been destroyed and no one knew the whereabouts of Lex Luthor. The idea that his enemy was out there lurking without a clue as to where he was was unnerving.

He tightened his arms around Lois. He couldn’t seem to shake the eerie feeling that had fallen over him this morning.

This husband of Lois Lane's seemed harmless. Superman watched from a distance as he paced around Lois' apartment. He was looking around, searching for something. He seemed harmless, but he was friends with this Superman and another enemy of his father's. He couldn't afford to underestimate him. He would destroy him and take what Superman cared most about: Lois Lane.

Dr. Klein stared at the numerous booklets of notes before him. He had known Dr. Leek was up to no good, but this was unimaginable. He had successfully created a clone—a clone of Superman at that. This 'boss' had paid for the research and development of this clone. Who was this boss? He'd seen Dr. Leek being interviewed by those reporters, Lois Lane and Clark Kent. He had followed Dr. Leek after they had left and found him sneaking into the back of LexCorp towers. A few hours later a fire had been set. What did this mean?

He never was very good at investigating. His forte had always been science. Before Superman had arrived in Metropolis he had a scientific explanation for everything. Now, he wasn't so sure. Those reporters seemed to be friends with the local superhero. Maybe they would have an idea of how to handle this development.

Lois lay in bed, curled up in Clark's arms. She replayed their recent lovemaking in her mind and listened to his heartbeat beneath his chest. His hands rested protectively around her waist, resting against her abdomen. "So, we never did figure out where we're going to live," Lois said, seductively running a finger down Clark's chest.

"I know." Clark sighed, turning to face her so that he was on his side. "We need to look at some places. It's just been so crazy..."

"Any more 'help' on rescues?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Nope, the clone seems to be making himself scarce... We'll start looking at places this weekend... barring any major disasters or distractions..."

A sharp thump from inside her abdomen caught her attention. "I think someone agrees." She laughed.

"Definitely your kid. He's not even born yet and he's already sticking his two cents in."

Lois thwacked him with the pillow. "You are going to pay for that!"

"I'm kidding. I'm kidding." He laughed.

Lois leaned down to tickle him, only to find him unmoving. "That is not fair," she whined.

Clark reached up to capture her lips. "I don't play fair," he murmured.

"Good morning, Ms. Drake," Lucy called out when Mayson entered the office.

"Morning," Mayson said briskly. "I have a meeting with the mayor and Judge Roberts this morning. I won't be available until this afternoon. Make sure everything on the schedule is pushed back."

"Ms. Drake, did you hear about what happened to LexCorp?" Lucy asked.

"Yes, I'm afraid the Skins are probably at it again, although I doubt it's actually the Skins' idea to burn it down." Mayson sighed. "I'm sorry. Have you heard anything from Lex?"

Lucy shook her head. "No, but I'm confident he'll show up."

"That's the spirit," Mayson cheered.

"So, what exactly are we doing about the Skins?" Lana asked. "I mean, they are out of control." Lana laid her purse at her desk, turning to face Mayson and Lucy.

"Well, I'm trying to get their bond revoked. They've just

obtained a new attorney, Sheldon Bender," Mayson said grimly.

"Legal representation for the corrupt and sleazy," Lucy noted.

"How are they affording representation from him? His rates are outrageous..." Lana noticed the curious glances she was getting from Lucy and Mayson, "...or so I've heard."

"Good question," Mayson said. She eyed Lana critically for a moment before turning to Lucy. "Can I see you in my office a moment?"

"Sure." Lucy followed Mayson across the hall into her office and closed the door.

"What I'm about to tell you doesn't leave this room. Are we clear?" Mayson asked.

"Yes. Absolutely," Lucy agreed.

"Good. I have reason to believe Intergang is backing the Skins."

"Intergang?" Lucy asked, curiously.

"Organized crime," Mayson said, as if that explained everything. "I want you to start looking into Martin Snell's books as well as Sheldon Bender's. I need to know what the commonality is between them. I know Martin was working for Intergang. I suspect Mr. Bender is too."

"Does that mean Linda is a part of Intergang too?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know," Mayson said. "All the evidence points to her, but I can't be sure of anything right now. Keep this to yourself. Don't tell Lana or your sister. I can't afford for Intergang to know what I'm up to. You seem trustworthy. That's a step in the right direction as far as I'm concerned. Now, I have to go."

"Clark?" Lois called out when she awoke to find herself alone in bed. She scanned the bedroom and saw no sign of him anywhere. Maybe he was out on a rescue. She grabbed his dress shirt from the night before and put it on; heading toward the kitchen to make some coffee. She opened the door to find Clark on the other side, carrying a tray of food and a freshly brewed cup of coffee. "Mmmm, you're good." She grabbed the coffee from the tray and took a sip. "Decaf?" she verified.

"Decaf." Clark nodded. "Fruit, yogurt, and croissant with chocolate drizzle. So, you still get your chocolate." Clark leaned down to give her a kiss. "Good morning."

"Morning." Lois gestured towards the tray of food as they sat down on the bed. "What's all this?"

"Breakfast." He pointed at each item on the tray. "Fruit, bread and dairy."

"But I don't want to eat that much in the morning," she argued. "You know I'm not really much of a breakfast person."

"Too bad," Clark said, handing her the bowl of fruit. "You need to eat healthy and we've both been running pretty ragged these past few days. You need to keep up your strength and eat more healthy than what you have been."

Lois scowled at him. "I eat healthy."

"Double Fudge Crunch bars are not healthy," Clark argued, avoiding the swat she aimed at him.

"How is it that you know what I am or am not supposed to be eating?" Clark pulled out a book to show her. "What to Expect When You're Expecting..." Lois read the title and shook her head in disbelief.

"I just want to make sure you and the baby are okay. I mean, we don't know everything to expect because of my..."

Lois leaned up to kiss him. "Thank you," she whispered. "I think it's sweet that you care so much, but I think you're slipping into that over-protective mode."

"You better believe it," he whispered, recapturing her mouth once more. Lois smiled against his mouth, eager to intensify their contact when he pulled away, standing up, leaving her disappointed. She gave a pout of disapproval. "We need to get ready for work," he explained.

“Spoil sport.” Lois pouted.

“Lois, CK, you’ve got a visitor,” Jimmy said, pointing at Lois’ desk.

Lois and Clark nodded as they headed towards Lois’ desk where an unfamiliar balding man sat. “May we help you?” Lois asked, taking a seat at her desk.

“Yes, I’m Dr. Bernard Klein. I work at S.T.A.R. Labs. I was a colleague of Dr. Leek’s...”

“Dr. Leek?” Clark asked curiously.

“Yes, I believe you spoke with him about the cloning process,” Dr. Klein prompted.

“Yes.” Lois crossed her arms over her chest. “How did you know about that?”

Dr. Klein avoided her gaze, his face flushing slightly. “I...I need to talk to you...in private about this.”

Lois glanced at Clark who nodded. He motioned toward Jimmy to clear out the conference room. Jimmy gave him a thumbs up. “We can go in the conference room,” Clark said.

“Bender!” Church hollered across the room.

“Yes, Mr. Church?” Sheldon Bender asked, running towards him.

“What is this?” Church threw down the morning edition of the Daily Planet. “This Lois Lane and Clark Kent are writing articles about how they think organized crime is implementing itself into Metropolis. I don’t like it. How do I get them to stop?”

“Well, the only person who can control what gets printed in the Daily Planet is the publisher and owners of the paper,” Bender explained.

“Get to it,” Church ordered. “I can’t afford this kind of press. Petition the board for a proposal to purchase the Planet.”

“Yes, Mr. Church.” Bender nodded.

“Are you sure about this, Mr. Luthor?” Dr. Leek asked. “I mean, we’ve been monitoring his every move for the last month. He hasn’t been without...”

“This is the ultimate test. I’m everything he knows. I want to see what he will do when he thinks I’ve been killed by my enemy,” Lex said, puffing on his cigar. “I’m sure I won’t be disappointed.”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor.”

“Have another shipment of Revenge sent over. I’ve come up with the perfect solution.” Lex said.

Dr. Leek had always been a creature of habit. He was methodical in all his experiments and developments. It was no wonder that Lex Luthor had chosen him for creating a secret weapon against his hated enemy, Superman. Dr. Leek had proven himself with the successful cloning of the frogs he had been experimenting on.

Dr. Klein had started as an assistant to Dr. Leek years ago, learning the ins and outs of the scientific community. He looked up to the scientist as he explored the science of cloning and made breakthroughs that would change medical science for all time.

Then something strange happened. Dr. Leek’s experiments began to disappear. Evidence of his medical breakthroughs would disappear overnight. Dr. Klein had grown into an intelligent scientist, capable of holding his own in medical debates and able to conduct his own experiments without observation from senior scientists. When Dr. Klein had left Lex Labs to start work at S.T.A.R. Labs it had been a bittersweet moment. He was finally doing what he wanted, but he was leaving behind his mentor. This was the reason everything had been so hard.

Superman had followed Lois and Clark to S.T.A.R. Labs as they walked with an unidentifiable balding man. He wasn’t sure

what was going on, but he wanted some answers. These were friends of Superman’s. Surely they would know where to find him...

“I’ve suspected for some time now that Dr. Leek’s research wasn’t all it appeared to be. The frogs we’ve been experimenting on were coming up missing along with critical research notes. When asked about the missing items, Dr. Leek simply brushed me off,” Dr. Klein explained as he walked Lois and Clark through the hallway of S.T.A.R. Labs. “Now, you promise you will keep my name out of print. As a scientist; I can’t afford to be linked to this. Too many...” Dr. Klein allowed his voice to lower a few octaves, “...crazy people.”

Lois and Clark exchanged a humorous glance between one another. “Dr. Klein, we won’t be revealing you as a source, but we need to understand exactly what it is that you’ve found,” Lois began soothingly.

Dr. Klein unlocked his office and ushered them inside. “I hid the notebooks in my safe. It’s where I keep everything... sensitive.” Lois and Clark nodded in understanding and Dr. Klein turned on the light only to come face to face with... “Superman?”

“Where is he?” Superman strode forward, advancing towards Lois and Clark angrily.

“Who?” Clark asked confused.

“He’s my father’s most hated enemy. I know he killed him!”

“Oh, my... You’re the *clone*!!” Dr. Klein gasped in amazement.

“What are you talking about?” Superman asked, in annoyance.

“You see, you’re a medical evolution. The ability to clone an entire being is well...” Superman grabbed Dr. Klein by the collar, hoisting him up in the air. “I assume you aren’t interested in what I have to say.”

“Put him down!” Clark intervened, placing a hand on the angry Superman’s arm.

Superman dropped Dr. Klein to the ground and turned to face Clark. His stony gaze was met with an equal steely gaze from Clark. “Where is Superman???”

“What does Superman have to do with this?” Lois asked, hesitantly.

“My father... He... He... I know he killed him,” Superman hissed angrily.

“Listen to me. Superman hasn’t done anything to your father,” Clark tried to reason.

“Liar!” Superman roared.

“No, I’m not,” Clark argued. “Your father made you from a part of Superman. You’re a part of Superman. He isn’t your enemy.”

“He killed my father!”

“He took a part of Superman’s body and cloned you. You’re a biological machine. You don’t have any memories of your life...” Clark continued.

“You *LIAR*!!” Superman lifted his arm to strike Clark, but Clark’s reflexes were quick. He caught Superman’s arm midair, forcing it back down. Superman’s eyes narrowed as he locked his eyes with Clark’s, who was staring back with his own steely gaze.

“Dr. Klein? We heard someone yell! Are you all right? I’m sending security...” The voice of the receptionist echoed through the intercom.

Superman’s face changed to panic. “This isn’t over. I’ll be seeing you.” With that Superman left.

“What just happened here?” Dr. Klein asked.

“As of right now there is still no word on the whereabouts of Mr. Lex Luthor, elusive billionaire and owner of LexCorp. The police have yet to issue a statement.”

Lana clicked off the television and turned to Lucy, who was typing away, ignoring the newscaster’s report. “Wow, you must be

a wreck. I can't believe you came in today."

"I have to work," Lucy said.

"Burying yourself in your work. Understandable."

"I'm sure Lex is fine," Lucy said confidentially. "Now will you hand me that deposition?"

"So, let me get this straight. You're Superman?" Dr. Klein asked, pointing at Clark. "But you're really Clark Kent?"

Clark nodded nervously. "Uh, yeah. Listen, Dr. Klein, I know we don't know each other very well, but if this got out..."

Dr. Klein laughed. "I'm not going to tell anyone. Relax. You've done so much good for Metropolis... It'd be a shame if someone found out about you and exposed it to the world. You could never continue doing your good work. I won't tell anyone, I promise."

"Thank you, Dr. Klein," Lois said, squeezing Clark's hand in support.

"So..." Dr. Klein began. "That was the clone?"

"Uh, yeah," Clark nodded.

"He seems very angry. What'd you do to him?"

"Nothing that I know of," Clark sighed.

"Who's this father he kept talking about?"

"He won't tell me. He thinks I'm his enemy. I really wish I could help him... if he'd let me."

"I have my suspicions on who his father is," Lois said dryly. "Too many coincidences."

Superman sat in a secluded area of the library, scanning book after book. Clone. That was what that man had called him. According to these books, he was a genetic copy. He wasn't real. How could he not be real? He felt real. He flew just like Superman. He didn't hide behind a pair of glasses and a fake name the way Superman did, but he was real. He had so many questions. Where was his father when he needed him?

"Are you okay?" Lois asked as they stepped inside Clark's apartment that afternoon. "I know that couldn't have been easy... telling Dr. Klein like that."

"We didn't have much choice," Clark reasoned. "He seems... trustworthy." Clark let out a shuddered breath.

"You're still scared?" Lois observed.

"The more people who know, the more exposed I feel. It's not like I was planning to tell him, like I was with you," Clark explained. "But if I hadn't done what I'd done, who knows what else that clone could have done..."

"I know." Lois sighed, leaning up against him as they sat on the couch. "You want to know what I think?"

"That Lex Luthor is lying low somewhere and the clone has gone berserk because his father is missing?" Clark asked.

"Great minds think alike," Lois noted. Clark gave her a weak smile, pulling her against his chest. "Clark, are you okay?"

"I'll be fine. It just takes a little getting used to," Clark explained.

Lois watched Clark as he sat solemnly, staring off into space. She hadn't realized how much of a burden his secret was before. Telling Dr. Klein had been frightening. Neither of them knew what the scientist would do with the information. They had been relieved when Dr. Klein had voiced his intentions to keep quiet about Clark's dual identity.

She hated seeing him like this. His usual upbeat mood was nowhere to be seen and showed no signs of returning any time soon.

"So, Lucy said Mayson's pushing to have Linda taken to trial this week," Lois said, hoping the change of subject would help.

"I can't believe they're trying to prosecute her solely on circumstantial evidence," Clark said.

"Well, Mayson seems like she's on a power trip right now. She wants Intergang and she's using everyone she can to try and get to them." Lois sighed, resting her head against his chest as he held her close, neither needing to say anything more.

"Sir? A word," Nigel said, entering the bunker.

Lex turned to face Nigel. "Yes, what is it, Nigel?"

"You may want to look at this." Nigel pointed the remote towards the television. Mayson Drake's image appeared at a press conference as she addressed the people of Metropolis.

"It is this office's position that Superman should turn himself in. He cannot seem to act like a law-abiding citizen and must be treated as a criminal just like everyone else."

"Hmmm... It seems he isn't taking the news of my disappearance very well," Lex observed.

"Yes. I've called the lawyers to assure them not to allow any declaration of death on your part for at least a few weeks. Will that be enough time, sir?" Nigel asked.

"Yes. I assume by the end of the week we will have the results we need," Lex said, puffing at his cigar.

<< "I'm going to be in hiding for a little while. I have dangerous enemies that are headed towards Metropolis. I want you to know this has nothing to do with you. It is imperative that people not know my whereabouts. Is that something you can handle?" Lex asked.

"Yes, Lex. I'm sure it won't be a problem. Lois and I usually try to avoid any subjects regarding you because we can never agree." Lucy smiled at him.

"It won't be this way for long. Until the proper authorities can apprehend this person I will stay in seclusion. As soon as I can I'll come back." Lex reassured her with a kiss.>>

"Lucy, are you okay?" Lana asked, waving a hand in front of her face.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry. It's just been a hectic week," Lucy explained.

"Yeah, I'll bet," Lana said, noting Lucy's evasive tone.

"Here's the file on Linda King." Lana handed her the file and Lucy nodded her thanks. Lana watched her for a moment then left.

She had to keep it together. She couldn't allow anyone to suspect that she knew Lex's whereabouts. If something happened to him because of her, she'd never be able to forgive herself.

"What do you mean they won't sell?" Bill Church raged.

"What am I paying you for?"

"Mr. Church, the Planet has the discretionary to refuse a proposal..." Sheldon Bender explained.

"They have no idea who they're dealing with. I will..."

"Mr. Church, this is just the preliminary process..."

"Enough of this legal mumbo jumbo. We'll do things the old fashioned way," Church snarled.

Perry White stepped out of the elevator into the lobby of the Daily Planet. He waved good night to the security guard, Wilson, and headed towards the parking garage. It had been a long week. He hadn't been home in time to have dinner with Alice all week. He checked his watch. Just enough time to stop by for a bouquet of roses and a bottle of wine.

A sharp pain hit the back of his neck. He turned to face the source of this pain only to be greeted by the scent of chloroform against his nostrils. What? No...

"Grab him. Throw him in the van," a voice said.

He couldn't. He couldn't stay conscious. Why? What was happening? He tried to open his mouth to speak only to be met with pain. The serenity of darkness and unconsciousness fell upon him as his body was lifted from the concrete ground and thrown into an unmarked van.

Clark glanced at the clock and sighed. Lois had gone shopping with Lucy at the Metropolis Baby Expo they were having. It seemed to be something more for mothers so he'd decided to just stay back and work on some of the research on the Snell case while Lois and Lucy had some quality time together. Since they'd gotten back from their honeymoon the time they'd been able to spend together was infrequent and he knew Lois missed that time with her sister.

He picked up the police report on Snell's murder and shook his head in disgust. How could this have happened and he not heard any cries for help? The fears over everything that had been creeping into the forefront of his mind over the last few weeks. The criminal element seemed to be ahead of them every time and he couldn't figure out where it all connected. There had to be something they were missing. Clark pored over the notes he and Lois had taken on Martin Snell's murder. Everything circumstantial was pointing towards Linda King. She had been the last to be seen with Martin Snell. The police called it a crime of passion.... Linda was the obvious suspect, but Lois insisted Linda wasn't a killer. It amazed him how Lois was quick to defend Linda despite the obvious dislike between the two women.

The closer they seemed to be getting to everything the more destruction that seemed to be going on in Metropolis and the more he feared for Lois and his son's safety. He couldn't be everywhere at once. He knew that but what would happen if he was somewhere else and he wasn't able to protect them?

The sound of jingling of keys caught his attention and he put the file down to help Lois with her bags. "Hey, honey." He gave her a peck on the cheek as he grabbed the bags from her and headed to the living room with them.

"Thanks... You wouldn't believe the stuff they had there," Lois said, following him to the couch to begin sorting the bags. "Lucy had a checklist for everything. We got mainly knick knacks and diapers and blankets... I still wasn't sure what to do about sizes. I know your mom said not to worry about it... they'll grow into it... but look at me..." She pointed to the small bump. "He's still so tiny."

Clark smiled, resting his hands on the small bump where their son was growing. "The doctor said everything was fine," he reminded her. "You're only a few weeks into the third trimester."

Lois nodded. "I need to call mom and try and tell her. I wanted to tell both her and daddy but that seems near impossible...so..." She shrugged, leaning back against the couch and let out a breath.

He nodded, wrapping an arm around her to pull her to him. "I think your mom will be happy. I'm still not sure why it is such a big deal to tell them both..."

"Because then it's one more thing for them to fight over..." Lois sighed. "Nothing is ever easy with them."

"Well, did you and Lucy have a good time?" he asked.

"Yeah," Lois nodded. "It was nice to talk to her about something other than work...or murders..." She gestured to the stack of files on the table. "...and not fight with her about Lex Luthor."

"Good." He gave her a peck on the cheek. "Have you eaten yet?"

"No, not yet. We had a snack at the Expo but it was so hectic there we kinda rushed..." Lois explained.

Clark nodded, heading for the kitchen to fish out leftovers from the night before to heat up with Lois behind him. "We've got Chinese and lasagna still left over..."

She thought about the choices for a moment and then decided. "Lasagna and egg rolls," she said with a grin.

He made a face, shaking his head. "If it's okay with you I'll just have the lasagna."

"More egg rolls for me." Lois smiled as he heated everything up with his heat vision and handed her a plate. She took a seat at

the dining table and propped her feet up on the chair across from her as Clark took a seat next to her. "These are great," she said after taking a bite from her egg roll.

"If you say so," Clark laughed as he watched her dip her egg roll into the sauce of the lasagna.

She rested her hand on her abdomen and smiled when she was rewarded with a thump and lifted her blouse up slightly to watch as their son moved beneath her skin. "See? He agrees with me."

He leaned down to press a kiss on her abdomen and whispered, "You have strange tastes little one," before leaning up to kiss her.

"I don't understand," Linda said huffily. "I have been working for Intergang for almost a year now and this is how I'm repaid? I'm being railroaded for a MURDER I didn't even commit!"

"I understand your predicament, Ms. King, but patience is key." Sheldon Bender sighed, raking a hand through his hair. "Listen, I've been hired to give you the best defense possible."

"I'm being railroaded! All the evidence is pointing to me!"

"There are ways around that," Bender replied coolly.

"Do you have any idea who you're dealing with?" Perry hollered as he heard laughter surrounding him. A dark cloth covered his eyes. His hands were tied securely behind his back along with his ankles, preventing him from getting free of his confines. He was in trouble.

"Yeah, we're really scared, ain't we, Gene?" a thug joked.

"You idiot!" A loud thump could be heard.

"OW!!" the thug cried. "That hurt."

"Don't do anything to jeopardize this mission again."

"Dr. Lane, working late I see." Dr. Leek commented as he opened the door to his office in LexLabs.

"Well, we're coming close to a breakthrough on this type 'A' clone. I think we're making real progress," Dr. Sam Lane announced proudly.

"Excellent. I'm sorry I was out of touch there for a while. After the fire at LexCorp, I wanted to make sure none of my experiments were jeopardized..."

"I understand Fabian..." Sam Lane nodded. "Any word from Mr. Luthor? I know the authorities are worried about his absence..."

"Uh, no." Dr. Leek shook his head vigorously, avoiding Dr. Lane's gaze. "I, uh, haven't heard anything. I'm sure he'll be all right."

"Hmmm..." Sam Lane nodded and turned back to his work, not completely convinced.

Later that evening Lois and Clark pored over their notes on Martin Snell's murder and the files they had on Intergang. Clark was dressed in his jeans and t-shirt. Lois opted to wear one of his old Smallville Football jerseys and a pair of shorts. A wardrobe choice that remained very distracting.

"This is creepy," Lois said, scanning the files. "She's been working with Snell since after college."

"You notice who else is with him?" Clark pointed at several black and white photos they had of Martin Snell and his colleagues in a file they had.

"Mayson Drake and Bill Church," Lois said grimly.

"But Mayson seems awfully gung-ho about putting Intergang away," Clark pointed out.

"She also seems awfully chummy with Bill Church too," Lois retorted.

"You think the law abiding district attorney is really a criminal in disguise?"

"Stranger things have happened," she shrugged.

A knock at Clark's front door interrupted their thoughts. Clark glanced towards his front door and grimaced. "It's Jimmy."

“Hasn’t he ever heard of a phone?” Lois asked.

Clark laughed and got up to answer the door. “Hey, CK! Great, you’re home!” Jimmy walked into the apartment then stopped when he saw Lois. “Uh, hi, Lois.”

“What’s up, Jimmy?” Lois asked, ignoring the embarrassed expression Jimmy wore when he glanced toward the kitchen and saw the scattered clothing that still lay on the floor.

“Well, I...I was wondering if you guys had heard what that Assistant DA was doing...” Jimmy said, staring at his feet.

“No, we haven’t really had time to watch television tonight,” Lois explained, pointing to the stack of files in front of her.

“Oh, right.” Jimmy nodded. “Uh, well, she’s trying to issue a warrant out for Superman’s arrest.”

“What???” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“Hello, darling.” Lex kissed Lucy on the cheek.

“Lex!” Lucy wrapped her arms around his neck. “You’re back.”

“Sorry, I worried you.” Lex kissed her. “I’ve already called the lawyers and made an arrangement for a press conference tomorrow morning.”

“I’m so glad you’re all right.” Lucy smiled, leaning up to kiss Lex once more.

Superman picked up a radio announcement as he flew over Metropolis. Mayson Drake’s voice echoed through the radio waves. “We ask that Superman turn himself in peacefully to avoid any further incidents.”

Turn himself in? Who did this Mayson Drake think she was? She seriously thought she could arrest him, keep him in a cage? He was Superman! Who did they think they were?

It was time he taught this Mayson Drake a lesson. All these threats....

“They want to arrest Superman?” Clark asked in shock.

“It’s been all over the news. Mayson Drake had a press conference earlier today asking Superman to turn himself in. He was caught destroying a public library earlier today. He ran off before anyone could catch up to him.”

“That’s insane,” Lois said, shaking her head in disbelief. “That isn’t Superman.”

“So, what’s going on? Superman have an evil twin brother he hasn’t told anyone about?” Jimmy joked.

“I don’t know,” Clark said.

Jimmy looked between Lois and Clark with a worried expression. “Superman didn’t really...I mean, he’s one of the good guys, right?”

Lois smiled weakly at Jimmy and patted him on the shoulder. “Yeah, Jimmy. Superman’s one of the good guys.” She caught a sideways glance at Clark. The expression on his face spoke volumes. “Uh, Jimmy, thanks. We’ll try and get to the bottom of this...”

Jimmy held his hands up, nodding in understanding. “I get it. I get it. I’m out of here.” Jimmy headed out the door and Lois turned towards Clark.

“I’ve got to try and find him. He’s been hurting innocent people left and right. What if he kills someone? He could have ...”

“Clark, calm down. You don’t know that he’s done anything more than knock a few bookshelves over,” Lois said reassuringly.

That familiar look crossed his face and she sighed. “What is it?”

“Superman is holding Mayson Drake hostage in the middle of town square,” Clark replied grimly.

“Look out!” A woman screamed in horror when Superman shot a beam of heat vision towards a young couple walking down the steps of the courthouse. He let out a small laugh when the

people below him dispersed into a panicked frenzy. It amazed him how easily they could be scared.

“Why are you doing this?” Mayson asked in between tears.

“Do you really think you can arrest me? I’m Superman!” he snapped.

“That’s enough!” a stern voice from behind him bellowed.

Superman turned to face his doppelganger. A smirk crossed Superman’s face. “Well, well, well, what do we have here? Finally, decide to come out of hiding I see.”

“Who’s hiding?” Clark challenged, advancing towards him. “Let her go.”

“Su-Superman?” Mayson looked back and forth between the two supermen. “There’s ... TWO of you.”

“Not exactly.” Superman snapped, throwing Mayson to the concrete ground below.

Clark knelt down to help Mayson up. “Are you all right?”

“I...I think so...” Mayson’s eyes widened when she saw Superman advancing towards them. “Look out!”

Clark looked up and saw a beam of heat vision directed towards him. He shot a blast of freezing breath towards Superman, freezing the beam in place and shocking Superman in the process.

“You killed my father!”

“I haven’t killed anyone. You’ve got the wrong idea!” Clark shot back. Another beam of heat vision was frozen in place. “Don’t you get it? This is a fight neither you or I can win.”

Superman was furious. Why did he insist on lying? “You’re lying! You’re a liar! A liar!”

“You’ve hurt innocent people for no reason. Let me help you...”

“NO!!!” Superman shot another blast of heat vision towards Clark. It hurt. He wasn’t supposed to feel pain. He was relieved when the blast of super breath hit him. He fell to the ground in pain.

“You’re hurt.”

“Dr. Klein, I’m Dr. Sam Lane. I received your call about a cloning experiment.” Sam Lane extended his hand to shake Dr. Klein’s.

“Yes, thank you for returning my call so quickly.” Dr. Klein greeted him with a firm handshake. “I’ve run a battery of tests on him. His vitals have lowered. Something...” Dr. Klein shook his head in confusion. “He’s been without daily monitoring for the last few days.”

“Yes, Dr. Leek’s just returned to the office. I really don’t understand where he’s been. I’ve been juggling all his projects. I’ve had to put off dinner with my daughter and her new husband quite a few times now...”

Lois stood behind them with Clark, listening to the conversation in disgust. “Oh, so you do check your messages.”

“Lois, what are you doing here?” Sam turned to face her.

“My job.” Lois crossed her arms over her chest in defiance as she stared her father down.

“At four in the morning?” Sam asked in disbelief.

“What can I say?” Lois shrugged. “I got used to staying up late at a young age.”

“Uh, Dr. Lane, from what Dr. Klein had said, you worked pretty closely with Dr. Leek on the cloning experiment?” Clark interrupted, trying to steer the conversation back to a more neutral topic.

“Yes, I’ve been working with him on it for the last eighteen months.” Sam eyed Clark critically for a moment. “You know it’s customary to have met both sets of parents before asking a woman to marry you.”

“Well, we can’t work everything around your schedule, Daddy. You’re always too busy with your flings to bother with

anything else besides work,” Lois snapped.

“Did you work with Dr. Leek on the Superman clone?” Clark asked directly.

“The what?”

“Follow me.” Dr. Klein motioned for them to follow him into a secluded area. He popped a light switch and Dr. Lane gasped when he saw Superman unconscious on a hospital bed with monitors hooked up to him. “He’s dying... unless we can figure out what kind of treatment Dr. Leek was giving him.”

“I’ll see what I can figure out,” Sam replied solemnly.

“Yeah, it’s not like you ever have any plans with family, do you?” Lois snapped bitterly as she stalked out of the office. Clark stared at Sam for a moment, shook his head; then followed Lois out of the office.

“Hi, Mayson, how are you?” Lucy asked when she saw Mayson Drake step off the elevator.

“I’m fine,” she snapped. “I’ve been in court all morning retracting the warrants I had taken out on Superman.”

“I guess he’s not such a bad guy after all, huh?” Lucy asked.

“No.” Mayson shook her head. “I still don’t like the way he conducts his rescues, though.”

“I have to go,” Lucy said, grabbing her purse. “I have to get this disposition filed and I have a meeting with Sheldon Bender.” Lucy gave a shudder at the mention of Sheldon Bender’s name.

“Careful. He’s as much a snake as Martin was,” Mayson warned.

“Uh-huh.” Lucy nodded, not really paying full attention to what Mayson was saying. “Well, I gotta go.”

“Hey, you’re up early,” Clark commented, noticing Lois on the couch in the living room. She was typing furiously on her laptop as she flipped through file after file.

“I don’t like waking up alone,” she said pointedly.

“I apologize, but tell that to the bank robbers who decided to rob the Metropolis Bank this morning.” He leaned down to kiss her.

“Was anyone hurt?” Lois asked concerned.

“No.” Clark shook his head. He gave her a peck on the cheek, placing a protective hand over her growing abdomen. “How’s our little Lane-Kent?”

Lois smiled at him and kissed him. “Hungry.” She laughed when her stomach growled loudly.

“Breakfast,” Clark said simply, pulling out a bag from behind him. “I made a detour on the way back.”

“I knew there was a reason why I kept you around.” Lois winked at him.

“What are you working on?”

“I’ve compiled everything we have on the possible killer of Marin Snell into this database... to give us a better idea what we’re looking for in possible suspects... and...” Lois glared at him when he took the laptop from her and closed it. “What are you doing?”

“It’s too early to be discussing murder. I’d like to talk about what happened last night with your father.”

“What’s to talk about?” Lois shrugged. “He’s a workaholic... doesn’t care about anything but his work. I’m used to it.”

“Lois, honey... He’s your father.”

“No,” Lois shook her head adamantly. “A father is someone who is there to guide you through the tough times in your life and celebrate your achievements. As far as I’m concerned Perry’s acted more like a father to me than Dr. Sam Lane ever will.” She stood up abruptly and headed for the kitchen to get a drink. “I really don’t want to talk about this right now. We’ve got so much to do...” She looked up at him and saw the expectant look on his face and sighed before she began to speak quietly. “I really love your parents. I look at them and I see how wonderful they are. I can see why you turned out the way you did.” She let out a

shuddered breath. “My childhood wasn’t that great.”

“I’m sorry.” Clark placed a hesitant hand on her shoulder. “I didn’t mean to push you. You just seemed really upset about your father. Then I came home this morning and you were already digging into the story. You only get like that when you’re upset.”

“I’m fine,” Lois said quietly. “All of this is just... it’s really hard. Mayson is... she’s really stubborn and doesn’t want to listen to reason.”

“What are you talking about? She dropped the charges against Superman this morning. I heard the press conference.”

“I’m talking about Linda. She’s obviously being railroaded.” Lois pointed out. “I don’t like Linda, but I don’t want her in jail.”

Clark smiled at her. “I think it’s commendable that you’re willing to go to bat for her after everything that’s happened between the two of you.”

“She doesn’t belong in jail.”

“By the way, what DID happen between the two of you?” Clark pressed.

Lois groaned, rolling her eyes. “You are not going to let this go, are you?”

“Nope.” Clark grinned back, following her back to the couch. “I think I’ve been very understanding... and patient.”

Lois rolled her eyes at him. “This doesn’t go past this room, understand?” Clark nodded, taking a seat next to her on the couch. She was quiet for a moment, leaning her back against his chest as she spoke. “In college, Linda and I were best friends. We were roommates. We were on the paper together. We were also very competitive.” She looked up at Clark who nodded for her to continue. “She got into the cliques that I wouldn’t be caught dead in; dated your typical monosyllabic goons that were a pretty face with nothing inside.” She knocked her head with her fist for effect. “I was working on a really big story about these jocks that weren’t taking their tests. It was set to print and everything.” She let out a shuddered breath as she fought to continue the story. “My story was replaced with something else.”

Clark’s grip on her tightened. He placed a kiss on her forehead, urging her to continue. “It’s the reason why I don’t like the paparazzi, why I took it so hard when Claude stole my story...” She turned to face him. His eyes were full of love and support, not judgment as she had seen from everyone at Metropolis University. “Linda wrote a story claiming I was... involved with my teacher. She went into graphic detail, claiming all these ridiculous accusations; like it was the only reason I was getting the grades I’d been receiving and so on. I transferred out of his class the next day. The school didn’t even punish me for it. I think they felt sorry for me.”

“I’m sorry,” Clark whispered, pulling her close to him. He placed a peck on her head as she continued to fight the tears. How was it that after all these years it still hurt to think about such a horrible time in her life? Wasn’t time supposed to heal old wounds? “I didn’t know. I’m sorry I pressed you to tell me.”

“It’s okay,” she sobbed, leaning up to kiss him.

“You’re incredible, you know that?” He whispered, stroking her cheek. “I mean after she did that you’re still working so hard to defend her.”

“I’m angry at her, but I don’t want to see her in jail,” Lois said simply.

“He’s WHAT??” Lex howled. “How could he fail?? That’s impossible.”

“From what I’ve been told there’s not a whole lot of time, Mr. Luthor. He’s dying,” Dr. Leek explained. “Like the frogs.”

“No...” Lex shook his head adamantly. “We... we have to start again... More...”

“We have to perfect the process first. We haven’t even perfected it with the frogs yet and we’re experimenting on Superman? Mr. Luthor...”

“Don’t you dare order ME around, you little weasel. You get started with the next experiment. I will have my army of Supermen and Superman won’t know what hit him.”

“What do we do about the clone?”

“Let him rot. He’s failed me. I don’t accept failure. Are we clear, Dr. Leek?”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor.” Dr. Leek nodded.

Jimmy pounced on Lois and Clark as they stepped off the elevator. “Lois, CK, we’ve been trying to get a hold of you. Have either of you heard from the Chief?”

“No, why?” Lois asked.

“He’s not here. He never came home last night.”

“What?” Clark asked in disbelief.

Lois glanced towards Perry’s office where Alice sat crying. Police were everywhere questioning the staff about their editor’s disappearance. “Oh, my God...” Lois shook her head in disbelief.

Bill Church stepped off the elevator and began heading towards Perry’s office. “What are YOU doing here?” Lois growled.

“Well, hello, Ms. Lane, Mr. Kent. I came to see if I could talk my buddy Perry into playing hooky for a game of golf at the country club.” Bill Church replied with a smile.

Lois glared back at him. “He’s missing. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, now would you?”

“Of course not, Ms. Lane. I sure hope he’s all right,” Bill replied with a smile. “If I can be of any help at all, let me know. I think I’ll go talk to Alice. Maybe I can help offer a shoulder to cry on.” With that, he headed towards Perry White’s office.

“What do you think? Coincidence?” Clark asked.

“No way.” Lois shook her head. “Follow him when he leaves.”

Perry groggily began to regain consciousness. His surroundings were a blur. He could hear a low murmur of voices around him. A dull pulsing of pain throbbled through his veins as he began to move.

Where was he?

He didn’t recognize his surroundings.

“I see you’re finally regaining your wits,” a voice from behind him said.

“Who? Who are you? Where am I?” Perry looked around, concerned.

“Those questions are better off left unanswered. Let’s just say Intergang has an interest in purchasing the Daily Planet, and you are our bargaining chip.”

“Lex, what are you doing here?” Lucy asked when she stepped off the elevator to exit the courthouse.

“I’m trying to address some issues that arose in my absence,” Lex explained, placing an arm around her shoulders. “I do hope I didn’t worry you too much.”

“No. I knew you were safe, so I wasn’t too worried. I knew you’d be fine.”

“That’s my girl. I have to go deal with the mob. I’ll see you for dinner tonight?”

Lucy nodded. “Sounds great,”

“He still hasn’t left the office.” Lois sighed, taking a seat next to Clark. “I know he’s behind this.”

“Unfortunately, we don’t have any proof,” Clark pointed out.

“I already called around. Bill Church was at a fundraiser last night for Coates Orphanage. He has the mayor, the chief of police, and a few judges to vouch for him.”

“That doesn’t necessarily mean anything,” Lois argued. “He could have ordered someone else to kidnap Perry...”

“Why would he do that, though? It doesn’t make any sense.”

Jimmy strode up to them with a fax in his hand. “Hey, guys,

this just came in on the fax from the Metropolis Library. I called over there and they said there had been several people using the fax machine this morning so they couldn’t be sure who...”

Lois impatiently yanked the fax out of his hands. “What is this?”

“It’s a ...ransom note...” Jimmy explained, “They’re demanding the board of directors sign all ownership over to Intergang or else...Perry will pay.”

Lois narrowed her eyes in fury as she read the note. The man that she had come to love as a father was in danger and some lowlife was threatening to hurt him. “Tap into the security system at the library and see what you can come up with. Maybe we can catch the person who sent this on camera.”

“You got it.” Jimmy nodded.

“We should probably take another look at Cost Mart’s floor plans.”

“What if it isn’t Church?” Clark asked, concerned. “We could be spinning our wheels looking for the wrong person. Let’s take a look at the evidence and...”

“Hey, turn that up!” The echo of one of their colleagues caught their attention.

They turned towards the television screen and noticed the reason for the outburst. Lex Luthor stood at the podium of a press conference with Inspector Henderson and Mayson Drake. “What in the world is going on?” Lois asked in confusion.

“The prodigal son finally returns.” Clark shook his head in disgust.

“Thank you all for coming,” Mayson spoke into the microphone. “Mr. Luthor has been in hiding ever since the attempt against his life with the fire set to LexCorp Towers. We are working hard to track down the responsible party. It wasn’t until earlier today that we were able to confirm Mr. Luthor was indeed alive.”

“Ms. Drake, is the fire set to LexCorp connected to the fires that have been set around Metropolis these last few months?”

“We are still investigating the fires. At this time the only connection we have found is various gang affiliation,” Mayson answered.

“Any word on where this Superman double appeared from?”

“We are still investigating the matter.”

“Is there anything you do know?”

Lex stepped up to the podium. “I believe that’s all for now. Ms. Drake has been through a lot these past few days as have I. I do know the District Attorney’s office, as well as the Police Department, are working hard to assure that Metropolis citizens are safe. Rest assured LexCorp will be rebuilt in a timely manner and resume business as usual.”

The crowd seemed to calm as the press conference came to an end. “Great,” Lois muttered. “Just great. As if we don’t have enough problems as it is.”

“Miranda, excellent to see you,” Lex cheered when the young blonde entered the office.

“It’s good to see you alive and well, Lex,” Miranda commented as she sashayed into the office. “I trust you received the latest shipment without a hitch.”

“Yes, we haven’t had any problems thus far,” Lex explained, pouring a glass of wine and handing it to her.

“Excellent.” Miranda took a sip of her wine. “Now, about this new top secret experiment you wanted me to work on...”

Lex pulled out a large lead box and opened it, pulling out a vial with a green glow emitting from it. Miranda glanced at it curiously. “Is that the Kryptonite?”

“Yes, it’s been molded into a powder so you can manufacture a brand of Revenge laced with this meteorite.”

“I’ll get this going and have something for you in the next few weeks,” Miranda said coolly.

“You can’t do this,” Perry argued. “You can’t just threaten to kill me because the board won’t sell...”

“We can and we will,” Gene said. “That’s how gangs work.” The phone rang and Gene smiled. “You better hope they did the right thing.”

Perry watched in apprehension as Gene picked up the phone.

“I’m sorry. There was nothing more that I could do,” Dr. Klein apologized. “He...He didn’t have a chance.”

Clark glanced at the body of his clone that was being covered up by a team of scientists. “What are you going to do with him?”

“I’m having him moved out of S.T.A.R. Labs... We do need to conduct a study on him and find out what caused the death process to initiate.” At Clark’s horrified look, he amended, “He looks and acts just like you, but he isn’t you. He seemed strong and able before; now all of a sudden he’s dead. We need to know what caused this. You have to understand...”

“Fine,” Clark said a bit too quickly. “Please just give me a call when you finish. I’d be interested in what you’re able to find out.”

“Of course.”

Clark watched as Superman was lifted onto a gurney and carried out of the lab by the team of scientists. It amazed him how quickly things had changed. He had tried to reach out to his double but had failed. The teachings of his ‘father’ were strongly ingrained into the clone just as his own parents’ teachings were ingrained in him.

<<“Dissect you like a frog.”>>

He shook his head to clear his mind of the memory. His parents had been scared for him when they had warned him of rogue government agencies that would try to take him away and conduct studies on him, studies that Dr. Klein would be performing on his clone.

“It’s official. The Daily Planet is now an asset of Intergang.” Gene smiled as he poured a glass of champagne. “Oh, don’t be so glum, Mr. White.”

“You lying, son of a...”

“Tsk tsk tsk. Language. Is that any way to treat your boss?” Gene asked, a guffaw of laughter escaped his throat.

Perry just glared at him in anger. “I will never work for a criminal organization.”

“Then I guess you won’t be working for the Planet then, will you?” Gene asked smugly. “It’s your choice, Mr. White. We can either do this the hard way or the easy way.” He pulled out a sleek revolver from his jacket pocket. The threat was clear.

Perry slowly strode into the darkened building he had come to know as his second home. He had made a deal with the devil in order to protect those he held dear to him. He had been willing to take the bullet, but then the unidentified man had threatened Alice.

“What will she think of me now?” Perry shook his head in disgust. He would have to bury stories that linked to Intergang, only print news they decided was news. It wasn’t fair. This was the last time he could truly call himself Editor-in-Chief.

“You can’t get me out on bond until the trial begins?” Linda asked aghast.

Sheldon Bender sighed and calmly explained, “After Judge Stevens reviewed the case and saw how...horrendous the crime was. He doesn’t want you released...”

“I didn’t kill him!!” Linda shrieked.

“I understand that, Ms. King, but Judge Stevens...”

“Judge Stevens can...I want another lawyer.” Linda hissed adamantly.

“Another lawyer?” Sheldon Bender asked, confused.

“You don’t have my best intentions at heart. I want a new

lawyer. I do have the right to do that, you know.”

“Very well. Good luck with your defense, Ms. King. You’re going to need it.” With that, Sheldon Bender left.

Lois awoke groggily to the smell of pancakes filling the room. She sighed contentedly and leaned back into her pillow as she stretched. “Morning,” Clark whispered, handing her a cup of coffee.

“Morning,” Lois whispered, taking the cup of coffee gratefully.

“You fell asleep on the couch. I didn’t want to wake you...” Clark explained when she looked around the couch.

Lois smiled up at him. “I guess I was more tired than I thought. These pregnancy hormones take a lot out of you.” She took a sip of her coffee and frowned. “I miss caffeine.”

Clark laughed. “I told you before; it’s either your coffee or your chocolate.”

“You’re so mean.” Lois pouted.

“Perry called this morning...”

“Perry! Is he all right? Did they catch whoever...”

“He said he wasn’t able to get a glimpse of the kidnapper. All he knows is he was dropped off in front of the Planet late last night.” Clark sighed. “That probably doesn’t bode well for the Planet.”

“I don’t know. Maybe they didn’t sell. Maybe the criminals realized they weren’t going to get away with it and bailed...” Lois argued weakly. She knew Clark was probably right. If Perry had been released then more than likely the demands had been met.

“Why don’t you eat some breakfast and we’ll go find out.” Clark pointed towards the kitchen where he had whipped up a batch of pancakes.

“Well, son, how is everything?” Bill Church asked when he entered the Intergang Headquarters.

“Excellent. We just purchased the Daily Planet last night.” Bill Church Jr. smiled broadly at his father. “It was a steal.”

“Really?” Bill Church eyed his son suspiciously. “Did it have anything to do with why Perry wasn’t around yesterday to play golf?”

“Hey, I was just trying to keep the upper hand.”

“Billy, I thought I told you to respect your elders,” Bill Church warned.

“Relax, Dad. It’s not like Perry’s gonna know it’s us he’s working for. I’ve got all the bases covered.”

“No one can connect me to Intergang. My reputation would be ruined.” Bill Church sighed. “So, what’s the plan with the Planet?”

“We’ll start small. We need to ease everyone into the transition,” Bill Church Jr. said.

“We are now employees of Intergang. Well, the name they’re using is ‘Multiworld Communications’...” Perry sighed, shaking his head in despair.

“We can fight this Perry. There has to be someone that would be willing to buy the Planet from Intergang...” Lois argued.

“I’ve been on the phone all morning, Lois.” Perry shook his head in despair. “No one wants to challenge them.”

“Well, maybe they’ll challenge them if they see them falling apart. What do we know about this Multi World Communications anyway?” Clark asked.

“It’s an international news and media company,” Perry said. “It’s board of directors consists of various philanthropists around the world. None of which probably have any idea what the company is really doing. Even Billy is on the board.”

“Billy?” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“Bill Church Jr. I’ve known him since he was old enough to spit-up on me,” Perry reminisced with a small smile. Lois and Clark glanced at one another. Church had a son? “But enough

about that. You two should take the morning off... You've got a baby on the way and things to prepare... You can email me what you've got on the Intergang investigation later and we'll take it from there."

"Perry..." Lois tried to argue once more.

"That's final. Get out of here. I don't want to see you two tomorrow and that's final." Perry ushered them out of the office and closed the door behind them. He swallowed the bitter bile that had formed in his throat. How could he do this? How could he guide his reporters away from the news? He glanced at a photo of himself and Alice on his desk. How could he not?

"I think there's more to what's going on than what Perry is leading on," Lois said as they stepped onto the elevator. "He seems so sad."

"So, you thinking what I'm thinking?" Clark asked.

"It's no coincidence that Church's son is on that board of directors," Lois said.

"That's what I was thinking." He shook his head.

"Why would Intergang want to buy the Planet?" Lois asked confused. "They already own so many other papers."

"I don't know," Clark said.

"What do you mean you can't repeat the procedure?" Lex snarled.

"Mr. Luthor, the sample... the hair sample we had... it's been destroyed. I can't get near the clone... so..." Dr. Leek shrugged his shoulders. "You just have to be..."

A shot fired and Dr. Leek fell to the floor. "I don't have to be anything. My last name is Luthor and when I want something done, it gets done."

Lois and Ellen sat at the table of a small café across the street from the Daily Planet. "I'm so happy you're finally married..." Ellen squeezed Lois' hand. "I can't believe it. I seriously thought this wouldn't happen. There was a time..."

Lois smiled at her mother. "I know." She squeezed her hand. "Mom, the reason I wanted to have lunch is... there's something I need to tell you..."

"What is it?" Ellen prodded, noticing Lois withdrawn expression. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Lois smiled, unshed tears in her eyes. "I don't know why this is so hard to say... but here it goes. Mom, I'm pregnant. We're having a baby... a beautiful little boy..."

"Pregnant?" Ellen cried.

"Please don't be upset..." Lois began.

"Upset?" Ellen squealed. "Why would I be upset? My baby's having a baby. Oh, honey..." She hugged her daughter tightly. "I'm so happy for you... I can't wait to hold my grandson."

"Really?" Lois asked, "I wasn't sure how you'd feel... I mean we just got married... I know how concerned you get about how things look..."

"I don't care how it looks..." Ellen hugged Lois again. "To tell you the truth I was kinda hoping this was what this lunch was about... Oh! A grandbaby!"

"Lex, what is all this?" Lucy asked in amazement when she looked around the dining hall of her favorite Italian restaurant.

"Well, we weren't able to see much of one another lately; so I thought I'd make up for it," Lex explained, guiding her towards the table that was set for two and lit by candlelight. "Shall we?"

"Hey, Henderson, what are you doing here so late?" Detective Wolf asked.

"I'm going over some footage..." Henderson rubbed his temples as he scanned the screen shots on his desk. "Lane and Kent are convinced Linda King is innocent. She's been nagging

me all week about this."

"Isn't Linda King going to trial soon?"

"Arraignment," Henderson corrected. "None of this makes any sense."

Detective Wolf came over to look at the screen shots with Henderson. The images showed the outside of the Metro Club. "These from the night Snell was murdered?"

"Yeah, I've got Snell entering the club, but I can't find him leaving the club anywhere."

"Maybe try a different camera? Could have come out the back," Wolf suggested. With that, he patted Henderson on the shoulder and headed out. "Don't stay here too late, Bill. You do have a wife at home."

Henderson laughed. "Thanks for the reminder."

"Lex, I don't know what to say..." Lucy was speechless. "I... This is so sudden."

"Just think about it," Lex pleaded.

"Okay." Lucy nodded. "I'll think about it."

Lois and Clark found a small townhome on Hyperion Avenue and placed a deposit on it. Thankfully the former owner was eager to sell and eager for them to move in. Superman helped them move everything and they began to get everything ready for their impending arrival.

Lois sat in the middle of the living room, surrounded by appliances while Clark worked at super-speed to finish painting the upstairs. The townhome had an added bonus feature they both liked, a secret compartment behind the bookcase in the living room. It was perfect for hiding Clark's Superman suits.

Clark reappeared downstairs within a few minutes, "Everything just needs to dry. I know they said the fumes are safe for the baby, but I left the windows open to clear everything out just to be safe. How's it going down here?"

"So far between your stuff and my stuff we've got two toasters, two blenders, and two crock pots," Lois said, pointing at the duplicate appliances she'd lined up on the counter.

"It takes up room and collects dust," Clark said with a grin. "We'll add it to the pile going to giveaway."

"This is so exciting! Our first home," Lois said, beaming, and pulled out his Superman suits from one of the boxes as she stood up, placing a hand on her lower back for support.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, just a little harder to stand up," she explained, walking toward the bookshelf to open the secret compartment. Once the compartment opened she hung up the Superman suits one by one. "Once we finish getting everything set up and sorted we can begin working on the nursery..." She placed a hand on her growing abdomen. It was still pretty small but her bump was slowly becoming more and more prominent. They'd agreed once they came up with a name they'd announce their little Lane-Kent's arrival, but that had been harder and harder to do as neither could agree on a name. "There's still so much to do."

"I know," Clark said. "We still have to come up with a name. I think by now everyone's probably already guessed..."

"Well, Perry and Jimmy know," Lois said, patting her abdomen as she felt the baby kick back, "but it just feels wrong to announce everything without a name for him."

"What about Aiden?" Clark asked, going through the list once more.

"No." She scrunched her nose. "He's not an Aiden,"

"Is this another one of those maternal instinct things?" he teased.

"I'll know when we find the right name," Lois said emphatically.

"Well, we've got a few months and nine hundred more names in that book to go through," Clark reminded her.

“Let’s finish unpacking first,” Lois said, handing him a large bag. “Another bag for giveaway.”

“What do you mean you won’t sign the warrant?” Henderson raged into the phone. “There could be evidence on those tapes... Evidence to find the killer... No, I don’t think... Listen... No, you listen.” A resounding click could be heard and Henderson was rewarded with the dial tone echoing into his ear. “Great.”

“You bought the Daily Planet by holding Perry White hostage?” Bill Church asked, dumbfounded.

“We need to control what’s being printed; owning the Planet is the best solution.” Bill Church Jr. shrugged.

“But, it’s Perry...” Bill Church was aghast at his son’s behavior. “I... I can’t believe you did that...”

“Relax. No one knows it was me. I hired Gene to take care of it. Worst case scenario we pin the kidnapping on him,” Bill Church Jr. explained.

“He’s not just going to allow you to push him over, Billy. You know Perry as well as I do.”

“But he has a family... one that he cares very much about.”

“I don’t know about this. Threatening people we don’t know is one thing...”

“Trust me, Dad. It’ll be worth it. Soon Intergang will control Metropolis and no one will be standing in our way.”

“Except Superman,” Bill Church remarked bitterly.

“We’ll figure that one out too,” Bill Church Jr. replied.

One Month Later...

Lucy sat at the bar, nursing a melted-down frozen margarita when Jimmy walked up behind her. “Hey, Luce, what’s up? Why the long face?”

Lucy smiled up at him. “Hey, Jimmy.”

“Uh-oh, you wanna talk about it?” Jimmy took a seat next to her.

“It’s nothing really; it’s just...” She sighed and took another sip of her drink. “Lex asked me something ... I’ve been thinking it over for a month, but I still don’t know. It was something big and something I wasn’t expecting at all.”

Jimmy’s eyes grew hesitant. “Wha- What did he ask?”

“He wants me to take a job as the mayor’s aide. I told him I’d think about it.” Lucy noticed Jimmy sigh in relief. “What was that about?”

“What?”

“You. You just sighed in relief when I told you what happened. What did you think Lex asked me?”

“Nothing.” Jimmy shrugged. He then turned to the bartender. “Excuse me, could I get a beer?”

“Fine. Ignore me.” Lucy sighed. “Anyway, I’m not sure what to do.”

“Well, do you want to work in the Mayor’s office?”

“No, I’m learning a lot from Ms. Drake. I really enjoy it,” Lucy said.

“Then there’s your answer,” Jimmy said simply.

Lucy smiled at him. “Thank you.” She gave him a peck on the cheek.

“If Lex doesn’t understand your wanting to stay in the DA’s office then he doesn’t belong with you,” Jimmy said. Lucy smiled back at him. The problem she had been stressing about for the last month had been solved within a few minutes thanks to Jimmy.

“So, Lucy, have you given some thought to my offer?” Lex asked as he sipped his wine over dinner.

“Yes, I have, Lex, and I’m afraid I’m going to have to decline. I’m happy working in the district attorney’s office. I appreciate your trying to help, but I don’t think the mayor’s office is well suited for me. Being an aide... It’s really not me.”

Lex seemed mildly amused for a moment and smiled. “I understand, darling.” He took her hand and brushed his lips against her palm.

Lucy breathed a sigh of relief. She had been afraid he would be upset with her answer. “I’m glad you understand, Lex.” She leaned in to kiss him.

“Well, maybe you could do something else for me,” Lex whispered, holding her hand firmly in his.

“What’s that?”

“Spend the rest of your life with me.” Lex knelt down before her and pulled out a ring from his pocket.

“Lex...”

“Lucy Lane, will you marry me?”

“I... I...” She tried to control the tears that were threatening to fall from her cheeks. “I don’t know what to say, Lex... This is so sudden. Can I think about it?”

“Of course, darling,” Lex crooned, leaning in to kiss her.

“What is this?” Bill Church Jr. asked when his father laid a copy of the Daily Planet on his desk.

“A copy of our paper.” Bill Church pointed to the headline.

“They are talking about us being in a drought while the Star is discussing the mayor’s affair and messy divorce.” Bill Church narrowed his eyes at his son. “What the hell were you thinking? I’m losing money! Perry’s backed off his responsibilities more than you anticipated. He’s playing golf, having dinner with his wife... Everything but his job...”

“Dad...”

“I have an offer on the table to sell the Planet. Don’t you ever make a decision like this again without consulting me!”

“Has the money been sent over to Louise?” Lex asked.

“Yes. I do say, sir. It was brilliant on your part to bribe the assistant editor to sabotage the Planet.” Nigel said.

“Yes, well, Intergang abducted our dear friend, Perry White. Louise would be the obvious choice to interfere when Mr. White was otherwise occupied,” Lex said with a smile. “Now I own the Planet and I hold the leverage to discredit the only reporters who would dare cross me. Revenge is sweet.”

“Are you sure about marrying Ms. Lane?”

“Never been more sure about anything in my life.”

Perry and Alice sat at the country club enjoying the afternoon. “Perry, not that I don’t enjoy these afternoon outings... but what brought the sudden change? You seem... different... aloof.”

Perry bit down the bitter bile that had formed in his throat.

“Alice, there’s something I need to tell you, something I didn’t tell you about the night I was kidnapped.”

“What is it?” Alice asked, resting her hand on his.

“Intergang blackmailed the Planet into selling to Multiworld Communications. Then they threatened me... you... if I didn’t back off of my responsibilities. I figured if I wasn’t there to point the finger at it would be easier.”

“Oh, Perry...” Alice placed a supportive hand on his arm.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was ashamed. I’ve worked so hard to build up the trust of the American people. I just...” His face fell in sorrow.

“We’ll figure something out,” Alice reassured him. “We have to.”

Three Weeks Later...

Bibbo sat at his bar cleaning a glass when a familiar face walked in. “Hey, Red, how you doing?”

Red shrugged. “Been better.”

“What can I get you?” Bibbo asked.

“Just gimme a cold one.”

“Your usual?” Red nodded and Bibbo handed him a beer. “So,

what's got you so glum?"

"This." Red laid a torn paper with bold handwriting on it. **'GET OUT OR ELSE!!'**

"That why you haven't been around lately?" Bibbo inquired curiously.

"Yeah. I've been trying to lay low." Red answered.

"There were a few reporters that came by to talk about what happened at the Metro Club. Do you think it could be connected?"

"I don't know..." Red shook his head, "But I ain't talking to no reporters...and neither are you, Bibbo. Whoever this is...trust me they mean business."

"Hey, what are you doing in here?" Clark asked, opening the conference room door. Lois was holed up in the corner reading through a stack of papers.

"Something's wrong," Lois said, brushing a few stray tears from her eyes. "Perry would never...He would never let the paper go to bed like this."

Clark scanned the papers she was referring to. Every single one of them lead with the dullest piece of information in the city section. "No wonder the circulation's been going down."

"Jimmy said there's talk about new management, budget cuts..." Lois shook her head.

A commotion out in the newsroom caught her eye. She and Clark walked out into the newsroom to find Lex Luthor standing with the usual suits addressing the staff. "For those of you who don't know me, my name is Lex Luthor. I, no less than you, have been greatly distressed to see the troubles that have been bestowed on Metropolis' great newspaper. I don't know why the Planet has suffered through such a great loss in this past month, but I have my suspicions." Lex shot a glare at the suits behind him.

"Oh, no," Lois muttered under her breath. "Please tell me this is a nightmare."

"Not unless we're having the same one," Clark whispered in her ear.

"I do know that the problems can be solved with strong leadership and fiscal responsibility. Therefore, I have taken the one step that would guarantee the future well-being of this newspaper: I bought it. I am the new owner of the Daily Planet." The staff around them erupted in applause as Lois and Clark looked at Luthor in disgust.

"Today begins a new era. I promise you no interference, only a few minor modifications and no layoffs. Why tamper with greatness?"

Bibbo Bibbowski watched Red Dixon anxiously as he played pool in the darkened bar. Red said he didn't want to go to the police about the threat against his life, but he had to do something. If anything happened to Red and he didn't do anything to stop it... He picked up the card Lois and Clark had left him and dialed.

"Hello? Yes, I'd like to speak with Lois Lane and Clark Kent, please..."

"Charlie?" Lois suggested, leaning back in her chair with her feet propped up in Clark's lap as they sifted through their article one last time before sending it to Perry.

"Nah," Clark shook his head. "How about, Lucas?"

"Too preppy," Lois said. "I think this is about ready,"

"Go ahead and send it," Clark nodded as she clicked send on her mouse.

The phone on her desk rang and she reached over to answer, "Lois Lane... Yes, I remember. Meet you?" She glanced at Clark and he nodded. "Okay. How about tomorrow morning? Great." Lois hung up the phone and turned to Clark. "Bibbo Bibbowski wants us to meet him at Hobb's Bay in the morning. He has some information for us."

Clark gave her a thoughtful look. "Why did it take him so long

to get back to us? I thought he said he was going to call us when Red Dixon showed back up."

"Maybe he just now showed up?" Lois shrugged, uncertainly. "I'm not so sure." She sighed, standing up to stretch. "Come on. We're going to be late."

"What do you think Luthor's real reasons are for trying to buy the Planet?" Clark asked, helping Lois with her coat.

"I don't know." She sighed. "I just know that it isn't good news for us." She gave him a peck on the cheek. "Enough about Lex. Let's finish going through these names on the way home."

"Look at this." Henderson pointed at the screen shots on his desk. "Linda King left the club at around eleven p.m. There's no sign of Martin Snell leaving with her." Henderson then pulled out another folder and laid a few more pictures on the desk.

"What's this? These weren't with the original disclosure," Mayson argued.

"These were taken from another camera around the back of the club. You see this woman? She came in and left with Martin Snell at around ten. That's your killer."

"So, Linda King is..."

"Being railroaded," Henderson said grimly. "I'm just sorry it took me this long to figure it out."

"I'll call her attorney and let her know we're dropping the charges," Mayson said huffily.

"You do that."

"This letter was left in Red's apartment. He ditched town for a while and just came back," Bibbo explained.

Lois and Clark looked at the letter. "Any idea why someone would try to kill him?" Lois asked.

"He probably saw or heard something he wasn't supposed to. Red's always been kinda a loner. Keeps to himself."

"Do you mind if we take this to the police?" Clark asked. "We could have them check it for a match of fingerprints."

Bibbo shrugged. "Not sure if it'll do any good. God knows whose handprints are on that thing."

"We'd still like to give it a shot," Lois said. Bibbo nodded and handed the torn paper to Lois.

"I just hope you find the person responsible." Bibbo sighed, raking a hand through what hair remained on his head.

"We'll do everything we can," Clark reassured him.

"Lucy, hi." Lois hugged her sister. "Sorry, I didn't have time to stop by last night. It's just been...crazy."

"I can imagine," Lucy said, eyeing Lois' growing abdomen.

"Yeah," Lucy began evasively. "Listen, I called you here for lunch because I have some news."

"What kind of news?" Lois asked. She watched Lucy suspiciously when she pulled out her purse and opened it. Lucy pulled out a small jewelry box and revealed a diamond ring.

"No..." Lois shook her head adamantly. "Lucy, you didn't..." Lucy sighed. "I haven't given him an answer...yet."

"Lucy..." Lois ran a hand through her hair, taking a deep breath before looking up and meeting her sister's gaze with a pleading expression. "Why? Why do you keep doing this? Why?"

"I love Lex and he asked me."

"No. You don't know him. You may think you do, but you don't."

"I'm not going to listen to this, Lois."

"Then don't. Just remember what I told you when you realize I'm right. Lucy, please don't do this."

Lucy shook her head in disgust. "Why can't you just be happy for me?"

The week progressed slowly. Everything in the townhome had been set up and everything for the nursery had been picked out.

Lois began working harder and harder on trying to bring Lex Luthor down. Henderson still hadn't found a match for the fingerprints on the threat against Red Dixon. Lucy and Lois weren't speaking to one another, leaving each sister equally unhappy.

Clark held his hands over Lois' face as he guided her towards the spare bedroom. "Keep your eyes closed."

"Clark, you know I hate surprises," Lois argued.

"You'll love this one," he assured her. "Keep them closed." He reached in front of them to open the door and turned on the light. "Okay. Open them."

Lois opened her eyes and gasped. "Clark..." He had taken the paint and wallpaper she had picked out the night before and completely finished the nursery for the baby. A small bassinet sat in the corner of the room next to a rocking chair.

"Mom sent the bassinet they used for me a few weeks ago..."

She leaned down to pick up the small pillow that lay in the bassinet. "Yours? This was your bassinet?" She asked in awe. The pillow was engraved with the monogram 'CK.' "It's so perfect..."

"Hey, don't cry..." He pulled her into his arms.

"I can't help it. It's just so beautiful. The baby will love it."

"Ah, that's another thing." Clark pulled out a book from the bookshelf. "We are going to pick out a name."

"2001 Baby Names." Lois read the title.

"We can't keep calling him Baby boy Kent." Clark pointed out.

Lois sighed and relented. "Okay. I get it." She opened the book and began to read...

"What about your name?" Lois asked.

"No. I want him to have his own name," he said.

"Okay, Cameron?"

"It means mischievous."

"You pick one." Lois handed the book to him.

He scanned through the book and shook his head. "I don't know."

"We have to pick a name. What about a name after your parents. I mean, we can't do Jor-El, but maybe Jordan?" Lois suggested.

"I'd like that." Clark smiled at her. He leaned down to kiss her. "Very much."

"Jordan Lane Kent," Lois mused. "Got a nice ring to it."

"Jordan it is then," Clark agreed.

"Sir, I just received word that the LexCorp database has been hacked into," Nigel informed Lex Luthor.

"Pardon?"

"I said LexCorp..."

"No, Nigel, I heard what you said. I just don't understand how that's possible."

"All I know is it's coming from the Daily Planet."

"The Planet?"

"You are going down, Lex Luthor. I am going to prove once and for all that you are bad news to Lucy. You have no right..." Jimmy typed away as he continued to breach security after security wall in LexCorp's defenses.

"Hey, Jimmy," Lois said from behind him. "What are you doing?"

Jimmy quickly saved his information to his flash drive then exited out. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Uh-huh," Lois mused. "Well, I'd like to talk to you about something if you have a minute."

"What is it?" Jimmy asked.

"We want to introduce you to someone," Clark said, placing a hand on Lois' abdomen. "This is Jordan Lane Kent."

"You're...Really? I was wondering how long it was going to

take before you announced... Oh, man, that's great, you guys..." He stood up to hug them. "I'm really happy for you."

"All right, gather around folks, I have an announcement to make," Perry bellowed. He stopped in front of Lois and Clark with a smile, then turned to face the rest of the staff. "It is my pleasure to announce that this year's candidates for the Meriwether Award for Journalism Excellence have just been released, and the Daily Planet's very own writing team of Lois Lane and Clark Kent are among the nominees."

An eruption of applause and congratulations surrounded the newsroom. Lois smiled weakly at the announcement. It wasn't that she wasn't happy about the award. She was. It was just that after everything else that had happened that week an award was nothing compared to the impending birth of her and Clark's child.

"That's great, you guys. Wow, two pieces of good news in one day. You guys are on a roll," Jimmy said with a grin.

"Two?" Perry arched an eyebrow at them.

Clark nodded at the elderly editor, wrapping his arms around Lois from behind, resting his hands on Lois' abdomen. Lois smiled up at Perry. "We're having a boy," Lois said simply.

"Really? Oh, that's wonderful!" Perry hugged them both in excitement. Lois smiled back at him. It was good to see Perry back to his old self again. "So, you're finally telling everyone?"

Lois nodded, happily. "Yes."

Below the Daily Planet an explosive device sat strategically right below the support beams of the building to assure maximum damage. The clock read eighteen seconds...

"Ladies and Gentlemen, it's my privilege to announce the impending arrival of the newest member of the Daily Planet, Jordan Lane Kent..." Perry announced proudly.

Applause echoed throughout the newsroom.

A loud resounding boom could be heard as the explosive device went off, emitting a green haze throughout the building.

The sound of chaos played in the back of his mind as Clark drifted in and out of consciousness. The pain. It hurt. The pain was unbearable.

<< "Lois!" >> His mind cried out. Then the sweet serenity of darkness overtook him.

Metropolis General Hospital was a frenzy of activity as nurses and doctors raced around the emergency trying to tend to the victims of the Planet explosion. Lucy Lane sat numbly in the middle of the waiting room, awaiting the doctors to return with the status on her sister and brother-in-law. When she had called Martha to tell her what had happened, she had been told to call Dr. Klein. Why would she tell her to call a scientist? She'd said Dr. Klein was Clark's doctor...

"You okay, Luce?" Jimmy asked, handing her a cup of coffee.

"We had a fight," Lucy said numbly.

"What?"

"We had a fight about my wanting to marry Lex. I have hardly spoken to her since she got back from her honeymoon..." Lucy began to cry. "The doctors said there is a chance of internal bleeding. There's no way they'd be able to do the surgery without... Oh, God..."

"Hey, hey, it's okay." Jimmy placed a supportive arm around her. "Everything's gonna be all right. Look at me. Just a few scratches."

"Well, you're one of the lucky ones I guess," Lucy sniffed. "I don't know what to do..." Lucy began to ramble. She didn't notice Jimmy kept inching himself closer and closer to her, holding her more securely against him. "Oh, Jimmy, what if they ask me to make a decision?" Lucy sniffed against his chest. "I can't make that choice for them..."

Jimmy sighed. His arm tightened around Lucy. "Lucy..." He leaned in to kiss her. For a moment she kissed him back, then without warning, she pushed him away.

"Jimmy, what are you doing?"

"Lucy, I love you. I've always loved you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Jimmy..." Lucy stood up, backing away from him as quickly as possible. What was going on here?

"I won't hurt you. I just want to be with you, Lucy," Jimmy pleaded.

"My sister is in the hospital and all you can think about is... You are NOT who I thought you were, James Olsen!"

Martha Kent stared out the window as the plane took off. Clark was hurt. The baby. Lois. She brushed away a few strands of tears.

Unconscious.

Lucy Lane had described her son as unconscious. The only other time she'd seen Clark unconscious was when Trask had exposed him to Kryptonite. The bitter memory of Trask's terror on Smallville came to the forefront of her mind.

"Hey, it's gonna be okay, Martha." Jonathan took her hand and squeezed it gently.

"All he ever wanted was to have a family..." She began to cry. "Why did this have to happen?"

"Jimmy, what has gotten into you?" Lucy hissed as she backed away from her young friend. "I think you should get checked out."

"Only if you're doing the checking," Jimmy said seductively, wrapping his arms around her.

"Jimmy, stop it," Lucy pleaded.

"Fine." Jimmy backed away. "I'm cool."

"Ms. Lane?" A young nurse in her mid-thirties came from the ER.

"Yes." Lucy turned her attention to the doctor.

"I'm Amanda Marshall, the RN on your sister's case. I'm sorry, but we're going to have to do surgery. Are you the next of kin?"

"No, her husband is. Clark Kent," Lucy said, shaking her head defiantly.

The nurse nodded solemnly. "He's in ICU. I was told he's being monitored by a Dr. Klein from S.T.A.R Labs." The doctor sighed. "I'm sorry, but he can't make this decision right now."

"Can't you wait until he's better?" Lucy asked in between tears. "I can't..."

"If we don't operate soon, your sister will bleed to death. Then there will be no saving her or the baby."

"Oh, God..." she cried. "Just do...do what you can to save both of them.... Please."

"I really don't think the baby will make it, Ms. Lane."

"Try." Lucy wrapped her arms tightly around her chest as she fought to remain in control.

The nurse nodded. "I need you to sign this paperwork, stating it's okay to perform surgery on your sister."

Lois' mind was a fog. It hurt. The pain was unbearable. She tried to open her mouth to speak but nothing came out. She tried to open her eyes but her eyelids were too heavy. She gave into the serenity of darkness.

<< "Clark..." >>

Clark's mind drifted in and out of consciousness. It hurt. Breathing. Moving. His body ached down to the core. What had happened? Why couldn't he just wake up?

<< "Oh, you are so going to pay for that!" Lois called angrily. Her face was covered in the snow that he had just thrown at her. The look of fury was partnered with a mischievous glint in

her eyes. She chased him, throwing snow repeatedly at him. He kept himself just out of her reach until she stopped.

She had her hands on her abdomen, caressing the small bump with a look of awe on her face. "What is it?" He asked concerned.

"The baby. It kicked." She smiled back at him.

"Really?" He moved towards her, dropping to his knees so that he was eye-level with their unborn child. He watched in amazement when Lois lifted up her sweater and he saw the ripple of movement flow across the rounded bump that had begun to form. He placed his hand against her skin, eliciting a gasp from her. "You okay?"

"Your hand's just a little cold," she explained.

"Sorry." He shot a beam of heat vision against his hand then hesitantly touched her once more. "Better?" She nodded. He watched in amazement as their child moved beneath her skin. The strength behind the kicks was incredible. "Does that hurt?" he asked, concerned.

"No. It...It feels nice." She smiled at him. "Lets me know the baby's having a good time."

"I guess he or she likes snowball fightsh" he teased.

"Oh, yeah." Lois slammed a snowball on top of his head and grinned at him as he shook it off. "I told you, you were going to pay."

He laughed then stood up and kissed her. >>

"Come on, Clark, you've got to wake up. I've tried everything I can...Something's gotta work." Dr. Klein muttered under his breath as he looked at Clark's vitals once more.

A knock at the door caught his attention. He looked up and saw an elderly couple standing in the doorway. "May I help you?"

"I'm Martha Kent. This is my husband, Jonathan," Martha explained.

"Oh, yes. Come on in!" Dr. Klein ushered them in. "Close the door behind you."

"What is all this?" Martha asked, looking at the wires hooked up to Clark along with a large lamp that was aimed at him as well.

"Since Clark is reenergized by the sun, I thought this would help. I've isolated the area where the Kryptonite has seeped into his system. It's mostly in his nasal passages. It seems to be something he inhaled when the explosion went off."

"Inhaled?" Martha asked aghast. "He...inhaled it?"

"Yes. Clark told me about what had happened in Smallville with the Kryptonite. I sent one of my assistants over there last week to try and find any more samples of this meteorite so I might be able to come up with a vaccine."

"You can do that?" Jonathan asked, impressed.

"Yes." Dr. Klein smiled proudly. His face sobered a moment.

"I hope I can, anyway. I've used the vaporizers to try and clear out his nasal passages and make the swelling go down. I'm trying to avoid having to manually remove it from his system. I don't know what to expect and..."

"Thank you," Martha said, placing a hand on Dr. Klein's shoulder. "Thank you for helping our son."

"The attack on the Daily Planet has had an unusual effect on the people that were caught in the crossfire. Many are declaring their love to one another and showing no restraint in the process. Police are still unaware of the source to this side effect, but they are working with the DEA to try and figure out how this has happened. Lex Luthor has announced his intentions not to rebuild the Planet based on the lack of economic funding." The newscaster sighed. "It's a sad day for the people of Metropolis. For the first time in two hundred and nineteen years, there will be no edition of the Daily Planet. With Editor-in-Chief Perry White and star reporters Lois Lane and Clark Kent in the hospital along with many of its staff, it is unknown how any of them will take the

news.”

Lex laughed as he clicked off the television. “I really do have to hand it to Miranda. She outdid herself this time. Not even a sign of Superman. By the time anyone is even aware of what has happened our Man of Steel will be long gone.”

“Yes, along with those reporters,” Nigel added.

“Yes, those reporters,” Lex agreed. “I’m sure they’ll be appropriately wounded when consciousness falls on them once more. They’re too stubborn to give up that easily. With no place of employment available but with me they won’t have a choice but to back down. I’ve won. I’ll keep Lois Lane and her partner in check with Lucy Lane as my bride. I’ll be unstoppable.”

One Week Later...

“LaToya Cox. A widow.” Detective Wolf laid the file on Henderson’s desk. “I’d say you’ve got your killer.”

“Why does she look so familiar?” Henderson asked.

“Who knows?” Detective Wolf asked. “She could have been anywhere.”

“Any change?” Perry asked, handing Alice a cup of coffee. He wore a cast on his right arm and had a bandage wrapped around his head.

“No.” Alice sniffed, looking at Lois. “The doctors said they removed particles of what appeared to be some kind of radioactive substance from her. Everyone was exposed to this...” She shook her head. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I know. I love those kids like they were my own.”

“How are we supposed to tell them?” Alice asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Lucy?” Jimmy knocked on her apartment door hesitantly.

Lucy opened the door. “What is it, Jimmy?”

Jimmy’s face fell. “You’re still mad.”

“I’m not mad. I get it. You weren’t yourself. I do watch the news.” She pointed towards the television. “What do you want?”

“I was going to head over to the hospital to check on Lois and CK. I wanted to know if you wanted to ride with me.”

“No.” Lucy shook her head. “I...I can’t.”

“You can’t hide forever,” Jimmy said softly.

“I can’t,” Lucy said again. “I have to go.” She opened the door, sending the silent message for him to leave.

“Right.” Jimmy nodded and left.

Everything hurt. Seeing. Hearing. He had to wake up. So many people. The explosion. Lois. He had to wake up. The bright light penetrated his eyes causing him to groan in pain. “Lois...” he croaked out.

“Clark?” The sound of his mother’s voice reached his ears. That wasn’t right. What was she doing in Metropolis? They were in the Daily Planet.

“Lois...” he echoed more insistently.

“Clark, honey...” His mother’s hand touched his forehead. “Dr. Klein, he’s waking up!”

A light shone directly into his eyes, causing him to flinch. “Just hold still, son.” His father’s voice said. He felt the familiar touch on his shoulder. What was going on?

“Lois...” He fought through the pain and lifted his eyelids. Three blurry figures were hovering above him. He blinked, trying to focus on the images. He tried to push himself up off the surface he was lying on but found a strong hand pushing him down.

“Don’t try to move just yet, son,” his father said.

The images began to come into focus. He wasn’t at the Planet. His mother. His father. Dr. Klein. Where was Lois?

He tried to sit up once more and was met with a pounding headache. He cradled his head in his hands, crying out in pain.

“Clark...” Dr. Klein held up two fingers in front of him. “How many fingers am I holding up?”

“Two...” he murmured, still wincing from the pain of a fleeting headache.

“Okay, do you know who we are?”

Clark looked at Dr. Klein incredulously. “Yes, I know who you are,” he hissed out. “Why don’t you try telling me where the hell I am and where my wife is,” he snapped angrily.

“I know this must be incredibly hard on you, my dear,” Lex said soothingly, rubbing Lucy’s shoulders gently. “So tragic. The Daily Planet...I can’t believe how under insured they were.”

Lucy gave a weak smile. “You did your best, Lex.”

“How is work?” he asked.

“It’s good. We’re trying to track down Martin Snell’s killer. It’s like trying to find a needle in a haystack.” Lucy took a sip of her wine.

“I thought that reporter, Linda King, was responsible.”

“No.” Lucy shook her head. “She was found innocent. They think it was someone else now.”

Lex smiled at Lucy then pulled out a large folder. “Have you given more thought to the question I asked you?”

Lucy shook her head. “I’ve done nothing but think about it, Lex. I just don’t know that we know each other well enough to...”

He placed a finger on her lips. “What is it you need to know? I love you...”

“I can’t do this right now...” she cried, shaking her head.

Lex sighed. “Have you gone to see your sister?”

“No.” Lucy shook her head. “I can’t face her right now.”

“She’s in a coma,” Lex pointed out.

“I signed the paper that had her baby killed,” Lucy said bitterly. “I don’t belong there.”

“How are you feeling, Jimmy?” Perry asked. Alice, Perry, and Jimmy sat at a small café eating lunch.

“I’m fine. Just plain old Jimmy Olsen, nobody.” Jimmy muttered to himself.

“Don’t talk that way about yourself, Jimmy,” Alice scolded. “You are somebody.”

“All I ever wanted to do was become a journalist for the Daily Planet.” Jimmy smiled weakly at Perry. “I guess that’s a pipe dream now, huh?”

“You guys I’ll bounce back,” Alice reassured him. “You’ll see.”

“I don’t think so.” Perry shook his head. “‘Will not reopen in the foreseeable future’ was the phrase Lex Luthor used at the press conference.” Perry grew thoughtful. “You know I was only seventeen years old when I came here. I had an interview with Krebs—assistant copyboy—and I was already late. But I stood under that globe and just stared at it. I knew that my future was in that building.”

“Thirty years later...” Alice mused, shaking her head. “Feels like a lifetime ago...”

“It’s a shame.” Jimmy shook his head. “I keep on playing that morning over and over in my mind. The look on Lois’ face when she and CK were telling us about the baby...This is going to destroy her.”

“Jimmy, the doctors did all they could,” Perry reassured him.

“I know, it’s just...”

“Mr. White, Mrs. White, could I have a word?” Lex approached them with several policemen behind him.

“What can we do for you, Mr. Luthor?” Perry asked grimly. He didn’t trust Lex Luthor any more than he had Multiworld Communications.

“It’s come to my attention that this fire was set deliberately by one of our own employees,” Lex said grimly.

“Who would do something like that?” Jimmy asked aghast.

“Who would, indeed?” Lex asked. He pointed towards Jimmy. “That’s him.”

“What? No!” Jimmy argued, trying to push the officers off of him.

“Mr. Luthor, this is a mistake,” Perry argued.

“No mistake, Perry. The police found the explosives he used to make the incendiary device that did this in his apartment, hidden in his room.”

“No, I didn’t do anything! Chief, I would never...” Jimmy argued as the handcuffs were slapped on him.

“It’s no coincidence that he’s the only one to walk away from all of this with just a few scratches,” Lex finished. With that, the police hauled Jimmy off.

“Clark, honey, are you all right?” Martha asked hesitantly.

“I’ve been unconscious for a *week!*?” he asked incredulously.

“Yeah,” Jonathan said. “We were real worried about you, son.” Clark visibly winced at the word ‘son.’ Jonathan sobered. “I’m so sorry.”

“I want to see Lois,” he whispered.

“She’s still in a coma,” Martha explained.

“I don’t care,” Clark said, standing up, peeling the tags off of his chest. “I want to see my wife now.”

Martha nodded. “I’ll go get you a change of clothes.”

“We know you were there, Mrs. Cox. We know you went inside the Metro Club that night and came out with Martin Snell. What happened that night?” Henderson asked.

Mrs. Cox sat across from the Inspector with her arms crossed. “What makes you think I’m going to tell you anything? I know my rights. You’re questioning me like a suspect, so I want my lawyer.”

The monotone beeping of the monitors continued in the background. Still no change. He shook his head in disgust. Ellen had been with her non-stop over the past week. She had tried everything from music to reading articles in the news to get some reaction from Lois. Nothing so far. The soft strands of a song played on the radio in the background as he watched Lois, looking for a sign.

“Lois...” Clark whispered, taking a seat next to her hospital bed. “Hey, sweetheart, you have to wake up. I...I don’t know what to do...” He cradled his head in his hands. “You are everything to me, I can’t lose you too. You have to wake up.”

I’m finding my way back to sanity again

Though I don’t really know what I’m gonna do when I get there

and take a breath and hold on tight

Spin around one more time

And gracefully fall back to the arms of Grace

‘Cause I am hanging on every word you say

And even if you don’t want to speak tonight

That’s alright, alright with me

‘Cause I want nothing more

than to sit outside heaven’s door

and listen to you breathing

Is where I wanna be

where I wanna be

<< “You are a strange one, Clark Kent.”

“Am I?”

“Yeah, but I think I’ve got you figured out.”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Didn’t take you long...”

“Well, it’s my business, looking beyond the external.”

“Don’t fall for me, farmboy. I don’t have time for it.”>>

<< “Exactly how predictable is that?”>>

I’m looking past the shadows in my mind into the truth

*and I’m trying to identify the voices in my head
God, which one’s you?*

Let me feel one more time

What it feels like to feel alive

and break these calluses off of me one more time

‘Cause I am hanging on every word you say

And even if you don’t want to speak tonight

That’s alright, alright with me

‘Cause I want nothing more

than to sit outside your door

and listen to you breathing

Is where I wanna be

<< “What are you saying? That this is my fault? At least I had the guts to...What am I saying? This probably is my fault. I know that I sometimes do things...you know, jump into the pool without checking the water level?” >>

<< “Sounds like he made quite an impression on you.”

“The guy flew me into the newsroom, Clark. It’s hard **not** to have an impression made on you after that.”

“True.”>>

<< “Come on.” She said to Clark, waiting for him to get the hint.

“Where are we going?”

“You are going to walk me home.” Lois turned to him and laughed when she saw his stunned look. “You’re a good friend, Clark...After everything we’ve dealt with the last few days.. I’d like to think we’re friends, right? I mean, we did call a truce, right?”>>

<< “Clark! You’re alive!”

“It would seem so...”

I don’t want a thing from you

Bet you’re tired of me waiting

For the scraps to fall

Off of your table to the ground

‘Cause I just wanna be here now

‘Cause I am hanging on every word you say

And even if you don’t want to speak tonight

That’s alright, alright with me

‘Cause I want nothing more

than to sit outside heaven’s door

and listen to you breathing

Is where I wanna be

<< “You know, if you really think about it the only time people ever really seem to express themselves is when they’re passionate and the polite veneer of society drops off. You know like they’re fighting...”

“...or make love.”>>

<< “Doesn’t anyone knock around here?”

“I should get up.”

“Yeah, but what if I don’t want you to.”>>

<< “Farmboy?”

“It suits you.”>>

<< “I love you, Clark Kent.”

“I love you, Lois Lane.”>>

<< “As I got older I started developing different abilities ... heat vision, x-ray, the power to defy gravity...Lois, I’m Superman.”>>

<< “So, Lois Lane, will you marry me?”

“Yes.”>>

<< “Clark, you’re my best friend. Until I met you I never had a best friend. You make me laugh when I need to and hold me when I cry. I was fighting falling in love with you from the first time you smiled at me, but I think it was too late, because I was already halfway in love with you. I don’t know why I fought it so long. You have such gentle grace, and such quiet strength, and mostly such incredible kindness. I’ve never known anyone with as pure a heart. Today, I give you everything I am. I give you my

heart, my honor, and our life together.”>>

<< “By the power vested in me ...I now pronounce you man and wife. You may nowcontinue kissing the bride.”>>

<< “A boy?”

“I love you so much, sweetheart.”>>

<< “How do you record a message like this, knowing you’re saying goodbye to your child. I don’t know that I would have that kind of strength. All these years I thought I was abandoned. They saved me.”>>

<< “Yours? This was your bassinet? It’s so perfect...”

“Hey, don’t cry...” He pulled her into his arms.

“I can’t help it. It’s just so beautiful. The baby will love it.”>>

‘Cause I am hanging on every word you say

And even if you don’t want to speak tonight

That’s alright, alright with me

‘Cause I want nothing more

than to sit outside heaven’s door

and listen to you breathing

Is where I wanna be

where I wanna be

where I wanna be

<< “Jordan Lane Kent. Got a nice ring to it.”

“Jordan it is then.”>>

<< “I used to come up here a lot by myself and just...drift. Not part of the stars, not part of the Earth. Not knowing where I fit in...until I met you.”

“Oh, Clark...You’re not alone anymore.”

“I know, I’m not going anywhere. You mean everything to me...you and ...our baby...”

“Our baby,” >>

<< “That’s the baby’s heartbeat. We’re definitely pregnant and...”

“It’s so fast,”>>

<< “Something’s wrong...I’m bleeding...”>>

<< “You don’t have to put on the invulnerable act with me, Clark.”>>

<< “Whatever we need to do. We’ll do it,”

“Absolutely,”>>

“Lois, we’ve been through too much...” He couldn’t hold back the tears any longer.

“Jimmy would never...” Perry balled his fist up. “There has to be something more going on here.”

Alice rested a reassuring hand on Perry’s shoulder. “We’ll figure this out, Perry, but right now you need to rest.”

“How am I supposed to rest when Jimmy’s being railroaded like that?”

“Here’s the deal, Inspector. My client gets Man-1 and she’ll give you everything you need to know about the murder of Martin Snell as well as the destruction of the Daily Planet,” Sheldon Bender remarked smugly.

“What?” Inspector Henderson asked incredulously.

“Your choice,” Sheldon Bender added.

Lucy walked down the hall of Metropolis General Hospital towards the Intensive Care Unit. After identifying herself at the nurse’s station she was let into the ICU. She scanned the various doors for Lois’ room number. She stopped short when she saw Clark sitting next to Lois’ bed; head in his hands.

“Please, sweetheart, I can’t lose you too,” Clark whispered hoarsely.

What was he doing out of bed? He’d been unconscious just as long as Lois and probably needed his rest...

“Clark?” Lucy knocked lightly on the door.

Clark turned to face her. A look of sorrow covered his face. “She hasn’t woken up,” Clark explained, his voice cracking. “Not

once.”

“I am so sorry. If there was anything I could do...” Lucy began to cry.

“You didn’t set the fire,” Clark said shakily, glancing down at Lois.

“No, but I had to sign the papers for them to operate on Lois.”

Clark visibly winced at the mention of Lois’ surgery. “It was...It was for the best. She would have...She would have died otherwise.”

“None of this makes any sense. Lex said they found explosives in Jimmy’s room...” Lucy rambled.

“What?” Clark’s eyes narrowed at the mention of Lex.

“They arrested Jimmy earlier today. Lex hired a lawyer for him...”

Clark angrily ran a ragged hand through his hair. “Lex, Lex, Lex. I don’t care about Lex. My wife is sitting here in a coma from something LEX probably did and you are too *blind* to see it.”

“Lex would never...”

“How the hell do you know what he would do?” Clark snapped back. “You have no idea what that man is capable of doing.” He waved his hands in front of him. “My wife ... Your sister...is lying in a hospital bed...my baby...my...my son...” He could feel the tears threatening to overflow. He shook his head.

“Just...get out. Please. I cannot stand to listen to you talk about that man around Lois. Especially not now.”

“She’s my sister.”

“When she wakes up I’ll have someone call you,” Clark whispered. “Please, just go.”

“Lex Luthor?” Henderson asked incredulously.

Mrs. Cox nodded, pulling out a flash drive. “Everything you need to hang him is right there. ‘The Boss’ that so many people are afraid of is Lex. He ordered the hit on Martin after LexCorp came under attack.”

“You think you know somebody...” Detective Wolf mused.

“Write it down.” Henderson handed her a paper and pen. “Everything.”

Perry gazed at the Stern Building before entering. No building seemed to have the same effect on him as the Daily Planet. There was just something so majestic about it that was lacking in other offices. He made his way upstairs to meet with Franklin Stern.

“May I help you?” the receptionist asked.

“I have an appointment. Perry White.”

The receptionist nodded and smiled. “Right this way.” She opened the door to a lavish office where Franklin Stern sat at his desk, scanning through a pile of files on his desk. “Mr. Stern?”

“Come in, Mr. White. Please, sit down.” He gestured to the chair in front of his desk.

“Thank you for seeing me at this late hour,” Perry said, taking a seat.

“Perry, may I call you Perry?” Perry nodded and Franklin Stern continued, “I work a fourteen hour day, always have. If I show my face at home before eleven p.m. my wife calls the cops.” Perry laughed. “I know what that’s like all too well, Mr. Stern.”

“Strange that we’ve never met. I’m familiar with your work of course.”

“As I am yours.”

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

“Those of us who worked there were proud to call it home. That’s why I’ve come.”

“I didn’t think you were looking for a fourth for Bridge.”

“Mr. Stern, you own television and radio stations. You have interests in book publishing, but have you ever considered owning a newspaper?”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, Mr. White, but there is no newspaper.” Stern pointed out.

“The Daily Planet was more than concrete and girders. It was people with ideas and principles. Those still exist.” Perry pleaded his case. “There is a newspaper. There is just no place to print it.”

“Even if that were true, why would I want to own the Daily Planet?” Stern asked.

“I can’t imagine anyone wanting anything else,” Perry said softly.

“CK?” Jimmy was stunned to see Clark sitting alive and awake across from him. “Are you okay? How’s Lois?”

Clark’s expression was dark. “She still hasn’t woken up.”

“I’m sorry, CK.” Jimmy’s face sobered.

“Why do the police think you did this, Jimmy?” Clark asked.

“Somebody planted explosives in my apartment.”

“Luthor,” Clark muttered.

“You guys don’t like him either.” Jimmy smiled.

“Yeah, you could say that.”

“I found some stuff that morning. I had hacked into LexCorp’s financial files and other encrypted files. I saved it to my flash drive. It’s at the hospital. Check it out. I think Luthor’s behind this. His lawyer keeps trying to get me to cop a plea.”

“Don’t,” Clark warned. “Whatever you do, keep your head low and don’t draw attention to yourself. I’m going to get you out of here.”

“Hey, don’t worry about me. Tell Lois we miss her.”

“I will.”

“CK?”

“Yeah, Jimmy?” Clark asked when he got up to leave.

“I’m really sorry about Jordan.”

Clark winced at the mention of his son’s name. “Thanks,” he said hoarsely, leaving the room as fast as he could. He could bounce bullets off his chest but the mere mention of his precious son’s name could bring him to his knees right now. He shook his head. He couldn’t do anything about Jordan, but he could help his friend.

“Dammit!” Henderson punched a hole through a wall.

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It was a trick!”

“Are you sure?” Detective Wolf asked

“It’s a virus.” Henderson snapped. “No evidence is on here. It’s just a damn virus!”

“Did you already sign the papers for the deal?”

“Judge Stevens has already signed the papers.”

Stern was thoughtful for a moment then shook his head. “I’m sorry, but my answer is no. I wish you luck, though in finding some way to rebuild. If you do, you have my subscription.”

Perry nodded then got up to leave. He stopped at the door, disappointed. “I just hate to see Lex Luthor win.”

Stern’s gaze turned icy. “Lex Luthor?”

“I suspect he’s the one behind the explosion that destroyed the Daily Planet. I’d just like to see his face when... Well, thanks again for your time, Mr. Stern.”

It hurt. Everything hurt. Her body was numb with pain. “Clark...”

“Lois...” Clark’s voice echoed through her mind.

“Clark...Jor...” Tears escaped her eyes as she tried to open them. Something was wrong. “Clar...”

“I’m right here, honey,” Clark whispered, holding her hand firmly in his grasp.

A bright light shone in her eyes as she tried to open them. Everything was blurry. Her eyes stung. “Wha...” She blinked her eyes, trying to focus her vision. Clark was watching her hesitantly. His eyes were red and his face was blotchy. It was evident he’d

been crying. “Clark...”

He leaned down to kiss her. “I was so scared. I was so scared you...”

“I’m okay,” she tried to reassure him, kissing him back hungrily. “I’m okay.” Something was still wrong. A nagging sensation tugged at the back of her mind. She slowly broke off the kiss and looked towards Clark. His face was still covered in sorrow. Something had happened. Something bad. She instinctually reached down to touch her growing abdomen only to find softened skin. She lifted up her hospital gown and saw the incision She frowned, looking down at the lack of growth beneath her hand. “No no no no no... Jordan... My baby... Where’s my baby? Clark, where’s our baby?”

Clark winced. He pinched the bridge of his nose, a gesture she had learned was something he did when he was trying to control his emotions. “Lois...”

That tone. “No...” She shook her head repeatedly. “No. No. No... God, please no...” she cried.

His arms wrapped securely around her as she beat against his chest, repeatedly crying ‘no.’

Lucy looked around Lex’s study, surveying the room. Clark claimed she didn’t know Lex as well as she thought. She’d prove him wrong once and for all. She began opening drawer after drawer. Nothing. Files on LexCorp’s finances. Project K. Project S. She picked up a small black remote that lay on the desk. It looked like a remote to a stereo.

“I wonder what this is...” Lucy mused. She opened the file as she hit play on the remote.

The wall across from the desk lit up and the figures of a man and woman appeared on the wall. The woman’s dark hair covered her face as the man held her against the wall, driving into her.

The soft moans echoed through the room. “*Oh, Cl...Clark...*”

Lucy’s eyes widened. ‘*Clark?*’

She stared at the screen once more and winced. Sure enough it was Clark.

“*Oh, God, Lo-is...*”

And her sister.

Why would Lex have something like this? She stared at the file in her hands and a cold shiver ran down her spine when she realized what was in her hands.

“What are you doing in here?” a voice behind her asked.

Clark took a deep breath, trying to regain control of his emotions before entering Lois’ room. She needed him to be strong for her right now. He couldn’t let her see him like this. She had cried herself to sleep earlier. The doctors had come in to check on her. Everything had seemed fine. They were optimistic about her coming home soon.

Home. Without their baby.

‘*Don’t go there,*’ he told himself.

He pushed open the door to Lois’ room. She wasn’t there.

“Great.” He muttered under his breath. He turned on his heel and began looking through the hospital for her. His powers still hadn’t returned.

“Mr. White, I’d like to help you, but my hands are a bit tied right now,” Henderson explained. “I just signed a deal for evidence that gave our entire system a virus, cleaning our entire hard drives.”

“Lex Luthor was behind the attack on the Planet. I know it. I just need to prove it,” Perry urged the inspector.

“Yeah, that’s what we were told too, but the evidence isn’t there,” Henderson argued.

“What if I can find you some?” Perry asked.

“Good luck,” Henderson scoffed.

“You sick, disgusting, son of a...”

“Now, now let’s not use names, darling,” Lex scolded.

“You taped my sister???” Lucy balled her hand into fist, trying to control the rage that flowed through her. “How could you?”

“I never taped anyone. It seems that in their...urgency...they forgot they were...rolling.” He moved closer to her and she flinched away. “Amazing, isn’t it? A mere week before she’d told me she never had dessert. Now here she is with her partner having oh, so much more...”

“Why? Why would you keep something like this?” Lucy screamed. “That ...is my SISTER!” She raised her hand up but he caught her wrist.

“Yes, and it’s been very entertaining. Do you really think this is the only tape I have? I have several tapes. Many different encounters. I enjoy watching ...it’s arousing. The great Lois Lane, star reporter...helpless in the arms of a mere hack from Kansas. I’ve wondered if you share the same expressions...”

“You’re sick!” Lucy spat out.

“Perhaps.” Lex nodded, advancing towards her. “But it’s hard to really know when you’ve experienced so little.” His hand lingered on her shoulder; she flinched away.

“Don’t touch me!”

Lex laughed. “What did you think was going to happen when we got married? Did you really think I would continue to be patient?”

“You sick, twisted, disgusting...How could you???” Lucy raged at the top of her lungs. “You destroyed the Planet....You... **YOU KILLED** my **NEPHEW!!!**” She was hitting Lex against the chest repeatedly with the folder as the papers flew around the room. “How could you?”

Lex grabbed her wrists to stop her from hitting him anymore. “Spoils of war,” he said grimly. She tried to escape he grasp and he moved to grab her by the neck and held her against the study wall. “Your sister chose her side. Your nephew is just a casualty from the battle.”

“His name was Jordan!” she hissed back, trying to escape his grasp. “Let go of me!!!!” she cried, struggling to escape from his grasp. “Help!!! Superman!!!! Someone hel...” Darkness overtook her as she lost consciousness.

“Lois?” Clark cautiously walked up behind her. She stood outside the nursery, watching the newborn babies coming in. “Honey...” He placed a cautious hand on her shoulder.

“I saw him,” she said in a monotone voice, tears in her eyes.

“Who?” he asked, stepping closer to her. It unnerved him to see her like this. Her body language and tone seemed so despondent.

She lifted her hands and pointed at the window. “Clark, I saw him. I saw Jordan. I heard him cry. There is no way...” She began to cry in a fit of rage. “I want my baby...” Clark wrapped his arms securely around her, trying to soothe her cries.

Every sob he heard, every fist he felt against his body cut him to the core. It killed him to see her so distraught. “Lois, you didn’t see him... You need to rest...”

“No!” She pushed him away. “No!”

A nurse stepped outside of the nursery to approach them. “Is there a problem here?”

“No, I apologize. We were just leaving...” Clark tried to pull Lois away from the window.

“No.” Lois shook her head adamantly. “I want my baby.” The nurse looked at her questionably. Lois continued, “Look under Lane or Kent. He was about seven and a half months...”

The nurse’s face fell at the mention of the age. “I’m sorry, but...”

“Could you please just check? Please?” Lois said in between tears. The nurse nodded and left.

“Lois, you can’t do this to yourself...” Clark warned.

“Don’t you dare try and tell me what I can or can’t do!” she raged.

“Lois...” It took everything he had not to break down in tears with her. It was killing him watching her look for a baby that was not there.

“No...My baby is not dead.” She shook her head. “There had to have been a mistake. I would feel it in here.” She tapped her chest lightly. “Clark, he had a name...” Clark pulled her into his arms once more. She fell against his chest, crying. “He had a name...”

Clark felt a lump in his throat begin to form as she cried. Jordan. Their son’s name had been Jordan. He’d never be able to use that name again.

She peeled herself out of his arms once more, wrapping her arms around her chest as she paced in front of the nursery. “I still feel him...here.” She tapped her chest lightly.

“I know,” he said solemnly.

“Ms. Lane?” the nurse called cautiously.

“Kent,” Lois corrected. “Where is my baby?”

“I’m sorry. I know this is hard...” the nurse began. “The doctors did all they could...”

“Where is my baby?” Lois repeated vehemently.

“I’m so sorry...” the nurse shook her head in despair. “He didn’t make it. You had internal bleeding. If they hadn’t operated when they did, neither one of you would have made it... Didn’t anybody explain this to you?”

Lois fought to suppress the tears. “I want to see him.”

“Lois...” Clark pleaded with her.

“I want to see his body,” Lois said edgily.

The nurse looked down. “I’ll page the doctor.”

“Lois, are you out of your mind?” Clark asked. “You cannot do this...”

“Why not?” Lois turned to face him. “All I know is that I woke up and Jordan was gone. I didn’t see what happened. How do I know what really happened on that operating table?”

“Lois...”

“Can I help you?” A doctor in his mid-thirties approached them.

“My name is Lois Lane Kent and I want to see my baby now,” Lois said vehemently.

The doctor sighed, raking a hand through his hair, “I’m sorry, but...”

“I need to see for myself that he is dead., Lois said in between tears.

“He was cremated yesterday afternoon.”

“Cremated?” Lois and Clark asked in unison.

“It’s hospital policy whenever there is that much damage and there’s no one to...”

“You cremated my son?” Lois hissed aghast, balling her fist up in a fit of rage. She advanced towards the doctor. “Who the hell do you think you are? What gives you the right to...?”

Clark grabbed her from behind, pulling her away from the doctor. “Lois, stop.”

“I’m so sorry,” the doctor said earnestly. “We weren’t sure what to do. We tried everything we could, but he just wasn’t strong enough...”

Clark took a deep breath, pulling Lois closer to him. “Let’s get out of here,” he whispered, guiding her away from the nursery.

“Hey, kid, how you doing?” Perry asked, sitting across from Jimmy.

“Well, the room’s small and drafty, company’s not much to speak of, but on the other hand, the food stinks.” Jimmy sobered a moment, noticing Perry’s look of concern. “How’s Lois and CK?”

“They’re...barely holding it together. Lois woke up earlier and Clark told her about the baby...” Perry explained with a look of anguish.

"I know this has to be killing CK.," Jimmy said, shaking his head. "Did he ever find that flash drive?"

"Flash drive?" Perry asked.

"Yeah, I hacked into LexCorp's files a little bit before the explosion occurred. Saved what I'd found to the flash drive." At Perry's reproving look, Jimmy smiled. "I don't like the guy."

"Well, you may have better instincts than you thought. I'm thinking Lex Luthor was behind this, and possibly behind the explosion at the Planet as well."

"There were plans for a weapon that released some kind of gas on the flash drive," Jimmy recalled. "Could be related."

"Where did you leave the flash drive?" Perry asked.

"It's in Lois' room," Jimmy answered.

"All right." Perry nodded. "I'll get to it."

"Hey, Chief?" Jimmy called as Perry knocked on the door to leave.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for looking out for me," Jimmy said.

"Anytime, kid."

"Rise and shine, darling," Lex crooned. "We have a wedding to prepare for."

Lucy groggily awoke. Something wasn't right. She looked down at herself and found she was dressed in a white gown. She opened her mouth to speak and nothing came out.

"I told you before, I will not be embarrassed," Lex warned. "Don't even think about trying to back out." He held up a revolver. "I'd hate for you to lose any more family members. Don't get any more ideas about screaming for help. I've paralyzed your vocal cords for the time being, but no one's seen or heard from Superman ever since I emitted Kryptonite into the air during the Planet's explosion."

At her questioning look, he continued. "Yes, I had to make sure the attempts to bring me down were thwarted. Every time I turned around, your sister, that Hack, and your friend... What's it? Jimmy?" Lucy lowered her head, realizing how wrong she'd been about Lex. Lois had been right. "Yes. They've all tried repeatedly, but I have the biggest bargaining chip... You." Lex narrowed his eyes at her.

"Lois, you need to rest," Clark said pleadingly.

Lois looked at him coolly. "My friend is in jail for a crime he didn't commit. I can't reach my sister. I do not need to rest."

"Your body has been through a lot, honey, and..."

"And I'll heal while I'm working," Lois cut him off. "You'll either help me or you'll get out of my way."

Clark sighed, relenting. "Fine. What do you need?"

"I need my laptop," Lois said pointedly.

"Lois, please. Let's just go through what we've got here."

"Fine," she harrumphed. "I'm compiling a list of every thug in Metropolis that does work for hire. I'm cross referencing that with everyone that is a known explosives expert..."

"They wouldn't necessarily be an explosives expert..." Clark argued. "Anyone can plant explosives..."

"Am I interrupting?" Perry asked from the doorway. Clark smiled weakly at the former Editor-in-Chief.

"Hi, Chief, come on in."

"Don't mind if I do," Perry drawled. "How are you two doing? You gave us quite a scare..."

Clark stole a glance at Lois before answering. "We'll be okay," he said.

"Maybe you can help us?" Lois said, pointing towards the chair next to her. "I've been on the phone all afternoon." She motioned to the stack of papers on her lap. "Of course I'd be able to work a lot faster if someone would go get my laptop." She looked pointedly at Clark.

"Don't fight it." Perry patted him on the shoulder. "Once the

pit bull gets a hold of the bone, it won't let it go."

"Tell me about it," Clark muttered under his breath.

"Laptop," she prodded, looking up at him sweetly.

Clark sighed, raking a hand through his hair. "Fine. I'm going." He gave her a peck on the lips. "Don't do anything adventurous while I'm gone."

Perry watched Clark leave, then turned back to Lois. "So, how are you holding up?"

"I'm fine," Lois said. "Could you hand me that stack."

Perry nodded and handed her the stack of papers. "It's not easy when you're first married. You're trying to adjust to one another's personalities clashing; then you have to adjust to being a parent." Perry stopped when he noticed Lois stiffen. "You lost something and it's okay for you to be upset. I'm upset."

"I just want to know why," Lois said in between tears. "This." She gestured to the papers in front of her. "This is all I have keeping me going right now."

"I know." Perry sighed. He placed a supportive hand on her shoulder.

"Everyone keeps saying 'the baby' like he was a thing. His name was Jordan." Lois began to sob. Perry stood up and wrapped an arm around her, allowing her to cry.

The laptop. He looked through the townhome. Their room showed no signs of the laptop; none of the other rooms. Where had she put it? His powers still hadn't returned. He felt slower, achy. Dr. Klein had said it would take time.

He stopped in front of the door to his son's room. The only room he hadn't looked in. 'Just look; then get out,' he told himself.

He avoided looking at the name that had been hung on the door. He was going to have to take that down. It was too painful to look at right now, but he didn't dare touch it until Lois said so. The way she had turned on the doctor for cremating their son...

On the table next to the rocking chair sat Lois' laptop. Just like Lois to leave it in there. He glanced at the screen as he picked it up. The scanned image of the sonogram they'd been given bounced on the screen as a screen saver.

He felt the lump in his throat begin to form. He couldn't hold it in any longer. He placed the laptop back on the table and fell to the floor in tears.

Jimmy scuffled through the population, trying to keep his head low. Many of the inmates were twice his size. He sat down at a table, watching as a few inmates played cards and catching the tail end of the conversation.

"...and we got hired by the Boss to set up some kid. Planted explosives and everything all in the guy's apartment. Boss said it would pay off big. Boy, was he right. They arrested him so fast."

The other inmate laughed. "That's a riot, Pete. You know I've heard of this boss. A lot of people in here work for him. Some of the time with the Metros.... Of course, now you got your thugs that work for Intergang."

"Hey, Pete Black has some class. I don't mess with gangsters."

Jimmy sat horrified as he listened to the account between the two men. The Boss? Explosives... He had to get out of here.

"Jimmy hacked into LexCorp?" Lois asked astonished.

"Yeah, I guess you've rubbed off on the kid," Perry explained.

Lois smiled weakly. "I guess he didn't like Lucy and Lex's engagement any more than I did."

"Yeah." Perry nodded. "I wonder where Clark is? It shouldn't take him this long..."

Lois looked down at her hands for a moment. "Maybe he just needed some time alone."

Clark locked the door to Jordan's room behind him, carrying

Lois' laptop with him as he bounded down the steps. This would get easier. It had to. He stopped in the kitchen and noticed a note on the counter.

"Clark, we had to take an early flight back to Smallville. There was an emergency on the farm. Call us if you need anything."

Clark sighed. "Well, thanks for letting me know." He sighed. He knew his attention had been otherwise occupied. It wasn't fair for him to be angry at his parents, but he couldn't help it. Everything around him seemed to be falling apart. The baby. The Planet. Lois. His powers were gone. He had no control over what was going on anymore.

"One day at a time," he muttered to himself. He headed towards the front door and was surprised to find Jimmy on the other side. "Jimmy, what are you doing here?"

Jimmy pushed him back inside. "Shhh." He closed the door behind him. "I had to get out of there. I think someone's after me." "What?"

"The guy that was hired to set me up ended up in the same cell block as me. That's not a coincidence, CK." Jimmy looked around. "Do you got anything to eat?"

"Lucy, I don't understand what is wrong with you? You're getting married. This is what you wanted. Why do you keep crying?" Ellen asked. Lucy just hung her head, crying even harder. "I don't understand why Lex is in such a damn hurry...and why everyone couldn't wait...You'd think with his upbringing he'd be a little more..." Lucy just cried harder. It hurt to try and speak. "Lucy, what is going on?"

<< "I will not be made a fool. You think your sister is hurting now. Just wait until I'm through. If you embarrass me I will make everyone you care about suffer..." >>

"Hey," Clark leaned down to kiss Lois. He handed her her laptop.

"Hi." She smiled weakly at him. It was evident he'd been crying; not to the outside observer, but she could tell. "What took you so long?"

"I ran into somebody." He gestured towards Jimmy, who was standing behind him.

"Jimmy, what did you do?" Lois asked.

"We found the guy that set him up," Clark explained. "The boss hired a guy named Pete Black."

"The boss? That name keeps coming up." Lois sighed.

Jimmy pulled out the flash drive that was on her side table. "Just give me a minute and I'll show you everything I've got."

"Where's Perry?" Clark asked.

"He got a call...I'm not sure what about," Lois said. "It must have been important."

"I demand you let me in there. My daughter..."

"Has been through a tremendous ordeal and needs her rest." Perry cut Ellen Lane's tirade off. "You can't do this."

"Her sister is getting married...I think there's something wrong...Please let me talk to her..." Ellen pleaded.

"I understand but you can't just go barging into her room like this. She's hurting..."

"I want to see my daughter now, Mr. White. I understand you're trying to protect her, but..." She didn't say any more, pushing past Perry and darting through the double doors that lead to the maternity ward.

"Great shades of Elvis..."

"This is incredible," Lois said, looking at the files Jimmy had saved. "But we still don't know who the boss is."

"Maybe we do," Jimmy interjected. "What if Lex Luthor is the boss?"

"It's possible," Clark reasoned.

"Have Perry take this over to Henderson," Lois instructed.

"What about me?" Jimmy asked, wounded.

"You are going to stay here and keep us company," Lois said with a smile. "You can tell me about your time in the big house. Besides, I don't want you getting hurt. This could get ugly."

"Lois!" Ellen Lane stormed into the room.

"Nice to see you too, Mother," Lois replied dryly.

Ellen looked around the room. "I'd like a moment alone with my daughter."

Jimmy got up to leave but Clark stayed put. "What is it, mom?" Lois asked irritably. She wasn't in the mood for any drama.

Ellen took a seat next to Lois, stroking her hair. "I know this is the worst time...and believe me I am not wanting to hurt you any more than you already are...I just...I can't even imagine..."

"What is it?" Lois cut her off.

"Something is wrong with Lucy. She is getting married and..."

"WHAT??" Lois and Clark asked incredulously in unison.

"Exactly!" Ellen said emphatically. "She would have *told* us. She wouldn't be trying to do some 24-hour wedding...and she's crying...over and over...doesn't say anything..." Clark glanced at Lois. Something was definitely wrong. "Anyway, I don't know who to go to. Do I go to the police? Do I get a lawyer? Superman? What?"

Lois sighed, raking her hand through her hair. "Mom, no one's heard from Superman since the explosion..."

"What?" Ellen asked, dumbfounded. "No..."

"Talk to Perry," Clark said. "He can get a team over there to figure out what is going on...I'll talk to the doctor and see what's taking so long on your discharge."

Ellen nodded. "I know you're tired of hearing this, but I am so...sorry..." she cried, closing the door shut behind her.

Clark looked back to Lois, who was in tears. "Hey, I'm sorry...It's gonna be okay..." He cupped her cheek, kneeling down beside her.

"It's not that," she whispered. "It's just...too much..." she cried.

"I know," he sighed. "I'll be right back."

"It's not fair," she said as he walked to the door. "I've worked so hard on trying to bring him down and I can't even be there to watch him get arrested."

"Now, darlin', you were unconscious for quite a while. Hell, you both were. I'm not even sure how Clark is able to be walking around. You need to take it easy..." Perry drawled.

"Fine." Lois crossed her arms angrily over her chest. "Go grab the story of the century without me."

Clark sighed and picked up the disk Lois had made for Perry. "Could you take this over to Henderson?"

Perry nodded. "Sure thing." He then pointed at Lois. "Watch her." He then turned to Jimmy, "Come on, son, I'll show you how the old pros here nab a big one."

Lois watched Perry and Jimmy leave. "So not fair."

Lucy stared at her reflection with a despondent expression on her face. How had her life ended up so screwed up? It was no use. No matter what, she couldn't pretend to be happy about this. The man was sick.

Lois had tried to warn her. Clark had tried to warn her. She'd brushed them off like an idiot. A fool. Now she stood here in a wedding gown about to marry a monster to protect her family.

Lois changed into the clothes Clark had brought for her. They were a little loose on her. These were the clothes she'd worn when she was pregnant. "You okay?" Clark asked.

Lois nodded. "Yeah, let's get out of here." Clark placed a supportive hand on the small of her back as they walked through

the lobby.

“Lois Lane?” One of the nurses called out to her.

“Yes?” Lois asked, turning to face her.

“I was told to give you these.” The nurse handed the package to her.

Lois looked at it curiously. She opened the package and a pair of keys fell out along with a letter. Curious, she picked up the letter. “Lois, I did something you probably don’t want me to do. I felt really bad about what happened. I know you were saving up for a Jeep; so I put your money with mine. You had me down as your power of attorney for some reason... I don’t understand your logic sometimes. It’s not brand new or anything, but I thought if I could help you have something that you wanted it might help. I don’t know when you’re going to get this. You’ve been unconscious for three days already. I hope you can forgive me for signing those papers. I just couldn’t bear the thought of losing you. It’s parked out front. The silver Jeep Cherokee. I love you, Lucy.”

“Oh, my God,” Lois said, grabbing the keys in her hand. “I can’t believe she did that.”

“What?” Lois handed Clark the letter and he read it. “I guess this teaches you not to put her as power of attorney,” he teased. Lois laughed weakly, then leaned up to kiss him.

“You want to drive? I’m supposed to be taking it easy.”

“We are gathered here to join this man with this woman...” How could she do this? How could she say yes when she didn’t want to marry him?

“Do you, Lucy Lane, take Lex Luthor to be your lawfully wedded husband...” No. She couldn’t do this. She couldn’t... “... till death do you part?”

“I...I...”

“Lucy...” Lex prodded, squeezing her hand tightly.

“No!”

Lex turned to her in rage. A loud crash came from the entrance of the ballroom. Lucy turned to see Perry, Jimmy, and Inspector Henderson surrounded by an army of officers enter the room.

“Stop the wedding!” Jimmy yelled, waving a disk in his hand.

“You can’t marry this man!”

“What’s the meaning of this?” Lex asked, taken aback slightly by the newest guests.

“The meaning of this, Luthor, is that you’re through. We have all the evidence against you we need.” Perry advanced towards them. Lucy inched towards Perry, trying to avoid the fireworks she was sure were about to occur.

“I have a warrant,” Henderson began, handing Lex the warrant, but Lex shoved it away, “here charging you with arson and other crimes too numerous to mention.”

“You must be out of your minds,” Lex scoffed. “All of you.” He scanned the room in dismay. The guests looked at him aghast.

Henderson pulled out his handcuffs. “You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided.”

“Will you stop that?? I can afford a thousand attorneys. I’ll have your head... your badge for this. Get me the Governor on the phone! Get me the President... **ON THE PHONE, GET ME SOMEONE!!!**” Lex raged.

“It’s a waste of time, Lex.” Mrs. Cox said, walking in with a pair of handcuffs on her wrists.

“Et tú, Mrs. Cox?” Lex shook his head in disgust.

Mrs. Cox shrugged. “If I’m going down, I’m bringing you with me.”

Lucy was now standing behind Perry. Jimmy wrapped an arm around Lucy. Lex looked towards her. “How the wind changes so quickly and the mighty have fallen...” Lex mused.

“I’m going to have to ask you to turn around, Mr. Luthor...” Henderson approached Lex, grabbing his arm. Lex twisted free, knocking Henderson to the ground. He raced towards the exit only

to be blocked by two officers. He delivered a quick blow to their knee caps and flung them to the ground before racing out of the room.

Henderson struggled to his feet, “Don’t worry. We’ve got this place surrounded.”

“Lucy, are you okay?” Perry asked, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder. “I know you didn’t plan your wedding day to end up like this.”

“Why? Doesn’t every girl imagine being blackmailed into marrying someone they thought they loved but figured out they didn’t?” Lucy burst into tears.

“Lucy, your neck...” Jimmy gasped, seeing the bruises on her neck she’d attempted to cover up with makeup.

“I know...” she cried. “I’m usually such a good judge of character...”

“He fooled a lot of people,” Perry soothed.

“Not me,” Jimmy said defiantly. “I never trusted him.” He wrapped a supportive arm around her waist.

“Oh, my God, Clark!” Lois pointed at the streets that had been blocked off. Clark parked the Jeep in a shopping center across the street and locked it. “You don’t think Lucy actually married him do you?”

“I don’t know,” Clark said. “I hope not.” He followed her down the street as they walked up the steps of LexCorp towers.

Lucy emerged from the building with Perry and Jimmy in tow. “Lois!” Lucy wrapped her arms tightly around her sister. “Oh, my God! You’re – You’re all right...”

“It’s okay,” Lois soothed. “Are you okay? Mom said...”

“Mom...?” Lucy asked, uncertainly. “You were right. You were all right. I’m so sorry...”

“Let’s not talk about that,” Clark interjected. “What happened?”

“He tried to blackmail me into marrying him after I found some... incriminating things.” Lucy said shakily. “Then threatened to kill my family if I didn’t cooperate.” She rubbed her neck. “He paralyzed my vocal cords so I couldn’t call for help.”

“Lucy...” Lois hugged her sister tightly, “I’m so sorry. Are you okay?” Lois asked concerned.

“I should be asking you the same question,” Lucy said shakily.

In the background, a police walkie-talkie delivered a loud burst of static. “He’s headed for the Penthouse!”

Lex quickly punched several buttons at his desk, opening the doors to the balcony. The police were closing in on him. His fate was inevitable. He grabbed a notebook off his desk and placed it strategically in a hidden compartment. He then walked out on the balcony as Henderson approached.

“It’s over, Luthor. Give yourself up.”

Lex nodded, looking at the surrounding officers. He then looked at the balcony edge and climbed on it. “Lex Luthor will not live in a cage!” He turned to face the drop.

“Luthor, no,” Henderson pleaded.

Lex smiled, looking back at Henderson. “Did you know this is the tallest building in Metropolis?” Henderson watched in anticipation. “Top of the world,” Luthor muttered smugly before plummeting to his death.

“**NO!!!**” Henderson ran towards Lex but was too late. He stared at the torn fabric from Lex’s jacket that lay in his hands.

“Damn!” he shouted out, angrily.

“Oh, my God!” Lois cried as she watched the body fall from the Penthouse. Clark released his arm around Lois, trying to will his body to fly up and catch Luthor, but to no avail.

“I...I can’t...”

Lois buried herself against Clark’s chest, unwilling to watch the scene. Jimmy held Lucy close as the inevitable occurred.

One Month Later...

“Lois?” Clark called, looking through the townhome for his wife. “Honey?” He used his x-ray vision to look for her and sighed when he found her. At super-speed, he was by her side. “Lois?”

Lois looked up at him with a smile. “How’d it go?”

“Your usual.” He nodded, taking a seat next to her. “You can’t keep doing this to yourself, honey.”

“I’m not ready to let go,” Lois whispered.

Clark nodded. “I know.” He pulled her into his arms. “It’ll be okay.” He leaned down to kiss her. “Come on, we’re going to be late,” Clark said, tugging her up from the rocking chair.

“I’m moving. I’m moving,” Lois complained. “Any idea what this is all about?”

“Perry said he had some news for us.” Clark shrugged.

“I just need to get changed, then we can leave,” Lois said.

Clark watched as she walked out of the room. He looked down at the book she’d been looking at. Her book of clippings from their partnership at the Planet. He missed it just as much as she did. They’d been doing contract work off and on for different newspapers, but nothing was the same as working at the Planet. They’d had plenty of offers, but neither of them had wanted to do take any of them.

Lois looked up at the tall structure that once was the mystical Daily Planet. “I wish they’d just tear this place down. There’re too many memories here...”

“Most of them good,” Clark said.

“You two need to get rid of those long faces,” Perry drawled, approaching them from behind.

“Hi, Perry.” Lois moved to hug him.

“How are you doing?” Perry asked cautiously.

“We’re good.” Lois nodded, looking cautiously at Clark.

“That’s good. I got some news for you; I wanted to tell you in person. This seemed like the best place to tell you.” He motioned towards the Planet’s structure. “So many things started here.”

Lois smiled at Clark, bumping his hip lightly. “A lot of memories,” she agreed.

“Well, I have several bits of news.” Perry pulled out three envelopes. “The Meriwether committee met last week and you two were a shoe-in. The chairman said he hadn’t seen that kind of writing in years. The banquet is tomorrow night. Dress to impress.”

“We won?” Lois asked mutely. “I’d forgotten all about it...”

“I know...” Perry patted her shoulder. “My other piece of news is this. You two have been getting nominated for award after award lately. The piece you two did on Roarke and Harrington?” Perry prompted. “It’s been nominated for the Kerth. I want you two to seriously think about some of these offers that you have on the table right now. You may not get a second chance...”

Lois shook her head. “Nothing will be the Planet. That was my dream.”

Perry sighed. “I know. I know. I hate it that Luthor got his way in this one thing.”

A voice behind him bellowed, “He didn’t!”

Perry, Lois, and Clark turned to see a large truck and crane carrying the globe of the Daily Planet. Franklin Stern sat in the driver’s seat of the truck. “Look!”

“Great shades of Elvis!” Perry shouted, approaching Franklin Stern with a grin on his face.

“We’ll start on the building next week, but first I thought we’d announce to the world we’re back in business. I reconsidered your proposal. I agree with you, Mr. White. Metropolis needs the Daily Planet. Besides one more nail in Lex Luthor’s coffin will suit me just fine.” Stern stepped out of the truck and Perry shook his hand eagerly.

“You won’t regret this, Mr. Stern,” Perry smiled broadly.

“There were some ideas I had about modernization,” Mr. Stern added.

“Modernization?” Perry asked wearily.

“Yes, improvements, expansions... Would you like to see the plans?” Mr. Stern pulled out the blueprints from his truck.

“Now, Mr. Stern! Wait, just a doggone minute here...” Perry followed Mr. Stern as he rolled out the plans.

Lois and Clark watched in amusement. Lois wiped a few tears out of her eyes. “All is right in the world,” she said, looking up at the globe that stood where it once had for so many years.

Clark nodded, looking at Lois. “I’ve never seen anything more beautiful in my life.”

Lois smiled, turning to face Clark. “You are amazing, you know that?”

“How so?” he asked.

Lois linked her arms around his neck, leaning in for a kiss. “Well, a little over a year ago I was a stubborn workaholic who never would have thought twice about not having a family... Now here we are,” she whispered against his lips.

Clark noticed the sadness in her eyes. “We’re going to be okay, sweetheart.”

Lois looked up at him with a watery smile. “I know. It’s just. I can’t let go. I can’t let go of Jordan. I keep on having these dreams that he’s out there somewhere crying for me...” Clark wrapped his arms securely around her.

“I know,” he reassured her. “It’s hard, but we’ll get through this.” He leaned down to capture her lips, cupping her cheek as he deepened the kiss. “We’ll get through this together just like we’ve gotten through everything else.”

Perry cleared his throat as he approached. “I almost forgot in all the excitement. Lois, this came for you from the Kerth Committee.” Perry handed her an envelope.

“What is it?” Lois asked, taking the envelope curiously.

Perry just smiled. “Read it and find out.”

Lois opened the letter and read: “Dear, Ms. Lane, It has come to our attention that a wrong has been done against you. The story that was run under the by-line of Claude Cluny was, in fact, your story. It is with our deepest apology that we offer you a chance to right this wrong and invite you to our Kerth ceremony this next season to claim what is rightfully yours. Good luck and thank you. The Kerth Committee.”

Lois looked up from the letter, glancing between the two men that had made this possible. Perry stood in front of her with a broad smile. She gave him a peck on the cheek and a hug. “Thank you.” Before Clark even had a chance to react, she wrapped her arms securely around him, pulling him in for a passionate kiss. “Both of you,” she whispered.

Nigel puffed his cigar as he watched the news of Lex Luthor’s death once more on the television. It seemed to be the only thing anyone wanted to discuss anymore. “Do you think they’d be making such a fuss if they knew Lex Luthor wasn’t the Boss?” Nigel asked.

Bill Church laughed. “All this time he never knew...”

“No, he was just a pawn. I made him think he was in control.” Nigel laughed. “Now we can discuss merging Intergang with my organization.”

“I don’t think so,” Bill Church said, coughing slightly.

“Something wrong?” Nigel asked amused.

“I...” Bill Church began coughing, bringing his hand to his throat, “I...I...” He began coughing hysterically, gasping for breath as he wheezed out, “I can’t breathe.”

“It might have something to do with the drug I slipped into your scotch.... Tsk. Tsk Tsk. A man with a heart condition shouldn’t drink, Bill,” Nigel scolded.

“You...can’t...”

“Your throat is swelling up. Your heart is hammering like a

stallion. Soon you will have a heart attack and you will die. Then I will push your son out of the way and I will run Metropolis the way it's supposed to be run." Nigel smiled. "Have a nice death," Nigel whispered before turning to leave. Bill Church fell to the floor in pain.

On the outskirts of town, a small baby cried. A young woman watched as she rocked the baby to sleep. The baby she'd always wanted was here. "Hush little baby don't say a word. Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird. And if that mockingbird don't sing, Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring. And if that diamond ring turns brass, Mama's gonna buy you a looking glass. And if that looking glass gets broke, Mama's gonna buy you a billy goat. And if that billy goat won't pull, Mama's gonna buy you a cart and bull. And if that cart and bull turn over, Mama's gonna buy you a dog named Rover. And if that dog named Rover won't bark, Mama's gonna buy you a horse and cart. And if that horse and cart fall down, you'll still be the sweetest baby in town."

THE END

To Be Continued in "[When Churches Come Crashing Down](#)"