

# Rules of Guilt

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Summary: In the next installment of the “*Rules*” series, Lois and Clark work with Mayson Drake to stop Jimmy from being framed for murder. After a close brush with death, Mayson’s federal investigation into Resurrection, a drug being used to help break prisoners out of prison brings a DEA Agent, Dan Scardino to town...who seems smitten with Lois as she ponders over a certain question from Clark. (6 of 10)

Story Size: 32,868 words (182Kb as text)

This story continues on from “[Rules of Love](#).” View the [complete list of stories here](#).

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## Previously On Rules of Love...

Lois stared up at the large white globe-shaped building in front of them. “You brought me all the way to Hawaii to look at an observatory?”

“Not just any observatory. Maua Kea Observatory. It’s supposed to be the best place in the world to look at the stars,” he said with a smile. “Besides your last visit to an observatory didn’t turn out that bad, did it?”

“Well, no...” she said, following him up the steps. “Is this one of those weird Smallville quirks?”

He laughed, holding the lantern in his hand as they approached the front door. To her surprise, a man was waiting at the front who seemed to recognize Clark. “Makai Kent. Everything set.” He pointed to a door in the dimly lit lobby they stood in and nodded.

“Thank you,” Clark said with a smile.

Lois watched the man return to his desk and then looked at Clark suspiciously as he led her to the door that would open up to who knew what. “Something tells me you planned this mysterious adventure.”

“Well, I can’t give away all my secrets.” He grinned back at her as he opened the door for her.

She stepped inside, taking a breath as she looked up at the large circular glass-paned ceiling where hundreds of stars shone brightly back at her. “Wow.” The entire room was lit up by the white, sparkling gems painting the clear night sky through the glass.

“Pretty amazing, huh?” he whispered in her ear.

She glanced to the corner of the room and saw a picnic basket set up in the corner—much like their first date at the Metropolis Observatory several months ago. “A picnic, huh?” She smiled back at him. “You don’t have any other earth-shattering news to share, do you?”

“It’s just dessert. Come on.” He tugged her arm gently, pulling her into the center of the room. She took a seat next to him on the blanket that was folded out next to a large telescope. He pulled a small box from the basket and opened it, revealing several assorted fruits dipped in chocolate of one kind or another. “Here.” He offered her a chocolate covered strawberry dipped in crushed nuts.

“These are delicious.” She took a bite, looking around at the starlit room then turned back to Clark who was watching her with a smile on his face. “What?” she asked self-consciously under his gaze.

“Nothing,” he murmured, taking a bite of his own chocolate-covered fruit. “Enjoying the view.”

She blushed, seeing his gaze was still directed at her and tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear. He’d done the impossible on this mini vacation. Made her forget the trauma from last night and this past week. He’d recreated their first date in the middle of paradise and had been the perfect gentleman throughout all of it. She had come to discover that was just Clark. He found joy from doing things like this that made her happy. She had fallen for him so completely and sitting here with him underneath the starlit sky she couldn’t think of anywhere else she’d rather be.

“This is pretty incredible that you put all this effort in for one evening,” she began cautiously, feeling her heart rate hike a bit. “Thank you. I think we both needed to get away and this”—he gestured to the room—“is amazing.”

“You’re amazing, Lois.” She met his gaze, feeling the heat from it hit her like a wave. His hand brushed against her cheek again, and he whispered, “I love you, Lois.”

“I love you too,” she said, looking up at him.

“I don’t think I could have gotten through these past few days without you.” He cracked a smile, “Or even these past few months. I know it’s only been four months since I brought you to the Metropolis Planetarium and let you in on my biggest secret.”

“You trying to go for a do-over?” she asked, looking at him quizzically, trying to break the tension with a joke. He seemed really nervous about whatever it was he was trying to say.

“No, it’s nothing like that,” he reassured her, taking her hand in his.

“What is it?” she asked, looking at him in concern.

“Lois, you’re everything to me.” His fingers wedged themselves between hers, tightening into a joined fist as he continued, “You save me from myself so many times. Everything I’m able to do...every life I save, I’m able to do that because of you. I honestly don’t think Superman would exist without you.”

She awarded him a smile. “Somehow I doubt you’d be able to stand by and not help when needed.” She reached up to stroke his cheek.

“Yeah, maybe,” He looked up at her, meeting her gaze slowly. “Lois, these past few months have been the best months of my life. I can’t imagine my life without you in it. You’ve been my best friend for so long. For a long time, I thought the scariest thing would be to let you in on what I thought to be the most dangerous secret known to man. You could have walked away, but you didn’t.” He stroked her cheek, and she felt a flutter in her stomach as she let him continue.

“You forgave me,” he whispered, running his palm along her jawline. “I know it couldn’t have been easy, and I know we’ve had our ups and downs these past months, but I want you to know how much I love you...how much I need you. Every day I wake up, and I still can’t believe how lucky I am to have you in my life.” He cracked a smile at her as he continued, “Even if you did try and push me out repeatedly in the beginning.

She laughed, toying with the collar of his shirt. “You were beginning to get to me. I wasn’t very good at letting people in back then.”

“I noticed.” His eyes twinkled with laughter behind them, but his tone remained serious as he continued, “I love everything about you, Lois Lane. I love how passionate you get when trying to right a wrong that’s been done. I love the way you never give up on anyone...even if they don’t deserve it. I love your laugh, your smile...every tear and frown that makes you, you.”

He ran his hand down her shoulder and smiled ruefully at her as he took her other hand in his. “I know there are probably a thousand reasons why I should just stop there...” His voice wavered slightly. “But I can’t because...” he took a deep breath, “we agreed no more secrets. This is something I’ve wanted to ask for months now. I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.” He pulled out a small velvet box from his pocket.

“Clark...” She moved her hand to her mouth in surprise, uncertain how to process what was happening.

He opened the box and pointed it at her. The solitaire diamond stared back at her with a glimmer. She met his gaze, still trying to process what was happening when she heard him finally speak the six-word phrase she knew to be coming. “Lois Lane, will you marry me?”

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### Teaser

“Clark...” She moved her hand to her mouth in surprise, uncertain how to process what was happening.

He opened the box and pointed it at her. The solitaire diamond stared back at her with a glimmer. She met his gaze, still trying to process what was happening when she heard him finally speak the six-word phrase she knew to be coming. “Lois Lane, will you marry me?”

She could feel tears burning in the corner of her eyes as she gazed back at Clark. A proposal. He was proposing? A thousand thoughts raced through her mind as she tried to focus on the question before her. Marriage? Were they ready for something like that? Was she?

“I...” She found her voice behind the boulder-sized lump that had formed in the back of her throat. “I don’t know what to say.” She did her best to choose her words carefully, uncertain how to react. A part of her wanted to say *yes* but the other part of her...the more logical part kept hounding her with all the doubts she carried inside after her recent failed marriage attempt.

He stood to his feet and stroked her cheek, looking at her with the same tenderness he always did. “You don’t have to say anything now.” He cracked a smile at her. “I know it’s still...”

“It just feels like...a lot,” she said, giving him a pleading look. “I love you. I just don’t know if we’re ready for that big of a step and with everything...”

“I understand.” He smiled at her. “Just think about it, okay?”

She felt a wave of relief hit her and nodded. “Okay.”

He leaned in to kiss her. She smiled against his lips, feeling the familiar flutter in the pit of her stomach as he pulled away. His eyes met hers for a moment, and she could tell he was debating internally before he spoke. He pointed to the telescope that was set up in the middle of the room, “This is one of the only places in the world where you can see both the northern and southern hemisphere stars at the same time,” he explained, adjusting the settings on the telescope for her to look in. “Take a look.”

She leaned forward, peering through the telescope to see the crystal gems reflecting back at her from the night sky. Each star shone with its own brightness. “This is incredible.” She smiled, looking up at him.

“Yeah, it is.” He smiled back at her. “Here, I want to show you something.” He pointed to the large glass-paned window again. “You see the bright light there.” He pointed to the right.

“Yeah?” She nodded, leaning back against him as his arms wrapped around her from behind.

“That’s Jupiter.” He pointed to the bottom left and whispered, “That’s Mars.”

She smiled, feeling the heat from his breath against the nape of her neck. “No Venus?”

“Not at this time of the year.” He grinned back at her. “Right there?” He pointed to the corner of the glass pane. “That’s called the Southern Cross.” He looked up at her with a smile. “It’s one of the few places that you can see the entire constellation without going into the southern hemisphere...”

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Perry White sat at his desk, staring at the two visitors in his office with a heavy sigh. Jimmy Olsen was standing in the corner of his office with two uniformed officers standing behind him. “I’m not sure I follow...” Perry let out a low sigh.

Mayson looked down at the report in her hand. “At nine

seventeen, Jimmy Olsen was let into the house to deliver a *Desk Friend* to Mr. Borges, and fifteen minutes later the housekeeper found Mr. Borges dead. Jimmy was the last to see him alive.” She stared coldly back at Perry.

“That doesn’t prove anything though, Mayson,” Perry pleaded with her. “You know Jimmy. He would never do something like this.”

“That’s why we’re having this conversation here and not downtown,” Inspector Henderson chimed in. “There’s a very solid case here against Jimmy. Now, I can hold off the police chief for seventy-two hours before I make an arrest, but if I were you, I’d look into finding a lawyer and try and figure out who might want to frame Mr. Olsen.”

“So you admit you think he’s being framed,” Perry pointed out.

“Yes, but if the DA says to press charges there isn’t anything we can do,” Mayson interjected. “The fact of the matter is there is a very solid case against Jimmy.”

“Okay, thank you,” Perry said, standing up.

“Don’t leave town,” Henderson warned, looking at Jimmy as he left.

“Chief?” Jimmy began stammering. “I would never...”

“I know that Jimmy,” Perry grunted, watching Mayson and Henderson leave. “Now look we’ve got a little time. Let’s pull our resources and start digging into what’s going on here.” He looked out into the newsroom. “Lois or Clark show up yet?”

“Uh, no,” Jimmy said warily. “Lois called earlier said they’d be a little late getting in. Jet lag.”

“Okay, when they get in, have Lois and Clark come see me,” Perry ordered. “I’ll make some calls and get a lawyer from Legal to come down to talk to us.”

“Chief, I can’t afford...” Jimmy stammered.

“Just breathe, son,” Perry reassured him, patting him on the shoulder. “Breathe.”

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### Chapter 1

“Wow.”

“Yeah,” Lois said, taking a sip of her coffee.

“Wow,” Lucy repeated.

Lois looked up at her sister who was staring back at her expectantly. “You said that already, Luce.” She let out a defeated sigh, glancing around the semi-crowded coffee shop she’d met Lucy at this morning.

She and Clark had gotten back home yesterday evening, and Lucy had still been in class. This was the first chance she’d had to see her and catch up on everything that had been going on since Christmas. Lucy had been holed away studying since the new semester had started.

Lucy took a sip of her coffee, toying with the paper label on her cup as she asked, “So, what did you say?”

“I said I’d think about it,” Lois grumbled uneasily, burying her head in her hands. “I feel like a complete idiot. I mean I didn’t even realize what was happening until he pulled out the ring and...” She groaned, shaking her head. “I’m a moron.”

<< “I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.” >>

Lucy set her cup of coffee down and shook her head. “You’re not a moron you were just...surprised.” Lois wasn’t sure if she should take the skeptical tone in her sister’s voice to heart. She let out a low grumble as Lucy continued, “Look, you’ve been through a lot this past year. I’m sure Clark understands that.”

“I know he does”—Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair—“but that’s the problem right there.”

“What?” Lucy asked, not following her train of thought.

Lois met her sister’s gaze with an exasperated breath as she explained softly, “He understands, and he gets me, and I really love him, but...”

“But what?” Lucy prompted, reaching her hand over to grab Lois’ hand. “What’s the problem? He seems like a great guy, and you guys seem happy. He’s not pressuring you for an answer so what’s the issue?”

“Me.” Lois frowned, shaking her head. “I’m the problem. Every relationship I’ve had has ended up on the list of federal disasters.” She scowled as she added bitterly, “Especially my last one with Lex.”

“So that’s what this is about,” Lucy said suddenly, scooting her chair over to put an arm around her. “Lois, what is Lex’s favorite color?”

“What?” Lois wrinkled her nose at her, uncertain what she was talking about. “I don’t know.”

“Favorite food?” Lucy prompted carefully.

“I don’t know.” Lois could hear the bite in her own voice as she glared at her sister.

“Okay, what’s Clark’s favorite color?” Lucy prodded, looking at her with a smile.

“This is ridiculous,” Lois shot back. Lucy gave her a *Come on* look, and she sighed, “Fine. Blue.”

“Favorite food?” Lucy asked with a grin.

“Kind of hard to pick.” Lois sighed. “He seems to like pasta and rice dishes a lot though.”

“I rest my case,” Lucy said with a proud grin.

“Your case?” Lois looked at her exasperated.

“You’re afraid of getting hurt again,” Lucy explained. “Lex hurt you in a bad way, but you can’t compare what he did to Clark. You know Clark. He knows you. He’s giving you the option. So, think about it, sis. Really think about it.”

“I have,” Lois said, glancing over at her sister with a sigh. “Believe me, I’ve done nothing but think about it. It’s just...”

“What?” Lucy asked.

“I wanted to say yes. Believe me, you have no idea how bad I wanted to, but Luce... This is forever. I mean, I love him but what if it’s not enough? Look what happened to mom and dad. They hate each other.” Lois looked down at her coffee, stirring it with the small white and red straw as she spoke, “I just don’t think I could go through that kind of heartache again.”

“Yeah, but mom and dad had a different kind of relationship than you guys have or... anyone has for that matter.” Lucy gave her a wry expression. “Besides, are you really going to let a great guy slip away because of how screwed up our parents are?” Lois groaned, uncertain how to respond and Lucy tightened her arm around her. “I think you need to do less thinking and a little more talking... with Clark.”

“We’ve kinda been avoiding the subject,” Lois said guiltily. “Or at least I have.”

“Well, maybe it’s time to stop,” Lucy pressed, giving her a tight hug.

“You sound like you’ve gotten pretty wise these past few months.” Lois smiled at her.

“Therapy. Lots and *lots* of therapy.” Lucy smiled back at her. “Dr. Friskin’s really helped me sort through a lot of stuff with Johnny and with mom and dad.” She was quiet for a moment and then added, “Lois, I just want you to be happy. If Clark makes you happy, then take a leap of faith. Sitting here fretting over his proposal and avoiding it isn’t going to get you the answers you need though. Sit him down and talk to him. You guys have the advantage of being able to talk to one another about anything because you were friends first. So *talk*.”

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Mayson Drake looked at the small blue capsule in her hand with a frown. She set it down in the small plastic bag it had been in before. If this information she’d received from Anita Rogers was accurate, then Metropolis was in a lot of danger.

She reached for the phone and began to dial, waiting for the operator to connect. “Yes, I’d like to speak to Agent Richards.

This is Mayson Drake with the Metropolis New Troy District Attorney’s office.” She waited for the line to be transferred and then heard the familiar voice on the other line.

“Ms. Drake? It’s been quite some time.”

“Yes, it has, Andy.” She leaned back in her seat. “You heard about the threat?”

“Intergang placed a mark on your head,” Andy responded with a grim tone. “Seems you’re barking up the right trees.”

“Well, I’ve definitely stumbled onto something, but I’m going to need your help.”

“I’m listening...” he ventured.

“How soon can you have a DEA agent down here?”

“Within the hour. Why?” he asked.

“I’ll explain more when your agent gets here, but we’ve got a serious problem. A drug being given to inmates. Intergang’s found a unique way to break them out of prison.”

“I’ll have my best guy on the plane within the hour,” he said.

“Thanks, Andy,” Mayson said, hanging up the phone.

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Marriage.

It felt like it was this looming cloud hanging over Lois, ready to downpour on everything. She couldn’t think. She couldn’t sleep. All she could think about was the question Clark had asked her this weekend. He claimed to understand that she needed time, but she still wasn’t sure. He hadn’t brought it up after his proposal. They’d had an enjoyable weekend together, and much-needed escape from Metropolis after Lex Luthor’s rise from the dead. But in the back of her mind, all she could focus on was the question he’d asked.

She stepped into the newsroom, her coffee from the coffee cart in hand as she made her way to the desk. The usually upbeat bullpen appeared to be in a quiet lull. Her conversation with Lucy still replayed in her mind. She was right. She knew she was right. The only way to get rid of the doubts and fears plaguing her mind was to talk to Clark, but starting that conversation seemed nearly impossible.

She took her seat at her desk and started her computer up, preparing to dive into the follow-up on Lex Luthor’s arrest. There was still no sign of Gretchen Kelly or Nigel St. John from what she’d been able to gather from the news circuits in Hawaii. The mystery of how Lex had risen from the dead remained, but she was sure Gretchen Kelly was connected somehow.

<< “I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.” >>

She spotted a single long-stemmed rose on her desk with a note attached to it that read simply, ‘*Love Clark*’. She sighed, setting the note down and reaching for her coffee to take another sip. She glanced across the aisle, noting the absence of her partner. She scanned the newsroom and spotted him in Perry’s office with a worried expression on his face. Intrigued, she stood up from her desk and walked to the editor’s office to find out what was going on.

Upon seeing the serious faces on both Clark and Perry’s faces, she tried to lighten the mood with a joke. “Who died?”

“Raul Borges,” Perry answered glumly, pointing at the door. “Close the door.”

“Raul who?” Lois asked, closing the door behind her.

“The guy they think Jimmy killed this weekend,” Clark said in a solemn tone.

“*What!?*” Lois exclaimed in surprise. “That’s ridiculous!”

“That’s what I said,” Perry countered with a grunt.

“Mayson and Bill Henderson are giving him seventy-two hours before they officially charge him,” Clark explained with a resigned sigh.

“Which is why whatever you two are working on is going to have to take a backseat. I want this to be your number one priority.” Perry handed her a file to go over. “This is everything

we know. Your job is to find out who's behind this and why."

"You got it, Chief," Clark said, placing a hand on her shoulder as he spoke.

She looked over her shoulder at him, meeting his gaze as they headed back into the bullpen together. She hadn't seen him since last night when he'd brought her back from their tropical vacation. Had it really only been three days ago that they were celebrating Lex Luthor's arrest and preparing for a long weekend away together? It felt so long ago. So much had changed between them.

"So, where do you want to start?" she asked as they approached her desk.

"I guess we should start with Lucky Leon," Clark said, pointing to the file in her hand. "Talk to him and go from there."

"Yeah, we should probably talk to that housekeeper too. Find out if she left anything out when talking to the police," she said, grabbing her purse and coat. "Let's go."

"After you." He gestured for her to lead the way to the elevator.

"Right." Lois nodded, heading toward the steps leading up to the elevator.

<< "I know there are probably a thousand reasons why I should just stop there..." >>

Marriage. The word continued to loom over her like an anvil as she climbed the steps in front of her. All weekend they hadn't talked about it. They hadn't said anything, but she knew he was thinking about it too. How could he not? It was all she seemed to be able to think of.

<< "Lois Lane, will you marry me?" >>

<< "Just think about it, okay?" >>

They reached the elevator, and she reached over to press the call button. She felt a slight blush cross her cheeks as she recalled the last time she and Clark had been in the Daily Planet elevator together. She glanced back at him, noting the fact that he seemed engrossed in the file he was flipping through while they were waiting.

<< "You're not fine. I'm not fine. This is not fine." >>

The elevator chimed, announcing the arrival of the car and they stepped inside. He closed the file in his hand and reached over to press the button for the lobby. How had things changed so drastically between them in just three days? A little over seventy-two hours ago they'd been unable to keep their hands off one another, now there seemed to be this uncomfortable wall between them—neither one wanted to say what they knew the other was thinking.

"So, anything interesting?" she asked, pointing to the file in his hands, hoping that the distraction of the investigation into Raul Borges' murder would help. As it was, they both seemed to be having a hard time finding a way to talk to one another. Though she knew Clark was concerned about Jimmy—she was too. It didn't feel the same. Nothing felt the same.

"Whoever's behind this seems to be going out of their way to frame Jimmy." Clark frowned. "I just can't understand why."

Lois nodded. "I'm sure we'll get to the bottom of it." She let out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding. "We always do."

"Yeah." He flashed her a smile and moved to cup her cheek. "I guess we do." She felt a flutter in her stomach as he leaned closer. "First time you didn't beat me into the office this morning."

She grinned back at him, fingering the lapels on his jacket. "I guess I was recovering from this weekend."

His eyes twinkled as he prompted, "Recovering, huh?" His mouth twitched into a half-smile, and he leaned in to kiss her. She sighed against him, feeling her body relax against him as his lips caressed hers, lingering for a moment more before pulling away.

She met his gaze, reaching up to stroke his cheek. "Thank you for the rose." She bit her lower lip uncertain if she should bring it up. It was all she could think about right now. "What's the

occasion?"

"Does there have to be one?" he asked, brushing his lips against hers before pulling away with a smile.

"Well, no." She grinned back at him shyly. "It's just usually when a guy gives a girl flowers there's a reason behind it."

"Well, I saw them at the florist this morning, and I thought you'd like one," he whispered.

"Okay," she whispered, still uncertain if there had been an ulterior motive to the rose on her desk. All she seemed to be able to do since Friday night was think about that question he'd asked her. It had been perfect. He said all the right things and done all the right things but given the recent reminder of just how bad her judgment could be she was scared to take that leap of faith. She knew she loved Clark. She loved him more than she thought she could love anyone, but was it enough? Was she capable of loving someone that much... forever?

She twisted her mouth for a moment and added, "I know you think I'm not thinking about it. Just because I'm not talking about it doesn't mean I'm not thinking about it."

"I didn't say anything," he argued with a shrug, releasing her from his arms. "Is that why you've been acting so weird this morning?"

"I have not been acting weird," she countered half-heartedly, meeting the *yeah right* expression on his face with a lighthearted scowl. "Okay, maybe I was. It's just... this is big and I..."

"Lois... Getting married's a big step," he began carefully. "I said I'd wait. I will wait."

She twisted her mouth, watching him carefully before responding, "I'm glad you understand."

"Of course." He grinned back at her before adding with a light chuckle, "Now, if I were the paranoid type, I might think you'd been avoiding the whole thing."

"Avoid it?" She let out a soft giggle. "No, of course, I'm not trying to avoid it I..." The elevator chimed, and she pointed. "That's our floor. We should get going."

She heard Clark chuckle behind her. "It's... great you're not avoiding it, Lois. It makes me very, *very* happy to hear that."

She was about to shoot him a look when Jimmy walked into the lobby and approached them with a depressed expression on his face. "Hey, Jimmy." She gave him a sympathetic look. "How are you doing?"

Jimmy slumped his shoulders with a sigh, following them to the corner of the lobby away from prying eyes and ears. "How do you think?" He shook his head. "I just had my first meeting with the lawyer Perry found." He let out a snort of disgust. "Man, I don't know how I'm going to afford this. Even if I do manage to clear my name, there's no way..."

"Jimmy, I'm sure there's something that can be done," Clark reassured him, placing a supportive hand on his shoulder. "In the meantime, Lois and I are going to look into this and see what we can find out."

"Thanks, guys." Jimmy managed a weak smile. "I just can't understand any of this."

"We'll get to the bottom of it," Lois reassured him.

Jimmy flashed his best smile at them both. "I know you will." He let out a sigh. "Listen, I've gotta get going. I promised the Chief I'd update him." He pointed to the elevator.

"Okay, we were just on our way to talk to Lucky Leon and Borges' housekeeper," Clark said, pointing to the door. "We'll catch up later."

Jimmy smiled weakly at them as he stepped into the elevator. "You're the best." He gave a final wave before the elevator doors closed.

Lois sighed, turning to look back up at Clark. "You think he's going to be okay?"

"Would you be?" he asked, shaking his head. "I think the sooner we get to the bottom of this the sooner Jimmy will be able

to get a good night's sleep.”

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Clark glanced up at the wall-length windows on the front of the building that read, *'Lucky Leon Inc'* and shook his head when he saw the cheesy billboard sign pointing to the back of the building, advertising the *Desk Friend*. He made a face, pointing at the billboard. “Think this guy goes overboard with his advertising?”

Lois let out a soft giggle. “I’m sure, but it doesn’t seem to have hurt him any.” She gestured to the spacious office as they reached the top step.

“Still, you gotta wonder who comes up with these ideas.” Clark pointed to the models on display as he followed Lois inside the empty lobby. One display read, *'Desk Friend'* and another *'Shower Friend'* with a picture of a model in a bikini behind the display.

Lois groaned. “What is it with women in bikinis and advertising?”

Clark quickly diverted his attention elsewhere to prevent her from going on another tirade. “This one’s new.” He pointed to the display that read, *'Golf Friend.'* There was a cardboard cutout of Tom Lehman behind it.

“Golf Friend?” Lois read the sign aloud with a roll of the eyes. “Of all the cheesy...”

A loud voice with a strong Russian accent interrupted her sentence. “Yes, may I help you?”

Clark suppressed a chuckle when he noticed Lois clamp her mouth shut turning to face Lucky Leon himself. “Mr. Leon, is it?” Clark pointed to the poster on the wall behind him. “I recognized you from your ads. I’m Clark Kent. This is my partner, Lois Lane. We’re with...”

“The *Daily Planet*. Yes, yes, I’ve read your work.” He nodded, taking a bite of his apple as he motioned for them to follow. They followed him into his office and watched as he made a beeline for his desk, snatching a piece of paper off the pad.

“We’re sorry, but there wasn’t any secretary around,” Lois said, pointing back at the lobby.

“Yes, it’s no problem. Please sit.” He pointed to the chairs in front of his desk. He then plucked an orange from the fruit bowl in front of him. “Would you like an orange? They’re only sixty-nine cents a pound. Please, take as many as you want!”

“Uh, no thank you.” Lois interrupted, shaking her head, but Leon continued to talk.

“When I was a boy, back in the Ukraine, I saw them only on holidays; and then I had to share with my sister.” Leon flashed them a smile.

Clark forced a smile back but noticed the slight hike in Leon’s heart rate as he spoke. What could he possibly have to hide? He cleared his throat, trying to steer the conversation on the topic at hand, “Um, we’d like to ask you a few questions about a customer of yours... Raul Borges?”

Leon ignored the question and grabbed a banana from the bowl. “Or how about a banana? I was twenty-five before I tasted my first one. Now I’m an addict!”

“Mr. Leon...” Lois interjected with a forced polite smile.

Leon placed the fruit back in the bowl and smiled at her. “Oh, I apologize, but this truly is the land of plenty!” He pointed to the pictures of on the wall behind him. One was of the new-looking factory, and the other was of an old small one that looked to be run-down. “Five years ago I started in a run-down factory. Now I have one ten times as large! However, I’m afraid I don’t know your Mr. Borges. Fortunately, we have a lot of customers.”

Clark exchanged a look with Lois, and she nodded. “Yes, well, this one is dead. The police believe he may have been murdered by an employee of yours... Jimmy Olsen.”

Leon looked up in surprise. “Have they caught him?”

“They’re still investigating,” Clark explained evenly, noting

the slight hike Leon’s heart rate took at that information.

“That’s what’s great about America, innocent ‘til proven guilty. Back where I come from, it’s shoot first, search for evidence later.” Leon flashed them a broad smile. “But what about Raul Borges?”

Clark nodded. “Yes. Since Raul Borges was murdered, we were hoping you might be able to share any records you may have on him?”

Lois flashed a pleading smile. “Yes, unfortunately, the house he was renting didn’t keep records, and the housekeeper didn’t speak English very well.”

Leon nodded his understanding and shrugged. “Quite frankly, I don’t know what information we might have that can help. But I can make a copy of what we have. Wait just a moment.” He stood up and headed into the lobby, calling over his shoulder, “Oh, and try the kiwi fruit. Delicious!”

Lois watched him leave then bolted out of her chair to look at the notepad on Leon’s desk. “Lois, what are you doing?” Clark asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Here. Read it.” She handed it to him.

“What?” He looked at her in surprise.

“You know.” She pointed to his glasses motioning for him to scan the paper.

“I don’t even know what I’m looking for,” he pointed out.

“Just give it a little buzz-buzz and take a look.” She shrugged. “I’ve seen you do it a hundred times.”

He lowered his glasses and muttered, “Just for the record buzz-buzz is not exactly the right term to be using when referring to x-ray vision.”

“Fine.” She shrugged, “Scan it. X-ray it. Whatever. Just tell me what he had on that paper.”

“Why do you insist on snooping on everyone we interview?” He sighed as he lowered his glasses to scan the pad. “First the housekeeper...”

“She had a weird look,” Lois retorted. “I’m trying to help Jimmy. Besides, you saw how quickly he grabbed that paper. He didn’t want us to see whatever he was writing.”

“Okay, yes, I’ll admit he seems a bit...squirrely, but that doesn’t mean...” He stopped when he saw the note he’d uncovered, *'Arrive 1:15 pm. Route 128'* and jotted it down, tearing the paper from the pad and handing it to her.

“Thank you.” She leaned up to kiss him.

He shook his head. “I’m not going on a wild goose chase. We need to...”

“Ms. Lane...” Leon’s voice from the doorway caused them both to jump. Leon was holding a long printout in his hand shaking his head. “I see that neither you nor Mr. Kent have ever ordered any of my products.”

Lois quickly shoved the paper in Clark’s hand from behind and lied, “But I’ve been meaning to. The, uh, Golf Friend; is this new?” She pointed to the setup Leon had in the corner of his office.

“Yes. It’s my latest. Go ahead, take a swing. I know, they seem incredibly tacky, but... they work!” Leon flashed her a smile.

Lois took the golf club Leon handed her and took a swing. Clark turned to Leon. “And you design all of these?”

“Every last one of them. I love it,” Leon said proudly, handing the printout to Clark. “Now as to Mr. Borges...” He pointed to the printout. “He ordered one Desk Friend, for thirty-nine ninety-five, eight days ago. Not the top of the line, but our bestseller. Paid by credit card. But that’s all he’s ordered, and he hasn’t bought from us before.”

The electronic voice from the Golf Friend shouted, “Hey, who let Greg Norman in here?!”

Leon made a face and Clark smiled. “Thanks. Sorry to trouble you.”

“Not a problem,” Leon said, waving them toward the door.

“And if you have any more questions, feel free to call.”

They made their way out the door, and Lois turned to him. “Quick! What’s he doing?”

Clark turned around and scanned the now-closed office door and saw Leon press a button to reveal a wall of television monitors with different people on it. “I’ll meet you in the car,” he said pointing to his ear. She nodded, and he began to listen in.

“Progress report?” an elderly man on the first screen requested.

“Lane and Kent just left. So far they’ve done just as I predicted. It’s all going to work out, trust me,” Leon said.

“We trust no one,” the man said.

“You want me to pull the plug? No problem. Then you won’t get the shipment, and you can forget about holding the world hostage!” Leon threatened menacingly.

“No one backs out of an Intergang deal,” the man warned angrily.

“Then leave me alone!” Leon shouted.

“We don’t even know the details of how you’re going to do it!” the man argued.

“Simple. I’m going to get Lois Lane to trick Superman into stealing the shipment for us,” Leon responded with a laugh before hitting a button on the remote in his hand.

“That’s what you think,” Clark muttered to himself. He debated for a moment if he should have Superman make an unannounced visit to the factory, then decided clearing Jimmy’s name was more important. At least now he knew for sure Lucky Leon couldn’t be trusted and what his plan was. He just had to figure out how to stay one step ahead of him, so he and Lois didn’t fall into his trap.

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## Chapter 2

Clark groaned as he followed Lois up the City Hall steps. Lois was still muttering under her breath about the idea of being tricked into helping Intergang with anything. “Unbelievable morons...”

“Lois, you need to calm down,” he said, catching up with her at the top of the stairs.

“Calm down?” she echoed, glaring at him. “Some maniac is trying to steal a shipment so Intergang can hold the world hostage.” She pointed out, flailing her arms around as they entered the double doors to City Hall. “Not only that but they think they can...”

“Lane, Kent, what are you doing here?” Bill Henderson asked, cornering them in the lobby before they could reach the elevators.

“Doing what you should be doing, Henderson. Investigating.” Lois gave him a pointed look. “You know Jimmy didn’t do this.”

“Lois!” Clark chastised with an internal groan.

Henderson rolled his eyes at her remark. “I’m going to ignore that comment because I know you’re under a lot of stress after last week.” He pointed to the door. “For what it’s worth, I do hope you find whoever’s behind this and soon.”

“Actually, we think we might have,” Clark interjected.

Henderson stopped, looking at them expectantly. “Don’t you two work fast.”

“We think it was Lucky Leon,” Lois blurted out. “Go ahead. Bring him in for questioning.”

Henderson gave her a dubious look. “And what proof would I be bringing him in on?”

Clark sighed. “We don’t have any, but we do have our suspicions about him. He seemed very uneasy when we mentioned Jimmy hadn’t been arrested yet. He also was very quick to change the subject when Raul Borges’ name was brought up.”

Henderson nodded. “I still don’t see the world’s most obnoxious infomercial being behind this, Kent.”

“Same could have been said about Lex Luthor, but look where he’s sitting now,” Lois pointed out. “It’s no better than your theory that Jimmy killed Borges.”

Henderson snorted. “Except the overwhelming evidence that Jimmy was the last one to see Mr. Borges?”

“Says, one person,” Lois retorted.

“Okay, okay, okay,” Clark interjected, sensing Lois was about to go on another tirade. “I think he gets it, Lois.”

“I’ll try and talk to him after the forensics report comes back on Borges. I should know something by the end of the day,” Henderson said with a sigh.

“Thanks,” Clark called after him as Henderson headed out the door. He guided Lois over to the elevators. “You can’t keep jumping down everyone’s throat like that. They could easily go arrest Jimmy if you antagonize everyone enough.”

“Henderson is not going to arrest Jimmy,” Lois shot back. “He knows he’s innocent.”

“He will if he has an arrest warrant to serve.” Clark pointed out, pressing the call button on the elevator. “I want his name cleared as much as you do but we’ve got to be smart about this.”

“Really? Have you figured out how you’re going to explain to the number one member of the *I-Hate-Superman Club* how he just happened to overhear a conversation with Intergang and Lucky Leon?” she inquired with a questioning gaze. He shook his head, uncertain how to respond. “Uh-huh, this oughta be fun,” she said as they stepped into the elevator.

“She has worked with Superman since then. Maybe her opinion has changed a little?” Clark guessed, leaning over to press the button for the floor the District Attorney’s office was on.

“Sure,” Lois said with a sigh, patting him on the shoulder.

“Just in case you may want to work on a backup story though.”

The elevator chimed, announcing their arrival on the second floor. The sign in front of them read, ‘*District Attorney’s Office*’ with an arrow pointing to the left. “After you.” He gestured for her to get off the elevator in front of them.

“This is a bad idea,” Lois pointed out as he opened the door for her.

“Need I remind you of how we ended up kidnapped by Trask in Smallville?” He raised his eyebrows at her and gave her a knowing look as he leaned in to cup her cheek.

“I’m never going to live that one down, am I?” She pouted, giving him a half-smile.

“Nope.” He chuckled, leaning in to kiss her.

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Jimmy crossed the street to the parking garage, ready to enjoy a much-needed break. Perry had him working on digging up everything he could on everyone he knew that worked at Lucky Leon’s factory as well as everything he could find on Raul Borges. Between that and the intense meeting with the legal counsel Perry had found him, he was wiped. He hopped into his newly restored convertible and started the engine, looking behind him to make sure traffic was clear before he turned onto the main intersection leading to Marci’s Cafe.

He turned his radio on, nodding his head to the beat as he drove past a construction crew. He turned down the next street and began to press his foot to the brake to slow down but found the pedal was unmoving.

“Hey!” Jimmy shouted, stomping on the brake again. This time the car jumped, pushing back on the pedal. He jerked his steering wheel trying to dodge the cars in front of him as he honked his horn shouting, “*Help!!* I can’t stop! Call the police!! Hel—!”

\*\*\*

Doris, Mayson Drake’s secretary, walked down the hall in front as Lois and Clark followed. “Ms. Drake is expecting you.” She knocked on the door and opened it. “Ms. Drake?”

“Yeah, anything we can find on this Stanley Gables the better,” Lois heard a man say as the door opened.

“We’ll finish this later,” Mayson said abruptly as they entered the room. Mayson was looking at a dark-haired gentleman sitting

in the chair across from her. “Lois, Clark.” She turned to them.

“Mayson.” Clark nodded to her.

Lois noted the guarded look Mayson wore but chose to ignore it. “We didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“Oh no.” Mayson shook her head. “This is Agent Scardino. He’s with the DEA. He’ll be helping our office out with the investigation into Intergang.”

Agent Scardino stood to his feet, running a hand through his hair smoothly as he looked over at Lois with a lingering gaze. “Please, call me Daniel.”

“Agent Scardino this is Lois Lane and Clark Kent from the *Daily Planet*. They’ve been working with our office on and off this year and been helping with the investigation into Intergang as well,” Mayson explained, introducing them.

“Really?” He smiled back at them. “Honest reporters? I didn’t know there was such a thing.” He glanced at them and flashed a smile. “Well, I suppose we’ll be working together real soon.”

Clark cleared his throat from behind her, placing an arm around her shoulders. “We tend to be a bit careful on who we’re sharing information with... Mr. Scardino was it?”

“Agent Scardino,” he corrected, taking a step toward Clark. “But please call me Daniel.” He flashed another smile. Lois shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, taking another step toward Clark as Scardino stopped in front of them. She could tell from the expression on Clark’s face he was unimpressed with the DEA agent. Scardino patted Clark on the shoulder. “Well, I’m sure we’ll get a chance to get acquainted *real* well, Kent.” He moved past him to head to the door. “Mayson, we’ll be in touch. If you need me, I’ll be staying at the Bristol.”

“I’ll have Doris set up a meeting for this afternoon,” Mayson said.

Agent Scardino ducked his head out the door and then turned back and looked at Lois. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but are those eyelashes real?”

She could feel Clark tense and silently cursed under her breath. How had this guy got assigned to a case this important? He seemed more interested in flirting than doing his job. She rolled her eyes at him and snipped, “Why don’t you put that astute observation to good use and try and stop Intergang?”

Scardino seemed dumbstruck for a split second and then quickly recovered. “Please I can stop Intergang in my sleep.”

“They’ve been in operation for the last twenty years,” Mayson interjected with an amused expression of her own.

“They didn’t have *me* on the case.” He grinned at her. “See ya around.”

“Of all the pompous...” She heard Clark mutter under his breath.

“I swear the more decorated the agent, the bigger the ego,” Mayson grumbled, reclaiming her seat behind her desk. “So, you said you had some information for me?”

“Uh, yeah,” Lois glanced over at Clark who still seemed to have a ticked expression on his face. “We, uh, came across some information that we thought might be useful and being the law-abiding citizens that we are we thought we’d tell you... instead of investigating it on our own.” She flashed Mayson a smile.

“How generous.” Mayson cracked a smile at her. “What information have you come across?”

“We think Lucky Leon may be in cohorts with Intergang,” Clark began slowly. “He was acting very suspicious after we left his office, so we asked Superman to...”

“Wait a minute, this information is coming from *Superman*?” Mayson groaned.

“And us!” Lois interjected. “If you’d seen the way he jumped up trying to hide that notepad when we came in you’d have been suspicious too.”

“What piece of paper?” Mayson stared blankly back at her and Lois sighed, trying to get the ADA to focus on the task at hand.

“Look, just hear us out and look into it. It can’t hurt,” Clark added. “We’ve all been working this Intergang angle for months now. This could be the first real break in the case. Are you really going to ignore a lead just because it happened to come from Superman?”

“No, I guess not.” Mayson clicked her tongue then looked back at them. “What did Superman find out?” She pulled out her notepad and pen.

Lois took a long sigh of relief, and Clark continued, “Lucky Leon is trying to steal a shipment off what we’re assuming is Route 128 by tricking Superman. The shipment is something Intergang wants to use to hold the world hostage.”

“I see,” Mayson said tapping her pen against her notepad.

“Look, I know you have your... We’ll call them qualms... about working with Superman, but at the end of the day all he’s trying to do is help,” Lois interjected. “Help stop Intergang. Help protect the city. Help rid this city of criminals. Is it exactly how you’d like it to be? No, but you have to admit this city is a lot safer with him in it.”

“I’ll see what I can find out,” Mayson said with a sigh.

“Thank you.” They stood up to leave, and Lois noticed a faraway expression on Clark’s face.

“Um, we should get going. We’ve got a lot of leads to follow up on. It was great talking with you, Mayson,” she said hurriedly, practically bolting out the door with Clark and leaving a dumbfounded Mayson in her office.

Once they were out of earshot, she asked, “What is it?”

“Jimmy,” he said, leaning in to kiss her before darting toward the door marked *Stairs* at the end of the hallway.

\*\*\*

“Help!! I can’t stop! Call the police!! He!—!” Clark heard Jimmy yell as he flew through the sky. He found Jimmy frantically pounding on his brakes. He came in to land in the passenger seat next to him. Jimmy looked over at him with a panic-stricken face. “Superman, I can’t stop!”

Clark leaned over and asked, “Well, Jimmy, did you ever think of trying this?” He turned the key in the ignition off, and the car came to a jolting stop. Jimmy looked over at him in surprise, and he shrugged. “See, simple?”

Jimmy leaned back against his seat and sighed in relief. “Easy for you to say.”

Clark floated out of the car and moved to inspect Jimmy’s car. “Open the hood,” he instructed. Jimmy leaned over to pull the lever, and a click could be heard. He lifted the hood and grimaced when he saw a black box attached to the motor. He reached up to remove it, noting the red blinking light immediately disappeared. “I believe I found the problem.”

\*\*\*

Lois sat at her desk, going through everything Jimmy had dug up on Raul Borges along with everyone else he’d worked with at Lucky Leon Inc. After Clark had left to help Jimmy, she’d come back to the Planet to see what she could find out on Raul Borges and Lucky Leon but so far no luck. It was as if Raul Borges only existed on paper and nowhere else. That and her mind wanting to constantly replay Clark’s proposal over and over had left her frustrated and desperately in need of caffeine.

<< “If Clark makes you happy then take a leap of faith.” >>

<< “Just think about it, okay?” >>

<< “So talk to him.” >>

<< “Lois Lane, will you marry me?” >>

<< “Are you really going to let a great guy slip away because of how screwed up our parents are?” >>

<< “I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.” >>

She reached over to grab her coffee mug and get a refill when a small black box appeared in front of her. She turned around and looked to see Clark and Jimmy standing behind her. “What’s

that?"

"It's what someone attached to my car to try and make me wreck!" Jimmy snorted pulling up a chair.

Lois glanced at Clark. "Someone's going out of their way to try and cover their tracks." She then turned to Jimmy. "Are you okay?"

"A little frazzled but I'm fine." He shook his head in disgust. "Thankfully Superman got there in time."

"Thank God for that." Lois looked up at Clark.

"What's all this?" Clark asked, pointing to the paperwork in front of her.

"Everything Jimmy pulled on Raul Borges and Lucky Leon associates." She gave a disgusted snort. "Not that it's doing anyone any good."

"Nothing?" Clark asked with a grimace, leaning over her shoulder to look at the empty search query she'd come up with on Raul Borges. She felt a flutter in her abdomen as his hand came to rest on her shoulder.

<< "So talk to him." >>>

'Not now.' she told herself, forcing her mind to focus on the investigation at hand. "I don't get it." Lois shook her head.

"Driver's license, home address, previous address, voter affiliation... But after that Borges drops off the radar."

Clark frowned. "Like he only exists on paper?"

"Exactly." Lois sighed, leaning back in her chair and facing Jimmy. "What about these guys you worked with. Anyone you can think of that might want to do this?"

"No." Jimmy shrugged. "They're just regular guys."

A ping from her computer caught her attention, and she turned back to see a new message icon on her screen. She clicked on it and read the message aloud. "Lucky Leon. Borges. Secret Shipment. From One Who Knows." She turned to the email message and pointed. "There's no sender's address in the email."

"If you were trying to remain anonymous, would you tell someone where you live?" Clark pointed out, still peering over her shoulder. She felt his hand squeeze her shoulder and a shiver ran down her spine.

<< "What?" >>

"Nothing. Just admiring the view."

"I think you're looking in the wrong direction, Farmboy."

"No, I'm not." >>>

<< "Just think about it, okay?" >>>

<< "So talk to him." >>>

'Just stop it.' She pushed the memories to the side, noticing the questioning gaze Clark had on his face. She cleared her throat and said, "We know Lucky Leon is trying to set a trap for Superman."

"We do?" Jimmy asked.

"Superman overheard Lucky Leon's plan earlier," Clark explained hurriedly.

Lois turned to Jimmy. "Jimmy, do you think you can trace this and see where it originated from?"

Jimmy nodded, rolling his chair up to her computer. "You may not be able to use your computer for about an hour, but yeah I can trace it."

"Great." Lois stood up, tugging on Clark's hand. "In the meantime, we'll do some digging into Raul Borges and see what we can find out."

"How exactly are we going to do that?" Clark asked as they approached the elevator.

"Well, you can call Roger Templeton on the way and see if he can do some digging," she said, pressing the call button for the elevator.

"On the way where?" he asked with a confused expression.

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### Chapter 3

Clark stared up at the Bristol hotel in front of them grumbling,

"You have got to be kidding me."

"We've already tapped out our resources at the *Planet*, but Jimmy's running out of time and we need to find out what we can about Borges," Lois pointed out as she pushed through the glass doors and entered the lobby. "What better way to find out information than talking to a government agent?"

"A government agent we don't know anything about," Clark pointed out. "Besides the guy's with the DEA. Not exactly the same line of business as Lucky Leon."

Lois sighed, hooking her arm into his as they approached the dining area. "I remember someone pushing a very annoying ADA on me a few months ago on a hunch. What's the big deal? It's worth a shot. If he doesn't know anything, then we move on."

"Fine," Clark said evenly, looking around the semi-crowded dining room until he spotted Scardino in a booth at the end of the room. He knew it was petty, but he really didn't like the way Scardino looked at Lois. Though explaining that to her while he still felt like he was walking on eggshells around her wasn't something he ventured to do either. She'd finally loosened up a little since this morning, but he could tell his proposal was still weighing heavily on her mind. He kept catching her drift off in mid-conversation throughout the day. Having to deal with the very forward Agent Scardino on top of everything else wasn't something he envisioned going well.

He pasted on his best fake smile as they approached, praying the DEA agent wouldn't have the information they were looking for. Roger was supposed to get back to him this evening. "Agent Scardino?" He cleared his throat

"Ah, Lane and Kent." He gestured to the booth across from him. "You come here for the food or the company?" He winked at Lois.

Clark shot Scardino a warning glare, and Lois ignored the comment, diving right into their reason for the visit. "Actually we came here for information."

"Really?" He flashed her a smile. "Well, I may be persuaded to provide you with said information over dinner with a glass of wine and some gnocchi..."

'You have got to be kidding me.' Clark thought to himself. Just as he was about to set Scardino straight, Lois cut in.

"I don't think so." Lois crossed her arms over her chest.

"Suit yourself." Scardino shrugged. "Though I'm not sure how willing I am to cooperate on an empty stomach."

"Well, dinner is off the table, Scardino," Clark interjected, placing both hands on the table and leaning forward, so he was just close enough to make Scardino uncomfortable. "Now, you need information from us to do your investigation. We would like to get some information from you on our investigation."

"Tit for tat, eh?" Scardino nodded. "I get it." He pushed his glass to the side. "Okay, what do you want to know?"

\*\*\*

Mayson sat across from Lucky Leon, sizing the man up as she waited for a response to her question. So far she'd seen him dodge question after question discussing his homeland and shoving fruit at her as if it was a high commodity. Though the idea of the loud and proud Lucky Leon being in cohorts with Intergang seemed out there, she had to admit he did act like he was hiding something.

"Intergang?" Leon frowned, seeming to look puzzled. "Yes, I've heard of them. Dangerous criminals, no?"

"Yes, we received a tip that a call was made to a known Intergang contact." Mayson flashed him a smile. "Of course, we know you'd never work with someone like that, but you know we do have to follow up with every lead."

"Yes, of course." Leon smiled back at her. "No, I'm not aware of anything, but I did discover one of my employees was being accused of murder. Perhaps it could have been him?"

Mayson gave her best look of surprise and nodded. "Really? Do you have a name?"

“Yes, it’s James Olsen,” he said, pulling out a file from his desk. “Such a tragedy.” He shook his head.

“Yes, it is,” Mayson said, taking notes from him on the information she already knew for appearances only. She grabbed her purse and smiled back at him. “Thank you, Mr. Leon. You’ve been incredibly helpful.”

“Of course!” He cheered following her to the door. “Just call if you need anything.”

Mayson waited until she was out in the parking lot and began to dial the already-familiar number on her phone, “Hey Bill? Go ahead and call Judge Thompson. I’m going to need a search warrant for all of Lucky Leon’s holdings by the end of the day. Yeah, I’m sure he’s hiding something, and I doubt it’s a shipment of pencil sharpeners.”

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Albie Swinson sat across the table from a tall man with brown hair and a dark blue prison uniform. He pushed the envelope across the table at him and whispered, “Not a word to anyone. You say anything, and we disappear, got it?”

Ryan Wiley smiled back at him. “Of course. I’m always there to help out a friend.” He took a swig of water, opening the small envelope and pulling out a small blue pill.

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“I’m going need a search warrant for all of Lucky Leon’s holdings by the end of the day. Yeah, I’m sure he’s hiding something, and I doubt it’s a shipment of pencil sharpeners.” Mayson’s voice played through the tape recorder Nigel St. John had placed on Lucky Leon’s desk.

“So it seems your acting needs some improvement, Mr. Leon.” Nigel narrowed his eyes at him and reached over to reclaim the tape recorder. “I believe your luck has run out.” He pointed a pistol and aimed it at Leon, hitting the trigger with his index finger and smiling when he saw Leon jump.

Leon looked back behind him to see a small burn mark where the bullet had gone through the wall. “She’ll be taken care of. Just trust me. Intergang will have their warheads by this time tomorrow and Superman will be disgraced.” Leon’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t make mistakes.”

“Be sure that you don’t or the next bullet won’t miss,” Nigel warned.

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Clark was finishing up his conversation with Roger as he and Lois entered his apartment. He held the Chinese takeout in one hand and had the phone nestled into the crook of his shoulder and neck as he walked to the dining table. “Yeah, thanks, Roger. I’ll let her know.” He flashed Lois a smile and set the bag of food down as she began setting the table for two. “You too. Take care, bye.” He hung up the phone.

“Any luck?” Lois asked, handing him his plate.

“Surprise, surprise, Lucky Leon has an alias.” He gave her a satisfied grin as he took the plate from her and began pulling out the different cartons from the bag. “Real name: Vasili Savchenko. Former Chief of the Technical Department, Executive Action Section, First Chief Directorate, KGB.”

Lois frowned. “What does that mean?”

“Think undercover assassin type stuff like in those James Bond movies you like so much.” He elaborated, handing her a spoon to serve the lo-mein with. “Everything from toy airplanes that were remote controlled bombs to poison-tipped umbrellas.”

“What kind of poison? Did he say?” Lois prodded.

He grinned, popping the cork to the bottle of wine she’d pulled out. “Yes, according to the NIA’s file on him his favorite poison was synthetic curare.”

Lois grinned happily, taking a sip of her wine. “Same poison they found in Borges’ bloodstream. I’d say that’s a connection.”

“Nothing concrete just yet, but with that and the information we got on Borges from Agent Scardino I think it’s safe to say

Jimmy’s off the hook.” Clark handed her the carton of sesame chicken and grinned.

“Aren’t you glad we talked to him, now? Now we have everything we need to clear Jimmy’s name,” Lois pointed out, taking a bite of her food with a satisfied grin.

He smiled back at her. “Yeah, I guess. I’m still not so sure about Scardino though. He seems a bit...” He struggled to find the right word to describe the DEA agent.

“Out there?” Lois guessed, setting her fork down. “Yeah, I noticed.” She rolled her eyes. “But Mayson seems to like him, and he did come through with the information, so I guess we can overlook his character flaws to get what we need. The important thing is Jimmy’s name is almost cleared.”

“Yeah.” Clark smiled back at her. “At least now we know why Raul Borges’ name wasn’t coming up on the searches you were doing. Drug smuggler turned CIA spy.”

“Hopefully it’ll be enough to put the police on Lucky Leon’s tail and keep Jimmy out of jail,” Lois said with a weak smile.

\*\*\*

Mayson walked with Dan Scardino toward her car. “You’re sure this is McCarthy?”

Scardino let out a bitter sigh. “Positive. I’d never forget his ugly mug. I know this guy. I know how he works...”

Mayson stopped, looking back at him and placing a hand on his shoulder. “Hey, we’ll get him. Gables and McCarthy will be behind bars before you can...”

Scardino looked over her shoulder. “You order a car service?”

Mayson frowned, turning to see a dark Suburban across the street. The lights were still lit and the engine running. The tint on the windows was too dark to see inside the car. Mayson frowned, feeling a sense of dread as she stared at the Suburban.

“I got a bad feeling,” Scardino said, reaching for his service weapon.

The doors opened on all sides of the Suburban, and five men dressed completely in black with masks jumped out with rifles in hand.

“Get down!”

Mayson felt herself being shoved to the ground as gunfire filled the air. She gasped, looking up to see an open car door in front of her. The sound of metal clanging against it surrounded her. “We’ve got to get out of here,” she managed to whisper, looking up at Dan who held his gun, shooting over the door.

“Yeah, how do you suggest that?” Scardino snapped.

The sound of a sonic boom filled the air, and Mayson let out a sigh of relief. *Just in the nick of time.* She moved to peek behind the door and felt a sharp pain in her side.

“Mayson?”

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Lois curled up on the couch next to Clark, relaxing against him as the credits to Harrison Ford’s *The Fugitive* rolled across the screen. “Not as funny as the *Lethal Weapons* but still a pretty good movie” she commented lazily.

“Yeah”—Clark leaned in to kiss her temple—“but it’s still one of his better movies.”

She let out a low sigh, looking up at him. They’d done this countless times before. Shared a meal and enjoyed a movie together yet tonight it felt different. Was this what it would be like when they... *If* her mind corrected her train of thought. If they got married. Would this be what being married to Clark was like? Share a meal with a light conversation and laugh together. She felt a flutter in her stomach at the thought. Yes, she could imagine a life with him. She could imagine growing old with him and...

“I can’t cook,” she blurted out, surprised to hear her thoughts being voiced aloud.

“What?” He looked back at her in confusion.

She shook her head and began to ramble. “I can’t cook...well, not very well and I have no plans to learn how to unless it’s

something that comes from a box because I don't have time to learn. I can't cook. I don't want to cook. Actually, I probably shouldn't cook for anyone. Can you imagine the looks I'd get from our um, kids... Well... I mean, not that we would have decided on if we wanted to have kids. I mean I know you'd be really great, but I'd be..."

She stopped when she noticed the laughter Clark was trying to hide. "What? Why are you laughing at me? This is serious!"

"I wasn't laughing I swear." He managed to say in-between a light chuckle.

"Liar," she retorted with a scowl. "I'm trying to have a serious conversation here and..."

"I know." He leaned in to kiss her. "I'm sorry. If it makes you feel any better, I don't care if you cook or not. I do know my way around the kitchen," he pointed out and then shrugged. "Or we can eat takeout." He leaned in to kiss her again and added, "And yes I would like to have children, but it's not a deal-breaker or anything."

She looked up at him and sighed. "Don't you think these are things we should talk about though? I mean, four months isn't that long, and there's still a lot we haven't..." She stopped, uncertain how to continue. Did she really want to have this conversation right now?

"Haven't what?" He prodded, tilting her chin to look at him.

Lois turned to face him, pulling her knee up under her arms as she continued, "Well, I just mean there are things we haven't talked about or...uh." She could feel the blush crossing her cheeks and sighed. "God, this is insane."

"Lois, whatever it is, just say it," Clark prompted gently.

She let out a breath and sighed. "Last week we came really, really close, and with everything else going on... What if we... I mean, what if it's not...?"

"Lois." He spoke her name, and she looked up at him nervously, feeling her stomach tighten as her eyes met his.

She took a deep breath. "I mean, we've waited...and I'm glad..." she began carefully, uncertain how to get the scary words out.

"Me too." Clark cupped her cheek.

"But I just don't want"—she let out a breath and continued—"I don't know if it will live up to your expectations," she finally said, noting the way his face fell in confusion as she continued to ramble. "I mean, I know we've come really, really close and we have had a lot of intense...and I mean...intense moments, but I'm not that experienced and I..."

She found herself unable to finish her train of thought as Clark captured her mouth with his. She felt a flutter in her abdomen as both his hands moved to trace the outline of her face. She felt a shudder go down her spine as his lips parted against hers, tracing the outline of her lips with the tip of his tongue just briefly before he slowly pulled away. His head rested against her forehead, and he murmured, "There is nothing that could make me regret anything with you, Lois."

"You're building quite a strong case there." She grinned back at him. "But I just... I'm not as experienced with this whole relationship thing as I look. I mean, every serious relationship I've had has ended up a federal disaster especially my last one."

Clark looked down, seeming to contemplate his words before responding, "I know. I also know there's a lot we need to discuss before we make that kind of commitment. So, we'll take it one thing at a time." He brushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "You're everything to me, Lois. I don't want to rush into anything."

"You're certainly more patient than most men would be," she commented with a pained expression.

"Well, I've had a lot of practice," he said cautiously, letting out a sigh of his own.

"Practice?" She prodded, uncertain if she was gathering what

he was trying to tell her.

"Well, I'm different. I didn't have the typical adolescence for obvious reasons," he began to explain. "I mean, I've dated and had girlfriends, but that threshold? The threshold? I've never really crossed it."

<<"I don't want a one-night stand, and I don't think you want that either. I want forever...">>

<<"Fine, several dates."

"Are you laughing?"

"No, of course not I just find it funny that you insist on emphasizing these 'several dates' when we've yet to have one."

"You shouldn't laugh. You're about to fall head over heels in love."

"I thought I already was."

"Not yet, but you will be.">>

<<"Lois... We've got to slow down."

"You want to stop?"

"No, But I don't want to rush into anything. This...is still very new for both of us and I...">>

<<"Lois, what are we doing?"

"Right now? I thought we were enjoying ourselves ..."

"Lois, you have no idea how many times I've fantasized about this, I would love more than anything to keep kissing you senseless and holding you...like this."

"But?"

"But right now if we don't stop I'm not going to be able to."

"I'm not stopping you.">>

<<"As much as I would love to pick up where we left off...">>

<<"I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.">>

<<"I want forever...">>

"Oh." She finally found her voice after a long pause. Suddenly everything made sense. The waiting. The pulling back when things got too intense between them. He didn't push her for more because... "So, you were waiting for...?"

"Just the right person." He stroked her cheek. "I knew I couldn't make that kind of commitment without sharing everything. So..." He shrugged his shoulders before offering her a smile. "Lois, I told you before I don't want you to feel pressured or anything. I don't want either of us rushing into anything unless we're both ready."

His voice dropped an octave to a low murmur, staring back at her hesitantly. His lips were just a few millimeters away, barely touching hers. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest as he stared back at her. His hand brushed against her cheek, and he leaned into her, brushing his lips against hers for just a split second then pulling away.

"What if I was..." She asked, feeling her heart pounding in her chest as she looked up at him hesitantly, "...ready?"

His eyebrows rose in surprise, and he opened his mouth to respond, "Well, I..."

She bit her lower lip, looking up at him expectantly only to see a familiar faraway expression on his face. His face was tense with concern, standing to his feet and disappearing into a blur of red and blue. "Be careful," she called after him. She tried not to focus on the pained expression that had been on his face when he left, leaning back against the couch with a long breath. "Whoa..."

\*\*\*

#### Chapter 4

Darryl sat at his desk, watching the news coverage of the shooting in front of City Hall. The newscaster kept recounting the tale of heroism on the DEA agent's part and the miraculous save by Superman. He grimaced, shaking his head as he reached for his scotch. Mr. Church wouldn't be pleased.

A shadow crossed his doorway, and he turned to see Nigel with a grim expression on his face, "I'm sure you saw the news."

“Yes, all this publicity and they’re still alive.” Darryl groaned.  
 “I believe it’s time to cut our ties with Mr. Leon. He’s proven himself to be more trouble than he’s worth,” Nigel suggested, strolling casually into Darryl’s office.

“Yes, this shipment of nuclear warheads isn’t worth it.” Darryl shook his head in disgust.

“Well, no reason to get hasty,” Nigel countered, “I’m sure there’s a way to get the warheads and frame Mr. Leon.”

“How?”

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Lois ran her hands over her arms, feeling a slight chill in the room with Clark’s absence. Had that really just happened? Had Superman really gotten called right when they... What? She took a deep breath, trying to push that thought out of her mind. ‘*It had to be serious.*’ She thought to herself. ‘*The way he left...*’

She stared blankly around the living room, trying to catch her breath. She glanced at the clock. It had been half an hour since he disappeared. A half hour since whatever disaster had pulled him away. Surely whatever it was would be in the news now. She reached for the remote on the coffee table, flipping the channels until she found the twenty-four hour news station.

The red ticker running across the screen caught her attention as the announcer announced, “Police are still surveying the scene of tonight’s shooting. ADA Mayson Drake and Agent Dan Scardino are in critical condition...”

“Oh, my God...”

\*\*\*

Five.

There had been five gunmen.

All with a Russian accent.

All refusing to talk.

All had been aiming rifles at Mayson Drake and Dan Scardino when Clark arrived on the scene. He still wasn’t entirely sure who the actual target had been. It was Lucky Leon. He knew it. Henderson knew it. He just couldn’t prove it.

“Superman!” Bill Henderson waved at him as he was about to leave.

\*\*\*

“Yes, I understand you can’t give out medical information, but can you at least...” Lois heard a loud click on the other end of the phone and sighed, running a hand through her hair. She’d been at it for hours, trying to find out what she could about Mayson’s condition. It had been four hours since Clark had left and there was no sign of him. She glanced around the apartment, toying with the idea of staying just a little longer before heading home. As it was, she wouldn’t be getting any answers tonight and for whatever reason Superman seemed to have disappeared altogether since the shooting.

‘*He’s avoiding me.*’ Lois thought to herself in disgust. Any other time he would have been back by now. She grimaced to herself, staring at the second hand as it ticked past the nine on the clock. ‘*Or he’s wallowing.*’ She thought for a moment. ‘*Or both.*’

Either way, Clark wasn’t here. She’d opened herself up and made herself completely vulnerable to him, and he disappeared. Yes, Superman was needed, but that was hours ago. Hours that he could have come back and finish their conversation instead of leaving her hanging like this. The longer it took him to return the angrier and more hurt she had become.

She glanced at the news coverage once more and shook her head in disgust before turning off the television. Last week Mayson’s life had been threatened and now this. Surely the two had to be connected. Intergang. It seemed to be a common theme this year. Lucky Leon was working with them. Mayson had been threatened by them. Even with Bill Church’s recent heart attack the criminal organization still found a way to strike fear into Metropolis.

‘*Enough of this,*’ she thought to herself, standing up and

gathering her notes. “I need to get out of here.”

\*\*\*

Albie looked over his shoulder, checking to make sure he wasn’t followed as he entered the Metro Club. Inside the smoky atmosphere, the music was loud and the smell of liquor and grease hung in the air. He spotted an empty table in the corner and took his seat.

“Mr. Swinson I presume?” a voice from behind him called out as a man with salt-and-pepper hair and a thinning hairline took a seat across from him.

Albie looked up in surprise. “How did you...?”

“You didn’t think you’d really make a deal like this without us knowing where to find you, did you?” the man asked.

“Look, I don’t want any trouble. I just don’t want to see anyone get hurt,” Albie pleaded. “You said you could talk to Mr. Church?”

“In exchange for your cooperating with Intergang’s plan, yes.” The man pulled out an envelope and passed it to him. “Inside you’ll find the names of four soldiers that need to be replaced by noon tomorrow. Make it happen, or Mr. Gables’ plans for Metropolis will be the least of your worries.”

\*\*\*

After a final patrol over Metropolis Clark flew back home to his apartment. It was after midnight. He had gone from one emergency to another tonight in the midst of the investigation into Lucky Leon’s death. A suicide note and confession were found by his body along with the pieces and parts to the Desk Friend dart that had been used to kill Borges. It appeared to be an open and shut case. Jimmy’s name was cleared, but he knew better.

It was too convenient.

He spun out of his suit and into his sleeping shorts then sunk down into the bed with a sigh. The last twenty-four hours felt like a lifetime ago. Mayson and Dan Scardino had been shot. He hadn’t heard anything from Henderson on how severe the injuries were, but he knew he probably wouldn’t hear anything back until morning. He let out a defeated sigh. Tomorrow had to be better, right?

\*\*\*

Lois made her way through the crowded lobby of the Daily Planet the next morning, coffee in hand. She was exhausted. She spent most of the night trying to track down information on the shooting. She’d called in the story to the night editor but still hadn’t had a chance to talk to Clark last night. She’d written up a rough sketch of the story just before falling asleep.

“Hold the elevator!” she called out, seeing the closing doors as she pushed past the news stand and raced to the elevator. A hand slipped between the elevator doors, stopping them from shutting and forcing the doors back open. “Thanks,” she said, stepping into the elevator, coming face-to-face with Clark and the newest mail clerk from the third floor whose name escaped her. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Clark said, meeting her gaze. She felt a flutter in her abdomen, staring back at him. The conversation from last night replaying in her mind.

<< “*So, you were waiting for...?*”

“*Just the right person.*”>>

<< “*I don’t want either of us rushing into anything unless we’re both ready.*”

“*What if I was...ready?*”

“*Well, I...*”>>

“Hi, Ms. Lane!” the blonde-haired mail clerk cheered happily.

“Uh, hi.” Lois managed a weak smile at the young clerk who seemed oblivious to the uncomfortable air between her and Clark at that moment.

“It’s amazing who you run into in the elevator here, isn’t it? I never knew the *Planet* had this many celebrities working here. I mean, sharing the elevator with the famous Lane and Kent duo. Then just last week I was in the elevator with the Perry White...”

The clerk rambled on at a rate that put even Lois' worst babbling moments to shame.

"Yeah, well, he is the editor-in-chief." Lois managed, looking over at the panel that read '2' and sighed. A soft ping rang and the doors opened.

"That's me," the chatty clerk said, stepping off the elevator and into the mailroom.

Lois and Clark waved a polite 'bye' as the elevator doors closed behind him. "Oh, my God," Lois muttered, turning to Clark.

"Yikes." Clark shook his head with a chuckle.

Lois shared a smile with him. "Guess they let just about anyone in here."

"Yeah, they should look into security." He grinned back at her, but she could see the tiredness in his eyes and hear the strain in his voice.

She looked at him, her smile falling. "How are you?" She moved toward him, closing the distance between them.

"Okay." He nodded with a shrug. "I guess." He let out a low snort. "I really don't want to talk about last night, Lois."

<< "I don't want either of us rushing into anything unless we're both ready."

"What if I was...ready?"

"Well, I...">>

"Oh." Lois glanced toward the panel on the elevator wall. "Right. Well, then we won't talk about last night...at all."

"No, Lois, I didn't mean..." He began to backtrack as the elevator pinged, announcing their arrival in the newsroom.

"That's our floor," she said hurriedly. "We should get to work."

"Lois..." she heard Clark call after her, but she was already making a beeline for her desk.

She took a seat at her desk, booting up her computer as she began to ramble hurriedly. "I'm going to reach out to Bobby and see what he's heard on Lucky Leon. There was no way his collusion with Intergang wasn't connected to his supposed suicide."

"Okay, yeah, but look..." Clark tried to interject, but her warning glare told him to drop it. He nodded, moving to his desk. "I'll work on writing up the story on last night's shooting."

"Great," Lois said, reaching for the phone at her desk that rang in her hand before she could dial. "Lois Lane," she answered.

"Lois?" She could hear Molly's sob from the other end of the phone. Her aggravation with Clark quickly dissipated as she listened to her friend try and get out what she was trying to say in between sobs.

"He's gone," she sobbed uncontrollably. "He's really, really gone this time."

"Who?" Lois asked.

"Ryan," Molly squeaked out.

"What?"

\*\*\*

## Chapter 5

Mayson winced, holding her shoulder where the bandage from her incision was. The stitches appeared to be holding up. She hadn't had any bleeding this morning. The nurse had helped change the dressing an hour ago. Her head still felt like it was in a fog due to the medication she was on, but that didn't seem to matter to Metropolis' finest who were intent on getting her statement before she was discharged...repeatedly.

"Are you sure there's nothing else you remember, Ms. Drake?" Detective Peters asked, jotting down his notes in the small notebook in his hand.

"No, that's it," Mayson said, hearing the edge in her voice as she arched an eyebrow at Peters, fighting the urge to throw him out of her hospital room.

"One more thing..." Peters interjected.

"What?" Mayson snapped through gritted teeth.

Thankfully for Peters, Bill Henderson chose that very moment to intrude and bring with him a familiar face. "Clark..."

Instinctually, Mayson reached up to run a hand through her hair and winced when she felt the subtle reminder of why not to do that. "Wh-what are you doing here?"

"I heard what happened last night..." Clark explained, his lips pursing into a tight line before continuing. "...and wanted to see how you were doing."

"Oh, fine. You know me. One stray bullet isn't going to keep me down," Mayson managed with a weak smile. Truth be told she felt like her shoulder was going to fall off from the pain, but she didn't dare try and ask for any more painkillers until after she was discharged and able to go home and sleep in her own bed far away from the intrusive questions from everyone. "Just ready to go home."

"Doctor said you should be discharged by noon," Henderson said with a smile. He glanced out the door behind him and said, "Speaking of which...I'll be right back."

Clark pointed at the sling her shoulder was in and asked, "Was it just your right shoulder that was hit?"

Mayson nodded. "Yeah, I thought the gunfire had stopped. I went to get up from behind the barricade Dan had made from my passenger car door and got hit."

"I'm sorry," Clark apologized with a frown.

"It's not your fault," Mayson responded in a wistful tone. No matter how hard she tried not to she still couldn't seem to shake the feeling that came over her when she was around him. 'Stop it.' she warned her conscience. "Superman showed up and saved the day." A lull fell across the room, and she continued, "I've never seen him move so fast in all the months I've been in Metropolis. He had the gunmen tied up before we could even react."

Superman. He had flown at record-breaking speed last night to save her and Dan from the barrage of gunfire. One bullet. One lousy bullet had made its way past their barricade though and struck her shoulder. Dan Scardino had been hit in the thigh and on his left side. She was told he was alright.

"I'm sure he just wanted to make sure everyone was...safe," Clark responded, looking down at his hands.

"Well, given that there were no casualties from the shooting I'd say he did a pretty good job," Mayson said, eyeing Clark with an uncertain gaze.

"Yeah, except for Lucky Leon," Clark reminded her with a grimace.

"Yeah, well I'm not sure about that suicide story either. Seems like awful convenient timing..."

Just as she began to speak Henderson re-entered the room, "I told you before Superman checked the scene where we found the body, and he found no signs of foul play."

"Well, maybe they covered their tracks," Mayson pointed out. "Or maybe he didn't die there or maybe... This was Intergang. I know it. It's no coincidence that Dan showed up, and then Intergang put a hit out on..." She stopped, noticing the disturbed expression on Clark's face. "Are you okay?"

"Fine," Clark said, standing up. "I need to talk to Dan Scardino as well. Any idea where he's at?"

"No." She shook her head, watching him leave. Something was obviously bothering him—what, she wasn't sure.

\*\*\*

The small cafe was filled with patrons. The smell of eggs and bacon mixed with coffee hung in the air. In the corner booth, Perry White sat with his old friend, Admiral Haberstetzer—Stormin' Norman. Unfortunately, this visit wasn't a personal one.

"Five disappearances in less than twenty-four hours. Each one was on leave here in Metropolis." the admiral laid the folder in front of Perry. "I'm not one to make bets, but I can guarantee you none of these men went AWOL like the commander is trying to

dismiss the case as.”

“I hate military investigations,” Perry groaned, taking the file in his hand. “You never get anywhere.”

“I know,” the admiral grimaced, taking a sip of his coffee. “After Colonel Fane’s arrest, it’s become nearly impossible to get a visitor pass at Fort Marshall.” He looked down and a long pause hung in the air between the two men before he continued. “This didn’t happen on base, Perry. It happened here in the city. Now I know the military is going to conduct their own investigation, but these were good men. I can’t see any of them just abandoning their unit like this.”

“I’ll look into it,” Perry promised.

\*\*\*

“Prison, Metropolis P.D. and more recently the Metro Club...” Bobby Bigmouth trailed off as he took a large bite of his breakfast wrap. “All of them healthy as a horse and dropped dead for no apparent reason. Examined within minutes of their death by the medical examiner.”

Lois scrunched up her face, glancing around the crowded diner. “Not exactly related to one another either.” She contemplated for a moment, wondering aloud, “Possibly the same food or water?”

“From what I hear it’s got something to do with something called ‘Resurrection’ a nutjob named Gables came up with. The only problem is he’s not keeping track of who’s getting the prescription if you know what I mean.” Bobby took another mouthful of his wrap and reached for the orange juice on the counter to take a large gulp.

“Resurrection?” Lois echoed. “What is that?”

“Don’t know.” Bobby shrugged. “A few guys were in the Metro Club the other night and were overheard talking about it. My bet is it’s some kind of drug. I mean Washington sends down the DEA, and then all of a sudden corpses start popping up everywhere? You do the math.”

“Okay.” Lois put her notebook back in her purse and sighed. “Thanks, Bobby.”

“No prob, kid. Thanks for breakfast. I’ll keep my ear to the ground and let you know what I find out.”

\*\*\*

Sedated and strapped to five hospital beds there were five soldiers unable to move. The sound of the monotone beeping from each of their respective monitors filled the room.

“I do hope you know what you’re doing,” Darryl warned, watching as Nigel St. John oversaw the administration of another dosage to the first soldier who laid on his bed, unmoving.

“I didn’t get to be a man in my position by being careless,” Nigel said with a shrug, lightly slapping the soldier’s cheek. “By this time tomorrow the warheads will be in your possession, and this will be nothing but a bad dream for our men in uniform.”

“We’re ready to move out.” A voice from the corner of the room spoke up. They turned to see Ryan Wiley dressed in his ACU’s. “McCarthy’s boys have been debriefed. The sooner we make the switch the better.”

“Then get on with it,” Nigel instructed. “No sense in wasting a moment.”

“Roger that.” Wiley nodded, tilting his hand as he turned to exit, leaving Nigel and Darryl alone.

“Replacing an entire unit in the middle of transporting the largest shipment of nuclear warheads this country’s ever seen is a bold move, Nigel,” Darryl warned.

\*\*\*

Lois walked down the long hallway, searching for the room number the nurse had given her. If everything Bobby was saying was true, then surely Mayson would know something. The question was whether Mayson would be willing to provide any background information on this Resurrection.

She spotted Bill Henderson standing outside one of the

hospital rooms, fiddling with his phone. “Bill?”

Henderson looked up. “A bit late for interviews, isn’t it, Lane?”

Lois let out a sigh. “The *Planet*’s already filed the story on the shooting last night, Bill.” Her tone softened as she added, “How is she?”

“About as well as can be expected. We’re waiting on the discharge papers so we can escort her home.” Henderson said, raising his voice a few octaves as one of the nurses walked by.

“You know you do that and you’ll be here all day,” Lois quipped.

“So they tell me.” Henderson shrugged. “But I’ve been here all night.”

“You guys have any leads on who might be behind this?” Lois asked.

“All our evidence seems to be pointing to Intergang.”

Henderson shrugged, opening the door for her.

“Doesn’t seem like Intergang’s style though,” Lois reasoned aloud.

“So I’ve been told, but there’s a first time for everything,”

Henderson said, following her into Mayson’s room.

Mayson was sitting on the hospital bed in a sling with an annoyed expression on her face. “You’re not the discharge nurse.”

“Sorry,” Lois apologized, flashing her a weak smile, holding up a Double Fudge Crunch bar. “But I do come bearing gifts.”

Mayson let out a light chuckle, wincing slightly when the jolt on her shoulder became too much. “I’ll take it.” Lois handed her the candy bar.

“I’ll be outside,” Henderson said, pointing to the door.

“How’s the shoulder?” Lois asked, pointing to the sling Mayson was in.

“Painful,” Mayson said with a pained expression, readjusting herself against the back of the bed that was propped up. “But gunshots do that so...”

“So...” Lois echoed, uncertain where to begin.

Mayson looked up at her with a smile. “Something tells me you’re not here for small talk any more than your partner was half an hour ago.” She peeled the foil off the chocolate and looked back up at Lois expectantly.

Lois frowned, pursing her lips at that remark but didn’t allow herself to dwell on it. She could exchange notes with him later. “Resurrection.” She noticed Mayson’s eyes widen at the name and continued. “I can tell from your face you know what I’m talking about. Look, I don’t know what’s going on here Mayson but something’s going on that you’re not telling me and...”

“Lois, I can’t talk about this with you or Clark...or anyone.” Mayson cut her off. “My orders come from way up.”

“I think whatever this Resurrection drug or concoction that you and Agent Scardino are investigating is what got you that ambush last night,” Lois continued, seeing Mayson’s eyes move to her lap as she slowly began to chew on her bit of chocolate. “I also think you letting the blame fall on Intergang when you and I both know it’s not their style is a load of bologna. Whoever did this is going to know that they missed. They’re going to keep coming after you.”

“It’s not me they’re after,” Mayson said looking up at Lois.

“Agent Scardino?” Lois guessed.

“It’s not someone they’re after, Lois. It’s something...and that’s all I can say,” Mayson said quickly.

“Okay.” Lois nodded, standing up and turning to leave. “For the record, I’m glad they missed.”

Mayson chuckled lightly and added, “Me too...and thanks.”

\*\*\*

“Agent Scardino? Room 305.” The nurse pointed down the hall. Clark followed the direction of her arm with his eyes, listening to the directions she was giving him to find Scardino’s room. He nodded and walked down the hall, searching for the

room number. He'd already spoken with Mayson and gotten her take on everything, now all that was left was to find the very obnoxious DEA agent and get his take on the events from last night so he could write up his and Lois' story.

Lois was meeting with Bobby Bigmouth to find out what he knew about Lucky Leon's connection to Intergang... alone. He frowned, recalling the sharpness in her tone when she'd stormed out of the newsroom, warning him not to follow her. Lois had been on edge this morning when she'd arrived at the Planet. He had been exhausted from dealing with the aftermath of last night's shooting and his racing mind. Mentally, he was wiped. So when Lois had asked how he was doing, he said the first thing that came to his mind. He hadn't been thinking and immediately realized his misstep when she did a one eighty on him—going from concerned girlfriend and partner to all business with her body language screaming *'Don't come near me or else'* in a matter of seconds.

She barely said two words to him before leaving to meet Bobby. After finding Lucky Leon's body last night, he hadn't gone back home. He'd patrolled the city for hours, trying to keep a diligent watch. It was what he did when he found himself unable to live up to his own expectations for himself.

There was only one problem.

He'd forgotten about Lois.

Looking through the list of names Lois had ordered background checks on and the notes he later discovered on her desk he felt like even more of a heel than he already did. While he'd been obsessing about what he could have done, she'd been working on what was now their story.

<< *"Why are you laughing at me? This is serious!"*

*"I wasn't laughing I swear."*

*"Liar.">>*

<< *"So, you were waiting for...?"*

*"Just the right person.">>*

<< *"I don't want either of us rushing into anything unless we're both ready."*

*"What if I was...ready?"*

*"Well, I...">>*

Why oh why did he have to specify that he didn't want to talk about last night when she asked him? True, last night had been difficult, and he was still reeling from the losses and near misses. But before all that, Lois was opening up and having a real conversation about the future... their future. A sign that she was thinking about his proposal. He'd made a huge error in judgment and wasn't sure how to get her to talk to him without unleashing the wrath of Mad Dog Lane on everyone within a mile radius.

All he knew to do now was bide his time and hope that her temper would have calmed down by the time they regrouped back at the Planet. For now, he would work on gathering everything he could to help put the story on the shooting together. Since Lois had already collected the statements from City Hall and the chief of police he figured talking to Mayson and Agent Scardino—despite the fact that he despised the man with a passion—would be a step in the right direction.

He stopped in front of the room marked "305" and reached his hand up to knock. The sound of shuffling inside could be heard before from inside the room before he heard a muffled, "It's open!"

He opened the door and found Dan Scardino hopping around with one crutch. "You know that isn't going to heal with you walking around on it," Clark said, pointing to the bandaged-up thigh the agent was trying to balance his weight on unsuccessfully.

"Not my first time being shot, Kent," Scardino said between gritted teeth as he landed on the hospital bed with a loud groan. "Probably won't be my last."

"Yeah, about that..." Clark reached for a chair in the corner of the room.

"Don't tell me, you're here for an interview?" Scardino

sneered, throwing his head back against the pillow. "I'm not one for press relations. More of a man of action if you know what I mean?" Scardino looked him up and down for a moment then added snidely before flashing him a broad smile, "Or maybe not. I save the photo ops for the boys in Washington."

"Well, that's too bad," Clark said, folding his arms over his chest. He did his best to keep calm, trying to keep his temper in check. Mayson was right. It was no coincidence that the hit was placed the day Dan Scardino showed up, but unlike her, he didn't think it was Intergang. "So, I'm assuming you're going to blame this shooting on 'Intergang' too?"

"Well, what can I say?" Scardino gave a non-committal shrug. "They sure like to live fast and loose with the law."

"You said you were here to investigate Intergang." Clark paced in front of him. "All these months we've been working on the same case yet nothing comes up that would warrant the involvement of the DEA. Not once has a city official been shot at..." He did his best to bury down the anger he could feel festering inside. "I find the timing of this all to be a bit too coincidental."

Scardino met his steely gaze with a snort. "You know if you wanted to get my cooperation you should have sent that partner of yours. Much easier on the eyes. No offense Kent but you're not really my type..."

"You are way out of your league, Scardino, trust me." Clark shot back, giving his foot a gentle shove, doing his best not to give into his anger.

"I'll be the judge of that," Scardino said with a wince, grabbing his leg. "Easy on the leg man. I'd like to get out of here sometime today."

Clark's jaw tightened as he watched Scardino massage the bandage on his upper thigh. He was lying. He knew it. Whatever Scardino's reasons were for being in Metropolis they weren't what he was saying. Intergang didn't operate like this. They worked in the shadows. They never... His eyes narrowed, grabbing Scardino by the hospital gown and jerking him toward him, so he was a few inches away. *"Five months."*

"What?" Scardino tried to pull away but to no avail, as Clark tightened his grasp on the collar to his hospital gown. "A lot stronger than you look."

"You have no idea!" Clark warned. *"Five months,"* he repeated. "That's how long Lois and I have been working on this Intergang story. Five months. Not once have they drawn attention to themselves by ordering a hit on a city official. Nothing on drugs outside of the petty crimes being run by the gangs enforcing their hold on the territory." He shoved him back on the bed by his good shoulder and began to pace in front of him, letting out an insincere chuckle. "Then *you* show up and all of a sudden the DEA is involved with the Intergang investigation?"

"Look, Kent—" Scardino began to interject, but Clark cut him off.

"*Don't,*" he barked angrily. "You and I both know you're not here to help with Mayson's Intergang investigation." His tone turned icy, and his jaw tightened. "What are you *really* doing in Metropolis?"

"He's after something called Resurrection." He looked up and saw Lois standing in the doorway then back at Scardino who had a dumbfounded expression on his face.

"Where did you hear that name?" Scardino asked.

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## Chapter 6

Lois reached the hospital room with the numbers "305" printed on the wall beside the door. She was about to knock when she noticed the door was slightly ajar. She heard the sound of Clark's very angry voice from inside and pushed the door open, listening to the tail end of the conversation before making her presence known.

“Then you show up and all of a sudden the DEA is involved with the Intergang investigation?” Clark was saying as she closed the door behind her.

“Look, Kent—” She heard Dan Scardino interject just as Clark cut him off.

“*Don’t*,” he barked angrily. “You and I both know you’re not here to help with Mayson’s Intergang investigation. What are you *really* doing in Metropolis?”

Lois chose that moment to speak up. If what she’d discovered about Resurrection was true then they were all in danger. Clark and Dan Scardino could resume their pissing match later. Right now, they had bigger fish to fry. “He’s after something called Resurrection.”

“Where did you hear that name?” Scardino asked, staring at her dumbfounded.

“Don’t worry about it.” Lois cut him off, turning away when she noticed Clark’s surprised expression. She really didn’t want to be here any longer than necessary. She’d had some time to calm down from earlier, but she was still upset. Not only had Clark basically abandoned her last night and disappeared with no indication whether he was okay or not but then he’d shut her down the minute she tried to bring it up this morning. She peered over at the corner of the room where Clark was standing, stealing a glance and then looking away when his eyes met hers. *Not now.*

“Lady, this is a matter of national security—” Scardino began, but Clark interjected.

“Maybe it might help if we had all the facts.” Clark’s jaw tightened as he jutted his chin out in defiance.

Scardino’s mouth twisted for a moment, looking at her and then Clark and back again before letting out a defeated sigh. “This is off the record.”

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Albie sat in the corner of Stanley Gable’s office listening as the recently-resurrected convicts gathered around the desk, looking over the blueprints of S.T.A.R. Labs. It unnerved him that Mr. Gables still thought he was going to get his hands on his Omega virus. After revealing his plans to infect the entire population of Metropolis with the virus Albie had reached out to his contacts within Intergang. He’d been assured Mr. Gables would not succeed.

He glanced at the clock warily. Two more days until the break-in was scheduled. One more convict to resurrect. Mr. Darryl had assured him Intergang would intervene but he’d yet to see or hear anything from them. Perhaps it was time to take matters into his own hands...

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“It’s a synthetic barbiturate. Taken in large enough doses, it produces a temporary state of suspended animation,” Dan Scardino explained, looking warily back at Lois and then to Clark.

“So making it appear the person that took it was dead?” Clark reasoned aloud.

“Hence the name *‘Resurrection,’*” Lois added, glancing at Clark.

“Yeah, there was an incident in Gotham last month with Gables and Dr. Quinn. Let’s just say a lot of guys that belong in Arkham found a very unique way to escape.” Scardino grunted in disgust. “I’ve been trying to track Gables down. We were at a dead end until we got the call from Mayson.”

Clark’s jaw tightened, debating whether to believe Scardino or not. He still didn’t trust him, but he could tell at this moment he was telling the truth. He glanced at Lois and saw from the expression on her face she also believed him.

“What do you think this Gables guy is doing here in Metropolis?” Clark asked, folding his arms over his chest and looking back at Scardino expectantly.

“That’s what I haven’t figured out yet,” Scardino said.

“So if someone was using this drug here in Metropolis how

soon would they come out of the suspended animation?” Lois asked, seeming to be contemplating something.

“Hours if that.” Scardino shrugged. “It depends on the dosage.”

Realization seemed to dawn on Lois, and she turned to leave, mumbling, “It’s the medical examiner. He’s in on it.”

“What?” Scardino asked at the same time Clark asked, “In on what?”

Before either of them could get a response, she was already out the door. Clark quickly followed hearing Scardino rant from behind him, “Hey, get back here!”

“Lois, wait up!” Clark called after her, catching her at the elevator.

“Clark, the medical examiner is in on it. They get pronounced dead and then no one is looking for them,” Lois rambled in the hallway in front of the elevator. “Don’t you see? He did it before, and he’s doing it again.”

“Who did what?” Clark asked, not following the last part of her rambling.

“Ryan,” Lois said hurriedly. “Molly called saying the prison had declared him dead last night.”

“What?” Clark’s nerves went on edge. Ryan Wiley was the fiancé of Molly Flynn’s. He’d tried to take the world hostage by using a military weapon he’d developed before the project had been shut down. Wiley had tried to frame Molly for his destruction. Thankfully he and Lois had been able to stop him in time. If he was out...

“It’s no coincidence, right?” Lois looked at him pleadingly. “I mean you don’t just drop dead for no reason and he’s faked his death before. Why not now? Especially with the best escape method in the world. I mean, who’s going to look for you if you’re in prison.”

“Yeah, but why?” Clark frowned, following her train of thought. “Wiley was a pretty intelligent guy. He’s not going to plan an escape like this without an endgame in mind.”

“Prisoners...all dropping dead. Soldiers missing... What do they have in common?” Lois wondered aloud.

“Soldiers?” Clark looked at her with a quizzical look.

“Bobby said several soldiers were reported missing last night, but I’ve got a feeling they’re connected to this. I can feel it in my gut. Ryan knows military protocol like the back of his hand. If he’s involved in this whoever’s behind this could be trying—”

“—to get on base,” Clark finished for her, finally catching onto where she was going with this. “I think we need to find out who these soldiers were and what exactly they had access to.”

The elevator pinged and the doors opened, letting a few passengers off. Lois grabbed his arm and tugged him toward the empty elevator car. “Come on, let’s see if Perry can get the Admiral to—”

“Hold on! No one’s going anywhere until I get some answers.” They both turned to see Dan Scardino hobbling toward them with a pair of crutches. “Who the hell is Ryan Wiley and—”

Lois hit the close doors button on the elevator panel right before pressing the lobby floor button, cutting the rest of his question off. Clark turned to her with an amused expression. “You know he’s going to be waiting for us in the parking lot, right?”

“He can try, but last I heard he wasn’t discharged yet,” Lois said with a grin. All he could do was chuckle as the hum of the elevator moving filled the car. It seemed the anger she had at him earlier this morning had subsided...for the moment anyway.

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Bill Church Jr. tipped his cigar in his ashtray, allowing the ashes to fall before taking another puff on his cigar. He looked to his head lieutenant for the latest update. “Since when do we draw this much attention to ourselves, Darryl?” He laid the latest copy of the *Daily Planet* on his desk for Darryl to see the front page photo with Mayson Drake being loaded in an ambulance. “Ms.

Drake is someone that's off limits."

"I understand that, Mr. Church. The call didn't come from us though," Darryl explained. "Mr. Leon was trying to take matters into his own hands. He's been handled."

"I see." Bill Jr. let out a sigh. "And the shooters?"

"Our contact in the police department has slipped something special into their morning meal. We should get news of their untimely deaths within the hour," Darryl explained, tugging on his collar nervously. "I can assure you, Mr. Church, I have everything under control."

"Do you?" He narrowed his eyes at Darryl and added, "Seems to me there've been an awful lot of mistakes on this venture of yours. Perhaps you're not up to the job?"

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Lois flashed her badge to the security guard in the parking garage before pulling out into traffic. She had to suppress a laugh when she caught the sight of Dan Scardino arguing with one of the hospital administrators when they drove by. "Looks like they caught him trying to make a run for it."

"Something tells me we probably haven't seen the last of him though," Clark said with a light chuckle, looking out the window from the passenger side.

"Yeah." Lois shared a look with him.

"Look, Lois, about earlier—" he began.

"Not now." She cut him off, not ready to discuss his disappearing act from last night just yet. After having most of the morning to calm down a lot of her anger had subsided, but in its place remained hurt and disappointment. Discussing what had happened—what potentially could have happened last night wasn't something she was ready to do just yet. "Later," she said simply.

"Later." He nodded, pulling back and turning to stare out the window as she made the turn down Main Street to head back to the Planet.

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The dreary walls smelled of musk and old blood that had seeped into them over the years. Lex cringed as he came to a stop in the corner, staring straight ahead at the large brown stain in front of him. Blood perhaps? He didn't want to imagine what else it could be. His trial date had been set.

Still no word from Nigel.

No word from Gretchen.

They'd had a plan...

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## Chapter 7

Clark sat in the conference room with Lois going over everything they had on the Resurrection pill and the supposed suicide of Lucky Leon. The timing of everything seemed too coincidental not to be related, but so far they'd found nothing to connect Lucky Leon with the Resurrection pill.

After getting the name Stanley Gables from Dan Scardino, they'd pulled everything they could on the man. What they found hadn't been pretty. He looked at the article they'd found, '*FREAK ACCIDENT KILLS FOUR—CHEMIST BLAMED*' and another read, '*GABLES CLAIMS S.T.A.R. LABS TO BLAME*.'

"So, it looks like this Gables guy created something called the 'Omega Virus' back in '89..." Lois said, pointing to the report they'd gotten from S.T.A.R. Labs.

"Yeah, the guy had an accident in his lab, and the virus killed four people," Jimmy interjected, pulling out the court transcripts he'd found on the trial. "After the accident, S.T.A.R. Labs fired him, and Gables sued them—blaming them for the accident."

"An accident that happened because Gables was working on an unauthorized project." Clark frowned.

"Jury didn't buy it," Lois said, scanning the transcripts in her hand. "So, he's created this killer virus and infected himself and others with it. Now, he's created this resurrection pill... What's the

connection?"

Clark scanned the transcript in his hand. "Listen to this, '*Metropolis will feel the pain I feel. Everyone will know my pain.*'" He looked up. "That's what he said in court when they read the verdict."

"Whatever happened to the virus?" Lois wondered aloud.

"Locked up under high security at S.T.A.R. Labs," Jimmy said, handing her the file marked "Omega" on the front. "Dr. Klein said they did have someone try and hack into their system last week."

"Okay, so we've got an insanely angry ex-chemist from S.T.A.R. Labs that's created this virus and Resurrection pill," Clark listed off, hoping hearing everything aloud would help put two and two together.

"Then we have a mysterious shipment that Lucky Leon said he would trick Superman into stealing for him," Lois reminded him.

"Until he was found with a suicide note in his office," Clark reminded her.

"So, now we have soldiers missing and prisoners dying left and right from this Resurrection pill," Lois added.

"And S.T.A.R. Labs has the Omega virus," Clark finished, slowly putting the pieces together. "Metropolis will feel his pain. He's going to try and infect Metropolis."

"But what does that have to do with Lucky Leon?" Jimmy asked, confused.

"When were these soldiers last seen?" Clark asked, looking to Jimmy.

"Seven o'clock last night," Jimmy said, looking at the report in front of him. "At the Metro Club."

Lois frowned. "That's where Bobby said he overheard the conversation about the Resurrection pill."

"That's three hours before Lucky Leon's time of death," Clark said with a frown.

"So, this shipment he was talking about. What if it wasn't your typical delivery? We're talking Intergang, right? They're not going to go to all this trouble for something unless it's big," Lois pointed out.

"The virus..." Jimmy guessed. "Maybe they're trying to steal it."

"No, I think that's Gables' motive in all this, but I don't think that's Intergang's." Clark frowned, looking at the list of names in front of him. "Four prisoners and five soldiers." He read through the measurements on each of them and his eyebrow furrowed.

"What is it?" Lois asked.

"They're the same size," he said with a frown.

"Who is?" Jimmy asked.

Clark handed the paper to him. "Same height and weight. Except one."

"One?" Lois' brow furrowed.

"Here." Clark pointed to the soldier. "Staff Sergeant Wilcox. Skeletal dysplasias."

"Dwarfism," Jimmy interjected.

"They're not done." Clark scowled, shaking his head.

"Who's not done?" Jimmy asked confused.

"Soldiers go missing and conveniently prisoners with the same measurements. Height, weight, and appearance conveniently die with the world's fastest medical examiner signing the death certificate." Clark explained, pointing at the files. "These guys have access to something Intergang wants."

"Well, if you were going to steal from the military you'd need to dress the part," Lois reasoned aloud, putting two and two together.

"Steal from the military? That's insane." Jimmy shook his head in disbelief.

"So is trying to hijack the world by satellite but Ryan did it before." Lois frowned. "What if the shipment Lucky Leon was

talking about wasn't your typical shipment."

"What do you mean?" Clark asked, not following.

"I mean, they transfer weapons of mass destruction to different bases all the time. What if that's what they were trying to steal?" Lois wondered aloud.

"What better way to steal it than have the soldiers that are delivering it bring it right to your doorstep," Clark countered, glancing toward Perry's office. "I think we'd better find out what those soldiers were doing in Metropolis."

"That sounds like a great idea." They turned to see Dan Scardino in the doorway, supporting himself on a pair of crutches.

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Albie paced in front of the four convicts with a worried expression. "You know the deal. Your new identities and money will be deposited once the virus has been destroyed. No one gets paid until that part of the plan has been completed. Our investor was very clear on that part."

"Yeah, yeah, we get it," Diego, one of the recently-resurrected convicts, said with a bored expression on his face. "We know what our part of the deal is. Steal the warheads and destroy the virus. Piece of cake."

McCarthy gave a noncommittal shrug. "What makes this virus so special?"

"It's airborne, and it's lethal. And there's no antidote," Albie explained hurriedly. "Anyone who comes in contact with it will die a slow painful death."

McCarthy looked down at the blueprints in front of him. "All the more reason to destroy it." He frowned, peering at the air duct path in front of him. "That air vent's pretty narrow. No one here's gonna fit."

"We're still missing one member of our team," Albie said hurriedly, patting the blue pill in his jacket pocket.

"Buster?" McCarthy gave a toothy grin, and Albie nodded.

"I'll be paying him a visit within the hour, and we'll be ready to move onto phase three of our plan before you can say 'prison escape.'" Albie said with a grin.

Diego glanced at the clock. "Four more hours till we have to suit up. Is he going to make it in time?"

"Of course," Albie nodded. "Intergang has a way of making things happen when they need to."

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In the hallway, out of sight Stanley Gables sat seething as he listened to Albie and his co-conspirators plan to destroy his beloved Omega virus. He'd been betrayed. Intergang had promised full support and cooperation in exchange for the use of his resurrection pill.

"Mr. Gables?" His nurse was calling him from down the hall.

He steadied himself, preparing to stand and make his way toward her. Albie's plan was brilliant. The perfect betrayal but he would be the one to have the last laugh.

"Anita?" He waved at her once he'd reached the middle of the hallway. "I'd like to set up an appointment with the ADA. You know, the one that was shot last night? I think I have some information for her..."

"Of course, Mr. Gables." She helped him to his bedroom.

"How about we give her a call after lunch and your acupuncture therapy."

"Yes, that would be perfect." Gables smiled broadly.

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"You always take your information and run?" Scardino asked, throwing a disapproving look at Lois.

Lois smirked. "Given that you weren't exactly in a position to help we thought we'd get a jump on our investigation." She crossed her arms over her chest defiantly.

"I provided you the information on the Resurrection pill, and that seemed to have really helped you along." He gestured to the files on the table in front of them. "This is still my case."

"You weren't exactly in any position to help, Agent Scardino," Clark interjected, pointing to the crutches. "I'm guessing you left the hospital against doctors' orders?"

"Ah, how sweet. Feigning interest in my health isn't going to get me to let you print this," Scardino warned. "Now, I'm guessing you've got a source of some sort that had some missing pieces on this Resurrection pill. I'll need a name."

Lois let out a snort. "You're out of your mind."

"So they keep telling me." Scardino hobbled himself inside the conference room. "But you know I still have the gun and badge so I can't be that crazy." He looked at Lois expectantly, pulling out his pocket notepad to begin writing. "Your source."

"What source?" Lois asked innocently.

"Cute." Scardino clamped his notepad closed and wagged a finger at them. "Kent, you look like a straight and narrow kind of guy. How about you remind your partner here that this is a federal investigation. She can be compelled to give her source up."

"He is right, Lois." Clark shrugged, knowing full well she wouldn't comply.

"Bozo the clown," Lois replied coolly.

Clark bit back a chuckle, watching Scardino scowl as he tried to hold back on losing his temper with Lois. It was clear he wasn't used to going toe to toe with people that didn't fall into line. "You do realize I can have you arrested for interfering with my investigation, right?"

"For what?" Lois laughed. "I already knew about Resurrection and who made it. All you did was provide some background so we could find the right Gables," she snapped irritably. "Don't worry we'll be sure to give you credit for the background info on our article that is being printed when we nail these guys."

"Is she always like this?" Scardino asked, looking to Clark for help.

Clark knew from experience not to engage in the side conversation. Lois was already mad at him about last night and adding fuel to the fire by discussing Lois with Scardino wouldn't help matters in the slightest. He placed a supportive hand on Lois' shoulder, and Scardino snorted, "Figures." That remark earned him a glare from Lois.

"You want trust, you have to earn it," Clark interjected. "You lied about why you were in Metropolis. Got yourself and Mayson shot. Then after Lois had the name of the drug you're tracking you provided some information about the Resurrection pill." He let out a dismissive chuckle. "Yet, we're supposed to trust you with our source's name?"

"Fair enough," Scardino nodded. "I haven't been straight with you two."

"There's an understatement," Lois snorted.

"You'll have to forgive me though. Journalists don't have the best reputations where I come from." Scardino chuckled, looking back at Lois. "I guess I don't have the best bedside manner either."

"So maybe let's put all the cards on the table and nab these guys before this"—Clark pointed to the article on the Omega virus on the table—"becomes the next headline."

"Okay." Scardino nodded. "I gave you the info about the Resurrection pill. Now it's your turn." He looked at Lois expectantly who didn't respond. "Fine, can you at least tell me how you got the name Gables' resurrection pill?"

"My source overheard a conversation at the Metro Club," Lois said grudgingly. He could tell providing Scardino with any information at this point was eating at her. She chewed on the inside of her lower lip seeming to contemplate whether she wanted to provide any more information to him.

Scardino seemed oblivious, jotting down notes in his notepad. Clark added the last bit of information they'd recently uncovered. "Which is the same place where five soldiers were reported missing last night."

"Soldiers?" Scardino asked with a frown. "I'm not following."

What does that have to do with Gables?"

"We don't think it's Gables pulling the strings." Clark shook his head, glancing at Lois who beamed happily at him with that gratified smile she always got when they cracked an investigation wide open.

"We think it's Intergang," Lois said smugly, pacing in front of the table with her arms waving around excitedly.

"Intergang?" Scardino's brow furrowed, trying to process the information.

"We think the prisoners that have been given this resurrection pill are being used to replace soldiers with some kind of access that Intergang wants," Clark explained.

"Interesting theory, but I don't hear anything to back it up," Scardino pointed out, standing to his feet with his crutches.

"You got anything better?" Lois countered, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring at him expectantly.

Scardino chuckled, letting out a light laugh. "Not exactly enough for a federal agent to get a warrant."

"Well, unlike you," she countered, hooking her arm with Clark's and allowing a broad smile to spread across her face. "We don't need a warrant to do our job."

"You certainly like playing fast and loose, don't you?" Scardino observed with a grin, glancing at Lois. He hobbled toward them, stopping in front of Lois with a wink. "You know you'd make my job a whole lot easier if you'd just give me the name of your source."

"And why would I want to do that?" Lois looked back at him in disbelief.

"I'm a fun guy. You should be nice to me. When I'm not chasing down drug dealers, I can be a fun person to be around." Scardino winked at her. "If you're not afraid of a little fun that is."

Lois rolled her eyes at him, and Clark suppressed the urge to interject his protest to where this conversation was going. He knew Lois could hold her own but the dismissive attitude Scardino seemed to have toward him was grating on his last nerve and after last night he didn't know how much longer he could continue to bite his tongue.

"Agent Scardino," Lois began carefully.

"Please call me Daniel," he responded with a smile.

"You really want my source?" Lois asked, her tone all innocence. Clark bit back a chuckle knowing full well there was no way Lois would give Scardino Bobby's name.

"Yes," Scardino said happily. "I really would."

"Okay, but his name is hard to spell. Are you ready?" she asked, motioning to the notepad in his pocket. He pulled out the notepad and began to jot the letters down as she spelled them out. "B-I-T-E-M-E."

Scardino finished jotting down the last letter, and then realization crossed his face before quickly being replaced with a scowl. "Cute. Very funny."

"Subtle." Clark chuckled. "Nice."

"I thought so." Lois grinned happily. "See, we can have fun too." She patted Clark on the chest before moving to the conference room door to leave and then stopped, turning to add, "For the record"—she shot Scardino a threatening glare—"never gonna happen."

The door closed behind her, and to Clark's amazement, Scardino didn't seem to be deterred in the slightest. "Quite the spitfire, isn't she?" He grinned happily. "I always enjoy a challenge."

"I think she made herself perfectly clear." Clark countered, suppressing the urge to throttle Scardino and have to explain why he decked a federal agent they were supposed to be working with.

"She'll come around. The ladies always do," Scardino said, hobbling out the door.

Clark narrowed his eyes at him, watching as the agent limped his way across the newsroom to Perry's office where Lois was

updating Perry on what they'd found out. "Do not hit an injured man. Do not hit an injured man..." he began muttering under his breath as a mantra.

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### Chapter 8

Mayson walked toward her townhome with keys in her hand and two officers and Bill Henderson behind her. "You know this isn't necessary."

"You are under orders from the mayor to have round-the-clock protection until we get to the bottom of who was behind the shooting," Henderson explained, pointing to the door. "Put the key in the lock and stay here with Ryder. I'm going to check and make sure it's clear."

Mayson let out a frustrated sigh. "Fine." She put the keys in the deadbolt and stepped to the side. She knew having the protection was necessary after last night's shooting, but it still felt like she was losing her freedom with the added security.

"It gets easier," Ryder said, looking at her with a sympathetic look. "Bill's just trying to be cautious."

"I know," Mayson managed weakly. "This would be a lot easier if we knew how five prisoners all simultaneously died in custody at the same time."

"Your guess is as good as mine." Ryder shrugged. "I don't need to tell you that tidbit needs to be kept close to the vest. We have that leaked by the press, and everyone will be all over us." He cleared his throat. "This case could be what makes or breaks you. The governor's gonna want to know where your loyalties are."

"You can trust me. My friendship with Lane and Kent is separate from my career. They both understand that."

"Do they?" Ryder shook his head, "If the information we got from this witness is true we just got the smoking gun to lock up all of Intergang's lieutenants. This is a career-making case, Mayson."

"I know," Mayson said with a pat on his shoulder. "Believe me I know."

Henderson stepped outside once more. "We just got a call." He looked to Mayson with a smile. "Seems you got a break. Stanley Gables just showed up at your office looking for you."

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Clark entered Perry's office behind Scardino, placing a possessive arm around Lois' waist as she was finishing her update to Perry. He noted the look of disapproval on Scardino's face to himself, letting out a sigh of relief when Lois placed her hand over where his rested on her waist. Her anger from this morning seemed to have disappeared though she still wasn't ready to talk about last night.

"Clark and I think these missing soldiers could have possibly been drugged by the same guy that's pushing this Resurrection pill to the prisoners. We've got to find out what kind of access they had and warn the base commander—"

"Now hold the phone," Perry interjected. "You and I both know the military isn't going to just open up about their personal matters with a major metropolitan newspaper like the *Daily Planet*. We're not exactly exchanging Christmas cards." He gave them a look of disapproval. "Especially after your last escapade at Fort Marshall."

"If we hadn't done that who knows if they ever would have caught Ryan Wiley." Lois sniffed, crossing her arms over her chest.

"That's not how the new base commander saw it," Perry reminded them. "I for one don't want to go through that again anytime soon."

"We can't just sit here and do nothing, Chief. The military may not exactly be known for their press relations, but I'm sure they don't want the bad press that will come with this if what we suspect is going on turns out to be true," Clark interjected, sharing a look with Lois.

“When you’re talking about the military you’re playing a different ballgame, Kent,” Scardino cut in, taking a step toward Clark before adding in a condescending tone, “Let me make a few calls, and I’ll set up a meeting. We should know something by tomorrow at the latest.”

Lois shook her head adamantly. “No, that’ll be too late.”

“How it works. You can’t expect them to stop training because you said jump,” Scardino pointed out. “I’ve been doing this a long time.”

“So have we and believe me there’s a better way,” Clark countered, hearing the edge in his tone as he narrowed his eyes at the DEA agent. The longer he was around him, the more his distaste for him grew.

“Agreed,” Lois said, tapping her hand against her chin for a moment before an idea struck her. Her eyes lit up, and she proposed, “Chief, what about Admiral Haberstetzer?”

“I can try but Lois he’s retired. I’m not sure how much help he’s going to be here,” Perry pointed out.

“Lucky Leon said there was a shipment coming in today,” Clark reminded Perry. “If we wait on Scardino Intergang will have already stolen the shipment, and then we’ll all be worrying about a lot more than everyone crossing their T’s and dotting their I’s.”

“It’s called national security,” Scardino shot back mildly ticked. “You know that thing that keeps everyone around here safe and protected so they can go about their lives every day?”

“Well, they won’t be able to do that if terrorists get ahold of military weapons now will they?” Clark argued, releasing his arm from around Lois’ waist and taking a step toward Scardino.

“Maybe if you spent more time doing your job instead of trying to work on your Mel Gibson impression, we’d actually have someone from Fort Marshall on the phone right now, but I guess that’s asking too much, right?”

“You got a problem, Kent?” Scardino countered.

“Yeah, *you*,” Clark snapped at him angrily.

A sharp whistle from behind him caught his attention. “Excuse me, hi!” Lois waved her hand at them. “If you don’t mind could you two can take whatever this is outside? Not sure if you got the memo but we have two hours until the shipment—whatever it might be—comes in. Let’s try and stay focused.”

“She’s right,” Scardino nodded his head in Lois’ direction. “We should play nice.” He then shrugged. “Not that I don’t think I can take you.”

Clark felt the fire in his throat begin to rise from the anger that was slowly building the longer he was around him. “Don’t be so sure.”

“That a challenge?” Scardino shot back, narrowing his eyes at him.

“Okay, Agent Scardino, why don’t you go take a walk over to the conference room over there and make your calls,” Perry interjected, breaking the tension between them.

“Great,” Scardino said, moving toward the door to leave.

Perry got up to escort him out. “I’ll show you where everything is.”

Clark shook his head, trying to suppress his frustration with Scardino. Lois moved to the door and slammed it closed behind them before turning to face him, folding her arms over her chest. “Are you out of your ever loving mind?! What do you think you’re doing?”

“Reaching my boiling point,” he snapped irritably. “You heard him. He’s not going to be able to get anyone at Fort Marshall until tomorrow. It’ll be too late then.” He let out a frustrated groan, “He is such an arrogant—”

“And you’re not any better?” Lois countered, looking at him in surprise. She walked over to him, placing a hand on his chest and looking at him in concern. “You do remember you can’t just throw down in the middle of Perry’s office, right? Red cape and ‘S’ ring any bells?” Lois snapped. “Yes, he’s a royal pain and a

jerk to boot, but right now he’s all we’ve got. Unless you want Intergang to win?”

“No, of course not.” He let out a muttered sigh of defeat. “You know I don’t want that.”

Her facial features softened, reaching up to run a hand across his cheek. “Then as painful as it is we’re going to have to suck it up and work with Dan Scardino.”

“Fine.” He sighed, wrapping an arm around her waist. “Maybe we’ll get lucky, and his contact will come through.”

“That’s the spirit.” Lois cheered, patting her hand on his chest.

“The sooner we put him on the next flight to Washington the better,” Clark muttered grumpily. “I’ll even provide the flight.” He gave her a half-smile.

Lois laughed, hanging on his arm. “That would be very interesting to explain why Superman is flying around federal agents...”

“You don’t think honoring a favor to us would be a good enough excuse?” he whispered in her ear with a chuckle, and she let out a giggle. His arm instinctually tightened around her. After the day they’d had her laughter was music to his ears. “I’m sorry,” he murmured in her ear. “For earlier and last night.”

She looked up at him with a pained expression. “Clark, I really don’t want to do this now...” She argued pleadingly.

“I know.” He stroked her cheek with the back of his hand.

“But I think not talking about it is only going to keep driving both of us crazy.” He offered a smile. “Case in point.”

“For the record, I think you could have taken him.” She grinned back at him happily. “Even without the superpowers.”

The corners of his mouth twitched into a full smile. “Glad to know I’ve got you in my corner.”

“I’m always in your corner,” she reminded him, pursing her lips with a sour expression.

“I know.” He sighed.

“You know, I waited for *four hours* last night,” she said with a look of disapproval, stepping away from him and pacing in a circle in front of him. “I watched the news. I started calling around trying to find out what I could so you wouldn’t have to. I *waited*, and you *never* came back.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, taking a step toward her. “Right after I rounded up the shooters they found Lucky Leon’s body and I just... wasn’t in a good place.”

“I noticed,” Lois said quietly. “But you can’t keep doing this. You can’t keep shutting me out. Do you have any idea how hard it was for me to—” She stopped, taking a deep breath and trying to change the subject. “You can’t shut me out,” she said simply.

*To what?* his mind screamed, seeing the torturous expression on her face. She was trying to tell him something but had stopped. What was she trying to say?

“I’m sorry. Believe me, I know the timing last night was horrible and I should have handled everything better, but there are things about being Superman that...” He let out a long breath, uncertain how to continue. “This isn’t easy for me,” he explained sheepishly. “I’ve spent most of my life hiding. Superman’s job is to protect and when he can’t—when I can’t...”

“You obsess.” Lois finished for him with a knowing look.

“Yeah,” he admitted. “People depend on me. If I’m not fast enough or strong enough then...”

“The coroner said Lucky Leon had died hours before the police showed up. You got the gunmen.” She ran a hand through his hair and gave him a wry look. “Seems to me Superman did a pretty good job saving the day.”

“They’re calling it a suicide.” He continued to brood.

“Then we’ll prove otherwise,” she said, hanging on his arm. “But bottling it up and shutting people out isn’t going to help anything.”

He nodded. “I’ll try and work on that.”

“I’m serious.” She continued, wagging her finger at him. “I’m

not going to have one of those marriages where the husband holes himself in a dark corner brooding about work and...”

He grinned happily at her, running a hand across her cheek before he leaned in to capture her mouth. She let out a muffled protest that quickly disappeared when she began to respond. Her arms looped around his neck and he whispered against her lips, “No more brooding.”

“Good,” she mumbled incoherently against his lips. “No more shutting me out.”

“I promise.” He cupped her cheek. A smile spread across his face, recalling their conversation from last night and just now when she’d slipped and referred to their future relationship as “marriage.” She was thinking about the proposal—really thinking about it.

<< “I can’t cook. I don’t want to cook. Actually, I probably shouldn’t cook for anyone. Can you imagine the looks I’d get from our um, kids...” >>

<< “Why are you laughing at me? This is serious!”

“I wasn’t laughing I swear.”

“Liar.” >>

<< “So, you were waiting for...?”

“Just the right person.” >>

<< “I don’t want either of us rushing into anything unless we’re both ready.”

“What if I was...ready?”

“Well, I...” >>

Last night, she’d been opening up—really opening up before he’d heard the gunfire. The conversation had taken a drastic turn to something he knew had been weighing on both of their minds. All day her question raced through his mind over and over.

<< “What if I was...ready?” >>

“Lois.” He looked into her dark eyes, trying to find the right words. “Last night...”

The tapping of a hand against the glass window of the office they were in cut him off. He looked up and sighed, seeing Perry standing outside the office.

“I guess, we’ll finish this later.” He sighed.

“Yeah,” Lois said, smoothing the side of her hair as he pulled away from her.

Perry opened the door. “Sorry to, uh, interrupt, but Agent Scardino just heard from General Reynolds, the base commander at Fort Marshall. He’s on his way over.”

“Over here?” Lois’ brow furrowed.

“That’s what he said.” Perry shrugged.

\*\*\*

Ryan Wiley adjusted his cap, ready to follow the rest of the unit into the truck marked “Sam’s Fresh Seafood.” Warheads. Nuclear warheads for their taking. He looked behind him with a chuckle, nodding to Diego. “Remember we stop for nothing and no one.” He held up his rifle and patted it with a laugh. “And we’ll use extreme force if necessary. Now let’s roll.”

They piled into the truck hurriedly and drove off. Behind them, three unconscious bodies were left still in their ACUs from before they’d been attacked.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 9

Darryl raced down the steps, trying to keep up with Bill Church Jr. through the narrow hallways. “We’ve sent the Kryptonite to the lab and had it split into three specimens. Wiley and the convicts have been armed with three Kryptonite bullets should they have any super problems along the way. What is your first move, Mr. Church?”

“Right now, we wait,” Church said warily. “I just got word on a leak within Intergang. It seems we have someone that’s agreed to turn evidence against us.”

“But no one’s ever testified against Intergang,” Darryl argued.

“Exactly.” Church nodded. “Let’s make sure it stays that way.”

He pointed to the map on the wall. “What’s the status on our warheads?”

“Our last communication had the truck en route to Lucky Leon’s old warehouse where we’ll be sending a courier to deliver the warheads to our underground factory for safekeeping.”

“And how are we coming along on our situation with Mr. St. John?” Church asked cautiously.

“He doesn’t have a clue he’s been played,” Darryl said with a satisfied smile. “All the evidence will lead the Feds to his doorstep.”

\*\*\*

“No.” Mayson shook her head adamantly, pacing in the large spacious office of Michael Clemmons, the acting district attorney. “We can’t do this.”

“I’m not sure that we have a choice, Mayson,” Clemmons argued. “We have five convicts. Five missing soldiers and a witness that can tell us where everyone is.”

“A witness that was trying to infect this entire city with a deadly virus!” Mayson shot back, wincing when she felt a sharp pain shoot through her shoulder with the sudden movement of her arm.

“But he didn’t,” Clemmons reminded her.

“The intention was there,” she reminded him. “He helped the convicts escape!”

“We’re negotiating a deal on that,” Clemmons admitted begrudgingly.

“A deal?” Mayson countered in disbelief. “Michael, you can’t be serious!”

“What choice do I have, Mayson?” Clemmons asked.

“The choice to not negotiate with terrorists!” Mayson snapped angrily.

“He’s a cooperating witness,” Clemmons corrected.

“He can’t be trusted,” Mayson said irritably. “Look, just give me some time before you agree to anything.”

“How much time?” Clemmons inquired. “We’re on a clock as it is.”

“There has to be another way, Michael,” she pleaded. “Just don’t sign off on anything just yet.”

\*\*\*

The Daily Planet was abuzz with activity when General Reynolds entered the newsroom with seven armed soldiers in hot pursuit. The conference room had been converted to a war room with both the DEA and military personnel having their teams collaborate. The conference room had been closed off to all *Daily Planet* personnel with the exception of both Lois and Clark being pulled in on occasion to provide information to the two agencies.

Lois glanced toward the conference room with a worried expression. “It’s twelve o’clock. One more hour.”

Clark tapped his ear, and whispered, “They can’t agree on who should make the arrest. The DEA wants Sean McCarthy for his connection to Intergang and the military wants him for his involvement with Ryan Wiley.”

“They better make a decision pretty quick.” Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair. “Either way, we’ve got criminals with some sort of weapon in their possession. I still don’t get why General Reynolds won’t at least tell us what’s going on. I mean, this is our investigation.”

“Not anymore,” Clark pointed to the doors that were opening. General Reynolds exited the conference room, making a beeline toward Clark’s desk.

“You Kent?” Reynolds asked gruffly.

“Yeah,” Clark said, adjusting his glasses nervously under the general’s gaze.

“Rumor is you can contact Superman. That true?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say contact exactly...” Clark began to correct him until Lois jabbed him in the ribs. She knew it wouldn’t hurt him but hopefully it would at least get his attention and make

him stop talking. Arguing about technicalities right now was a moot point.

“What he means is yes he’s had some luck in that department, but no one really knows how to contact him. He just kinda shows up when he’s needed.” Lois rambled quickly, hoping not to raise any red flags among the federal agents that were standing behind the general.

“Well, let’s hope today’s a lucky day, shall we?” Reynolds raised his eyebrows and looked to Clark. “Route 128. Have Superman meet us there if you can reach him. We’ll work on an alternative plan just in case.” He motioned to the two agents behind him. “Let’s go.”

Lois watched the general move to the elevator with the soldiers he’d arrived with. “Route 128? Isn’t that the same road that was written on Lucky Leon’s notepad?”

“The one and the same,” Clark said with an amused expression. “I guess it wasn’t a wild goose chase after all.”

“Just be careful,” she whispered, leaning in to kiss him as she loosened his tie. “They had a plan to trick you into stealing that shipment if you remember.”

“Yeah, somehow I think that plan disappeared with Lucky Leon,” Clark said grimly, running his palm against her cheek. “I’ve got to go.”

“I know,” she said, with a long sigh. “Go round up your convicts. I’ll have the keyboard ready for you when you’re done.”

“Good.” He leaned in to kiss her one last time before heading to the hallway that led to the stairs. She let out a breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding.

“Well, looks like you’ll have that story after all,” she heard a voice behind her say.

“What?” Lois looked behind her and saw Agent Scardino with one crutch under his arm as he hopped toward her. “Agent Scardino, I thought you left with the rest of the mob.” She pointed to the elevator.

“Agent Richards has me on administrative duty until this thing heals.” He tapped his hip with a grimace. “The rest of the team’s gone with General Reynolds to make sure there are no hiccups in rounding up these guys. McCarthy’s quite the snake.”

“Yeah, I read the file,” she said cautiously, running her hands up and down her shoulders. “He did a series of bombings to throw the police off his tail. They caught him in ‘91 in a standoff.”

“Yeah.” Scardino’s face fell to a downcast expression, seeming to pull back. Quite a difference from the outgoing and comedic man he’d portrayed himself to be since their introduction yesterday. “Listen, I don’t know about you but sitting on the sidelines isn’t really my style. How about we take a drive down Route 128 and see them slap the cuffs on McCarthy ourselves.”

“And Wiley?” Lois gave him an amused expression. “I thought you were on administrative duty.”

“I can’t type up the report without knowing what happened,” Scardino pointed out.

“You have *one* good leg,” she pointed out.

“Trust me, I can hold my own crippled or not,” he shot back with a grin. “Come on, if anyone gives you any grief I’ll take full responsibility.”

“It would help tie up the article if I saw everything with my own two eyes.” Lois reasoned aloud for a moment. “But it could be dangerous.” She looked to his crutch. “You already got yourself shot last night.”

“You’re *scared*.” Scardino chuckled.

“I am not scared.” Lois harrumphed. “I’m . . .”

“Yeah?” Scardino grinned at her. “Don’t tell me, Kent said he’d update you, right? I must say you’re not what I pictured at all.” He shook his head.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois snapped defensively.

“It means I thought you had a little more backbone.” Scardino shrugged. “I mean, this is the opportunity to catch resurrected

convicts from starting a nuclear war, and you’re sitting on the sidelines. I would have thought the woman that nabbed the first Superman exclusive by sneaking onto the *Messenger* shuttle had a little more guts is all.”

Lois narrowed her eyes, grabbing her keys. “Don’t just stand there. Get moving!”

“Where are *we* going?” he asked innocently.

“Where do you think?” she snapped over her shoulder. “I’ll drive.”

\*\*\*

Albie Swinson sat in the security office, uncertain how to explain the blue pill in his possession to the security guard. “I’m going to ask you one more time, Mr. Swinson, what is in the capsule?” The guard crossed his arms, looking at him expectantly.

“Am I under arrest?” Albie asked.

“Not yet.” The guard shook his head. “But from the tip we just got I’m sure it’ll only be a matter of time.”

“Tip?” Albie echoed, uncertain how to respond.

The guard pointed to the window where a blonde-haired woman with a blue shoulder sling stood, staring at him with a look of satisfaction. A tall man with dark sunglasses and a middle-aged man with dark brown hair stood behind her. The guard looked to her and asked through the glass, “What do you want us to do with him, Ms. Drake?”

“Read him his rights and throw him in one of the visitation cells,” she responded before patting the men behind her on the backs. “These two will take it from there.”

\*\*\*

A Humvee with two soldiers in ACUs was parked in front of the hillside just north of the exit that let out onto Route 128. Two soldiers stood in front of the crowd of soldiers surrounding the general and his first sergeant.

“Superman?” General Reynolds waved him through.

“General.” Clark nodded his recognition to the man.

“General Reynolds.” He extended his hand to shake Clark’s then nodded his head to the soldiers behind him. “When I asked Mr. Kent to get ahold of you I didn’t think it would be this quickly.”

“I always try to stay nearby,” Superman explained, looking to the remote devices that were set up on the hood of one of the Humvees and a map with a red line marked in permanent ink. “Is this the shipment coming to Fort Marshall?”

“Yes,” General Reynolds said with a sigh. “Nuclear warheads that are supposed to be delivered this afternoon. It should be en route as we speak. All of the missing soldiers from Metropolis were assigned to this route. Superman, if these warheads get in the hands of Intergang . . .”

“They won’t,” he promised.

“It is imperative we take these guys alive,” the first sergeant piped in. “We’ve still yet to find the missing soldiers. These guys may be the only way of locating them.”

“Agreed.” The General nodded. “But we will use deadly force if we have to.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that,” Clark said.

\*\*\*

Lois parked her Jeep in the grass just below the interstate that diverted onto Route 128. She pointed to the grassy pathway in front of them. “If we keep going this way it’ll bring us to the middle of 128 and fork out into east and west.”

“You lead the way,” Scardino said, holding the crutch beneath his left arm as he limped across the grass.

“You sure you’re going to be all right with that thing?” Lois asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Aw, what is this? Concern for my well-being? I thought you didn’t care,” he teased.

Lois rolled her eyes. “I *don’t*.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Scardino muttered, looking toward the road.

“Oh boy, looks like we’ve got company.” He pulled her back into the bushes.

“Hey!” she hollered only to have him clamp his palm over her mouth.

“Get down!” he ordered in a harsh whisper.

\*\*\*

Clark flew through the air, searching on Route 128 where the general had instructed the military’s transport was moving the warheads on. Sure enough, he found the truck matching the general’s description flying down the highway. Using his x-ray vision from the air, he confirmed there were only five individuals.

He landed on the road in front of them, preparing for the collision he was afraid would occur if they didn’t stop. He held his hands in front of him, steadying himself. The rubber against the asphalt burned as the truck came to a stop. A bullhorn raised itself out of the window.

“Superman, clear the path!” a familiar voice ordered, remaining behind the tinted windows of the glass.

“I don’t think so. I’m about to return some stolen property,” he said, pointing at the driver he could see clearly. “I know it’s you, Wiley. Give yourself up now and make this easy on yourself.”

The window opened, and Ryan Wiley smiled back at him. “Can’t blame a guy for trying.” With that, he lifted a pistol out the window and fired three shots. All of which Clark caught with ease except the last one.

He fell to the ground, feeling the burning sensation graze against his shoulder. “Wh...” He gasped in surprise, looking up at the truck in front of him in surprise.

“You didn’t really think we’d come unprepared this time, did you?” Wiley chuckled, aiming the barrel of his gun at Clark.

“Amazing what you can get your hands on when so many people want the same person dead, isn’t it?”

\*\*\*

“Superman, clear the path!” Ryan Wiley shouted through the megaphone on the Humvee.

Lois sat hunched down behind the bush she was hiding behind, watching the scene unfold. She glanced to the side and saw Scardino loading his weapon. “What are you doing?”

“It’s called being prepared,” Scardino said, putting the last of the rounds in the chamber.

“I don’t think so. I’m about to return some stolen property,” she heard Clark say. “I know it’s you, Wiley. Give yourself up now and make this easy on yourself.”

“Can’t blame a guy for trying.” There was something eerie about Ryan Wiley’s tone. She saw a glint of something reflect off the sunlight. One. Two. Three shots rang out, and she jumped, startled when she saw Clark fall to the ground.

She clamped a hand over her mouth, holding back tears as she mentally began going through all of the if-scenarios. Bullets bounced off of Clark like nothing. She’d never seen him stopped by anything other than Metallo. Clark had suspected he had Kryptonite on him somewhere or was carrying it...But where would Wiley have gotten Kryptonite?

“You didn’t really think we’d come unprepared this time, did you?” Wiley chuckled, aiming the barrel of his gun at Clark.

“Amazing what you can get your hands on when so many people want the same person dead, isn’t it?”

Lois watched the scene before her unfold, unable to move, unable to think. She couldn’t just sit here and do nothing, but she couldn’t give away her cover either. She glanced back at Scardino who had disappeared.

‘Oh, no.’

\*\*\*

Michael Disanto took a deep breath, looking around the room. The wood paneling in the courtroom was dark. He glanced up at the Ten Commandments on the wall, wondering briefly how he had gotten here. The life of luxury, fast cars, sex, drugs, and

money seemed like something that happened to someone else.

“Mr. Disanto?”

He looked up, nodding to the man in uniform, holding up a bulletproof vest. “I’m Officer Ranken. I’ll be escorting you to the safe house.”

“Let’s go.” Michael stood up, allowing Ranken to help him with the vest to ensure it was on properly.

“The DA’s going to do everything he can to make sure news of your testimony doesn’t leak out to the press until we’re ready, but right now there are a lot of players and parts moving within Intergang. We’re not taking any chances.”

\*\*\*

General Reynolds motioned to the troops behind him. “Superman’s down. Move in!” The parade of tan and grey moved in front of him. The dust picked up around them as they climbed up the hills on both sides, peering up to the asphalt road in front of them where they’d heard the gunfire. Reynolds looked up to see Superman on the ground. “Get ready!”

\*\*\*

## Chapter 10

Clark stared down the barrel of the gun, preparing for the worst as he fought against the burning pain that seared through his ligaments in his shoulder. The shock of what was happening weighted on him as Ryan Wiley cackled happily. “Not so cocky now, are you?”

Clark caught sight of the ten Humvees that were now surrounding the truck from behind, holding his shoulder in pain as he steadied himself. Wiley cocked the trigger, and Clark winced, preparing for the worst. There was no way the Humvees would arrive before the final shot rang out. He prepared himself to summon what super-speed he could to move out of the line of fire in his weakened state.

“Of all the people that wanted you dead I’m the one that gets to fire the final shot.” Wiley laughed.

A shot from behind him fired and Wiley fell to the ground as Clark stood up, holding his injured shoulder. Before he could react, four soldiers had already surrounded the truck and kept the injured Wiley at bay as he cradled his injured knee. “One man down!” He heard a voice crackle over the radio.

“Keep your hands where we can see them!” the voice of the General came from the megaphone on the first Humvee.

“Unauthorized shots fired!” Another voice crackled over the radio.

He looked to the side and spotted Sean McCarthy and Diego Martinez making a run for it up the hill. Two more shots were fired, and they both fell to the ground. He looked behind him and spotted Dan Scardino lying on the ground with his arm extended and the pistol in his hand.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” he muttered under his breath.

“Scardino! I thought I ordered you on administrative duty!”

He heard Agent Richards tear into Scardino as he reached down to help him up.

Clark smiled, turning his attention back to the truck where the convicts were being lined up and read their rights. Three injuries. Two surrenders.

He winced, holding his shoulder and looking at it with a grimace. He’d have to make a stop by S.T.A.R. Labs to have Dr. Klein take a look at his shoulder. He kept his hand clamped over the gunshot, trying to hide the blood from the team of agents and soldiers that were now combing over the area with a fine-tooth comb. He had to get out of here.

“Superman!” He turned to see Lois running toward him, worry in her eyes as she approached.

“Ms. Lane, how did you get here?” He heard one of the FBI agents ask, blocking her from entry. “This is a federal matter. We’ll have a statement for the press at—”

“Would you cut it out?” she snapped irritably. “I’m not here

with the press I'm—"

"But—"

"Let her through," Clark interrupted, walking up behind the agent who seemed intent on keeping Lois behind the yellow perimeter and barricades that were already being set up. The agent snorted, looking back at Clark's stern expression then nodding and moving to another of the agents and pointing in their direction as Lois climbed under the yellow tape to meet him. "What are you doing here?"

"What happened out there?" she asked, not answering his question. "You fell to the ground when he..."

Clark grimaced, looking around to be sure no one was close enough to them that their conversation could be overheard. "Uh, where did you park?" he asked, keeping his tone as level as he could at the moment.

She seemed to understand what he was hinting at and nodded. "I'm in the grass down here." She pointed to the sign where the road split into two different directions.

"I'll walk you," he said evenly, taking a deep breath and following her toward the Jeep. "You never answered my question," he reminded her in a low tone when they were out of earshot. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought I could help," she said, avoiding his gaze. "And I didn't have much of a choice."

"What do you mean you didn't have much choice in the matter?" he asked, between uneven breaths as they turned the corner to where Lois had parked the Jeep. The silver Jeep Cherokee never looked so good.

"I mean..." She stopped when she turned to look at him. "Clark, you're sweating. What the hell happened out there?" He staggered forward, and his hand fell down, revealing the blood-soaked stain in the shoulder of his costume. "Oh my God, you're bleeding!" She gasped, looking at him in surprise.

"I know," he said, trying to shrug it off. "I'll be fine. I just have to get the..."

"Hold on." Lois helped lower him to the ground then wagged her finger at him. "Don't move." She pulled her pocket knife out of her pocket and flipped open the knife. "Hold still."

He should have yelled at her for once again running headfirst into a dangerous situation without looking, but right now the pain from the Kryptonite in his shoulder outweighed his anger at her. He let out a muffled grunt, feeling the burning sensation disappear. He watched Lois take the bullet and wrap it in a cloth from her purse. "I'll be right back," she said before disappearing behind the bushes.

He let out a sigh of relief. The pain was gone. He stood up, holding his hand over his shoulder in relief. He glanced over his shoulder, sighing in relief when he saw the wound heal before his eyes. That was a good sign.

"Superman, you okay?" He looked up and saw Agent Scardino hopping toward him, supporting himself on one of his crutches.

"Fine," he said, crossing his arms across his chest in hopes that the position would make the blood on him less noticeable. His shoulder still ached from the Kryptonite, but he was no longer in constant pain. "Agent Scardino, right?"

"You've heard of me?" Scardino flashed him a smile.

"I've heard your name mentioned a time or two," Clark said, doing his best to keep his emotions in check. Even though he still didn't like Scardino the man did stop Wiley before he could get off another deadly shot. "Uh, thank you for your help back there."

"Sharpshooter every year," Scardino boasted proudly. "I'm glad I was able to help."

"Okay, I think we're all set," Lois said, walking back with a satisfied grin.

"Thank you, Lois," Clark said, meeting her gaze. "Although, I still think you would have been safer back at the Planet...away from danger."

"Don't give Ms. Lane too much grief. I had to bait her to get her to give me a ride out here. I'm not much for sitting on the sidelines," Scardino interjected.

Clark glanced at Scardino with a look of disbelief. "You might want to be more careful about who you're roping into your adventures, Agent Scardino. You could have gotten yourself or Ms. Lane killed."

"True, but then I wouldn't have been around to save you," Scardino pointed out. "See? Win-win."

"I think it's time we head back," Lois interjected. She glanced toward Clark. "Are you going to be okay?"

"I'll be fine. Thanks again, Lois." He then turned to Scardino and shook his hand. "Agent Scardino." Afterward, he took off into the sky, flying back to where General Reynolds was to see if there had been any luck in finding the locations of the missing soldiers.

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Bill Church Jr. took a whiff of the orchids placed on the coffee table in front of him and cringed. "You know I never was one for the perfume-scented flowers."

"That's because your taste and mine are very different," Diana Stride said, pouring herself a glass of wine as she spoke. "So, Bill, it's been awhile."

"Yes, it has." He looked around the luxurious condo decorated in the finer things. "You've made good use of your time away from Intergang."

"It's not time away, Bill. I'm retired," she reminded him.

"You don't retire when you work for Intergang," Church reminded her.

"Look, whatever it is I'm not interested." She cut him off before he could begin to explain.

"Oh, I beg to differ." Church took a 8x10 glossy photo from the folder in front of him and handed it to her. "Ring any bells?"

"Nice hood," she joked. "Couture?"

"He's one of ours, turning state. The DA's calling him Mr. X, but you know him... as Michael Disanto. Your former partner," Church said casually. "I've got guys on the inside trying to find the safe house. We've got two weeks to get to him before this leaks out to the press."

"I'm not sure what this has to do with me," Diana replied coolly. "Michael and I haven't been an item since our split in '86."

"Michael has information he's willing to tell everyone. Information about you, Diana." Bill Church Jr. narrowed his eyes at her, folding his hands in front of him as he spoke. "You remember how you got all this?" He waved his hand toward the apartment behind him. "If we don't find him and silence him, he's going to tell the grand jury everything he knows. How we plucked you out of nowhere and made you a world-famous journalist. So you could meet the rich, the powerful...and kill them for us."

"All right." Diana waved him off. "I'll dust off my contacts in the Bureau and see what I can dig up."

"That's my girl," Church said with a broad smile.

"This is my last job," she called after him.

"That's what they all say." Church shrugged.

Diana pursed her lips looking at him with a pout. "You know I can't stay on forever, Bill."

"You're still of use to us," he reminded her. "After Michael's been taken care of we'll work something out. I can't afford to let go of a good soldier right now. Not after today."

"Yes, I heard about that. It's a shame about that drug being confiscated." Diana shook her head. "Could have come in handy for torturing."

"Yeah, Gables turned on Swinson. I didn't see that one coming." Bill Church mused with a scowl. "We'll have to find another way of getting our hands on the Omega virus."

\*\*\*

Stanley Gables sat with his attorney at the table, waiting patiently for the ADA to return with his plea deal. He had been so

close to realizing his dream and inciting revenge on Metropolis, but Albie had ruined it all. Albie had turned against him. He wouldn't see Intergang prosper from his labors. Given his already morbid future of impending death from the Omega virus, he didn't see the harm in turning Albie over to the authorities and confessing his crimes. With the way the law was, he knew he'd never see the inside of a jail cell given his terminal illness.

"Mr. Gables?"

He looked up and saw Mayson Drake standing in the doorway. "Ms. Drake, have you reached a decision?"

"I have." She smiled back at him.

"Excellent." He beamed back at her. "Where do I sign?"

"Oh, no, there's not going to be a plea deal," she corrected him.

"What?" He looked at her in surprise.

"See, the compassionate release program is only for those criminals we feel are no longer a danger to society." Her eyes narrowed at him. "We don't think you fit that criteria, Mr. Gables." With that, she spun around and walked out the door. "See you at trial, Mr. Gables."

\*\*\*

Clark landed on the balcony outside his apartment and let out a sigh of relief to be home. It had been a long and trying day. After the arrest of Wiley and his gang of resurrected convicts, they were able to get the location of the missing soldiers from McCarthy in exchange for having his involvement in his latest terrorist act tried in civil court and not a military court martial. General Reynolds had agreed, and the DEA had taken charge from there.

By the time he'd gotten back to the Planet, Lois had already left for the night. Most of the afternoon had been spent providing his statement over and over and over again to the officers doing the intake on the latest threat to national security. Thankfully they'd been understanding when he had to leave to attend to rescues nearby, but by the time he was done giving his statement, it was too late to do his nightly patrol. Most of the city appeared to be sleeping anyway—even the criminals thankfully.

They'd found the missing soldiers in Lucky Leon's old warehouse along with information on Leon's original plan to steal the warheads for Intergang. There was an invoice from a very familiar name he'd have to update Lois on in the morning. The soldiers were expected to make a full recovery. He had found them hooked up to an IV with some kind of drug that was keeping them all unconscious.

He closed the balcony door behind him and spun out of his suit and into a t-shirt and shorts. He smiled to himself when he heard the familiar heartbeat coming from the living room. He sighed, moving to the couch where he found Lois fast asleep curled up with her notes on the resurrection pill in one hand and the remote in the other.

He smiled, peering over the couch to look at her. "Oh, honey." He ran a hand across her cheek.

Her eyes fluttered open sleepily and she yawned. "What did you just say?"

"Honey," he repeated, running his hand down her jaw. The corners of his mouth twitched into a half-smile.

He watched her face light up in amazement as she stared back at him, having set down her notes and the remote and turning to face him, leaning against the back of the couch. "That's the first time you ever called me that." Her eyes twinkled at him.

"Yeah, it is." He grinned at her.

"Say it again." She cheered happily, the fatigue in her voice was long gone as she looked back at him expectantly.

"Honey," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

"That's amazing!" She giggled happily. "I like it."

"Yeah?" He leaned in to kiss her.

Her hands ran up his shoulders, and her lips met his enthusiastically as she murmured against his lips, "I never thought

of myself as a 'honey.'"

"Really?" He teased, running his hand down her shoulders. He moved to join her on the couch, wrapping his arm around her.

"Seemed like something so...foreign," she said wistfully, leaning her back against him.

"Foreign?" he asked confused.

"Well, like something that was for a housewife or school teacher...not that there's anything wrong with being a housewife or teacher. It's just not me." She began to ramble then stopped letting out a yawn and gave him a sheepish smile. "Sorry."

"It's after midnight," he pointed out.

"I wanted to make sure you were okay," she mumbled in between a yawn.

"I'm fine, really," he reassured her. "Come on, you should probably head home and get some sleep."

"I know, but I'm so comfortable..." She yawned lazily, lifting her head up from his chest to look at him.

"You want me to fly you home?" he asked as she rested her head back against him.

"That requires moving." She giggled lazily. "And I'm not really a fan of doing anything right now that requires moving."

"Fair enough." He nodded, running a hand down her shoulder. "You can stay the night if you want. I'll make up the..." He could tell she was already starting to drift in and out of sleep as he heard the even breathing against his chest. "Lois?"

He readjusted himself, so his feet were on the ground then maneuvered her so he could lift her up comfortably without waking her. He then carried her into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. He pulled the covers over her, leaning in to kiss her forehead when her eyes fluttered open. "How'd everything go?" she mumbled sleepily.

"You're supposed to be sleeping," he whispered, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"But if you don't tell me I'm gonna keep waking up and asking you." She smiled at him, her eyes fluttered sleepily as she tried to stay awake.

"It's several steps to the living room. I think that goes against your whole moving theory," he pointed out.

"True." She reasoned aloud. "Too many steps." She scooted over on the bed and tugged on the hem of his shirt, pulling him toward her.

"Lo-is..." He chastised, stopping himself from falling completely on top of her.

"You're avoiding the question." She yawned sleepily, reaching over to pat the other side of the bed. "How'd it go?"

"You're exhausted. You're not even going to remember this in the morning," he pointed out, rolling over, so he was on his back as he laid next to her.

"Maybe, maybe not," she said sleepily, curling up against him, so her head was on his chest. "Much better." She giggled.

"Uh-huh." He chuckled, giving her a look of disbelief.

Her hand ran over his shoulder where he'd been shot that afternoon. "What did Dr. Klein say about your shoulder?"

"There were a few shards of Kryptonite in there that he had to remove but the wound seems to be healed, and there are no lingering effects," he said, running a hand down the middle of her back as he spoke.

"That's good," she said before letting out a yawn. "And the missing soldiers? I kept the news circuit on, but they never had any updates..."

He smiled. "We found all the soldiers in Lucky Leon's old warehouse along with a very large supply of the Resurrection pill." He reassured her, running his hand down her vertebrae as he spoke. "My thought is they were going to use it for something big. There was a name on Lucky Leon's desk that might interest you though. Nichol—" He stopped when he heard the even breathing from her and looked down to see she had fallen asleep in his arms.

“Goodnight, Lois,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her and then smiling to himself before adding, “*Honey.*”

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Nigel moved down the long corridor, weaving through the underground subway-like second nature. He reached the corner where the tunnel veered off into a hidden area closed off by a steel door. He punched a code into the numeric lock and grinned when he heard the clicking sound of the bolts being released from inside the mechanisms. He wandered inside, finding himself in the familiar surroundings where a man was plugged into the power strip on the wall and had several machines hooked up to him.

Nigel typed in the handheld computer, watching as a light green glow emitted from the man’s chest. He checked the numbers on the computer and smiled before turning his attention back to the computer in his hand. “Repairs are looking good, Gretchen. I’d say he should be ready for a test run before the end of the month.”

Gretchen’s voice rang through the phone in his hand. “Any word from Lex?”

“Nothing so far. I’ve been playing the part of the villain.” He smiled into the phone and chuckled. “How easily I was able to convince Mr. Church I’d turned on Lex was astonishing.”

“Well, once Intergang’s out of the way Lex can take back control of his old territory,” Gretchen soothed. “I’ve just about finished setting up shop here. Interesting meeting with a gentleman from Omni Corp. It seems he doesn’t trust Intergang either. That’s one thing you can say about Lex. He had a reputation of keeping his word.”

“Yes, a rarity among criminals,” Nigel said, turning the dial on the machine in front of him. “His stats look good, Gretchen, but I’m not sure about the power supply he’s on.”

“I’ll be back in town next week,” she soothed. “I’ll take a look then.”

“Hmm, so soon?” Nigel asked.

“Well, I can’t have you doing all the work now can I?” she asked. “We should be ready for the final takeover soon. Metropolis will rue the day they turned their backs on Lex Luthor.”

\*\*\*

Lois sighed happily feeling the warmth from the bedroom’s window creeping on her face. She squinted, trying to allow her eyes to cooperate while fighting the fatigue that still hung over her. She was still exhausted. She looked up, seeing the familiar decor of Clark’s bedroom and grinned happily, recalling falling asleep in his arms last night. She lifted her head from his chest, seeing the relaxed expression on his face as he slept. His arms still hung loosely around her waist.

She smiled, patting his chest for a moment before sitting up in bed. It wasn’t the first time he’d spent the night with her, but it was the first time he’d still been there when she woke up. Was this what it would be like? Being married to him? Waking up with him?

She felt a tightness in her abdomen, putting a stop to that train of thought. All she’d done for the last few days was think and think and think some more about Clark’s proposal—in between tracking down terrorists that is. She knew she loved him. She didn’t doubt that for a minute, but after everything she’d gone through with Lex and her history with her parents’ marriage falling apart, it was hard to trust that that would be enough. Four months—almost five—since they’d started going out and true she’d begun to see the man behind the cape and the boots, but there was still something keeping her from giving in and saying ‘yes.’

<<“*I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.*”>>

<<“*I’m not talking about the partnership. I’m talking about us. I’ve been in love with you for a long time. You had to have known.*”>>

<<“*What do you want, Lois?*”>>

<<“*Lois Lane... Kent?*”>>

<<“*I...*”

“*Lois...*”

“*I... can’t.*”>>

<<“*Lex after everything you’ve done how could you expect... ?*”

“*Yes, I’ve done terrible things. But I did them for you. Provoked by the blinding light of your beauty.*”

“*I’m not going with you.*”>>

<<“*I know things didn’t turn out exactly as planned, but...*”

“*Why? Doesn’t every woman dream of a wedding like this?*”>>

<<“*What’s wrong, Superman, afraid I might be right? The great Lois Lane in love with your greatest enemy. Tsk tsk tsk. A hard pill to swallow, isn’t it?*”

“*How about the truth? That seems to be the pill that’s hard for you to swallow, Lex...I never loved you. I was manipulated by you. There’s a big difference. I know that now.*”>>

<<“*I love you, Lois. I always have and I always will. I told you before I want forever, and I want it with you.*”>>

It wasn’t about trust. It wasn’t about love. It was about her own fears and doubts that continued to plague at her. Every relationship she had had ended in disaster. Committing to a lifetime and ending it with the dreaded D-word scared her, but the possibility of losing Clark scared her even more.

She caught sight of the clock on the nightstand and let out a muttered curse. She was going to be late. She still had to stop by her apartment to get changed. She swung her legs off the side of the bed, preparing to stand up only to have two strong arms pull her back. “Where are you sneaking off to?”

She smiled, looking back at Clark who had messy bedhead hair as he leaned in to kiss her. “I still need to stop by my apartment and get dressed,” she explained, feeling his arms tighten around her waist as his lips brushed against hers. “We’re going to be late.”

“Probably.” He chuckled, moving his attention to her jawline. “But we did just bring in a big story with plenty of material for follow-ups, so I’m sure Perry will understand.”

“Yes, but I still do need to get changed, shower, and eat breakfast...” She summarized half-heartedly, pulling away from him.

“Okay.” He nodded, looking up at her as she stretched her arms over her head. “I’ll pick up some breakfast and meet you at your apartment.” A playful grin crossed his face, and he added, “Maybe next time you plan to spend the night you should pack a bag.”

She pursed her lips at him. “I didn’t plan to spend the night.”

“Uh-huh.” He gave her a dubious look. “Not buying it, but for the record, you can sleep here anytime you want. You don’t have to pretend to fall asleep.”

“I wasn’t pretending.” She smiled at him. “I *do* have a key you know.”

His smile broadened, and he added with a knowing look. “Yes, you do.”

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Lex Luthor stared at the darkened cell door in front of him, contemplating his next move. He’d heard of the recent prison escape by a few lowly criminals. How they hadn’t anticipated getting caught in their plans was beyond his comprehension. Creating a new identity and establishing a way to avoid being caught should have been their first priority. Instead, their greed and ability to be controlled by the elusive Intergang made them fail before they’d even made it out the door. A mistake he himself knew all too well.

He had failed himself, and by association, he’d let down those that looked to him for guidance. Nigel and Gretchen were both still in the wind. He hadn’t heard any updates from either of them

on whether the money transfer had gone through before Bender had turned himself in.

Bender. There was another sore subject for him. His trusted attorney had stabbed him in the back in exchange for witness protection. His latest attorney, Barry Barker, was as ruthless as they came, but he lacked a certain class about him that Lex had enjoyed during his relationship with Sheldon Bender.

“Luthor!” The cranking of metal against metal grated on his nerves as he saw the cell door open. In the doorway one of the guards stood, waving his baton in his hands as he spoke. “You got a visitor.”

Lex did his best not to react, standing to his feet and moving down the corridors as he had been told to. This was his life for now. The time would come when he could plan his escape from this hell, but until then he would have to play the good soldier and fall into line. His day would come though. He would reclaim everything that was once his... even Lois Lane. He’d made the misstep of making her think she had a choice in the matter. He wouldn’t make the same mistake again. Next time she wouldn’t see him coming. Next time Superman wouldn’t be able to interfere. Next time was what kept him going.

The large metal door opened and he smiled, seeing the elderly gentleman sitting at the table. “Hello, old friend.”

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### ***Nuclear Disaster Diverted!***

*By Lois Lane and Clark Kent*

Lois looked over the front page of the *Daily Planet* with her and Clark’s byline. Another front-page article for Lane and Kent. Shortly after breakfast this morning, Clark had gotten a call for help and had to leave. She hadn’t even gotten herself a cup of coffee before she’d found herself lost in thought again. Four words. Four simple words that held so much meaning.

<< “Will you marry me?” >>

<< “What?”

“Nothing. Just admiring the view.”

“I think you’re looking in the wrong direction, Farmboy.”

“No, I’m not.” >>

<< “I know we’ve had our ups and downs these past months, but I want you to know how much I love you...how much I need you. Every day I wake up, and I still can’t believe how lucky I am to have you in my life.” >>

“Looks like another Kerth win to me,” Perry said, peering over her shoulder.

“Or two,” she said, pointing to the article on Stanley Gables’ arrest. “I still can’t believe he thought Mayson would cut a deal with him.”

Perry nodded, shaking his head. “I’d give my set of gold-plated Elvis spoons to know what makes a guy like Gables tick.”

Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair. “That’s the way it is today. Everybody sees themselves as a victim.”

“How’s Mayson doing?” Perry asked, looking at her in concern.

“Fine. Glad the DA’s office isn’t pursuing a deal with Gables.” She flashed him a smile.

“I’ll say,” Clark said, walking up behind her and setting a cup of coffee in front of her. “Morning.”

She flashed him a smile, taking the cup from him gratefully. “Morning.” She took a sip of her coffee, looking up at him over the rim of her mug.

“Kent?” Perry checked his watch. “A little late to be rolling in. It’s nearly ten.”

“Yeah, I had a—”

Before he could come up with another lame excuse she knew he was wracking his brain for, Lois interjected, “Well, he had a last-minute interview this morning with, uh, Bobby Bigmouth. We’re trying to see about picking up where we left off last week on our investigation into Nigel St. John.”

“Uh-huh,” Perry noted, looking between the two of them before clearing his throat. “Any, uh, leads?”

“We might have a few,” Clark said, placing a hand on her shoulder as he spoke.

“Well, good.” Perry nodded.

“Chief, publisher’s on line one!” Jimmy called from his desk, holding the phone away from his ear.

Perry grunted. “Oh, what now?” He moved past them and headed into his office to take the call.

Lois laughed, shaking her head. “Never a dull moment around here.”

“Yeah.” Clark smiled at her.

“So, how did everything go?” she asked, pointing to the monitor that showed Superman holding up two bank robbers and floating them back to the ground.

“Nothing too bad,” he said, perching himself on the edge of her desk. He gestured to the newspaper in front of her. “Admiring your handiwork?”

“Our handiwork,” she corrected. “Perry thinks this one will bring in another Kerth next year.”

“Yeah, but whose name is going to go first?” he teased.

“Mine of course.” She grinned back at him, recalling the conversation they’d had so long ago after his departure during the heatwave last year.

“Of course.” He chuckled, sharing a look with her. She felt her stomach flutter as she stared back at him. So much had happened in the last forty-eight hours since their return from Hawaii.

His proposal still weighed heavily on her mind—even more so after seeing him shot down in cold blood by Ryan Wiley. Every day he put himself at risk. More and more people were discovering the existence of Kryptonite which put him in more danger. Was that something she could live with? Knowing that every rescue he went on, he might not come back?

She fingered the end of his tie and smiled up at him. “So, I was thinking...” she began cautiously as he leaned toward her. “Maybe if we don’t have any disasters pop up we can pick up that conversation we left off on the other night.”

A smile crossed his lips, and he murmured, “Of course, I would love that.”

“Hey guys.” The intrusion of Dan Scardino pulled them apart.

She sighed, tucking a strand of hair that had fallen across her face back behind her ear. “Agent Scardino, shouldn’t you be on a plane?”

“Yeah, funny thing,” Scardino said, pulling a chair up as he held one of the crutches in his hand. “My boss in Washington was so impressed with my work yesterday he’s decided to push through a transfer to Metropolis.”

“Transfer?” Lois could see Clark’s face crestfallen as he stared at the DEA agent. She knew Clark didn’t like Dan Scardino, but the man had saved Superman yesterday, so maybe he wasn’t all bad. “Well, I hope you like excitement cuz there’s never a dull moment.”

“Sounds like it’ll be right up my alley.” Scardino flashed her a smile. “I’ve gotta go check in, but I thought I’d share the good news with you two. I’m sure our paths will cross from time to time.”

“Great.” Clark forced a smile and Lois reached over to place a supportive hand on his arm. Dan Scardino grabbed his crutches and began hobbling back to the elevators. Clark groaned. “We were *so* close.”

“Maybe we won’t have to work with him *that* much.” Lois reasoned.

He glanced at her, grabbing the stack of files on her folder. “Are you forgetting the follow-up we have to do on the resurrection pill?”

“Oh yeah.” Her face fell.

“Everyone gather around, I’ve got an announcement to make,”

Perry announced, waving a piece of paper in his hands. The newsroom quieted down, and they turned to Perry. “Now as you all know we’ve had quite a bit of success this past year. Our subscriptions are up forty-five percent from last year. That’s fifteen percent higher than the Metropolis Star mind you.”

“Is there a point to all this?” Kathy interjected. “We heard these numbers last week.”

“Yes, there is a point,” Perry said, waving the paper in his hand. “All of the stories and hard work pay off when we have one of our own recognized for their hard work.”

Lois’ eyes widened when she saw the blue paper in Perry’s hand. The blue paper with the familiar lettering for the prestigious Meriwether Award.

“The candidates for this year’s Meriwether Award for Journalistic Excellence have just been released, and the *Daily Planet’s* very own Lois Lane and Clark Kent are among the nominees.” He looked to Lois and Clark with a twinkle in his eye. “Congratulations you two.”

A light applause filled the room, and Jimmy walked up to them cheering, “Congrats you guys! I’m sure you’ll knock ‘em dead.”

“Thanks, Jimmy,” Lois said, doing her best not to appear overly excited. After all, last year they’d been nominated but never made it past the final vote.

“Top notch writing you two.” Perry praised them as the crowd of congratulating colleagues dispersed. “The committee would have to be out of their minds not to give you the nod.”

“Thanks, Perry,” Clark said, taking the extended hand Perry had offered to shake.

Perry patted him on the shoulder then moved on. “Jimmy, where are those photos from this morning’s robbery?”

“Right here, Chief!” Jimmy held up the 8x10s in his hands for him to see.

“Bring them in my office and let me have a look.” Perry waved for him to follow.

Lois swiveled in her chair, turning to face Clark. “So second time’s a charm?”

“Maybe so.” He smiled, running a hand down her jawline. She stared back at him, feeling her stomach do somersaults as she stared back at him.

<< “A date?”

“Several.”

“What makes you think I would want more than one date?”

“What if it ends badly.”

“Not possible. We’ve already spent the last two hours proving how very right the end of any date would be.”

“Aren’t we full of ourselves?”

“Very.”

“Okay. After all, this mess is cleared up .... A date.”

“Several.”

“Whatever.”>>

<< “Just think about it, okay?”>>

< “If Clark makes you happy then take a leap of faith.”>>

<< “So talk to him.”>>

<< “Are you really going to let a great guy slip away because of how screwed up our parents are?”>>

“Clark?” She fingered the end of his tie.

“Yeah?” He looked back at her, and she could feel it hit her like a wave. Every doubt and fear that continued to plague her. Every relationship that had failed and hardened her as she had closed herself off from the rest of the world.

“I love you, you know that, right?” She managed to say weakly.

“Yeah.” He smiled, cupping her cheek. “I love you too.”

She smiled back at him, mentally badgering herself for not being able to say what was weighing on her mind. “So, a Meriweather nomination. That gives us two weeks to show them

why we’re the best. Think we can track down Nigel in that time?”

“We can give it our best shot.” He grinned, leaning in to kiss her.

THE END

*Read “Rules of the Game”*