

Murder Over Metropolis

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: What if Season One had ended differently and the wedding of Lex and Lois never took place? What if Lex believed Clark was a more significant threat than Superman? How far would Lex go to keep Clark and Lois apart?

Story Size: 45,323 words (247 kB as text)

Notes: Thank you so much to the two people that helped this come together. Without them this wouldn't be what it is today. They were patient with me and kept encouraging me that this could be a 'super' story filled with passion, mystery, friendship, and a murder. Thank you, KSaraSara and SuperBek!

Lois stood around in the crowd of politicians, entrepreneurs, and all the elite people of Metropolis, trying to surreptitiously scratch at the inside of her arm. She knew she looked elegant, appropriately alluring in the knee-length, hunter-green velvet dress Lex had picked out for her for this occasion, and the white lace of the bodice made her stand out amongst all the other women wearing darker shades of evening gowns. But the lace was a constant irritation, making her arm itch and reminding her that she'd have never left the store with this dress if she'd had the choice.

She looked over to see Lex a few feet away talking to the mayor, who was here, along with all of these other people she didn't really know, to celebrate her engagement with Lex. Lois may have interviewed many of these people before, but she didn't belong with them, and tonight was just reminding her of that. She'd much rather be spending her Saturday night watching movies and ordering pizza... like she had done with Clark.

A smile appeared, and her heartbeat quickened at the thought of her partner. He had always been someone she could connect with, someone she had things in common with. Like enjoying pizza and movies on a Saturday night. God, she missed him.

At that same moment, through the crowd, she noticed a tall man with dark hair and the same build as Clark, and her heart stuttered again as she started moving his direction. Could Clark have changed his mind and come to support her? As she got closer to the man she hoped was Clark, she could feel herself finally starting to relax a bit, finally starting to look forward to the rest of the evening, spent with someone she could connect with and had things in common with, not spent feeling so out of place.

She got a short glimpse of the man's side profile and his glasses, reminding her how intelligent Clark was. She was less than a foot from the man when he stepped away just as she was reaching out to grab his arm.

"Ms. Lane," came a sonorous woman's voice from behind her, halting Lois's movement. "Congratulations on being the woman to finally land the most eligible bachelor in North America!"

Lois smiled tightly and did her best to thank the woman graciously before she excused herself. Finally, she was able to catch up to Clark, and she reached out to grab his arm.

"Clark, I can't believe you came," Lois gushed with the biggest grin. "I'm so happy you're here."

The man turned around, and her heart sank—his eyes were blue, and his smile was all wrong. This man had dimples. Lois sighed, and her shoulders slumped a bit. She really was alone.

"Miss Lane, I am a huge fan. The article you wrote about the car theft ring was impeccable. Congratulations on your engagement," the man stated, smiling at her with those non-Clark dimples and reaching out to shake her hand.

"Oh, thank you. I'm sorry for grabbing your arm. I thought you were someone else," Lois replied, doing her best to keep up appearances as the happy bride-to-be. However, she had to suppress a frown as she realized the man's hands were rough, not like Clark's; Clark's touch was more gentle and smooth.

"I'm Jackson Winchester. I play for the Metropolis Tigers," he said, shaking her hand enthusiastically. "Mr. Luthor had a hand in getting me traded to the Tigers last year."

"Yeah, Lex makes sure we get the best for Metropolis," Lois responded with a fake smile. The football player had Clark's build and profile, but even the sound of his voice was different. Jackson Winchester's voice was more high-pitched and irritating. A couple more minutes with this football player was all she could stand.

A short time later, she was out on the balcony by herself. She needed air. Being stuffed into the ballroom with all of these privileged types was making her claustrophobic. She looked out to the Metropolis skyline, trying to remember why she was even here. Did she belong with these people? She'd hoped coming out here would make her feel better, but her jumbled thoughts only made her wish for simpler times, things that made sense. She missed Clark. Her best friend. The only partner she could ever stand to work with. The only man she'd ever truly trusted.

As she looked out over the city where she had lived her entire life, she realized this view from above was different. It wasn't just the view, though; it was the people she was surrounded by. She could see so much from high above Metropolis, including where the Daily Planet had stood, the building now a pile of rubble. She wiped away tears from the reminder of that feeling she missed so much—that feeling of being part of something bigger, part of a family. Trying to forget about the Planet, her gaze turned a bit left, and she saw the fountain at Centennial Park. The park held so many memories. Memories of playing as a child, running around with Lucy. Memories of when the colors of the leaves changed in fall, walking through the park in awe. Memories of the last time she was at the park and the confession of love Clark had given her.

Lois remembered how Clark had admitted his feelings to her that day in the park. She loved Clark, sure; he was her best friend. She had told him long ago not to fall for her and that she didn't have time for it. Now, after a year of spending time with him, she realized having him around made her relax more and not take life so seriously. Having him around just made things...better.

"Lois, I'm in love with you," Clark's voice from that day in the park echoed in her head. She remembered the look in his eyes as he'd stared directly at her and the warmth of his body as he'd sat so close to her...

She hadn't known what to say or what to feel.

Even now, she didn't know. Clark was her best friend and her partner. Sure, she was attracted to him—the pheromone spray Miranda used on Metropolis had pretty much made her admit those feelings. The kisses they had shared a few times had sparked something inside her. And he certainly was a handsome man who looked amazing shirtless; Mr. Hard Body, she had once called him. He had looked at her with such yearning that day, and she knew in her heart it hadn't been the only time he'd done so.

Of course, it wasn't just his looks; it was his good nature, his honesty, his kindness, and the fact he could stand toe to toe with her. She looked down at the ground, her hands shaking, and her heart quickened. It had been such a huge

confession; no one had ever told her they loved her before and meant it. And she knew Clark wouldn't lie to her. But she'd been so awful to him in the past... How could he possibly have feelings for her? And did she even deserve his love?

Clark Kent was one of the most honest men she had ever met. He was optimistic, truthful, and kind. And yet, when they'd first met, she had been cruel to him. There were many times in the past year when she'd gotten the scoop on him by lying. She'd been conniving, spiteful, and worse... and all to this wonderful man who'd only wanted to learn from her.

Then, that day in the park, he had looked at her with his deep chocolate eyes, and she had wanted to say "Yes," but her head hadn't let her.

Really, though, what was she supposed to have said? How was she supposed to have responded to him without ruining the best relationship she'd ever had? She hadn't been able to bear the thought of it, couldn't risk losing his friendship. So instead of taking the risk, being with the right man—a good man—she'd broken his heart.

Her loneliness now, at this party where she didn't really belong, made her ache for Clark's companionship even more. He always seemed to know exactly what to say to cheer her up and make her smile, as though he'd known her for years.

Now, she stood outside, alone at her own engagement party, an engagement to a man who didn't really know her, who wouldn't know what to say to cheer her up or make her smile. And she realized she didn't really know Lex, either. There was so much she didn't know about him.

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Lex stood in center of the ballroom talking to the mayor of Metropolis. As he nodded his head in agreement with whatever the mayor was saying, his mind was elsewhere, on his bride-to-be. He looked around the crowd, trying to locate her; she always stood out, no matter where she was, with her petite frame and big personality. And although she was the picture of elegance, breathtaking in her beauty, she was also fiercely independent and stood her ground—one thing he was hoping to change once they were married.

He couldn't see her until he caught a glimpse of her dark green dress out of the corner of his eye. She was outside on the balcony, looking out into the night.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayor," Lex said, patting the man on the shoulder and stepping toward the doors that led outside. As he got closer, he could tell Lois was talking to herself, and he immediately knew she was thinking about the other man in her life—the one who wasn't here tonight.

Hiding a scowl, Lex switched directions and moved through the crowd, searching for his personal assistant. Many people believed that Nigel had been an agent of Her Majesty's Secret Service years ago. However, what they didn't know was that Nigel had turned corrupt and now was Lex's main henchman. As a former British soldier gone rogue, Nigel was as ruthless as Lex and didn't mind getting his hands dirty, which made him the perfect choice to help Lex finish his plans for Lois's former partner at the Daily Planet. After all, Lex intended to do everything in his power to make sure that not even the frustratingly independent Lois Lane could say "No" to Lex Luthor, and that meant distancing her from everyone in her life to whom she had any emotional attachment...or maybe eliminating those threats altogether.

Lex spotted Nigel standing in the shadows near the entrance of the ballroom, and he casually made his way that direction.

"Nigel is everything set for tonight?" Lex asked, looking around the crowd. He stood tall, smiled, and waved at all the right people, never forgetting that many of these people he could bring down at any moment.

"Sir, your bag is packed with the essentials," Nigel stated as he folded his arms. "Mr. Kent was last seen near City Hall, and the message has been delivered."

"Good," Lex said, nodding his head. The check for Kent was waiting for him inside Lex's desk, along with the information for his parents' bank account. If Kent didn't take the offer, then Plan B was in place. "Thank you, Nigel. Now let me make sure my fiancée is enjoying the party."

Leaving Nigel to take care of things, Lex found Lois again and moved smoothly across the ballroom toward her. He could tell throughout the night that her smile never reached her eyes. She tried her best to be cordial to everyone, but none of her friends from the Daily Planet had arrived. Her sister also hadn't made it, and her mother wouldn't arrive until tomorrow. Now he had to go show her how he was the one who would be there for her when no one else was.

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After a few minutes outside in the cool night air, her shoulders slumped as she went back into the ballroom. People stopped to congratulate her, asking to see her ring. They asked what her plans were for after the wedding and if she had thought about joining any committees or hosting fundraisers. Although she remained cordial to everyone, her face held no emotion, and she had to hide her distaste. The last thing Lois Lane would be was a trophy wife.

The evening continued, and she moved around the ballroom, finding herself more and more isolated. No one she spoke with asked about how she was doing or what she wanted. Many of them just boasted about how they knew Lex and what Lex had done for them.

And although she was surrounded by many prominent people, not one of her friends from the Daily Planet was there. Lois touched the emerald necklace she was wearing, an engagement present from Lex. One of many. He probably thought he was spoiling her, but really, he was overwhelming her. A diamond-encrusted heart surrounded by twenty-three pear-cut emeralds? This wasn't her...was it? The necklace and dress went perfectly with her ivory skin tone and white satin heels. But this wasn't really her. Or was this what Lex wanted her to become?

She had found one saving grace at this party: the chocolate fountain standing in the middle of the room. It was one of the only things at the party she had enjoyed. The chocolate was more her style than the hors-d'oeuvres that were being served by waitstaff circulating around the room. She stopped in front of it in all its glory and then stood there, patiently, waiting for someone to comment how she was now in heaven—a chocolate fountain just for her. However, when no one did, she turned away from it, unable to relish the enjoyment of chocolate without her friends. No one was there to remind her about her love of chocolate. Did Lex even know that chocolate gave her such joy?

Lois sat at one of the tables on the side of the ballroom. Her feet had started to hurt in the uncomfortable heels she wore. People only came up to her to congratulate her; no one bothered to have a real conversation with her. Lex had found her for a few minutes and tried to get her to mingle more. He had taken her around to introduce her to John Collington III, only the fourth-richest man in Metropolis, as Lex was sure to point out. She tried to seem interested in the conversations, but most were about stocks, bonds, or their newest acquisitions. After ten minutes of mingling and not feeling welcome, she had gone to sit down again. It was only seven twenty, and all she wanted to do was disappear from this crowd of people she didn't know.

She also found herself feeling just a little suspicious. So many of these people had said what Lex had done for them. But Lois wondered what was in it for Lex. Was he just using these people to get what he wanted? Was Lex manipulating them? Was he doing the same thing to her? She had no one here tonight whom she knew personally. Was that by Lex's doing? Was he chasing away all her friends and co-workers from the Planet? Was everything Clark said right?

Since Lois had accepted Lex's marriage proposal, her relationship with Clark had been nonexistent. But that wasn't what she wanted; she didn't want to lose her friendship

with Clark or anyone because Lex was possessive. A shiver ran through her. Was this all Lex's doing? It couldn't be, could it? She couldn't be that blind to Lex's charms. She had been suspicious of other wealthy billionaires who had seemed too perfect to be true. And of course, why would Clark keep blaming Lex for all the evil things in Metropolis if a fraction of them were not true? Where did Clark get his evidence from? Lois wondered if this had been Lex's plan from the start—keeping her away from everyone and everything she loved.

* * *

Fifteen minutes after the engagement party ended, Lex guided Lois into a black stretch limousine waiting in front of LexCorp, kissed her lightly on the lips, and then closed the door and watched the limousine drive away. He'd told her he would call her in the morning, that he had business calls to make tonight. But the truth was, he had other plans. As the limousine turned the corner, Lex walked back to the building, ready to put his plans into motion and resolve the situation with Kent. He didn't want to leave anything to chance. No, if Lex was to marry Lois, then she had to be done with Clark Kent. Lex had to make sure Kent was not a factor anymore.

Lex Luthor wasn't a mystery. He was just intelligent, rich, and powerful. However, as he stood in the elevator, waiting for it to rise to the penthouse, he reflected on the fact that these things—wealth, money, power—could only get him so far. No, it was his cunning deception that made him so dangerous. And the fact that he wouldn't accept anyone saying "No" to him, especially when it came to the female persuasion.

That was why he had to make sure things went as planned tonight.

It took him ten minutes to make his calls once he arrived back in his penthouse. Then, he moved out onto the terrace, marveling, as he always did, at how his penthouse towered above Metropolis and how everyone in the city had to look up to see him. Now, as he stood out on the terrace, his mind flashed back to the night he had met the astounding Lois Lane. In three days, he would marry Lois; she would be his to have and to hold. He loved her, he really did, but he had to admit, one of the things he was looking forward to most was to use her influence with the press to make sure the narrative of his story would always be covered, to make sure some of his illegal doings were not investigated.

And while Clark Kent wasn't a threat to him romantically, he was certainly a thorn in Lex's side that needed to be dealt with. However, he could tell Lois still had doubts about marrying him, especially because of all the ideas that annoying Kent was putting in her head about him. He

needed to drive a final wedge between Lois and her former partner so she stopped moping over that inconsequential hack. Lex would just have to fix that situation by the end of tonight.

Lex walked over to his desk and used the intercom to call in Mrs. Cox. He wanted to know if his guest had arrived yet. Kent hadn't shown up for the engagement party, just as Lex had hoped. Now, Lex wanted to make sure Kent stayed as far away from the wedding as possible too, and he knew exactly how to do that.

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Lois stood at her windowsill, looking out into the night sky. It had been an hour since Lex's driver had dropped her off. Now she was in a pair of gray sweatpants and a Superman T-shirt Jimmy had bought her for Christmas. Sure, she even missed the flying superhero, but not as much as she missed her partner.

She had a fiancé, a new job, and soon a new life, but she had never felt more alone. She craved her co-workers, her friends, her boss...her best friend.

Chocolate. Maybe chocolate would make her feel better. At least, it usually did. However, although the engagement party had had some of her favorite things—chocolate and champagne—and Lois should have had the time of her life, at the time, all she had been able to think about was Clark and her other co-workers whom she missed so much.

It really hurt her feelings that no one had shown up, not even her best friend. Had she hurt him that badly that he never wanted to see her again? She choked back the sob that threatened. She didn't want to be sad anymore.

Where had Clark been, anyway? Had he had something better, more important to do? What could have been more important than her engagement party? Sure, Clark had a biased hatred for Lex, but that didn't mean he couldn't be there for her. How hard was it to set his hate for Lex aside for one night? It wasn't fair.

Her sadness began to dissipate as anger boiled over. Clark had kept saying he would be there for her—yet he wasn't. What made him so righteous to tell her marrying Lex was wrong? Clark couldn't even tell her why he thought Lex was so evil. He had never given her proof of Lex's supposed evil doings. They were investigative reporters; they needed proof to print a story. Yet Clark hadn't ever shown her a single shred of proof that Lex had arranged for the bombing of the Planet or that he had set up Jack to take the blame.

Lois turned around and walked over to the phone hanging on the wall in the kitchen. She dialed Clark's number, and as it rang and rang, her anger continued to grow. How could he be so stubborn? She thought he cared about her. All she

wanted to do was give him a piece of her mind. She tried to fight the tears that she knew were coming. He hadn't bothered to show up at her engagement party, and now he apparently couldn't be bothered to answer his phone! Where was he?

She slammed the phone down and turned around quickly. Lois's nose flared as she grabbed her keys and stormed out of her apartment. If Clark couldn't answer his phone, she would go to his apartment and tell him exactly how she felt. She was tired of suppressing her feelings. Lois had had enough of it at the party. No—the real Lois Lane would be making an appearance now.

* * *

At the same time, Lex was at his desk on the other side of town when the door to his office burst open.

"What are you doing here?" Lex asked as he stood up from his desk, his eyes cold. "You're early."

"There has been a change of plans," the tall guest announced as they reached inside their jacket and pulled out a gun. "Dr. Kelly won't be coming, and she won't be giving you the drug."

Before Lex could reach for his own gun, two shots fired, and Lex looked down in horror as blood appeared from underneath his white button-down shirt.

"I didn't think you had it in you," Lex wheezed. He used his hand to put pressure on the bullet wound over his right shoulder.

Blood seeped through Lex's fingers as the tall figure turned away and whispered, "Goodbye, Lex."

Lex collapsed back into his chair; he took the pressure off his shoulder wound and reached for the phone. The items on his desk became a blur as he started to lose consciousness. Seconds seemed to last for minutes, and Lex's mind raced through the events of the last few days as he struggled to breathe. He cursed at himself. He should have known not to trust anyone.

As his body slumped over, dark red blood spread out over the documents he'd been studying, and his head hit the desk before he was even able to take the phone off the hook.

The pain became unbearable, and his thoughts quickly turned to Lois and how instead of planning their wedding, she would be planning a funeral.

His final thought before he blacked out was whether the rest of his plot had been set in motion. Then, at least, he'd have succeeded in this one thing. Although, the real question would still remain: who had killed Lex Luthor?

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Lois marched through the dark hallway. She was angry. No, it wasn't anger; Lois was furious. After what they had been through the past year together, she thought Clark would have at least shown up for her engagement party. They were supposed to be best friends, yet he hadn't bothered to even make an appearance—to be there to show his support, to laugh with her, or to enjoy the chocolate fountain with her. She had been there for him when Trask had tried to kill him and when he'd lost his memory during the Nightfall incident. It seemed only fair that he be there to support her during what was supposed to be one of the happiest times of her life. He'd always told her they were friends, that he'd be there for her, but now those words just sounded like empty promises.

Her heart quickened, remembering all the times they had shared, not just those times when they had saved one another but movie nights and stakeouts, too. Lois put her fingers to her lips and remembered what it had felt like when he'd kissed her in the honeymoon suite.

NO! She shook her head; she couldn't think like that. As she looked down at the ring on her left hand, she knew she had made her choice. Lois was going to marry Lex, so she needed to put the memory of Clark's lips on hers in the past. Instead, she tried to remember and hold on to the frustration she'd felt when Clark hadn't shown up tonight.

Now, as she stood at his door, she hesitated, swallowing hard before her hand came up to knock. Why was she even here? He had made it perfectly clear what he thought of Lex.

That was why she needed to talk to him. She needed to explain to him why she was going to marry Lex, and she needed to tell Clark how much of a lunkhead he was being. Finally, her mind set, her knuckles hit the door, and she stood firmly—her body stiff, shoulders tense, and feet slightly apart.

As she knocked on the door, she heard the Chief's voice. What was Perry doing in Clark's apartment?

"I'll get it," someone else answered. Lois shook her head in confusion. How many people were at Clark's apartment? Why wasn't Clark answering the door?

As the door opened, Lois slipped in, her eyes darting around the apartment. Everyone was here; the only person missing was her best friend.

"Lois, what are you doing here?" Perry asked as he stood up from the kitchen table, his expression blank.

"I was thinking the same thing about you. And Jimmy, how about you? But, of course, Jack, you're supposed to be in juvenile detention," Lois stated as she stepped down the stairs. "And where is Clark?"

"I'm right here," he said, entering the apartment just seconds after her. He closed the door behind him and turned around with a nervous smile on his face. He stood at the top of the stairs in blue jeans, a dark blue button-down shirt, and a black leather jacket. Her heart skipped a beat when she finally saw him. Searching for him all night at the engagement party and now seeing him, she felt at peace for a brief second, before her shoulders tensed and she remembered why she had to come to his apartment.

* * *

Clark stood at the top of the stairs looking down at Lois. He noticed her taut shoulders and her feet planted somewhat apart. Even though Lois was always beautiful in his eyes, the look on her face now—her deep brown eyes glaring at him, her lips pressed firmly together—showed anger. She was hurting; he could see how much she was hurting. And he had expected she would be a bit angry that none of them had gone to the party tonight. However, Clark hadn't expected her to show up at his apartment. He'd expected her to maybe be spending time alone with her fiancé after their engagement party.

He moved down the steps, wishing he could wrap his arms around her, comfort her. She always acted like she didn't need anyone, but Clark had known within days of becoming her friend and colleague that it was just an act. She'd have felt terribly lonely and out of place at the party, surrounded by people she didn't know and had nothing in common with. Although, Clark thought, that had been her choice, even if he felt it was the wrong one.

"Where were you?" Lois demanded as she turned to him.

He stopped only a couple of feet away from her, and she closed the distance between them. Her eyes wide and jaw clenched, she stepped right up to him and pushed on his chest.

Clark let her push him; he needed to know Lois could hurt him physically, since emotionally, she had broken his heart less than a week ago. He looked down at her small frame, wanting to take her hand in his and tell her everything was going to be okay. Yet he knew it wouldn't be, especially after Clark told her where he had been.

"Where were all of you?" Lois asked, turning away from him to glare at Perry, Jimmy, and Jack. "I know the Daily Planet is gone, and I know it's not the same, but I thought my friends would have been there for me tonight."

"Lois, sweetheart, there's something we have to tell you," Perry announced as he walked across the room toward her.

"Lois, I'm sorry," Clark admitted, staring down at his feet. "I'm sorry I wasn't there for you, but we had a good reason."

Clark wanted nothing more than to have the guys leave so he could talk to Lois alone. Yet, he knew it would probably be better for her to receive the news from all of them together. After all, she'd already shown him she didn't entirely trust his judgment. Also, although they had proof of Lex's illegal activities, Clark wasn't sure he wanted to be the one to tell Lois that he'd been right all along. He knew that being delicate with her right now was the best choice.

And as they stood there in a giant circle—Lois in the middle, Perry near the kitchen, Clark near the stairs, Jimmy on one side, and Jack behind the couch—Clark realized the men in this room were the only ones she truly trusted in her life. Yet they hadn't been there for her tonight.

* * *

Lois didn't care for their excuses. Her friends, the only ones she considered her real family, had not shown up for one of the most significant moments in her life. She had been alone.

"It's Lex," Jack interrupted the silence in the room while Lois and Clark stared each other down.

"Jack, please, this isn't about Lex!" Lois shouted without looking over at him. Her eyes didn't leave Clark's as she tried to blink back tears. He'd said he was sorry he hadn't been there for her, but did he really understand how much that had hurt? To be so alone on one of the most important nights of her life? If he really cared about her, shouldn't he have shown up?

"We found the proof, Lois," Clark whispered and reached out to her. Suddenly Lois noticed his eyes dart to the television behind her. "Turn that up, Jack."

Jack grabbed the remote and turned up the volume. The reporter was outside LexCorp with an announcement on the screen. The eleven o'clock news was on, and a breaking news update showed a picture of her—Lex Luthor's fiancée, the famous Daily Planet reporter, Lois Lane. The reporter announced a shooting at LexCorp earlier that night—the third richest man in the world had been murdered.

"Oh god," Lois gasped, feeling a tightness in her chest and her heart beginning to race, and then suddenly things went dark.

* * *

Lois opened her eyes slowly. Perry and Jimmy and Jack were surrounding her, looking down at her. She must have passed out—and while it had felt only like seconds, the concerned looks on their faces made her think it'd been more like minutes. As her mind cleared, she felt someone's arms around her—Clark's.

“What happened?” Lois asked as she glanced around and patted Clark’s hand on her waist. He had caught her before she had hit the ground. Clark always seemed to be saving her, even when she didn’t want to be saved. Lois shook her head, and her heartbeat quickened, then she tried to stand.

“You fainted,” Clark whispered as he guided her up, brushing her arm to make sure she was okay.

“Lois, are you okay?” Perry asked as he helped her get seated on the couch and then sat down next to her.

However, she’d seen him hesitate, and she knew that Perry must be uncomfortable with her being in trouble since he cared so much about her, almost as though she were the daughter he’d never had.

“He’s dead,” Lois murmured. “How could this be happening? I was just with him at the party.”

“Lois, Lex was responsible for the bombing of the Planet. He set up Jack,” Jimmy announced as he sat on the arm of the couch with his chest puffed out, clearly proud of whatever research he must have done.

“We found proof that he received a huge insurance payout. He lied, Lois,” Jack responded, his shoulders pulled back as he stood tall next to Jimmy. “Clark was right about all of it.”

“Guys, not right now, please,” Clark said, and Lois noticed that firm edge to his voice, the one he didn’t use often. He was trying to protect her.

Confusing and conflicting emotions flooded through her. She couldn’t help but feel grateful that Clark was still being kind and caring even though she’d yet again treated him... less than kindly. She looked around at her friends, especially Clark, who was now sitting down on the coffee table in front of her so he could face her and take her hands in his to soothe her. She didn’t deserve this, did she? She was mad at them and had let them know it in no uncertain terms.

But she’d hated the party. Lex was dead—her stomach lurched again at the thought. They’d hated Lex—did they hate her too? Is that why they’d not come, built a compelling case for Lex’s criminal endeavors, and now were...gloating at what they’d found when her world was crumbling down around her?

Lois rejected the idea that Lex could have done these horrible things Jimmy and Jack were saying. She was an investigative reporter; she would have seen the signs! And surely he hadn’t deserved to be murdered.

Lois looked at Jimmy and Jack, then over to Clark. She was angry that her friends hadn’t come to her engagement party, and now the soon-to-be groom was dead. Was it really

anger she was feeling, though? Or sadness that she didn’t seem to mean as much to them as she’d thought?

“Who could have done this?” she asked as she looked over at Perry. She wanted to cry, but her eyes felt dry and achy from the tears she had shed earlier.

Before Perry could answer that question, there was a knock at the door. Clark squeezed Lois’s knee for a second, then stood up to answer the door.

Lois watched as Clark hurried up the steps and opened the door. From this angle, she couldn’t see who it was, but she was dying of curiosity—it was 11 p.m., after all. Who would stop by so late? All she could hear were softer voices talking, and then she saw Clark move the door slightly to make the opening smaller while shifting himself so that he was blocking her view even more.

When the conversation at the door got a little louder, she recognized Henderson’s distinctive voice immediately and shot up off of the couch, running to the door. “What’s going on, Clark? Did he say he needs you to come down to the station? Why?”

She watched as Clark gave Henderson a pleading look and said in a whispered tone, “Lois doesn’t need to know.”

“Like hell I don’t! What are you hiding from me?” she demanded, taking a deep breath through her nose and exhaling from her mouth.

“Lois, I just...have to go down to the station. Stay here with Perry, Jimmy, and Jack, please,” he pleaded. “It’s not what you think.”

Lois eyed the uniformed officers behind Henderson’s six-foot frame. Henderson wouldn’t have needed officers if it wasn’t something serious.

“It’s okay. This won’t take long,” Clark promised, taking her hand.

“I don’t know about that, Kent. There is a video of you tonight in Luthor’s office, looking pretty angry,” Henderson said as he stepped into the entryway of the apartment. “My superiors want me to arrest you for the murder of Lex Luthor, but I told them I could get you to come down to the station for questioning.”

Lois dropped her hand and stepped away from Clark. This had to be some sort of nightmare “Why did you go see Lex? What is going on, Clark?” Lois demanded as her heart started beating faster. A horrific image flashed through her head of an angry Clark shooting Lex, and she shook her head to rid herself of it, but it left her trembling. It couldn’t be true, not even close!

“Lois, please. It’s not what you think, okay? Trust me.”

“How can I do that when you won’t even tell me what’s going on?” she said angrily as she stepped away from him. “Did you kill Lex?”

“Lois!” Perry interrupted. “Darlin’, there must be a reasonable explanation. Let Clark go, and he’ll tell us when he’s ready.”

“Please, Lois,” Clark begged, reaching for her hand once again. “Once I go to the station with Henderson and get this straightened out, we can talk.”

Finally, she relaxed for a moment and let him take her hand, and she took a deep breath when he gave it a squeeze. Lois focused on his dark chocolate eyes, seeing so much in them. She felt his strength, his sincerity, and how much he cared about her. Lois knew he was trying to protect her from something, and even though she didn’t like it, she would just have to wait a little longer for answers from him.

“This isn’t over,” she said, resigning herself to having this discussion later as she squeezed his hand back.

Clark let go of her hand, climbed the stairs, and disappeared out of his apartment with Henderson seconds later. Lois put her hands on her hips and turned to the other men in the apartment. Clark may have had an excuse to leave, but Perry, Jimmy, and Jack sure didn’t.

“What the hell is going on?” Lois demanded, tensing up as she glared at the three men. She was beyond aggravated. Not only had her friends not attended her engagement party, but now she’d found out they had been investigating Lex behind her back. “What are you doing in Metropolis, Perry?”

“Darlin’, please, have a seat,” Perry replied as he sat back on the couch.

Lois listened to the Chief as he detailed all the evidence they had found. She listened as Jimmy told her about Lex blackmailing the board into selling the paper to him. And she listened to Jack as he revealed that the men who had set the lunchbox bomb had confessed, and there had indeed been a large insurance payout, contrary to what Lex had told her.

After fifteen minutes, all she wanted to do was throw things and break things. All of the proof that Lex was “The Boss” was right in front of her. How could she have been so blind when it came to him? She had very nearly thrown away everything to be with a criminal mastermind. Now that the mastermind had been murdered, her best friend was the only suspect. How could this have happened?

None of this made sense. Her mind was spinning.

“Clark was right,” she whispered, sitting back down on the couch.

“This wasn’t about him being right, darlin’,” Perry told her as he sat down next to her. “He kept telling me that this was about protecting you—saving you.”

“Perry, I broke his heart.” Lois buried her face in her hands and bent over. “Why would he want to protect me?”

“Because he cares about you whether he’s heartbroken or not. If he didn’t care, he wouldn’t have kept going. He would have just forgotten about Lex and not told us what he had found,” Perry explained. “How about Jack, Jimmy, and I get out of your hair? Just think about what I said. That boy would walk on water for you.”

Lois hugged Perry and thanked Jimmy and Jack for their excellent work, then the three men left the apartment. She had to do something. She had to find out why Clark was a suspect. What did the police have on Clark? Why did she hurt so much when it came to Clark? She had a lot to think about and only one person who could answer all her questions.

* * *

Clark walked down the long hallway from the police interrogation room to the lobby of the police station, Henderson walking slightly behind him. Henderson was letting him go—with a warning not to leave town—but the evidence against Clark was concerning. Even though Clark had shared everything he knew about Lex’s criminal activities with the inspector, there was nothing that shielded Clark from a motive for killing Lex.

Sure, the evidence against Clark was circumstantial at best, but he was still not out of the woods. He should have known that going down to the penthouse at Lex’s request had been a terrible decision.

When they reached the waiting room, Henderson told him to keep his nose out of trouble until this was all cleared up and then said goodbye. In the lobby, there were a fair number of people around—two officers behind the desk, a group of teenagers on a bench along one side of the room, and a dark-haired woman sitting by herself. The woman looked familiar, though her hair was wavy and her shoulders tense. She looked up at him with big brown eyes, and he recognized her immediately.

“Lois,” he sighed as she stood up and started approaching him. “What are you doing here?” he asked, unable to keep the irritation from his voice.

“You owe me an explanation,” she responded as she stepped closer to him. “I figured I could give you a lift home, and we could talk or go to a diner for some coffee.”

“It’s late,” he said as he brushed past her.

“Then just give me the explanation,” she demanded, grabbing his arm to stop him. “Please.” Now it was less demand and more a request, a plea.

He stopped and turned to her, wishing he had the ability to tell her no. He wished she wasn’t the one who grounded him, wasn’t the light in his world that made him sane given everything he had to deal with. She knew none of that, though, and he couldn’t tell her. Because the last time he’d let his feelings be known, she had turned him down.

“I don’t want to go back to my place,” he responded, putting his hand over hers. “But I can’t do this right now, Lois.” He pulled his hand back and turned to walk out of the police station.

He could sense her following closely behind him, and when he reached the sidewalk, he turned to face her, finally just now noticing what she was wearing. Lois stood in front of him in jeans and a burgundy short-sleeved shirt. She must have gone home to change, and he half wondered if she knew burgundy was his favorite color on her, if she’d done it to gain his favor.

He sighed and looked up at the sky for a moment. The clouds had cleared up in the last few hours since he’d entered the police station, but it was a bit chilly at two in the morning—or at least he assumed Lois would be a bit chilly. Reluctantly, he looked back at her, wishing she didn’t have those beautiful, pleading eyes.

“Why did you go see, Lex?” Lois asked.

“He called me, Lois. He told me that your happiness was at stake and that I needed to see him in person,” he responded, running his hand through his hair.

“What time was that?” she asked, clearly frustrated with him.

“Lois, I just went through all this with Henderson and his captain,” Clark informed her. “It’s late, it’s been a long day, and I’m tired.”

Clark could go without sleep, of course, but he was emotionally drained from the day’s events. He couldn’t even begin to explain how it felt to be considered a murder suspect, especially when the deceased was his mortal enemy. How could anyone believe Clark could kill someone?

“Then I’ll walk with you,” Lois retorted, “or you can just get into the Jeep, and we can go back to my place to talk.”

“Please, Lois, not tonight,” he said. “I know I told you I owe you an explanation, but I really just...can’t right now.”

Not even bothering to acknowledge his plea, Lois continued, throwing another question at him. “What did my happiness have to do with you going over to see Lex?”

“Because I would have done anything to see you happy, even if that meant watching you marrying a psychopath like Lex. You made your choice, Lois, when you agreed to marry him.”

He was angry. Clark never got mad like this. He was so fed up with Lois wanting his approval yet not taking his advice. They were best friends and partners, and yet she didn’t trust his judgment. He kept walking down the sidewalk, knowing she would follow.

“Clark, that’s not fair. Agreeing to marry Lex didn’t mean I wanted my life at the Planet to end or not have my friends anymore. It’s not like I was going to live as a socialite or give up my job.”

“But he destroyed the Daily Planet and nearly ruined Jack’s life!” Clark yelled, turning on his heel to face her. “He even tried to kill Superman,” he blurted out, so mad, so furious that he couldn’t get her to see the truth that was staring her in the face. Maybe if she knew her fiancé had tried to kill her precious hero, maybe she’d care then.

And she did—she gasped, clearly shocked by his admission.

“Superman,” Lois whispered, almost sounding like she didn’t believe him. “I didn’t know, Clark. I mean, why didn’t he tell me?”

Clark looked over at her, shook his head, and then turned and walked away. This was precisely what he didn’t want. What was so much more special about his alter ego?

“So, you would have believed Superman, but you didn’t believe me when I told you about Luthor?” he challenged, turning back to face her, the bitterness and frustration coming through in his tone. He squeezed his left hand into a fist and pursed his lips together. He had wanted to tell her about Luthor, as Superman, so many times, but what good would it have done?

Her silence seemed to be his answer.

“Did you at least believe Perry when he told you everything Lex was responsible for?”

Lois hesitated for a moment but then nodded weakly. “For what it’s worth, I would have believed you too...all that evidence...” She trailed off, almost looking as though she was feeling physically ill.

If he were capable of it, he was sure he’d feel sick to his stomach too. She’d almost married a monster. He’d almost lost her. And maybe it was the late hour or his exhaustion or the fact that when it came right down to it, he didn’t want to fight with Lois anymore, but Clark decided he might as well share what Henderson had told him.

“Lois, they wanted to arrest me for Luthor’s murder. They have a video showing me in Luthor’s office talking to him. The only problem is...the timestamp on the video is different from the time I was actually there. I left LexCorp at about eight twenty, but the video shows I didn’t leave until after nine,” he explained.

“Did anyone see you?” she asked, and he could almost see the wheels start turning in her head.

“I don’t know. But Luthor was willing to do anything to make sure I stayed away from you,” he admitted, frustrated, even a little disgusted at himself for having gone to see Luthor in the first place. “Even offering me twenty thousand dollars to move out of Metropolis and out of your life.”

Clark watched Lois step back, her hand coming up to cover her mouth and her eyes dropping down. Then she looked back up slightly.

“Did you...consider taking the money?” she wondered.

His left hand tightened back into a fist, and his heart rate skyrocketed. His lips pursed into a line, and he took a deep breath in through his nose. How could she?

“I can’t believe you! After everything we’ve gone through, do you think my feelings for you are that fleeting? Twenty thousand or twenty million, there isn’t an amount of money that would make me leave Metropolis or you,” he snapped.

Clark turned his back on her. He couldn’t believe she would ask that.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered as he felt the touch of her hand on his shoulder. “It was a stupid question. I’m not even sure why I even asked.”

He faced her again and saw the defeat in her eyes. Reaching up, he cupped her cheek with his hand. Those eyes staring back at him made his heart squeeze, like they always did, and he suddenly had the urge to remind her how he really felt for her.

“Lois, you have to know how important you are to me. You’re more than just my partner—you’re also my best friend,” he admitted. Right then, there was nothing more he wanted to do than kiss her, but it had been a very long day, and this really wasn’t the time or the place.

Instead, Clark stepped back, dropping his hand and trying to refocus on what they had been talking about before he’d confessed Luthor had tried to bribe him. “His assistant, Mrs. Cox, let me into his office. She also happens to be the one who found the body.”

Clark watched Lois’s expression as she processed his abrupt change in subject. To her credit, it didn’t take her

more than a second to catch back up to him. “Do you think she doctored the tape?”

“I don’t know, Lois. It’s possible. But...you do believe me, right? That I didn’t do it?” he asked, his jaw tight as he studied her.

She frowned and nodded. “Of course I do, Clark. I just... need to know so I can help you. Because if you didn’t do it—I mean, since you didn’t do it—who did? And we have to prove that you didn’t do it. So...where did you go after you left LexCorp?”

Clark ran his hand through his hair. That was the million dollar question. And he hated that he’d had to lie to the police and everyone else. What was he supposed to say? How was he supposed to answer that question? He couldn’t very well tell them that he’d been in California putting out a wildfire.

“I walked around the city for a bit,” he lied, knowing the truth would hurt him even more. By her silence as they walked the rest of the way to the Jeep, Clark assumed his answer would work for the time being.

But the silence didn’t last long, and he wasn’t terribly surprised when she spoke up again, her voice filled with determination. “Clark, please, let me help you. I can’t help you if you don’t open up to me.”

He sighed and shook his head. “It’s after two in the morning—it’s been a long night. Can we just talk about this tomorrow?” he asked, frustrated that she wouldn’t let things go, let him be alone given the long, emotionally charged day they’d both had. He couldn’t even look her in the eye; instead, he watched a taxi drive by and heard the sounds of police chattering on their radios in the background. “First thing in the morning, I have to find myself a good lawyer.”

“I have the names of a couple of lawyers you could reach out to,” she said eagerly, putting her hand on his bicep. “How about I bring over breakfast first thing, and we can make the calls together?”

“I don’t know...” he hedged, unsure how he felt about Lois helping him with this case. It was her fiancé he was suspected of killing, after all. And he didn’t even know how she actually felt about Luthor’s death—having been engaged to the man, she had to have loved him even a little. He could tell it was hurting her, the fact that he wasn’t immediately jumping at her offer of help, but he just didn’t want it.

Lois walked around to the front door of her Jeep, and then she looked at him pointedly. “Well, you need some help, Clark,” she told him, “and I’m going to give it to you since I’m part of the reason why you’re in this mess.”

Before he could even respond, she was in the driver's seat and starting the car, without even having said goodbye to him. Well, that was fine with him—he'd wanted the space from her tonight anyway. But he couldn't deny the way it stung, deep within his heart, knowing they were back to bickering and not admitting their feelings for one another.

All Clark really wanted to do was fly her to a deserted island and tell her the truth about everything. But he couldn't just run away from a murder charge, and telling Lois anything right now seemed terribly risky. So instead, he stood there for a moment, watching her drive away, and then continued walking down the sidewalk in the general direction of his apartment.

* * *

Clark woke up to the sound of a neighbor's radio announcing that a Category 4 hurricane was about to hit the Bahama islands. Although he'd only gotten about three hours of sleep after doing a quick patrol over Metropolis earlier that morning, he didn't hesitate; he jumped up out of bed, spun into his Superman suit, and took off toward the Bahamas.

While he was saving hundreds of people from the disastrous flooding and damage caused by the hurricane, he let himself forget about his problems back in Metropolis, especially how he was going to investigate Luthor's murder without Lois. She was the best investigative journalist he knew, but Clark wasn't sure he wanted her help. It would only complicate things.

As he flew back into his apartment two and half hours later, he remembered he still hadn't called his parents. They didn't know what was going on in Metropolis, and for once, Clark was glad his parents lived so far away in Smallville. Yet he knew he needed to call them and tell them what was happening. It would be great to have their support and get their advice, particularly since they knew how he felt about Lois. So, after he changed back into his regular clothes, he picked up the phone and dialed his parents' number. His dad answered after only one ring.

"Clark, hi, son," Jonathan said. "How is everything?"

"Okay. Is Mom around? I need to tell the two of you something," Clark said as he sat at the kitchen table.

"I'm here, Clark," his mother said a minute later.

"Have you watched the news yet this morning?" Clark asked, knowing his parents loved reading the paper first thing in the morning or catching the first ten minutes of the morning news on television.

"No. The Hawkins kid is late with the paper this morning. We had a lot of rain last night," Jonathan answered. "Why?"

"Lex Luthor was murdered. And I'm the prime suspect," Clark admitted, cringing as he said the words out loud for the first time.

His mother shouted a few obscene words he hadn't heard from her in ages, and he heard his dad trying to calm her down, assuring her things would be okay.

"What happened, Clark?" Jonathan asked.

"Remember how I told you the other day that Lois and Luthor were going to have an engagement party? Well, it was last night. Afterward, Luthor invited me to his penthouse, said he wanted to talk. I don't know what I was thinking, but I went, even though I knew I wouldn't be able to talk him out of marrying Lois. He offered me a large sum of money if I promised to leave Metropolis and stay away from Lois," Clark explained as he twirled the telephone cord around his hand.

"That's absurd, thinking he could bribe you to leave!" Martha declared.

"Exactly, Mom," he replied immediately. "I tore up the check and left. And then sometime later, he was shot and killed."

"Why are you the prime suspect then?" Jonathan inquired with worry in his voice.

"A security video was altered showing that I left his penthouse later than I actually did," Clark said. "And I was sort of busy at the time of the murder."

"Clark?" Martha asked, clearly confused with his vague explanation.

"I was busy with my other job," he clarified. He didn't want to say much about his other job in case the Metropolis Police Department was close by or listening in. Clark still needed to be sure to search for any bugs in his apartment, and he silently reminded himself to keep a look out for anyone who might be watching him more closely than usual.

He talked a few more minutes with his parents, then stood up and got ready for his day. Perry had left a lawyer's name and address on the kitchen table last night. Maybe it was time to talk to a lawyer just in case the police decided to charge him.

As he was getting ready to leave for the lawyer's office, hoping they'd be able to fit him in today given Perry's name and the case's notoriety, there was a knock on his door. Using his X-ray vision, he checked who was there, and then he shook his head with resignation as he jogged up the steps.

"Lois, what are you doing here?" he asked as he opened the door. Lois stood on the front porch, her arms crossed over her chest and a look of concern in her eyes.

“When I got home earlier, there was a message on my answering machine from the police station. They wanted me to come in early this morning,” she explained as she tentatively walked down the stairs, following him into his living room.

Clark stopped suddenly and turned to her, worried that she might have made his case worse. Both of them stood for truth and justice, but Lois had a tendency to say exactly how she felt. Clark knew Lois didn’t believe he had committed the crime, yet she could have told the police things that would suggest he had a motive. Plus, she could have told Henderson and anyone else that they were crazy, that Clark wouldn’t have hurt Luthor, and while that was true, Clark certainly didn’t want the police thinking maybe Lois had something to do with Luthor’s murder either.

Lois might have lied to the police a few times in the past, but this case was different in the sense that it wasn’t for a story she was working on. And it wasn’t that he wanted her to lie to the police for him; that would be wrong. No, he just didn’t want her to complicate things. Deep down, he was also concerned she might uncover his secret if she dug too much. He had trusted Lois before—before she had accepted Luthor’s proposal—but he wasn’t sure what he thought anymore, and more than anything, he just wanted her to stay as far away from the case as possible.

“What did you tell them?” he asked after taking a deep breath.

“I’m sorry, Clark!” she blurted out, looking down at her shoes. “I screwed up... Well, not screwed up, because I had to tell the truth...can’t lie to the police, and they asked about our talk that day in the park, and I had to tell them... I’m so sorry!”

“Lois,” he sighed, and he turned away. He knew it had looked bad enough before, but now... “It’s...it’ll be okay. I mean, yeah, you couldn’t lie. But now they could think I had a motive to kill Luthor. I bet they think I went there in a jealous rage or something.”

“Crime of passion,” Lois murmured.

“You know it’s not like that. I wouldn’t. I couldn’t,” he stammered, turning around.

“Of course not! You are the last honest man on Earth,” she replied as she stepped closer to him. “I guess my question is, what are we going to do now?”

“I’m going to go find myself a good lawyer because who knows what other evidence they might have to make me the prime suspect in Luthor’s murder,” he stated. Somehow, Clark just knew Luthor had to be behind this. Maybe Lex Luthor was faking his death to make Clark pay for turning

down his money. But he’d have to look into that after he found a lawyer, Clark thought.

“Did you want to get breakfast first? Or did I ruin your appetite?” Lois asked, frowning.

“I’ll get some coffee, then go meet with a lawyer Perry recommended,” he responded. He adored Lois, but when it came to matters of the heart, they weren’t always on the same page. And right now was one of those instances.

“Are you shutting me out?” she questioned as she put her hand on his forearm. The familiar touch was almost comforting in the moment, but he noticed her tension in the tilt of her head and the quickening of her heartbeat.

Clark really didn’t want to shut her out, but right now, he felt as though had no other choice. “I think it’s better if I do this by myself, Lois,” he admitted, running his hand through his hair. “I think you should just go see Perry about the Daily Planet. He said something about a meeting with Franklin Stern. He thinks Stern might buy the paper.”

“Fine, but this isn’t over, Clark,” Lois responded, her voice filled with sadness. She turned on her heel and left.

With a sigh, Clark finished getting ready and then headed out.

Forty-five minutes later, Clark sat in the waiting area of the office for the lawyer Perry had suggested. He looked up at the receptionist, who was on the phone and kept looking over at him. The receptionist reminded him of Cat. Right now, he could definitely go for hearing Lois and Cat argue over boundaries and the social society. That would be much better than listening to all of the negative thoughts running through his head. But Cat had run off to California right after Luthor had bought the paper. She had told them before she packed up her desk that she could sleep with billionaires, write about them, but not work under them—it just wasn’t quite her style.

Clark had quickly felt at home when he had started working at the Planet nearly a year ago. They were a family, even if none of them would admit it except maybe Perry and Lois, who had a father-daughter relationship like nothing Clark had seen before. He hoped Perry was successful when he spoke with Mr. Stern about getting the Planet rebuilt so they would all have a place to call home again.

He’d seen Perry’s determination first hand in the last few weeks when they’d been working on the Luthor investigation, and, like father, like daughter, Clark knew Lois was also a force to reckon with, one that he got to see close up. It really had pained him when he’d told her he didn’t need her help. After all, her relentlessness was something he adored about her. However, right now, he knew what he needed the most was to stay grounded and focused to get through

this meeting, and having her here would have definitely distracted him.

Clark noticed the receptionist answer the phone and look over at him. She nodded and then put the phone back down.

“You can go in now,” the young woman told him.

He stood up, straightened his tie, and started toward the closed door at one end of the waiting room. With a deep breath, Clark opened the door and stepped into the office of Constance Hunter. A shorter lady in her mid-to-late thirties with long, dirty blonde hair, Constance sat behind her desk, which was covered with stacks of law books and notes.

Although Clark knew Perry had recommended her because she was a straight shooter who could help the good guys out when needed, he was still quite nervous and wasn't sure how this would go or how he would pay.

“Mr. Kent, I heard great things about you,” she said as she stood up to shake his hand. “Perry called me this morning and said you were coming by.”

“I hope you can help me, Ms. Hunter,” he responded. “I'm being set up.”

“Tell me what happened.”

* * *

Lois felt defeated that Clark didn't want her help. She got into her Jeep and headed for downtown Metropolis. She wasn't sure what she was going to do to help him, especially since he'd told her to stay away from the case. Lois knew she was partly to blame for this whole mess. They were partners, though, and she had hoped he would trust her enough to help him.

Just as she was almost ready to turn around and head back home, resigned to having to wait until Clark would accept her help, she passed the police station, and an idea popped into her head. There was a way she could help, after all!

Fifteen minutes later, Lois rushed into the district attorney's office. She knew one of the receptionists and had a few sources at the courthouse, and she'd managed to find out that the new district attorney was assigned to Clark's case. Now Lois needed to ensure the DA knew just what type of man Clark Kent was.

“Is the district attorney in?” Lois asked the older, dark-haired woman at the reception desk.

“Yes, but—” The woman stood as Lois rushed to the office door. “Ma'am, you can't just go in there!”

Lois stopped instantly when she stepped into the office and noticed the new district attorney was a woman—a young lady in her late twenties with shoulder-length blonde hair.

“Yes, can I help you?” the woman asked as she hung up the phone.

“I'm Lois Lane from the Daily Planet. I'm here to talk about the Lex Luthor case,” Lois explained as she stepped farther into the office.

The blonde-haired woman didn't look up for several seconds, clearly not fazed by Lois's intrusion.

“From what I understand, Ms. Lane, the Daily Planet was destroyed. And if I recall, you were also engaged to Lex Luthor, and your partner is the prime suspect in his murder,” the woman stated. “Have a seat; I've wanted to speak to you.”

“Me too,” Lois said as she sat across from the woman. The nameplate on the desk identified the woman as Mayson Drake, and Lois immediately noticed that her office was neat and organized. The bookshelves were full but contained no personal items except a small photo of the district attorney with two older gentlemen.

“I'm sorry about your loss, Ms. Lane,” Mayson said as she stood up and reached for Lois's hand.

“You're quite young to be district attorney, Ms. Drake,” Lois said, shaking her hand and hoping her voice wasn't too obviously dripping with flattery. “How did you move up the ladder so fast?”

“Well, Ms. Lane, hard work and determination, just like you, I guess,” she answered as she sat down again and grabbed a pen and paper.

Mayson had a point, Lois thought. Indeed, she was no stranger to being young and attractive and having to work hard to rise to the top of a male-dominated field in a large city. And like Lois becoming one of the Planet's top reporters, Mayson had somehow managed to break through that glass ceiling and become the first female DA of Metropolis. Lois definitely shouldn't underestimate this woman, and she could only hope that Ms. Drake would see the truth of who Clark was and not try to make some example of Clark just because it was a high-profile case.

“Yeah, I suppose we have a bit in common there,” Lois admitted congenially.

“What can I help you with, Ms. Lane?”

“Clark Kent. I want to know if you plan on formally charging him,” Lois said, hoping that Clark wasn't in more trouble.

“Ms. Lane, I believe you need to talk to Captain Elliott Benson. He's the one compiling the evidence.”

“Why? I thought Inspector Henderson was?”

“Henderson was taken off the case earlier this morning. I guess he’s too close to the case; friends with Mr. Kent,” Mayson stated as she wrote notes on a yellow legal writing pad. “I’m sorry, Ms. Lane, I’m really not at liberty to discuss the case any more than I have already.”

“I understand. Thanks for your time, Ms. Drake,” Lois said as she stood and gave the woman a quick nod. She paused just at the doorway and turned back. “Clark’s a great guy and a good person, you know. He wouldn’t do this. He didn’t do this.”

Mayson nodded, her face almost expressionless. “Sometimes good people make really bad choices.”

“Not Clark,” Lois said, hoping she didn’t sound too desperate.

The DA raised her eyebrows slightly. “We’ll see,” she said simply. “Have a good day, Ms. Lane.”

“You too,” Lois said, feeling defeated again as she headed out the door.

Well, that was certainly no help! she thought as she started back down the hallway toward the exit. Now how could she help Clark?

The courthouse wasn’t as busy as when Lois had arrived. It was lunch hour, so many courts were on recess and staff members were out of the office. Outside, people were standing around smoking, chatting, or eating their lunch. Lois wasn’t hungry and didn’t smoke; the only person she wanted to speak with didn’t want to talk. So, she decided she had to do something else. She had to help Clark.

There was someone she could ask, but asking him could make the predicament even more awkward. Clark had admitted how he felt about her, and after she’d told him no, she’d thrown herself at Superman. Lois knew that was a mistake now. Why did her crush on a flying man make her want to jump off a building? The real hero was Clark—the man who had been fighting injustices beside her the past year. He was the one who needed her help now. Asking Superman to try and find evidence to exonerate Clark could just dredge up those old feelings and make all the heartbreak even worse.

No, she couldn’t try to contact Superman. But maybe she could try to find out what else Lex had been involved in.

Perry had shown Lois all the evidence against Lex the night before. Maybe someone Lex had worked with wanted him dead. It had seemed like Lex had double-crossed many people throughout the years. He’d apparently been the one known as “The Boss,” the man everyone feared in Metropolis. There had to be a list of people who’d wanted to see him dead. Maybe some of this information could be found

in his office. And what about Mrs. Cox? Where was she? Maybe Lois could find her at the penthouse or at one of Lex’s offices.

Fifteen minutes later, she walked into the lobby of Lex-Corp. She didn’t want the attention. So instead, she snuck past security as some staff walked through the lobby with boxes from their offices. Although some people seemed teary eyed since their CEO had just been murdered, many appeared to be continuing on as though nothing had happened. As she pushed the button to the elevator, she hoped she could make it into Lex’s office unnoticed and then maybe search for evidence to show Lex had had bigger enemies than her best friend.

However, when the elevators opened to a penthouse bustling with Metropolis police officers, she knew her plan wasn’t going to work; it would be impossible to search through Lex’s office with all the activity going on around her. She groaned in frustration, wishing she’d realized the police would be here, at Lex’s office. Though, considering the amount of activity here... Oh, God. Was this where he’d actually been shot? Neither the police nor the news had mentioned where Lex had been murdered.

In any case, her plans of finding evidence in his office would have to be postponed. Before she could push the button to close the elevator door again, she noticed a man in a suit walking toward her.

“Ms. Lane, please, come on in,” the man said as he set a hand on the elevator door to ensure it didn’t close. “I’m sure you know your way around.”

“Captain Benson, I assume,” Lois stated as she stepped off the elevator. She had seen him at the police station when she’d first arrived that morning. He had been talking to Henderson at a desk. The man was in his early forties, tall with broad shoulders and thin dark hair that receded. He looked friendly enough, but seemed like he could hold his own in a fight. And from what she’d heard, Benson was also a ruthless detective who could get even the most innocent man to confess.

“Yes, I’ve heard many things about you, Ms. Lane,” Benson said as he welcomed her into the lobby. His stern voice shook her a bit. “I have some questions for you.”

“I was already questioned this morning. I have nothing else to say to the police,” Lois stated as she stood taller.

“Yes, but I wasn’t there this morning. I have more questions and my own way of getting to the facts,” he said, waving his hand outward.

Lois followed him, her mind racing. Her plans had been foiled. And now she had to answer even more questions.

She needed to do something to save Clark—not answer more questions.

“Have a seat Ms. Lane,” Captain Benson instructed as they stepped into one of the side offices, where Lois thought Mrs. Cox had likely worked. The office may not have been Lex’s, but it still had expensive furniture. Boxes were scattered about and filled with files. The desk was clean except for a pen holder, a calendar, and a few yellow notepads. Lois knew firsthand that the yellow notepads were not what Lex typically used.

“Why was Inspector Henderson taken off the case?” Lois asked, hoping she could take control of the situation. “Who packed up the offices?”

“You do know that I’m the one who’s supposed to ask the questions. This isn’t an interview for the Daily Planet,” Benson responded as he took out a little gray tape recorder and hit play.

“I’m more interested in suspects—” Lois stammered, cutting off abruptly as she realized she had to find another way to get her information. “I mean, in finding out more about the death of my fiancé.”

“How about you tell me about Mr. Kent?”

“What do you want to know?” Lois countered as she clasped her shaking hands together in her lap. She could feel beads of sweat forming on her forehead, and her heart quickened. She’d already thrown her partner under the bus today; she didn’t need to do it again.

“Now, from what I recall, he had only been at the Daily Planet for less than a year,” the captain stated. “Do you know where he was before that?”

“He told me he traveled around a lot after college,” Lois answered, wiping her forehead as surreptitiously as possible.

“When Lex bought the Planet, was Mr. Kent upset?”

“I guess. I mean, he was never a fan of Lex,” Lois mentioned as she remembered the day Lex had announced he was the new owner. Clark definitely had definitely been upset. She swallowed tightly as she wondered why she hadn’t taken him more seriously at the time.

“And didn’t Perry White get an assistant when Mr. Luthor came on? Plus, Jimmy Olsen and Jack Milner got demoted. Was Mr. Kent upset about his boss and co-workers leaving?”

“Well, of course he was, but so was I. I mean, Jack wouldn’t blow up the Daily Planet. Clark and Perry found evidence that it was Lex,” Lois responded before she realized what she had said. She quickly added, “I mean, Clark couldn’t have done it.”

“How well do you know him? You’ve only known him a few months?”

“Well, I knew Lex even less, and I was engaged to him,” Lois interrupted. She suppressed a grimace as she put her hand on her forehead, realizing she’d made yet another mistake. “I’ve been to Smallville, where Clark grew up. I met his parents; hell, I even met his high school prom date.”

“And he’s a good guy, right?” the captain questioned while he wrote some things down. “Didn’t this same guy admit he had feelings for you and told you not to marry Luthor?”

“Yes,” she answered quietly and looked down at her hands in her lap.

“As a result of your relationship with Mr. Luthor, you were able to get a job at LNN, correct?”

“No! I mean, I guess that’s...probably true, but I was well qualified for the position,” Lois said indignantly.

“I have no doubt, Ms. Lane.” Benson eyed her, his expression inscrutable. “Did Mr. Kent get a position at LNN?”

“No, but I gave him a tour and hoped he would come work with me there,” Lois stated as she remembered her excitement about getting the new position.

“He didn’t accept?”

“No. He told me he could never work for Lex Luthor. He said LNN was sterile, soulless, and superficial and that I had given up on the Planet,” Lois admitted, unable to stop herself from babbling. “He told me he didn’t want to live without me, seeing me every morning, working with me, or being with me.”

“So not only was Mr. Kent in love with you, he was also angry with Luthor for losing his job, the Daily Planet, and his friends, and he blamed Luthor for the Planet’s destruction. He had more than one motive,” the captain said as he tapped his pencil on the pad of paper. “Thank you, Ms. Lane. Given all of this and the gun my officers just found in the dumpster behind Mr. Kent’s apartment, I think I have enough now.”

Lois froze with uncertainty. They’d found a gun in the dumpster behind Clark’s apartment? How? Why? None of this made sense.

“Enough...for what?” Lois asked nervously.

Benson smiled at her. “Enough to charge your friend with murder.”

* * *

The late May afternoon sun shone down brightly on the city as Lois exited LexCorp. She had to find a way to help

Clark since she had practically dug his grave. Where would he be now? She needed to warn him; he needed to know that Benson was nearly ready to arrest him.

But first, since Clark was probably still meeting with the lawyer anyway, maybe she could do something else for him. Standing on the sidewalk, she looked right and left, trying to figure out which direction Clark would have gone when he'd left LexCorp the night before. If the security video had shown Clark arriving at the LexCorp building at a specific time, maybe a camera at a different business would show him leaving at the time he said he had. Which way would Clark have taken to get to his apartment?

Lois headed left, walked the busy weekday streets, and looked at each building for any type of camera. Finally, after five blocks, Lois crossed the road and headed back toward LexCorp. She wrote down all the businesses and ATMs along the stretch of road, including the addresses and other information that might be helpful. And although this seemed like a good first step, she didn't feel terribly confident that she would find anything that might be useful to Clark.

Lois wanted to be strong for him, but right now, her hands were shaking. Maybe instead of trying to figure out where he'd gone that night, she had to change tactics. Maybe she could find someone to help her prove that Clark didn't kill Lex. Who was framing Clark Kent? And where would Mrs. Cox or Nigel St. John be hiding? She had so many questions and no answers.

There was only one man she knew who always seemed to be able to help her find answers when she was in trouble. The one man who had gotten her out of a lot of jams over the years—Perry.

Her decision made, she got in her Jeep and headed toward Perry's house. With any luck, Jimmy might also be at Perry's; he'd be able to help her with her investigation into the businesses near LexCorp that might have security footage. But her first priority was talking to Perry.

It only took her forty-six minutes to get to Perry's house, a modest colonial house on the outskirts of Metropolis. Perry and Alice had lived there for over twenty years and had raised their two boys there. Now, the older couple lived in the house alone. Yet when Lois pulled into the driveway, she was relieved to see an extra vehicle—an aged, dark blue two-door sedan that looked like it was on its last leg—parked alongside Perry's car. She knew Perry had been home since last night; he had told her that he would return to the house and that Jimmy and Jack would stay with him. And the extra vehicle might mean that Jimmy was indeed here, which meant she could recruit him to help Clark.

Lois jumped out of the Jeep, hurried up to the house, and knocked on the old oak door. After a moment, Jimmy answered.

"Lois, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"I need Perry's help, and hopefully, your technical skills can come in handy later," Lois responded as she grabbed her notebook from her bag.

"Lois, come on in," Perry shouted from around the corner. "I was just getting ready to give Jimmy a serving of my chili."

She stepped inside the foyer, trying to remember how it had looked the one time she'd been here before for an anniversary party Perry had thrown for Alice a couple of years ago.

"Please don't make me eat more of that chili," Jimmy whispered to Lois as he guided her through the kitchen and into the dining room, where there was a long oak table. During the anniversary party, the table had been set elegantly and ornately by Alice; however, it now sat empty but for a briefcase and some old newspapers. Lois stepped up to the table and set her notebook down with a sigh.

"What is it, darlin'?" Perry asked as he entered the dining room with two bowls.

"Oh, Perry, I... I just don't know what to do!" Lois admitted, blinking back tears. "Clark is going to be charged with murder, and it's all my fault. I...was only telling the police the truth, but now they think he had motive, and his whereabouts can't be confirmed at the time Lex was murdered. I really need to fix it, and I need your help, Perry."

Lois took a bowl of the chili Perry offered and then sat down at one side of the table. Perry sat at the head of the table, and Jimmy sat across from Lois.

"Darlin', what's going on?"

"I talked to the new district attorney and Captain Benson. Henderson is off the case, and I sort of messed up and told them that Clark had a motive to shoot Lex. I mean, I was telling them the truth, but I was nervous and started babbling as I sometimes do. Clark won't talk to me, and his alibi is shoddy. I mean, he said he was taking a walk, but unless we find evidence of him walking home from LexCorp at the time he said, he could be in real trouble. Benson is already talking about arresting him and charging him with murder!"

"What can we do?" Jimmy pushed his bowl of chili away, shaking his head.

"Well, Perry, I'm hoping you know someone at the police station who can get us a copy of the videotape from LexCorp. Clark said that the timestamp is off, so I'm hoping we

can find evidence that the video was tampered with,” Lois explained as she took a spoonful of the chili without hesitation. After a couple of bites, she looked over at Jimmy, then looked back down at her notepad and started writing some notes. “Then, Jimmy, I was hoping you could help me with contacting the businesses nearby LexCorp that might have security cameras showing the street. I found six businesses to the west of LexCorp, so later, I’ll call and see if they have tapes from last night. Jimmy, I need you to contact the businesses to the east of LexCorp.”

“Okay, that sounds like a plan, Lois,” Perry agreed. “Jimmy, go ahead and go to LexCorp and do what Lois requested. I’ll call Trudy, the desk lieutenant at the Twenty-First Precinct. She owes me a couple of favors. I can see if she can get me the original videotape. Lois, I need you to go home and call those businesses you have. I say we meet back here tomorrow morning at eleven with what we have.” Perry took another bite of his chili.

Jimmy looked up at Perry and shrugged his shoulders.

“It’s fine, Jimmy,” Perry told the boy. Perry then put his hand over Lois’s hand, stopping her from scribbling more notes.

“Chief, what do I tell the businesses I talk to? What is this concerning?” Jimmy asked.

“Tell them it’s a story for the Daily Planet. I’m sure Franklin Stern won’t mind us working on a story even though he hasn’t publicly announced his plans for the paper. Don’t let this out of this room, you two, but he said he would love to stick it to Luthor after all the businesses Luthor stole out from under him.”

“So the paper is back!” Lois smiled for the first time in what seemed like forever, suddenly feeling like things were looking up. However, her smile quickly faded as she was hit with a wave of guilt. The news about the Planet’s reopening meant more to her than hearing about Lex’s death. What did that say about her?

“It’s okay, to be happy, darlin’,” Perry assured her. “I think I praised Elvis a few times after Mr. Stern called.”

Lois nodded, allowing her smile to return. She shouldn’t feel guilty. Lex had misled her, manipulated her, and lied. And the Daily Planet reopening... That was huge. That was what the world needed. It meant that the Daily Planet was bigger than the man who had tried to bring it down.

“I tried to call Clark to tell him, but there was no answer,” Perry said.

“He went to meet with the lawyer you recommended,” Lois explained. Then she sighed and shook her head.

“Perry, he won’t let me in. I keep telling him I want to help, but he keeps shutting me out. How am I supposed to help someone who doesn’t want my help?”

“The same way you always have—with everything you’ve got. And I’m sure when this is over, Clark will let you back in. It’s one reason he kept digging for information on Luthor,” Perry said, finishing his chili.

At her confused look, Jimmy spoke up. “Lois, all Clark kept telling us the whole time we were trying to investigate Luthor was that you were in danger. Even if he had to do it alone, he was going to make sure you knew the truth before your wedding.”

Perry cleared his throat. “Construction on the Planet won’t start for another couple of weeks, so we’ll have to make do until then. We can meet here when needed, and otherwise, Lois, you can work from home.”

“What about Alice?” Lois wondered. “What does she think about you going back to the paper?”

“She decided it was best to visit her sister in Tucson for a few weeks,” Perry explained as he waved his hand dismissively. “No worries, Lois, it’s not the first time she didn’t like a decision I made about the paper. She always gets over it and comes back after a trip away.”

Lois wondered if that would always be true. When does the person you trust the most stop coming to help you? Do they ever give up on the person they love? When you love someone, do you tell them everything?

She closed her eyes and suppressed a shiver. After all of this, was Clark still going to love her? Did he still love her now? He had become a beacon to her, and she had almost lost him. And actually, now, something just as bad could happen if he were to be convicted of Lex’s murder. She needed to stop the police from pinning the murder on Clark. She couldn’t fathom being without him now. What did that really say about their relationship?

And after this fiasco, could they...move forward with an actual relationship, as in, more than partners and best friends? Is that what she wanted? Did he love her enough to not give up?

Jimmy and Lois left in their separate cars minutes later; she needed to get started calling those businesses near LexCorp to see if they had the footage she needed. It was somewhere to begin, at least. Then, she could try to find Mrs. Cox and see what Mrs. Cox knew. Was Mrs. Cox the one who had tampered with the tape? And where was Lex’s other assistant, Nigel?

After she got home, she went through her mail, started a pot of coffee, and grabbed the leftover Chinese food she had

from two days ago. Once the food was warmed up in the microwave, she sat at the kitchen table and started flipping through her notes.

Why would Clark go for a walk after talking to Lex? Which way did he go? Why was he pushing her away? Was he still angry with her for choosing Lex?

She called two of the six businesses; at the first, a coffee shop, the camera wasn't working, and for the second, she would need to call back tomorrow when the manager was in. She slammed the phone down and closed her eyes for a moment, preparing herself to call the third business, when there was a knock at the door.

"Hi," Clark said when she opened the door a moment later. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?"

"No, of course not. Come on in," she said as she opened the door farther. She wanted, no needed to talk to him some more. She had missed her best friend.

After she closed the door, she looked over at him; his shoulders sagged a bit, and he didn't have that glow about him that he seemed to have back when they'd worked at the Planet. She could tell she had hurt him, but now she really needed her partner back.

"I talked to Perry a little bit ago. Stern is going to rebuild the Daily Planet," Lois said as she leaned back against the door. "Isn't it great, Clark? We'll get to be partners again!"

"Yeah, Perry was hoping that Stern would go for his idea. I guess Stern and Luthor didn't get along too much. Luthor had stolen businesses out from under him a few times," Clark replied as he moved to the opposite side of the living room. He shoved his hands in his pockets, his expression uncertain.

"What is it, Clark?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, running one of his hands through his hair.

"You didn't come over because you were in the neighborhood," Lois stated as she walked toward him.

She didn't know how to explain what she was feeling, but she knew she needed to tell him she was behind him and believed him.

"Clark, I talked to the district attorney and Captain Benson earlier. It doesn't look good. I tried to call you a few times when I could get to a phone. But you never answered. Where have you been?" Lois asked as she stepped closer to him.

He looked up at her in surprise. Why did he look even more frustrated than when he came in? Was he upset that she hadn't listened to him, again?

"Lois, I asked you not to—to look into this," he stammered, stepping back.

"Why? Why won't you tell me where you were? And why did you even go to see Lex?" Lois was frustrated now, and she threw her hands up in the air as she started pacing. "If it's me—tell me. Are you still angry with me for turning you down? Do you want me to throw myself at you like I did when we were sprayed with Miranda's perfume?"

He shook his head. "No, Lois, that's not... I can't do this right now. I didn't come over here to fight with you. I just wanted to see how you were. Your fiancé was killed, and even if I didn't trust him, I just... I wanted to make sure you were doing okay. And I can't tell you where I was because it would make things worse."

"He didn't have to die, Clark. So what do you want me to say? That you were right?" she shouted. Her shoulders tensed as she stopped and glared at Clark. She couldn't understand why he had even come over to talk if all they were going to do was argue, again.

"No, Lois. Yes, he was a horrible man who did some ruthless things. But, you're right; he didn't have to die. What I really want to know is, do you believe me? That I didn't do it," he questioned, his voice pleading with her to believe him.

Lois continued to stare at him, her breathing returning to normal. She sighed and then started pacing beside the couch as Clark watched her. She could tell how hurt he was. And she did believe him. She really did. Yet...she knew that Clark hated Lex; he had told her plenty of times that Lex was evil. Clark had confessed his love for her, hoping it would convince her not to marry Lex. She stopped pacing and turned to face him.

"Clark, I... I don't know what to say here. Of course I believe you. You...couldn't kill anyone. But what I believe doesn't matter if we can't prove it. And I need you to trust me so I can help. Now, the video shows that you were there at LexCorp just minutes before he died. You even admitted that you went to see him," Lois pointed out as she turned her back to him. "What am I supposed to do here—how can I help you—if you won't tell me the truth?"

She felt Clark move closer to her, his warmth so familiar, and she heard him draw in a long breath.

"Lois, you know I said the video was doctored. And I know you want the truth, but I'm sorry. I can't give that to you right now. I...don't want to hurt you. It's just that..."

His presence moved closer still, until she felt him set his hand on her shoulder.

“But you did. You did hurt me when you didn’t show up to support me,” she mumbled with tears in her eyes. “I thought you were my friend. Where were you then? The party?” She paused, turning to face him. “I trusted you, Clark. Yet you won’t trust me enough to be honest! I know you didn’t kill him, Clark, but you have to trust me enough to tell me. You told the police that you left Lex’s at eight twenty. He was shot at eight fifty, and you didn’t arrive back at your place until eleven. Where were you?”

He shook his head and ignored her question, his expression darkening, and she took a step back, surprised at the unfamiliar anger in his eyes. “Seriously, you’re angry with me for not showing up at your engagement party? How about when you turned me down and then went running to Superman? Then when Superman turned you down, you accepted Lex’s proposal? Whose bed will you go to next?”

The unexpected words filled her with anger. How dare he?! Before she realized what she was doing, she stepped toward him and raised her hand to slap him across the face. But he grabbed her wrist before impact, stopping her, and they glared at each other, the tension growing.

A sudden knock at her door startled both of them, and she gave Clark another angry look as she pulled her hand away and moved to the door. Glancing through the peephole, she saw Captain Benson standing impatiently in the hallway. She shook her head and opened the door.

“Captain, what can I do for you?” Lois asked, annoyed.

“I’m here to see Mr. Kent,” Captain Benson announced as he put his hand up to push the door open.

“How did you even know Clark was here?” Lois stepped aside to let Captain Benson in.

“We’ve been having him followed since early this morning,” the captain replied. “Except for a few hours this afternoon when my officers lost him. We figured he would come back here.” Captain Benson gave her a smug smile and then turned back to address Clark. “Clark Kent, you are under arrest for the murder of Lex Luthor.”

Clark’s eyes widened with shock, as did Lois’s. She’d known Benson planned to charge Clark, but she hadn’t expected this! She stepped between Clark and Captain Benson.

“There has to be a mistake. He didn’t do it,” Lois interrupted. “He wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

Clark stepped up to Lois and put his hands on her shoulders, his expression almost panicked. “Lois, I know I asked you not to get involved, but now I need your help. Call my parents, please?”

Lois opened her mouth to respond, to tell him that yes, of course she would call his parents, but her breath caught as she saw Captain Benson take out his handcuffs. “Are—are those really necessary?” she asked. When Captain Benson didn’t answer, she turned to Clark. “I’ll do everything I can to get you out of there. And yes, I’ll call your parents.”

Lois watched in horror as Captain Benson put handcuffs on her partner. She then looked up and noticed two plain-clothes officers at her door.

“One minute, please,” she begged as she put her hand on Clark’s chest. She turned to Benson, hoping he would give her a minute to say goodbye. Instead, he just stopped in the doorway. Lois touched Clark’s cheek and stretched up to kiss him briefly on the lips. “I’m sorry for everything,” she whispered. And then she watched, holding back tears, as Captain Benson and the two other officers escorted Clark down the hallway.

She had led the police right to her partner, her best friend, and the one man she could count on. Yes, he had hurt her with his words, but he’d been angry. He had every right to be.

Yet he still didn’t deserve to be arrested for a murder he didn’t commit. And she was going to prove it.

* * *

“Perry, I don’t know what to do,” Lois said, feeling helpless as she sat at her kitchen table on the phone with the editor of the Daily Planet. It had been two hours since Clark had been arrested in her apartment, and she still couldn’t believe what had happened. “I called Clark’s parents. They’re going to take the next available flight out. But I’m worried about Clark. I need to help him.”

“Lois, you’re doing all you can,” Perry replied. “Clark is tough; he’ll be able to handle himself in there tonight.”

“But Chief, he shouldn’t be in this mess in the first place, and it’s all my fault.” Lois scribbled on her notepad in a vain effort to do something.

“You did nothing wrong, darlin’. We’ll get everything straightened out. Jimmy and I will do what we can,” Perry stated with confidence in his voice. “Speaking of, I was able to get the security video. Jimmy is looking at it right now.”

“Good. Good,” she said almost absently, then seemed to process what he’d said. “I hope Jimmy can find evidence of it being altered. It might be the only thing that can help Clark. In the meantime, I need to figure out where I’m going to find the money for his bail,” Lois said. “I mean, I can get about twenty thousand, but if it’s more, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

“Don’t worry about that, darlin’. I’ll figure something out,” Perry reassured her. “How about you try to get some sleep, and Jimmy and I will keep working on this?”

“I don’t think I can sleep knowing Clark is in jail because of me. I still need to find Mrs. Cox.”

At least Perry knew better than to try and talk her out of it right now. Lois said goodnight to Perry a few seconds later.

She needed to go back to LexCorp. There had to be something in Lex’s office that could help in the investigation. She didn’t think Captain Benson or the police would still be there later tonight; they had to have finished processing the crime scene by now.

Lois had a couple of hours to kill, though, until it would be wise to sneak in. So in the meantime, she sat down on the couch with some rocky road ice cream and her cordless phone. She called a couple more of the businesses that were still open to see if they had footage from last night, but she didn’t have much luck.

A couple of hours later, she changed into black jeans and a black turtleneck and headed out to LexCorp.

When she opened the double glass doors to the LexCorp building, she was relieved to see a security officer she knew. Ernie, an older Black man in his late fifties, had usually worked the day shift, and Lois had gotten to know him a bit over the course of her engagement to Lex.

“Ernie, it’s great to see you,” Lois said as she stepped up to the security station. “How’s your wife? The kids?”

“Miss Lane, wh-what a surprise! Are you... H-how are you doing?” It wasn’t until she saw his look of concern that she remembered she was technically a grieving fiancée. He eyed her carefully as he sat down in the black swivel chair and glanced at the screens before looking back at her. “I’d heard you’d stopped by earlier today...”

“Oh, yep, that’s right. I was a little surprised not to see you when I was here,” Lois said, trying to look more aggrieved than nervous like she was actually feeling. She looked around her, half expecting another security guard to show up and escort her out. But she was probably just being paranoid.

“I had to switch to the night shift. My dear Julie needs me home during the day,” Ernie explained as he looked down briefly at the screens on the desk again. “Are you sure you’re okay, Miss Lane? Is there anything I can do for you?”

“I, um...actually, I was curious... Are the police still in the penthouse?” Lois asked as casually as she could manage.

“No, ma’am, they left around six.”

“Is it okay if I go up? I left some things up there the last time I was here. I promise not to touch anything,” Lois said in her best convincing voice as she started edging towards the elevator.

“Of course, of course, Miss Lane. Whatever you need. Just be careful. The crime scene is still active. I guess the police wanted to wait a couple more days before sending in a cleanup crew in case they needed to come back tomorrow for more evidence in Mr. Luthor’s murder,” Ernie stated as he grabbed his coffee mug and took a drink.

Since Ernie was concerned for her and forthcoming with information right now, she might as well try and use it to her advantage, even though the thought of it made her cringe a little. “Do you happen to know where Mrs. Cox is? Does she stay here or somewhere else? I just...wanted to ask her if there was anything I needed to do...with the wedding being...not happening...”

“I’m so sorry, I can only imagine how difficult... I’m sure, Mrs. Cox...I’m sure she won’t bother you with all the details! But if you need her, she’s staying at the Lexor Hotel in room 406,” Ernie replied.

“Thank you, Ernie,” Lois said as she walked toward the elevator, pushed the button to call it, and waited. She couldn’t believe how great Ernie had been. He knew everyone around LexCorp and about their lives, so she shouldn’t be too surprised that he had even known what room number Mrs. Cox was staying in.

Did Ernie know all this information from being the head of security on the day shift? Or was there more to Ernie than Lois knew? What if Ernie had even known about Lex and his illegal dealings?

Lois shook her head as she stepped into the elevator. Ernie was so nice; her imagination was just running wild. She hit the button for the penthouse along with the code needed to go up to that floor, which thankfully hadn’t changed since the last time she’d come to visit Lex.

When she stepped off the elevator this time, there were no police waiting for her. The penthouse seemed eerie with no one around. Lois turned on the light in Lex’s office; she wanted to find evidence of Lex’s illegal businesses. Maybe one of his accomplices or someone he had done business with had killed him. She noticed four file cabinets lining one wall; they were the type of cabinets that were longer than they were tall, which meant she could sit in a chair to pick the locks and find the information more easily.

Inside were tons of files concerning the companies he had taken over and others that he had been interested in. She found two very important files that sent chills up her spine. One file was labeled “Superman,” and it was filled with

news clippings about Superman. The other file was marked “Clark Kent,” and inside were some of his stories and a copy of his personnel file from the Daily Planet. Why would Lex keep this? Had Clark been the target all along? Why keep files on Superman and Clark? It made no sense. She kept digging until she gave up and turned her head, looking at the desk. The computer was missing—the police must have already taken it.

She wanted to dig in the desk, but Lex had been killed right there. Blood was still all over the desk and chair. Lois felt another shiver run up her spine. She’d seen a man murdered before, and even a few dead bodies. But this was the death of someone she’d been close to, someone she’d been about to marry.

How was she supposed to feel? Upset? Sad? Those feelings weren’t there. She wasn’t sure why. If he had lived, would she have still married him? Why had having Clark there for the engagement party and the wedding mattered to her so much?

The search of Lex’s office had been a bust. Of course, the police had already done their job. The one time she had hoped the MPD was slacking on the job. Nope, now they were doing their job too diligently. Lois had to try to figure out a way to show the prosecution that Lex had been a threat to Clark, not the other way around. While Clark would do almost anything to save his friends and family, murder certainly wasn’t one of those things.

She knew she had to save Clark somehow, and it struck her that Clark was more of a priority to her than the death of the man she had been about to marry. Deep in her heart, Lois knew why that was, but she didn’t want to say it out loud just yet. She wasn’t ready to admit it to herself, and she was sure Clark wasn’t ready to hear it, either. Her heart ached for what she had done to him.

Lois covered her heart with her hand, looked down, and sighed. After all this time, she had finally realized what she was feeling for her best friend. Telling him the truth was going to be the hardest thing she would have to do. Would he even believe her?

Lois shook herself mentally. It wasn’t like she could tell him right now anyway. Now, she needed to rest. Spending hours poring over files had been exhausting.

She grabbed the file on Clark plus the one on Superman. The files might help her with some of Lex’s history, but she wasn’t sure they were much help otherwise. At least this visit to LexCorp had given her a good place to start—room 406 at the Lexor Hotel.

Tomorrow would be another day; hopefully, she would have her partner back. Her only issue tonight was that she

didn’t want to return to her place. She knew Clark’s parents would be arriving in the morning from Smallville, so she figured she could go to his place and ensure they had everything they needed.

An hour later, she entered Clark’s apartment with the key he had given her a few weeks back to use in case of emergencies. She had also stopped at the grocery store for the basics—ice cream and chocolate, although she also bought milk, creamer, pork chops, and a frozen pizza. The pizza would be for her tonight, and she was sure Martha could use the pork chops for something while they were staying here. Lois wasn’t sure what else to get for them, but she had remembered Clark saying his mom made great pork chops.

Lois would feel like an intruder anywhere else, but she felt at home at Clark’s. They had spent many nights together, working late at one apartment or the other. A couple of times, they had even just watched a movie at his place and ordered pizza. Now she was alone.

While the pizza was in the oven, she looked at the bookcases near the stairs and the pictures he had around, and she even picked up a couple of books to read the inserts. He had traveled around the world, seen many things, and met many people. What had made him stay in Metropolis? Why had Metropolis been so different from every other place he’d visited? He had once mentioned learning to dance from a Nigerian princess. She had seen women fall over Clark before, but how many more were there?

She knew what attracted her to Clark—his demeanor, his kindness, and the fact he was the only one who could stand up to her in a way that she found fascinating. They worked so well together. And right now, she would give anything to have him here.

Before long, Lois found herself in his bedroom. She ran her hands across the clothes hanging in his closet, realizing she would need to pick out a suit for his arraignment tomorrow. Lois found his blue suit and a tie and put it aside—it was one of her favorites on him. Blue always looked good on him. Then again, the man looked good in anything, she thought with a smile.

She couldn’t help herself as she opened one of his dresser drawers. Was she being too intrusive? Since she couldn’t have Clark here with her or tell him how she really felt, she grabbed one of his t-shirts out of the second dresser drawer and put it up to her nose, inhaling his scent. All she wanted was to feel close to him. Stripping her clothes off down to her underwear, she then put the shirt on and smiled slightly when she saw it hung down just past the middle of her thigh.

The timer on the oven beeped, reminding her of her pizza. After she got the supreme pizza out of the oven, she got herself a soda, sat on the couch, and turned on the television.

It felt strange, doing all of this without him. Lois needed her partner, her best friend back. Finally, after Lois had finished her dinner and cleaned up a few dishes, she turned off all the lights except the one above the kitchen sink.

Was she ready to turn in? Where would she sleep? She looked over towards the couch, then towards the bedroom, and back to the couch. She wanted to feel even closer to him—plus Clark would have insisted she take the bed anyway—so she went to the bedroom. Pulling down the blankets and sheets, she slowly crawled into his bed. His scent was everywhere, but she needed more of it, and so she pulled one of his pillows to her chest, hugging it close to her heart.

“Clark,” she murmured as the tears began to fall. “I’m sorry.”

Her heart and her mind could not take the pain anymore, and she fell into a deep sleep. She couldn’t be any closer to him unless he were here. She was in his apartment, in one of his t-shirts, and in his bed, dreaming of the moment she could wrap her arms around him for real.

* * *

Martha was unlocking the door to their son’s apartment when Jonathan grumbled behind her, “I can’t believe they lost my bag.”

“I’ll call the airport after we get back from seeing Clark,” Martha responded as she walked inside and down the steps with Jonathan right behind her. “Was that Lois’s Jeep outside?”

“I think so, but what would Lois be doing here?” Jonathan wondered aloud as he set Martha’s suitcase down on the floor.

Putting down the larger carry-on she’d been holding, Martha looked up and noticed the light on in the kitchen and dishes in the drying rack. Then, her eyes drifted to what she could see of Clark’s bedroom, and she noticed a blue suit and tie hanging up off the stairs that led to the roof. She moved closer, stepping slightly into the bedroom, only to find a small figure curled up in the bed. Martha turned around, moving back toward Jonathan again and putting a finger up to her lips. “Shh. Lois is sleeping in his bed.”

“I wonder why she isn’t at her apartment,” Jonathan questioned, his voice a whisper. “I never did understand why Clark got an open concept place. There is no privacy here.”

“I think she has feelings for him. I mean, you remember when she was in Smallville? The way she hung on him after that horrible man almost killed him. She wouldn’t let him leave her sight,” Martha explained. “I know she broke his

heart after saying she just wanted to be friends and then accepting Lex Luthor’s proposal, but…”

“Martha, she ran to Superman before accepting Luthor’s proposal,” Jonathan pointed out. “What does that say?”

“It says I made a horrible mistake,” Lois said regretfully. Martha turned and saw her standing there in Clark’s robe with her hair messed up, rubbing her eyes and looking like she had been crying. “I made a horrible mess of things and got my best friend arrested because of my stupid mistake.”

“Oh, Lois,” Martha sighed as she went over to the young woman and pulled her into a hug. “It’s okay. I’m sure he forgives you.”

“I don’t think so,” Lois said, welcoming the hug. “He said some horrible things to me before he was arrested. I don’t think he will ever forgive me.” Lois pulled back and looked down at what she was wearing and then at the clock. “What time is it? Did I sleep past your flight? I wanted to pick the two of you up at the airport.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Martha said, waving her hand. Then, she stepped back into the kitchen and opened the cupboard.

“We caught an earlier flight,” Jonathan explained as he watched his wife search through the cupboard. “What are you looking for, Martha?”

“The coffee filters. I know how Lois likes her coffee in the morning.”

Martha stepped back and watched as Lois walked past Jonathan and opened the cupboard on the right-hand side of the sink. Lois pulled out the coffee filters and then got the coffee grounds from the freezer. Martha beamed as she realized Lois knew where everything was and how Lois felt at ease in Clark’s place. When Lois stopped and looked at Martha and Jonathan, her cheeks reddened. Martha was happy that her son and Lois had become so close.

“We know our way around each other’s kitchens,” Lois admitted, running her hand through her hair as she looked down. She suddenly seemed to realize what she was wearing, and Martha just giggled a bit after Lois tightened her robe and tried to tame her hair. “I’ll just go get dressed,” she said, and she made a beeline for Clark’s bedroom, grabbing her bag on the way.

Several minutes later, Lois came out of the bedroom with her hair brushed and wearing black slacks and a red sweater. Martha looked up from where she and Jonathan sat at the table and then motioned to the seat across from her, where she’d set Lois’s coffee cup.

Lois sat down, took a sip of her coffee, and smiled. “Thank you, Martha, this is perfect,” she said quietly. “I’m

sorry I invaded Clark's space. I feel horrible about what happened between us. I'll do everything possible to make sure he gets out of jail today. The arraignment is at ten, but I figured the two of you would like to see him before then. I know I'm probably not your favorite person right now, but I'm happy to drive you both down to the courthouse early," Lois explained as she looked over at Jonathan.

"Oh, hush, Lois," Martha reassured, reaching over to pat Lois's hand. "It wasn't until he got the job at the Daily Planet and started working with you that Clark was finally ready to settle down. Your presence in his life made him light up like I've never seen before. He never had anyone else in his corner except us. Before you, he seemed so lonely and adrift." Martha smiled wistfully as she remembered the long years when Clark was off running around the world, trying to find his place. "We know how hard you're working to protect Clark and prove his innocence. Your relationship will be stronger after all of this is over. The two of you will be back working together soon enough."

"Lois, I know this isn't all your fault," Jonathan said. "I'm sorry if I gave you the impression that's what I thought. Our son is —"

"— special," Martha cut in with a smile.

"He's more than that. I've never known anyone like him. I think I took it for granted, and now I could lose him," Lois said as she took another sip of her coffee.

"No, you won't," Jonathan corrected. "You make him happy, Lois. Even after you accepted Luthor's proposal, he would still go on and on about you. You're practically all he ever talked about."

Martha smiled, happy that Lois was talking to them, opening up to them. Although she hadn't really made a declaration of love, she was admitting her feelings for Clark, and Martha figured the rest would come soon enough. Yet Martha still felt that ache for her boy, knowing what he was having to do to keep his secret. She had noticed how difficult it was becoming for him to lie to Lois the past few weeks. Would he tell Lois his secret? And if he did, would Lois forgive him for hiding his secret from her? Martha didn't know, but hearing Lois now made her hopeful. Right now, though, Martha had to keep a level head as her son was behind bars for something he didn't do.

Martha watched as Lois put her cup down and said, "Oh."

Yes, Lois, Martha thought. You have no idea, do you? Clark even talked about Lois to her and Jonathan when he was angry with her. Even when Lois had broken his heart, he had still always found a way to turn the conversation to her.

"We should get to the courthouse," Lois suggested as she stood up. "I know someone that can get us to see him before court starts."

Jonathan and Martha stood up and took their cups to the sink. They poured out the rest of their coffee, and then Martha grabbed a to-go mug for Lois and poured more coffee into it, along with one sugar and some creamer. Lois looked a bit tired, Martha noticed, and probably needed the caffeine. Lois grabbed her messenger bag and Clark's suit while Martha and Jonathan locked up.

* * *

It was a silent ride to the courthouse. Lois noticed the police van parked along the side of the courthouse. She shivered for a moment thinking of Clark in the back of the transport van, handcuffed. He didn't deserve this. She parked her Jeep in the visitor parking lot and walked up the stairs with his parents. When she entered the courthouse, she found her friend Milo Pearson, a bailiff.

"Milo," Lois said, greeting him as she approached. Milo hadn't changed a bit since she'd last seen him. He still wore his sandy blond hair neatly combed to one side, and his brown eyes looked serious, even as he smiled at her, a dimple forming on his left cheek. "What conference room is Clark in?"

"Lois, hey, I know I said you could visit him. But I'm not sure what his lawyer will say," Milo explained as he looked from one side of the hallway to the other.

"Come on, Milo. I brought a suit for him to wear to his arraignment. Plus, his parents want to see him," Lois pleaded as she motioned to Jonathan and Martha, who were standing down the hallway a bit.

Milo sighed. "I put Clark in Conference Room C. It's down the hall, the second door to the right. Remember, you owe me tickets to the Metropolis Monarchs," he reminded her, waving her off.

"Taken care of! Hope your son enjoys the game!" Lois replied quickly as she started walking toward Jonathan and Martha. She'd really have to thank Pete from Sports later for scoring those tickets for her.

She ushered Jonathan and Martha down the hall and then stopped in front of the door of Conference Room C, suddenly very nervous. She wished she could see inside, but the door had an opaque glass panel in it that blocked the view; no one could see in or out. Her eyes closed for a minute as she hesitated. Would Constance Hunter let her in? Would Clark want to see her? Would he ever forgive her?

"Lois, it will be okay," Martha reassured her, putting her hand on Lois's shoulder. Lois turned and smiled nervously,

then she knocked lightly on the door. Within seconds, an older lady just a tad shorter than Martha opened it up.

“Can I help you?” the woman asked.

“Hi, I know this isn’t normal procedure, but I’m Lois —”

“Lois, what are you doing here?” Clark interrupted as he stood up from the conference table.

Lois looked beyond the woman and saw her partner, his warm chocolate brown eyes filled with confusion. He was standing there in an orange jumpsuit that looked one size too small, and his hands were held awkwardly out in front of him, the handcuffs clearly visible. She smiled briefly, hoping that he could see how much she was hurting.

“I brought you a suit for your arraignment,” Lois explained as she pushed past Constance. Clark tried to move toward her, but the chains on his feet stopped him. She paused for a moment, unsure, then shook herself and smiled again. “And I also made a phone call last night and ensured you had two more people in your corner today.”

Lois turned around and went back to the door, then opened it more to reveal Clark’s parents. Both of the older Kents entered the conference room and rushed over to their son. Martha pulled Clark into a tight hug, while Jonathan set his hand on Clark’s shoulder and squeezed slightly.

“Miss Lane, this is quite inappropriate,” Constance told Lois as both women watched the family reunion. “You shouldn’t be here. Thank you for the suit for Mr. Kent, but you’re the fiancée of the deceased.”

“I—I know,” Lois said sadly, looking past Constance to watch Clark and his parents. She took a deep breath and told herself she wouldn’t cry. “Clark needs some time alone with his parents anyway. I’ll just wait outside the courtroom.”

“Thanks,” Constance said with a small, grateful smile. She motioned to Lois, and the two women stepped outside of the conference room, shutting the door behind them. “He has at least a few minutes now. And then we’ll...see you in there.”

Lois nodded and then turned and walked down the hallway toward the courtroom.

* * *

“I can’t believe Lois,” Clark said, sitting down with a sigh.

His mother sat next to him and put her arm around him.

“She’s just trying to help,” Martha admitted. “We found her sleeping in your bed this morning.”

“Why?” he wondered aloud. He tried to run his hand through his hair, but the handcuffs kept getting in the way.

“I think she’s trying to make up for what happened,” Martha admitted. “The three of us had a nice chat this morning. Lois is heartbroken after what happened.”

“How do you think I feel?” Clark replied, looking over at his mom. “She turned me down, then ran to Superman, and after Superman turned her down, she went running to Luthor. It’s like I’m not even her second choice.”

He was so confused. One minute she didn’t want to be partners with him, the next minute she did. His head felt like it was spinning when he thought about his relationship with Lois.

“It sounds like you were her first choice. You are Superman,” Jonathan said. “Talking about yourself in third person still feels weird.”

“Dad, I wanted her to love me. Choose me. Not the suit or the powers, but me. And when I gave her a chance, she told me no. How can we come back from that? She made her choice,” Clark admitted, his shoulders sagging as his heartache from that moment in the park returned.

“I think she made a mistake that day,” Martha said. “But you did, too. You probably frightened her when you told her you loved her. Remember what you told us before? She’s been alone for years. Then suddenly she had three men vying for her attention.”

“So what should I do? Give her another chance?” Clark asked, looking over at his mom.

“I think when this is over, the two of you sit down and hash it all out. And maybe tell her exactly why you were so hurt after she ran to Superman,” Martha explained.

Clark’s eyes widened at his mom’s suggestion. After everything, she was suggesting that he should tell Lois the truth?

They were interrupted by a knock on the door, followed quickly by Constance opening the door slightly.

“Hurry up and get changed. We have five minutes,” Constance told him. “I’ll get the bailiff in here to take off those cuffs so you can change.”

A few minutes later, Clark was led into the courtroom, where he noticed his mom and dad sitting in the first row behind Constance. Lois was next to his mom. He looked over at Lois, and their eyes met for a brief second. His eyes then drifted to his parents, who were holding hands. He smiled as he watched his mom reach over and take a hold of Lois’s hand.

He realized that his parents were there not just for him but also for Lois. She needed more people in her corner, he thought. Watching his mom accept Lois made him realize that maybe Lois was also in his corner. Maybe he shouldn’t

shut her out. After all, that was not how he was raised. The talk with his parents had also made him think about how Lois was here for him now, not off somewhere else, planning Luthor's funeral. Why wasn't Lois mourning Luthor? Were his parents right? Did she really care about him that much? He wanted to let himself feel all of his love for her, but he was scared of being hurt again. Was that enough reason to keep her at arm's length? What else could she do to prove her loyalty to him?

There were only a few other cases this morning, and Clark's was the next one. Right before he sat down, he looked over at Lois one more time, and she put her hand over her heart and smiled.

"All rise, the honorable Marco Cena, presiding," announced the bailiff, an older man with a bit of weight on him and a gray comb-over.

Clark stood as the judge came in. He immediately recognized the silver-haired man from several trials he'd covered. Clark knew he was the first Hispanic judge in Metropolis history and was known for being fair to and more lenient with those who were less privileged and tough but fair with more privileged defendants.

"Please be seated," the bailiff announced.

Clark sat down with the rest of the others in the courtroom and watched as the judge settled at the bench. The judge studied the papers in front of him and then looked up at Clark.

"Clark Kent, you have been charged with murder in the first degree. What is your plea?" Judge Cena asked Clark.

Clark stood up and looked directly at the judge. "Not guilty," he stated. He turned his head very slightly and saw Lois watching him.

"We would like to request bail, Your Honor," Constance said as she stood up.

"Your Honor, the defendant is accused of murder in the first degree of a prominent citizen of Metropolis," Mayson Drake stated as she stood up suddenly.

"Your Honor, Clark Kent has never been in trouble with the law. He has a steady job at the Daily Planet," Constance said.

"The Daily Planet was destroyed," Mayson retorted. "There is no Daily Planet."

"Yes, the Daily Planet was destroyed, but I have a statement of sale here. The Daily Planet was bought by Franklin Stern yesterday. I also have an official statement from Stern stating that reconstruction of the Daily Planet will start in the coming week," Constance responded as she walked up to the judge with the documents for him to read. When she

came back to the defense table, she continued. "Hence, Your Honor, Clark Kent has a job. And he will agree to turn in his passport and not leave the city."

Clark turned around to his parents, trying to hide his concern. How could he be Superman if he couldn't leave Metropolis? He knew that he could fly fast enough to leave without anyone noticing. But if that was technically breaking the law, would it be worth it? Clark remembered quickly how hard it had been dealing with the heatwave last year and trying to not save people's lives. But he also recognized that he had to follow the law. He wasn't above them.

"Bail is set at one million dollars," the judge said as he looked at Clark. "Opening statements will be..."

Clark's stomach dropped, and he inhaled sharply as he sat back down in his chair. The rest of the judge's words barely registered—something about the next court date—because his mind was reeling, unable to fully process what was happening to him. How did all of this happen? Who would have set him up? And why did he feel so isolated, even from his parents and Lois, when they were just feet away from him? After all of these years of saving people on his travels, he was now the one in trouble. All he wanted to do was fly away into the clouds and disappear.

He heard the sharp bang of the gavel, and it brought him back to the present.

"I don't have that type of money. My parents don't either," Clark told Constance, keeping his voice low.

"Actually...it's already been taken care of," Constance turned around to look at the three people Clark loved the most.

* * *

The drive back to Clark's apartment had been a quiet one. Clark had made bail and didn't want to question how it'd happened—he was sure someone would let him know. He just hoped it hadn't been his parents putting up the farm as collateral.

Clark sat in the front passenger seat, as he had so many other times, and Martha and Jonathan sat in the back seat of Lois's Jeep. But other than his normal seat, everything about the drive had been different. Lois didn't swear at the drivers who cut her off or even the black sedan that ran a red light.

Clark wondered how she could be so calm—he didn't understand it—his entire life was on the line.

Lois pulled up to his apartment, managing to get a parking spot right in front of the building. Martha and Jonathan got out, and Clark sat there for a moment. He noticed she didn't turn off the engine.

“You’re not coming up?” Clark asked as he turned to her.

“No, I have a lead on where Mrs. Cox is. I’m going to see if she’ll tell me who else was there that night. Or if she knows more about Lex’s illegal activities,” Lois explained, keeping her hands on the steering wheel.

“I wish you would stay out of this. She could be dangerous,” he warned, putting his hands on the dashboard.

“She is very dangerous, but I need to do it. I’m to blame for this entire mess, so I’m going to do everything in my power to fix it,” Lois said as she dropped her hands from the steering wheel and reached over to him. He felt her hand settle on his shoulder. “Clark, I got a couple bags of groceries for your parents last night. But I wasn’t sure what else they would need. I could always let you take the Jeep, and I could use a taxi.”

“You didn’t need to get groceries,” Clark said, suddenly. Then he paused, realizing all of the other little things she had done for him lately. “Thank you, Lois, for calling my parents and taking care of them. I know this isn’t easy.”

“Easy for me?” Lois asked, tilting her head slightly as though she was surprised with his assessment. “Clark, I’m doing all of this because of what you’re going through. I’m trying to help you with the disaster I created.”

“You keep saying that, but if I’d been honest with you in the first place...” He trailed off, realizing it was his secret that had caused a lot of the problems he was now facing, not Lois. “Just...thank you. I’d better go.”

Clark knew one reason all of this was so messed up was his other job. It had been almost a year now since he’d created Superman, hoping it would help solve the problems of his personal life while also letting him use his powers to help. Investigating Luthor as Superman, and telling Lois about it as Clark, had been a mistake.

Clark exited Lois’s Jeep, but before he walked away, he leaned in, his head through the open window. He still felt like he wanted to tell her more—explain some of that night—but he realized now wasn’t the right time.

“I know you, Lois, you’re going to go looking for Mrs. Cox, whether I want you to or not, so all I am going to say is please be careful,” Clark said, trying to be stern without sounding controlling. “And call me when you get back, so I know you’re okay.”

“I will.” She smiled, and he turned away and walked up to his building.

* * *

As she watched Clark walk away, she was sad to realize he didn’t have that confidence like he once did. His shoulders slumped a bit, and even his smile—the one that usually

drove her crazy—didn’t reach his eyes. She hadn’t seen that smile lately, she thought.

Lois drove away, hoping she would be able to find the answers she needed. It only took her a few minutes to get to the Lexor Hotel. She just hoped that Mrs. Cox hadn’t checked out since Lois had gotten the information about her location.

Once in the elevator, she waited impatiently for the elevator to rise to the fourth floor. When it arrived, the door opened to reveal an elderly couple waiting to get on.

“Oh, dear, I can’t believe it. Aren’t you Miss Lane, the woman who was going to marry Lex Luthor?” the woman asked as she looked at Lois. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you,” Lois replied, as naturally as she could while she tried to get past the couple and into the hallway, but she was stuck.

“I hope you’re okay, Miss Lane. Sweetie”—the woman turned to her husband, not letting Lois pass—“her fiancé had done so much for Metropolis.”

“Ma’am, please,” Lois said, sighing. The woman seemed oblivious that she was in Lois’s way. Lois had gotten off the elevator, but could move no further.

“Honey, please, let the woman pass,” the older man said.

Before Lois could get past, she noticed a door open to the left—it was Mrs. Cox.

Mrs. Cox must have heard the commotion down the hall and caught a glimpse of Lois because she turned and ran down the hallway in her heels the opposite way. Lois finally pushed past the couple and started running down the hall after her. Lois couldn’t lose this one chance at saving Clark.

Mrs. Cox ran farther down the hallway, heading toward the stairwell, but Lois was catching up to her. Lois’s penny loafers versus Mrs. Cox’s high heels were no contest, and suddenly Lois was just five steps away from Mrs. Cox.

“Please, Mrs. Cox, stop!” Lois yelled as she jumped toward the woman, trying to grab her arm. Both of them tumbled over, and Mrs. Cox slipped down a few steps. Lois stood up quickly and went down to Mrs. Cox. “I just want to talk to you.”

“I have nothing to say to you,” Mrs. Cox retorted as she dusted off her legs and then brought her hand up to hold her arm as if she might have injured it.

“I just want to know about Lex and what might have happened. Who else showed up that night? Where are the other two people who worked for him?” Lois demanded as she stepped closer to Mrs. Cox and held her hand out to help her up. Mrs. Cox pushed it away.

“You—you didn’t even love him. You’re in love with Mr. Kent. Lex knew it, and so do I,” Mrs. Cox stammered as she pulled herself up using the handrail. “Lex even said that after Mr. Kent left that night.”

Suddenly, it dawned on Lois the significance of words that had come out of Mrs. Cox’s mouth. Clark had left that night before Lex had been murdered. Here was the proof she needed that Clark didn’t do it.

“What time?” Lois asked.

“What?” Mrs. Cox seemed confused or annoyed or both.

“What time?” Lois demanded, moving even closer to Mrs. Cox. “What time did Clark leave?”

Mrs. Cox backed away, forgetting that she was on the stairs, and she started to fall backwards. Lois reached out to try and grab ahold of her but couldn’t reach, and Mrs. Cox tumbled partway down the stairs, hitting her head hard. Lois looked down in horror. She could see blood trickling from the woman’s head.

Lois quickly grabbed her cell phone from her messenger bag and dialed 911, trying to steady her breathing. She hadn’t meant for this to happen, and she certainly hadn’t meant for Mrs. Cox to be injured. The 911 operator told her not to move Mrs. Cox just in case she had a spinal injury as well as the head injury. It was a nerve-wracking, waiting for the paramedics, and she breathed a sigh of relief when they finally arrived.

Lois stood up at the next landing, watching as they worked on Mrs. Cox. What was she going to do now? What if...

Lois had trouble calming her nerves, especially when a uniformed police officer came over to Lois to question her. Lois told the officer what happened and that the hotel’s security footage would show it was an accident. She had important things to do, so as soon as she knew Mrs. Cox was in good hands with the paramedics, she rushed home.

Her heart raced, both from her nerves from the accident and her realization of the luck she’d had in getting this new information. Mrs. Cox had mentioned that Lex was alive when Clark left Lex’s penthouse, that she had talked to Lex after Clark had left. This was it, this was what she had been waiting for. Only now, she wasn’t sure how she’d get Captain Benson to believe the information thirdhand.

By the time she got back to her apartment, three hours had passed since she’d dropped Clark and his parents off at his place. As she played her messages, Lois changed her clothes into khaki shorts and a black tank top. It was a hot day, and she didn’t have air conditioning in her apartment.

There were four messages on her answering machine. One was from Perry saying that he had talked to Mr. Stern and that Jimmy had come up empty handed with the businesses she’d asked him to talk to about security footage. Captain Benson had left a message to let her know that he’d heard about the accident at the Lexor Hotel, and he wanted to talk to her tomorrow. Finally, there were two messages from Clark checking in on her. Wanting to delay having to give the bad news to Clark, she started by calling Perry back.

“Lois, darlin’, how did it go today?” Perry asked.

“Clark is at his apartment with his parents. I located Mrs. Cox...” Lois told Perry. “But there was an accident, and she’s now at Metropolis General Hospital.”

“What kind of accident?”

“She fell down some stairs. I swear, Perry, I didn’t push her or anything! She had admitted to talking to Lex after Clark left, and I started asking her more questions. The next thing I knew, she was tumbling down the stairs.”

“Well, I hope she’ll be okay. Unfortunately, Jimmy has come up with a dead end on the businesses having any footage of Clark leaving. There’s a video of him arriving at the time he said, but not leaving,” Perry admitted.

Just then, Lois heard a knock at the door. She wasn’t sure who it could be. She wondered if it was the police asking more about Mrs. Cox.

“Perry, someone is at the door. I’ll talk to you later,” Lois said before she hung up the phone.

* * *

Clark had tried to call Lois twice, and she still hadn’t answered. So instead of doing nothing; he figured he’d wait at her apartment instead. Clark was worried about her, especially with Mrs. Cox involved. He wanted to make sure Lois was okay and maybe finally get some of their issues resolved.

She took a few minutes to open the door, but he wasn’t too worried after checking for her heartbeat with his super hearing.

“Hi,” Lois said, looking at him.

“Can we talk?” he asked as she opened the door wider.

Lois waved her hand, gesturing for him to come inside, and Clark stepped into the apartment. He walked toward the kitchen and turned back to notice her sighing.

“What’s going on? Did your parents need something?” Lois asked.

Clark stood at the kitchen table with his hands on the back of one of the chairs, and he breathed deeply, trying to gather his thoughts and his courage to talk about the bail money and what it really meant. But then he realized exactly what was spread out on the table in front of him—notes and files, all about Lex and his doings, and calculations about Clark's whereabouts and times and conjectures. He read everything he could see, his anger rising the more he read.

Why did this matter so much to her? Clearly, she didn't believe him after all, that he didn't do it—or at least that he wasn't fully innocent of fighting with Lex. If this was some weird obsession to prove something, he wasn't sure he wanted to know why.

He didn't even want to look at her. "So even though I asked—no, begged—you to stop this, you're going through with your investigation anyway?"

"Why wouldn't I?" He heard defiance in her voice. Always so stubborn.

"Because I asked you not to!" he hissed.

"I'm just trying to fix it! I didn't trust you enough to believe what you said about Lex —"

"Exactly! I'm in this mess because of you! If you hadn't said yes to Luthor's proposal, none of this would have happened!"

"Don't you think I know that?" she yelled, moving closer to him.

"And what about the bail money? I asked my parents, and they said you posted it. Where did you get the money?"

"I asked my dad," Lois admitted, so quietly he almost had to use his super hearing to hear.

"Excuse me? The last I knew, you weren't even talking to your dad after what happened a few months ago. So why would you ask him? I don't get you, Lois." Clark started closing the distance between them, trying to keep his breathing even. "Why are you really doing this? Don't give me the excuse that you are the one at fault. It's more than that."

He couldn't fathom what on Earth would make her ask either of her parents for help. He didn't know everything about her childhood, but he knew it hadn't been easy.

"Why?" he asked again after she hadn't answered.

"Because I think—no, that's not—not it," she stammered, then continued, "I don't feel sadness about Lex's death. What does that say about me? That I'm more scared of you going to prison for a crime you didn't commit than I am upset that my fiancé died." She paused and took a deep breath. "I can't live without you, Clark."

"You turned me down in the park," he said, not quite understanding, and he held his breath, almost afraid of her response.

"I didn't...I didn't realize then. I was scared, Clark! I didn't want to risk losing my best friend...but that's what's happening anyway, but in the worst way imaginable. I-I can't lose you, Clark!"

He let out a heavy breath and hung his head for a moment. "You could never lose me," he said, cursing his foolish heart even as he stepped closer to her. His eyes flitted down to her lips and then back without his permission. He wasn't done asking her the tough questions, but all he wanted was this moment in time. He'd wanted this for so long. He put his hand under her chin, his heart torn. Clark wanted to kiss her, fly away, make everything and everyone disappear. Even though he knew that letting Lois into his heart fully could destroy him.

"Where were you that night?" Lois asked, her voice quiet.

He dropped his hand from her chin and ran it roughly through his hair. For a moment, he'd thought he would kiss her. Now, all of that hope was lost.

"I should have known," he sighed, turning away from her.

"Known what?"

"This was all a ruse. You don't have feelings for me; you just want to know where I was," he snapped.

"How could you stand there and think my feelings aren't real? I just don't know why you won't tell me where you were. There is no proof of you leaving when you said."

"Lois, you turned me down, then threw yourself at Superman —"

"I didn't throw myself at Superman!" she said, cutting him off. "And how would you know? I can't believe you think so little of me."

Clark threw his arms up in the air. It was the same argument once again. The last time they had this argument, the police had shown up before he could answer. What was he supposed to say? Yes, he loved her.

Clark had never known someone like her—she made him so angry one minute, and the next minute he could fall even more in love with her. But he couldn't understand why she was so obsessed with helping him when she should be grieving her fiancé. Why did she keep pressing for his whereabouts that night? Was she just angry that he hadn't gone to the engagement party?

Or was it because she actually cared for him? Was it really so hard for her to say the words? Why did it take

having his life on the line for her to get even close to admitting her true feelings—if that was what they were?

“Why are you doing this, Lois?” Clark demanded as he stepped toward her. “Why did you say ‘yes’ to him? Yet here you are, not even mourning his death, but trying to prove my innocence.”

“You’re my best friend. How can I not do this?” she asked, stepping closer to him. “I made mistake after mistake that day. I am trying to fix it.”

“What mistake? Saying no to me, or asking Superman if there could be anything between the two of you an hour later?” he spat out angrily. “What makes Superman so damn special to you?”

“You’ve never answered me on how you know I threw myself at Superman,” she demanded. She stood before him, her arms crossed like she was being guarded. He knew she wanted the truth, but how could he tell her?

“Out with it, Clark.”

He let out a heavy sigh, all the fight leaving him. “I was in California,” he admitted softly, looking down at his feet.

“What? How could you be in California? Stop joking about this,” Lois said, still demanding, as she stepped away from him. “This isn’t the time for jokes.”

“I’m telling the truth.”

“How could you have been in California that night?” Lois asked.

He looked into her eyes, mouthing a silent ‘I’m sorry’ before he spun into the Superman suit.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you. I wanted to. But telling people puts their lives at risk, and...I was hurt by the fact that you seem to think more of him than you do of me.”

“You’re Superman,” she said, and he wasn’t sure if it was a reaction to his revelation or to the fact that he was jealous of himself.

“Superman is what I can do, Clark is who I am,” he said, hating how sorrowful his voice sounded. All he’d wanted this past year was for her to see that. He’d dreamed that she would see him for who he really was.

He watched her pace in front of him for a few minutes. She would stop for a moment, hold up her finger as if there was a question, then start pacing again. He wanted to know what she was thinking, ask how mad she was, or even just hold her.

But he stopped himself, giving her time to think. He knew this was quite a shock, especially after all the moments they

had shared together the past year. He had kissed her both as Superman and as Clark.

“That’s why there is no video of you leaving Lex Corp. What did you do—go through the back and fly off?” she asked, finally standing still and looking at him. “What are we going to do?”

“What is this ‘we’? Lois, I can handle this on my own,” Clark said, hoping that she would have let it drop now that she had the answer she’d been after.

“I put you in this mess; I’m going to help you get out of it. Not only that, but Clark, we’re partners and best friends,” Lois admitted.

“I don’t want your help. Don’t you get that? I don’t want to be that guy,” he said cold-heartedly.

“What guy?”

“The best friend, the guy who stands around and watches the woman he was crazy about date someone else. You were going to marry Lex. No matter what, I wasn’t planning on being at that wedding. Even if I couldn’t find the information on Lex in time, I wasn’t going to the wedding.” He turned his back to her. Clark didn’t want to be the best friend and partner—he wanted it all. Now he couldn’t have that—she’d chosen everyone but him.

“You said ‘was’...” Lois said quietly. “Are you saying you don’t love me anymore?”

“Maybe it’s not enough,” he said as he turned to face her again. “I don’t know if I can trust you anymore.”

“Then just trust this,” she whispered as she moved closer and kissed him.

She kissed him. Somehow, he could tell it wasn’t Superman she was kissing even though he was standing before her in the super suit.

“Loi...s,” he murmured. He wanted to just melt into her embrace, and he kissed her back, his lips dancing with hers briefly, but then he pulled back. “I can’t.”

His eyes fell, and so did hers. He could tell she felt rejected again. But so had he.

“You don’t get it, Lois. I have waited months for you to kiss me like that, but not like...this,” he said, waving his hand up and down to emphasize the spandex.

“So, if I kissed you as Clark, you would kiss me back?” she asked, her voice full of hurt.

“I don’t know if it matters now—I’ll never know if it’s Clark you actually want to kiss. This is why I didn’t want to tell you,” he explained, motioning to the two of them. “You

told me before you would love me if I were an ordinary man, but you don't."

"That was a mistake," she said, her eyes pleading with him to believe her. "That is what I've been trying to tell you. It's another reason I have tried so hard to fix this. I'm in love with you."

"That's not enough," Clark said, his heart twisting painfully. "You don't love me, you love the suit."

"That's not true! The night of the engagement party, all I wanted was for you to show up, not as Superman, but as Clark, and take me away from there. I wanted my partner, my best friend—you," she admitted, and she then sank down into one of the chairs at the kitchen table, clearly holding back tears.

Before Clark could react to Lois's admission, there was a knock at the door. Lois tried to stand up, but Clark waved her off. He spun quickly back into his regular clothes and walked to the door.

"Captain Benson."

* * *

"Mr. Kent, fancy meeting you here," Captain Benson said. "It seems you spend more time at Ms. Lane's apartment than your own."

"I'm out on bail, Captain. None of the conditions the judge set for my bail said anything about visiting a friend," Clark responded sarcastically.

"Good, because I'm here to see Ms. Lane," Captain Benson announced with a smile.

Clark wondered what the captain needed with Lois. Was he here to ask her more questions about their relationship? Would she tell the police his secret? For a moment, uncertainty gripped him. But when he looked over at Lois, sitting with her knees up in the chair, hugging them, he thought otherwise.

"Is she here?" Captain Benson asked.

"Of course," Clark answered, his jaw tight. He just wanted this nightmare to be over.

"Clark, who is it?" Lois asked.

He could hear the sadness in her voice, and he frowned as he addressed Captain Benson again. "Captain, this isn't a good time."

"Did you know Ms. Lane was with Mrs. Cox earlier today when Mrs. Cox took a fall down some stairs?" Captain Benson put his hand up onto the door and pushed it to let himself in. "I need to talk to her and find out what they talked about."

"Why don't you just ask Mrs. Cox?" Clark asked, but he felt his shoulders tense as he looked back at Lois and then at the captain again.

"It's hard to do that. She's in a coma caused by the fall. She had defensive wounds also. The video shows Ms. Lane with her in the stairwell."

"Well, you know those videos can be altered," Clark pointed out, unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice again.

"Mr. Kent, do you want another charge?" Captain Benson asked, stepping up closer to Clark as he raised his voice. "This time it would be interfering with the police in an ongoing case."

Clark sighed. He knew Benson was just doing his job, but everything happening all at once was just overwhelming, and it seemed like he was getting knocked off balance at every turn. He heard Lois coming up behind him, her heartbeat quickening as she reached out and touched his shoulder. Immediately, he felt just a little better; her heartbeat could have that effect on him, keeping him going at times.

"It's okay, Clark," Lois whispered to him, staying behind him so Captain Benson couldn't see her. "You can let him in. It's okay."

Clark opened the door farther, letting the man inside. He then closed the door and leaned his back against it with his arms crossed. Lois moved back to the sofa closest to Clark and sat, while Captain Benson sat in the chair.

"Ms. Lane, what were you doing at the Lexor Hotel earlier today?" Captain Benson asked as he pulled out his notepad from inside the pocket of his blazer.

"I went to ask about the night Lex was murdered. I know for a fact that Clark wasn't there at the time the video shows. I wanted to hear why Mrs. Cox lied," Lois responded.

"What did she say?" Captain Benson asked as he looked up at Lois.

"She didn't say much at first. She tried to run away from me. I told the police officer this in my statement," Lois said.

"When you caught up to her, did she mention anything about the night Luthor was murdered?"

Clark looked over at Lois, and she sat up a little straighter as she nodded.

"What did she say?" Clark asked quickly. He pushed away from the door and moved to stand behind Lois, putting his hand on her shoulder. His heart raced with a sudden sense of hope, and he realized how lucky he was to have Mad Dog Lane on his side.

“I don’t think she meant to tell me, but she mentioned that she talked to Lex after you left,” Lois answered, bringing her hand up to rest on top of Clark’s on her shoulder. “If you supposedly shot him, how could she have talked to him?”

“Maybe he wasn’t dead yet when Mrs. Cox came into the office,” Captain Benson replied.

Clark noticed the way Captain Benson kept looking at Lois, then at their joined hands. He was waiting for the captain to mention it, but he silently hoped Benson wouldn’t say anything. This connection between Clark and Lois was new, still shaky, and he really wasn’t entirely sure where they stood.

“No, that wasn’t it,” Lois responded. “She said something like, ‘What are we going to do now?’ But I asked her what time Clark left, and before she could answer, she fell backward down the stairs. The video from the stairwell shows that I tried to help.”

“I’m not doubting you,” the captain stated. “I checked the report and even talked to the officer.”

Clark turned his hand over to take a hold of Lois’s, and then he squeezed it lightly. He didn’t like where this conversation was going. He knew she wanted to be his lifeline, and now, she knew his biggest secret. But he also knew Benson was suspicious enough already, and with them now “teaming up,” holding hands... Even if Clark believed that Lois wouldn’t have gone through with the wedding, Benson might be seeing things differently, bringing their relationship and Clark’s motive into question...again.

As though she could sense his uncertainty, Lois looked back over her shoulder and smiled at Clark, and it warmed his heart.

“Well, the officer should have taken you down to the station,” Captain Benson stated. “Will you come down tomorrow for a formal statement? And also explain to me what this relationship between the two of you really is?”

“Captain, our relationship is none of your business,” Lois said, letting go of Clark’s hand and standing up. Benson followed her as she walked over toward the door.

Benson grabbed onto her wrist as she walked by, and Clark flinched instantly. Lois seemed to know what Clark’s reaction would be, and she turned to Clark and held up her hand to signal him that she could handle herself.

“I think your relationship plays a key role in this investigation. I believe it’s why Luthor called Mr. Kent over to LexCorp,” he explained. “But I can only go by the facts, and the facts are the two of you are lying to me about more than the night of Luthor’s murder.”

Lois pulled her hand away from Captain Benson, walked over to the door, and opened it.

“I’ll be at the station first thing in the morning for that official report,” Lois said. She moved to the side to give Benson room to leave. “Now I think you better leave.”

Clark grinned at that, happy to see Lois back to her old self again. They had a long way to go before things were settled between them, especially given that he’d just let her in on his secret, but right now, they had other things to worry about.

“Fine.” Captain Benson walked out the door. Before Lois could close the door, he added, “I’m going to find out what happened.”

“Captain, in all your years on the force, have you ever had a partner you would do anything for?” Clark asked. He hoped the captain could sense his sincerity.

“Yes, yes, I have. Her name was Olivia, and she was my first partner when I made detective. We worked together for seven years,” Benson answered with a faraway look in his eyes.

“You would have done anything for her, right?” Lois commented.

“Yes, I would have, and I did...until she crossed a line from which neither of us could recover. She died on duty after shooting the person suspected of kidnapping her son,” Benson recalled. “You can’t always cover for your partner when they break the law.”

With that said, Captain Benson left the apartment.

* * *

Lois closed the door, locked it, and leaned against it. She knew what she and Clark had to do, just not how they were going to accomplish it.

“Are you okay?” Clark asked, moving toward her from his spot near the back of the couch.

“I’m fine. I figured he was going to ask about Mrs. Cox eventually. I just didn’t think he would show up here... again.”

Lois walked over to the kitchen table and sat down, not quite ready to look at Clark or be right next to him. She’d been fine with showing their united front to Benson a moment ago, but now she needed a little space.

She was exhausted mentally from the revelation that her best friend, the man she loved, was Superman. And so much else had happened in the past forty-eight hours that she didn’t know how much more she could handle. But right now, she needed to focus on proving Clark’s innocence—

the closest thing she had to throwing herself into her work since the Planet was gone.

“What do we do now?” Clark asked. He headed over to the table and stood behind the chair next to her, wrapping his fingers around the top of the chair.

“Now I’m going to start looking through these files to find someone else who would want to kill Lex,” she said as she started shuffling through the papers in front of her. She still couldn’t look up at him, part of her still a little afraid of what she’d find in his eyes.

“Okay, then, how about some decent food, and we work on this together?” Clark suggested.

Finally, Lois lifted her eyes to meet his. Her heart fluttered, just as she thought it would. But her confusion resurfaced. How could she work with him and just ignore the fact that she still needed to reconcile his two personalities? Could she handle the fact that the man she’d been working with at the Planet for the past year was also the one who flew around saving people?

“Sure, let’s do it, partner,” she stated, trying for a smile.

Clark grinned at her, then stepped back and spun into the red and blue suit.

“Wow...I don’t know if I am ever going to get used to seeing you do that,” Lois commented as she raised her arm and spun her finger in a circle quickly.

“I’m glad you know, Lois. It’s going to make everything easier. But...” Clark hesitated and frowned. “We have to be careful... Knowing who I am...I don’t want that to put you in danger.” Clark looked down at her, and she felt his sincerity and concern.

“I remember what Trask did to you in Smallville. Your secret is safe with me, and I meant what I said, Clark. I am in love with you, not Superman.” Lois smiled up at him and touched his hand gently. “It’s not Superman who was there for me when Barbara Trevino tried to kill me.”

“I know, Lois,” Clark said with a smile. “I’m going to pick up some dinner. I’ll be right back.”

With that said, Clark flew out of Lois’s apartment. Lois shook her head in amazement and started to dig into the files again. She contemplated calling Perry, but it was getting late, so she decided that could wait until tomorrow.

Yawning, Lois stood up from the table. It had been a long, stressful day, and she needed something to keep her going, like a good cup of coffee. She headed into the kitchen to start a fresh pot of coffee, and just after she’d poured the water into the pot, Clark flew back in through the window.

“I started some coffee. Hope you don’t mind,” Lois said as she finished her task.

“I wish I could have gone to China to get you the good stuff,” he lamented, placing two pizzas on the table.

Lois tilted her head sideways, trying to remember what he was talking about. Then it dawned on her.

“You went to China. Now I get it! I kept trying to figure out which restaurant you’d gone to that night. Now I know why I never could.” She grinned as she joined him at the table and opened the pizza box.

“I wanted to make a good impression. I still do, Lois,” Clark admitted. “I figured authentic Chinese food that night would have done that.”

Before she could say another word, he moved into the kitchen to grab a couple of plates and napkins. She watched him intently. He was right—he wasn’t like every other man. Why hadn’t she seen that in the first place? Why had she kept him at arm’s length for so long? Suddenly, all of his disappearing acts made sense, and although a part of her wanted to be angry, she realized that being angry would get her nowhere. After days of being at odds with Clark, it was time to get back to their partnership.

There was a silence that lasted a few minutes as Clark poured them each a cup of coffee and then joined her as they both sat at the kitchen table. He looked at her notes, which mostly consisted of jumbled nonsense.

“Where do you want to get started?” Lois asked, biting her lip nervously.

“You think Toni Taylor murdered Luthor?” Clark asked. He looked up at her from the list of suspects he’d been reading on one of the pages in her notes.

Lois reached across the table for the notepad in Clark’s hand. Her thoughts of Lex were written on that notepad, and she didn’t think Clark needed to read those as well.

“Not really, but I was trying to think of anyone that wanted Lex gone,” Lois retorted as Clark pulled the notepad farther from Lois’s reach.

Lois watched as Clark grinned slightly and chuckled at some of the other suspects on her list.

“Lois, this one doesn’t even make sense,” Clark said. “How could Antoinette Baines have killed Luthor? We saw the helicopter blow up with her in it.”

Lois huffed heavily at Clark’s teasing. She had worked hard on that list—so what if some names didn’t make sense?

“I was trying to think outside of the box,” she answered, and she started to look through more of Lex’s files. “Anyway, even Franklin Stern could be suspect for all we know.”

Clark shook his head. “Not everyone is a killer.”

“Well, my judgment is not the best at the moment. No matter how many times you told me Lex was evil, I didn’t believe you. Then, look at you; I didn’t think you were both my best friend and the guy who flies around in spandex, saving the world.”

Lois’s guilt returned then as she remembered all the things she’d done to put Clark in this position in the first place. She was going to do whatever she could to prove Clark was innocent, even if it meant looking into the most unlikely suspects on her much-too-long list.

“You make it sound like I have two personalities,” Clark stated as he put the notepad down on the table. “It’s not like I came to Metropolis to deceive anyone. I just knew that I couldn’t help people and have a normal life.”

“So where did the suit come from?” Lois asked. She put her pencil back behind her ear and looked over at him.

“Would you believe my mother made it?” Clark laughed. “She made me so many different costumes that day. It felt pretty hopeless until she finally came up with the blue, red, and yellow...”

Lois looked over at him and noticed how he looked more relaxed than he had in days. She felt better also, like a weight had lifted off her shoulders.

“I’m sorry I didn’t believe you,” she murmured, reaching over to take his hand. “I know I’ve said it before, but I mean it. I don’t know if I was just enamored by Lex’s attention or the fact that the third richest man in the world wanted to spend time with me. But I know that I almost lost the one true friend I have—my best friend—because I didn’t look at what was right in front of me.”

Lois studied his face, how his hair sometimes fell onto his forehead and how his eyes twinkled at times when he looked at her. Her heart melted as he smiled again.

“I know I didn’t make it easy on you either,” he admitted as he ran his hand through his hair. She noticed that he gazed at her longingly and that his eyes flitted down to her lips as she bit her bottom lip. “I know we have a lot more to talk about after this is over.”

“Yeah, we just need to find out why the killer set you up.” Lois sat up a little straighter as she suddenly realized something. “Why didn’t I think of this before?”

She started digging through the papers and clippings of newspapers she had gathered the last few days. Turning over pages of articles and files of Lex’s, she came upon an article from the Metropolis Star.

“Clark, look at this.” She handed the paper to him.

She watched as he read the article in seconds, then put the paper back down as though unsure what he was looking for.

“Gretchen Kelly was the doctor who announced Lex was dead!” Lois said, pointing eagerly at the paper.

“Okay, who’s Gretchen Kelly?”

“None other than Lex’s personal doctor. Why would his own doctor pronounce him dead? Wouldn’t a coroner do that?” Lois asked, her voice rising in volume as she stood up quickly.

Clark closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, and Lois could tell he was skeptical.

“What if Lex isn’t dead?” she asked. “He knew what you meant to me. What if he set this whole thing up?”

“Are you saying that you think he faked his death to put me in jail?” Clark’s eyes narrowed at the implication.

“Exactly!” Lois exclaimed, nodding. She knew they were on the right track now, all the pieces suddenly falling into place. She held Clark’s gaze with a fierce determination, no longer content with wallowing in her self-pity. No, there had to be something there—she was sure of it. She smiled at Clark. “Now all we have to do is prove it.”

* * *

The next morning, Lois and Clark entered LexCorp together, Clark just behind her. Her heart fluttered as he put his hand on the small of her back like he had done so many times before.

They had worked together well past midnight last night. Even though it had been a long day for Clark and he hadn’t gotten much sleep the night before, they’d both felt invigorated working together again. They’d started with Gretchen Kelly and decided they needed to determine her whereabouts. However, since it had been much too late to go looking for the woman that night, they’d decided to try to find the doctor in the morning.

Clark had also mentioned he had a couple of sources at the FBI who might be able to look into Nigel St. John. Nigel was one of Lex’s henchmen, and Lois had recalled seeing Nigel around the penthouse a few times. Another promising lead was the cameras located at the loading dock of the LexCorp building. No one had thought of checking those cameras; now that Lois knew Clark had left from there the night of the murder, she thought maybe the video footage might show who else had exited the building that night.

Clark had left her apartment just after twelve thirty, when Lois had started nodding off at the table trying to stay awake. They’d set a plan for the next day, including locating Gretchen Kelly, going back to LexCorp, and checking on Mrs. Cox at the hospital.

Now, as they approached the security desk, Lois perked up, noticing the friendly face of Ernie again.

“Look who it is,” Ernie announced as he looked up at them.

“Hey, Ernie,” Clark said, smiling at the older man.

“Ernie, I thought you worked nights,” Lois said as she leaned over the counter. She knew being friendly with security guards could have certain advantages, and she hoped to play into that now.

“Someone called out, and I could use the extra money. My dear granddaughter, Bernice, will be attending college next fall,” the older man explained. “What can I do for the two best reporters in Metropolis?”

“Well, thanks for the compliment.” Lois blushed and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I was wondering if you had video from the night of Lex’s murder.”

“The police have a copy of it already,” Ernie replied as he glanced down at the small monitors showing video surveillance at several points in the building.

“Actually, we’re looking for the delivery entrance. I don’t think the police even thought of that one,” Clark said.

Lois followed his gaze as he looked around the building. LexCorp should have been bustling with employees now; however, the place looked half empty. The corporation was going to be bought out eventually now that Lex was dead, but some of the employees were still around.

“What have you heard about what’s going to happen to the company?” Lois asked, frowning as she watched the few employees moving through the lobby.

“I heard that the board of directors was talking to Wayne Enterprises or Queen Industries.” Ernie sat down and began entering information into the computer system. “Either company sounds better to me than the one we had. Mr. Luthor was ruthless.”

Lois looked over at Clark, who just shrugged his shoulders. Ernie had never mentioned how he felt about working for Lex before, but now that Lex was gone, Ernie wasn’t scared to show his true feelings.

“Head of security has all the old tapes locked away by order of the police. And the relevant tapes from that night should all be in police evidence. Sorry, I wish I could help! After six, there are very few deliveries back there. Anyone could use it as an exit and not be seen. I can’t believe the police never thought of that. I’m sorry the police believe you would do such a horrible thing, Mr. Kent.”

“It’s okay, Ernie. Things will work out,” Clark replied. He glanced over at Lois and gave her a quick smile.

“And we’re hoping to be back at the Planet soon,” Lois said, smiling back at Clark.

“I heard that on the news last night. I’m sure Franklin Stern will even give you some updated technology,” Ernie said. He looked down at one of the security monitors and frowned. “Oh, looks like we’re getting a delivery right now.”

“Ernie, what could they be delivering if Lex is dead? I mean isn’t almost everything shut down now?” Lois asked as she leaned over to see what was happening on the screen.

“Oh goodness, you’re right,” Ernie said, raising his voice as he noticed the two “delivery guys” pull out guns.

“Clark, I think you need to, um...feed the parking meter?” Lois said, turning quickly toward her partner.

Clark looked away from Lois for a second, tilting his head. She assumed maybe he was using his super hearing to figure out what was happening at the back entrance.

“Uh, yeah. I sure do. I’ll be right back,” Clark mumbled before he ran off towards the building’s entrance.

Lois turned back to Ernie with a smile. “Don’t want a parking ticket.”

A few minutes later, Superman flew in from the back of the building, carrying two men in their late thirties, tied together with heavy-duty cables. Superman dropped the men off next to the security desk.

“Superman, I can’t believe you’re here!” Ernie said enthusiastically.

“I was flying by when I caught these two guys trying to break into LexCorp. I guess they thought since Luthor is no longer here, they could steal whatever they wanted,” Superman declared, crossing his arms over his chest. “Ernie, you may want to call the police to come pick them up.” He turned and nodded at Lois. “Lois.”

“No problem, Superman,” Ernie said as he picked up the phone.

Lois watched Superman fly back out the building’s entrance, then she turned back to Ernie. She knew Clark would be strolling back in within a few minutes. However, the minutes passed as she listened to Ernie talk to the police. When he hung up the phone, Clark still hadn’t returned.

Suddenly, a ding at the desk reminded Ernie what he’d been doing before Superman had flown in.

“I hope you find who killed Mr. Luthor. I may not have liked the guy, especially after what he did to us this past Christmas. But he didn’t deserve to die,” Ernie stated.

“What did he do?” Lois asked.

“After years of giving us a Christmas bonus, he didn’t bother with it this year. No reason, just no bonus. Some of the other employees were really upset, but there really wasn’t anything we could do about it,” Ernie explained.

Lois frowned. “I’m sorry. That’s just...” She couldn’t find the right words, so she just shook her head.

“Like I said, I didn’t like him much. But I hate to think whoever killed him will just get away with it.”

Lois nodded her agreement and waited with Ernie for the police to arrive.

* * *

Superman’s work hadn’t ended with just one rescue. Clark hoped Lois would understand why he hadn’t come back right after flying off. After he landed in the alleyway, he changed back into his regular clothes and ran up to Lois’s Jeep. He noticed Lois in the driver’s seat, about ready to pull away. He opened the passenger side door and jumped in before Lois could drive off.

“Sorry, I heard another call for Superman,” Clark said as he settled himself into the parked Jeep next to Lois. “I haven’t been able to do many rescues lately since...well...” Clark straightened his tie.

“I didn’t really think about that. I-I’m s—” Lois stammered as she pulled out onto the road.

“Lois, don’t, please. You’ve apologized enough times. I knew I shouldn’t have gone to see Luthor that night. Let’s just...find out who killed him, and then maybe things can get back to normal,” Clark asserted.

Clark noticed how stiff Lois was and how her heart rate was higher than usual. She wouldn’t even look over at him. And she didn’t respond, just kept her eyes on the road.

“What’s on your mind?” Clark asked as she turned onto Constitution Avenue.

Lois didn’t say anything for a few seconds, then she suddenly merged into the right lane, cutting off a blue sedan, and turned quickly into a parking lot.

“Lois, what are you doing?” Clark shouted as he grabbed onto the door.

Lois put the Jeep into park and looked over at him. Then, she took a deep breath. “I think we should go out on a date,” she blurted out quickly, turning to look straight ahead again while keeping both hands on the steering wheel.

Clark inhaled sharply. He hadn’t expected this. They were finally back to working together, and as much as he wanted more, he was pretty sure right now really wasn’t the right time. Looking over at her now, he could hear her

heartbeat racing, and he could see her tension. What was he supposed to do?

She was saying exactly what he had wanted to hear... before she’d rejected him and then thrown herself at Superman only a short time later. He couldn’t help but wonder now whether she was doing this because of his “side job.”

Clark reached over and put his hand on her shoulder, a flicker of emotion running through him as he heard her heart rate spike at his touch. However, he wasn’t sure of what to say, and her tension didn’t help—her hands still gripped the steering wheel tightly, and she still couldn’t seem to look at him. After a few seconds, he squeezed her shoulder lightly. They had a job to do, and he hoped maybe...they could just talk about this later.

“Will you say something? Please?” Lois asked.

“What do you want me to say?” He took a deep breath and then ran his hand through his hair before wiping his hands on his slacks. “After last night, I thought we’d decided to let this go.”

“You told me you loved me just days ago, and after I admit I feel the same way, you say you don’t,” she argued, her voice becoming a little louder.

“Lois, you turned me down. You accepted Luthor’s proposal. What am I supposed to think?”

“I figured you would have believed me last night, and then... I figured that maybe we could take a chance on us,” Lois admitted, the sincerity in her voice clear to Clark. “There’s something here between us, and I want to take that chance. I know I’m breaking all my rules, but it’s your fault really.”

“What do you mean, my fault?” he countered, blinking back his confusion as he glanced at Lois.

“You’re the one who confessed first,” she said. “And it’s not like you didn’t react when I kissed you.”

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat and sighed.

“Of course I’m going to react. You know how I feel about you. I confessed before you knew who I really am. I wanted you to love me for who I am—not what I can do.”

“But I do! Why don’t you believe me? Do you think that at the engagement party, I was thinking of Superman? No! I was thinking of the times my partner and I spent together. The time you threw me on the bed at the Lexor Hotel and kissed me. What about the pheromone spray? Doesn’t that explain how attracted to you I am?” Lois explained, her hands finally coming off the steering wheel and waving around as she spoke.

“You have my head spinning, Lois,” Clark admitted. “Can we get back to proving I didn’t kill Luthor? And when this is all over, then we can...talk about...whatever this thing between us is?”

“Fine,” she scoffed, turning away. She put the car in gear and drove back onto the street.

The air was thick in the Jeep. Neither of them said a word as she drove toward the police station.

Clark couldn’t understand why Lois was acting like he could just bounce back. He’d poured his heart out to her that day in the park. He had—not the man in the blue and red costume. He’d never had this much chemistry with anyone else, never felt this way before. Yet, she’d told him she could only love him as a friend.

And now, she seemed to want to just take all of that back. Pretend it hadn’t happened. He couldn’t just erase all of her words, all of that pain. Did his feelings even matter?

“I’m going to catch a cab and go back to my apartment,” Clark said as Lois parked the Jeep at the police station a few minutes later.

“I’ll only be a minute. I know this place doesn’t give you a good feeling.”

“Yeah, being locked up in jail for twenty-four hours for something you didn’t do kind of does that to you,” Clark responded sarcastically.

“How about you meet me at the hospital, then?” Lois suggested.

“I need to check on my parents first and make some phone calls. I also want to check in with an old friend at the FBI and see what he can find on Nigel St. John.”

He didn’t want to follow her plan. Right now, he wanted to distance himself in case either of them did something unexpected again. Clark wasn’t sure he could pull away again if she kissed him.

Yes, he loved her. And dating her, being with her, it was what he’d wanted for months, but things were different now, and he needed...time. He got out of the Jeep, and she followed. She walked over to him before he could hail a cab.

“Don’t pull away from me again, please. I know I’ve made some mistakes lately, but I really hope that doesn’t keep us apart,” Lois said, looking down at her feet.

“Lois, I’m not pushing you away. We’ll talk about this thing between us afterward. After all this is over,” Clark promised as he took her hand and squeezed gently. “I need some time.”

“Okay,” she responded. She pulled her hand away, her shoulders slumped. “I’ll call you if I hear anything.”

* * *

Lois stepped away from him and turned toward the precinct. She wanted to talk to him more, to figure out what he was thinking, but every time she looked in his eyes, there it was—the hurt. Lois wished it wasn’t so difficult being around him. The huge mistake she’d made, denying her feelings for him, may have destroyed any chance they’d had of being together. But she’d been caught off guard that day, and it might have cost her more than just a partner. How was she going to get him back? How could she prove to him that she wanted him, not the man in tights?

Without thinking about what she needed to do, she walked through the police station, straight to Captain Benson’s office. No one stopped her. When she got to his office, he wasn’t there, and Lois sighed. She didn’t have time to run around chasing after the captain.

“Can I help you?” An African-American man with black hair, a mustache, a goatee, and a crew cut stepped toward her.

“I’m looking for Captain Benson,” Lois stated. “Do you know where I can find him?”

“Yeah. He’s at Metropolis General Hospital. One of our victims woke up from a coma,” the man said. “I’m Inspector Finn Wolf. You’re Ms. Lane, correct?”

“Yes,” Lois answered with a smile. “Mrs. Cox woke up?”

“Yes, she did. Captain told me that you would be stopping by. He figured you would want to know and told me to tell you to meet him at the hospital,” Inspector Wolf stated, walking back toward his desk.

“When was this?” Lois asked as she looked at her watch.

“About an hour ago,” Inspector Wolf answered.

Lois said thank you and rushed out of the precinct. If it had been an hour, Lois really needed to hurry to get to the hospital. She knew she hadn’t done anything wrong to cause Mrs. Cox’s fall, but she doubted the older woman would just talk to her and tell her what she knew.

About twenty minutes later, Lois ran down the hospital hallway towards Mrs. Cox’s room. When she reached the room, she was out of breath, and she staggered in to find Captain Benson standing beside the bed, writing in his notepad.

“Glad you could join us, Ms. Lane,” Captain Benson stated as Lois took a couple of deep breaths.

“I’m sorry,” Lois explained. “Clark and I were busy on another lead.”

Mrs. Cox was sitting up, but she turned toward Lois when she mentioned Clark’s name.

Captain Benson cleared his throat and looked from Lois over to the woman lying in the hospital bed. "Mrs. Cox was just informing me that Lex wasn't supposed to die," he said.

* * *

"What does that even mean?" Lois asked.

Captain Benson guided Lois out of the hospital room, and Lois sat in the nearest chair. She couldn't understand what was happening.

"Mrs. Cox informed me that Luthor was planning on faking his death and pinning it on Mr. Kent. The crime lab found that the videotape was altered, and she confessed on that front. She told me who was in on the plan. A man named Nigel St. John was supposed to shoot Luthor with blanks," Captain Benson explained, looking down at Lois as he leaned up against the wall next to her.

"So, will you be dropping the charges against Clark?" Lois wondered aloud, looking up at Benson.

"I have to talk to the DA, but that's what I'd expect. We still need to find who shot Luthor, though," Benson stated. "And there are a few other people we need to locate to corroborate Mrs. Cox's story."

"If Nigel was supposed to shoot Lex with blanks, maybe he was the one who double-crossed him," Lois suggested.

"That's the idea. Mrs. Cox wasn't in the penthouse when it happened. She was in a lab on the fifth floor looking into a project Luthor was working on. At ten fifteen, she was supposed to go back to the penthouse and call Gretchen Kelly," Benson told Lois.

"Gretchen Kelly was Lex's primary doctor. She was also the one who signed the death certificate," Lois interrupted.

Benson nodded as though he already knew this information. Then he continued. "We have men trying to locate Dr. Kelly now. You know, Ms. Lane, when I'm not going after your partner, you're not as bad as Henderson says," Benson admitted as he looked down at her with a smile.

"Henderson and I have an agreement. He gives me a hard time, and I leave his name out of my articles," Lois explained, tucking a strand of her hair behind her ear. If she didn't know any better, she thought maybe Captain Benson was hitting on her.

"Well, maybe after all of this is over, you and I can go out for a drink and see if what Henderson says is right," he suggested with another smile, putting his hands in his pockets.

"I'm flattered, Captain. I really am. But after this is over, I'm hoping that my partner and I can make a go at something more," Lois admitted. Captain Benson was a fine-looking

man, maybe a few years older than she was, and he was good at his job. She was sure he could make a woman very happy, but she wanted to be happy with Clark.

"Just making sure, I hear you have all the guys falling over you," Benson said with a smirk. "I've even heard you have a certain man in blue and red falling over you at times."

"You don't know half of it," Lois sighed. The turn in the conversation reminded her that she needed to call Clark. She'd forgotten about calling him as soon as Benson had given her the news about Mrs. Cox. "Speaking of my partner, I need to call him. Excuse me for a minute."

Lois stood up, turned to Benson, and held out her hand. She thought he may have pushed a bit too hard at times when trying to pin the murder on Clark, but she could tell all he'd really wanted was the truth, just like she and Clark had. And apparently, he'd been very helpful in the search for that truth in the last twenty-four hours.

"Thank you for believing that Clark didn't do it," Lois said.

"Just doing my job, Ms. Lane," he responded with a smile.

"I think you can call me Lois."

"Okay, Lois. If we're going to be on a first-name basis, you can call me Elliott," he replied, grinning.

"Well, Elliott, thank you," Lois said before stepping away. "Bye."

Lois turned away and walked down the hall. She still had a bunch of questions. How was Lex supposed to have gotten away with framing Clark? What was getting Clark arrested going to prove? Was she supposed to have turned her back on Clark just like that? And who had really killed Lex?

All of these things were running through her mind as she drove to Clark's. Forty-five minutes later, she knocked on Clark's door. She figured telling him in person would be better than over the phone. He answered the door seconds later, wearing blue jeans and a red shirt, but no shoes or socks.

"I thought you were going to call," Clark said nonchalantly, opening the door.

"Well, I figured I would stop by with the good news," Lois replied, strolling right into his apartment. She stood on the top steps and looked around. "Where are your parents?"

"They wanted to get out for a bit, so they went to go pick up some lunch," he answered as he closed the door. He led her down the steps, and then, probably noticing the bit of a hop she had in her step and the smile on her face, he asked, "Why do you look so joyful?"

Lois turned around to face him, grinning ear to ear. She couldn't hold in the good news any longer.

She proceeded to tell Clark all about Lex's nefarious ploy to fake his own death and have Clark framed for his murder. She put her hand on his chest when she finished and looked up at him, studying his eyes. She couldn't tell what he was thinking.

"Well, what do you have to say?" Lois asked quickly.

"What do I have to say?" Clark put his hand over Lois's. "Elliott? You mean 'Captain Benson'?"

Lois took a deep breath and shook her head. She stepped away from him, flabbergasted at his question.

"That's the only thing you got from ALL that," Lois blurted out, heaving a sigh as she turned away from him. "I just told you that this case is likely closed, and all you can think of is me calling the captain by his first name."

"Lois..." Clark said, grabbing her wrist gently. He pulled her back to him, and suddenly she was up against his chest. "Thank you for believing in me."

He looked down at her, and she could see the love in his eyes, making her feel warm and cherished once again. The electricity between them was intense, and she wanted nothing more than to kiss him right then.

"You have nothing to be jealous about," Lois pointed out, resting her hands on his chest again.

"I wasn't jealous..." he began. "Okay, for a brief second. I think...both of us tend to get jealous when the other is getting attention from someone of the opposite sex. But, really, we should just have admitted how we felt about one another a long time ago," he admitted as he cupped her cheek with his hand.

"I don't know if I would go that far. I don't get jealous," she joked lightly, a teasing grin on her lips. Then she leaned into his touch and lowered her voice. "What does this mean now? Are you going to let me go?"

"I'm still holding onto you, aren't I?" he whispered. She watched him glance at her lips briefly and then look back up again.

"He asked me out, you know," Lois said as she studied his reaction. She wanted to kiss him, but she remembered him pushing her away last time.

"Oh!"

"I told him no. I told him that there was someone else," she explained. She looked down at her hands on his chest and began to slide her fingers up to his neck.

"What did he have to say?" Clark asked, and Lois smiled as she noticed the hitch in his voice.

"He understood," Lois replied, continuing to gauge Clark's reaction. She'd needed to know if he was still interested in her. And from the way his body had started responding to her touch, he was definitely still interested. She smiled. "After the district attorney drops your charges, we are going out on a date, correct?"

"I never said I didn't want to go out with you. I just wanted this Luthor mess out of the way before," Clark said. "And as much as I would love to kiss you right now, some things are still up in the air."

"Like what?" she asked, frowning. She paused, her hands just on either side of his neck, and her body tensed.

"It's not about this—this thing with us," Clark answered with a smile. "It's about Luthor. What was Luthor's plan after I got arrested? To run away from Metropolis with you? And who killed him?"

Lois relaxed as he wrapped his arms around her waist. He wasn't letting her go.

"Can we forget about Luthor for the night, please? I just want to celebrate our win."

She felt a laugh rumble in his chest, and he nodded. Then, he slowly lowered his lips to hers. At first, the kiss was soft, but then she wrapped her arms around his neck, and he pulled her even closer. The kiss deepened, and Lois knew he still loved her. His hands tangled into her hair, and a warmth spread throughout her body.

"Excuse us."

Clark and Lois pulled apart instantly, and Lois looked up to see Martha Kent walking into the apartment.

"I see the two of you made up," Martha said, laughing as she came down the steps carrying a plastic bag of food.

"What am I missing?" Jonathan asked as he followed behind Martha.

"Lois was just here to tell me they'll be dropping the charges," Clark said as he straightened his shirt.

"Looked like a lot of talking to me," Martha teased, setting the food on the table.

"Mom," Clark muttered, blushing.

"Are you staying for lunch, Lois?" Jonathan asked. "We have plenty."

Martha began to pull containers of food from the bags, and Lois immediately recognized the logo for the House of Hunan.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Lois said, looking over at Clark. As soon as he smiled at her, she knew she was done for.

“Please stay, Lois. I’m sure you’re hungry?” Clark said, taking her hand in his.

* * *

Clark held Lois’s hand, still reeling from their kiss. He squeezed it gently, and she smiled at him and then nodded.

“Okay, I guess I could eat,” Lois replied, biting her lip as she looked at him. “But afterward, I think I’m going back to see Mrs. Cox.”

Clark nodded. “Maybe I should go with you. She might be able to tell us more,” Clark suggested, tilting his head in thought. “I really want to know what Luthor was planning after faking his death. What was he going to do? Make sure I was in prison for his ‘death,’ then kidnap you and take you to some deserted island?”

Clark shook his head and then escorted Lois over to sit at the table while his parents got out plates and utensils. Clark took a seat next to Lois, and they started to dish out the contents of the food containers.

“He had to know I wouldn’t let you rot in prison,” Lois pointed out. “Maybe he was going to get someone to try and kill you in prison. Part of me would have liked to see him try. He never took failure well.”

Clark looked at Lois intently, and he realized that was it—Lex had wanted to make sure Clark never left the jail.

“Jail...” Clark said, tilting his head sideways. “Wait, you wanted to see him try and kill me?”

Clark hoped Lois hadn’t meant it the way it sounded. Did she? She knew about his strength. And if someone had tried to hurt him, chances were they would be hurt, not him. Yet, Lois did have a valid point. What had Luthor been planning?

“No, I didn’t want to see him try and have someone kill you. Not like it would have worked either,” Lois said with a laugh. “But what if he was going to have someone kill you in prison? Do you think he would have waited that long?”

Clark shifted in his chair. Lois was too trusting when it came to certain men with authority, and Luthor was a smart man. What if Luthor had tried to have him killed and somehow figured out his secret in the process? Kryptonite...did exist. What if Luthor had somehow succeeded in trying to kill Clark? Clark knew Luthor hadn’t deserved to die, but right now, he was also glad Luthor hadn’t gotten a chance to carry out whatever other plans he might have had.

“You knew him better than I did,” Clark said, taking a bite of his Szechuan chicken.

“I didn’t mean I wanted him to hurt you. Of course I didn’t want anything to happen to you,” Lois assured him, and she took a small bite of her lunch.

Clark noticed his parents eating in silence while listening to the conversation. He also noticed how Lois sighed, then looked like the weight of the world had just been lifted off her shoulders when she took another bite of her food. It was probably the first real meal she’d had in days.

He was glad she was here, and he knew she enjoyed spending time with his parents. The thought reminded him of the fact that she’d asked her dad for money to bail him out of jail. She didn’t get along with her parents like he did, and so he knew that it must have been really difficult for her to do that. How was he ever going to repay her? Not the money; they’d get the money back. But for her time and effort and dedication. She’d worked night and day to get his name cleared. Sure, they were now celebrating by eating Chinese with his parents, but what he really wanted to do was take her flying someplace alone so they could talk.

“You must be hungry,” he said, watching her intently.

“What?” she asked, looking up at him.

She put her fork down, reached over for his hand, and squeezed it. He smiled at her and nodded his head.

“I’m just thinking how good it feels to have you in my corner.”

“I made a mistake with Lex—”

“It’s okay, Lois. I know. I’m just happy that things worked out. Now we just need to figure out who really killed Luthor and what his plans were,” Clark said with a smile.

“The two of you better finish eating before it gets cold,” his mom said.

Clark looked over at his mom, and he noticed Lois spear another forkful of her food.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” Clark apologized, looking down at his plate as his cheeks heated up with embarrassment.

“Let Lois finish eating,” his mom replied. She glanced at Lois and smiled encouragingly.

“Yeah, sorry, Lois, I—” Clark cut himself off abruptly as he heard a call for help. Mentally cursing the timing, but knowing he couldn’t just ignore it, he looked over at Lois with a half-smile. “Lois, go ahead and finish eating,”

Clark said. “I know you probably haven’t had much to eat lately. Just relax. I need to go for a minute, but I’ll be back.”

Lois’s eyebrows scrunched together in confusion, and she tilted her head slightly.

Clark just smiled and stood up. "Finish up, and I'll be back," he said before kissing his mom on the cheek and squeezing Lois's shoulder. "There's a bank alarm in downtown, and the suspects have guns. I need to hurry."

Lois nodded, and he felt her eyes on him as he walked into his bedroom. Seconds later, he flew out the window. He didn't want to leave Lois and his parents, but he knew Superman needed to make up for not being around as much. He hoped though that this rescue would only take a short time.

He also knew he needed to get used to having Lois know his secret. It would be nice to have someone to talk to after the tougher rescues, but he'd spent years keeping the rescues to himself and holding in the heartache of what he saw every day. Now that he had Lois, they would have to figure out how to balance their relationship with him having to fly away at a moment's notice. How would Lois feel knowing that their time together could be interrupted at any minute? Clark knew they needed to have a long discussion about what it might be like for Lois to date a man with a secret identity.

He also still worried about keeping the evil away from the people he loved, including his parents and Lois. When Trask had used his parents to get to him, he'd felt so helpless. If other criminals found out Superman was in a relationship with Lois, she could be in danger. How was he to stop that from happening? He knew Lois would never stop putting herself into danger, and in a way, he didn't want to stop her from being who she was. He would need to be careful about keeping up appearances when he was around her as Superman.

Clark did a few more rescues before flying back to his apartment. He walked into the bathroom, cleaned up, and came back out in his regular clothes. He found his parents and Lois still at the table; their lunch had been all cleaned up. Now they were just sitting around talking and drinking some coffee.

"How was lunch?" Clark asked.

"I put the leftovers in a container for you," his mom replied, smiling up at him.

"Thanks, Mom. Are the two of you okay? Need anything before Lois and I take off?" he asked, moving behind Lois and putting his hand on her shoulder.

He looked down at her, and she turned slightly to look at him. He could see the wheels turning in her mind.

"Are we heading back to the hospital?" Lois asked.

"Yeah, I think it's time we find out what Luthor was planning exactly," Clark said with a smile. "Are you ready?"

Lois nodded, and Clark pulled out the chair for her.

"Thank you for lunch," Lois told his parents.

"Anytime," his mom replied, and Clark nodded a thanks to her before he and Lois left the apartment.

* * *

After lunch, Lois and Clark were getting buckled into the Jeep so they could head down to the hospital. Lois turned the radio on, but before she could pull away from the curb, Clark reached over and turned it off.

"Lois, before we go, I need to apologize. I know you've been trying your best to prove my innocence," Clark admitted, taking a deep breath. "I haven't really been fair to you."

Lois didn't know exactly what to say. So instead, she just waited for him to continue.

"I'm glad you were able to have some time alone with my parents. I think my mom always wanted another woman around to talk to about me," Clark admitted with a teasing smile. "But I worry a lot about both of them. Plus, running off during lunch and leaving you with them was out of my control."

"It was my pleasure. Your parents are great. I bet it was great growing up with parents who loved each other and would do anything for you," Lois said, lowering her eyes to her hands.

She hadn't had the best upbringing. For years, Lois had looked after herself and Lucy while her dad had been off performing surgeries for high-paying vanity clients and her mom had been out drinking her emotions away. Lois had never wanted marriage or a family because she hadn't had the greatest influences.

Now, watching Clark with his parents, Lois knew it was possible. Maybe one day, she could have that with someone. And as much as it was early in their relationship, she was sure that future could be with Clark.

"Believe me, it wasn't always sunshine and roses," Clark said. "My parents can argue, but it's small things. From what I remember, dad told me he proposed to my mom five different times. Each time she said no, he would go out and plow a field or something. But they always got back together." Clark paused and frowned. "And when it came to me and my powers, growing up... Dad warned me all the time to be careful, not to let anyone see me use my powers. He was afraid I would be seen, and then someone would capture me and study me in a laboratory. Dissect me like a frog."

Lois couldn't believe it. It made sense though. When Superman had appeared, many people had been skeptical—people like Jason Trask.

“Trask,” Lois whispered, blinking as she set her hand on Clark’s arm.

“Exactly. It’s another reason I created Superman. I wanted a normal life, but to be able to use my powers to help those I could.”

“I get it. I do,” Lois said. “Trying to have a normal life, even when you’re faster than a speeding bullet.”

“Yeah, and having to constantly apologize for flying off. If we move forward with a relationship, I hope you understand I might have to run off at the most inappropriate times,” he admitted, running his hand through his hair.

“That explains the strange excuses you used to give when you had to disappear,” she said with a smile. “Clark, I admit that it threw me for a moment when you had to run off during lunch. I understand though, and if we are on a date and it happens, I just hope you come back when you can.”

Lois glanced down as he took her hand, lifted it to his lips, and then kissed the back of her hand. She looked up again and saw tenderness and maybe a little bit of mischief in his deep brown eyes.

“I promise I’ll always come back,” Clark whispered to her.

Lois blushed slightly at Clark’s boldness. This was all so new to her. A man that would promise he would always come back. Was this real?

“I know we have other things to talk about, but I didn’t want to leave without you knowing,” he said as he kissed her hand again.

As she had several times today, she felt an urge to kiss him. However, now wasn’t the time to start making out with Clark. As much as she loved being in his arms and the feeling of his hands on her, they had things to do.

“We should get going,” she said lightly, pulling her hand away.

When she started the Jeep back up, she could tell something else was on his mind. She looked over at him, and he smiled back. But the smile wasn’t reaching his eyes.

“What is it, Clark?” she asked as she pulled the Jeep away from the curb and began maneuvering through the streets of Metropolis toward the hospital.

“I was thinking about the moment before my parents showed up,” he said quietly.

“I know. I’m sort of glad your parents did show up,” Lois admitted, tightening her hands on the steering wheel slightly. As much as it had felt amazing kissing Clark, she didn’t want to move too fast.

There was silence for a few minutes, and it started making Lois uneasy again.

Finally, Clark cleared his throat and spoke up. “Why? You didn’t enjoy—”

Lois reached her hand over to his thigh and squeezed slightly. She knew where he was going.

Miscommunication had to stop between them.

“Oh, I enjoyed it. It...was like that time at the Lexor Hotel. You threw me down on the bed and kissed me. You left me breathless then too. It took me a minute to get my bearings,” Lois admitted, blushing, remembering that moment in the hotel.

“My kisses leave you breathless?”

She glanced over at him, and he smiled as though also remembering that moment months ago in the hotel.

“Yes, your kisses leave me breathless,” she admitted. “And I don’t want to rush things or ruin what could be something ‘super.’”

She focused on the road again, feeling her shoulders tense. Her insecurities were coming out, but she felt the need to be as honest as possible with him. After all, Clark had been honest with her about his worries that he might have to disappear during a date. It was only fair that she admit how scared she was about having a physical relationship with him.

Before Clark could respond, Lois turned into the parking lot of Metropolis General Hospital.

“Oh, look, we’re here,” she announced, and she promptly found a parking spot, turned the Jeep off, and started to get out.

Lois wanted to talk more about their insecurities, but this was not the time nor the place. They had to finish solving the case before really discussing their future. Though at least she thought it did seem like both of them were on the same page.

* * *

Lois found a parking spot and turned the car off, but before she got out, Clark took her hand. He wanted to say one more thing. Something she had mentioned that was starting to get to him.

“There’s one more thing, Lois. I’m sorry,” he murmured as he opened his eyes and looked at her. “I keep kissing you like that and forgetting that you might not be ready for more.”

“I’m ready, Clark. I am. I’m just scared about moving too fast. I know I made some mistakes. I can’t apologize

enough for accepting Lex's proposal," Lois explained. She pulled her hand away from his and gripped the steering wheel again. "It was like he swept me off my feet, made me believe he was something else—someone else."

Clark realized what she had said. He had done the same thing to her. He had made her believe he was two different people, and he'd done it by lying—just like Lex. Was he really any different than Lex?

"Maybe I'm more like Luthor than I thought," Clark admitted as he fumbled with his hands. "I lied to you about who I am. I made you believe I was two different people, just like he did."

"You're not a monster. You weren't trying to control me or manipulate me."

"Wasn't I manipulating you, though?"

"Clark, stop! Yes, you made me believe you were two different people, but the difference between you and Lex is that you are a good person. You lied to protect people, not to control and manipulate them..."

"Is that what he did to you? Did he manipulate you?"

"In a way, yes. I shouldn't have been enamored with Lex. I mean, you know me...money, fame, material things...they just don't matter to me. Yet, here was the third richest man in the world paying attention to me. He kept dazzling me with his intellect and cultured ways, taking me to far-off places I'd never been..."

"You were flattered by the attention, just like you were with Superman," Clark observed. "Powerful men."

"Yes, but the difference between Lex and 'Superman' is that both of them are fantasies. I fell in love with you, Clark. The man with insecurities and problems. The man who could sit there and listen to me babble on and yet call my bluff when I try to win at a darn Scrabble game."

Clark grinned at the last comment. He remembered the way they had played games in the Lexor Hotel. She'd tried to cheat at Scrabble, but he'd called her out on it.

"Chumpy is not a word, Lois," Clark said, "no matter how much you try to argue your way through that one."

"See what I mean? Who else would edit my copy? No one but you. I never wanted a partner, but you came along and broke all my walls down. No one has ever done that. I was too scared to let anyone even try," Lois explained. She looked down and fiddled with a stitch on her shirt.

"I remember how you were at the beginning—always wanted to be top banana," Clark recalled. "And the way you scooped me."

"Yes, but only you tried to get back at me. Most people would have given up on me. You never did. Perry wanted you to learn from me, but what he didn't realize is I needed to learn from you," Lois explained. She looked back up at him and smiled. "You made me see things in a different light. I didn't have the best role models when it came to love, my parents fought all the time. I don't want to argue with you anymore. I never wanted that. But I also know that it's just the pain we're feeling from being rejected. You showed me that love and friendship go hand and hand. I... want that back."

He was in awe of her admission. She had never opened her heart to anyone before. Now she had, and he...really didn't want to hurt her again. Clark knew that they were better, that he was better. He didn't like to see her in any sort of pain, and lately, that was what he'd been doing. Hurting her.

No more. It had to stop.

"I don't want to hurt you anymore. I believe you, and I can get back to where we were before—"

"No, I don't want things like they were," she interrupted. His breath caught in his throat as she reached up with both hands to frame his face. "I want more. Before, we were just friends and partners. I want more," she admitted with a smile.

"So do I," he replied as he covered one of her hands with his. He let his thumb rub over the back of her knuckles. "So forward. We move forward."

"Forward," she whispered as she leaned towards him.

Before she got too close to him, he put his free hand up to stop her. He knew what would happen if she kissed him, and as much as he wanted to kiss those luscious red lips of hers, they should probably get moving.

"As much as I would love to kiss you—because believe me, I do," Clark said, grinning, "we need to finish this investigation."

She looked at his lips, then his eyes, and finally seemed to realize he was right. "I know, you're right, but..." She pulled him to her, and their lips met.

The kiss was intense, and Clark immediately lost himself, deepening it as he threaded his hands through her hair.

"Lois..." he moaned, and as the sound reverberated in the car, he remembered where they were—in her vehicle, in the hospital parking lot. He groaned in protest. "We...need to stop."

"I know," Lois said. But he felt her bite his bottom lip, and she didn't pull away. He could feel his body reacting even more.

“Lo...is,” he moaned once more. He put his hands on her shoulders and slowly pulled back. “This could get out of control real fast if we keep this up. And I don’t want to get caught making out with you in the parking lot.”

The spark between them was electrifying. Both of them needed to learn to control themselves. After a couple of minutes straightening themselves up, they got out of the Jeep and went into the hospital.

* * *

Lois and Clark walked down the hallway toward Mrs. Cox’s room. Both of them were quiet, hoping that things were good between them now. As they got closer to Mrs. Cox’s room, Lois noticed a police officer standing guard.

“Can I help you?” the police officer asked as he stood in the doorway with his arms crossed.

“Yes, I’m Lois Lane and this is Clark Kent, we’re from the Daily Planet. I need to speak to Mrs. Cox,” she stated .

“Sorry, no one’s allowed in,” the officer replied. “No press.”

“You don’t understand, Mrs. Cox is a witness in a story we’re working on,” Lois responded, trying to bypass the guard.

“No,” he said louder.

“You don’t understand,” Lois said, forcefully. “We need to find out what else she knows.”

“I don’t care who you are or what case. I was told not to let anyone through unless it is a doctor or Captain Benson,” the officer told her.

“Captain Benson,” Clark mumbled before elbowing Lois. “Lois here is close friends with the Captain.”

“I don’t care if she’s close friends with the president. An hour ago, there was an attempt on Mrs. Cox’s life. I was told not to let anyone in,” the officer said, crossing his arms in front of him.

“What? How? Can you tell us more?” Lois asked, grabbing her notepad out from her bag.

“Lois. Mr. Kent,” Captain Benson announced coming down the hallway.

Lois looked up, relieved to see Benson. She knew the captain would help answer the questions she and Clark had.

“Captain, what’s going on? The officer said there was an attempt on Mrs. Cox’s life,” Clark said.

Benson waved his hand to the two of them and led them down the hallway. Lois and Clark followed him into

a waiting room. He looked around making sure they were alone.

“About forty-five minutes ago, a nurse came into Mrs. Cox’s room and gave her a dose of penicillin in her IV. Only issue is that it is clearly stated in her chart that she is deathly allergic to the drug,” he said, and glanced down at where Clark held Lois’s hand.

Lois immediately noticed that the captain had seen their joined hands, but she didn’t mind. She had felt Clark take her hand when Benson had started speaking. Lois wondered if Clark thought his freedom would still be in jeopardy if Mrs. Cox was killed.

“I came into the room as the nurse was rushing out and noticed Mrs. Cox’s reaction. She had been sleeping, and I think the drug must have just hit her, because her eyes opened suddenly. She screamed for help, and I hit the call button before trying to run after the nurse,” Captain Benson explained.

“Did you catch up to whoever it was?” Lois asked.

“No, but I did find out that Mrs. Cox wasn’t scheduled to get a dose of any medication. We were actually getting ready to take her into protective custody, once she was released,” he replied.

“So, someone found out she told the police the whole story,” Clark suggested. “Did you recognize the nurse?”

“Mr. Kent, I’m a detective. Of course, I did. She was a taller woman with blond hair and blue eyes,” he responded.

Lois squeezed Clark’s hand and looked over at him.

“Gretchen Kelly,” Lois murmured.

“Yep, Luthor’s doctor. I’m not sure why she would try to kill Mrs. Cox, but there’s obviously a bit more going on here than we thought,” Benson said, looking out the window.

“Did you put an APB out on her?” Clark asked.

“What do you think, Kent?”

“I know. I know. You’re a detective,” Clark retorted.

“I think I need a cup of coffee. Clark, how about you come with me down to the cafeteria?” Lois suggested, pulling on his hand. Lois had an idea and needed to discuss it with Clark.

“Coffee. Lois, you just had a cup at my apartment,” Clark replied, looking over at Lois.

Captain Benson looked between the partners and shook his head. “Excuse me,” he said. “I have more calls to make.”

Benson turned to leave. As soon as they were alone, Lois turned to Clark. She smacked his shoulder lightly, knowing full well it wouldn’t hurt.

"I was trying to get you away from Elliott. I have an idea, and I thought maybe Superman could help," Lois said quietly.

"Superman?"

"Yes. What if Superman went flying around Metropolis looking for the great Dr. Kelly," Lois suggested, putting her hand on his shoulder where she smacked it a minute ago. "And of course, he can take me with him."

Clark tilted his head slightly and started shaking his head.

"Lois, no. If she can sneak into the hospital and drug Mrs. Cox, what do you think she could do to you?"

"I'll be safe since I'll be with, you know, Superman," Lois replied as she leaned into him. "He wouldn't let anything happen to me. Would he? Plus I'm always safe when I'm with him."

She slid her hand up to the back of his neck and started playing with his hair. She knew going after Gretchen Kelly was their best option right now. And Superman was how they needed to do it. The safest choice.

"What do you think, now that we're together, you can get your way by using your feminine wiles on me?" Clark asked with a half-smile.

"I don't know. Are we together? I mean, I know earlier at your apartment before your parents showed up, we were. And outside in the parking lot was interesting," Lois whispered seductively as she leaned into Clark, coming closer to his lips. "I know a few things that could convince you."

"Lois, please," he mumbled, shaking his head. "You're my kryptonite. I can't take you with me. What if we find her and Nigel is with her? I can't keep an eye on you and catch them at the same time."

"Kryptonite? It's real...and it can hurt you?" When Clark nodded solemnly, Lois's heart sank. "That's it then. What if Lex found out about kryptonite and was going to use that to catch Superman?" Lois said, stepping away from Clark.

She turned and started pacing. Lois remembered a file she'd seen in Lex's office that she hadn't taken.

"I think we need to go back to Lex's office," Lois said. She stopped and looked at Clark. "I found a file on Bureau 39 in Lex's office. I didn't think it had anything to do with you, so I never looked at it. It's still in his office."

"Luthor had a file on Bureau 39? Trask knew about the kryptonite. He was the only one who knew what it could do to me. If Luthor had information on kryptonite..." Clark trailed off, his expression grim and maybe a little...pale..

Lois's eyes widened as she remembered Clark almost dying when they'd faced Trask in Smallville. But if Trask

was the only one who had known...and he was dead... Had Trask devised some sort of a back-up plan before he died?

"Clark, what happened to Trask's body after he was shot at the pond?"

"Rachel mentioned that some men from the government came and picked it up the next day," he answered, still looking pale.

Lois's stomach lurched, and she stepped closer to Clark. "What if...Trask and Lex were in on this together? We know Lex wanted Superman gone, and Trask was just as evil." Lois paused and shook her head. "Clark, what if Trask isn't dead?"

* * *

Clark shivered. Trask was worse than Luthor. Luthor hadn't used Clark's parents to get what he wanted. Trask, however, was willing to kill anyone who got in his way, anyone who had helped the "alien."

He couldn't risk being vulnerable to kryptonite. It was the worst feeling when his powers had been taken away from him, and he hated the feeling of being so powerless, unable to protect those he loved.

"How about we go to LexCorp and see if we can find that file I left?" Lois asked, taking his hand and pulling him toward the exit.

As they walked down the hallway, he put his hand on the small of her back. He hoped that holding onto her would give him the strength to finish this nonsense once and for all. Neither of them could go on like this. They needed a break.

As they walked out of the hospital toward the Jeep, Clark's mind was running through the aftermath of the last time they had run into Bureau 39. Could they really be behind all of this? How could they know that he was Superman, since the only person who'd known was dead? And if they didn't know, how would sending Clark to prison have stopped Superman?

"Clark... Hello?" Lois stepped in front of him as they reached her Jeep.

Clark shook his head and closed his eyes. He pinched his nose for a second and then looked up at Lois.

"Sorry, Lois. What did you say?" he asked.

"I wanted to know if you wanted to drive," she replied. "But it looks like you're miles away. What is it?"

"I'll explain later. Do you need to rest?" he wondered, putting his hand over hers.

"No, but I think you do. What's going on?"

“Trask. What if he’s somehow behind all of this? I should call Rachel and see if she remembers anything about the men who picked up the body,” he said.

“Let’s go to LexCorp, and after we grab the file, we’ll go back to my place. Grab some dinner, maybe, and contact Rachel,” Lois suggested, putting her other hand over his cheek. He leaned into her touch.

“What would I do without you?” he said with a smile.

Before she could answer, he took the keys from her. He couldn’t keep thinking ‘what if’; that wasn’t how reporters worked. They dealt with facts. And right now, they had to find that file to see what Luthor knew about Bureau 39.

A few minutes later, he gripped the steering wheel tightly as he drove toward LexCorp. He’d noticed Lois watching him, and he glanced over at her briefly.

“What?”

“You’re worried that Trask had something to do with all of this,” Lois stated.

Clark frowned. He couldn’t lie to her no matter how he much wanted to keep his insecurities to himself.

“Yes. And if he did, how was he involved? And how much did Luthor know? Who else knew? Lois, Trask knew I was Superman. If that gets out, everything I’ve worked for disappears... I disappear,” he explained with a heavy heart.

“No! Clark, you can’t let Trask run you out of Metropolis. I mean, we just figured out this thing between us. I won’t let Lex, Trask, or anyone else run you out of Metropolis. Not as long as I’m alive,” Lois demanded.

“Don’t even say that, Lois. I can’t lose you. If Trask is behind this, then I can’t lose you too,” he said.

“Then we have to find Gretchen Kelly and figure out what she knows. Maybe Trask is really dead, like we thought,” Lois said, putting her hand on his thigh.

The touch was reassuring, and he gave her a small smile. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

Trask had always been a bigger threat to Clark than Luthor. Clark had been able to handle everything Luthor had thrown at him. All Luthor ever really wanted was power—power over Metropolis, over Lois, and over Superman.

But Trask wanted something even more. Jason Trask believed Superman was an evil alien who had come to Earth to destroy it. Although everything Clark had done as Superman had been to help the people of Earth, Trask believed Superman’s presence was just a ruse to gain control of them. So if Trask had his way—Clark would be captured and dissected and studied. Of course, everything Trask thought about him was about as far from the truth as one could get.

Clark felt Lois squeeze his leg again. Looking over at her, he noticed the sullen look across her face. He wanted to do everything in his power to make her feel better. However, he wasn’t sure how he was supposed to do that right now, when he was terrified himself.

“Lois, remember how I told you my dad would tell me to be careful about showing my powers? That someone from the government would find out and dissect me like a frog?” he said quietly. “When Trask first showed up, I finally realized my dad was right. I’d always thought my dad was just trying to scare me. But when Trask kidnapped me in Smallville, I realized he was right. And I...thought for a second that it was the end.”

“Oh, Clark,” Lois sighed. “Even though I didn’t know it was you, I knew Trask was crazy. Not because of him thinking you were Superman,” she said. “Okay, you being Superman was absurd at the time, but what Trask thought of Superman was worse. There was no way you could hurt us. I knew that from that first moment I saw Superman in the Messenger.”

Clark noticed a small smile play across her lips as she mentioned that moment when he first appeared to her as Superman.

“Lois, you thought I was insane, especially when I swallowed that bomb,” he said, laughing lightly.

“But you did it to save our lives. No questions. You did it not knowing if I was telling the truth.”

“I knew,” he murmured. “I knew when I first met you in Perry’s office that you wouldn’t lie to me about something that important.”

“Too bad, I didn’t realize it earlier,” Lois said, leaning her head back against the headrest. “Knowing who you were then would have solved so many issues.”

“But some of those walls needed time to come down. You wouldn’t have let me be your partner or your friend if you knew the truth. Plus, we had so many great memories this past year. I wouldn’t trade those for anything,” he admitted as he stopped the Jeep at a red light. He took her hand and brought it up to his lips. Their eyes met, and he realized he knew everything he needed to.

“Even me breaking your heart at the park that day?” she asked quietly, tilting her head as she regarded him.

“I surprised you with my confession.”

“I knew it though. I told you that day that I knew you had feelings for me, and I still hurt you,” Lois said, trying to pull her hand away.

He wouldn’t let her go, and instead pulled her hand toward his heart. Clark wanted her to feel his heartbeat.

He wanted her to know that she always had his heart, even when she had broken it.

“That’s in the past. We both made some mistakes, and we can only move forward. And when all of this is over, we’ll get that chance,” he said. A horn honked from behind him, and Clark flinched and glanced in the rearview mirror then up at the green light. He shook his head and started driving forward again. “I guess having a heart-to-heart on the streets of Metropolis isn’t in the cards for us.”

“No, but maybe tomorrow night, we can have a quiet dinner, that is if this darn case is ever closed,” Lois suggested.

“I don’t care if it’s not, you and I are going to spend a couple of hours alone. I bet you haven’t been sleeping much lately,” Clark said.

Ahead of them, Clark could see the large LexCorp building, and he wasn’t terribly surprised to see how the parking around it had cleared more.

“What about you?” Lois asked. “I bet you haven’t been sleeping much either.”

“Lois, I don’t need as much sleep as you think,” he answered. There were so many things she didn’t know about him. “I only need, maybe, a couple of hours of sleep. I’ve gone longer without sleeping, but it’s like eating.”

“You don’t need it, but you still do it? I’ve seen your cupboards, Clark. You eat like a teenager. I always thought you just had a fast metabolism. Never realized just how fast,” she said with a laugh.

“That’s not the only thing I can do fast,” he replied, reaching over to her. Hearing her intake of breath, he glanced over and saw a blush on her cheeks.

“I don’t mean that!” he said, feeling heat rise to his own cheeks, “I mean I can read a book in seconds. I cleaned my apartment when I first got it within minutes. The landlord was shocked. I can’t tell you how many keyboards I’ve short-circuited,” he explained.

“When this is over, I think I’ve got a lot of questions for you.” Lois said.

“And I’ll answer them all. Lois, I’ve never lied to you when it came to Superman,” he said hesitantly. “I mean, I might have left out a few details.”

“Like the secret identity.”

Clark pulled the Jeep up to the curb in front of LexCorp without looking over at her. There was so much he wanted to explain. He knew she was still upset with him about keeping her at arm’s length when it came to his alter ego. However, neither of them would get any work done if they rehashed all of their issues right now.

“Look, we’re here,” he stated, turning off the engine.

“Nice tactic. I think I’ve done it a time or two,” she mumbled.

Both of them got out of the Jeep and walked inside without saying another thing. Clark wanted to talk, but finding out the truth about Luthor’s murder was still the top priority.

* * *

They walked inside the building with just a little space between them. Lois didn’t like the tension, but she knew they needed to work now, talk about things later.

Once again, there was barely anyone inside. Lois even noticed that the security guard was someone new whom she didn’t recognize.

“Hello, can I help you?” the security guard asked.

“Yes, I’m Lois Lane. I left a few things up in his office that I need to get,” Lois said.

“And you are?” the officer asked Clark.

“He’s with me,” Lois stated, grabbing Clark’s hand without letting the guard see. “I have the code for the elevator.”

“Ma’am, that won’t do any good. The codes were changed this morning,” he said. “I was told that no one can go upstairs.”

“Well, I don’t care who told you what. I left some personal items up there that I need,” Lois lied.

Lois and the guard glared at each other, and she had no intention of backing down. She really needed to get upstairs. However, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Clark looking up like he was hearing something.

“Clark?”

“How about we go call Captain Benson? Or come back later?” Clark pulled Lois’s hand lightly and nodded toward the door.

“Fine, but I’ll be seeing you later,” Lois told the officer with a snarl.

Lois let Clark lead her out of the building. Before he turned the corner, she stopped and squeezed his hand.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“I heard a helicopter landing on the roof,” Clark answered. “I figured we could find another way up.”

Lois watched as he signaled that he meant flying. Then he looked around to be sure they were alone before spinning into the Superman suit.

“Want a lift?” he asked with a grin.

“Sure. I wasn’t going to use the stairs.”

Lois walked into his waiting arms, and as soon as his arm was around her waist, he shot up into the sky. They landed behind some of the mechanical stations on the roof to keep them hidden.

Peeking around the corner, Lois saw Nigel St. John walk out toward the helicopter, Gretchen Kelly following behind him carrying a rather heavy-looking briefcase. Kelly was yelling at Nigel.

“What is she saying?” Lois asked Clark.

“That she has the files ‘he’ asked for. And that Nigel better not double-cross them like he did Luthor. That he is being paid plenty of money,” Clark answered, watching them.

Lois couldn’t believe Nigel had double-crossed Lex. But more importantly, who was the person Kelly was talking about? And what did she have in that briefcase she was holding?

“Can we get closer?”

“You can’t, but I can grab that briefcase and be back so quickly they won’t even notice,” Clark responded as he stood up.

Lois didn’t like the idea of just sitting on the sidelines and watching Clark do all of the work. But she held back as he took off toward Nigel and Kelly. She closed her eyes for a second, expecting him to return before she could even take a breath. However, when he didn’t, she peeked around the corner again. She screamed as she saw Superman fall to the ground just feet away from Kelly.

It must be kryptonite! Kelly must have the kryptonite!

Nigel tilted his head back and start laughing, and Lois couldn’t wait any longer. She started running toward Clark as Kelly kneeled down in front of Clark and said something to him. Kelly seemed to smirk as she clicked the briefcase shut. Then, the doctor stood up, walked around Clark, and climbed into the helicopter behind Nigel. Lois slid to a stop and fell to her knees next to Clark, who was still keeled over in pain. Her arm went around his shoulders, and he grimaced as he looked up at the helicopter. She followed his gaze, both of them watching as the helicopter flew away.

* * *

When the helicopter was farther away, Clark tried to stand. He still ached everywhere, even though the kryptonite, which had been in Kelly’s briefcase, was far away now. Lois slipped her arm around his waist to help him.

“Are you okay? What did she say to you?” Lois asked.

“That Nigel shot Luthor and she has the proof. Plus something about ‘he’ was right. I’m not sure who ‘he’ is, Lois,” Clark mumbled.

“Who was right?” Lois wondered aloud. “Who is the man Kelly keeps mentioning? Can you move?”

Lois helped Clark toward the door to the stairwell. Her arm was wrapped firmly around his waist, and he tried not to put too much weight on her. It had been a short exposure, so he could already feel his powers coming back. But Clark knew they needed to call Captain Benson and let him know right away about Kelly and Nigel’s escape.

It took them a few minutes to make their way down a flight of stairs and into Luthor’s penthouse, where they were able to get to a phone so Lois could call the precinct. Clark stood by watching, still in his Superman suit. If anyone came up, hopefully they wouldn’t question how he and Lois had bypassed security.

“Are your powers back one hundred percent?” Lois asked as soon as she hung up the phone.

Clark sat in one of the chairs in Luthor’s office. The crime scene had finally been cleaned up. He pinched his nose, then tilted his head side to side trying to feel his muscles relax.

“Not quite. I could probably fly around Metropolis to check where they took off to, but it would take me a little bit of time. I’m probably around eighty percent, maybe. But knowing they have kryptonite is a bigger problem. I guess Luthor got his hands on it somehow,” Clark explained, not hiding the anger or frustration he was feeling.

“I guess we really have no idea what happened to the piece from Smallville, do we? Not sure how Lex would have known who to contact about it. I guess we could ask Mrs. Cox, since she’s the only one talking,” Lois said as she stepped closer and put her hand on Clark’s shoulder.

“She has to know more than she’s told us. Maybe we can find out where Kelly’s office was or where she lived,” Clark suggested. “When we’re done talking to Captain Benson —”

“— maybe we can check out Kelly’s home and see if she left something there that can give us some clues,” Lois finished for him, grinning.

Clark smiled back, in awe. They always seemed to fall in line with each other. When one was thinking something, the other seemed to catch on instantly without any hiccups. He smiled again as he remembered some of their past stories where they had worked undercover. She had certainly kept him on his toes the past year. It was no surprise he’d fallen in love with her.

“What’s on your mind?” Lois asked, catching his eye.

“Just how wonderful you are,” he commented with a smile.

She blushed and swept a strand of hair behind her ear, looking down. Clark looked around and noticed the drawers of the file cabinets had been opened.

“Should we see if there’s anything left for us to find in those files?” he asked.

“Sure.”

Both of them walked to the file cabinets and started looking through what files were left. Clark’s speed allowed him to go through the files a lot faster than Lois. He sighed as he finished the last drawer before Lois could get through even one.

“Nothing,” Clark sighed, closing the drawer and putting his head down.

“I guess everything important was cleaned out. The file I was talking about is missing. There’s nothing on Bureau 39 or Trask. That’s probably the file Kelly was talking about,” Lois stated, closing the drawer she’d been going through. “What next?”

Before Clark could answer, the elevator opened. Benson stepped out with two officers behind him.

“Lois, I figured when Kent’s charges were dismissed that we were done,” Benson said, walking farther into the room. Benson seemed surprised when he saw Clark, and his eyes widened slightly. “Oh, Superman. What are you doing here?”

“Lois got in contact with me about Gretchen Kelly. We flew up and caught Nigel St. John and the doctor flying off,” Clark said, folding his arms over his chest in his usual superhero stance.

“We couldn’t stop them because —” Lois stopped and glanced over at Clark as though asking silent permission. With a tight smile, he nodded. He trusted her to not give away the whole truth, and, as much as he was loathe to admit it, he trusted Benson enough with the information. Lois nodded back and continued. “We couldn’t stop them because they had something that made Superman’s powers weaken,” Lois explained.

“You mean kryptonite? I remember the article. So who do you think had it—Luthor or Dr. Kelly?” Benson asked.

“We believe Lex located it and Kelly and Nigel St. John stole it. That’s probably why they were here. Some files from the cabinets are also missing,” Lois explained, leaning against a large bookcase.

“You mean other than the ones you took with you before,” the captain replied.

“She did it for me,” Clark said without really thinking. He couldn’t react to his comment, so he just shrugged nonchalantly, hoping they could move on.

A few seconds later he noticed Lois stand taller and smile.

“He knew Clark didn’t kill Lex and wanted me to do anything I could to prove it. Plus some of those files were able to help me find the truth about Nigel St. John and some of the things Lex had hidden from everyone.”

“Well, okay, but Superman can’t just give you permission to break the law. He technically isn’t supposed to break them either.”

“Well, he didn’t tell me to steal the files. I did it on impulse. I wanted to help Clark,” Lois said, stepping closer to Clark.

Clark gave Lois a slight nod of his head, trying to remind her to keep her distance. Their relationship was new, so they still had to get used to being together in the same room but keeping their distance when he was dressed as Superman.

“I’m going to choose to ignore all this, since you’ve actually helped a lot with this investigation so far. I’m also going to choose to tell you I did find an address on Gretchen Kelly that might be helpful. She’s likely staying at a brownstone on Hyperion Avenue that once belonged to her aunt,” Captain Benson said. “But that doesn’t mean I want you to go flying off there.”

“How about Clark and I meet you there in an hour? That gives me a chance to call Clark and tell him what’s going on,” Lois stated with a quick glance over at Clark. He straightened up again, having to remind himself he was there as the superhero, not Lois’s partner.

“If you and Kent beat me there, do not go in without us. Lois, I mean it,” Captain Benson said sternly. “Henderson informed me that you tend to not listen to him at crime scenes. I’m not going to let that slide again.”

“I got it, Captain,” Lois replied as she started leaving the room.

Clark followed her without saying anything to the Captain. He figured he’d already said enough as Clark, and he didn’t want Benson to realize just how close Superman was to the case.

When they reached the foyer near the elevator, Clark leaned over and whispered, “Lois, how about I fly off to see if I can find that helicopter and meet you at the brownstone?”

“Okay. Be careful. Like I said before, don’t get too close,” Lois murmured back before turning to look at the captain and his two officers.

“Lois, wait a minute, if Superman is flying off, I want one of my men to escort you downstairs. I noticed the security company has changed, and I’m not sure they’ll understand you getting in with Superman’s help,” Benson said as he motioned to one of the officers.

“That’s okay. By the way, the new security company—do you know who hired them and why?” Lois questioned.

“The new owner of LexCorp, I guess. From what I understand, Luthor had a handful of people who might be wanting to take over. An ex-wife, a few sons, and even a half-sister,” Captain Benson stated.

Clark saw Lois’s eyes widen and her face pale slightly at this information, and he quickly took a step toward her. “Lois, how about I fly you down to your car? Then you don’t need to bother with security,” he suggested.

“That works,” Lois said with a nod.

As they flew out the window a moment later, Clark felt how stiff Lois was in his arms, and he realized she must have been as shocked by this new information about Luthor as she’d looked. When he landed near Lois’s Jeep, he put his hand on the top of her vehicle. He needed to tell her.

“I’m not going to ask whether or not you knew about his children or his ex-wife or that he even had a half-sister. All I’m going to say is I don’t have any ex-wives or children out there. I’m not going to hide anything from you,” Clark said, smiling gently as he looked down at her. He wanted to reach out to her, but knew this wasn’t the time or place.

“It’s okay. I mean it’s not, but we can talk about it later tonight,” Lois replied. “I think I need a chocolate bar or something sweet to de-stress.”

“I can fix that. Meet me at your place. I’ll take a quick look around the city for that helicopter and then get you something to make you forget,” he said. Then, he smiled at her again and added quietly, “I really want to kiss you right now.”

“Just go. I’ll meet you at my apartment. I’ll leave the window open,” she said before opening the driver’s side door.

Clark watched Lois get into her Jeep and drive off, then he flew up into the blue skies. He had a couple of things to do before he could fly off to get Lois her sweet piece of chocolate heaven.

* * *

Lois watched in her rearview mirror as Clark flew up into the sky. She had to get used to interacting separately with his two personalities plus make sure she didn’t say something in front of anyone that might give away his identity. One thing Lois was good at was coming up with excuses.

Driving to her apartment was lonely, and what she really wanted to do was just change her clothes and hide for the rest of the day. Yet there was still so much to do. They needed to find Gretchen Kelly and Nigel St. John. Finally get to the bottom of everything that had happened.

After a few minutes, she pulled up to her apartment complex. She was numb going upstairs and even walking down her hallway. It wasn’t until she reached her front door that she woke up. Her door was ajar. She hesitated for only a moment, wondering if she should wait for Superman to come back or just do what she had always done.

Pushing the door open slightly, Lois noticed the chaos. The apartment had been trashed. Someone had broken in looking for something. Lois knew instantly who it must have been—Nigel St. John.

She was standing with her hands on the island in her kitchen when she felt the familiar swish of Superman arriving behind her. Turning around, she ran to him and put her arms around his waist.

“I can’t believe they did this,” Lois cried.

He held her and stroked her hair gently, letting her cry. Everything finally hit her, and she was exhausted.

“I’m sorry,” she said, her words muffled into his chest.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about,” Clark murmured, pulling away from her slightly.

Lois didn’t want to look into his eyes, but he put his hand under her chin and tilted her head back so she was looking up at him. So much love in his eyes.

“This isn’t your fault. I’ll always be here to hold you, wipe away your tears, and love you,” he said with a hitch in his voice. “Do you want to call the police? Or just have me clean it up?”

Lois was confused. What would the police do that they couldn’t? She knew who did this, and it would take hours to clean it up. Was it even worth calling the police? She stepped away from Clark and turned around to look at the mess again. They had other things to deal with, and she didn’t have time to deal with the break-in. Grabbing her coat rack, she stood it up and started cleaning.

She could feel Clark staring at her, but she just kept working silently. All Lois wanted was this darn murder to be solved. The running around, worrying about Clark, and even dealing with the revelation that Clark was Superman were all making her frazzled. As she picked up a few more things, she noticed Clark looking around, then suddenly she felt a swoosh as he disappeared in a blur.

Within seconds, her apartment was spotless, and everything was exactly where it was supposed to be. She stood

there with her hands on her hips and smiled. Lois couldn't believe her life.

"I can get used to this," she said as he came to a stop in front of her, now wearing his regular clothes. "Now I see how you've always been able to do research faster than me."

"You should see me take out the garbage," he said with a wink.

"Give me a few minutes to shower and change, then we can go," Lois told him.

"Wait," he said. "I meant to grab you something when I was out but things got a bit chaotic. There was a bank robbery and a runaway bus and... Ah, never mind. I'll just go get it while you shower."

Before Lois could say anything, he had flown out the window again. Shaking her head in amusement, she turned toward her bathroom. All she really wanted to do was take a long, hot bath, then maybe curl up next to Clark and watch a movie. Unfortunately, Lois knew that was impossible. They had to get to Hyperion Avenue to meet Captain Benson in thirty minutes. That didn't give her enough time to even fill her bathtub, let alone relax.

Ten minutes later, she came out of her bedroom dressed in tan slacks, a white blouse, and a tan vest. Clark was sitting on the couch enjoying a coffee.

"I know we don't have much time, but if you let me drive, you can drink your cafe mocha and eat your chocolate croissant from France," Clark said, turning toward her with a grin.

"Did you say chocolate croissant? Wow," she replied as she took some quick strides to the coffee table to grab the little bag of heaven. As she opened the bag, she inhaled the scent of the flaky, buttery crust and sighed.

Lois couldn't wait to taste the delicacy, so instead of grabbing her keys and bag, she just bit into the pastry. She couldn't help herself; she ate the whole thing and washed up before they left.

About fifteen minutes later, they pulled up to the brownstone. There were several officers stationed outside.

Walking up the steps, Lois tried to get a glance in the brownstone through the open door, but they were stopped by an officer in uniform.

"No press allowed," the younger officer told them.

"We were supposed to meet Captain Benson here," Clark said.

"I'm sorry. He has better things to do than talk to the press," the officer replied.

"Patrolman, they can come in," the captain shouted from inside the home. Benson stepped into Lois's view and waved them inside as he nodded into his phone.

"Well, damn. Yeah, yeah. Okay. I'll head over as soon as I'm done here," he said, and then hung up.

As Lois and Clark stepped further into the brownstone, Lois watched Captain Benson run a hand through his thinning hair and shake his head.

"What happened?" Lois asked.

"I just got a call from the precinct. Kelly's body was found at the airport. Witnesses said they saw a tall older gentleman with gray hair leaving in a black SUV just before that," Captain Benson stated, frowning. "So, Kelly is dead, and Nigel is in the wind."

Lois sighed, wondering if they'd ever get some good news for a change. She looked around the living room, noticing several photos on the shelves near the fireplace. Suddenly recognizing one of the men in one of the photos, she moved over to the shelves and picked up the black-framed photo. Two young men flanked a younger version of Gretchen Kelly.

"Lois—don't you dare touch anything," Captain Benson warned.

"Clark, come here," she whispered quietly, hoping that no one else could hear her. She looked closer at the picture, and a shiver ran through her.

Seconds later, Clark came up behind Lois and put his hand on her shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked.

Lois pointed to the picture she had noticed, then turned to look at Clark.

"Is that who I think it is?" she questioned.

"Jason Trask with Gretchen Kelly," Clark confirmed, and she noticed a slight hitch in his voice as he spoke. "Who's the other guy?" Clark asked. He slipped his glasses down. "Fort Campbell."

"I think we need to call Jimmy and see if he can look into Trask's past, along with Dr. Kelly's," Lois stated, grabbing Clark's hand.

"August 1987," Clark whispered. "That was the date. There is a newspaper in the background. So whoever the other man is, he was close to Kelly and Trask. There's also a notepad on the coffee table with an address on it. Looks like it was written fairly recently. Maybe it means something too."

"Let's go to that address."

“It’s more than an address, Lois. It’s a cemetery,” Clark explained, giving her shoulder a squeeze.

“Not the first time the two of us went sneaking around a cemetery at night,” Lois stated, giving Clark a half-smile as she stepped away from him.

Finally, after spending another twenty minutes looking around and talking to the captain, they said goodbye. After Lois grabbed the keys from Clark, they started off on their way to the cemetery. The sun was beginning to set, and clouds were rolling in. A storm was coming.

At the cemetery, Lois and Clark reached the location that had been written on the notepad Clark had found. It was a gravestone—that of a Lieutenant Marcus Kelly, who had died in November 1987. Under the dates were the words Son, Brother, Friend, Soldier.

“Oh gosh, the man in the picture must have been Dr. Kelly’s brother. Trask and the Lieutenant must have met in the military,” Clark stated, moving to stand beside the headstone.

Lois looked around and noticed a crypt about fifteen feet away. The door was slightly ajar, and a faint light shone from the crypt. Something told her this was big and important, and maybe a bit dangerous. Before Clark could tell her to stop, Lois broke into a jog, heading toward the crypt.

“Lois,” Clark exclaimed, running after her. “What are you doing?”

He caught up to her quickly and grabbed her hand as she opened the door further with her other hand.

“I noticed the light and decided to investigate,” she said, taking a step down into the crypt.

She felt Clark following behind her as they descended into the creepy stone crypt. As the light got brighter, Lois’s shoulders tensed. What was she going to find?

Finally, they reached the landing, and Lois felt her heart start to race. There was a clear glass chamber, empty except for some wires that hung from it, and a couple of IV bags were hanging on poles next to chamber. They were filled with a liquid that glowed sickly green. She stepped farther into the room, but no longer felt Clark’s warmth behind her. She turned to see him still standing at the landing, his face pale.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Those IV bags are filled with liquid kryptonite. I can feel my powers slowly fading, although it’s...weaker than the effect of the solid form from earlier,” Clark explained, leaning against the wall for support.

Lois frowned and continued into the room. She moved over to a table and rifled through a few documents. It was all some sort of medical jargon. She glanced at the chamber again, shuddering as a thought came to her. “All these IVs, Clark... I think... It looks like someone was trying to bring someone back from the dead, maybe. But who?” Lois asked.

“And did they succeed?” Clark added.

Lois looked up at him, horrified. “Dr. Kelly was pretty obsessed with Lex, in love in a sick way, so maybe...”

“Or...”

She saw the moment the fear returned to Clark’s eyes, and suddenly, she understood. “No, Clark...you don’t think... Could that have been Trask? But what does kryptonite have to do with any of this?”

He shook his head. “I have no idea. But we have to get rid of that stuff. Now.”

Lois had never agreed with anything as strongly. With a nod, she followed him up out of the crypt, and together, they decided he’d fly off and find a few large lead boxes for her to package the IV bags in, so he could destroy them properly.

Zombies? Liquid kryptonite? Another murder? Could this week get any weirder? Lois sighed and sat down on the top step of the crypt as Clark flew off. She needed another chocolate croissant.

* * *

After disposing of the kryptonite, Lois and Clark gathered up all of the documents they could find in the crypt. Hopefully they could find someone to help them analyze it all later. A few minutes later, they got back into the Jeep, and Lois leaned back against the seat and closed her eyes.

“Well, now we know Kelly had something really strange planned. I guess our next task will be...to find Nigel St. John,” Lois said slowly.

“Yeah, but... I think that can all wait until tomorrow,” Clark suggested with a smile. “I think we earned the night off. Tonight we go back to my place, have a quiet dinner and just enjoy our time together.”

“What about your parents?” Lois asked.

“Remember when I left LexCorp? I flew them home, but then an emergency came up. That’s why I’d forgotten your chocolate and had to make a separate trip,” Clark explained.

Lois turned to look at him, and then she smiled seductively. “You mean we’ll be alone at your place,” she said.

“Exactly,” he whispered, leaning toward her.

Lois leaned closer toward him, and soon, their lips met in a gentle kiss. It was finally over, and in the morning, they could move on, work on solving the rest of the case. Tonight, it was just the two of them moving onto something better.

Lois slid her hand up his chest and then around to play with the hair at the nape of his neck. She wanted to be closer to him, but this was not the place. Clark pulled back after brushing her hair behind her ear.

“I love you,” he said. “I don’t know what I would have done without you in my corner.”

“Always,” she replied before reaching over and kissing him one more time. This was a quick kiss, knowing full well that they shouldn’t let things get out of hand.

She straightened back up, started the Jeep, and pulled away from the curb. As they exited the cemetery, Lois noticed a dark sedan following them.

“Clark, someone’s following us,” Lois said quietly as she noticed the sedan get closer to them. She sped up and started weaving around traffic and making turns she wouldn’t normally make.

“Lois, take it easy,” Clark said, holding onto the door handle. “I’ll look back and see if I can tell who it is. Slow down at the next street and let them get behind us.”

“Oh, don’t act like my driving can bother you; you flew into space and stopped an asteroid,” Lois replied with a sneer.

“Just like flying in a plane, Lois. But not my favorite thing, especially with you driving,” Clark commented. He turned around and lowered his glasses. The sedan was getting closer. “Slow down a little bit more.”

Lois looked over at Clark as she slowed down to thirty miles an hour. He was still staring out the rear windshield, his jaw clenched. She decided the best thing to do would be to pull to the side of the road and park the car.

The dark sedan drove by a moment later, and Lois kept her eyes on Clark as he watched it closely.

“Oh my god,” Clark said as the car passed.

“Clark, who is it?” Lois asked, swinging around to look at the car. The driver was staring right at Clark, not even trying to hide who it was.

He looked at Lois, his eyes wide with anguish.

“I don’t know exactly how,” Clark said hesitantly. “But it was Trask. He’s back.”

Lois’s face fell and her stomach twisted in knots. How was this possible? She’d thought they were going to get a

break, but now she knew this was only the beginning. Jason Trask was back in their lives. Would this be the end of Superman? The end of Clark Kent?

The murder over Metropolis was solved, but now Lois and Clark would be dancing around death!

The End