

Epiphany

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Rated: PG-13

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Summary: In the aftermath of the episode "Fly Hard," Clark issues a warning to Lois about Lex as he finds himself at odds with her over his archenemy. Unable to see any other way to make her see the truth, he decides to tell her the truth in hopes that it'll keep her out of Lex's grasp. When Lois learns the truth both she and Clark are forced to juggle the ups and downs of their budding relationship while trying to find the connection between "The Boss" and every story they've covered over the past year.

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A/N: Big *HUGE* thanks to NostalgiaKick and Deadly Chakram for helping me sort through a lot of these plots and moving things along. Couldn't have done it without you. You guys ROCK!

Hope everyone enjoys this one! I had a lot of fun writing it.

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

What did Clark mean she didn't know Lex like he did? As far as she knew Clark and Lex didn't have anything more than a professional relationship.

Lois sighed, rolling over on her side to get more comfortable. The events of the evening wearing on her mind as she willed sleep to come. She'd been held hostage before but never like this. Normally when she was held hostage it was from her tracking down a criminal and breaking in or following them. This time had been different. The gang that had broken into the Planet had come to them with guns and a bomb. They'd taken the place she'd felt the safest and turned it into a place she so desperately wanted to escape.

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

What did that mean?

Nigel watched as Lex pulled himself up from the exam table, wincing in pain. "Shall I bring you a change of clothes?"

"No, Nigel, that's quite all right. I won't be here much longer," Lex said with a wry smile. "Brings back memories of the old days of being an orphaned street fighter."

"Well, let's hope you don't have to get your hands dirty like the old days," Nigel mused.

Lex smiled, "There was a lot I could have done tonight, but I didn't."

"So, would you care for me to arrange a visitor for Mr. Fuentes and his gang?" Nigel asked.

"No, that won't be necessary," Lex mused. "I admire his gusto. Maybe not his tactics..." Lex eyed his wounded shoulder, "but he has potential. Make the arrangements...but be sure to send him...payback...for this," He held up his sling.

"As you wish," Nigel nodded.

A knock at the door announced the Chief of Staff, "Mr. Luthor, sorry to keep you waiting. We were reviewing your x-rays. Sometimes it takes a little bit for them to come up."

Lex smiled, "Perhaps some new equipment is needed?" He turned to Nigel, "Nigel, make sure to send funds for a new radiology equipment."

"No, Mr. Luthor, that isn't necessary."

"Nonsense," Lex continued. "You're in need. I'm able. I help.

It's what good businessmen do."

The doctor sighed, realizing this was a losing battle, "Yes, Mr. Luthor, about your scans. It appears there was some damage to the ligaments in your shoulder, but no nerve damage. You won't be able to use those muscles for at least six to eight weeks. I'm surprised your wound wasn't worse...it appeared to have been healing itself when you arrived..."

<< "You'd be bleeding to death if it wasn't for him.">>

Lex's expression grew thoughtful, "Yes, well luckily one of the other hostages knew of a remedy for open wounds."

"You should thank whoever it was. They saved your life," the doctor handed Lex some paperwork. "Here are your discharge papers, Mr. Luthor. I've written a prescription for pain. You'll have to keep alternating ice and heat over the next few days but for tonight ice only. Your paperwork is all in order."

"Thank you, doctor," Lex said handing the papers to Nigel as he stood. He watched the doctor leave then turned to Nigel, "I owe Clark Kent my life?" He shook his head in disgust.

The next morning Lois was still just as restless as she'd been the night before. She hated being the last one to know anything and it appeared Clark knew something she didn't. How?

He'd certainly made no attempt to hide his contempt for Lex even after their first meeting him. She remembered fighting with him about her interview that Clark had insinuated was more.

<< "Tell me something...How far are you willing to go to get this interview?">>

At the time the insinuation had infuriated her. Looking back she realized that the question wasn't an insinuation but just Clark expressing his concern for her. She didn't know him that well back then but she knew he'd always had her best interest at heart. He always did. Even after she'd treated him awful all week when they'd first been teamed together on the EPRAD story he never was smug or telling her 'I told you so.' Instead, he was trying to comfort her.

<< "Not that it means anything from a 'hack from Nowheresville' but I think you're pretty terrific too.">>

As she'd gotten to know him over the past year she'd come to realize Clark was pretty terrific in his own way. He was a good friend and a great partner. Even if she did resist the partnership, in the beginning, she'd enjoyed being teamed up with him. He just seemed to get her. They fought like cats and dogs at times but always seemed to work through it. One of the main things they seemed to fight about was Lex. Clark had insinuated something more was going on with Lex over the last few months but never said what. Now, last night he'd warned her to be careful. Be careful of what?

"This is so frustrating..." Lois muttered to herself as she paced around the living room of her apartment. Clark was insinuating that something was wrong here, but what? The time she'd spent with Lex had been enjoyable. He'd never tried to push her into any uncomfortable situations. Which given the way past boyfriends had behaved it was a welcome change. They'd seen each other a handful of times over the past few months. Lately a bit more frequent, but she'd welcomed his company. What had started as an interview attempt seemed to be turning into something...she just wasn't sure what.

Interview. That was a joke. The interview she'd been so adamant to get never did come. Somehow she'd gotten swept up in the moment and had blown her chance to get the interview she so desperately sought out. It wasn't like she hadn't had a chance, but rather...

Why hadn't she gotten that interview? It wasn't like she didn't have access anymore. She was seeing Lex...nothing serious but still...

<< "From what I've heard, I'd be better off out there with the cops on my tail than you, Mr. Luthor.">>

She recalled the statement Fuentes had made and shook her head. What had that meant? She knew Lex was powerful in the business world but why would criminals be afraid of him? Could he be involved with someone or something dangerous? A shiver went down her spine and she shook her head, realizing what she was accusing Lex of without anything to go on besides the ravings of a criminal.

"This is ridiculous!" Lois shook her head. "He said I don't know Lex like him..." She was thoughtful a moment. How does Clark know him? She reached for the phone, determined to get to the bottom of her dilemma by going directly to the source. "Lex Luthor please?" She waited a moment, "Yes, this is Lois Lane."

A very bloody and bruised Fuentes staggered into the penthouse with Nigel right behind him, "Mr. Luthor, may I present Mr. Fuentes."

Lex nodded with a broad smile, happy to have the upper hand with his former captor, "Mr. Fuentes, we meet again."

Fuentes' eyes widened as Lex closed the distance between them with a smug smile, "Mister...Lu...thor..."

"I trust you found Nigel accommodating. He assured me he'd give you the same treatment you gave myself and Ms. Lane last night," Fear crossed Fuentes face as Lex grabbed him by the neck, "Make no mistake you will pay for putting your hands on her, but for now we will discuss the future..."

"Future?"

"I'm a businessman, Mr. Fuentes, I always enjoy a good deal. Now, I arranged for your release and in exchange, I expect your cooperation..."

"Cooperation?" Fuentes asked, realizing his worst fears weren't being met he straightened up, "What can I help you with, Mr. Luthor?" Lex laid a photo of Jack in Fuentes' hands, "The kid from last night?"

"A liability," Lex said with disgust. "He is a witness I need disposed of. I trust you'll use more discretion than you used last night? You'll be working with Nigel and my personal assistant, Mrs. Cox. He needs to disappear," Lex turned to confront him, "Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Fuentes nodded.

"Good," Lex reached for his right hand and jerked his thumb and index finger in a twist as Fuentes screamed in pain until he heard a loud pop indicating the bone breaking, "If you ever put your hands on Lois Lane again I'll be breaking more than your hand joints. Make sure it never happens again."

Clark landed softly on the balcony of his apartment, stepping inside and changing back into his street clothes after assuring himself no one had seen him. After the previous night's hostage situation he had made sure to patrol a bit longer than usual. He'd managed to stop an attempted mugging and a carjacking in Suicide Slum. Then this morning he'd stopped by the police station to give his statement to Henderson like he'd promised, but found there was no longer a case. Fuentes and his gang had been released and no one seemed to know where he disappeared to. He had a feeling Luthor was behind it. He just couldn't prove it.

Lois stepped off the elevator that led to the penthouse and made her way toward Lex's office. Nigel opened the door for her and she nodded her thanks as he closed the door behind her, "Lois, so good to see you," Lex greeted her with a smile.

His arm was still in a sling but his demeanor was still as pleasant as ever. She smiled back, "Lex, how are you feeling?"

Lex shook his arm still trapped in the sling and sighed, "I'll live. How are you?"

"Good. Last night was kinda crazy, but I'm fine," Lois smiled. "Actually after what had happened last night ... there was something I realized that I never put together before ..."

"Oh, like what?" Lex asked, concerned. He seemed nervous.

Lois tightened her jaw as she continued, "Why don't you like Clark? What's the deal with you two?"

Lex looked at her in surprise, "What? This is about Kent?"

Lois shook her head, "No, this is about a lot more than that.

Answer the question. What is the deal with you two? He obviously doesn't like you and you don't like him. Why? What happened?"

Lex looked at her in astonishment, contemplating his answer for a moment, "I honestly don't know. You'd have to ask him. I would assume maybe he doesn't approve of our relationship or ... Jealousy, but I haven't had any situation arise that would explain his hostility toward me."

'Jealousy? Why would Clark have to approve of her relationship?' The Clark Kent Lex was describing didn't fit with the man she'd come to know over the last year.

Lois sighed, disappointed she hadn't gotten an explanation, "Lex, Clark isn't like that. He would never be hostile to someone without being provoked. Something must have happened. Are you sure you don't remember anything?"

Lex was thoughtful for a moment, "I'm sorry, darling," Lex shrugged. "Maybe you should be asking Kent these questions."

Lois nodded, "Maybe I should," She turned to leave.

"Can I interest you in lunch?" He inquired.

Lois shook her head, "Maybe another time."

Fuentes had been released less than twelve hours after holding the Daily Planet hostage. No one seemed to know how he'd gotten the charges dropped or who had dropped the ball with processing. Clark shook his head in disgust. Some of the team members that had helped with the hostage situation had insinuated there was help from someone called 'the Boss.' Unfortunately, no one had met him or her.

A loud insistent tapping at his front door caught his attention and he headed up the steps to answer the door, "Lois?" He was surprised to see her on a Saturday, especially after spending all evening held hostage with her. He glanced at the clock, "Lois? What are you doing here?"

Lois was quick to shoot back, "Not standing in the doorway," She pushed past him and began pacing through the living room, "I need to talk to you."

"Come on in," He said wryly closing the door and turning back toward the living room. "What's up?"

"What did you mean last night?" Lois began to ramble.

"What's with the cryptic warning? You're never cryptic. Ever. A bit boneheaded sometimes and a bit of a pushover...no offense...but never cryptic. What gives?"

Clark raised his eyebrows, trying to follow what Lois was rambling about, "What are you talking about?"

"You!" Lois fumed angrily, waving her hands in the air, "Insinuating...whatever you were trying to insinuate about Lex last night...What's with the games?"

"Games?"

"If there is something you know why not just tell me? Why give me some cryptic warning like that? What is your deal with Lex anyway? You act like you hate him for no reason. He said there was never a reason so what gives?" Lois stopped pacing and turned to face him, crossing her arms over her chest.

"You talked to Luthor?" Clark asked, worried.

Lois rolled her eyes, "Yes!" Clark hung his head in disbelief, "Lois, you shouldn't have done that."

"Shouldn't have...Clark, what is going on? This is ridiculous!" Lois fumed angrily.

"I can't tell you," Clark shook his head.

"Can't tell me *what*?" Lois fumed angrily.

"I have my...doubts...about Luthor. Just leave it at that," Clark said.

"Doubts? No, I'm not going to just leave it at that," Lois

snapped back, "You have been acting like he's the devil incarnate since you met him. There is no reason that I can think of... You never act like that about anyone... What gives?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Clark said.

"Try me!" Lois pressed.

"No!" Clark snapped.

"No? You have got to be kidding me..." Lois was on her way to full babble mode.

"Lois..." Clark was doing his best to hold in everything he wanted to say. He couldn't talk to her about this ... not while she was still involved with Luthor. It could put her at risk.

"You sit there and make your snide remarks and your little digs and then last night with your cryptic warnings but when I ask for an explanation you won't give me one. You are out of your mind!" Lois began to ramble on, "Lex has done nothing but a gentleman as long as I've known him."

"Don't push this..." Clark warned.

"He's set up charities to help the less fortunate, donated millions to help orphans, homeless, but do you care about that? No, to you he's just..."

"He's a murderer!" Clark fumed.

"*WHAT!?*" Lois was taken aback. She looked at him in disgust and backed away from him in shock.

"Everything is set?" Lex asked as he stepped into the main living area of his home.

"Yes, sir," Nigel nodded, "Fuentes is being debriefed on the 'Jack' situation. Quite remarkable that he was right under our nose for so long and didn't know it."

Lex nodded, "I don't believe in luck. Tell me something, Nigel, did we ever find any more information on the Superman identity theory we were tossing around last month?"

Nigel shook his head, "No, Superman hasn't had any major events in the last month, but he did help with a kidnapping when the illusionist was attempting to control the world with mind control and a few weeks ago he helped stop the virus that Harrington designed to take over the world."

Lex was thoughtful for a moment, "Is it just me or does it seem awfully convenient that both these instances were stories being worked on by Lois Lane?"

Nigel caught on and nodded, "Yes, it does seem he has a soft spot for her."

"Pull up everything the Daily Planet has printed on our man of steel. While I'm recuperating, we can begin our research."

"And when you discover his secret?"

"I will destroy him and everyone he holds dear," Lex smiled, happy with his plan.

Clark sighed as he watched the front door slam. Lois didn't say anything after he'd blurted out that Luthor was a murderer. She just looked at him in disgust and left. He didn't want to tell her his suspicions yet. Not without evidence. Unfortunately, that was something he'd yet to find in the past year. Lex Luthor seemed to be one step ahead of him.

Now, Lois wouldn't even look at him. He sighed, resigning himself to his fate. "This is gonna be a long week," he muttered to himself. A loud insistent knock at his door caught his attention. "Maybe not," he raced to the front door and opened it, expecting to find Lois but instead found Jack. "Jack, what are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to you," Jack said, pushing past him.

Clark sighed, closing the door behind him, "Sure, what's up?"

"You remember when I got kidnapped by those guys that I sold Superman's globe to?" Jack asked.

Clark nodded, recalling how he'd found Jack tied to a chair in a hidden warehouse below ground where he'd found his globe among many other treasures. He'd wondered if Lex Luthor was

involved given the rarity of the items he found but never saw any trace of him. He'd been relieved to find his globe and return it to its rightful place. "Yeah, Superman rescued you from that underground museum."

Jack nodded, "I know this may sound crazy..."

"Try me," Clark smirked.

Jack nodded, "Okay, well, I think Lex Luthor was one of the guys that kidnapped me a few weeks ago."

"What?" Clark wasn't sure he heard him right.

"I never saw the guy's face but I heard his voice. It was him," Jack said adamantly. "After last night I'm sure it's only a matter of time before he puts two and two together..."

Clark could see the apprehension growing in Jack's voice and tried to calm him down, "Jack, I don't think he would..." He sighed when he saw Jack giving him a skeptical look. "I'll talk to Superman and see what we can do..." He patted the young man on the shoulder. "Don't worry. You'll be fine. Denny will be fine." He noted how Jack's shoulders slumped in relief. It was Denny Jack was most afraid for.

"I can't believe I didn't put two and two together until now..." Jack fumed. "I should have known..."

"You'd never spent a lot of time with him before," Clark reminded him.

"We've got to warn Lois. She's got to know..." Jack stopped when he saw Clark shaking his head laughing. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Clark shrugged. "I've just been trying to warn Lois about Luthor for almost a year and that hasn't worked yet. Now, we have something somewhat concrete and..."

"...and you don't think she'll believe you?" Jack guessed.

"Not in this millennium," Clark said bitterly.

Lois hadn't been able to think of anything but her fight with Clark and how... betrayed she felt when Clark had spat out that vulgar accusation about Lex. Clark had earned her respect and trust over the last year they'd worked together now she felt like she didn't even know him. She'd decided to take her frustrations out at the gym. She'd tried the aerobics, weights, but nothing seemed to be helping. After putting on protective gloves she decided to work out the pent-up frustration with some kickboxing.

She glanced around at the familiar gym. Menken's gym had been renamed to "Allie's" after the corruption the previous owner had been exposed. She shuddered recalling how he'd tried to use her as bait for her father. If it hadn't been for Lex...

<< "*He's a murderer!*" >>

Clark's words rang in her ears and she pushed the thought out. No, Lex had saved her.

Clark seemed to have this unexplainable hatred toward Lex but could never explain why. She never thought he'd stoop so low as to throw out an accusation like that. "Slander," she muttered to herself. "Acting like a petulant child..." She slammed her foot against the punching bag, knocking it off its axis as she fumed angrily over her fight with Clark.

<< "*You talked to Luthor?*"

"*Yes!*" >>

She struck the punching bag once more. Why did it bother him so much that she'd talked to Lex? The look in his eyes had been filled with fear.

<< "*Lois, you shouldn't have done that.*"

"*Shouldn't have... Clark, what is going on? This is ridiculous!*" >>

She kicked the punching bag again, tears streaming down her face as the bag fell back once more. Who was he to tell her what she should or shouldn't be talking to Lex about? Why was it so wrong of her to confront him about his spat with Lex?

<< "*I can't tell you,*"

"*Can't tell me WHAT?*" >>

Of course, he couldn't tell her why he acted this way. She

suspected it was from jealousy, but if this was jealousy...he'd gone too far this time. He'd resisted her attempts to confront him at first.

She kicked the bag again.

Why was it so hard for her to drag this out of Clark?

<< "I have my...doubts...about Luthor. Just leave it at that," Clark said.

"Doubts? No, I'm not going to just leave it at that," Lois snapped back, "You have been acting like he's the devil incarnate since you met him. There is no reason that I can think of...You never act like that about anyone...What gives?">>

She felt her knees growing weak as she continued to cry and opted to get her frustrations out by punching the bag. "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you. I hate you..." She cried.

No matter how many times she said the words she knew it wasn't true. One thing was sure. How she felt about Clark Kent was anything but hate. Complicated, yes. Frustrating, yes. Definitely not hate. She cared about him. She knew that. She'd discovered how deeply after the asteroid Nightfall had threatened their lives. The fear of the unknown had forced her to take a good look at her life, but she never found the courage to act on those feelings. After Nightfall was gone she did her best to bury them deeper and found solace in work and distancing herself from him.

<< "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Clark said.

"Try me!" Lois pressed.

"No!" Clark snapped.

"No? You have got to be kidding me..." Lois was on her way to full babble mode.

"Lois...">>

He could get to her in a way no one ever could. Something about Clark just brought out this need to divulge her every thought to him. He was still the only person to know about her and Claude and he'd surprised her by keeping her confidence. She'd been worried he'd be blabbing it to everyone after the fiasco with Baines, but he hadn't. He'd earned her trust.

<< "You sit there and make your snide remarks and your little digs and then last night with your cryptic warnings but when I ask for an explanation you won't give me one. You are out of your mind!" Lois began to ramble on, "Lex has done nothing but a gentleman as long as I've known him."

"Don't push this..." Clark warned.

"He's set up charities to help the less fortunate, donated millions to help orphans, homeless, but do you care about that? No, to you he's just..."

"He's a murderer!" Clark fumed.>>

She knew she didn't know Lex very well but she thought she had a pretty good judge of character. For Clark to slander Lex like that...

She stopped hitting the punching bag and fell to her knees in tears.

Martha set a slice of pie in front of her husband, taking a seat next to him as they listened to Clark detail his fight with Lois in defeat. He looked at them in agony, "I don't know what to do."

Martha glanced at Jonathan for a moment who nodded at her, "Clark, you said she asked you what your deal was with Lex Luthor... Why didn't you just tell her everything?"

Clark shook his head, "Most of what I know is from my being Superman. Explaining that...would be too complicated. Besides, she's still dating him. I can't risk..."

"You don't seriously think she'd betray your confidence to him, do you?" Jonathan interrupted.

"No," Clark shook his head, "nothing like that. It's just...as long as she's seeing him..." His body shuddered involuntarily as he spoke, "she's at risk...telling her what I know only puts her more at risk..."

Jonathan cleared his throat, "More risk than she already is?"

Clark hung his head, "That's her choice...I can't...make her see him for who he really is...not without..."

Martha placed a hesitant hand on Clark's hand, "Without telling her you're Superman?" He nodded. She glanced at Jonathan. He seemed to recognize what she was trying to say silently and nodded. "So, what if you told her?"

"What!?" Clark asked, taken aback.

Martha sighed, "Clark, it's obvious you love her. Even if you're not ready to act on it yet...for whatever reason your father and I don't understand..."

"Because she doesn't..." Clark began but was cut off by Martha.

"You are putting her at risk every moment you don't tell her what you know. If even a fraction of what you have told us about this man is true...Do you seriously want to leave Lois with this man? He blew up a building to test you, arranged for two people to fall off thirty-foot buildings across from one another...drugged children...My God!" Martha shook her head unable to continue.

Clark nodded, realizing his mom was right, "So, you think I should tell Lois that I'm Superman?"

"If that's what it takes to get her away from Lex Luthor, yes," Jonathan chimed in.

"All my life you guys have told me never to tell anyone..." Clark mused.

"Lois is different," Jonathan said with a smile.

"She's family," Martha nodded.

Clark smiled, "I do love her..."

"We've known that since you started talking about her,"

Martha said taking a sip of her coffee. "We were wondering how long it would take you to figure it out."

Clark laughed, "I guess I just have to figure out how to tell her I've been lying to her for almost a year."

"Love is never easy," Martha added.

"In the end, it's worth it," Jonathan promised. "Worked out pretty well for me," he held Martha's hand tightly with a smile.

Monday morning at the Daily Planet Clark couldn't help but notice the cool tone Lois took with him. She was going out of her way to avoid him. He still hadn't had a chance to tell her about Fuentes being released from custody or about Superman. He needed a way to break the ice with her but right now she was going out of her way NOT to talk to him.

Jimmy and Perry walked past his desk discussing the damage to Perry's office, "Well, I guess the place needed a lift," Perry said with a sigh in defeat. His attempt to bring humor to the situation was met with forced smiles among the five of them.

A messenger came in with a large arrangement of flowers. As soon as he saw them he knew who they were for. There was no one else they would be for. Lois. It had Lex Luthor's hand writing all over it. It made him sick to his stomach to know Lois was still dating Luthor. He watched her read the card and couldn't help himself. He peeked at the card that read, 'Love, Lex,' and grimaced. He didn't notice Lois looking back at him. Did she love him? He didn't think so, but... He shook his head in disgust, trying to keep his emotions in check. That was what had gotten him in this predicament in the first place.

Cat walked in all smiles and he couldn't help but frown, recalling how she'd left them at the Planet, ignoring their pleas for help. She had been oblivious to their plight.

"Send yourself flowers again, Lois?" Cat sneered as she took a seat at her desk. Lois cast Cat a dirty look but didn't say anything. "Whew! What a weekend. I know he may not look it, but under that mild-mannered façade, George is a wild man," Clark caught Lois' gaze when she cast a sideways glance at him. What was that about?

Cat continued, "I spent most of the weekend in handcuffs. So, what did you guys do this weekend?" They all glared at her with

dirty looks. She seriously didn't know? She shrugged, "Sorry I asked."

He saw Jack in the corner of his eye and nodded to him. Jack came over to greet him. He seemed to sense the tension in the air and whispered, "If looks could kill."

Clark nodded. "Superman took Denny and his foster family out of town for now. He can fly you out to visit if needed but for now..."

Jack smiled in agreement. "Tell him I said thanks."

Clark sighed, watching Jack head back to his desk with Jimmy then glanced at Lois. She could barely look at him. Making up his mind, he decided the best way to get to talking again was to get on the same page about work. She may not want to talk to him right now but he hoped she'd listen long enough for him to tell her about Fuentes.

Lois was typing away at her computer. He didn't dare tell her he knew she was trying to avoid him. He could read the gibberish she was typing. He stood by her desk for a moment, contemplating how to begin when she jerked her head at him and snapped, "What is it? You didn't get enough slander in yesterday?"

Clark sighed, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything like that to you."

'At least not out loud...'

Lois stared at him for a moment. He watched her apprehensively, unsure if she'd forgive him or not. "I really am sorry, Lois," he continued, trying to squash his inner voice.

Her facial expression seemed to crack ever so slightly and she turned briskly, "Don't ever let it happen again."

Clark nodded, "Okay," He took a seat next to her. "I do need to talk to you... I wanted to tell you..."

He stopped when he heard a cry for help. Cursing his luck, he noticed the annoyed look on her face. "Lois, I left a... file at..." He couldn't seem to think of a place that would sound believable and she just gave him an incredulous look.

"Home?" She guessed.

"Yes!" He said backing away from her desk. "I left a file at home and I'll be right back. It's really *really* important." With that he disappeared.

Lex Luthor sifted through the articles in front of him, "Our man of steel has been quite busy this year, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Nigel nodded. "Appearances from saving Prometheus to appearing at children's schools to speak about safety... Quite a variety of appearances."

"Is it just me or does it seem like a lot of these exclusives come from the Daily Planet?" Lex pulled out the article on Nightfall recalling the coverage shown of Lois Lane kissing the man of steel goodbye. It still made his blood boil to imagine that...Lois Lane in his enemy's arms.

"Yes, it seems Ms. Lane has gotten just about every exclusive along with her partner, Clark Kent." Nigel said with an amused smile. "With one exception..."

"What is that?" Lex asked intrigued.

"This," Nigel placed the article about Superman's return after his first attempt to stop Nightfall.

"Superman Came Home. Now Where Is He?" By Lois Lane," Lex read the title with the byline.

"...and James Olsen," Nigel pointed out.

Lex laughed, "So, obviously we know the man of steel has a soft spot for the Daily Planet...and Lois Lane." His face flickered with anger at the last statement. "I want to know why...get the background on Lois Lane and start surveillance on her. Someone close to her either is our famed man of steel or is connected to him somehow. We're going to find out who."

"Yes, sir," Nigel nodded.

A knock at the door announced Asabi who stood quietly by the door, "Mr. Luthor?"

Lex looked to Asabi and smiled, "Yes, Asabi?"

"A Mr. Fuentes is here to see you,"

"Show him in," Lex nodded at Nigel, "We'll finish this later."

Nigel grabbed the files and headed out. "I'll get on this right away."

Lois fumed angrily as she watched Clark leave before her eyes. She'd spent most of the weekend crying. It had surprised her how much it had hurt to see a man she respected so much stoop so low as to slander a good man like Lex. She hadn't realized how much she cared about him until she was faced with seeing a side of him she never knew existed. She never would have thought Clark was capable of slander before.

Who did he think he was kidding? Trying to convince her Lex Luthor was some criminal? She'd spent almost a year with him, getting to know him...well, parts of him. She didn't know him as well as she'd like but she thought she knew him well enough to know whether he was a murderer.

She'd been prepared not to talk to Clark at all. When the flowers from Lex had arrived she'd cast a sideways glance at Clark. She wasn't sure why she'd done it. The look on his face was pure devastation. It hit a nerve with her when she saw that look on his face. She wasn't sure why it affected her so much.

When he'd approached her this morning she'd been determined to give him the cold shoulder, going so far as to begin typing gibberish on her computer to make it look like he was interrupting her. It wasn't like he could see her screen. Then he'd done something she hadn't expected. He'd apologized.

When it came to Lex Luthor Clark never apologized. They normally just ignored each other until they were forced to work it out by Perry and would just agree to disagree and move on. This time was different. Clark had apologized. It had surprised her. She'd seen the sincerity in his eyes and she could feel her defenses melting away when she saw how devastated he seemed to be. He seemed to be the only person that could drive her crazy in one minute and then make her want to hug him the next.

They were just getting back on track and then Clark got that look on his face that he got when she knew he was going to run away from her... *again*. She still didn't understand why he did that. He was the most wonderful person in the world one moment and the next he was gone.

Lois sighed in frustration as she glanced at the card Lex had left. Why had he signed it 'love'? She didn't think they were that serious. It was companionship, friendship... neither knew enough about one another to warrant either one falling in love. She sighed in frustration. Many women would have given anything to have Lex Luthor send flowers with a love note but not her. Why? Maybe she just needed to talk to Lex about what he meant?

She gathered her purse and headed toward the elevator. Not looking where she was going she bumped right into Jack as he was stepping onto the elevator with files in hand. "Whoah!"

Lois winced when she saw all the files fly all around. "Sorry," She knelt down to help him pick up the files that had flown all over the place.

"It's okay," Jack sighed. "Just one of those days."

She picked up the last file and caught the name 'Fuentes' on it. "Jack, why are you researching Fuentes?"

Jack shrugged. "Jimmy said Clark asked for everything on the guy. Apparently he got released less than twelve hours after he was arrested and no one can find him. Jimmy and I were told to find everything we can on Fuentes and his gang and anything relating to 'the boss,'" Jack explained.

Lois handed the file back to Jack in shock, "How did Fuentes just...I mean, there were witnesses against him...more than one... a video surveillance..." Lois stammered in shock.

Jack nodded, "That's what Clark's trying to find out." Lois' eyes widened as the wheels began to turn in her head and Jack

looked around the newsroom, "By the way where did he go?"

"Mr. Fuentes, good of you to stop by," Lex said with a smile, welcoming the man in. He smiled smugly when he noticed the brace on the man's hand where he'd broken a few fingers. "I expect Nigel has been taking care of you?"

Fuentes nodded, "It appears your kid Jack is a bit of a rabbit. He didn't go home all weekend. We tried his brother's foster home and the family's been on vacation as of Saturday afternoon."

Lex leaned back, "Well, I must say this is an interesting development. It appears we've underestimated him."

Fuentes looked at Lex nervously, "I can keep a tail on him if you'd like, but so far there has been no sign of him outside of the Planet. Unless you want me to..."

Lex shook his head, "No, nothing too direct. Jack is nothing... a nobody... making a hit on him so direct would draw too much attention. I don't need anyone asking questions. Keep on Jack but until you get an opportunity to take care of him I want you to work with Nigel on setting up surveillance on Ms. Lane."

"Surveillance?" Fuentes asked skeptically, looking at Lex disapprovingly. "On your girlfriend?"

Lex sneered, "Just do it. I'm not paying you for your judgments," Fuentes nodded and left, leaving Lex to stew over his next move. A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts.

"Lex? A call for the boss is on line three," Mrs. Cox said with a smile.

He nodded, reaching for the phone. He turned on the voice distorter and spoke, "This is the boss."

"Ms. Lane," Nigel nodded seeing Lois step on the floor of the penthouse. "Can I help you?"

Lois smiled, "Yes, I'm looking for Lex."

Nigel nodded. "Yes, right this way," He knocked three times in a pattern on Lex's door then opened it for her.

"Lois!" Lex cheered happily when he saw her. "So good to see you." He gave her a peck on the cheek.

She smiled, "Lex, hi." She brushed a stray hair behind her ear and turned away from him for a moment.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" He asked, taking her hand and kissing it.

She pulled her hand back nervously, "Lex, I got the flowers..."

"...and you wanted to thank me in person?" He asked with a smile. "I have a few meetings but I'll clear my afternoon for you..."

"No," Lois shook her head, taking her hand back from his grasp. "I wanted to talk to you about this note..." She pulled the note out of her pocket. "Did you write this?"

"Yes," He said with a smile. "I know after Friday night not to take the precious things in life for granted..."

"It just seems so... sudden..." Lois began. "I mean, I..."

"You don't feel the same way?" He asked.

"I... I don't know how I feel..." Lois said softly.

Lex looked down for a moment, but recovered quickly, "Well, maybe I jumped the gun a bit... after everything that happened this weekend I thought we'd grown closer..."

Lois frowned slightly, "I'm still ... working through everything..." She said softly.

<< "He's a murderer!" >>

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Why did she keep thinking about Clark's warning about Lex? He wouldn't hurt her...

"Maybe we can work through it together." He said softly kissing her hand.

"I think this is something I need to work through on my own."

Lois said softly. "I need some time... to think..."

Lex smiled, "You just need to get back in your routine. It's not

easy dealing with a hostage situation like that..."

<< "He's a murderer!" >>

"You don't seem to be affected by it..." Lois pointed out. "I don't know. I think I just need some space..."

"Space?" He laughed, "Lois, you can't get any more space than I've already given you... Come on, I think I've been more than understanding..." He took a step toward her.

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

She took a step back, "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing," He shook his head, pasting a charming smile on his face. Lois looked at him warily and he said, "Let me take you to dinner tonight and we'll talk,"

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Clark's warning continued to echo in her mind. There was something about it. "I..." Lois began, but was interrupted by Nigel.

"Mr. Luthor a call on line three for you. It's urgent."

Lex turned to the phone and said, "I'll see you tonight."

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

"Fine," She said curtly, unsure of what had just happened. She took a step out of his office and headed back to the Planet. How had it gone from her trying to distance herself from Lex to her having dinner with him? What had just happened?

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Clark sighed as he took his seat at his desk, looking around the newsroom for Lois. He didn't see any sign of her. He scanned the conference rooms and spotted her in there with a stack of files and Jack and Jimmy leaning over her shoulder.

File. He remembered he was supposed to be bringing a file.

He grabbed the file he had brought in from Henderson on Saturday and knocked at the door, opening it. Lois looked up, "Hey, Clark, why didn't you tell me about Fuentes?" She pointed to the stack of files on the table.

"I was going to but..." He trailed off remembering why he hadn't told her. Their fight. She seemed to recognize the expression on his face and didn't press. She looked down at the file in front of her quietly and he took a seat next to her, "So, what is all this?"

"Everything that could be remotely related to Fuentes and his gang," Jimmy pointed to one small stack to the left.

"Everything related to anyone called 'the boss' for the past five years," Jack said pointing at the several stacks of files to the right.

"Yikes," Clark muttered.

"Yeah," Lois nodded. "What's the deal with this 'boss'?"

Clark shrugged, "I don't know. Inspector Henderson said he heard some of the members of Fuentes crew talking about 'the boss' as the one that got Fuentes out. First time I've heard of him..."

"...or her," Lois smirked. "Women can be crime lords too."

"...or her," Clark nodded.

"This is some scary stuff," Jimmy said as he handed them a stack of police report. "Everything the police think is connected to 'the boss' in the last year."

Clark let out a low whistle and his jaw dropped. There had to be at least five hundred crimes on this report. He knew as Superman he couldn't save everyone but it frustrated him to no end knowing there was so much crime going on right under his nose.

"Impressive resume," Lois said taking the report from Clark. Her nose crinkled slightly and she grabbed him by the arm, "Clark!"

"What?" He asked, trying to pull his arm back from her death grip.

"Look!" She pointed to the very top of the list where the death of Dr. Baines was listed. "I knew Baines was involved in

something big...I can't believe you trusted her..."

"I never said I trusted her..." Clark tried to interject but was cut off by her continuing her tirade.

"Yeah, sure. She was *so* unprofessional...sizing you up like a piece of meat and... I mean...that was my first sign that something was off...Who did she think she was?" That statement surprised him. He glanced at her questioningly. Jack and Jimmy were wearing equally amused expressions on their face. She seemed to notice the looks and changed her tone. "It just kinda bothered me." She shrugged. "Anyway, I wonder how many stories we covered this year are on this list..."

Clark wore an amused expression as she did her best to cover up the slip of tongue. It was moments like this that gave him hope that she might be noticing him, Clark Kent as more than just her partner and friend. "I'm sure a lot of them are on there," He tried to mention casually.

Jack was looking at the list now reading off the top, "Double suicides, Carlin building bombing, Toasters destruction of Suicide Slum..."

Lois' eyes widened. "Do you know what this means?"

Clark smiled, knowing full well what was coming next. Jack shrugged, "No, what?"

"Pulitzer!" Lois cheered happily. She shoved a stack in Clark's arms, "Let's get digging."

Later that evening Lois and Clark were among the last in the office as they finished up the research on everything they knew about 'the boss'. Clark was relieved it had been fairly quiet this afternoon. He didn't want to have to make up another excuse to leave ... Again. He knew he needed to tell her but right now he just couldn't figure out HOW.

Lois rolled her neck, trying to work the kinks out of it as she stared at the file in front of her. "Here, let me," Clark offered. She nodded and leaned back against him as he gently massaged her neck muscles. He gave a quick blast of heat vision to the area his hands were massaging to relieve some of the tension and she groaned in approval. He bit his lower lip as she leaned up against him.

"That feels great," Lois sighed as he worked on the knots in her shoulder. She was really tense. He wasn't surprised. They'd been working in here most of the day. He glanced at the files on the table that they had sorted through. They had made some progress in sorting the list of crimes that were associated with the stories they had covered and categorized them by importance. They had begun a map on the wall to keep track of who was connected to who. Mostly small time criminals seemed to be in the system but everyone knew not to name names.

Lois leaned back against him, staring at the wall for a moment as he continued to massage her shoulders. He caught her gaze and frowned, "Depressing, isn't it?"

Lois nodded, "Yeah, I just don't get how we missed...this much."

Clark sighed, "Me neither. I wish we had more than *...this...*" He gestured to the poorly formed map on the board. "There are still way too many holes."

"Who do you think is behind all this?" Lois wondered aloud. He knew better than to say what he thought. After this weekend, he didn't dare breathe a word of what he suspected until after he told her about Superman. Lois cast a glance at him and sighed, "Oh, I forgot. You think Lex is a murderer so it's not a giant leap to think HE is the boss."

Clark sighed when she pulled away from him, "I didn't say anything."

"But you're thinking it," Lois snapped.

"I am not," Clark argued.

'Liar,' His conscience chided him.

"Oh, really?" Lois challenged. "I think your face disagrees."

She pointed at him.

He sighed. How was it she could tell when he was lying as Clark but couldn't figure out he was Superman? He didn't dare say anything else for fear they'd end up in another fight.

"I don't know why I even bother," she muttered under her breath, unaware that he could hear her.

He let out a long sigh, and stood up. "I think I'm gonna call it a night."

Lois nodded, "Of course, run off like you always do when we're having a discussion..."

Clark gave her a sideways glance, "I am *not* always running off..."

"Oh, really?" She challenged, standing to her feet to confront him. "Every time I turn around you are running off...to a...a... barber...or dentist...or ...or sometimes you don't even give an excuse!" She jabbed him in the chest repeatedly. "Always when we're having an important discussion...you disappear..."

"It is not like that..." He began. This was it. She had laid the perfect groundwork for him to tell her. He just had to...

"What the hell is wrong with you anyway? Throwing accusations like that? That is so low..."

"Wrong with *me*?" He couldn't believe she'd just said that. Look at who *she* was dating. He did his best to control his temper. He didn't want to end up in another fight, but if she kept pushing him... "I..I thought we weren't going to talk about this."

"Well, I changed my mind!" She crossed her arms over her chest. "I am just so...sick and tired of the digs and the ...jealous tantrums I could scream..."

"*Jealous!*?" He scoffed. She thought his accusations against Luthor came from jealousy? It wasn't a far cry from the truth but that had nothing to do with...

"Are you denying it?" She challenged.

He was about to open his mouth to argue but thought better of it. Anything he said would just make her angrier. Truth be told he couldn't deny he was jealous. He was jealous of Superman. He was threatened by Luthor. She never looked at Luthor the way she looked at Superman but he'd give anything for her to look at him, Clark Kent the way she looked at his alter-ego. He'd never know if she would after he told her.

He wanted to tell her. He needed to tell her so he could warn her but here in the middle of the office...even if everyone had left...it wasn't exactly the right place.

"See? You're not even denying it!" Lois snapped jabbing her finger in his chest once more.

Without thinking he threw caution to the wind and leaned in to kiss her, really kiss her...just like he had as Superman before stopping Nightfall...and at the airport after dealing with the pheromone fiasco. Almost a year of frustration fueled the hunger behind this kiss. Every other time he'd kissed her as Clark he'd had his guard up, not wanting to reveal how much he cared...how much he wanted her...afraid of scaring her off. This...this was different.

Outside the conference room, Perry White was busy gathering his things before heading out for the evening. It had been a long day. Machinery had broken down on the printing press and they'd had to negotiate getting the part sent same day with Accounting. The guys just didn't seem to understand why it mattered if the printing press was down for the afternoon. Luckily he'd gotten the board to pull their weight on the issue and force the Accounting department's hand.

Now, here it was nearly nine o'clock and everyone had gone for the day. Well, everyone but Lois and Clark. He was mildly surprised to see them standing in the conference room. They didn't normally work this late but it looked like they were working on something big. It didn't surprise him to see them arguing. Lois was jabbing Kent in the chest as she fumed at him angrily and he

stood there with his arms across his chest just taking it.

What did surprise him was what happened next. His eyebrows rose when he saw Clark grab Lois and kiss her. He thought for sure she was going to fight him off but she didn't. Instead she seemed to be kissing him back. It didn't take a rocket scientist to realize there were feelings festering between the duo. They were like gasoline and fire at times which made for some pretty big fights between the two of them, but it also made for some great stories...and from the looks of things...a blossoming romance.

"Good for you, son," Perry smiled as he stepped on the elevator. "Fight for her."

He knew Lois had gone on a few dates with Lex but after spending the evening with the man...he began to realize the 'golden child' of Metropolis wasn't all he seemed to be. There was definitely a lack of spark between him and Lois. There also seemed to be something superficial with Lex Luthor that didn't jive right with his reporter's instinct. It was something that guy Fuentes had said that perked his interest.

<<"From what I've heard, I'd be better off out there with the cops on my tail than you, Mr. Luthor.">>

Maybe one day they'd figure out what that meant. It was late. He smiled to himself as he stepped off the elevator, giving a quiet yodel to himself. Things would definitely be different around the Planet. That was for sure.

At first Lois seemed too shocked to respond but then something changed. To Clark's surprise and delight she kissed him back. He groaned inwardly as he deepened the kiss, cupping her face with both hands as he continued the kiss. The spark he felt when he'd kissed her. He didn't care how much she tried to deny it. He knew she felt the same way about him as he did her. She just would never admit it to herself...until now. Every fear he'd had about their very complicated relationship seemed to subside and he let out a soft moan as her hand moved to the back of his neck, running her fingers through his hair.

'You have to tell her...' His conscience chided him, reminding him of the dilemma at hand.

He slowly broke off the kiss, moving his hand to wrap around her wrist that rested on his shoulder. She had a slightly dazed expression on her face. He smiled to himself. It was obvious she'd felt that spark too. She seemed to break out of her reverie and he was afraid she was going to lash out at him for kissing her but instead he saw an emotion he hadn't expected. Fear.

"I have to go..." She mumbled incoherently, pulling away from him and running out the door, leaving him to stare after her numbly in shock as she hurriedly grabbed her purse from her desk and ran up the ramp to the elevator.

Unnoticed by Lois, Perry, or Clark was Fuentes in a disguise. He had the cleaning equipment with him as he made his way through the newsroom. He'd spotted the steamy kiss between Lois and Clark as he placed a camera at the window. As long as the blinds to the conference room were open then the camera would pick them up.

Confident that they wouldn't notice him he continued to move throughout the newsroom and place cameras on Lois Lane's desk and computer. He added a recorder to her phone then headed for the elevator. He discreetly placed a micro camera above the call button for the elevator as he pretended to be cleaning and pressed the call button to leave.

He was surprised when Lois Lane stepped on the elevator with him. He was sure she would recognize him, but she didn't. She seemed flustered. Looking straight ahead at the elevator doors until they opened on the Lobby floor and he slipped a camera on the wall of the elevator before leaving.

She offered to hold the doors for him to roll the cleaning cart out with him. He smiled to himself. It was amazing how little she

paid attention to him.

Lois approached her apartment building and was surprised to find a limo sitting outside waiting. The wheels began to turn in her head and she realized she'd completely forgotten about her dinner date with Lex. He stepped out of the limo as she approached, "Lois, darling."

Lois felt her insides cringe for a moment, cursing her luck. "Lex, hi." She pushed a stray hair behind her ear, "I'm sorry, I completely forgot about dinner."

"Not a problem," Lex smiled back, guiding her toward the limo, "I had them hold the reservation..."

The last thing she wanted to do was go to dinner with Lex. "Lex, I'm really not in the mood right now."

"Very well," His tone was sharp and she turned to look at him. There was a flash of something in his eyes. She just couldn't place it. "Tomorrow then?"

Would she feel like spending the evening with Lex tomorrow? No, she really didn't see this as something she'd work out in her head in less than twenty-four hours. She hadn't really wanted to have dinner with him tonight but somehow she'd gotten talked into...

<<"Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

"Lex, I really..."

"Something wrong?" He asked, placing a hand on her shoulder.

She let out a long breath. What wasn't wrong? "I appreciate you waiting for me and I'm sorry I forgot about dinner..."

She was flattered by the attention but right now she wanted to get as far away from him as possible so she could figure things out. Clark had kissed her...not as a ruse...but really kissed her... She wasn't sure how she felt about that, but she knew she'd felt something...something big...something *more*...More than she'd ever felt with Lex...More than she'd ever felt with Claude...

"But?" Lex prodded. "What's wrong, Lois?"

<<"Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

"I...I..." She began shakily, "I can't do this anymore...I told you this morning...I just need some space...I need to figure out some ...things..."

Lex's face fell slightly but he recovered quickly, "Space?" He looked around on the street, "Are you seriously breaking up with me in front of..."

Lois sighed, "I know it's not the best place or time, but I really just...can't deal with this right now..." She backed away from him.

"Can't deal with what?" He demanded, confused. There was a flash of something she didn't recognize on his face. A darkness she'd never seen before. It frightened her.

<<"From what I've heard, I'd be better off out there with the cops on my tail than you, Mr. Luthor.">>

<<"Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

She was a bit taken aback by his abrasiveness and took a step toward her apartment. "I can't deal with ...this...whatever it is...It just isn't ...I can't do this anymore..." She said carefully.

He took a step toward her, "No, you are obviously just confused about something. Let me take you to dinner and we'll..."

Lois pushed him away angrily, "No!" He reached out to grab her arm and she glared at him, "Let go of my arm..."

<<"From what I've heard, I'd be better off out there with the cops on my tail than you, Mr. Luthor.">>

<<"Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

"No, no," Lex looked around at the bystanders on the street and seemed to regain control of his emotions and he let go of her arm. She watched him uneasily. She'd never seen this side of him before. "You said you need space and I'll respect that."

Lois shook her head shakily. Something was seriously wrong. She knew what she'd seen and it scared her. "No, I don't need any

space anymore... I think we just shouldn't see each other anymore..." Before he could respond she raced up the stairs.

<< "From what I've heard, I'd be better off out there with the cops on my tail than you, Mr. Luthor." >>

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Lex slipped back into his limo, "Were you able to set the cameras up?"

Asabi smiled back from the driver's seat, "Yes, Mr. Fuentes has them placed in her apartment and at the Daily Planet."

Lex nodded, "Good. I want to review what happened tonight at the Planet. There is no way she came to this realization about needing...space...on her own."

Asabi nodded, "Yes, sir."

Lois slammed the door to her apartment closed and let out a shaky breath. She was home. She looked around at the familiar surroundings and headed for the bedroom to change out of her work clothes. She turned on the shower and stepped in, closing the door behind her. The water beat on her back as she leaned back against the hot water.

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Lois winced as she felt the tight muscles in her neck begin to relax against the hot water. What had gotten into Lex tonight? He'd actually tried to grab her... Would he have tried to force her to stay with him if they hadn't been in public?

<< "Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do." >>

Suddenly Clark's warning didn't seem that insulting. She massaged the shampoo into her hair, recalling the little conversations she'd had with Clark over the past year that hinted at his feelings for her. She'd suspected, but he'd never acted on them until now. Her lips were still tingling from that kiss.

The way he'd kissed her. It reminded her of that kiss she'd shared with Superman at the airport after he'd been sprayed by the pheromones... and the kiss she'd given Superman before he left to stop the Nightfall asteroid. There was a hunger... and desire behind it that she never suspected existed. The way he'd kissed her...

<< "But that would have to mean that I found you... Clark, you were sprayed. How come you didn't fall for me?"

"I guess I'm just not attracted to you, Lois."

"Liar! You are so attracted to me." >>

Why hadn't he been affected by the pheromones? He'd been sprayed. It would have been the perfect opportunity... She was grateful he hadn't been affected, but it didn't make sense. Knowing what she knew now...

<< "Your problem, Lois, is that you can't admit your true feelings." >>

"What a hypocrite!"

She thought to herself. He'd been trying to guilt her into admitting she was attracted to him when he was obviously unable to admit how he felt.

"Until now..."

That kiss. There had been so much intensity behind it... almost like he was kissing her as if his life depended on it.

<< "Have you ever lived with anyone... I mean, full time... with the opposite sex?"

"No, not full time."

"Me neither. What do you think it's like?"

"Scary at first."

"Compromises."

"Forced intimacy."

"Sharing responsibilities."

"Never alone."

"Never alone." >>

Lois shuddered involuntarily recalling the conversation they'd shared at the LEXOR during their undercover assignment. She'd been desperate to clear the air somewhat after he'd kiss her to

cover up the surveillance equipment when the maid had walked in. That kiss had surprised her too, but it hadn't nearly been as intense as the one they'd shared tonight.

<< "I am just so... sick and tired of the digs and the ...jealous tantrums I could scream..."

"Jealous???"

"Are you denying it?" She challenged. When he didn't say anything she continued, "See? You're not even denying it!"

Then he surprised her by leaning in to kiss her; softly at first then with more intensity. To her surprise, she began to respond. >>

Why had she kissed him back? Sure, there was a part of her that was attracted to him. He was an attractive man. Anyone with a heartbeat could tell that.

<< "I said nine. I thought you'd be ...naked...um, ready." >>

She blushed when she recalled seeing him in nothing but a towel when she'd picked him up from the Apollo during their first assignment. That had been a surprise. If she hadn't seen it for herself she never would have suspected small town, farm boy Clark Kent was built like...

"Superman," she muttered to herself.

Where had that come from?

<< "This will work."

"That's a relief. Why are you so sure?"

"Because it has to."

"Power of positive thinking, huh?" >>

Clark was definitely well-defined like him. He even had his positive attitude. It was a characteristic that annoyed her to no end with Clark, but with Superman it was endearing.

<< "I'll be back, Lois. We'll go flying."

"I hope so."

"Count on it. I've got to go."

"Good luck," Then on impulse she'd grabbed him and kissed him. That kiss had been intense. That was the kiss that had given her a glimmer of hope that there may be hope for her and Superman. >>

Was she seriously comparing Clark to Superman? Aggravated, she jerked the knob to the water off and grabbed her towel to dry off.

Tonight had scared her. When Clark had kissed her she didn't know how to react. She'd been shocked at first then before she knew what was happening she began to kiss him back. The memory of his lips on hers sent a shiver down her spine.

She stepped out of the shower and wrapped her towel around her as she headed toward the bedroom to get ready for bed. She opened the drawer to where her nightgowns were and grabbed a tank top and shorts and put them on.

<< "Oh, I get it. You're jealous."

"Jealous? Are you out of your mind?" >>

She recalled the inner voice that told her differently when she'd seen Clark kiss Toni Taylor as a distraction for her to get out of there. When she was finally alone she'd admitted to herself that she was jealous. She hadn't had time to think too much about that feeling because Lex had shown up.

<< "Lex, what were you doing at the Metro Club?"

"Meeting with the new leader of the Metro gang. She called me. According to her, we have similar interests in the Riverview district."

"I find that hard to believe."

"So, do I. She talks a good line: slum clearance, uplifting the neighborhood, micromanagement, growth and prosperity."

"And you believe her?"

"Not for a minute. In fact, I think the whole thing was designed to get me to slow down my own plans for reviving the area. She even suggested a partnership of sorts."

"And what are you doing here?"

"I came to warn you. I think Toni's hiding something."

"What?"

"I wish I knew. I only know that if I were a smart reporter looking for answers, I wouldn't bother to look any further for the source of all the problems in Riverview than Toni Taylor."

"Thanks for the tip. I guess I owe you one."

"Don't think I won't try to collect.">>

Her eyes shot wide open for a moment as the wheels in her head began to turn. Why had Lex told her to only look at Toni Taylor?

<<"He's a murderer!">>

Clark's words echoed through her mind and she shook her head. No, Lex was a lot of things but there was no way he...

"The boss is linked to the Toasters..."

"Now, I'm sounding like Clark..." she muttered to herself. There was no way Lex could have known who Toni was working with. Obviously he'd just been duped.

"Or had he?"

<<"Be careful with Lex. You don't know him like I do.">>

That warning from Clark was so cryptic. She didn't understand any of this. She knew she cared about him...more than she'd been willing to admit to herself. It was obvious he cared about her. If that kiss had proven anything tonight it was just how much he cared.

<<"Clark, whether or not that memory of yours comes back, I just want you to know I think you're terrific."

"Likewise."

"I mean, I love you....like a brother.">>

She had been quick to recover. Trying to cover up the feelings that began to make their way to the forefront of her mind before she was forced to deal with them...Clark hadn't seemed to notice...or had he?

<<"I write as well as you do. I'm vastly more fun at parties, but you are the star here...Chief's favorite...in on all the action. Oh, and when you get into trouble look who's hanging around to come to the rescue? Not only a cute guy...but a GOD in a CAPE!!!"

"But I..."

"No, no, no, you asked; I'm answering. You've got something the rest of us just don't have Lois.">>

Cat was right. Clark and Superman had been there for her when her life had been threatened. She'd never thought of Clark as being the person she'd turn to when her life was in danger but she'd felt safe with him. After he'd stopped that Mr. Makeup from choking her he'd been overprotective and trying his best to keep her safe. He was there when she needed him.

<<"Lois! You don't sneak up on somebody at a time like this."

"A time like what?"

"Somebody just tried to kill you!"

"Yes, you!">>

<<"Maybe I'd better stay with you tonight."

"Nice try, Kent."

"Somebody just tried to take a shot at you!">>

<<"The only danger to me out there was caused by guess who?"

"Someone who saved your life today."

"That was earlier."

"But I did save it. You admit that.">>

"So what you're saying is that you saved my life twice today?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the odds against that?">>

<<"He tried to kill me..."

"I'll find him..."

"No...Please don't leave me..."

"I won't. I'm here. I'm right here.">>

Lois shuddered involuntarily recalling just how scared she had been when Clark had found her that morning. She recalled how her first reaction that evening after being threatened by Barbara

Trevino was to find Clark. That had surprised her. She wasn't normally an emotional person. She didn't scare easily. When an immediate threat was in her life she'd either handle it herself or ... call Superman. Though recently she found herself turning to Clark more and more...What did that mean?

<<"Clark, I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but..."

"What?"

"I guess I'd just feel better if I could..."

"Stay here tonight?"

"Yeah...">>

<<"Your problem, Lois, is that you can't admit your true feelings.">>

A knock at the door broke her from her reverie. She glanced at the clock. Who could that be?

She grabbed a robe and reached for the door, "Clark, what are you doing here?"

Clark knew he should just leave it alone. He knew he probably was just borrowing trouble right now but he just couldn't help himself. He couldn't just leave things like this. He'd seen Lois outside her apartment with Luthor. He couldn't help himself. He had to hear what she had said.

<<"I can't deal with ...this...whatever it is...It just isn't ...I can't do this anymore...">>

<<"No, I don't need any space anymore...I think we just shouldn't see each other anymore...">>

Space. She had asked Luthor for space. He smiled to himself. Even if she pulled away from him after this it would be worth it. She may never forgive him, but he was willing to take that chance as long as it guaranteed that Luthor was no longer a fixture in Lois' life. It seemed Luthor didn't take it well but Lois was quick to nip it in the bud and tell him to let go of her arm rather loudly for the bystanders to hear. He'd been ready to step in if Luthor were to try anything but thankfully he had been too stunned to do anything.

Now here he was standing outside her apartment door, trying to get the nerve to knock.

'Here goes nothing,' He lifted his hand up to knock on Lois' door.

He heard her rustling inside the apartment before answering the door, "Clark, what are you doing here?"

"We need to talk..." He said stepping inside as she opened the door for him to enter.

She was quiet for a moment, "Oh, now you want to talk," she said softly as she closed the door.

He winced, "I shouldn't have done that."

She crossed her arms over her chest, circling him, "Then, why did you?"

He twisted his mouth slightly, unsure of how to answer, "I think you know the answer to that," he said catching her gaze.

Lois caught his gaze and turned away, "What did you want to talk about?"

How in the world did he even begin to tell her what he wanted to tell her?

'Hey Lois you know that guy you've been obsessed with for the last year? That's me. The guy you can't even give the time of day to,'

'Yeah right,' He thought to himself.

Baby steps...

She was doing everything she could do avoid his gaze. He knew she'd been just as affected by their kiss as he had. Maybe there was a chance? She was in love with his alter-ego. It had torn him up for almost a year...watching her ignore him while swooning over Superman. If he did this there was no going back. He would never know if she would ever have just loved him... Clark Kent.

<<"What do you mean, 'he?' Clark, you speak as if

Superman were someone else. You are Superman, Clark."

"I guess I feel like I'm losing myself to the man in the red, yellow and blue suit."

"It's the man beneath the suit that we care about." ">>

<<"Clark, it's obvious you love her. Even if you're not ready to act on it yet...for whatever reason your father and I don't understand..."

"Because she doesn't..."

"You are putting her at risk every moment you don't tell her what you know. If even a fraction of what you have told us about this man is true...Do you seriously want to leave Lois with this man?" ">>

"I wanted to talk to you about...us," he said softly taking a step toward her.

"Us?" Lois shook her head. "Look, just because I was too shocked to react earlier doesn't mean..."

"You didn't seem in shock to me," he smirked.

Lois glared at him. "You took me by surprise."

He took another step toward her, "You kissed me back."

"I was...curious..." She said hurriedly, not looking up at him.

"Curious?" He echoed. "About what?"

"Clark, don't..." She said softly. He could tell she was scared. Not of him, persé but the situation. Over the past year he'd learned that no matter how fearless Lois Lane was in her professional life...when it came to her personal life she was terrified of a relationship...of getting her heart broken. "...don't make me say it."

He had to take this slow. The last thing he wanted to do was scare her off. Right now she seemed like she was teetering on the edge. "Okay," he said softly. "I want you to have dinner with me."

Lois glanced at him with an amused expression, "It's a bit late for dinner don't you think?"

"No, I mean, yes, it's late for dinner tonight, but..." He ran a hand through his hair, unsure of how to continue. "I want you to go out with me."

Lois let out a sharp breath, "You're asking me out?" She sighed, seeming to mull it over. He lowered his head for a moment, unsure of what her reaction was going to be. She seemed to sense his nervousness and placed a hand on his cheek, "Like a date?"

"Yes," He whispered, meeting her gaze. She was nervous. He could hear her heart pounding in her chest.

"Clark, this is..."

He cut her off, pushing ever so slightly, "Lois, I know what you're going to say. You probably have a list a mile long about why not to, but just hear me out...I'm crazy about you. If this evening proved anything...I think maybe you feel the same way." She didn't say anything. He moved to cup her cheek. "I'm not Claude and I'm not Paul. I would never betray you like that. All I'm asking for is a chance."

"Clark, we work together...everyday...We're *partners*! What if it doesn't work out and..." Her voice grew shaky.

His thumb moved to trace her jaw line and he felt her defenses coming down, "What if it does?"

"Just dinner?" She asked.

"Just dinner," he repeated.

"And if it doesn't work out?" She prompted.

"We'll always be friends," he promised.

Her defenses seemed to have fallen completely as she mullied it over, "I don't think I could handle us not being friends..."

"I couldn't either, Lois, you mean too much to me," He wanted so badly to kiss her again but he was afraid of pushing too much. "I..."

She cut him off as she leaned up to kiss him and whispered, "Okay," as she slowly broke off the kiss.

He let out a sigh of relief, smiling broadly at her. He rested his head against hers. "Tomorrow night?"

She nodded, "That's fine."

Lex stared at the security system hidden in his office angrily. He hit the rewind button and hit play again, watching the scene unfold once more. One moment Lois was jabbing Kent in the chest and appeared to be yelling at him and the next moment he leaned in and kissed her. Not, a soft peck...No...

Lex threw the remote angrily. "How dare he? He had the nerve to..."

After learning of Lois' past he'd gone out of his way to take things slow with her physically...show her he could be a gentleman. It appeared Kent thought he had a right to...

"No wonder she was so traumatized," he mused as a calm began to fall over him as he watched Lois push away from Kent and run out of the conference room. It appeared she didn't appreciate the gesture. Kent seemed to be shocked when she left. Lex smiled to himself. There was no way Lois Lane would ever seriously entertain the idea of anything serious or romantic with that hack. He was beneath her. It appeared to have shaken her quite a bit. She said she needed space but right now he wasn't willing to give her too much space.

Lois sighed, leaning against the door frame of her apartment, closing the door after Clark. She glanced at the clock and sighed. It was times like this she wished Lucy was still living in Metropolis with her. She missed being able to talk to her about anything at any time of night. It was ten o'clock in Metropolis which meant it was only seven in California. Maybe she could catch Lucy before she got too far into study mode.

She reached for the phone and dialed her sister's number, listening as the phone began to ring, playing a techno tune in the background. She would never understand her sister's fascination with those ringback tones. It was just annoying. Maybe someone doesn't like the song? Ever think of that?

"Hello?" Lucy answered the phone.

"Lucy, you're up!" Lois sighed in relief when her sister answered the phone.

"Yes, that's why I answered the phone, Lois," Lucy teased. "What's up?"

"So, how's California?" Lois asked, not wanting to get into what she was calling about just yet. It had been awhile since they'd been able to catch up.

"It's good. I've been trying to work odd end jobs..." Lucy began.

"I thought you were working with dad?" Lois asked.

Lucy sighed, "Lois, I don't know why I thought this was going to be worth it. After that fiasco with Menken I thought maybe daddy had changed...He seemed willing to try...Now, it's nothing but work...again."

"I'm sorry, Luce," Lois said softly. Images of the fights she'd had with her dad over the years came rushing back. She hated the fact that her sister had to figure out the hard way just how much Dr. Sam Lane didn't prioritize his family over his work, but maybe Lucy would move back...She missed her. She worried about her taking a semester off from school to work on her relationship with their dad.

"It's fine," Lucy sighed. "I met a few friends and I'm just going to make the most of this time off. I may come back to Metropolis in a few months..."

"Really?" Lois asked happily.

"Don't sound so excited, sis," Lucy laughed. "You miss me?"

"You know I do, Luce, it's just not the same without you here."

"I miss you too, sis," Lucy said with a sigh, "So, how are things? Planet still keeping you busy?"

"Yeah," Lois nodded. "It's been a crazy few months."

"You still seeing Lex Luthor?" Lucy teased.

Lois sighed, "Well..."

"Ah," Lucy nodded. "What happened?"

"I'm taking a bit of a ...break from Lex." Lois said slowly.

"Thank God!" Lucy said in relief.

"Lucy!" Lois laughed. "You were the one that was pushing me to date him."

"That was when you didn't have any other suitors." Lucy corrected "I was trying to make sure you didn't end up an old maid...but Lex just didn't seem to fit with you very well...Plus, didn't you think it odd that he never asked about your family or cared to..."

"Lex, is a busy man..." Lois began to argue.

"Lois, he was dating you...pursuing you...I never met the guy once when I was in Metropolis. You were going out for almost a year and you still didn't know much about the guy. Don't you find that a bit odd?"

"Well, I..."

"I mean, I know more about Clark than I do about Lex..." Lucy continued. "Anyway, you can do better. You've got prospects..."

"What prospects do you think I have?" Lois asked dryly.

"Uh, what about Clark? He's pretty cute. I think he likes you..."

"Lucy..." Lois could feel the blush creeping on her cheeks.

"Come on, Lois..." Lucy said. "It's been three years since Claude..."

"I know, that's actually what I wanted..."

"Have you *seen* the way he looks at you? I mean, I would kill to have a guy look at me like that..."

"Like what?" Lois asked.

"Like you're the only person in the room...like...like you're the only person in the world...like..."

"Okay, I get it!" Lois said, knowing just where her sister's mind was going. "Clark is who I wanted to talk to you about."

"Really?" Lucy asked intrigued. "Keep talking..."

"He kissed me," Lois said softly.

"Oh, my God! Define kissed you..." Lucy pressed.

"Kissed me...kissed me...like..."

"Kissed you like, 'make your knees weak' kissed you?" Lucy asked with intrigue.

"More like 'make my toes curl' kiss," Lois corrected with a shaky breath.

"Wow," Lucy said with a sigh. "So, he kissed you...then what happened?"

"Before I knew what had happened I kissed him back...then he broke off the kiss and ...I ran," Lois admitted shyly.

"Of course you did," Lucy sighed, "Lois, you have got to stop running from real relationships..."

"I know," Lois admitted, "Anyway, I have been mulling it over for the last hour trying to figure out what to do next then next thing I know Clark showed up here and..."

Lucy squealed in laughed, "Are you serious? Please tell me you let him in..."

"Yes, I let him in..." Lois sighed, recalling how terrified she'd been. Part of her wanted to just slam the door in his face, but another part...the part that had been curious and kissed him back...wanted him to stay.

"And?" Lucy prompted in a sing-song voice. "Lois?"

Lois sighed, "And he asked me out..."

"On a date?" Lucy squealed in excitement, "You said yes right?"

Lois sighed, "Yes, eventually."

"Eventually?" Lucy echoed. "Lois you have a hot guy that is also your best friend and wants to date you. There is no eventually."

"No, see, there is an eventually...because I..."

"Three years, Lois," Lucy reminded her. "It's been three

years."

"He hurt me," Lois said softly as a tear rolled down her cheek.

"He's not Claude," Lucy reminded her.

"I know that," Lois said softly. "It's scary," She sniffed, wiping her cheek as the tears began to fall slowly.

"I know, but you can't hide forever." Lucy reminded her.

"Besides, do you really want to turn into mom?"

"God, no!" Lois admonished. Their mother had been alone and miserable since their parents' divorce. She was bitter and angry and let everyone around her know it.

"So, go on a date with Clark...let him kiss you senseless and ...let him *in*!" Lucy said emphatically. "He may not be Superman but he is a nice guy and he does care about you."

"So what am I supposed to do with these feelings I still have for Superman? How can I have feelings for..."

"I don't think you have feelings for Superman," Lucy argued.

"You don't?" Lois asked.

"No, you have a...celebrity crush...an infatuation...or whatever...but there's no way you could have real feelings for him. You don't even know him..."

"I know enough..." Lois sniffed.

"Right?" Lucy asked, "What's his name?"

"Superman," Lois said.

"Not the name you named him, Lois, but his real name. You gave him the name Superman, remember? You are afraid of being hurt so you throw yourself into relationships with unattainable men. If Superman were to walk up to you right now and declare his love for you you would run for the hills..." Lucy continued.

"That is not..." Lois stopped, realizing a little bit of truth that was behind Lucy's words.

"Fine. Stay in denial all you want," Lucy continued. "So, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to go out with Clark tomorrow night," Lois said softly.

"And?"

Lois smiled, "And you're going to come back home to Metropolis because I miss you."

"I miss you too, sis," Lucy admitted. "Maybe I could come in for a week or two? Make sure you don't talk yourself out of a healthy relationship..."

"Look who's talking..." Lois admonished.

"At least I'm not afraid to let people in. I may get my heart broken but I'm not afraid to try," Lucy corrected. "Take a chance, Lois, please."

"Okay," Lois said softly as a tear ran down her cheek.

Clark sighed, resting his head against the soft pillow of his bed as he willed sleep to come. After Lois had left the Planet he decided to do his patrol around Metropolis. It had been fairly quiet. He'd stopped by Jack's to check in on him. After taking him to visit Denny for a few minutes he'd brought him back and then headed toward Lois' apartment to talk to her. He'd watched as Luthor drove away with a smirk. It felt good to know that him kissing Lois had affected her so much. He never wanted to push her for more than friendship until she was ready but with Luthor in her life he'd been afraid of what could happen. He could live with her loving only Superman if it meant keeping Lex Luthor away from Lois.

Tonight, he'd been ready to tell her everything then when he'd seen the look in her eyes...fear...he'd chickened out. He didn't want to push things with her. He had made his decision he would tell her...but not when she was still so emotional. He'd take her to dinner then afterward he would tell her he was Superman...then he'd beg for forgiveness and tell her everything about Luthor. He couldn't seem to wipe the smile off his face. She'd kissed him back...and she'd agreed to go out with him. That had to mean something. Could she possibly...

He cringed inwardly as he imagined the worst case scenarios of what would happen when he told her everything. Would she hate him? Would she be able to forgive him for lying to her for almost a year? Everything was finally falling into place but...

'You can't have a relationship with her without telling her,' he reminded himself.

Part of him had been tempted not to tell her yet...to wait. She was no longer seeing Luthor so what was the harm? Of course, another part of him...the part that sounded a lot like his mom told him otherwise.

<< *"All my life you guys have told me never to tell anyone..."*

"Lois is different."

"She's family." >>

Family. That was what his mom had called Lois. He prayed one day she would be...if she didn't pull away from him after he told her the truth...

<< *"Clark, we work together...everyday...We're partners! What if it doesn't work out and..."*

"What if it does?"

"Just dinner?"

"Just dinner,"

"And if it doesn't work out?"

"We'll always be friends." >>

He silently prayed he would be able to keep that promise as he drifted into a fitful sleep.

The next day Perry had decided to go over budget cuts that were being made at the Planet. After the fiasco with Carpenter the Planet was still recovering. Perry had moved everything they'd had on 'the boss' to the smaller conference room as he went over the latest orders from Accounting. "No more paid lunches... special requests for anything over fifty dollars has to come with manager approval," Perry continued.

Clark sighed, shaking his head. He knew it was only a matter of time before the Planet bounced back but it was frustrating having to deal with budget cuts like this. It meant if they paid for lunch for a source it'd be coming out of their own pocket.

He glanced next to him and smiled when he caught Lois' gaze. She had come in an hour later than normal this morning. He hadn't had a chance to talk to her before the meeting. He noticed it looked like she'd gotten her nails done. He'd also noticed her casting hidden glances at him during the meeting.

He did his best to avoid being too conspicuous. The last thing he needed right now was for him to give the Planet gossip hounds something to run their mouth about. For now at least he wanted to keep things quiet...let things progress naturally without everyone sticking their nose in where it didn't belong. He didn't think Lois would appreciate being the subject of the Planet gossip either... especially after what happened with Claude.

He noticed a notepad shoved in his lap from underneath the table and held in a chuckle when he read it.

//Stop looking at your lap. You're going to make people start to talk.//

He caught her gaze and smirked for a moment then took a pen and responded.

//Can't help it. Keep thinking about last night.//

He watched the slow smile form across her face and watched as she scribbled something else on the notepad.

//Me too.//

He caught her gaze and smiled back. She seemed to be thinking of something else to write when Perry interrupted their private conversation, "Lois, Clark, that 'boss' stuff you two were working on yesterday...How far did you get?"

Lois sighed, "Um, not as far as we'd like..."

"...there's still a lot of...holes..." he added.

"But we're definitely onto something big..." they both said in unison.

Perry eyed them critically for a moment then nodded. Did he know? Clark held in a sigh. Of course he knew. He was Perry White. Nothing went on in the newsroom without Perry being wise to it. Perry let out a low drawl, "Uh-huh, well, I want to see what you've got. If you have enough for print maybe we can get something in the afternoon edition?"

Lois shook her head, "It's still a bit too sketchy for print..." Clark nodded his agreement.

Perry nodded, "Okay, well stay on it. I'll see you two after this meeting."

They nodded their agreement. Perry turned to the chart behind him and continued. He let out a sigh in relief and then felt the notepad land on his lap once more. He glanced at Lois who looked away, trying to give the pretense of paying attention to Perry's speech.

//Where are we going for dinner? What do I need to wear?//

He fought the urge to laugh, opting for a smirk instead and responded, handing the notepad back to her.

//It's a surprise. Wear whatever you want. You look gorgeous in anything.//

He saw the blush on her cheeks and smiled to himself. She scribbled something else on the notepad and handed it back to him.

//I hate surprises.//

He sighed, recalling their conversation about magic during their research on the illusionist, Constance that was kidnapping children for money.

//Not this one. Dinner and optional dancing. That's all I'm telling you.//

She smirked and looked back at him. He couldn't help but smile. He could see the wheels turning in her head, "Okay, that's it," Perry said, clapping his hands. "Let's get to it!" He turned to Lois and Clark, "You two, meet me in the other conference room in five with everything you've got on this 'boss.'"

They nodded their agreement and headed for the smaller conference room where their research had been moved to get ready for their meeting with Perry.

After their meeting with Perry Lois and Clark headed back toward their desks and found Lois' desk covered in three dozen bouquets of roses. Clark bit the inside of his lower lip to suppress the groan and curse he wanted to make. He knew those were not from him and there was only one other person who would...

She stared at her desk in shock, taking the note from the roses and shook her head in disgust. "Nice to know he can listen," she handed him the note and shook her head in disgust. "I've got an appointment...Can you get Jimmy to...do something with these? I really don't want these here when I get back..."

He nodded, "Yeah, no problem," He watched her grab her things and head out then turned to read the note she'd handed him.

//Lois,

I know you need space. Please know I'm thinking of you.

Lex//

Clark crumbled up the note in his hand then called Jimmy over, "Jimmy?"

"What's up CK?" Jimmy asked.

"Lois had to run an errand...Can you do something with these? Lois said she didn't want them here when she came back..." At Jimmy's confused look he continued, "Maybe check with hospitals or nursing homes or even shelters to see if any of them would be interested in a flower delivery? I'll do the drop off if needed..."

Jimmy gave him a perplexed look then nodded, "Sure thing CK," He headed to his desk to make some calls.

Clark silently willed his anger to subside. Things were different now. He was not going to let Luthor ruin what had started out to be a wonderful day. He had too much riding on tonight to let

himself dwell on his anger at Luthor. He headed toward the small conference room where most of the research they'd done the previous day was still set up and found Jack staring at the board. "Hey, how you doing?"

Jack smiled at him, "Still a lot of holes huh?"

Clark nodded, "Yeah, we're still trying to piece it together."

Jack was quiet a moment then said, "I'm thinking about going to the police about Luthor."

"What?" Clark asked, surprised.

"I've got to cover my back...Denny's..." Jack began.

"You don't know Luthor like I do," Clark began. He really didn't want to go to the police until they had more to go on. Luthor had too many people in his pocket "I really don't think we should go to the police just yet," Clark said. "You have a feeling... There isn't anything concrete to pin on him yet."

Jack shook his head, "I lived on the streets for two years relying on my gut. I'm telling you I know something's up. What happens if we wait too long and he tries to..."

"Superman isn't going to let anything happen to you, Jack, and neither am I," Clark reassured him.

"What are you going to do?" Jack asked. "You don't know what he's gonna do any more than Superman does...It's not like the guy can watch me 24/7." Jack shook his head. "No, I know people like him. They get what they want by making moves behind the scenes...never get caught but have plenty of police and politicians in their pocket for a rainy day...We gotta bring him down..."

"I agree," Clark nodded. "I just don't want to make a move until we have something more to go on than your blindfolded ID," Clark shook his head in frustration and crossed his arms over his chest as he stared down at the table in front of him.

"You think he's the boss don't you?" Jack asked.

Clark didn't say anything. "I don't know. I have my suspicions..."

"...but nothing concrete..." Jack sighed. "You don't know how guys like him work. You're never going to have anything concrete. If you do he'll use threats and intimidation to stop you. That's how guys like him work."

"Jack, I'm not going to let anything happen to Denny. Just trust me..." Clark pleaded.

Jack sighed. "Thanks for having Superman take me to see him. He's a mess right now. After our parents died...for so long I was all he had."

"I know," Clark said. "Which is why I want to be very very smart about this. No going to the police until we have enough to start an investigation."

Jack nodded, "Okay."

A knock at the conference room door caught their attention and they looked over to see Jimmy carrying a stack of files. "Chief said to pull all the research on you and Lois' stories over the last year. Where do you want it?" He struggled under the weight of the folders, "Hopefully somewhere close?"

"Here," Clark took the stack from Jimmy and placed it on the table and Jimmy sighed in relief. "Thanks Jimmy."

Jimmy nodded and looked at Clark with a smile. "No sweat, CK. Coates Orphanage is coming by to pick up the flowers for their Spring festival within the hour. Should be gone by the time Lois gets back."

Clark nodded, "Thanks Jimmy I owe you one."

Jimmy wore a broad grin and Jack looked at him with a smirk, "What's with the face? You swallow a hanger or something?"

Jimmy laughed and shook his head, "No," He looked at Clark expectantly.

"What?" Clark looked back at him impatiently, unsure of what Jimmy was staring at him for.

"Oh, just wondering what was up with you and Lois during the meeting this morning?" Jimmy pressed, taking a seat at the

table.

Clark sighed, "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, come on, CK, don't give me that," Jimmy folded his hands behind his head and wore a grin that would have made the Cheshire cat envious, "You two were passing notes during the meeting...and grinning at each other...then finishing each other's sentences and agreeing... You two never agree on anything...then Lois is wanting the roses from Luthor gone and you're helping... What's up?"

Clark gave him his best innocent look and just shrugged. He didn't dare try to deny anything because he knew what a terrible liar he was. The excuses he'd come up with for his Superman rescues were getting lamer and lamer.

Thankfully Jack interjected, pushing Jimmy's feet off the table, "I think if Clark wanted to tell you ...you'd know," Jack pushed past Jimmy, "I gotta get back to work."

Jimmy watched Jack leave and smiled with a knowing look, "Come on, I'm not going to tell anyone. What's going on? Rumor has it she dumped Luthor last night...now you two are ...very cozy this morning...what gives?"

Hearing a cry for help he leapt to his feet to leave, "I gotta go..."

"But..."

"See you later," he said, racing out of the conference room. He headed toward the storage closet with the only window high enough he could fly out of and headed toward the cries for help that only he could hear at the moment.

After her hair appointment Lois headed to Luthor Towers to confront Lex about the flowers. He obviously was having a hard time understanding the word, 'no' but there was no way she was going to even entertain the idea of anything with him while she was seeing Clark. After his heartfelt confession and her talk with Lucy last night she had decided to take a chance and see where this thing with Clark went. If that kiss was any indication of what was to come ...

She let out a shaky breath and stepped off the elevator to enter Lex Luthor's office. In his office she found a tall brunette in a sharp business suit with a skirt way too short and a blouse way too low cut. She shook her head in disgust, crossing her arms over her chest. "May I help you?"

"I need to talk to Lex," Lois said coolly.

"He'll just be a minute," the woman said with a smile.

Lois nodded, "I'll wait."

A few uncomfortable minutes passed and Lex entered the office from another door that was hidden behind the bookcase. Lois arched an eyebrow uneasily. Why hadn't she ever noticed that before? Had he ever used that door in front of her before?

"Lois, so good to see you darling," Lex said with a smile, leaning in to kiss her.

She stepped out of his grasp and turned back to him. "What part of we shouldn't see each other anymore don't you get?"

"You said you needed space," he corrected.

"Until you tried to 'handle' me then I decided I needed permanent space," Lois snapped irritably. "Don't send me flowers. Don't send me gifts. Do not call me. Got it?"

"Lois..." He began.

"I'm serious!" Lois snapped. "You know Clark tried to warn me for months that I didn't know you...that I..."

"Ah, yes, the accusations from Kent," Lex mused. "He's just jealous, Lois...of what we have...you can't..."

"Of what we...? Wow...Do you hear yourself? Lex, what we have is...is *nothing*..." Lois fumed.

Lex ignored the statement and continued, trying to throw on the charm. "I know you were upset last night after what happened with you and Kent but that's no reason to..."

"How do you know something happened last night with me

and Clark?" Lois accused. "Are you spying on me!?" His eyes widened slightly and she let out an inaudible curse, "Stay the hell away from me," she snapped before leaving.

Once he made sure all passengers were safe after he stopped a train near the Metropolis Transit Railroad that had lost control when the brakes went out, Clark headed to Smallville to discuss the latest developments with his parents. Jack was convinced Luthor would come after him. He was paranoid, but for good reason. He still hadn't talked to Lois about what Jack had confided in him. Lois had said she was taking a break from Lex Luthor for the moment so at least for a little while she was out of his reach, but he knew she wasn't going to be safe until she saw Luthor for who he really was. Jack's paranoia about Luthor got Clark thinking about what would happen if Luthor were to come after him. He needed to make sure his parents were protected. He needed to warn them.

Clark flew up to the familiar barn and saw his dad was on the ladder, painting. He floated up behind him and placed a hand on his dad's back as he said, "Hey, dad, need some help?"

"Clark!" Jonathan looked a bit shaken, looking back at his son who still donned the superhero uniform, "Warn me next time you sneak up on me like that."

"Sorry, dad," Clark said sheepishly before changing into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, grabbing another bucket of paint and opening it. He dipped a spare brush in the paint and floated up next to his dad to help.

Jonathan eyed him with a knowing look, "Something you want to talk about, son?"

Clark sighed, "I'm a bit nervous about tonight," He couldn't help but smile.

"Tonight?"

"I'm taking Lois to dinner tonight," Clark said with a grin. He couldn't seem to wipe the smile off his face.

Jonathan sighed, "Dinner? So have you two talked?"

"Sort of," Clark admitted sheepishly.

"Clark..." Jonathan began with a look of disapproval.

"I was going to tell her everything last night... I had it planned out in my mind and then..."

"What do you mean you *were* going to tell her last night?"

Jonathan pressed.

"I don't know what happened. I just...kissed her." His father's eyebrows rose and Clark nodded sheepishly, "I think I scared her."

"Right into Lex Luthor's arms?" Jonathan shook his head in disgust.

"No," Clark shook his head. "I overheard her tell him she didn't want to see him anymore after..."

"Overheard her?" Jonathan looked at him with disapproval.

"I know, I shouldn't have been listening in but I couldn't help it," Clark admitted sheepishly. "Anyway I went and talked to her afterward..."

"But you still haven't told her?"

Clark shook his head, "No, I asked her out on a date and she said yes. Well actually she kissed me and then said yes, but..."

Jonathan wore an amused look as Clark fumbled to find his words. He was nervous. He knew his dad could tell. "So she kissed you huh?"

"Yeah," Clark smiled broadly, recalling the kiss in Lois' apartment.

"Who kissed who?" Martha asked, walking up to them with a tray of lemonade. Clark smiled broadly and Martha seemed to be able to tell from Clark's expression who had been kissed. "Did you finally tell her?"

Clark shook his head, "Not yet."

"Clark," Martha gave him that motherly tone.

Jonathan interrupted, patting Clark on the back, "Now, Martha, he knows what he's got to do. He's going to tell her

tonight...on his date...with Lois."

Martha smiled conspiratorially, "Oh, really?"

Clark smiled shyly, "Yes, really. I'm going to tell her tonight...but that's not the reason I came out here."

"Oh, I thought it was to help paint the barn," Jonathan teased, flicking him with his paint brush.

Clark laughed, "I wish. No, it's about Luthor..."

Lois sighed, swaying in the ivory green dress she'd purchased that afternoon as she examined herself in the mirror. Clark had told her to wear something comfortable. She wasn't sure what that meant. It was a date so she figured she needed to dress up somewhat. She examined the dress critically in the mirror. It was a sleeveless ivory green dress with lace detail on the bodice. It came down to her ankles. She had curled her hair and she had to admit she looked great.

She let out a quiet breath. This had to work. She couldn't think about what would happen if it didn't. A light knock at the door announced Clark's arrival. She smiled glancing at the clock, "Seven o'clock on the dot."

She opened the door and found Clark standing in front of her in a charcoal suit with a solid black tie. She smiled, eying him up and down. It wasn't often that he wore solid ties. Normally he wore crazy outlandish ties to the office. She'd only seen him like this a handful of times. She had to admit, he looked incredible in his charcoal suit.

'Or in a towel...'

Her mind reminded her of the memory of him standing in front of her in a towel during their first assignment together. That memory had fueled so many fantasies. Now, with him in front of her like this, knowing tonight could lead to her fulfilling those fantasies...it made her shudder involuntarily.

"Hi," she managed to squeak out nervously.

"Hi," he smiled at her, glancing up and down her once before meeting her eyes with a smile, "You look beautiful."

She smiled. Another thing that separated Clark Kent from anyone else... He never leered at her. Not once had she noticed him leering at her body but rather catching her gaze and seeing her for who she was. "You look pretty handsome yourself," she said, grabbing her purse and the green shawl that matched her dress before turning to leave, making sure to lock the door before they left.

Lois watched Clark through her eyelashes as she took a sip of her wine, savoring the taste that molded on her tongue with the flavors of the wine and the divine pasta. How he had gotten them into *Foquet*, one of the most exclusive restaurants in Metropolis in such short notice she'd never know. He seemed to be as nervous as she was. This was new territory. They already knew so much about one another but now...this was different.

This was so different from her dates with Lex. It had been a feeling of awe in a world she never really felt like she belonged in. Opening up to him wasn't something that ever happened on their 'dates.' But with Clark... He was still the only person she'd told about Claude even though the man made sure every man knew what a bad lay she was before he'd taken an assignment in Washington. She did her best to push thoughts about him out of her mind as she focused on Clark.

Somehow they'd gotten onto the subject of college. He'd told her about some of the travels he'd done after graduating and she shared some of what she'd grown up with in the Lane household. Things she'd never shared with anyone but her sister. There was something about Clark that made her want to divulge every thought and fear without thinking twice about it.

"...anyway, my senior year in high school I had a huge fight with my dad and I moved out," Lois said quietly. She'd never told anyone but Lucy about her sordid past with her parents. Clark

knew some parts, but never...

"You never told me that," Clark took her hand from across the table gently.

"In vino veritas," she whispered softly, opting to blame her openness on the wine. She caught his gaze as she took another sip of her wine, setting the glass down. "Anyway, he was always disappointed he never had any sons," she sighed, trying to push that memory out of her mind. She didn't want to think about her family right now. What she wanted to do was have a bite of that chocolate molten cake that was sitting in front of Clark with only two bites taken out of it.

"And you went out and became a world famous reporter to prove him wrong?" Clark asked, intertwining his fingers with hers from across the table.

"Maybe," She admitted shyly. She glanced at the cake once more, "Are you going to finish that?"

Clark didn't seem to notice the question, focused instead on finishing the conversation, "So, why don't you quit? Now you can do what you want?"

Lois smiled broadly, thinking for a moment, "Maybe I found out I like it," she wiggled her eyebrows at him, brushing her thumb against his wrist, "Did they give you an extra fork with that?"

Clark blushed, realizing he'd forgotten about the dessert. He took the fork and put a piece of cake on it, offering it to her. "Sorry, here."

She opened her mouth for him to feed it to her. As the chocolate hit her taste buds she closed her eyes, savoring the taste as she felt the muscles in Clark's hand flinch slightly. She smiled as she realized what she was doing to him...what she was doing to herself. She slowly opened her eyes and laughed, "I hate myself."

He held up the fork with another bite, "Ready for another round?"

"No, I think I need a moment to recover," Lois said softly. She turned to him with a smile, "So what about you?"

"I'm fine," he pushed the plate toward her. "It's all yours."

Lois laughed, realizing he wasn't understanding what she was referring to. "No, I mean you and your parents. Did you ever have any big fights with them?"

Clark was quiet a moment, "Little ones mostly. There was one thing ...big..." He trailed off for a moment, "but I guess you could say I was your basic goody two shoes."

Lois smiled, "The perfect son."

Clark smiled teasingly, "Now, it's not easy being perfect."

Lois laughed, holding his hand, "It never is," She remembered the teasing fight they'd had when they'd argued about the invisible man and he'd told her it must be so hard to be right all the time.

He smiled at her, seeming to recall the same thing, "You know if you think about it, the only time people are really honestly expressing themselves is when they're passionate...the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they're fighting..."

"...or make love," Lois nodded, fingering this hand once more. She slowly met his gaze and saw the heat of desire in his eyes she knew was reflected in her own. Was she seriously thinking of...?

'Oh, God...'

He cleared his throat and smiled nervously, "Uh, you feel like dancing?" He pointed to the large room where the band that had been providing the background music for the evening was playing. There were a few couples that had taken advantage of the space and begun to dance to the music.

"Sure," she smiled, happy he hadn't taken her slip of the tongue as an invitation. She didn't know what she was so afraid of. He had told her when they first met he wasn't like other men. She allowed him to lead her to the dance floor and enjoyed the feeling of his arms on her waist as she rested her hands on his shoulders as they began to sway to the music.

You're the light, you're the night

You're the color of my blood

You're the cure, you're the pain

You're the only thing I wanna touch

Never knew that it could mean so much, so much

You're the fear, I don't care

Cause I've never been so high

Follow me to the dark

Let me take you past our satellites

You can see the world you brought to life, to life

She could smell his cologne as she rested her head against his chest, inhaling his scent. How had this happened? How had she not seen the signs for so long? She had fallen for her partner, her best friend. It was obvious he cared about her...maybe even loved her. Was it enough?

So love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do

Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do

What are you waiting for?

Fading in, fading out

On the edge of paradise

Every inch of your skin is a holy grail I've got to find

Only you can set my heart on fire, on fire

Yeah, I'll let you set the pace

Cause I'm not thinking straight

My head spinning around I can't see clear no more

What are you waiting for?

Clark sighed, holding Lois close as the chords to the song played. He couldn't help but smile at the perfect timing of this song. It had taken him aback when Lois had mentioned making love during their conversation. The intimacy of the evening had grown easily and the sexual tension was thick. He needed to tell her, even if it made her hate him. He knew that. He just prayed she'd be able to forgive him.

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (like you do)

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do

Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do

What are you waiting for?

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (like you do)

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (yeah)

Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do

What are you waiting for? (ahhh)

Lois sighed, looking up at Clark as they danced together. How had she not realized what a good dancer he was before? She noticed a stray curl of his hair that had fallen on his face and reached up to brush it out of his face. She smiled when she noticed the nervous expression on his face. It somehow made her feel better to know he wasn't as confident as he appeared to be. He was just as nervous as she was. Giving her heart to him wouldn't be the end of the world, would it? Taking a chance...

I'll let you set the pace

Cause I'm not thinking straight

My head spinning around I can't see clear no more

What are you waiting for?

He could feel himself trembling when she brushed her hand against his forehead, pushing the stray hair out of his face. He had to smile at that. It was a gesture he'd done to her countless times but never had she done that to him...not even as Superman.

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (like you do)

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (yeah)

Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do

What are you waiting for? (ahhh)

This would work. It had to. Clark was her best friend. He knew her better than anyone and he understood her better than anyone. He was...real...attainable. Unlike Superman who she had convinced herself, in the beginning, he was in love with her... After her talk with Lucy, she seemed to have faced some hard

truths with that notion. He was unattainable. Safe. Unlike Clark who was right here, ready to give himself to her completely. Superman was a dream... a fantasy. Clark was real.

She glanced up at him through her eyelashes and noticed he seemed to be holding her as if it was the last time he was going to touch her. Trying to reassure him, she reached up and brushed her lips against his lips.

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (like you do)

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do (ohh, ahh)

Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do (ahh)

What are you waiting for? (ahh)

Clark groaned inwardly when he heard the soft moan coming from Lois as he deepened the kiss between them. He kissed her like his life depended on it, cupping her cheek as she slipped her tongue inside his mouth, teasing him with the soft taste of chocolate from earlier.

Remembering they were still in public he slowly broke off the kiss, tracing the outline of her jaw with his thumb and rested his head against hers. "You know this isn't really dancing," he whispered.

"It's not?" She smiled.

"Let's get out of here," he whispered. She smiled back, walking with him back to their table as he pulled out his wallet to pay the check and they headed out.

Lois sighed against the soft cushion of Clark's couch. She watched him curiously as he brought a cup of coffee in from the kitchen. He'd suggested getting some coffee after dinner. She'd expected to stop at a coffee shop, not to go back to his place, but she didn't question it. He seemed really nervous.

He handed her a cup of coffee. She smiled when she noticed he'd already sweetened it to her liking and took a sip, "Perfect." He smiled and took a seat across from her, on the edge of the coffee table, "So..." She began nervously. He looked really good. It would be so easy to lose herself in his eyes... in his arms...

"So," he began nervously, "Lois, do you remember when you asked me about any big fights with my parents..."

She nodded, "Yeah."

"Well, there was something we fought about that was pretty big... it has something to do with what my... biggest secret is."

Lois smiled, recalling how she'd demanded to know his deepest darkest secret when she'd been stashing Eugene Latterman at her apartment. "You mean your big secret you never told me?"

Clark nodded. "What I'm about to tell you... you have to understand, I've never told anyone. I was taught not to share this with anyone for so long... I guess it just became second nature not to ever..." He shook his head nervously.

Lois placed a hand on his cheek, "Clark, whatever it is can't be that bad..."

He sighed in relief for a moment and continued, "I'm sorry. This is just really hard... I need to tell you this... I'm crazy about you, but before this goes any further I have to tell you this. I don't want to screw this up."

Lois smiled, cupping his cheek, "You're not screwing anything up."

Clark sighed nervously. He seemed to contemplate something for a moment then stood up and headed toward the stereo to turn it on. "Do you remember when we first started working together and you suggested I bring an extra suit to work?" He asked as he searched for the right album.

Lois nodded, "Yeah, you got filthy from that explosion..."

Clark hung his head as he found the album he was looking for. He opened the disk player and placed the cd in and pressed play, "Well when you said that it kind of planted a seed. I told you I was adopted?" Lois nodded and he continued, "I never told you how I was adopted..." He pressed play and the soft chords of Frank

Sinatra's 'Fly Me to the Moon' began to fill the air.

Lois smiled, "I love this song."

"I know," he said, extending his hand to hers, "Dance with me?"

She nodded, taking his hand as he pulled her to him. "So, you said we weren't really dancing earlier..." She reminded him.

Fly me to the moon

Let me play among the stars

Let me see what spring is like on

A-Jupiter and Mars

In other words, hold my hand

In other words, baby, kiss me

"I'm getting to that," he whispered, "I was found in Shuster's field. My parents found me there after what looked like a meteor landed there."

"Oh, Clark," Lois reached up to stroke his cheek and he closed his eyes, seeming to savor the feel of her hand against him.

Fill my heart with song and let me sing for ever more

You are all I long for

All I worship and adore

In other words, please be true

In other words, I love you

He continued, refusing to stop, "I didn't know where I came from and neither did my parents. They'd thought maybe a Russian experiment or something but didn't know ... I grew up normal, but felt like something was off. I didn't find out I was adopted until I was older... they were forced to tell me..."

Lois looked at him quizzically, "Forced to tell you?"

Fill my heart with song

Let me sing for ever more

You are all I long for, all I worship and adore

In other words, please be true

In other words

In other words

I love you

Clark nodded, "I didn't get sick as a kid. As I got older I found I couldn't get hurt..." Lois' face tensed up as she began to realize what he was saying, "I found out I could see things others couldn't see, hear things others couldn't, and eventually... I discovered I could..."

"...fly..." Lois gasped out in realization as he floated them above the ground, keeping a firm grasp on her waist.

Clark stared at Lois for what felt like an eternity. He'd just given Lois everything she needed to destroy him. Even though he didn't think she would do something like that old fears from his childhood still haunted him...

Finally, Lois spoke, "So, you're ... Superman..." Lois began slowly. She glanced down at the floor and noticed they were still floating a few inches off the floor.

He nodded, "Like I said that wasn't really dancing... this is." He smiled at her.

"Oh, God..." She let out a shaky breath, looking down at the floor and tightened her grip around his waist.

"I've got you," he reassured her.

She hung her head, uncertain of how to form the questions that were probably forming in her mind. "Wha... Why are you ... I mean..."

Clark noticed the shakiness in her voice and cupped her cheek. "I know it's hard to wrap your head around..." He sighed, "It's a lot."

"Cl... I mean, what do I even call you?" She asked nervously.

"Same thing you've always called me... when I'm in the suit, 'Superman' and when I'm not, 'Clark,'" He smiled at her. "It's just a costume. Superman... it's just a disguise I wear so I can help people." He sighed, "I know you probably need time to digest this. I just hope you'll understand why I did what I did... You're being

really quiet right now.”

“I think I’m still in shock,” she said softly.

Clark nodded, “I understand...”

“So, that’s why you’re always running off...” She mused.

He nodded, “Yes,” he smirked, “I’m not very good at the whole coming up with excuses to leave thing. I hate lying. Never was any good at it.”

“And why you had Superman’s globe,” she nodded in realization. “I thought it was odd that you’d steal something like that.”

He hung his head, “I wasn’t sure how to tell you... everything... then.”

“So, why now?” Lois asked.

He sighed, “There are things I need to tell you...that you wouldn’t understand unless you knew everything. It was actually mom’s idea to tell you...”

Lois sighed, “Your mom? Right, Martha...” He nodded and she let out a shallow breath, “What you have to tell me...I’m guessing it is big if Martha wanted you to tell me...from what you said they didn’t want you telling anyone...Is that why you kissed me yesterday?” She asked as she began to fall into babble mode.

He smiled at her, “No,” He cupped her cheek, outlining her jaw with his thumb. “I kissed you because I wanted to ...”

She seemed to relax slightly in his arms, “So obviously we have a lot to talk about...”

“Yes,” he nodded, resting his head against her forehead, “I’m sorry.”

“I’m trying to wrap my head around this...every conversation I’ve had about you...with you...” he smiled at her and she glared at him, “It’s not funny.”

“I didn’t say anything,” He said.

“You smirked,” she challenged, linking her arms around his neck, “So, where do we go from here?”

“I don’t know,” he said softly. “How mad are you?”

She seemed to think about it for a moment, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” He asked in confusion.

“No, I don’t,” she sighed. “I guess a part of me is hurt you didn’t tell me before but at the same time I can’t really pinpoint when you’d have been able to tell me...I mean, I understand the why...and your reasoning behind it. I guess I’m still mulling it over. Everything I thought was one way is...”

“...different,” he nodded. “I know,” She reached up and took his glasses off, folding them in her palm. “What?” He asked. She reached up and mused with his hair for a moment, “Just trying to see what I missed...for a year.”

“Well, I was trying to hide...” He said softly.

“So was I...” She said softly. She felt the tears in the corner of her eyes. She didn’t want to cry. Not now. He seemed to sense her withdrawal and floated them back to the floor.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I never wanted to hurt you. I just...”

“I get it...” She smiled through her tears, “It’s just a lot...”

He nodded, “Do you...feel up for a flight?”

She smiled, “Why not?”

He cupped her cheek for a moment then stepped back, spinning into the Superman suit before her eyes. She blinked in surprise, stunned to see him change in front of her before her eyes. He scooped her up in his arms and whispered, “There’s something I want to show you.”

Lois gasped in surprise as they drifted above the clouds. She looked around, shivering at the sudden cold air that surrounded them. Clark wrapped his cape around her, making sure to cover her shoulders, “Better?”

She nodded, “It’s beautiful up here.”

He nodded, looking around, “I used to come here and just sort of drift...not really part of the stars...not knowing where I fit

in...”

Lois looked up at him tenderly, uncertain of what to say. The emotions on his face spoke volumes. The loneliness she could relate to. So many nights of pushing everyone around her away ... afraid to let anyone in. She understood now why Clark was able to understand her so well. He lived the same way. “Oh, Clark.”

“I finally found where I fit in when I came to Metropolis... when I met you...You gave me a way to fit in ... A way to help people...without being afraid of being exposed,” Clark continued as they floated across the moon.

She sensed his apprehension at his last statement and stroked his cheek, “Clark, I won’t tell anyone. I promise. This...is a lot and I do have...a lot of questions...mostly trying to figure out how I didn’t figure it out before now...but you can trust me.”

“I know that Lois,” he sighed, holding her close. “This...is probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but I never doubted I could trust you.”

Lois smiled when she felt him relax against her, “So, where do we go from here?”

“That’s up to you,” Clark said, resting his head against hers.

“Well, I think we’ve had enough revelations today,” Lois began. “I guess...this...whatever it is ... We take things slow...get to know one another without the disguises.”

He smiled broadly, “I’d like that.” He sighed in relief, “I was afraid you’d never want to talk to me again.”

Lois smiled, “I don’t think I’d be able to do that. I’ve kinda gotten used to having you around. I’m not going to walk away. I want this to work.”

“Good, then I won’t have to fly away,” he teased with a broad grin. He sobered slightly, “I want this to work more than anything I’ve ever wanted in this world.”

Lois intertwined her fingers with his, “Then we’re agreed. We’ll take this slow and figure out...us?” Clark nodded and she leaned up to kiss him. It wasn’t a demanding kiss like the one they’d shared on the dance floor before or the one in the conference room. Just a soft kiss filled with the promise of what was to come.

Lois smiled wistfully as they walked back to her apartment. Clark had changed back into his suit and glasses and here they were at the door to her apartment. She smiled at him, still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that the man standing in front of her was the same man that had bore his soul to her in the clouds a few hours ago. Things were definitely different.

“Well, uh,” Lois began softly. “Thank you for dinner ...and for...” She looked down the hall to make sure no one was around and mouthed, “the flight.”

He smiled at that remark. “Goodnight, Lois,” he whispered and leaned in to kiss her. It took everything in her not to pull him in for a deeper kiss but right now they were taking things slow... getting to know one another as more than friends.

He slowly broke off the kiss and she turned toward the door, trying to compose herself. He waited for her to pull out her key and unlock her door. “Goodnight, Clark,” she said softly before leaning in to kiss him once more this time allowing herself to pull him in for a deeper kiss, tugging him close to her by his tie. She sighed inwardly as she felt his hands cup both sides of her face, fingering her hair as he traced her lips with his tongue. She could feel him responding to her and smiled against his lips. She could easily lose herself in his arms tonight. She suspected he knew that too, but seemed to be holding back.

He slowly broke off the kiss, taking a step back. It was clear he was just as affected by the kiss as she was. She’d never thought of Superman becoming breathless yet here he was standing in front of her trying to catch his breath. “I better...” He motioned toward the hallway and she nodded taking a step into the apartment.

She slowly closed the door, watching as he turned to leave through the crack in the door. She began to slowly lock the several different locks on her door and sighed, leaning against the door frame. "Wow..."

The next morning Lois sighed happily as she began to get ready for work. The stress of the last few days seemed to subside and she couldn't seem to wipe the smile off her face. Clark was Superman. Superman was Clark. Clark said he was 'crazy' about her. She had suspected he'd had a crush on her for some time but dismissed the idea after the whole pheromone fiasco when he wasn't affected...or was he? She recalled the kiss at the airport with 'Superman' and smiled. She suspected he'd faked being under the influence of pheromones to kiss her. That was something she'd have to ask him about...

She'd been a bit shell shocked last night after his revelation but now the more she thought about it the happier she became. There were still a lot of unanswered questions. Why he hated Lex so much? What was the 'big' thing he eluded to last night Martha wanted him to tell her? How had he gotten a paper cut?

She sighed. It was something that excited her, knowing she'd finally be able to ask 'Superman' every question she'd ever thought of. It all slowly began to make sense now. The way Clark seemed to be able to crack codes when they were breaking in somewhere or get lucky guessing passwords.

She was looking forward to finally getting the answers she'd always wanted and maybe even repeat last night's kiss. She'd been so tempted to pull him into her apartment when she'd kissed him good night, but he'd pulled away before she could act on it. He seemed intent on taking things slow with her. It was refreshing. She wasn't that experienced when it came to relationships. Paul had left her for Linda when she wouldn't give up the 'goods' and when she'd thought she was 'in love' with Claude it had only been that one time. She'd thought she was in love and then she woke up to have her heart broken and realize she'd given her virginity to the wrong man. It hadn't even been that enjoyable. Claude had grown impatient with her and just focused on his needs. She ended up just pretending for his ego. She thought he hadn't noticed but... She shuddered, recalling the names that had been used when he told everyone what had happened.

'Frigid'

'Ice Queen'

'Ice Maiden'

"Clark's different," she reminded herself. He'd never do that. He'd been the one to stop. He'd been the one to...

<<"So, you're ...Superman..."

"Like I said that wasn't really dancing...this is."

"Oh, God..."

"I've got you." >>>

Lois sighed, recalling the dance they'd shared at his apartment. It had been surreal to have him dance with her in the air. It was one of the many things she'd wondered about...Does Superman dance? Does he sleep in a bed or in the air? Does he need sleep?

She finished getting ready and grabbed her purse to head out the door when the phone rang, backtracking she turned to grab the phone. "Hello?"

"Lois?" her sister's voice echoed on the other end of the phone.

"Lucy?" Lois looked at the clock. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd work on packing for my trip back to Metropolis..." Lucy said in a sing-song voice.

"Really?" Lois practically squealed happily.

"Really, I miss you and Metropolis and....dad couldn't care less if I'm here or not so I figured..."

"Oh, you have no idea how glad I am to hear that!" Lois

sighed happily. "Listen, I've got to get to work, but when does your flight get in? I'll pick you up..."

"I get in at three on Friday. If that's too early I can get a cab..." Lucy began.

"No, no, no," Lois argued. "I'll be there."

"Good," Lucy said with a grin, "Then you can tell me all about your date last night... You never did call last night so I figured it either went so horrible you can't even talk about it or it went so well you are still dreaming about it..."

"It was...incredible," Lois said softly, "but I've really got to go."

"Okay, I'll see you Friday. I'll leave the flight information on your voicemail."

"Bye, Luce," Lois said softly, hanging up the phone. She then grabbed her keys and headed out the door. As she opened the door she found a single stemmed rose with a note and a small bag outside her door. She glanced at the time. She was running late but curiosity got the better of her and she opened the note.

//Thought you might want something more than coffee this morning for breakfast. Superman has to give a statement to the transit authority about the train derailment. I'll be in as soon as I can.

Thinking of you,

CK//

Lois smiled, tapping the rose against the pastry bag for a moment and sniffed the heavenly smell of the pastry inside. With a smile, she headed into work, still holding the rose he'd given her with the pastry bag.

Once she got to the Planet, Lois parked her jeep in the parking garage and headed in. She picked up the rose along with her purse and headed in. Once she entered the lobby of the Planet she stopped at Joe's coffee bar inside to get a cup of much-needed coffee.

"Beautiful rose you have there," Joe said handing her her coffee.

Lois smiled looking at it, "Yes, it is."

"Present from Mr. Luthor?" Joe asked with a wink.

"No," Lois said with a smile, taking her coffee and heading for the elevator. She was slightly disappointed not to be heading into work with Clark this morning. They'd gotten into a routine of riding into work together. Yesterday they hadn't done so because she needed to get a manicure before her date with Clark. After a weekend of biting her nails, and kickboxing she needed a refresher.

A guy she recognized from the mailroom was in the elevator when she stepped on. "Uh, newsroom," She said when the guy from the mailroom asked what floor. The doors were just about closed when a hand slipped between the doors. She smiled to herself recognizing that hand as her partner's.

The doors opened and she smiled, looking up at him as he stepped onto the elevator. The guy from the mailroom looked at Clark asking what floor. Clark just nodded, "Uh, newsroom as well."

The doors closed and Lois sighed happily when Clark stood a few inches away from her, staring at the doors ahead. "Hi."

"Hi," She said back with a smile, not daring to look at him for fear that she'd lose all her resolve at the moment. He looked really *really* good right now in his gray suit and blue dress shirt. His tie, of course, was a loud yellow with gray and black designs on it. "How'd it go with your, um, source?"

He seemed to recognize what she was talking about and smiled, "Fine. I've got enough for a few follow-ups."

"Good," She nodded with a smile, continuing to stare straight ahead.

"Nice rose," He smirked at her.

She couldn't help but giggle, "Yes, it is. This guy I've been

seeing gave it to me.”

“That’s nice,” he managed to say. She could tell from his voice he was struggling to keep a straight face. She had to admit she was having the same problem.

“Yeah, I think you’d like him,” she said softly.

“Seems to have put you in a good mood,” Clark commented.

“Yes, he has,” she winked. “That and I found out Lucy’s moving back...”

“That’s great news,” he said with a smile, knowing how much she’d missed her sister.

The elevator dinged and the guy from the mailroom stepped off. She watched as the doors closed and then she turned toward Clark, “Thank you for my rose and breakfast.”

“You’re very welcome,” he said, turning to cup her cheek.

She leaned up to kiss him on the cheek. She was just about to pull him in for a kiss when the elevator dinged, and the doors opened. A group of businessmen stepped on the elevator with them. She sighed, trying to focus on something else other than what her partner’s lips felt like pressed up against hers. It was so tempting...

The elevator dinged again and they arrived on the newsroom floor, Lois did her best to act as professional as she could as they stepped off the elevator. The last thing she wanted was another situation where she became the topic of the Planet gossip. As she approached her desk it was harder and harder to keep up the resolve when she noticed not one, not two, but four bouquets of flower arrangements sitting on her desk. She looked back at Clark but it was obvious from his expression the flowers were not from him. She picked up the card that was attached to them.

//Lois,

Please know I’m thinking of you.

Lex//

“That ugh...” Lois muttered under her breath.

Clark didn’t say anything. Instead, he turned to his desk, turning his computer on. She grimaced. The man had a lot of nerve... What part of ‘stay away from me’ didn’t he get? Seeing the dark cloud that crossed over Clark’s face just now...

No, she needed to nip this right in the bud now. She reached in the cabinet under her desk and grabbed the small vase from the bouquet of flowers Clark had given her a few weeks ago, and headed toward the break room to get some water. Once she had the water she needed she dropped the rose in and smiled, recalling their conversation about the rose in the elevator. After making sure she had enough water in the vase she returned to her desk only to find a delivery man with another bundle of flowers.

“You have got to be kidding me,” Lois muttered under her breath.

“Are you Lois Lane?” the floral delivery person asked.

“Depends,” Lois said placing the vase on her desk, “Who are these from?”

“Mr. Luthor,” the floral delivery person said. “Order is for four bouquets of roses every hour from seven am to three pm.”

Lois laughed, “No.” She grabbed the other four arrangements that were on her desk and handed them to the delivery man along with Lex’s note. “No. I am refusing this delivery. I refuse to sign. Take them back. Take them all back...”

“But...”

“No!” Lois snapped angrily a bit louder than she anticipated. She winced when she heard herself and saw the delivery guy jump slightly. “I’m sorry. This isn’t your fault...I don’t want these...”

“The order is paid for already...” The guy argued.

Clark walked up to them hesitantly, “I’m sure some of the local hospitals would appreciate the flowers...”

“Yes!” Lois turned to pat Clark on the chest, “There have to be people that don’t get visitors or...gifts. This would definitely brighten someone’s day...”

The delivery guy smiled, “Yeah,” he turned to leave.

Lois let out a frustrated groan, “I don’t believe him!”

Clark sighed, “I guess he still thinks...” He was a quiet a moment. “Lois, the reason I needed to tell you...” He gave a flying motion and she nodded, “There have been some...” He got a faraway look in his eyes and she looked at him curiously.

“Someone need you?” Lois asked uncertainly.

He smiled apologetically, “I’ll be right back. Don’t go anywhere,” He cupped her cheek for a moment before disappearing toward the storage closet. She heard the sound of a sonic boom in the distance and smiled to herself. How had she not put two and two together for so long?

Lex threw a glass against the wall in his study as he watched the scene play from the elevator over and over, hitting rewind as he watched Lois Lane lean in to kiss Clark Kent on the cheek. Competing for her affections with Superman he could handle, but Kent? He was nothing. A nobody. What could she possibly see in him? He’d lost himself and let his anger show. Now it seemed winning her back would prove more difficult than anticipated.

A knock at the door announced Nigel’s presence, “Will you be needing the cleaning service?”

Lex glared at him. “No, I... What have we gotten on Superman so far?”

Nigel nodded, “I’ll get the reports.”

“Get me Mazik’s as well. Maybe some jewelry will do the trick,” Lex added.

“Yes, sir,” Nigel nodded.

Clark landed at the Daily Planet, spinning back into his work clothes. He exited the storage closet and found Lois outside waiting for him, handing him a box of pencils. He looked at her curiously. “You needed pencils,” she said with a wink.

He nodded. It certainly helped to have her in on the secret to help him cover for the disappearances he had. “Thanks,” he said softly following her back to the bullpen.

“No problem,” she said, grabbing him by the hand. He smiled at the gesture and gently squeezed her hand in his. “So, you were saying earlier...”

“Yes,” he nodded. “Not here, though,” he guided her to the small conference room where they had everything on ‘the boss.’ He closed the door behind them and closed the blinds then lowered his glasses to scan the room and make sure no one was around.

Lois laughed, “So that’s what you’re doing when you pull your glasses down. I always thought you had astigmatism.”

He smiled, cupping her cheek, “There’s probably gonna be a lot of those moments.”

She linked her arms around his neck, “I hope so.” He let out a shuddered breath as she pressed her small frame against him. The things she was doing to him...

“So,” He began slowly, “as I was saying...” He let out a shuddered breath as she pressed herself against him again, “Lois...”

“Am I distracting you?” She teased.

“You have no idea...” He whispered.

“I think I might...” She teased pressing her body against him more tightly.

“Oh, God, Lois...” He let out a moan and captured her lips with his own.

She sighed happily as he kissed her thoroughly on the mouth, slipping his tongue inside the warm confines of her mouth, “Clark...” She sighed happily as he slowly broke off the kiss.

“I’ve been wanting to do that since this morning,” he whispered.

“Why didn’t you?” She asked, intertwining her fingers with his playfully.

“I didn’t know if I was allowed... We’re still in the...getting to

know you...phase..." Clark sighed, "Speaking of which..."

"Yes, speaking of which..." she said with a smile, stepping away from him.

"Okay, so you remember when we started going through all this ..." He gestured to the map of all the crimes associated with 'the boss' and Lois nodded.

Lois sighed in aggravation, "Is this where you're going to tell me Lex Luthor is 'the boss?' I told you before you've yet to show one ounce of ..."

"Just hear me out. A lot of what happened occurred between Luthor and..." He lowered his voice a few decibels, "Superman."

"I'm listening," she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

He pointed to the note on Dr. Antoinette Baines, "We'll have to start at the beginning..."

"This is nothing," Lex fumed angrily. "Absolutely nothing!"

"We know that the man of steel has a soft spot for Ms. Lane but he hasn't been seen with her as of lately. It seems she's taken up with her partner..." Nigel laid a few surveillance photos of Lois and Clark dancing at *Foquet* and having dinner. There were pictures of them kissing on the dance floor and of them holding hands across from one another at their table.

"I already know this..." He muttered. "What about Superman?"

"Well, our man followed them back to Mr. Kent's apartment. They seemed to disappear for some time and then reappear at Ms. Lane's apartment."

"What do you mean disappear?" Lex asked, confused.

"We're assuming they were just...where he couldn't see them..." Nigel said slowly, hoping he didn't have to spell it out.

"No," Lex shook his head in disgust. "She wouldn't dare... Not on a first date and not with ...*KENT*... Get better surveillance..."

"We'll have to ..." Nigel began but Lex cut him off.

"Just do it!" Lex snarled. "I know she is the key to bringing down Superman..."

"So, you're saying Lex was funding the sabotage of Prometheus?" Lois asked in shock.

"Think about it. It makes sense," Clark reasoned. "Remember when you asked Baines 'why?'"

Lois nodded, "She said it was for..."

"Profit," Clark nodded. "Who stood to make a profit if Prometheus didn't succeed?"

Lois cringed inwardly, "Lex," She thought about it for a minute, "Hey! You could have gotten us out of there anytime. Why did you let me spill my guts about Claude?" She smacked him on the arm lightly.

Clark laughed, "I actually tried but you weren't listening so I just let you finish babbling..." At her confused expression, he continued, "Remember I said, '*Lois, somehow, I've managed to...*'"

Realization dawned on her face and she sighed. "I still can't believe how blind I was ..."

"People see what they want to see," he shrugged. "It's what makes the disguise of Superman work. No one expects the guy with glasses to be the one lifting space shuttles into space..."

"Or stop asteroids..." She reasoned thoughtfully. "You lost your memory from...trying to stop Nightfall...not getting hit by a car...I thought that was odd that you'd wake up with amnesia a couple of days after that happened..."

"Yeah," He nodded. "You helped me get my memory back... and stop Nightfall," He leaned in to kiss her.

"And the pheromones?" She asked teasingly as they broke off the kiss. She placed a few fingers on his shoulder, tracing her way up behind his neck. She smiled seeing him blush slightly.

"Two days of not being able to do anything when you were

under the influence of those pheromones...I guess I just kinda lost my willpower..."

She smiled proudly, intrigued by the idea of him losing his willpower. "Really?" She linked her arms around his neck, tracing random patterns against the fabric of his jacket.

"Two...days..." He repeated slowly as she ran a hand down his chest, watching him intently as she did so.

"So, is that the limit to Superman's willpower?" She teased, "Two...days..." She traced the outline of his tie against the fabric of his dress shirt and smiled when she heard him take in a sharp breath. She smiled to herself, realizing the effect she was having on him.

"It...depends..." He began slowly, letting out a shuddered breath as she fingered his tie, tracing an imaginary path upward to the knot he had so perfectly tied.

The thought of loosening his tie flashed through her mind.

"On ...what...exactly?" She asked with a smile.

"How long you're torturing...him...for..." He managed as she fingered the knot to his tie, feeling his resolve melting beneath her fingertips. His hand moved to cover her hand as she fingered the silk of the knot at his collar, "I thought we were...taking things...slow..."

"There are different definitions of ...slow..." She whispered, pressing her small frame against him.

He smiled, "I wasn't aware."

She bit her lower lip in anticipation as he leaned in to kiss her. The door to the conference room opened and they both jumped back from one another, looking like two children that had been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Jimmy looked at them confused for a moment then looked at the map behind them with notes on them. He looked back at Clark who was readjusting his tie as she was looking everywhere but at him or Clark. Hopefully, he didn't suspect anything. Jimmy was the worst about gossip.

"Uh, what are you guys doing in here?" Jimmy began slowly.

"Uh, we were just going over..." Lois began. Her mind didn't want to cooperate with her at the moment.

"...some notes on the older stories linked with 'the boss,'" Clark finished for her. He was still readjusting his tie slightly. She couldn't help but smile knowing how affected he'd been by their teasing.

"Really?" Jimmy asked skeptically. Lois sighed. Was he buying it? Could he tell what they had been...?

"Mainly the stuff with Prometheus," Clark said hurriedly, "What's up?"

Jimmy nodded, "Uh, I was looking for Jack..."

Clark stiffened, "Jack?"

"Yeah, he went to go grab some lunch an hour ago and I haven't seen him since..." Jimmy began but before he could finish Clark had raced out of the conference room and headed toward the storage closet. Jimmy looked at Lois confused, "What was that about?"

"I don't know," She shrugged, taking a step back into the room. She took a seat at the table, grabbing a file in front of her on the Toasters, intent on focusing on anything else at the moment. Realizing Jimmy was staring at her she gave him a glare, "What?"

Jimmy smiled broadly, "Nothing." He whispered to himself, "I didn't say nothing." With that he left, closing the door behind him.

Jack. He'd gotten sidetracked with Lois and completely forgotten about Jack. Clark sighed as he soared through the air, looking for any sign of his young friend. Outside Callards he spotted Jack in a conversation with Inspector Henderson holding up the sandwiches in one hand and a bag of drinks in another. He sighed in relief. He was safe. He wasn't...

He saw Henderson step away and watched as a man in black walked toward Jack. He bumped Jack to the ground and Jack

dropped the bag of food in his hands. “Hey, watch it...”

The man in black pulled out a gun and Clark soared down at super-speed and shielded Jack with his cape, deflecting the bullets that were aimed at him.

He scanned the perimeter looking for the man that had approached him but found nothing.

He looked back at Jack, “Are you all right?”

Jack looked at him in shock, “I...”

Henderson ran up to them, pointing at the man that had bumped into Jack wearing different attire in handcuffs “Did you see that? We’ve got the perpetrator in custody...”

Clark’s face grew grim. Jack was right. Luthor was coming after him. “Inspector, can you take it from here? I want to see if I can find who did this...”

“Sure thing,” Inspector Henderson said, wrapping an arm around Jack as they walked. He began to bark orders into his radio, “Alpha Mega Charlie we have a four seventeen, downtown Metropolis Square, repeat four seventeen in progress. All units respond.”

What was wrong with her? After one date, she was unable to concentrate on anything but Clark...Lois sighed, trying to focus on the file in front of her. If she was like this after friendly flirting, then heaven help her when they...

She thought to herself.

The image of her partner in nothing but a towel came racing back to her mind and she could feel her heart rate speed up. Oh, God! She was seriously thinking about...

‘Why not? You fantasized about it with Superman enough times...’

That was different. Superman was a fantasy. Clark is... What? She sighed to herself. It was one thing to fantasize about a man she didn’t see on a daily basis...didn’t... What?

Memories of her breakup with Claude rushed to the forefront of her mind and she winced, trying to focus on anything but the painful memories.

<<“Cold frigid bitch...”>>

‘No, Clark isn’t like that...’ She reminded herself.

<<“You know this isn’t really dancing.”

‘It’s not?’>>

He had taken her breath away on the dance floor then again when he’d entrusted his secret to her. She’d been too shocked last night to feel anything but numbness. The man she’d been fantasizing about for almost a year was the same man that she’d been working side by side everyday...her friend...Her friend that said he was ‘crazy’ about her. It scared her, knowing his feelings... knowing Clark and Superman were the same person, but intrigued her at the same time. She had so many questions...

<<“But if he is an alien, maybe he doesn’t get the old...you know, itch...”

“One way to find out.”

“Possible visitor from another planet arrives on Earth and all you can think of is hauling him off to your lair so you can try him out?”

“Test drive Lois. A couple of hours behind the wheel and I’d know for sure if we’re talking import or domestic.”>>

<<“Wait a minute. I get it. You and Superman joined the zero-gravity club up on the space station didn’t you?”>>

‘Don’t go there...’ She chastised herself. She knew all too well how those fantasies always ended up.

<<“I’m sorry. This is just really hard...I need to tell you this...I’m crazy about you, but before this goes any further I have to tell you this. I don’t want to screw this up.”

“You’re not screwing anything up.”>>

She’d spent so many nights alone in her apartment... wishing...hoping for Superman to love her back...Now, he had declared his feelings for her. Only, it wasn’t just Superman...

He was Clark. Clark Kent, her partner...the man she’d come to respect as a friend and colleague for almost a year. It had been hard to take her sister’s advice the other night and just ‘let him in’ after he’d kissed her the other night, but she had...and she was so glad she had.

<<“Clark, I won’t tell anyone. I promise. This...is a lot and I do have...a lot of questions...mostly trying to figure out how I didn’t figure it out before now...but you can trust me.”

“I know that Lois...This...is probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but I never doubted I could trust you.”>>

Trust. It was something that didn’t come easy to her over the years but somehow knowing Clark trusted her enough to share this secret with her... He could have kept her in the dark and just lied to her about Superman telling him about Lex but he hadn’t. He’d trusted her with his secret and now...

<<“I want this to work more than anything I’ve ever wanted in this world.”>>

Now, what? Things were complicated that was for sure. A part of her wanted nothing more than to fulfill every fantasy she’d ever had about Superman, knowing he felt the same way... but the other part... The other part was still scared. She’d suffered irreparable damage when she’d gotten involved with Claude. She’d been so hurt when she found out none of it had been real.

After Claude she’d decided she would never let a man hurt her like that again so she made sure to keep everyone around her at arm’s length...Everyone except Superman. She shook her head in disgust, recalling how she’d treated Clark during their first few weeks at the Planet together.

‘He probably got a kick out of literally making me speechless and me drooling all over Superman.’

<<“You know he didn’t seem that special to me. Except for the flying and the uniform he could have been any ordinary guy.”

“Ordinary? Give me a break!”>>

<<“Clark is the before. Superman is the after...Make that the way, way after...”>>

“Maybe all this frenzy isn’t what he expected. Maybe he’s gun shy.”

“That’s ridiculous. He has no reason to hide...especially from me...”>>

<<“We? There is no ‘we.’”

“How do you know I don’t have the inside track on finding Superman?”

“Sure, Clark. And when you run across Jimmy Hoffa and the Easter Bunny why don’t you reel them in too?”>>

<<“Now there you go using that word again Clark. There is ‘you,’ there is ‘I,’ there is no ‘we.’”

“Not yet.”

“Not ever.”

“We’ll see.”

“How long can you hold your breath?”>>

‘No,’ She thought to herself, cringing as she recalled so many things she’d said in front of Clark about...himself. It almost seemed like he was jealous of himself. *‘Why not? You were practically drooling over Superman while ignoring Clark...’*

<<“Then we’re agreed. We’ll take this slow and figure out... us?”>>

He’d declared his feelings for her and then left the ball in her court after he’d trusted her with his secret...so why was she having such a hard time coming to grip with the idea of trusting him with her heart?

<<“I was saving for Tahiti. But a date with Superman...that would have been a real adventure. Oh, Clark, he doesn’t even know I’m alive. Maybe it was stupid of me to think that he really cared...”

“Not so stupid, Lois...Did you ever think that maybe Superman was afraid to reveal himself...his true feelings?”>>

<<“You’ll always be special to me, Lois.”

"I will?"

"Of course you're the first woman that I hel...um, interviewed me." >>

"Lois Lane?" a voice behind her broke her from her thoughts and brought her back to the present.

"Yes?" Lois looked up to see the mail clerk handing her a package. He handed the package to her silently then headed to the next recipient. She looked down at the box confused. She wasn't expecting a delivery.

She opened the package and found a long velvet box inside with a diamond tennis bracelet inside it. She groaned. She had a feeling this was not from Clark. She turned to Jimmy who was standing a few feet away from her in discussion with the new transfer from Washington, Ralph Simms. "Jimmy, I'm going out."

"Need any help?" Jimmy asked with interest. He seemed to recognize the look in her eyes and mistook it for a lead on a story.

"No!" Lois snapped bitterly, grabbing the box that had been delivered and headed for the elevator.

"Yikes..." Ralph muttered, watching her leave.

"You don't know the half of it," Jimmy muttered.

After checking to make sure there were no other shooters in the area and Jack had arrived at the Metropolis P.D. safely, Clark headed toward Lex Luthor's penthouse and stepped inside, scanning the room for any sign of the attempted assassin. He found no guns. No residue. Just Lex Luthor sitting at his desk with a smug smile, "Superman, do come in."

"You've crossed the line, Luthor..." He took a step forward. Everything in him wanted to grab him by the neck and throttle him but it went against everything he'd been taught...everything he stood for.

"I beg your pardon?" Lex asked, pretending to be insulted.

"You've gone too far," Clark growled.

"Oh, Superman, look at you... You really should take some time off... All this saving the world has gotten to you..."

"He's a kid..." Clark fumed angrily, ignoring Lex's dodging of his accusations.

"False accusations like that are just insulting... I thought you were better than that..." Lex smiled back smugly.

"This is your warning," Clark warned. "I am now making it my mission to ensure Jack's safety. If you even breathe the wrong way in his direction... I'll be there... Back off!" With that Clark slammed his arm against Luthor's chest knocking him back slightly and then soared away.

Lex watched as Superman left with a smile. "It seems our efforts need to be doubled."

Outside Lex's office with the door slightly cracked Lois stood, clutching the box she'd been so adamant about throwing back in his face but after overhearing the exchange between him and Clark just now she wasn't so sure. She needed to get out of here. She was about to turn and leave when something caught her eye. Lex reached for a knob on his desk and turned it, revealing the hidden door behind the bookcase. He pressed a button on his desk and it beeped, "Mrs. Cox, be sure to recruit a replacement for the Jack project... and send Nigel up so we can discuss the 'Superman Problem.'"

'Superman Problem? Oh, God, Clark...Nigel.'

"Of course, Mr. Luthor. There is an Agent Carter from Bureau 39 on line four for the boss. Should I transfer him to the scrambled line?"

'Bureau 39?'

"Yes, I'll take it in the office for now. Transfer the call in five," Lex said with a smile.

"The Boss? The Office?" She had to get out of here before someone saw her. The front desk hadn't given her a second look when she'd come up and she hadn't passed anyone on the way up

but she needed to get out of here before someone saw her. She watched as Lex stepped through the hidden door and the bookcase closed behind him.

"Oh, God..." She whimpered, struggling to catch her breath from the revelation. She heard the elevators across the hall ding and darted into an open office, hoping to avoid being seen by Nigel, keeping the door ajar just enough to see what was going on so she could safely make her exit.

Holding her breath, she watched as Nigel opened the door to Lex's office and closed it behind him. She heard the click of a lock and what sounded like a whirling noise from Lex's office.

'I've got to get out of here,' she reminded herself. She opened the door slightly, checking to make sure there was no one in the hall and darted out of the office, heading for the elevator. Once she arrived in the lobby she rushed past the front desk, hoping not to be seen. Thankfully there seemed to be a big meeting going on. There was a large group of stuffed shirt businessmen surrounding the receptionist desk. It was weird. Some of them looked a lot like the board members at the Planet...

Not now. She had to remind herself to focus on getting to the Jeep and finding Clark.

"That's it!" Jack said shaking his head as he paced in the police station with Inspector Henderson and Clark Kent. "He's made his move. We've got to..."

Clark shook his head, "No, he's been too smart about it. There's nothing linking him to it. The gunman is claiming to be working alone and taking full responsibility."

"Lucky for you Superman was flying by when he did," Henderson said with a shaky breath.

"Lucky," Jack muttered, "What am I supposed to do the next time someone tries to come after me?"

"I already spoke to Superman," Clark reassured. "He's doing everything in his power to look out for you. He'll be your escort to and from the Planet..."

Jack scoffed, "You're joking right?"

"I'm also putting a police detail on you..." Henderson added. "We'll start an unofficial investigation. If this is Luthor then he's sure to have contacts everywhere... We'll keep the investigation between us for now until we have enough to..."

"What am I supposed to do until then?" Jack scoffed. "He tried to *kill me!!!* I can't go home... I can't..."

"I'll get you moved to an undisclosed location. That along with the detail I'm putting on you and Superman escorting you ... you should be safe..."

Back at the Daily Planet, Lois hurriedly rushed into the newsroom frantically looking for Clark. She checked both conference rooms and found no sign of him anywhere. She poked her head into Perry's office to see if he was in with the Chief. "Something I can help you with, Lois?" Perry asked, noticing the shaken expression on Lois' face.

"No, I was just, um..." Lois stammered out.

"Looking for Clark?" Perry guessed with a smirk. Did he know?

"I, uh..." Lois began to backtrack.

Perry smirked at her, leaning back in his chair, "He called a few minutes ago.. He's on his way back from the police station with Jack. Apparently, Superman stopped an attempted mugger from trying to gun our copy boy down in the middle of Metropolis Square..."

"What!?" Lois asked aghast.

Clark stepped off the elevator with Jack in tow and a plain clothes policeman. He scanned the newsroom for Lois and spotted her with Perry in his office. "Jack, are you gonna be all right?" He asked.

"I'm fine," Jack said. "Thanks for your help."

Clark nodded and headed to Perry's office to catch Lois up on everything that had been going on this afternoon. As he approached it seemed he didn't have to catch Lois up on everything as he caught the tail end of Perry and Lois' conversation, "Apparently, Superman stopped an attempted mugger from trying to gun our copy boy down in the middle of Metropolis Square..."

"What???" Lois asked aghast. He noticed her fidgety demeanor and the quick pace of her heart rate as Perry spoke.

"Gunman is being booked and Jack's under police protection for now..." He said walking up behind Lois as he entered the office.

"Clark!" Lois visibly relaxed slightly when she saw him.

She still seemed a little shaken. He wasn't sure what the cause was but decided not to press it at the moment. "I just brought Jack back from the police station..." He said as Lois reached for his hand squeezing it gently as she looked down at his fingers as if she were mesmerizing them. He noticed Perry's inquisitive look and continued, "I was running that... errand ...and ran into Superman who... told me what happened..."

Lois looked up at him with a smirk, "Lucky Superman was nearby..."

"Yeah, it was..." He gave a weak smile.

Worry was written on her face as she continued, "Is ...I mean, was Superman okay? I mean that must have been hard..."

Despite having an audience of one he reached out to cup her cheek, "He'll live."

Perry having seemed to take a backseat to the exchange, watching the obvious glances between the two before he cleared his throat, "Uh-huh, well, uh, Kent it sounds like that was quite an ordeal...maybe you two should take the afternoon to, uh, go over everything...Lois seems a bit shaken up from something...and ...no offense, son, but, uh, you don't look that great either. Maybe just email your copy to me by four from home..."

Clark looked at his Editor-in-Chief for a moment, trying to figure out what the glint in Perry White's eyes was about but before he could respond Lois had already agreed and drug him halfway out of the office.

As Lois stopped at her desk long enough to grab her things and drag him to the elevator he overheard Cat and the new guy Ralph, "I'm telling you there is *no* way..." Ralph said emphatically. "I had contacts all over and from what I heard about Mad Dog Lane..."

"Don't believe everything you hear, Ralph..." Cat said, pointing toward the elevator, "Look!" Just before the elevator doors closed the newsroom caught a glimpse of Lois Lane putting her head against her partner's chest as he kissed her forehead.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Clark asked, holding Lois to him as the elevator doors closed behind them.

"It was horrible!" Lois cried. Clark held her close as he reached behind them and pulled the elevator stop so they wouldn't be interrupted. "I got another one of those STUPID presents from Lex so I thought maybe just throwing it back at him would help get the message across..."

Clark stiffened as his worst fears came to light, "If he hurt you so help me I'll..."

"No, nothing like that... I took it over there and was about to but his door was halfway closed and I overheard you and him arguing about Jack..." Lois continued as the tears began to fall.

Clark hung his head, "I'm sorry you had to hear that...He just brings the worst out in me and..."

Lois shook her head, "After you left he said something about doubling efforts and fixing a 'Superman problem' and then..." She cried harder. "I know it's stupid to get upset. It's not like anything can actually hurt you but..."

"Lois..." Clark sighed, stroking her cheek.

"What?" She recognized the uneasy tone in his voice. Could he be hurt? "Clark, what is it?"

He let out a long breath, "Not here," He said softly. Lois looked at him curiously, trying to determine what he was trying to say without saying it, but didn't say anything as the elevator dinged and they arrived on the lobby floor.

Lex stared at the velvet box Mrs. Cox laid on his desk angrily. "It appears you had a surprise guest..." Mrs. Cox said coldly.

Lex leaned back in his chair, contemplating the situation for the moment. "And no one knew she had come up? No one signaled..." He drew his hand into a fist as he struck the marble top of his desk. "I do not accept failure...find everyone...every person responsible for"

"And what do you plan to do with Ms. Lane?" Mrs. Cox cut him off. "She may have overheard ..."

"No, she didn't hear anything...She would have confronted me...I suppose this..." Lex fumed angrily, tossing the velvet box across the room angrily, "...is my dear John letter..." Lex seemed to have a calm come over him before turning to business, "No, I will not accept defeat. Perhaps the backup plan needs to be initiated faster than anticipated to draw her back in where she belongs..."

"All measures?" Mrs. Cox asked.

Lex nodded, "Yes," he picked up his planner, "I'll need a replacement staff for the front fully trained by tomorrow and a pilot for tomorrow evening..."

"Pilot?" Mrs. Cox asked confused.

"Yes, it seems this Agent Carter won't talk business over the phone and insists on a meeting with 'the boss' in person. Set up a double just in case...but only as a decoy. I don't want to scare him off. This could be the real deal...the end for Superman."

Clark landed in an alley outside Lois' apartment and spun back into his business suit before exiting to the main street where her apartment building was. Lois was watching him with a curious expression on her face, "What?" He asked, looking behind him uncertainly.

"Nothing," she said, shaking her head.

He stared at her curiously for a moment before following her to her apartment. She remained unusually quiet as they climbed the stairs to her apartment building and even more quiet as they rode the elevator up to the fifth floor. When they finally arrived at her apartment he followed her in, taking a seat on the couch as he watched her lock each of the seven locks on her front door.

She turned back to him and took a seat next to him, looking at him expectantly, "So?" She prompted.

"Lois, are you okay?" He asked, taking her hand for a moment. "You still seem ..."

"I'm fine," she said nervously. "Why wouldn't I be? I mean it's not every day you get to overhear someone you thought you knew...plotting murder and destruction throughout the city..."

"Lois..." He took her hand and intertwined his fingers with hers, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"No," Lois shook her head. "Not right now. You were saying in the elevator...Go."

He didn't think she was as 'fine' as she was making herself out to be but he knew better than to press, "Okay," he sighed, turning toward her, "Do you remember when we dealt with that guy, Trask...I told you he *thought* there was a meteorite that could kill ... Superman?"

Lois nodded, "Yeah, when we were in Smallville he almost..." She seemed to recognize something in Clark's expression, "No, no, no..."

He sensed her apprehension and began to reassure her, "Lois, calm down..."

"Kryptonite???" She gasped in horror. "What if he finds it? Clark!"

"Bureau 39 was shut down from what we've been able to tell and my dad said they haven't seen any other sign of Kryptonite on Wayne Irig's property..." Clark tried to reassure her.

"But it could still be out there and..." Lois hung her head, burying her head in his chest.

"Hey, it's okay," he reassured her holding her close as he stroked her cheek. "Everything's gonna be all right."

"You don't know that," Lois argued.

"No, I don't," he sighed, "but for now we have one thing on our side."

"What's that?" She asked.

"Luthor and the rest of the world don't know that Kryptonite exists," Clark sighed. "As long as it remains a figment of Trask's imagination then there's nothing to worry about."

"He thought it could kill Superman," she said shakily. "Can it?"

"I don't know," he sighed. "Superman was without his powers for a few days after being exposed to it...but beyond that," He shrugged, "Who knows?"

Lois looked at him wryly, "Any other secrets you haven't told me about?"

He sighed, "Well..."

"What?" She asked when a familiar expression crossed his face.

His face went grim, standing up to turn on the radio frequency he'd just heard. The announcer's voice filled her apartment, "Metropolis National Forest has been engulfed in flames for the last half hour. Fire department officials say the drought in New Troy has contributed to the ease with which the fire has spread into the rural neighborhoods surrounding the..."

He looked at her apologetically, "I gotta..."

"Go..." She smiled, sitting up so he could get up from the couch.

He leaned in to kiss her, "I'll try to be quick. Maybe we can pick up where we left off with the whole... 'getting to know you'..."

"Count on it," she winked at him. He laughed then left, leaving Lois with a smile on her face as she watched him close the door behind him, the familiar sonic boom could be heard from a distance as he ricocheted into the sky.

{ "Kryptonite??? What if he finds it? Clark!"

"Bureau 39 was shut down from what we've been able to tell and my dad said they haven't seen any other sign of Kryptonite on Wayne Irig's property..."

"But it could still be out there and..."

"Hey, it's okay, everything's gonna be all right."

"You don't know that."

"No, I don't, but for now we have one thing on our side."

"What's that?"

"Luthor and the rest of the world don't know that Kryptonite exists. As long as it remains a figment of Trask's imagination then there's nothing to worry about."

"He thought it could kill Superman, can it?"

"I don't know, Superman was without his powers for a few days after being exposed to it...but beyond that. Who knows?"

"Well, well," Nigel mused, "This is an interesting development," he said as he stopped the recording.

"Kryptonite," Lex mused. "We'll need to do some more research on this Bureau 39 before we leave in the morning."

"Do you think this Agent Carter might know something about it?" Nigel asked.

"It never hurts to ask," Lex said as he replayed the audio footage.

{ "But for now we have one thing on our side."

"What's that?"

"Luthor and the rest of the world doesn't know that Kryptonite exists. As long as it remains a figment of Trask's imagination then there's nothing to worry about."

"How do you think Mr. Kent would feel if he knew he was so...instrumental in bringing this Kryptonite's existence to my knowledge?" Lex asked as he paused the recording once more. He lit his cigar and smiled, "Continue the surveillance. We'll catch up when I get back," Lex ordered, heading toward the elevator.

Unfortunately, the fire that had broken out was not something Clark would be able to fight easily. It had spread throughout almost all of Metropolis National Forest, trapping hundreds and leaving the firefighters to struggle through the smoke to help find and rescue the families that were trapped amidst the raging fire. Lois caught the coverage of the fire on television and watched with admiration as Clark struggled to carry the families to safety alongside the firefighters and search and rescue teams that were working to save everyone.

It was strange to see Clark...Superman like this. To see the stern, steely expression on his face...the grief on his face when he carried out a four-year-old girl with third degree burns as she screamed in pain...This was Clark. Seeing the pain on his face...touched something in her. She could feel the helplessness in him like a wave. Surely he didn't think that...

Lois bit her lower lip as she watched a similar scene unfold with a two-year-old boy and felt tears in the corner of her eyes threatening to escape. This was Clark. Of course he would try to shoulder the burden of not being able to help as much as he thought he should. How did he deal with this? How did he go on day to day after witnessing the things he witnessed...When he wasn't able to save everyone?

Lois laid in bed, thinking about Clark well into the evening as she contemplated the new discoveries she'd made about her partner over the past few days. To discover he not only cared about her as more than a friend or partner, but also moonlighted as another man she'd fantasized about for so long was hard to come to grips with. She'd thought she was in love with Superman but after her conversation with Lucy the other night she wasn't so sure anymore. Was it the idea of being with someone she couldn't have?

Could she have Superman? Clark was being called away to rescue people every day. There wouldn't ever be a time when Superman wasn't needed. Could she share him with the world?

Without even thinking about it she knew the answer. She couldn't imagine her life without Clark Kent anymore than she could imagine the world without Superman. It just wasn't possible. She could share him with the world if that's what it took. She sighed, watching the coverage of the forest fire continue. It didn't look like Clark would be coming back anytime soon...if at all tonight.

The next morning Lois arrived in the newsroom alone, looking for Clark. She frowned when she realized he hadn't arrived yet. It was scary to realize how much she'd been looking forward to seeing him...touching him...loving him...

'Whoa girl.'

Love? Had she really thought that? Wasn't it too soon?

'You've known him for almost a year,' she reminded herself. She supposed it wasn't a huge leap that once she let him in she'd realize what she'd been feeling was...love. 'Slow down,' she reminded herself. It was one date. One amazing date and lots and lots of incredible kisses and touches...

She shivered slightly recalling how good it had felt to be in Clark's arms.

<< *"Love is never enough, Lois. You think you know someone and then they disappoint you. Men don't know how to love. They*

always leave.">>

She recalled her mother's harsh words to her after her breakup with Paul in college. It wasn't surprising. She'd seen how badly a bad relationship could be when children were involved and never wanted to end up like her mom...bitter and alone with kids to raise, reminding her of their father.

<<"I'm not Claude and I'm not Paul. I would never betray you like that. All I'm asking for is a chance.">>

She knew he cared about her. She definitely felt something... scary and wonderful, but was it love? Her feelings for Clark had always been complicated...partly because she was trying to deny them for so long. Now that she was free to express them...it scared her. She blushed recalling the teasing from yesterday. The idea of taking things slow was losing its merit more and more but the idea of not...scared her. Clark was Superman. What if she disappointed him? Her experience with any relationship hadn't been that great. She never considered herself a prude...just careful.

She knew her fantasies about Superman never disappointed her, but would she disappoint him? He'd traveled the world...Had women falling all over him...Surely he was more...experienced than she was. What if it was bad?

'Yeah right...' her mind snickered to herself, recalling the pleasurable jolt she'd felt when he'd been responding to her teasing and caresses.

'Yet another thing we need to talk about,' she reminded herself.

The jolt of a large leather purse being laid on her desk brought her back to the present and she looked up to see Cat Grant sitting at her desk expectantly, "So..." Cat began cautiously.

"So?" Lois echoed a bit hurriedly, trying to cover up where her mind had been before Cat had sat down in front of her.

Cat's eyes widened as she sized her up for a moment before looking around to see if anyone was paying attention to them. "You are *sooo* busted..." She whispered in a hushed whisper.

"What are you talking about?" Lois harrumphed, unsure of what Cat was referring to.

Cat glanced around the newsroom once more then pointed at Ralph and Jimmy who were watching them as they talked, "Not here." She shook her head, motioning for Lois to follow her.

Lois rolled her eyes, unsure of what nonsense Cat was trying to spin in her head. Dare she follow? She sighed as curiosity got the better of her and she followed Cat into the small conference room she and Clark had been in yesterday, teasing one another.

Cat nodded, closing the door firmly and locking it before closing the blinds, "Peering eyes," Cat said with a grin.

"Peering what?" Lois asked.

Cat just grinned impishly, "You dirty, dirty girl..."

"What??" Lois half laughed, half choked out as she felt her throat going dry.

"Don't even try to deny it. I can read it all over your face..." Cat added.

"Read *what*!?" Lois laughed nervously.

'Oh, God. She knows.'

"You and Clark Good for you, Lois," Cat grinned impishly. "I was wondering how long it would take you to get yourself a good..."

"What are you talking about???" Lois asked aghast, unsure of how Cat had gotten such an idea. Fears of the past began to race through her mind as she struggled to hold her ground. Where had Cat got the idea that she and Clark...

'He wouldn't dare...'

"At first I didn't think too much of it when Phil and Craig were whispering about the goofy grin on Clark's face when he came in the newsroom the other morning...Then in the staff meeting you were *flirting* with him..." Cat said pointedly as she made her case.

Lois struggled to remain calm as an inaudible "Oh, God," escaped her lips while she placed her head in her hands.

"Then there was the goofy grins you both had on your faces yesterday morning..." Cat continued. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out..."

"Cat, I think you've got the wrong..."

"I still can't believe you'd do something like that...in the newsroom...I mean, that's bold, Lois..."

"What are you talking about?" Lois hissed. "I..."

"Oh, please!" Cat scoffed. "You and Clark disappear down a long hallway into a storage room where no one hardly goes then later you disappear in the conference room and close the door and the blinds..." Cat grinned impishly at Lois, "I know exactly what you were doing..."

"We weren't *doing* anything!" Lois snapped irritably.

"That's not what your face said when Jimmy opened the door," Cat said in a sing-song voice. "Don't give me that look! My desk is right by the conference room. I saw your face when that door opened..."

"Ugh! Get your mind out of the gutter!" Lois snipped, turning toward the door to unlock it, "For your information...we were *working* on some...sensitive...material...and and ...didn't want to be disturbed...I can't believe you think I'd..." She caught Cat's arched eyebrow and continued, "I am not...Whatever is going on between my partner and me is nobody's damn business but mine and Clark's!" She snapped as she jerked the door open.

"So you do admit there is *something* going on?" Cat teased in a whisper. "Was it good? Did he clear out the cobwebs? Clark looks like a guy that knows how to..."

"Stop! Stop! I am not having this conversation...with...*you*!" Lois snapped irritably as she stormed out of the conference room and headed back to her desk. As she approached she caught the tail end of a conversation between Clark, Phil, and Ralph.

"Come on, give it up, Kent, we all know..." Phil was saying.

"For the last time, I'm not even going to dignify that with a response. It's none of your business..." Clark said irritably.

"You're no fun, Kent," Ralph sneered. "I was just curious if there was any truth to that rumor..."

Clark stood up from his desk, staring Ralph down, "You better choose your words very carefully..."

"Ralph, back off...back off, man..." Phil warned, grabbing Ralph's arm and tugging it away from Clark Kent.

"I just meant that I'd heard some..." Ralph stammered as Clark crossed his arms over his chest, daring Ralph to say one wrong thing, "I think I'd better get back to work..."

"You do that," Clark said with a steely gaze.

'If looks could kill...' She thought to herself. She sighed in relief as she walked up behind Clark to see the two men scurrying to the other side of the bullpen to get as far away from Clark Kent as humanly possible. She couldn't hold in the laughter. She walked up behind him and gave him a hug from behind, "Wow...I don't think I've ever seen Phil run ...ever..."

He dropped his arms from his chest, slipping one around her waist and muttered, "He's a pig..."

"He's a sports writer...most of 'em are," She smiled, "I saw the fire last night. You okay?"

It had been a long morning. First Clark hadn't gotten home until late after dealing with the aftermath of the destruction from the forest fire that had spread to some rural neighborhoods. Thankfully no one had been killed but plenty had been injured. He'd managed to get a few hours of sleep before waking up late and rushing to get to the office after dropping Jack off as Superman this morning. When he'd finally arrived Lois was nowhere to be found. Before he could try and scan the newsroom to find her Phil and Ralph had approached him. Clark didn't know Ralph very well but he knew Phil and didn't really like the guy. He

was a guy's guy that had no filter and enjoyed running his mouth.

"Hey, Kent, buddy...pal..." Phil began patting Clark on the back as he walked toward his desk.

"Something I can help you with?" He asked, uncertainly as he took a seat at his desk.

"Never thought I'd see the day when the Ice Maiden would melt...I gotta hand it to you, Kent..." Phil continued with a grin. Clark visibly flinched when Phil let the name 'Ice Maiden' roll off his tongue. "You sly dog..."

"I don't know what you're talking about..." Clark said, unsure of where this all was coming from or why Ralph and Phil were perched on his desk, doing a great impression of vultures circling their prey.

"He doesn't know what I'm talking about Ralph..." Phil rolled his eyes. "You and Lane...in the conference room yesterday...closing the blinds...Come on, you can tell us. It's just us guys..."

Clark's jaw tightened as he realized what it looked like and exactly what Phil and Ralph were doing hovering over his desk for. They thought he and Lois had... He had to admit. It did look bad, but what made them think he'd even consider talking about his relationship with Lois with them? He wanted to throw them across the room...to hit something...After last night he was very tempted, but instead he opted for the calm approach, "I'm not having this conversation with you."

Ralph laughed with a sneer, "So is that code for, uh, 'yeah I hit that' or..." Clark threw down his pencil, fighting every urge to throw him through a window.

Phil tried to coax him down by patting him on the shoulder, "Come on, give it up, Kent, we all know..."

"For the last time, I'm not even going to dignify that with a response. It's none of your business..." Clark said irritably. He was about to snap.

"You're no fun, Kent," Ralph sneered. "I was just curious if there was any truth to that rumor..."

Rumor? He knew all about the supposed rumor that had been spread around the newsroom about Lois. That animal Claude had made sure Lois' reputation was damaged beyond repair before he left when she'd filed a complaint about him stealing her story. What he didn't know was how Ralph knew about it...

Clark stood up from his desk, staring Ralph down, "You better choose your words very carefully..." He warned.

"Ralph, back off...back off, man..." Phil warned, grabbing Ralph's arm and tugging it away from Clark's desk.

"I just meant that I'd heard some..." Ralph stammered as Clark crossed his arms over his chest, daring Ralph to say one wrong thing. If he so much as breathed the wrong way he was prepared to deck him. Ralph seemed to sense the mood Clark was in and thought better of continuing the statement he was about to make. "I think I'd better get back to work..."

"You do that," Clark said with a steely gaze. He watched as Phil and Ralph scrambled across the room in a panic and smirked to himself.

He heard a familiar laugh behind him and looked behind him as Lois hugged him from behind muttering, "Wow...I don't think I've ever seen Phil run...ever..."

He dropped his arms from his chest, slipping one around her waist and muttered, "He's a pig..."

"He's a sports writer...most of 'em are," she smiled, "I saw the fire last night. You okay?"

He shook his head, "There're a lot of kids...babies...in the burn unit after last night."

She looked at him cautiously, "Well, I'm sure...Superman," she lowered her voice a few octaves as she said 'Superman' and continued, "...did everything he could to help."

"It wasn't enough," he said sternly.

"Well, he can't be everywhere at once," she reminded him softly.

He sighed, recalling a similar conversation they'd had before she knew about his dual identities. "I know, it's just..." There was so much he wanted to say but couldn't find the right way to say it. It was hard having conversations like this in code with so many people watching their every move. He didn't dare try to take the conversation to the conference room either. God forbid he give the gossip hounds even more to talk about. Lois took his hand and squeezed it gently. He looked down at her hand, fitting so perfectly in his and smiled. "You feel like dinner tonight...to make up for last night?"

"Sure," she said softly. "Dinner sounds good."

He glanced down at her hand that was still in his hand and squeezed it as he looked up nervously, "So, how much of that did you hear?"

"Enough," she winked at him, leaning in to kiss him on the cheek. "Thank you."

"Careful or you'll give them even more to talk about," he teased, directing his eyes toward a few co-workers that were watching them.

She followed his gaze for a moment then he saw a glint in her eyes before she reached up to kiss him on the lips, slipping her arms around his waist as she kissed him. The catcalls and whistles around them reached his ears. He could feel all eyes on them and pulled away nervously, "Lois, everyone's watching..." He whispered self-consciously.

She smiled at him, pulling him to her by the knot on his silk tie and whispered, "Who cares?" With that she slipped her tongue inside the warm crevices of his mouth, outlining his lips with her tongue. He could taste coffee on her tongue as he began to forget about the fire from last night and instead focused on the feeling of Lois Lane in his arms, kissing him.

"Hey! Hey! Hey! What in the Sam Hill is going on out here!?" Perry bellowed from his office as the catcalls and whistles continued.

Lois broke off the kiss, grinning impishly at him before turning to Perry, "Oh, just a bit of an 'object' lesson, Chief."

Perry wore a smirk as he raised his eyebrows, "Uh-huh, well could you maybe save that for after hours? We've got a lot to cover today. There was a forest fire that destroyed half of Metropolis National Forest and a few neighborhoods around there and so far I don't have..."

"Uh, we're already on it, Chief," Clark interjected, finally finding his voice. "I was actually working on that when..." He stopped himself, unsure of how to explain what had distracted him in the middle of the newsroom.

"Let me guess, you tripped and fell on your partner's tongue?" Perry smirked.

"I...uh..." Clark began, looking at Lois for help who was wearing a very satisfied smile at the moment and was no help at all.

Perry held up his hand, "Just save it for after hours, will ya?" He then wagged a finger at Lois, "You two, get me that copy..." He then turned around the newsroom that was still watching them intently, "What is this, a wax museum? Everyone get to work!"

Everyone around them scurried around trying to get out of Perry's line of fire as Clark took a seat at his desk to begin piecing the story on the fire together as Lois perched herself on the edge of his desk looking like a cat that ate the canary. "Feeling pretty satisfied with yourself?" He asked with a wink.

She smiled, "I think so."

"Perry looked like his jaw was gonna fall on the floor," Clark said.

Lois shrugged with a smile, "Well it worked..."

"What did?" He asked with a smile.

"You're not thinking about last night's rescue, are you?" She whispered seductively as she stood up and he grinned, watching as she sashayed back to her desk with a wink.

"Wow..." He smiled to himself as he struggled to string together any thoughts on anything but Lois.

Lex stepped on his private jet taking a deep breath as he looked around. Mrs. Cox was pouring a glass of champagne for him as he approached. "Mr. Luthor," she said, handing him the flute.

"Thank you, my dear," he said taking the flute from her and took a seat.

"We're set to land in thirty-six hours." Mrs. Cox said. "Nigel is working with the team on turning the final board members..."

"Excellent," Lex said with a smile.

Lois sighed as she stared at the news coverage detailing the bridge collapse Superman showed up to save at the last minute. It seemed like this week was busy for the man of steel. She hoped he didn't come back in as sour of a mood as he had been this morning. Though she suspected part of his mood had to do with Ralph and Phil. It had been fun to pull him out of his bad mood. After overhearing the tail end of the conversation Clark had had and recalling the conversation she'd had with Cat she'd realized keeping her relationship with Clark out of the newsroom gossip was impossible. No sense in suppressing her urge to kiss him when everyone thought there was *a lot* more going on.

It wasn't like she didn't want to...

She definitely wanted to. She'd fantasized about it since seeing him in that towel at the Apollo. That towel she wished would fall off and...

'Don't go there,' she reminded herself.

Cat laughed as she took a seat at Lois' desk, "There's that face again..."

Lois glared at her, "I'm not talking to you."

Cat sighed, "I came off too strong. I was just..." She stopped and turned around, "You know what, never mind. Forget I said anything."

Lois sighed, "No, Cat, wait, what is it?"

Cat sighed, "I was just happy to finally see you putting the whole Claude thing behind you..."

Lois gave Cat a slow smile, "I am, but ... what everyone thinks happened with Clark...didn't happen..." Cat arched an eyebrow at her and Lois glared at her, "I'm serious."

Cat smirked at her, "Seriously?" She let out a low whistle. "Well, you've got more patience than...uh, most of the women in this newsroom..." Lois shot Cat a glare and she laughed, "Come on, Lois, you know what I'm talking about..."

Lois let out an irritated sigh and gave Cat a forced smile, "Women in the newsroom like you?"

Cat gave Lois a slow smile, "What can I say? I love the chase..."

"...or rejection..." Lois muttered under her breath. Cat glared at her and Lois continued, "Don't try to play all innocent with me. You were the one over there trying to take advantage of a man with *no memory*...I mean, really? Who does that?"

Cat shrugged, "Nothing else was working, but it backfired anyway. What can I say I never stood a chance because he only had eyes for ...you." Lois looked at her curiously. What was she saying?

<<"*You got the wrong idea, Lois.*"

"*Cat Grant's bedroom has more comings and going than the Metro Station. You're just another commuter.*">>

"What are you talking about, Cat? He wasn't even here a week and you were already..."

Cat cut her off and laughed, "Lois, you of all people should know better than to believe the local gossip from the Planet Grapevine..."

"Are you saying..." She began hoarsely.

"Not everything is as it seems. Take you and Clark for

instance...a week ago I never would have thought you'd have the guts to plant one on him in the middle of the newsroom, but people surprise you....even you. I still don't understand what took you so long to notice... I mean it was so obvious..."

Lois was quiet a moment, "Are you done?"

Cat smiled, "I'm just trying to say...don't let your past wreck your future...and I'm happy for you. He's a good guy and ... you deserve that."

Lois smiled at Cat, "Thanks, Cat."

"Hey, Chief?" Jimmy knocked on Perry's door and stepped inside.

"Uh, what's up, Jimmy?" Perry asked, looking up at the copy in front of him.

"I, uh, don't know how to say this..." Jimmy began.

"Just spit it out, Jimmy, can't you see I'm elbow deep in red ink?" Perry asked irritated.

"My paycheck bounced!" Jimmy said hurriedly.

"What?" Perry asked, confused.

"I...I'm in the red, Chief, I can't..." Jimmy began, but Perry cut him off.

"Calm down, Jimmy, I'll figure it out."

He pulled out his wallet and Jimmy shook his head, "Chief, I can't..."

"Nonsense," Perry said, handing him a couple hundred dollars, "Just to get you by until I get to the bottom of this."

Jimmy nodded, taking the money, "Thanks Chief." He grew thoughtful for a moment, "You, uh, think it might have to do with those budget cuts?"

"I don't know," Perry sighed. "There have been cuts across the board. We suffered a lot with the whole Carpenter scandal but we were bouncing back...It just doesn't make sense."

"Maybe there's something else going on...Carpenter could be doing something..." Jimmy suggested.

"No," Perry said, "Carpenter is in prison...this feels...different..."

"Maybe Lois and CK can look into it..." Jimmy suggested.

"Yeah, when they aren't busy ogling each other in the middle of the newsroom," Perry muttered under his breath.

Jimmy laughed, "I saw that! I wonder how that happened. I mean they went from being at each other's throats to..."

"...being in each other's arms?" Perry asked with a wink.

"Love is funny like that. Sometimes it just sneaks up on you."

"Are you sure you're okay with this? I mean we can go out and..." Lois cut Clark's protest off with a kiss before snuggling up with him on the couch to watch a movie. Their 'date night' had been turned into pizza and movie night after filing the stories on the fire and bridge collapse.

Lois had decided instead of going out she'd rather just stay in so she could spend whatever time she could with Clark before he got called away for Superman duties. It seemed the man of steel was extra busy lately. That or she was just becoming more and more aware of his coming and goings now that she was in on the secret.

"It's fine," she said, leaning against his chest as she curled up on the couch to watch 'Die Hard' with him. "You've been in and out all day. We don't have to go out. We've got a movie..." She pointed to the television and then gestured to the pizza in front of them, "and food. I'm good."

He wrapped an arm around her as she leaned against him, kissing her head before he hit play on the movie. "Okay, hopefully we can get through this movie without some disaster happening..."

"Seems to be happening a lot lately," she said softly, "Is it normally like that?"

"No, not usually," he sighed. "I'm not sure what's been going

on out there. It's just one thing after another...I'm sorry I wasn't much help earlier. I didn't mean for you to handle everything on your own today."

"Well, it's just something we have to figure out, but I think we're getting the hang of it. Besides you contributed the Superman quotes and eye witness accounts so there is that..." She said rubbing her palm against his chest as she leaned on his shoulder.

He smiled, removing her hand from his chest and intertwining her fingers with his, "I guess you're right."

She smiled, "I'm always right," She leaned up to kiss him, softly at first then with a little more intensity. She leaned into him, turning into his arms as his arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her to him as he deepened the kiss.

"I still can't believe I waited this long...to tell you..." He murmured against her lips.

She sighed against his lips, linking her arms around his neck as she readjusted herself on his lap, "I know...so much...wasted time..."

He nodded his agreement as he began nibbling at her collarbone that was exposed by her sleeveless button down top. "That feels so..." She moved to straddle him, eliciting a groan from him as she pressed her body against his. She tightened her thighs against his and laughed when he jumped slightly.

"Lo-is..." He admonished, pulling back slightly. She gave him her best innocent look and laughed. "We do a very bad impression of a couple taking things...slow..." He murmured as she kissed his neck.

"But this is *so* much more fun..." She teased against his neck.

He groaned as she raked her fingers against his chest, "Oh, no doubt, but..."

She pulled back when she sensed his hesitation, "What's wrong?"

"Lois, I don't know how to say this..." He pulled back slightly, "I'm crazy about you and I'm..." He let out another groan as she ran her hands up and down his chest.

"But?" She prodded.

"This...you and me...it's kinda uncharted territory for me. I mean..." He floated them off the couch for a moment and she tightened her arms around his neck, "being in a relationship...a relationship where I don't have to hide anything...its new to me. I'm so afraid of blowing it I..." He looked away sadly.

Lois stroked his cheek, turning his face to look at him, "Clark, I'm not as good at the whole relationship thing as I might look..." She shifted slightly so her legs were tucked beneath her but she remained on his lap.

"Really?" He asked, surprised.

She nodded, "I mean my whole life's basically been about work the past four years...I'm just trying to figure this out like you are..." She looked away sadly, "I've only had two serious relationships and both of those ended up as federal disasters..." He moved his hand to cup her cheek and she continued, "I told you about Claude?" He nodded, "Well, what I didn't say was this, it was one time and it was...awful." She shuddered recalling the pain both physically and emotionally she'd suffered from Claude. "Awkward...and painful...and...I just wanted it to end so I ended up just pretending..." She shook her head at the memory.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, cupping her cheek.

"After I found out he'd stolen my story I filed a complaint against him..." Her tone grew more bitter with each word she spoke, "He spread a lot of *awful* rumors. I just wanted them to stop so I withdrew my complaint...but it was too late."

Despite her best efforts to hold in the tears a few escaped and Clark leaned in to kiss them away. "Lois, anyone that would...I swear, I would never..."

"I know that," she said softly, "I just...I want you to know what you're getting yourself into. I'm not that experienced and..."

"Lois..." Clark began softly.

"I mean I know you traveled a lot and its not like you wouldn't have opportunity ...I mean, you're ...*you*, but I just don't want you to be..."

"Lois, I'm not..." He shook his head and she looked at him curiously. He smiled softly, "I'm not that experienced either..."

"You're not?" She asked with a curious expression.

<< "*You got the wrong idea, Lois.*"

"*Cat Grant's bedroom has more comings and going than the Metro Station. You're just another commuter.*">>

<< "*Nothing happened.*"

"*Clark, you can do the horizontal rhumba with the entire MetNet cheerleading squad for all I care. Just keep your hands off my copy.*">>

"No, actually not...at all..." At her widened expression he continued, "Lois, I'm not from here...I'm different...so I made the decision not to...cross that threshold until I could find someone I could share everything with..."

"Really?" She asked cautiously. "So, you're waiting for..."

"Just the right person," He stroked her cheek, "You."

"Oh, Clark," She began to cry and he captured her lips with his own, holding her to him. "You are just so...I love you."

"I love you too, Lois," he whispered, capturing her lips once more.

The next morning Lois found herself unable to wipe the smile off her face from the evening at Clark's apartment. He'd brought her home after the movie...which they'd had to rewind a few times to catch up on the parts they missed. It had been a great evening with the man she loved and after their talk she felt closer to him...safe. His promise of "I would never betray you like that" rang true to her. She knew Clark. She'd known him for almost a year and the more she got to know him the more she understood why he did the things he did.

When she'd arrived at work she'd found a bouquet of white roses, coffee and a familiar pastry bag sitting on her desk with a note.

//*Just Because.*

Love,

Clark//

She smiled after reading the card and closed the note to her chest for a moment as she contemplated its contents for a moment. It was so surreal to have Superman as a boyfriend but she had to admit it had its perks. The authentic pastries he was able to pick up in a moment's notice...the flights home when she was too tired to drive...

"Morning, Lois, how's it going?" Jimmy asked, walking past her.

"Good," Lois smiled happily. She noticed the boxes in his arms and asked, "What's all this?"

"Oh, uh, the Chief thought it'd be a good idea for you and CK to have backups of everything with how...connected...this boss seems to be. So, he's got me making copies of everything. I gotta warn you, I probably won't be done till this evening..."

"That's fine," Lois nodded. "You can just drop it off when you get everything done. That's a really good idea. Thanks, Jimmy."

Jimmy smiled, "No problem."

Lucy's flight came in that day so Lois left work early to pick her sister up from the airport. When she'd arrived at the terminal to pick her up she'd been surprised to find someone she wasn't expecting, "Mother!"

Ellen gave a forced smile, "Lois, how nice to see you. Picking up a friend?" The bite in her mother's tone was evident and Lois did her best to suppress the groan in the back of her throat.

"I should have called you," Lois began carefully.

"Yes, you should have!" Ellen snapped. "I have to find out through the country club grapevine that my youngest daughter is

moving back home? Neither one of you have the decency to call me and..."

"Lois!" Lucy's voice interrupted her tirade as her younger sister gave her a big hug from behind. "I missed you so much I..." Lucy stopped when she saw her mother's face, releasing her grip on her sister, "Uh, hi, mom...surprise..."

Ellen arched an eyebrow at Lucy, "Surprise?"

Ellen followed Lois and Lucy back to Lois' apartment to help Lucy unpack and catch up with each other. It was a bit awkward trying to catch up with their mother there but they did the best they could. "So, you broke up with Lex Luthor?" Ellen asked, taking a sip of her coffee.

"Yes, isn't it great?" Lucy beamed happily.

"I...guess..." Ellen shrugged. "I'd never met the man so... what do I know?"

"Me neither," Lucy added. "He never wanted to meet me when I was living here. I met her partner and co-workers more than the guy that was supposedly *so* interested in my sister..."

"Luce..." Lois sighed, not wanting to get into the whole Lex Luthor discussion with her mother.

"So you're single again?" Ellen sighed. "Should I buy you a cat for Christmas?"

"No," Lois said, trying to force herself not to snap at her mother's sarcastic remark.

"Oh, she's not single...at least I don't think so..." Lucy winked, "She did have a date the other night with a hot guy the other night."

"Well that was fast," Ellen said with a disapproval tone.

"Not really," Lucy winked, "She's known him for about a year now."

"Really?" Ellen's face perked up and she actually looked intrigued. Lois wasn't used to seeing this side of her mother at all.

"I..." She began carefully. How would her mother feel about her dating Clark? Would she get a lecture about how she'd been forced to give up her nursing career to take care of her and Lucy?

"Go on," Ellen said eagerly.

"I've been ...seeing Clark," Lois said slowly.

She was ready for the fireworks. The lectures and the disapproval tones. What she wasn't prepared for was this. "Good for you."

"What?" Lois asked, uncertainly.

"I said, 'good for you,'" Ellen repeated. "You're friends. If it works out ...and I'm not saying it won't...it'll make the relationship stronger."

"Who are you and what have you done with my mother?" Lois asked, surprised.

"What? I can't be happy for my daughter?" Ellen asked.

Lucy laughed, trying to cut the tension a bit, "So, how was the date?"

"It was nice...dinner and dancing and..." She smiled slowly, recalling the kiss on the dance floor.

"I'm really happy for you, sis," Lucy said taking a sip of coffee, "Clark's a great catch. See you let go of that silly Superman crush and good things happen..."

Lois laughed, "Yeah, I guess."

'If she only knew'

Lucy smiled, "I guess? Please it is written all over your face! You have been bitten by the 'love bug'..."

"Lucy..." Lois blushed.

"You do look happy, Lois," Ellen observed quietly.

"Say Clark's name without smiling," Lucy said teasingly. Lois blushed and a smile spread across her face. "See? You can't even think about him without smiling..."

"Luce..." She laughed, knowing full well her sister was right. "We're...taking things slow...Neither of us want to rush into anything and..."

"Yeah, let me know how that goes for you..." Lucy teased. "I think it's great. At least we know you can't scare him off..."

"Don't remind me," Ellen said shaking her head. "I still don't understand how you manage to find the trouble you do. If I had a penny for every ..."

"I know, I know," Lois sighed. "Clark says the same thing."

"Something we have in common," Ellen said with a smile.

"I'm starved! What are we doing for dinner?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, uh, Clark was going to pick up some Chinese takeout when he brought over the files on the story we're working on..."

"Oh, really?" Ellen asked, her eyes doing a twinkle as she spoke.

Lucy's eyes sparkled as well, "Do we need to make ourselves scarce...give you some privacy?"

"Lucy!" Lois blushed, "We just started going out..."

"So?" Lucy shrugged, "You've known each other for a year... almost...Besides you said something about his kisses...making your toes curl'..." Lucy reminded her. Lois blushed recalling just how weak that kiss had made her. Ellen just laughed as Lois' face turned beet red. "We should come up with a signal. You wiggle your nose or something and I'll make an excuse to leave..."

"Wiggle my nose?" Lois laughed. "Do I look like Samantha from Bewitched?"

Lucy shrugged as she wiggled her eyebrows, "Just a suggestion."

"Behave, both of you," Ellen interrupted.

A knock at the door interrupted the sibling teasing and Lois sighed, "That's probably dinner."

"...and Lois' dessert," Lucy added laughing.

"Shut up," Lois said before turning to open the door, "Hi," She smiled, seeing Clark on the other side of the door with a bag of Chinese.

"Hi," he said with a smile as he stepped into the apartment. He handed Lois the bag of Chinese and she turned to introduce him to her unexpected guest...her mother.

"Uh, mom, this is Clark. Clark, mom..." Lois introduced them.

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Lane," He extended his hand to greet hers. She gave him a once-over before taking it, eying him critically before stepping back. She looked from Lois to Clark back to Lois again then smiled.

Lucy elbowed her mother, whispering, "Don't even think about it..." in a harsh whisper.

Ellen gave him a once over once more then smiled, "Nice to meet you, Clark. I've been hearing..."

Lucy tugged her mom into the spare bedroom, "Mom, why don't you help me unpack?"

"But you already..." Ellen began before realizing what Lucy was trying to do then nodded, "Oh! I suppose a second opinion on where everything is won't hurt..."

"What was that about?" He asked curiously.

"Lucy is just being...Lucy," Lois said too quickly and pointed at the box in his hand. "Are those the files?"

He nodded, patting the box with his one hand, "Jimmy said he'd be coming by with the rest..."

"Uh, just put it in the living room. We can sort through this later," Lois said.

Clark nodded, handing her the bag of food. "Hopefully there's enough. I got extra because of Lucy..."

"Mom's not a big eater," Lois reassured, "Should be fine."

He snapped his fingers, "I almost forgot...I was supposed to call Jimmy and give him the names of the guys that were caught in the sting at the Metro Club so he knew which files to grab..."

Lois handed him the phone and he began to dial. "It's so weird going though all these old..." She stopped when he motioned for her to stop talking, moving the phone away from his ear cautiously. "What is it?"

He lowered his glasses, scanning the room cautiously then whispered in a barely audible tone, “Unlock your window,” before dropping the phone on the couch and disappearing out the front door.

Ellen reentered the living room with Lucy, “Lois? Are you two ready for...” Before she could finish her statement Lois was already opening her window for the famed superhero of Metropolis. “Oh, my...”

“This’ll just take a sec...” Clark reassured. In a blink of an eye, he reappeared in front of them with a handful of gadgets that appeared to be small cameras.

Lucy stared at the cameras in shock, “Is that...?”

Clark nodded, “Yes, Clark, uh...told me...” He wasn’t very good at coming up with excuses. Lois noticed he was looking at her for help and she wasn’t sure what to say.

“He found a camera...and then went to find Superman to sweep the place...” Lois explained.

“Who would bug your apartment?” Ellen asked.

Lois looked away from her mother nervously, unsure of how to explain everything. Lucy caught her sister’s gaze and shook her head, “You think it was Lex don’t you?” She turned to Superman, “Take those to the police and get a restraining order...now!”

“Lucy, it’s not that simple...” Lois began. *“Oh, how to explain...”*

Clark nodded, “I’m going to take these somewhere...safe...” He caught Lois’ gaze before finishing, “Clark should be back soon...when I left he was picking up, uh...”

“Double Fudge Crunch bars?” God, she was as bad as he was. When Lucy and Ellen turned to look at Lois in confusion she fought the urge to laugh when he mouthed ‘double fudge crunch bars, really?’ to her. She just nodded, “When you got a sweet tooth...”

“Right,” he nodded. Within the blink of an eye, he was gone.

A knock at the door a few seconds later announced Clark’s arrival. Lois opened the door and smiled when she saw Clark standing there with a box of Double Fudge Crunch bars. “For you, uh, sweet tooth...” He whispered with a smirk as he stepped inside the apartment.

Nigel glared at the screen as he watched the footage of Lois Lane opening her window for Superman and then within a few seconds each monitor’s feed went blank. He’d found the surveillance equipment. Now that Lex was no longer a fixture in Lois Lane’s life it would be harder to replant the equipment. He’d have to keep Superman occupied while he did...

Later that evening, they all sat around the dining table, enjoying the Chinese food Clark had brought from ‘a little place he knew’. Ellen and Lucy took the food and set everything up at the table and Lois helped set the research up in the living room. Once the table was set they all sat down to eat, “So, Lucy how’s it feel to be back in Metropolis?” Clark asked, handing her an eggroll.

“Great!” Lucy beamed. “California was fun for a bit but it’s good to be back and get back to school this Fall. I need to finish up my degree.”

“...and stop living paycheck to paycheck...” Ellen added.

Lucy sighed, “I’m doing what I can while going to school.”

Clark smiled, “Well I’m glad you’re back. I know Lois missed you.”

“Yes I missed her too,” Lucy sighed, “but thanks for taking such good care of her.”

“No problem,” He shared a look with Lois for a moment then turned away.

“Lois, isn’t easy to keep up with,” Ellen added with a smile.

Clark smiled, “She’s worth it,” That earned him a smile from Ellen. She seemed to be trying to make her mind up about him for

a moment. He noticed the lull in the conversation and decided to try and find out more about Lois’ mother, hoping to steer away from any sensitive topics for the moment. “So, Ellen, Lois said you were a nurse?”

Ellen nodded, “Yes, I was a surgical nurse at Metropolis General. It’s where I met Sam.”

Clark nodded, “Yeah, I met him when we did the story on Menken’s gym. He seemed...”

Ellen raised her eyebrows at him, waiting for the response with amusement, “Colorful?” She offered.

“Uh, yeah,” He said uncertain if that was the right way to describe Sam Lane.

“He wasn’t always like that, but ambition kind of took over and...” She sighed, “Well, you know the rest,” She took a fortune cookie and opened it, “What in the world?”

“What is it?” Lucy asked, opening her own fortune cookie, “Hey!”

“What?” Lois asked.

“It’s in Chinese!” Ellen said in shock.

Lois laughed, handing the fortunes to Clark to translate, “Here...”

Clark laughed, taking the fortune and reading it for her. “Do not mistake temptation for opportunity,”

Lucy and Ellen stared at him in shock, “You can read Chinese?” They asked in unison.

“...and about three hundred other languages,” Lois added.

“Photographic memory,” Clark explained.

“Wow...” Lucy sighed, “Feel like helping me with Statistics this Fall?” Clark laughed.

Ellen sighed, stretching her arms. “This was nice. Delicious food.” She turned to Lois and Lucy, “I think I’m going to head out.” She gave Lucy a hug, “Don’t you dare leave town without telling me again,”

“Yes, Mother,” Lucy said, giving her a hug.

Ellen turned to Clark, “Clark, thank you for dinner. It was amazing. You will have to get me their caterer. We’re always looking for new places to try at the club,”

“Uh, I don’t know if they cater,” Clark began.

“Really?” Ellen asked, surprised. “They really should...”

Anyway, I’m out of here. You three have fun,” She then turned to Lois and gave her a hug, whispering just loud enough for Lois to hear, “Hold onto him. He’s good for you,” Before turning to leave.

“Did that just happen?” Lucy asked in shock.

“Dinner with mom and an enjoyable conversation...yeah, I wouldn’t have believed it either,” Lois laughed.

Lucy smiled, “I think she was on good behavior for Clark,”

“Probably,” Lois said, turning to look at him.

Lucy let out a yawn and sighed, “I think the jet lag is getting to me...I think that’s my cue to turn in. Do you need any help cleaning up?”

“No, that’s fine,” Lois reassured her, “Get some sleep. We’ve got this,”

Clark nodded, taking Lois’ hand in his. “Good night, Lucy,” Lucy waved goodnight and left. He turned to Lois as he grabbed the trash from the table and tossed it in the trash. “Your mom seems nice,”

She laughed, “She has her moments.” She began wiping the table down and smiled as she watched Clark bend over to sweep up the stray bits of food that had fallen on the floor. Lucy was still awake so he didn’t want to do anything super with her in the next room.

He noticed her eyes on him and turned back to smile at her, “All done,” He said, putting the contents of the dustpan in the trash.

He followed her into the living room and took a seat on the couch with her. “Thanks for bringing the files over,” She said. “...and dinner. My mom’s not the easiest to deal with...”

"She seems...guarded..." He observed sadly.

"She is," Lois nodded. "After everything that happened with daddy...She put her walls up and turned to drinking..."

"That must have been rough on you and Lucy," He said, intertwining her hand with his.

She smiled slowly, "It was. Lucy locked herself in her room while I dealt with the brunt of everything...she has her qualms about relationships...just like I do. She's just less guarded. I don't do too well with the touchy feely stuff if you haven't noticed."

Clark smiled, "I've noticed."

"I mean, after what happened three years ago I...I promised myself I wouldn't..." She sobered slightly, looking down at his hand that still held hers in his palm. "Then you kinda snuck up on me...I spent a year trying to deny it and then after the other night...there was no denying what I felt when you kissed me and then..." She squeezed his hand, "I...love you,"

He cupped her cheek, "I love you too," He said with a smile.

"I don't think I'll ever tire of hearing that..." Lois smiled at him.

"Then I'll just have to keep saying it," He grinned, leaning in to kiss her, tracing the outline of her lips with his tongue. She cupped his face with her hand, fingering the curls on the back of his head with her fingers. He moaned against her lips as she deepened the kiss, pressing her small frame against him.

"I guess you will," She grinned back at him, pulling away from him slightly so she was leaning against him, "So, why the glasses?" Lois asked.

"I needed them to help me when I was younger..." At her perplexed look, he continued, "I had to learn how to control my powers when I was younger...having fires start out of nowhere wasn't the ideal situation."

"Or seeing through someone's clothes..." Lois teased. Clark blushed at that comment. "Have you...?"

"Not intentionally, but when I was in high school I accidentally x-rayed the girls' locker room...Not my proudest moment..." He added as she laughed at the blush that was spreading to his neck.

"Ever been tempted?" She asked, leaning back against him again as she stroked her hand against where his hand rested below her rib cage.

"May...be," He admitted shyly.

"Really?" She asked, turning to face him, "By me?" At his blush, she grinned impishly, "When?"

He looked away, avoiding her gaze, "Uh..."

"Superman doesn't lie," She added, arching her eyebrow, pressing her small frame against him as he struggled to form a response.

She ran her hand seductively down his thigh causing him to jump, "Lo-is..."

She giggled in response, "I believe you were trying to answer a question..." She said running her index finger and middle finger from his thigh to his knee in a walking motion.

"Please don't do...that..." He whispered, taking her hand from his knee and holding it in his palm as he brought it to his hand to kiss.

"Why?" She teased. "Am I distracting you?"

"Without a doubt," He whispered, brushing his lips against the nape of her neck.

"You never answered my..." She sighed happily as he nibbled in just the right spot against her neck, "Oh, Clark..."

He smiled against her neck, "Two can play that game..."

She laughed, leaning back against him as his arms tightened around her waist. "I was just testing this...super...willpower... Oh, God..." She managed as his tongue grazed against just the right spot to make her melt in his arms.

"It has its limits..." He whispered in her ear, pulling away from her.

She looked at him intrigued. "Really?" She was about to see just how far those limits were when he got that familiar expression on his face. "What is it?"

"Bank alarm,"

"Bank alarm?" She glanced at the clock, "All the banks are closed!"

"It could be nothing, but just in case..." He gave her a peck on the cheek before standing up, "I'll try to be quick,"

"I was just about to find out all those juicy details..." She teased as the door closed behind him.

Nothing. No sign of anyone anywhere. Clark scanned the building as he landed outside the bank. A security guard walked up to him, shaking his head. "Damn kids...waking me up in the middle of the night..."

"Is there a problem, sir?" Clark asked.

"Obviously not," He sighed. "I gotta drive all the way down here to reset the alarm because someone thinks it's funny to mess with the system..."

"Any idea who or what could have tripped the alarm?" Clark asked.

"There's no telling," the guard shrugged. "The system is pretty sensitive,"

"I didn't call for maintenance..." Lois began to argue.

"This'll just take a minute," The man reassured. "We have to check the plumbing in all the apartments. We just replaced a pipe and need to make sure there aren't any leaks..."

"Okay," Lois nodded, stepping aside for the man to enter the apartment. She watched him head to the bathroom and then turned back to the file on the table. Hopefully, Clark would be back soon. A few minutes later the man was leaving. Lois waved and got up to lock the door behind him. "Well that was quick," She quipped.

"Bureau 39? Jason Trask's Bureau 39?" Lex asked skeptically as she took a sip of the beer in front of him. They were after all in Germany.

Agent Carter nodded, "That's right. He may have been off his rocker like they said and he may have gone about things the wrong way, but he was right about one thing..."

"What was that?" Lex asked.

Carter shook his head, "No way," He pointed to the table, "I want the money up front first then I'll tell you everything you need to know,"

"Very well," Lex took out his checkbook and began to write, "How much?"

"Cash," Carter corrected. "I need the money in my hand and then I'll tell you everything,"

"How do I know you aren't just trying to shake me down for cash?" Lex inquired.

Carter pulled out a small green glowing rock inside a Ziploc bag, "Because I'm the one that did the initial testing on this little piece of home for Trask,"

"Is that..." Lex began to say.

"Kryptonite," Carter nodded.

Clark shook his head as he knocked on Lois' door. Since Lucy was staying with Lois again he couldn't just fly in and out without raising suspicion. He needed to be careful. Someone had planted cameras in Lois' apartment. How many conversations had they heard? He hadn't examined the cameras enough to know if they were audio or not, but the idea of someone watching Lois...

The door opened and Lois smiled at him, "That didn't take long..."

"False alarm," He said with a smile as he stepped into her apartment. He rubbed her right arm and smiled, "I guess we need to be more careful...what we say...just in case..." He scanned the

room to make sure he didn't see any more cameras.

Lois nodded, "Yeah," She shuddered slightly, wrapping her arms around herself as she took a seat on the couch.

"I checked the room. There are no more cameras..." He reassured her, taking a seat next to her.

"But there were..." Lois reminded him. "Just the other day we were..." She shook her head in disgust. "What if someone was listening?"

"We don't know if those cameras had audio on them," Clark reminded her.

"But we were talking about...you know what...What if someone finds out?" Lois said, opting to talk in code rather than say the actual name of 'kryptonite.'

Clark sighed, "We'll deal with it if it happens," He reassured, cupping her cheek.

"Do you think Lucy's right?" Lois asked shakily.

"I don't know," Clark sighed. "The problem is, I already removed the cameras. I didn't wait for the police so it's our word against his...knowing Luthor there's probably zero paper trail and it'll lead to some fall guy and nowhere near him."

"This is getting kinda scary," Lois said shakily. She cast a glance at the box of files next to the couch. "I'm starting to think we haven't even scratched the surface of what he's capable of..."

"I know," He sighed, taking her hand in his. "He's always a couple steps ahead..."

"Well, maybe if we keep taking steps backward we can find loose ends he forgot to trim," Lois reasoned, squeezing his hand.

"Thank you," He whispered.

"For what?" She asked.

"Everything," He sighed, intertwining his fingers with hers. "You could have been mad at me and you weren't. You didn't have to believe me when I..."

She held a finger up to his mouth and whispered, "Enough of that. I told you I was a bit shell-shocked that night...You're right I could have been mad, but as I said before I can't think of a time when you could have told me. You trusted me so I trusted you. It's that simple."

"I love you," He said softly, leaning in to kiss her. She turned to face him, cupping the side of his face as she deepened the kiss. She traced the length of his tie with her index finger, pulling him to her as she tugged on his tie, wrapping the silk tie around her hand as she moved up toward the knot of his tie to loosen it.

"I love you," She murmured against his lips, pressing him back against the couch, as she slid her other leg to the other side of his leg so that she was hovering above his lap, supporting herself on her knees as she kissed him, tugging at the knot on his tie with her fingers.

"I love you," He whispered, slipping his hands around her waist so they rested on the small of her back. His tie hung loosely around his neck, untied and she pulled it through the collar of his shirt. He could feel the heat from her body pressed against him, smell her perfume as it teased his nostrils. Her chest was pressed up against his chin, teasing him as she deepened the kiss. He could feel his body responding to her touch.

"Take this off..." She murmured, trying to get his jacket off him without breaking their embrace. He nodded, leaning back just far enough so he had enough room to shrug the jacket off and threw it over the back of the couch. She reached for his collar and pulled him toward her. He groaned as his face brushed against her blouse. He'd fantasized about what lay beneath those cotton blouses for months. He wasn't sure if he should be the one to make the first move. He didn't want to scare her off and he was really enjoying what she was doing to him right now. She seemed to sense his hesitation and she reached for his hand and guided it to her chest. He'd dreamed of this for so long...

"Lo-is..." She caught his gaze meeting his eyes he watched in anticipation as she unbuttoned her blouse, one button at a time.

The idea of making love to Lois was enough to make him sweat. He knew she was just as turned on as him. He looked down at the fabric that was bunched up on both sides of her thighs, swallowing hard as he noticed how far up her legs her skirt had been hiked up to. So many fantasies...

He groaned as he saw her slowly reveal a simple lace bra beneath her blouse and bit his lower lip in anticipation, meeting her heated gaze with one of his own. He leaned forward, brushing his lips against her collarbone. She sighed happily and lowered herself down to his lap, pressing herself against him. "Oh, Cl..." She gasped as he buried his face in her chest. "Oh, God, yes..." She whimpered against him, moving to recapture his lips with her own.

"Lois..." He devoured her lips with his own and she whimpered against him. He drank in the sight of her with her blouse hanging open, straddling him and he smiled.

She cut him off and devoured his lips with her own. "You are...so..." She whimpered against his lips, "I love you,"

"Hey, Lois, I brought the rest of the stuff over here like the Chief wanted me to..." The sound of the door opening caught his attention and he quickly grabbed his jacket to cover Lois up as she pulled back to look at him in curiosity. "Whoa!"

"Jimmy, what are you doing here?..." Lois whimpered from beneath his coat as she fumbled with her blouse.

"Oh, God..." Clark groaned between gritted teeth, trying to regain control of his body as he felt her move against him.

"I am *so* sorry. I had no idea...Oh, God..." Jimmy managed, struggling with the boxes in his arms. Unfortunately, Clark was in no position to move to help him.

Lois fumbled with the buttons to her blouse under the cover of his jacket as she growled, "Don't you knock?"

"I did...no one answered and the door was unlocked..." Jimmy stammered, trying to avoid looking at either her or Clark.

Lois finished buttoning her blouse then turned on his lap, eliciting another groan as she brushed against him. "You have got to be the most inconsiderate..."

Jimmy was still struggling with the boxes he was holding and took a step back, "Hey, I had no idea you guys were....I mean..."

Clark still struggling to regain control of his body decided to intervene, wrapping an arm around Lois' waist, "Lois, honey, I'm sure it was just...bad timing..."

Lois glared at Jimmy for a moment then glanced back at Clark again then turned her attention back to Jimmy shooting him a look of death, "I better not hear about this in the Planet grapevine or I swear..."

"Lois, come on you know me better than that," Jimmy said a bit offended.

"What is going on out here?" Lucy asked, stepping out of the spare bedroom. "I'm trying to sleep and..."

"Lucy?" Jimmy dropped the box where he was standing, surprised to see the younger Lane sister. "I...I didn't know you were..."

Lucy nodded, "Just got in...What are you...?" She looked around the room and spotted her sister still sitting halfway on Clark's lap with his tie thrown over the back of the couch and his coat still hanging on her shoulders and realization began to dawn on her.

Unfortunately, Jimmy was no longer paying attention to his friends that he'd intruded on, instead intent on reconnecting with Lucy. "So, how long are you in town for?" Jimmy asked.

"Um, why don't we talk another time..." Lucy said eying Lois and Clark who were still sitting on the couch.

"What?" Jimmy asked confused for a moment then realization dawned on him, "Oh, right! Another time...I'll just be..."

Clark let out a sigh of relief that their unexpected houseguest was finally leaving when his super-hearing picked up the police radio from down the street, "Hostage situation in progress...repeat

gunman is armed and dangerous..." He silently cursed his luck, willing his body to calm down. "All units respond...repeat...All units respond..."

"I've got to go," He whispered, grabbing his jacket off Lois' shoulders to help hide the effect their very heated make-out session had had on him from Lucy and Jimmy who were still not paying any attention to them. "I'll see you tomorrow," He leaned down to kiss Lois goodbye before leaving.

"See, Jimmy, look what you did..." Lucy smacked him on the shoulder.

"I didn't do anything. I was in the middle of leaving..." Jimmy argued.

Thankfully the hostage situation was a quick in and out situation where he didn't need to wait around for long. He'd left before the media had shown up so he was able to get out of there without drawing attention to his current predicament. It wasn't as bad as it had been earlier but it was still very noticeable. That was one downfall about the Superman suit...it was very revealing. He smiled to himself. He'd have to come up with a plan for how to deal with interruptions like this without embarrassing himself. It was painful but the memory of Lois' body pressed up against him made it so worth it. He wouldn't trade a single second for anything in the world...

Maybe a trip up to the arctic for a few minutes would help... He recalled the look on Lois' face when her body had been convulsing against him and shuddered. Make that a few hours...

Lois turned on the television to see the coverage on the hostage situation at a gas station down the street. She smiled as she watched the familiar red and blue streak fly in and rescue the hostages while depositing the gunmen to the police at super speed. He hadn't even stopped long enough to talk to anyone.

'Probably still having problems with that suit,' She reasoned to herself.

She shuddered involuntarily recalling the hardness she'd felt pressed up against her when she'd been kissing him tonight. There was no way that had gone down in just a few minutes...Superman or not...

<<"Two days of not being able to do anything when you were under the influence of those pheromones...I guess I just kinda lost my willpower..."

"Really?"

"Two...days..."

"So, is that the limit to Superman's willpower....Two...days...?"

"It...depends..."

"On...what...exactly?"

"How long you're torturing...him...for..." >>

She recalled their conversation about how his willpower had been tested to the max when she'd been under the influence of the pheromones a few months ago. She'd been so mortified when she realized she'd been throwing herself at Clark like that...even more mortified when she saw what she'd shown up at his apartment in.

<<"Lois..."

She cut him off and devoured his lips with her own. "You are...so..." She whimpered against his lips, "I love you," >>

She shuddered involuntarily recalling how she'd reached completion from just heavy petting and him kissing her. For a long time, she'd thought there was something wrong with her after what had happened with Claude. Now she realized it had nothing to do with her.

<<"I've been wanting to do that since this morning

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't know if I was allowed...We're still in the...getting to know you...phase..." >>>

Clark was such a boy scout. He had been afraid to touch her...

afraid to push...allowing her to set the pace of their relationship. It was empowering to know he had given her so much power...

<<"I want this to work more than anything I've ever wanted in this world," >>

"Oh, Clark..." She sighed, leaning back against the couch.

Lucy and Jimmy were at the dining table catching up over chocolate ice cream and cream soda. She smiled at her sister. She wasn't sure what had happened between the two of them but it seemed to be in the past now because they didn't seem to be able to take their eyes off of each other.

<<"Lois, it's very late..."

"Not too late I hope...for us...for happiness?"

"Oh, no! Lois, please no don't!"

"Oh, Clark, I love you! I want to spend the rest of my life with you!"

"Lois, please go home..."

"You're here...this is my home..."

"Lois, you don't know how many times I've thought about this...dreamt about this...well something like this...but it's not real. What you're feeling is not real. I don't know exactly how but there was something in the perfume that made everyone drunk on...love...Lois, I cannot take advantage of you like this..." >>>

The memory of that night she'd tried to seduce him under the influence of the pheromones had been seared into her mind for months. She'd tried to brush it off as just the pheromones but her heart and her head knew better. She'd fought her feelings for months and now she'd faced her feelings, but still felt that fear in the pit of her stomach.

<<"Lois, I can't take it anymore. If you really want me I'm yours..." >>>

Her feelings for Clark were intense...and that scared her. After everything that had happened with Claude...moving too quickly scared her. So why hadn't she been scared when she'd been the one to make the first move? In the heat of the moment, it had been so easy to forget...

<<"Lois, I can't take it anymore. If you really want me I'm yours..." >>>

She knew she had been the one to push the boundaries tonight. She had been the one to lose control...If Jimmy hadn't shown up when he did...Would they have...? She loved Clark. Admitting that had been the first hurdle but taking that step...a step that had ended in a disaster last time...terrified her.

<<"I mean, you're ...YOU, but I just don't want you to be..."

"Lois, I'm not...I'm not that experienced either..."

"You're not?"

"No, actually not...at all..." >>

A week ago they had been just friends, partners...and she was infatuated with his alter-ego, oblivious to the fact that they were one and the same. Now, so much had changed and everything seemed to be moving so fast. What she felt...she could easily lose herself in his arms without thinking twice, but that was where she'd messed up the last time...Getting lost in the heat of the moment without checking the water level first. They'd known each other so long yet didn't know each other at the same time.

<<"Lois, I'm not from here...I'm different...so I made the decision not to...cross that threshold until I could find someone I could share everything with..." >>>

<<"So, you're waiting for..."

"Just the right person, ...You,"

"Oh, Clark, you are just so...I love you,"

"I love you too, Lois," >>>

He was Superman yet he seemed just as scared about crossing that threshold as she did. His plea to take things slow had been met with skepticism on her part...partly because she'd never taken things slow with anyone or anything.

<<"Lois, I can't take it anymore. If you really want me I'm yours..." >>>

She'd dreamed of hearing those words from Superman for so long, but now everything was different. It was Clark. Clark was Superman. The same man that had told her so long ago that all she had to do was say the word... Why did that thought scare her so much?

<< "*Lois, I can't take it anymore. If you really want me I'm yours...*" >>

After a long dip in the Arctic ocean, Clark landed outside his balcony and stepped inside, changing back into his dress slacks and dress shirt from earlier. He sighed as he closed the window behind him. Tonight had been incredible and if Jimmy hadn't shown up when he did he knew they would have ended up moving their very heated make out session to the bedroom... but he had. Jimmy had shown up and interrupted them... again. That boy had the worst timing... He'd wanted to go right back to her apartment and finish what they'd started, but something was stopping him. He just wasn't sure what.

Maybe it was the fact that everything seemed to be moving so fast. Not fast in a bad way, but a very *very* good way. He was afraid of scaring her off. He was afraid of blowing it and possibly losing what was blossoming into a wonderful relationship. He loved being able to be himself with her, but he still sensed she was holding back... scared. He didn't want to lose himself in a moment and have her regret it the next day. He wanted it all. He wanted forever. If that meant dips in the Arctic ocean became a nightly ritual; so be it.

Back at Lois' apartment Lucy and Jimmy were still catching up. "So, how long are you in town for?" Jimmy asked, taking a sip of coffee.

"I haven't decided..." Lucy said shyly. "Lois is letting me crash here until I get my bearings again and then get started back with school."

Jimmy nodded, "So, you... uh, seeing anyone... I mean when you were... out in California..."

Lucy laughed at Jimmy's nervousness. They had gone on a few dates before she'd decided to move out to California. Rather than try to keep a long-distance relationship they'd decided to just take a break. Now that she was back it seemed he wanted to pick up where they left off. "No, I mean no one special..." She said with a smile. "You?" She took a sip of her coffee and looked at him expectantly.

"Uh, no..." He said rather hurriedly. "No one special,"

The next morning Lois woke up to find Lucy and Jimmy had fallen asleep on the couch watching an old movie. She smiled, looking at her sister curled up in a ball on one side and Jimmy on the other with a bowl of popcorn just a few inches from his sleeping arm. It seemed the two of them were trying to pick things up where they left off a few months ago. She headed to the bedroom to finish getting dressed, throwing on a blouse and jeans. Thankfully it was Saturday and she had the weekend off. It had been a long week. She smiled recalling all the changes that had taken place over the last week. "What a difference a week makes," she mused as she headed to the kitchen to begin brewing some coffee.

A knock at the door caught her attention and she tip-toed to the door, careful not to wake Jimmy or Lucy. She smiled when she saw Clark on the other side in a green button-down shirt and jeans. She eyed him appreciatively, "Morning."

"Morning," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

She smiled against his lips, smoothing her hand over the imaginary wrinkles on his shirt. "Everything go okay?"

"Yeah," he smiled, stepping into the apartment and closing the door behind him. He raised an eyebrow when he saw Lucy and Jimmy on the couch.

Lois smiled, "I think they were... catching up... last night," She winked at him.

"Ah," he nodded, "Well, I just, uh..." He noticed Lucy starting to stir and quickly covered, "I mean, uh, Superman took Jack to visit Denny for the weekend and he, uh, offered to fly ...us out to Smallville... if you'd be interested... just for the day."

She arched an eyebrow at him, "There's not some weird Wheat Festival going on that I should know about?"

Clark laughed, "That was the Corn Festival and you had fun..."

She smirked back at him, "Okay you got me there, but it's still weird..."

"I promise there are no crop festivals for you to accidentally have fun with," he teased, holding up three fingers to give a 'scout's honor.'

Lois laughed, leaning in to kiss him, "Okay, sure. Just let me change my top."

A groan from the other side of the room caught both of their attention and they turned to see Jimmy looking at them amused with a half-smile, "CK don't you have a home?"

"I could ask you the same question," Lois teased, mussing his hair as she walked by him to change.

{ "*Thank you.*"

"For what?"

"Everything. You could have been mad at me and you weren't. You didn't have to believe me when I ..."

"Enough of that. I told you I was a bit shell-shocked that night... You're right I could have been mad, but as I said before I can't think of a time when you could have told me. You trusted me so I trusted you. It's that simple."

"I love you."

"I love you..."}

Nigel stopped the tape, seeing enough. He rolled his eyes in disgust, reaching for the phone, "Start pulling everything you can on Clark Kent."

After giving his orders he hung up the phone. It had been too easy. Masquerade as a repairman and add an audio feed to the electrical system so everything in the apartment worked as a transmitter. Thankfully the electrical circuit box was encased in lead so Superman wouldn't be able to see it.

The sound of the familiar sonic boom could be heard behind the barn. Martha looked at Jonathan, "Did Clark call?" He shrugged his shoulders and she shook her head as he stood up to follow her out on the porch, "He better have told her or..."

"I don't think you have to worry about that..." Jonathan pointed at Clark and Lois walking hand in hand toward them.

Carter flipped through the envelope of cash happily, "Pleasure doing business with you, Boss," He smirked at Luthor who just stared at him impatiently.

"You have your money..."

"How much do you want to know about Bureau 39?" Carter asked.

"Everything. Everything that has to do with Superman..." Lex said, pointing downward at the table as if the information was something Carter could make magically appear on the table.

Carter smiled, "We'll have to start at the beginning..."

"Can I get you some coffee?" Martha asked, heading into the kitchen.

Lois looked around the dining room nervously. It was strange being back here. "Uh, sure," she nodded.

"They shouldn't be too long. Clark likes to try and help where he can with the heavy stuff on the farm ever since Jonathan's back surgery a few years ago," Martha brought her a cup of coffee and

took a seat at the dining table, “So, Clark told you?” She prompted.

Lois nodded, “Yeah,” She smiled taking a seat across Martha as she took a sip of her coffee. Surprisingly it was already sweetened to her liking.

“Black, two sugars. Just like Jonathan.” Martha said with a smile, “I remembered from the last time you were here.”

“Thanks,” Lois said, setting the cup down.

“Kinda weird, huh?” Martha asked.

“Yes!” Lois nodded, “Very. It’s just so...” She was trying to find the right word but couldn’t.

“Surprising?” Martha guessed.

“Shocking...” Lois nodded. “I was shell-shocked when he first told me...very...VERY shell-shocked.”

“In a good way or a bad way?”

“I guess...a good?” Lois shrugged. “We’re still trying to figure everything out...take things slow,” Lois said.

“And he told you about everything with Lex Luthor?” Martha asked uneasily.

Lois nodded, “Yeah, and some of it I had to find out on my own...I still can’t believe I was so ...*blind*.”

“I didn’t want you getting caught in the cross-fire with everything...especially considering everything he did when he was testing Clark a few months ago. There’s no telling what he would do...”

“Testing Clark?” Lois asked, confused.

Martha sighed, “So he didn’t tell you everything?”

“The stuff with Prometheus mainly...we’ve been researching a lot of the old stories and he’s been slowly telling me everything...like with the Kryptonite...” Lois explained. “What test?”

“When he first started out ‘being Superman’ Lex Luthor started testing him. He had two people jump at the same time across town from one another to test his speed...” Martha began. Lois blushed slightly recalling the incident where she’d ‘stolen’ Clark’s story. It wasn’t her proudest moment. Did she know? He seemed to be pretty open with his parents... “Then he set off a bomb to test his vulnerability...”

“The Carlin building...” Lois nodded. “I remember.”

“When he put the pieces together and confronted Luthor ...”

“He confronted him?” Lois asked, aghast.

“Yes, sometimes he just jumps in without thinking...especially when people he cares about are in danger. Anyway, when he confronted him Luthor told him the tests wouldn’t stop unless Superman left Metropolis.”

“That’s why he went missing for three days,” Lois sighed, recalling how worried she’d been when Superman hadn’t shown up to help during that week they were all trying to land the ‘Superman exclusive.’

“I tried talking him out of it...We just couldn’t get through to him. I’m actually not sure what it was that changed his mind,” Martha sighed, “but I’m glad he did. Superman gives him a way to use his powers...to help like he’s wanted to for so long...and not risk being exposed...”

<< “It’s the idea of Superman. Someone to believe in. Someone to build a few hopes around. Whatever he can do; that’s enough.” >>

Lois recalled the words she’d said to Clark so long ago and shifted uncomfortably in her seat. What had changed his mind? “So, do you guys all talk about him in the third person?”

Martha laughed, “Sometimes it’s the only way to keep everything straight,” She smiled at Lois, giving her a pained expression, “This is nice.”

“What?” Lois asked, unsure of what the change in Martha’s tone was.

“I’m sorry,” she sniffed, taking Lois’ hand. “It’s just...well, it’s been almost thirty years and you’re the first woman I’ve been

able to talk to about my boy,” Lois smiled, uncertain of what to say. Martha squeezed her hand before dabbing at her eyes, “Sorry, I just get...” She waved her arms trying to indicate something but never finished her statement, seeming to brush herself off she smiled, “Did he ever tell you about all the different suits we went through before deciding on *the* suit?”

“No,” Lois said cautiously.

Martha had a gleam in her eye as her grin widened, “Wait right here...”

“It emits a pretty strong radiation. No one we tested it on seemed to be affected. Trask had a theory that it would kill Superman because it came to Earth at the same time as his ship,” Carter said nonchalantly.

“Do you have this ship?” Lex asked in anticipation.

“No, but I know where to get it...” Carter grinned.

That afternoon Lois walked with Clark toward the lake, still mulling over her conversation with Martha earlier. “So, no crop festivals...” She looked around with a smile. “No crazy Bureau 39 agents...”

“Nope, just a normal Saturday,” he grinned at her, wrapping his arms around her waist as they walked toward the pier.

“Why did I let you talk me into this?” Lois asked nervously.

“You said you’ve never been fishing before and here in Smallville that’s a cardinal sin...” He joked, walking her toward the end of the pier.

“I’m not much of a fish eater...If I catch one then I’m gonna have to clean it and ...” She shuddered.

Clark laughed, “You can always throw it back.”

“Throw it back?” Lois asked, incredulously. “What is the point in fishing if you’re just going to...”

Clark laughed, “It’s just a fun way to pass time. My dad used to take me fishing all the time when I was a kid.”

“I didn’t get to do too much of the whole playing outdoors thing growing up,” Lois admitted softly.

“Seriously?” He asked. Lois nodded and he handed her a fishing pole, “How do you *not* play outside as a kid? My folks had to drag me back inside ...”

Lois gave him a sad smile, “Your parents are really wonderful.”

He nodded, smiling, “He’s just an ordinary guy you know... who loves doing this ordinary thing...fishing. I guess I love it because he does...”

“I can understand that,” she said softly, “Lucy and I used to try and do everything we could to get our dad’s attention when we were younger because he worked so much...Lucy used to pretend to be injured so he’d have to ‘help’ her,” Lois rolled her eyes, “Silly, huh?”

“No,” he smiled at her. “I think kids just want to share something with their parents...Fishing, sports, writing... whatever...”

“Yeah, until you grow up and realize sharing something with them is the last thing you’d want,” Lois said sadly.

He looked back at her in concern and she sighed, “Last night was the first time I’ve been able to have a decent conversation with my mother since I was ten. Even then it ended with yelling...”

“I’m sorry,” Clark said, placing a supportive arm around her. “I know you said your childhood was ...complicated...with your dad.”

Lois nodded, “That’s putting it lightly. Growing up, having a home...a childhood...wasn’t the same in the Lane household. I know it wasn’t any picnic for you either...what with flying and all, but at least you had a great home...growing up with this...” She gestured to the lake behind them as the tears began to fall. She knelt down, tapping the fishing pole against her knee as she buried

her face in her hands.

Clark knelt down next to her in concern, wrapping an arm around her, “Hey, what’s wrong?”

She shook her head, “I left as soon as I could and never looked back. My mother was depressed. My father only related to cyborgs and my sister wouldn’t come out of her room. I didn’t want to be there...”

“I’m sorry,” he wrapped her arms around her as she rested her head against his shoulder, “I never thought...” He shook his head, leaning in to kiss her.

“Sorry for melting down on you,” she sniffed. “I just...”

“No need to apologize,” he whispered, holding her close. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories for you.”

“It’s not your fault,” she smiled up at him. “You were sharing a memory and I can’t seem to share one happy one without thinking about the bad ones...” She looked around the pier, “It’s so quiet out here.”

“Picks up more at night,” Clark said.

“Really?” She teased, running her hand up his back, “How would you know?”

He laughed turning to look at the speedboat that just drove by, “See? Already starting to pick up...”

“I think you’re avoiding the question...” She teased, looking at him accusingly as they stood up.

“Never,” He smiled at her, still not answering the question. “I always enjoyed coming out here when no one was out...more peaceful than a bunch of teenagers daring one another to dive off that cliff over there...” He pointed across the lake where a rocky cliff stood with an old tire swing that looked like it had been there for ages.

Lois laughed, shaking her head, “Really? So did you fly down or crash?”

“Floated...just enough to look realistic,” He smiled, scooping her into his arms, “Here, I’ll show you...” Within the blink of an eye, they were up on the cliff that from what Lois could see below was a lot higher up than she thought.

“What are you doing?” Lois asked nervously as he walked determinedly toward the end of the cliff. Realization began to dawn on her and she squirmed in his arms, “No, no, no, Clark, don’t...” Before she could finish her plea he had already stepped off the cliff and floated them into the lake. He set her down in the water and she shrieked, “Ah, that’s cold!”

“It’ll warm up. Here,” a minute later the water warmed up and he gave her a grin, “Better?”

She splashed him lightly, “My clothes are soaked...”

“So are mine,” he gestured to his waist that was below the water level. “Don’t worry. I’ll dry you off. As I was saying before, the trick is to float just enough so it looks realistic...”

“So, why float? I mean, you could easily have flown down...” Lois pointed up to the cliff they’d just come from.

Clark shook his head, “I didn’t start flying till after high school.”

“Really?” Lois gave him a half-smile.

“Really,” he nodded, lowering himself to the bottom of the lake so he was eye level with her, “I didn’t start developing any of my powers until Junior High.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Lois reasoned as she shook her head, laughing to herself.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she said, “I’m just realizing how blind I was. Little things I never thought of...or thought to ask...”

“Well, I told you before...Superman is just a disguise,” he smiled at her.

“A disguise you almost gave up?” At Clark’s surprised look she continued, “Your mom mentioned the tests from a few months ago...”

He hung his head, nodding, “Yeah, I thought if I stopped being

Superman I could protect everyone...but then this really pushy reporter I know ...”

“Pushy?” She countered, flicking him with some more water.

“...made me realize what a dumb idea that was.” He turned to face her, cupping her cheek. “You saved me from myself so many times.”

She smiled, linking her arms around his neck, “Well you’ve saved me a time or two so I guess we should call it even.”

“A time or two?” He echoed with a grin. “You get into trouble more than anyone I’ve ever met...”

“I don’t go *looking* for trouble,” she shrugged as he raised an eyebrow at her and she relented slightly, “It just finds me...”

“I’ve noticed,” he teased.

“I do have to say, I think you made a good choice...the leopard print isn’t nearly as good on your complexion...”

“Leopard print?” He asked, before realizing what she was referring to. “Oh, nooo...” He groaned as he hung his head, “Mom showed you the reject pile, huh?”

She laughed, “Oh, yeah,” She wiggled her eyebrows at him. “Did you seriously try on every one of them?”

He winced, hanging his head in shame, “Uh, yeah, unfortunately...Remind me to burn that box when we get back...”

Lois laughed, leaning up to kiss him, “Not a chance,” The look of embarrassment on his face made her laugh.

“I should probably just assume that you know every embarrassing moment from here on out, huh?” He asked, wrapping his arms around her waist as he pulled her to him. She could feel her heart rate pick up the closer he got. Did he know what he was doing to her?

“That’s for me to know and you to sweat about...” She teased, linking her arms around his neck, leaning up to kiss him.

He deepened the kiss, cupping her cheek as she shivered against him. He looked at her in concern, “You cold?”

“A little,” She admitted. He scooped her into his arms and carried her toward the pier they’d been on earlier. “Where are we going?”

“To dry off,” he said, leaning in to kiss her before floating them up to the edge of the pier.

“Nothing,” Nigel read the reports in front of him, “Not even a parking ticket.”

“He seems to be clean,” Fuentes said, tapping his fingers against the folder in his hand.

“No one is *that* clean,” Nigel argued. “Keep digging. He’s hiding something...”

After drying off from the lake they had found a spot on the grass to sit and enjoy one another’s company. Clark laid on the grass, staring up at the sun while Lois laid next to him, resting her head against his chest. “I still can’t believe he blew up a building like that to ...test you...”

“I know,” Clark sighed, resting his arm around her waist as he spoke. “So many people were injured...almost killed,”

“Does it scare you?” She asked.

“Does what scare me?” He asked, turning to look at her.

“Knowing there’s something out there that could kill you...not knowing where...” She shuddered slightly and he tightened his arm around her.

“A little,” he admitted, “but not nearly as much as it scared me to know what he was capable of and not being able to...convince anyone. Henderson put a protective unit on Jack, but I don’t think he believes Jack about Luthor. No one does. He’s the ‘golden child’ but he’s capable of...and getting away with it...hurting so many people without a second thought.”

“What I don’t get is ‘why,’” Lois began slowly. “I mean, he’s done a lot of good with all the charities and employs thousands of people in Metropolis. Why bother? It’s not like he’s hurting for

money...”

“I don’t know,” Clark shook his head in disgust. “I think it’s like a game to him. Kinda like those clay pigeons...He puts on this cover and plays the part and gets some kind of sick thrill out of getting away with everything...pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes...”

“Including mine,” Lois admitted sheepishly. “I can’t believe I was so...*blind*.”

“You wanted to see the good,” Clark reasoned slowly. “Nobody can fault you for that.”

Lois gave him a weak smile, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” He asked.

“Not believing you,” she sighed, running her palm up his chest, “You tried to warn me ...so many times...and I just didn’t listen. I’m sorry. Maybe if I hadn’t been so quick to dismiss...”

He leaned in to kiss her, “Enough of that,” he whispered. “It’s in the past. What’s important is ...right here, right now.”

“I love you,” she whispered softly, turning to look at him. “I hate that it took me so long to realize...so much wasted time...I’m sorry.”

He leaned in to kiss her once more, “I have no regrets, Lois, I’m here with the woman I love enjoying a beautiful day at the lake. I don’t care about what could have been or what should have been. All I care about is right here, right now.” To prove his point, he leaned in to kiss her. She smiled against his lips, rolling with him as he rolled them so that he was hovering above her as she deepened the kiss, wrapping her arms around his neck as she linked her arms around his back, holding him close.

How was it so easy to just lose herself in his arms? What was so wrong with that? They loved one another and she didn’t envision him to turn into the love ‘em and leave ‘em type considering he had waited this long. She could feel her body temperature rising and the familiar flutter in her abdomen as she enjoyed the feeling of his lips pressed against hers. She tightened her arms around him, pulling him to her as she ran her fingers through his hair, reveling in the feeling of his body molded against hers.

He slowly broke off the kiss, resting his head against hers, “We need to stop,” he murmured, “or I won’t be able to.”

She smiled back at him, nodding as she removed her arms from around his neck and watched as he pulled away. She couldn’t help but smile as she watched him struggle to regain control as he tried to calm his breathing. His face was flushed and she noticed he was sitting at an angle to where half of his body was pointed away from her. It was mind boggling to realize she could have this type of effect on him. He wanted her as bad as she wanted him but seemed intent on taking things slow.

He hadn’t brought up what had happened last night. She’d been grateful for that. He seemed to sense her hesitancy this morning and instead of bringing up the uncomfortable conversation she didn’t want to have he’d done a very good job of distracting her with an afternoon in the country. That was just Clark. He was her friend. Her best friend. Her partner. He was also the man she was in love with and learning to trust more and more.

“We’ll need to put together a team to find the files on Bureau 39,” Lex instructed as he took his seat on the private jet. “I’m sure the Kryptonite is with everything else they have on Superman. I want it. I want it all.”

“Should we include Nigel in this?” Mrs. Cox asked, taking her seat next to him as she pulled out her phone to begin taking notes.

“No, Nigel is handling the surveillance. In case he’s come across anything important I don’t want him distracted. Work with someone familiar with the government enough to know where they’d hide something they don’t want to be made public knowledge...”

“I’ll put some inquiries out when we land and we’ll go from

there,” Mrs. Cox reassured him.

“Hi,” Lois smiled as she walked up to Clark in the Daily Planet lobby Monday morning. They had spent all day Saturday together in Smallville and by the time he’d brought her back home that evening she didn’t want him to leave. Unfortunately, the criminal element had other plans. He’d been called away on several incidents in Southside. It seemed like all at once the floodgates opened and muggings, robberies, attempted arsons, and car jackings all took place at the same time.

He turned to smile at her, handing her a cup of coffee, “Hi,” he said with a smile. She hadn’t seen him since Saturday and he looked so good in his light gray suit with his usual outlandish tie in gray and red. Would it be in terrible taste if she kissed him here in the middle of the Daily Planet lobby? Sure it would give the gossip hounds even more to talk about but right now she really couldn’t think of a reason why she should care.

She was about to act on her impulse when Ralph walked up to them, “Hey you two done giving each other googy eyes yet? The Chief’s called an Emergency Staff Meeting...”

Lois rolled her eyes at Ralph as she watched him race to the elevator and step onto the already full elevator car. “Emergency staff meeting? Wonder what that’s about.”

“Who knows,” Clark shrugged as an empty elevator car arrived on the Lobby floor.

They stepped inside and Lois watched in rapt attention as the doors closed before turning to face him and capture his lips with her own as she dropped her bag to the floor, allowing her arms to feel him freely. His arms circled around her waist as he met her lips just as enthusiastically, “I ...missed ...you,” she murmured in between heated kisses, tugging him closer as she fisted his silk tie with her hand, rolling it upward as she tightened her grasp on him.

“I...missed you...too,” he murmured against her lips. She heard the ding of the elevator and he glanced back quickly before murmuring “Four more floors.”

“Good,” she whispered, wrapping her arms around his neck as she molded the top half of her body against his, deepening the kiss. There was another ding from the elevator and she heard the doors open. She didn’t want to stop. Not yet.

“Three...more...floors...” he murmured against her lips.

“Uh, we’ll take the next one,” a female voice could be heard from outside the elevator.

She couldn’t hold in the laughter as the doors closed once more and his arms tightened around her waist, “Perry’s gonna kill us...” She laughed.

“But what a way to go...” He laughed with her, recapturing her lips once more, “Besides...we...have...seven...minutes...and eighteen...seconds...until we’re...officially...in...working...hours...” He said in between heated kisses.

“He did...say...save it...for...after hours...” She giggled against his lips.

“Mmm hmm,” he grinned, molding his body against hers.

“One more floor...” She whimpered against him in protest as she tightened her arms around his neck.

“Who cares?” He murmured against her lips, tightening his arms around her waist. “Still have ...a few ...minutes left...”

The elevator dinged, announcing their arrival on the newsroom floor. Whistling and catcalls could be heard from their co-workers as they reluctantly pulled away. She smiled at him before grabbing her bag she’d dropped on the floor earlier.

“Hey you two, any day now? Since when do you two arrive in the newsroom without a second to spare? You two are too busy acting like Elvis and Priscilla on their honeymoon to notice your emails about the emergency staff meeting...” Perry roared across the newsroom. “Everyone! Conference Room! Now!”

“Someone’s crabby,” Lois muttered under her breath as she dropped her things at her desk and grabbed her notepad and pen.

"I heard that," Perry warned.

"I know you did," Lois smiled back at Perry as she headed to the conference room notepad in hand. "You said to keep it professional in the office during working hours...technically we did."

Perry rolled his eyes as he pointed toward the conference room for them to move. "Lois, conference room..." He muttered irritably as he walked past them to get started.

Ralph's voice could be heard from the distance, "I told you... they are sooo..."

Cat's response was simply, "Shut up, Ralph."

Lois took her seat at the conference table next to Clark and grinned back at him, "So worth it," she whispered in a barely audible tone that she knew he could hear. He looked back at her and smiled, taking her hand in his.

"This doesn't make any sense, Chief!" Lois argued as she glared at another list of cutbacks from upper management. The Planet is the number one paper people are reading...subscriptions are up. How are we still having budget cuts?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, Lois," Perry argued, pacing in the conference room as he went over the latest cutbacks, "I take my marching orders from upstairs..."

"So, when will be paid?" Jimmy asked, holding up a copy of his bounced check, "I've got bills to pay..."

Perry sighed, raking a hand through his thinning hairline, "They didn't say. I guess when there's money to pay you..." He admitted sheepishly. Protests began as everyone started talking over one another and he held his hands up to calm everyone down, "I'm just the messenger boys and girls. I can only repeat to you what I've been told...and that's not much."

Sanchez shook his head, throwing a pencil across the table, "What are we doing to resolve this? I mean, what is the paper doing?"

Perry snorted, "I have no idea. They haven't asked for my... input."

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, leaning back against the back of her chair, trying to portray a calm she didn't feel, "Budget cuts, bounced checks, Chief, we can't live off our savings forever...How are we expected to work like this?"

"I don't know," Perry sighed, continuing to pace in front of the board.

Clark shook his head, "They said last week's problem was a clerical error...What's the excuse this time?"

"Clerical error? More like the paper's broke..." Jimmy muttered bitterly, "There's a rumor the paper's going under."

"Jimmy, there's always a rumor," Perry retorted annoyed.

"And it's usually true," Lois snapped back.

"Anything else, Chief? Any more surprises?" Clark asked.

"They...uh, they're ... Talking about layoffs," Perry muttered reluctantly.

"*WHAT!?*" The entire room erupted in protest and Perry held his hands up to calm everyone down.

"All I know is if we don't find ways to save money around here, we're gonna be out of business," Perry said, opening the door to the conference room, "That's it. Everyone get to work. I'll let you know when I know something."

Lois gathered her notebook and stood up, shaking her head, "This is nuts."

"This reeks," Clark said softly, "All these cutbacks and financial issues...Don't you think it seems to be happening overnight?"

"I know," Lois sighed, crossing her arms over her chest. "Something more is going on here..."

"Maybe we oughta check with Accounting ourselves and see if we can find out what's going on before the Planet becomes vulnerable to a hostile takeover..." Clark reasoned, "If it isn't

already, that is."

Lois read off the list from her notes, "No business lunches, no payments for sources, no cabs..."

"Well, I think it's a scam," Jimmy interrupted. "The pinstriped pinheads upstairs only want us to think the Planet is broke."

"Why would they do that?" Sanchez asked from behind him.

"I don't know," Lois said, linking her arm around Clark and tugging his arm to her as she headed out of the conference room, "but we're going to find out..."

A balding man stood in an abandoned warehouse looking around nervously. The room was lit by one light bulb as it flickered above him. He heard footsteps from the other side of the room and called out, "You the boss?"

"He sends his regards," The woman said as she approached with a briefcase in her hand, "You Devane?"

He nodded, "Yeah."

She handed him a file, "You have a reputation of finding obscure items the government wishes to keep hidden...hacking into files...leaking classified information to the tabloids..."

"What's it to you?" He sniffed.

"The boss would like to acquire your...talents to help find a rock..."

"A rock?" He echoed, curiously.

"The banks are no longer extending credit, the advertisers are no longer buying ad space..." Lois ticked off the notes as she and Clark reentered the Planet.

"And Accounting says there's no rhyme or reason behind it," Clark said bitterly.

"I smell a rat," Lois muttered.

"But who?" Clark wondered aloud.

"I don't know," Lois said softly, "This feels...off...Feels like the Planet is a sitting duck waiting for the sharks to take a bite..." A light bulb went off in Clark's head and Lois recognized the expression on his face, "What?"

He smiled, "Maybe we're going about this the wrong way... The question is who would want to put the Planet out of business..."

"I guess," Lois reasoned, "Maybe we should find a buyer," She laughed as she pressed the call button for the elevator.

"Why not?" Clark asked as they stepped onto the empty elevator car together.

"Why not what?" Lois asked, "It was a joke."

"But not far off," Clark pressed. "Someone's after the Planet. So, we find someone to buy it and beat whoever it is to the punch."

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, "How do you expect us to do that?"

"Lois, you and Kent have come in this office with some whoppers over the years, but this one has to take the cake..." Perry muttered, shaking his head.

Lois threw her arms in the air in frustration, "Just think about it Chief... It makes sense!"

"You want us to pitch the Planet to a buyer before this 'invisible' interested party gets a hold of it?" Perry asked skeptically. "How do you even know there is an interested party?"

"We don't," Clark shook his head, "but think about it. Everything that's been going on...It all started last week. That's way too quick of a time table for the Planet to start having financial issues out of the blue. Someone wouldn't sandbag the Planet like that unless they were trying to make a play for it..."

"Or trying to put the competition out of business?" Perry guessed.

"Carpenter's out of business and the STAR just got bought by Multi World Communications," Lois shook her head. "They're a

bit more liberal with the quality of work expected over there..."

"Well this is certainly an interesting theory, but what do you want me to do about it?" Perry asked. "Even if it's true...I wouldn't even know where to begin..."

"We need to beat... whoever this is... to the punch. Get a buyer to buy up the Planet..." Lois said.

"**NOT** Luthor," Clark added.

"Definitely not," Lois shuddered.

Perry arched an eyebrow at them and sighed, "I guess it wouldn't hurt to dust off the old contacts in my black book and see what I can find out..."

"Yes!" Lois cheered, leaning up to kiss Clark in her excitement. "I knew we could count on you, Chief!"

"Don't thank me yet," Perry sighed, pointing to the door. "Everything you have on all your stories... on your hard drives... make copies and keep them at home... Kent's right. This started last week when you two started researching the boss..."

"You don't think..." Lois began.

"Just do it," Perry ordered gruffly.

Lois came home that evening with boxes of files and a copy of the map they'd created to map out the known players associated with 'the boss'. She struggled to get her key through the door and banged against the wooden door, hoping Lucy was home to help. The door opened and Lucy grimaced when she saw Lois struggling under the weight of the boxes, "Whoa, sis, did you leave anything at the office?"

She reached out to grab a few boxes and Lois sighed in relief, "Thanks!"

"Where's Clark?" Lucy teased. "I thought he'd have helped you home with all this..." Lucy set the boxes down in the living room and sighed, "What is all this anyway?"

"He's working with Perry on looking into the Planet's financial issues lately. He'll probably be by later..." Lois said, sinking into the couch, "These," she gestured to the boxes, "are copies of everything we have on 'the boss' we're investigating right now. Perry thinks since the financial issues started when we started investigating that it's probably related and wanted us to have backups of everything..."

"Smart," Lucy nodded, grabbing the boxes and moving them to the closet. "I'm going to put these up out of the way,"

"Thanks, Luce," Lois sighed.

"No prob," Lucy said, grabbing the last box and closing the door to the closet, "So, who's the boss?" She asked, sitting down next to her.

"I don't know," Lois said, sitting up, "but I have my suspicions... Clark thinks that..." A knock at the door interrupted her train of thought and Lois whimpered, "I'm too tired to move..."

"Here, you stay put," Lucy ordered, "That's probably Jimmy. He said he was going to stop by and..." Lucy opened the door and stammered, "Mis-Mister... Lu-Luthor."

"Very funny, Luce," Lois rolled her eyes, standing up, "You know if you didn't want to get the door all you had to do was say..." She stopped cold in her tracks when she saw Lex Luthor standing in her doorway, "...something," She finished her sentence shakily.

"Lois, I'm so glad I caught you..." He smiled, taking a step inside the apartment despite Lucy trying to block him from entering. Realizing she wasn't able to stop him she moved to stand next to Lois.

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, narrowing her eyes at him, "Lex, what are you doing here?"

"I thought we could talk... you haven't returned any of my calls..." He began.

Lois looked at Lucy with a raised eyebrow and Lucy shrugged, "I deleted 'em. Sue me."

"And you are..." Lex inquired with a bite in his tone.

"Lucy Lane, Lois' sister. You know... the *family* you never bothered to meet or find out about for a whole year?" Lucy's tone became more and more bitter with each word.

"Lois, can we have a moment?" Lex asked.

"No," Lucy said, approaching him with her arms crossed over her chest. "You need to take a hint. Lois doesn't want anything to do with you..." She pressed a finger into his chest and he narrowed his eyes, glaring at Lucy.

Lois caught the gaze and pulled her sister back, "Luce, back off," she hissed.

"I think that decision should be something mutually agreed upon," Lex countered, "and I never agreed to that."

Lois shook her head in disgust, "Well, that's too bad because this..." she gestured between the two of them, "doesn't work for me... I told you I didn't want to see you anymore. What are you doing here?"

He took another step toward her and Lucy took another step toward her sister, "I know you've been... confused... lately, but surely you can't expect me to give up on us so quickly..."

Lucy snickered, "Us?"

Lois jabbed her in the ribs, "There is no 'us', Lex. I already told you we are through! Done!"

"Lois, you don't know what you're saying. It's Kent. He's gotten into your head and filled you with these lies about me... If we could just take some time... I know we could recapture what we once had... I love you..."

"You need to leave, now!" Lucy ordered, pointing to the door.

Lex looked as if he was fighting the urge to strike her. Lois braced herself, ready to push her sister to the side if need be to protect her. Where was Clark? She glanced at the clock. Why hadn't she waited another half hour for him to finish? She shuddered as she watched his eyes darken, advancing toward them, "I just want a few moments alone, Lois, please..." He pleaded angrily, turning to glare at Lucy.

"I think Lois wants me to stay," Lucy snapped, narrowing her eyes at him. "You don't scare me. I am not one of your servants you can order around and I'm not one of your bimbos..."

Lex ignored Lucy, trying again to sweet talk Lois, "Please, Lois, don't do this. We have something special. Our connection. I love you... If you could just take some time to see... We are meant to be..." He pulled out a box from his jacket and Lois' eyes widened.

"Oh, God..." Lois shook her head as she watched him get down on one knee, "No, no, no, no, no... Are you out of your mind? What do you think you're doing?"

"What does it look like?" He asked, reaching for her.

"Are you nuts? Get up! She's not in love with you!" Lucy snapped irritably.

"I beg your pardon?" He asked, standing up to face her.

"Get out!" Lois spat, pointing at the door.

"I'll leave when I'm good and ready..." He snapped irritably, pushing Lucy aside as he lunged toward her.

"Hey!" Lucy snapped, trying to stand up.

Lex grabbed Lois by the jaw, "You think I don't know about your rendezvous with your partner Lois? How long did you wait before you let him into your bed? Hmm? A week? A day?" He caressed her face as he spoke and she cringed at his touch.

"Let... go... of... me..." She hissed slowly, trying to portray a confidence she didn't feel at the moment.

"I try to give you the world and you spit in my face you ungrateful..." He doubled over in pain and released her jaw. She took advantage of the opportunity and delivered another kick to his back, watching in satisfaction as he rolled onto his back in pain.

"Nice aim," Lois said, helping her sister to her feet.

"I learned from the best," Lucy said brushing herself off.

Lex stood up, glaring at them in a rage, “You think you can betray me...humiliate me like this?” He snarled angrily as he finished staggering to his feet.

“Get *OUT!*” Lois pointed to the door as Lucy started grabbing things from the shelf behind them and throwing them at him. Lois couldn’t help but laugh as he ducked from the books as Lucy continued to throw them across the room. Lois started grabbing things from the shelf with Lucy to throw at him, hoping to push him out the door. He continued to duck as he headed for the door.

He opened the door only to find Clark standing on the other side with his arms crossed in his famous Superman pose. If she didn’t already know his secret seeing him now would have been a dead giveaway. Fortunately, Lex didn’t seem to notice as he glared at Clark. “Why am I not surprised?” He muttered angrily.

“Obviously, you have a problem with boundaries, Luthor,” Clark said stepping into the apartment as he approached Luthor, staring him down, “What part of ‘*stay away*’ don’t you understand?”

“Well, Kent, I see you’ve wasted no time...” Lex accused angrily.

Clark ignored the dig, “Lois told you to stay away from her. I’d suggest you do as she asked and leave.” Clark gestured to the door for him to leave. His face was a few inches away from Luthor’s.

“This isn’t over...” Lex warned, sulking out the door.

“Arrogant son of a...” Clark slammed the door behind him, locking the deadbolt before turning back to Lois and Lucy, “Spring cleaning?” He teased, trying to lighten the tension in the room as he looked around at the books on the floor.

Lois bumped Lucy’s hip and smirked, “You started it.”

“You were throwing books right along with me,” Lucy said, wrapping her arm around Lois’ shoulders.

“Are you okay?” Clark asked it off, stepping toward them as he began picking up the books scattered on the floor.

“Fine,” Lois said, rubbing her hands up and down her arms, “Just a little shaky.”

Clark placed the books on the shelf before turning to check on Lois and Lucy, examining her reddened jaw to make sure she was indeed all right. “Did he hurt you?” He asked in concern.

“Tried to...” Lois brushed it off, stepping toward the middle of the room as she began gathering the books that were strewn across the room in their confrontation with Lex. “The nerve of that...”

“Tell me about it,” Lucy muttered, taking a seat on the couch as she reached under her to gather a few more books that had been thrown.

“Do I even want to know?” Clark asked cautiously, helping pick up the books with them.

“Probably not,” Lois muttered slamming a stack of books on the shelf.

Clark glanced at her in concern and she didn’t say anything. Lucy supplied, “He was trying to beg her to take him back...then got down on one knee...then tried to manhandle her when she didn’t give him the answer he wanted...”

“That was when Lucy kicked him,” Lois said, slamming another stack of books on the shelf.

Clark raised an eyebrow, glancing back at Lucy, “I’m over-protective...and I don’t like him,” Lucy said hurriedly. “I’m starving. Let’s order some food...”

“No thanks,” Lois shook her head, “You go ahead. I’m not hungry.”

“Suit yourself,” Lucy said, reaching for the stack of take-out menus on the table in front of her as she headed to the kitchen to call her order in, “I’m feeling pizza...”

Lois sighed, sinking into the couch as she watched her sister head to the kitchen. Clark sunk down next to her, placing a protective arm around her, “You wanna talk about it?”

Lois shook her head, pulling Clark’s arm around her as she

rested his head against his chest, “How’d it go with Perry?”

“Okay,” Clark nodded, “I think we’ve got a good list together. He’s meeting with one of the potential buyers tonight,” He tightened his arms around her. “Lois?”

“Clark?” She tightened her grip on his hand, intertwining her fingers with his. She could feel the tears stinging the corner of her eyes.

“It’s okay...I’m here,” he whispered, leaning down to kiss her forehead, wrapping his arms around her. “I’m right here, Lois.”

“Mr. White?” a pretty blonde called from the waiting room and Perry stood up, following her down the long hallway.

“Uh, interesting décor,” Perry said, looking around the office at all the bats that were painted on the hallway.

“Mr. Wayne used to have a fear of them when he was younger so he keeps them around to remind himself that fear is just an obstacle,” She said, pointing to the office ahead. She knocked on the door three times and announced, “Mr. Wayne? Perry White to see you.”

Lois rested her head against Clark’s chest, relaying what had happened earlier, “I don’t know what happened. It was like my body just froze and forgot how to scream...” She shuddered against him.

“You panicked,” Clark said, kissing her forehead as he tightened his arms around her.

Lois shuddered, “I’ve never frozen like that. I don’t know why I...”

Clark rested his head against her forehead, “It’s a completely normal reaction.”

“He was insane...out of control...I’d have called the police on him if I thought it would have done any good. He’s got every officer in his pocket...”

“Not every officer,” Clark countered. “Henderson is still clean,” Lois just snorted and he continued, “He thinks he’s untouchable, but that’s his biggest weakness...his ego.”

“Then we’ll just have to use it against him,” Lois said, drawing random patterns on his chest as she spoke, “Prove he’s not as untouchable as he thinks...” She smiled as he tightened his arms around her, “Thank you.”

“For what?” He asked.

“Trying to warn me...even though I wasn’t listening a good part of the time...you tried to warn me. Thank you,” she leaned up to kiss him.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” He asked cautiously.

Lois shook her head, “I don’t have any marks on me...” She held up her wrists for inspection, “He scared me...but I’m fine now. Lucy said she’s going to do a better job of checking who is at the door before answering...”

“You think he’ll try something again?” Clark asked.

“I don’t know ...honestly I don’t know what to expect.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” Clark sighed, kissing her cheek, “I don’t know what I’d do if anything ever happened to you.”

“Oh, Clark,” She sighed against him, “I love you.”

He ran his hand through her hair and whispered, “I love you too, Lois.”

She leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arm around his neck as she pulled him to her. She smiled against his lips as he began to respond to her, deepening his embrace with her as she rolled on top of him, hovering above him as she molded her chest against his, deepening the embrace. “Clark...” She whimpered against him as she ran her hands up and down his chest.

She moved to straddle him and he pulled away, “Lois, we need...to slow down...” He said in between heated kisses.

“Why?” She asked, pulling him to her by his tie as she kissed him. “This is...so much more ...fun...”

“I know, but...Oh, God...” He groaned as she pressed herself

against him, tugging on his earlobe with her teeth. “Lois...”

“Clark...” she moaned against his lips, molding her body against his as his hands slipped down to her hips, resting on the small of her back. “Stay with me tonight...” She pleaded.

He slowly broke off the kiss, realizing her motivation for trying to push things. “Lois,” He cupped her cheek, fingering the strands of her hair cautiously, “You don’t need to...” She shuddered against him and he tightened his arms around her, “I’m not going anywhere.”

The next morning, Lois woke up with the sun shining in her eyes. She blinked, trying to adjust to the light. A familiar weight was wrapped around her waist. She looked down and smiled, recalling how Clark had spent the night with her last night.

She turned in his arms to face him, smiling when she saw him in his wrinkled dress shirt. He looked so different without his glasses. It was a side of him that no one would ever see...a combination of Clark Kent and Superman in one. His face looked so relaxed as he slept.

She moved her hand to caress his cheek, leaning up to kiss him. He began to stir, tightening his grip on her waist as he kissed her back softly, “Morning,” he murmured with a grin.

She smiled back at him, “Morning.” She linked her arms around his neck, “You stayed.”

He cupped her cheek, “I told you I would.”

“I love you,” she whispered, leaning into him to capture his lips.

Lex held an icepack to his shoulder as he listened to Nigel update him on the latest intel from the surveillance. “Still nothing on Superman?”

“Not yet,” Nigel said, “but I believe I have a lead. They found the surveillance equipment but I was able to replace it with one of our audio transmitter prototypes. Should be hidden well enough to keep from attracting the attention of the Man of Steel.”

“How did he find it?” Lex asked.

“Apparently, Mr. Kent found it and alerted Superman who swept the place,” Nigel said gloomily.

“How?” Lex pressed.

“I don’t know, but there’s definitely more to Mr. Kent than meets the eye,” Nigel said, pulling up the video feed from earlier, “Look.”

“You could have been mad at me and you weren’t. You didn’t have to believe me when I...”

“Enough of that. I told you I was a bit shell-shocked that night...You’re right I could have been mad, but as I said before I can’t think of a time when you could have told me. You trusted me so I trusted you. It’s that simple.”

“What kind of secret could he be hiding that would cause Ms. Lane to be angry at him?” Nigel asked, “I asked myself the same question. I’ve got our investigators looking into his background... So far he’s come up clean, but I know there’s something there.”

“Yes,” Lex nodded, “Whatever it is...must be serious if he’s afraid of losing Lois Lane to it,” he grew thoughtful for a moment. “Can we get surveillance put into Mr. Kent’s apartment as well?”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Nigel said.

“Good,” Lex nodded, “Anything else of interest?”

Nigel shook his head, “Just your confrontation with Ms. Lane, sir.”

“I lost my head, Nigel...my focus...” Lex shook his head in disgust.

“You seem to have a weakness for Ms. Lane, sir, but don’t let it blind you from the goals at hand...” Nigel reminded him.

“Bringing down Superman,” Lex reminded himself.

“The ultimate goal,” Nigel nodded.

“I always love a challenge, but this is a game I’m quickly growing tired of,” Lex snapped bitterly.

That following week Lois and Clark began piecing together contacts from their earlier stories. One of those contacts was Monique Kahn, the woman that had fallen off Luthor Towers at the same time Jules Johnson had attempted to jump off the Lexor Hotel several months ago.

Monique shifted uncomfortably under Lois Lane’s gaze as she looked around the café, “I’m not sure what you expect me to help you with, Ms. Lane. It was an accident...an...unfortunate... accident.”

“An accident that could have cost you your life if Superman hadn’t shown up,” Lois countered, pulling out her notes. “You have a fear of heights, yet you expect us to believe you *fell* off a thirty story building?”

Monique looked down uncomfortably, “Yes.”

Clark met her gaze, “Ms. Kahn, when Superman rescued you...you were hysterical...ranting and raving about a ‘test’...”

“You said yourself, Mr. Kent, I was hysterical...” Monique sniffed, offering him a slow smile. She caught Lois’ eyes narrowing her and cleared her throat, “I, uh, wasn’t in my right mind.”

“Well, I’m sure being thrown off a thirty-story building will do that to anyone,” Lois said with a smile, arching an eyebrow at her.

“I...I wasn’t thrown,” Monique argued.

Clark folded his hands on the table, meeting her eyes with his, “Ms. Kahn, what would have happened if Superman hadn’t shown up that day?”

Monique looked down, and Lois continued, “There was no backup plan. You would have died...For what?”

“It wasn’t supposed to...” Monique began before catching herself.

“You were never told you would be jumping that day, were you?” Clark asked. “Someone pushed you.”

“We just want to know who was arranging the test...” Lois added.

“You don’t understand,” Monique shook her head. “I can’t...”

Lois shook her head in disgust as they made their way back to the Planet. “She knows something...”

“She’s scared,” Clark reminded her.

“I can’t believe she’d protect someone that was willing to throw her off a building like that,” Lois fumed, pushing through the doors of the Planet as they entered the lobby.

“Maybe she’d afraid of them trying something again,” Clark said gently as they headed for the elevators. “Being thrown from a thirty-story building like that can be...traumatizing.”

“Being thrown out of a plane with no parachute is too,” Lois quipped as she stepped on the elevator with Clark right behind her.

“Lois,” he cupped her cheek gently, “not everyone is you.” He reminded her, leaning in to kiss her. “Just give her some time. I’m sure she’ll come around.”

“What would really help is to get Henderson in on this. I don’t know why he won’t open an official investigation...” Lois huffed.

“He’s probably afraid of raising suspicions,” Clark said as the elevator dinged and they stepped off the elevator onto the newsroom floor, “Going after someone this powerful...everyone is scared.”

Lois nodded, casting a glance toward Jack who was talking with Jimmy, holding a handful of file folders in his hand, “What are we going to do?”

Clark sighed, “I guess we keep digging...Let’s try and find Jules Johnson and see if we can get him to talk.”

Lucy popped a fry in her mouth as she stared at the piles of tapes on the table in front of her. “You know, Jimmy, when I said I wouldn’t mind dinner and a movie this wasn’t exactly what I had

in mind.”

Jimmy gave Lucy a half-smile, “I know, I’m sorry. The Chief’s got me running background on all the board members to see who could potentially partner with us on the buyout with the Planet.”

“What’s with the tapes?” Lucy asked.

Jimmy grinned, “Jack’s, uh, surveillance on everyone.”

“Surveillance?” Lucy asked, “He was spying on them?”

“To see who we can trust,” Jimmy added. “A few of these guys have been meeting over at Luthor Towers...closed door meetings. No one knows who they’re with.”

Lucy crinkled her nose, “Anything related to Lex Luthor is bad news. He’s like a skunk in a rose garden.”

Jimmy looked at her perplexed, “What makes you say that?”

Lucy raised an eyebrow at him, “Lois never told you?” Jimmy shook his head, “He showed up at our apartment last week and tried to attack her when she wouldn’t take him back.”

“You need to find another place to stay, Luce,” Jimmy breathed, “What if he...”

Lucy shook her head, “Lois doesn’t want me moving until she and Clark finish this investigation into the boss. She said I’m safer with her than I would be anywhere else...”

“But...”

“Clark’s got Superman watching out for us. Don’t worry,” Lucy reassured him.

Lois took a seat next to Clark on the couch, “Well Jules Johnson was another dead end.”

Clark shook his head, “Doesn’t surprise me. He’s obviously in cahoots with ...” Lightning cracked through the sky and Clark glanced out the window, “It’s getting pretty bad out there.”

Lois nodded, watching as the lights flicker throughout the apartment, “Lucy said she was having dinner with Jimmy at the Planet. Hope she doesn’t get stuck there.”

Clark shook his head, staring out the window. Thunder boomed through the night sky, and another crack of lightning flashed through the sky. “That doesn’t sound good.”

“Maybe we should pull out some flashlights,” Lois said, heading for the kitchen. Another loud crack of thunder boomed outside with another flash of lightning, and the lights flickered once before everything went dark. “Clark?” Lois called out.

“Right here,” Clark whispered, wrapping his arms around her from behind.

She relaxed against him, “I, uh, think the flashlights are in the cabinet,” She pointed above them. She could make out the shadow of his face from the moonlight reflecting from the window. She heard the rustling from the cabinet and a click before seeing the white light reflect off the ceiling as it reflected off Clark’s face.

He flashed the light towards the window, “Looks like it’s just this building. The lights are on across the street.”

She nodded, shuddering slightly as the heat from his touch was removed, and he walked toward the window. “Um, I think the fuse box is in the back...” She pointed toward the hall where a large metal box held the fuses.

“I’m not sure what good I can...” He stopped when he opened the door to the fuse box, “What’s this?”

“What?” Lois asked, walking up behind him as he shone the light into the fuse box.

He pulled out a small square clip that had been attached to one of the wires linking the fuse box to the wall and lowered his glasses to examine it more, “It’s another bug,” he said grimly.

“A bug?” Lois echoed, “What is it doing in the fuse box?” She watched Clark walk into the kitchen and pull out a glass and fill it with water, “What are you doing?”

He dropped the bug into the glass of water and lowered his glasses, checking the rest of the apartment, “Doesn’t seem to be any sign of any cameras...”

Lois tugged her jacket closed, wrapping her arms around herself as she walked back toward the couch, “Well gotta hand it to him. He’s persistent...”

“At least now he can’t hear anything...” Clark said, walking back into the living room with the flashlight. “We need to take that to Henderson in the morning. See if he can have it analyzed. Maybe find out where the signal is going.”

“Good idea,” Lois nodded, leaning against Clark as he set the flashlight down on the table in front of them. “I wonder how long that’s been there.”

Clark sighed, “I don’t know, but your fuse box is lead-lined. That’s why I wasn’t able to see it earlier.”

“Anything else in here lead-lined?” Lois asked, looking around the darkened room.

“No,” he shook his head. “I guess I’m gonna start scanning everything to make sure we don’t have any uninvited guests eavesdropping.”

“He must think we’re onto something,” Lois said, shaking her head.

“Or have serious boundary issues,” Clark added ruefully. “Maybe you oughta stay at my place for a little while. This is the second time...he’s just going to keep trying...What if I’m not around?”

“What about Lucy?” Lois asked.

Clark shrugged, “Maybe see if she could stay with your Uncle Mike for awhile until this lets up.” He stroked her cheek, “I can’t be everywhere at once...”

“He knows we’re together. Do you really think he won’t look for me at your place?” Lois asked, wrapping her hand around his. “We’ve just got to be careful. We’re so close. I know it.”

“That’s what worries me,” Clark sighed, tightening his arms around her. “We’re close...very close, and Luthor is being cornered. Nothing is more dangerous than an animal when it’s cornered.”

Henderson stared at the glass in front of him skeptically, “What is it?”

“A bug,” Lois said, crossing her arms over her chest as she paced in front of him.

“A bug?” Henderson repeated uncertainly. “And you brought it to me because...”

“Because this is the second time Superman’s found a bug in my apartment,” Lois explained. “I need you to analyze it and see if you can trace where the signal was programmed to send the feed to.”

“Why do I get the feeling you already have a suspect?”

Henderson asked, rubbing the temples of his head.

“You’re right,” Lois nodded. “I do, but I want you to verify it for me. Can you do this for me?”

Henderson nodded, “Sure. I’ll send it over to LexLabs and ...”

“No!” Lois shouted, “Don’t!”

Henderson arched an eyebrow at her, “And why not?”

“Don’t you have another lab you could use?” She managed hurriedly.

“There’s S.T.A.R. Labs...” Henderson began.

“Good,” Lois said, nodding as she spoke. “That’ll be perfect.”

“Lois, what is going on?” Henderson asked.

“I can’t tell you yet. Just let me know what you find out,” Lois said hurriedly as she left Henderson’s office.

Lois stepped off the elevator and found Clark at his desk. He smiled as she approached him, “How’d it go?”

“I think I got the message across,” Lois murmured. She pointed to the list in front of him. “What’s that?”

“Tip from Louie,” He said, handing her the list. “Seems like ‘the boss’ has been cleaning house at the Metropolis Penitentiary.”

Lois read the list and smiled, “Remind me to send him a thank

you.”

Perry laughed as he read the list in front of him, “You’re joking, right?”

“This could be the biggest story of the century, Chief! The biggest thing since Watergate. We’re talking government corruption, organized crime...”

“What does that have to do with you wanting the Planet to pay for a trip to California?” Perry asked.

“There are some witnesses out there we need to talk to...”

Lois said hurriedly, “Come on!” She stomped her foot impatiently.

Perry let out a long breath, “Lois, have you forgotten that the Planet is ... broke?”

“If we can crack this boss scandal open all people will be talking about is the Planet...” Lois shot back, “Come on, it takes money to run down leads...”

Perry sighed, pulling out his wallet, “Don’t bother with an expense account. Just don’t bankrupt me.” He handed her his Amex, “And I want receipts!”

Lois leaned down to hug him before grabbing the card, “You won’t regret this, Chief.”

Perry shook his head, watching as the door closing the door, “I better not.”

Clark sighed as he and Lois boarded the plane to California. He looked around at the seats and shuddered. He did not want to be in here. “Remind me why we’re doing this?” He asked as he followed Lois to their seats.

“Re-investigating every story that has anything to do with rumors of ‘the boss’?” Lois reminded him as she took her seat by the window. She watched him put their bags in the overhead, and he gave her a half-smile before taking a seat next to her. He really didn’t want to be here on this flight. Why couldn’t they have just flown Superman express? He already knew the answer. If they’d taken Superman Express, it would have raised suspicions. Lois had pointed out several little things he did over the last few weeks that would give away his identity. He never knew how careless he had been until now.

“It’s cramped in here,” he said, looking around as the other passengers filled the seats around them. He fidgeted in his seat, trying to get comfortable. There was no legroom, and there was hardly any elbow room. He hated planes.

Lois arched an eyebrow at him, giving him a half-smile, “What is with you?” She watched as he fidgeted in his seat once more, “Why are you so nervous?”

“I hate planes,” he muttered quietly.

“Why?” Lois asked, “I mean, I’ll admit the seats could be better...” She motioned to the cramped legroom of their seats, “but I would have thought ...” she lowered her voice to mouth, “Superman” then raised her voice again, “would enjoy a flight where he doesn’t have to do all the work.”

“No,” he looked around to make sure no one was paying them any attention and whispered, “Superman” he raised his voice once more, “doesn’t enjoy flights where he’s not doing the flying. Doesn’t feel natural.”

“So, you just don’t like being in control?” Lois asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

He smiled, “Something like that... I don’t know. I just feel... claustrophobic... in planes.”

She gave him a funny look, “You didn’t seem claustrophobic on the last flight we took.”

He smiled, recalling the last flight they’d taken. It was the first time Lois had kissed him when they were trying to escape Trask. “I was more focused on you,” he admitted, cupping her cheek, “and getting us out of there...”

“So you need a distraction?” She asked, her eyes twinkling as she spoke.

He smiled, “Something like that,” he said softly, noticing the flirtatious sparkle that twinkled in her eyes. What was she planning?

Lois smiled as she watched the ground slowly disappear as the plane took off. Clark was still nervous, fidgeting in his seat. She turned back to him, squeezing his knee gently as she turned in her seat to face him. He jumped slightly.

“You okay?” Lois asked with a smile, fingering his arm gently.

“Yeah,” he gave her a small smile, and she reached for his hand, intertwining her fingers with his.

“You said you needed a... distraction,” she whispered, tightening her grip on him as she leaned against him.

“You’re very... uh, distracting...” He said with a smile as she fingered the cotton on his dress shirt.

She smiled, noticing him take a sharp breath as she moved her hand up his chest, “Distracting?” She leaned in to kiss him, “All I’m doing is...”

“...distracting...” Clark finished for her, leaning in to recapture her lips once more with a smile.

Perry White looked around the room he was in, sizing up the collectible movie posters and autographed comic books that were framed on the walls. He’d heard Bob Fences was a bit eccentric, but it seemed he was a bit of a child at heart.

“Mr. White,” A tall brunette in a sharp business suit with a skirt that showed off way too much leg approached him.

“Uh...” He looked up at the ceiling, hoping to distract himself from staring. He was a married man after all. “Yes...” He turned back, forcing himself to look only at the woman’s face.

“I’m Simone,” she held her hand out for him to shake, “Mr. Fences executive assistant,” she motioned for him to follow her. “He’ll see you now.”

She opened the door for Perry to enter and he saw a young man in his late twenties with brown hair and large rimmed glasses in a polo shirt and khakis sitting at his desk with what looked like action figures of Star Trek characters.

“Look out!” Fences made the plastic figures fly in the sky, imitating the sound of a laser, “Bzzzt!” He made one of the figurines fall down, “Ahh, the death ray! Skkkk... Don’t worry I’ll save you, Princess Cleavage. Gzzzz!”

Perry raised his eyebrows unsure of how to begin. This man was a juvenile, but he was a self-made billionaire by the age of nineteen, funding NanoSoft Technologies at age sixteen. Fences may be out there, but he had business smarts. The question was would he be able to help the Planet?

Lois and Clark walked outside the Oakland International Airport hand in hand. Lois scanned the line of people waiting for cabs and sighed, “Probably going to be awhile,” she said, rubbing her palm up his chest seductively. “Maybe we should ask ‘Superman’ for a lift?” She teased.

“Maybe,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her. “When are we supposed to check in?”

“We’ve got an hour,” she said, toying with the end of his tie.

He groaned as she linked her arms around his neck, leaning in to kiss him, “An hour, huh?”

“Yeah,” she murmured against his lips. “The meeting with daddy isn’t until three...” She brushed her hand against his chest, looking up at him with a smile.

“You think he knows anything that could help?” He asked, tightening his arms around her waist.

“I don’t know but...” Lois trailed off when she recognized a tall, balding man walking toward them. “What is *he* doing here?”

“Who?” Clark turned to look in the direction Lois was looking and saw Sam Lane looking around. It didn’t appear that he’d spotted them yet. Lois tugged his arm to follow her, “I thought we

were supposed to meet him at his office.”

“So did I,” she muttered, making her way through the crowd as she waved her arm, trying to get Sam Lane’s attention, “Daddy? What are you doing here?” She asked, confused as she approached Sam who had his back to her.

He turned and smiled, “Princess,” he beamed, “I, uh, thought I’d pick you up and we could have, uh, lunch...” He began hesitantly, looking at the ground for a moment before looking up at Lois.

“Since when do you have time for lunch?” Lois asked suspiciously, offering him a half-smile.

“I, uh,” he began, hesitantly. He spotted Clark standing behind Lois and noticed Lois’ arm around his then glanced at Clark as he extended his hand, “Uh, Clark was it?” He asked.

“Yes, sir,” Clark took his hand to shake, “Good to see you again, Dr. Lane.”

“Yes,” he nodded. There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment, and Sam cleared his throat, “Uh, do you have your bags? I can give you a ride...to the car rental place, or hotel...” He motioned to the parking garage behind them.

“Well, uh,” Lois began at the same time Clark said, “Uh, sure.”

Lois gave Clark a look, and he realized immediately he shouldn’t have said anything. Her jaw tightened as he felt her tighten her grip on his arm. She knew she couldn’t hurt him but the look she was giving him...

<<“Okay, so I don’t get along with my father. Big deal?”>>

<<“I mean, haven’t you ever known anybody so wrapped up in their work that they don’t have time for anyone or anything...?”>>

<<“A lot of parents are workaholics...”

“Well, the one’s I knew at least tried to spend some quality time with their family. My dad just came home to criticize. ‘Daddy I got a ninety-eight on this test,’ ‘Oh, that’s good Lois. That leaves two points for improvement.’”>>

They walked in silence toward the parking garage as he recalled the few times Lois had opened up to him about her father. After the fiasco with Menken they seemed to be working through a lot of their issues, but seeing them now...He wasn’t so sure anymore. This was going to be a long day.

Jimmy knocked on Perry’s office door, “Come in...” Perry called.

“Here’s the background check on Bob Fences. There seems to be a lot of sketchy stuff going on with Nanosoft’s trading overseas. A couple of my contacts said he’s pretty unhinged...”

“Yeah,” Perry nodded, “I noticed,” He glanced at the other file in Jimmy’s hand, “What’s that?”

“The information on Viologic’s new owner, Eric Thorp,” Jimmy handed him the file.

Perry smiled, nodding as he read, “Yeah, Thorp’s a real whiz kid. A multi-millionaire. He made his first million by the time he was your age.”

“Yeah, well...” Jimmy looked at him defensively, “I had the mumps in sixth grade...Kinda slowed me down.”

Perry laughed, “I’ll set up a meeting and feel him out. Keep digging...” He handed the file back to Jimmy.

“You got it, Chief,” Jimmy nodded.

After an uncomfortable car ride to the car rental place and an even more uncomfortable car ride to a small Italian eatery they sat down for lunch and Lois seemed to be focused on getting down to business despite Sam Lane’s attempts to divert the conversation to her personal life.

“Lucy said she moved back in with you...”

“Yes,” she said nodding her head, “I’d like to go over everything that happened with Menken...”

“You seem happy...”

“Are you sure there wasn’t anyone else working with Menken?” Lois pressed, ignoring her father’s comment.

“You’re smiling more...”

Lois bit the inside of her lower lip for a moment, trying to hold in her knee-jerk reaction to snap. He was deliberately trying to divert the conversation elsewhere. “Is there a reason you won’t answer my question?”

He arched an eyebrow at her, “Is there a reason you won’t talk about your life with me? I am your father after all.”

She glanced back at Clark who looked really uncomfortable as he stared at his plate silently. He seemed to sense the chill in the air and had kept mostly quiet all through lunch except to order his food and ask questions about Menken. Sam had answered HIS questions but was refusing to answer hers.

Lois laughed, “You’re kidding, right?”

Sam sighed, “It’s been fifteen years. Can’t we just put this all behind us?”

Lois stiffened, “I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me why Lucy decided to move back so fast?”

He lowered his head in shame, “I had a breakthrough on a new robotic computer chip we’re developing and...”

“...and Lucy took a backseat to a scientific breakthrough.”

Lois finished for him, “Big surprise.”

“Lo-is,” Sam gave her a warning look, “That is not fair.”

“Fair? You want to talk about fair?” She scoffed. “How about all the nights you didn’t come home and Lucy and I had to hear all the gory details of what mom thought you were doing...”

Sam gave Lois a warning tone, “Lois, we are in public. Do you really want to do this here...in front of your partner?”

Lois shrugged, “It’s nothing he hasn’t heard before.”

Sam lowered his head into his palm and Lois opened her mouth to add another retort, but Clark cut her off, “Okay that’s enough...” He gave Lois a look then turned back to Sam, “I understand your relationship is a bit complicated but this...isn’t helping.”

Sam sighed, “No, it’s not.”

“You started it,” Lois grumbled.

“Lo-is,” Clark gave her a warning look, and she relented.

“Fine,” she leaned back in her seat, “Can we just get back to the story?”

“Fine,” Sam relented, nodding, “What do you want to know?”

“Dr. Lane, the reason we came out here,” he gave Lois a look before turning back to Sam, “is we need to know who Menken was working for...”

“Working for?”

“We have reason to believe he was working for someone when he enlisted your help to build those robotic arms. What was the intention when they brought you on?” Clark asked.

“I was told we were repairing injured players...then slowly they wanted them stronger and stronger...a, uh, ‘Superman’ if you will,” he explained.

“Did Menken ever mention any names...or act secretive about anything?” Lois asked, taking notes.

“No, all he ever mentioned was a, uh, ‘boss’ that wanted the changes when I asked about trying to make the fighters do too much too fast with the robotic arms.”

“Boss,” Lois repeated, raising her eyebrows.

“Yes,” he nodded, “Mean something to you?”

“Maybe,” Clark said, “There’ve been quite a few fingers pointing toward a ‘boss’ in Metropolis. We’ve been taking a second look at everything to see if we’ve missed anything.”

“I try to block that time out...not my proudest moment,” he said with a grim smile, “I’m just grateful to Lex Luthor for saving you from Menken like that...” He reached for her hand, “You’re my daughter, and I love you, Lois. If anything, ever happened to you...”

Lois nodded, “Well, I’m not so sure we should be grateful to Lex.”

“Why?” Sam asked. “I mean, he saved you...”

“We think Luthor could be involved,” Clark said, taking Lois’ hand in his and squeezing it gently.

“Involved?” Sam scoffed, “As what? He’s a philanthropist. What could he possibly be involved in boxing scandals for?”

Lois looked at Clark for a moment who nodded then sighed as she spoke, “We think this ‘boss’ that everyone is talking about is... Lex.”

“What??”

“And the ‘rescue’ from Menken was an assassination,” Clark added.

“But ...”

“He shot Menken,” Lois murmured.

“He didn’t have to kill him, but he did,” Clark said.

Sam looked at her cautiously, “So, is that why you...uh, stopped ...seeing him?” At Lois’ surprised look he added, “Your mother called...updated me. I have to keep tabs somehow.”

“I didn’t know you and mom still talked,” Lois said surprised.

He nodded his head, “Well, we can be amicable if need be.”

Lois let out a scoff of disbelief, “Since *when*?”

“Okay,” Clark intervened before they could get into it again, “We should get going.” He helped Lois to her feet, “Thank you for your time, Dr. Lane.” He extended his hand to shake Sam’s hand.

“Good to see you again, Clark,” Sam said, “Uh, take care of yourself, Lois.”

“You too,” Lois nodded, turning to leave.

Clark turned to follow, and Sam placed a hand on his shoulder, “Clark, take care of her. She puts on a tough front, but if any of this is true...She’s not as tough as she looks.”

“I know,” Clark nodded, “She’s tougher,” he said before turning to leave.

That evening Lois and Clark went over everything they had on the investigation with Menken as they finished up dinner in their hotel room. Due to their limited budget, they were in a single room with a double bed and a pull-out couch. Lois hadn’t said anything when they’d checked in, and neither had he. He wasn’t sure if he should bring up the sleeping arrangements. They’d spent the night together after Luthor’s attack, but that had been different. That had been when she was scared. This was business.

They sat at the table, reviewing their notes as they finished off the remnants of their dinner. “So, with Prometheus it was to get the profits from all the patents...” Lois said, stabbing her fork into the salad she was eating, “...but why robotics and fixed boxing matches? It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Well, maybe it wasn’t about sports at all,” Clark reasoned, grabbing a fry from his plate.

“Then what is it about?” Lois asked, “Dad specialized in robotic arms after he left his practice...Menken ran the gym... Allie handled the players...Not exactly screaming criminal organization here...”

“Yeah, but think what you could do if your dad had succeeded in creating the type of robotics they wanted...” Clark reasoned. “Those guys were pretty strong...If they were strong enough...”

“They’d be able to break walls...” Lois said, following his train of thought.

“...or bank vaults...” Clark added.

“...Super-powered criminals...” Lois nodded, “Makes sense.”

“Who else is on that list?” Clark asked, pointing to her notepad.

“Johnny Taylor. He was transferred to California Institute last month after his arrest during the whole Toasters fiasco,” Lois said.

“Think he’ll be willing to talk?” Clark asked, taking another bit of his fry.

Lois shrugged, “I don’t know, but we’ve got two days out

here. We better make the most of them.”

Clark nodded, “Any word from Perry on his search for a buyer?”

Lois shook her head, throwing a napkin into the container she was eating from, “No, I haven’t heard anything. I guess he’s still hunting.”

He watched her quietly fiddling with the button on her jacket. Her mind seemed to have drifted to something else at the moment. Lunch had been extremely uncomfortable. Seeing the way Lois interacted with her dad and hearing some of the accusations she’d thrown at him... It made him wonder how she’d ever let him in. The walls she’d built around herself...it made sense. Sam Lane seemed nice enough, but he’d never spent more than a few hours with the man. Hearing the things Lois and Lucy had told him...It killed him to know how much he’d hurt Lois.

“So, still think my dad is...colorful?” Lois asked with a fake laugh.

This was good. Lois was talking about it without prodding.

“Uh, I’m not sure,” he said with a smile. “He’s ... Different.”

“Sorry about lunch,” Lois apologized. “Holding a decent conversation with him is hard after...” She trailed off, looking away and he placed a hand on her shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he squeezed her shoulder. “I don’t understand ...I guess I don’t want to understand...how anyone can walk away from their family like that.”

She gave him a soft smile, “You’d never do that...” She leaned in to kiss him, leaning against him as he wrapped an arm around her. “What was the worst was ...near the end...when they were fighting so much...Lucy and I *wanted* him to leave. After he did...it destroyed my mom...”

His arm tightened around her waist, “Sounds like a bad situation all around.” He kissed her head, “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

She patted his chest, “It was a long time ago...” She sat up, stretching her arms. “I’m gonna take a shower...get ready for bed...We’ve got an early start tomorrow.”

He nodded, “I’ll clean this up and ...” He gave a flying motion “...do a quick patrol over Metropolis,” At her look he elaborated, “Superman needs to make an appearance otherwise the criminal element will take advantage...”

“We don’t want that, do we?” Lois whispered, leaning in to kiss him as she walked across the room to pull out her things from her suitcase.

He smiled, “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

He quickly spun into the Superman suit and Lois smiled at him, “Never gets old.”

He grinned, leaning in to kiss her, “Love you.”

Later that evening after patrolling Metropolis Clark headed back to California and found Lois already asleep. He had taken longer than he had expected on his patrol. It wasn’t anything major like the last few weeks but rather petty crimes scattered throughout the city. A mugging here, carjacking there. Nothing that would usually draw his attention unless he was on patrol.

He spun out of his suit and into boxers and a tank shirt, gazing at Lois’ sleeping figure. It still amazed him to know how much had changed over the last few weeks. He and Lois had grown closer than he could have ever imagined.

“Clark...” He heard Lois call his name in her sleep. He smiled kneeling down on the side of the bed as he brushed the hair out of her face. Her eyes fluttered open sleepily, “Hey.”

“Hey,” he whispered back with a smile.

She rolled on her side, propping her head up with her arm to look at him, “You just get back?”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “I didn’t mean to wake you.”

She smiled, “It’s fine. Anything exciting on your patrol?”

“No,” he shook his head, “Just small stuff here and there.”

Lois nodded, patting the other side of the bed, “That’s good.” She leaned in to kiss him, “Come on, it’s late. We need to get up early. Come to bed,” she patted the side of the bed.

“You sure that’s a good idea?” He asked, “I can sleep on the couch...” He offered.

“No,” she shook her head, tugging him toward her. “I want to sleep in your arms...makes me feel safe,” she said sleepily. He nodded, climbing into bed with her. She curled up with him, resting her head against his chest as she drifted off to sleep, “I love you.”

“I love you too sweetheart,” he whispered, kissing her cheek. He looked down at her sleeping figure that had curled up next to him. She had already drifted off to sleep.

He rolled over on his side so he was facing her, watching her sleep, hoping sleep would come soon. It had been a long day. Between the flight that had turned into a very enjoyable experience as Lois ‘distracted’ him with flirtatious teasing for three hours and the very uncomfortable afternoon with Sam Lane, he was exhausted. Still, it was hard to sleep. He was sharing a bed with Lois. She’d said she felt safe in his arms. They seemed to be getting more and more close. He was trying to take things slow with her, but it was times like this that made it harder and harder. He groaned, rolling over on his back. It was going to be a long night.

Lois sleepily rolled over on her stomach, reaching out for Clark. She frowned, feeling the cool sheet next to her. She opened her eyes, rolling on her back as she looked around the room, trying to allow time for her eyes to adjust. It was still dark out. Where was Clark? She glanced at the couch to make sure he hadn’t moved to the sofa after she’d fallen asleep. Nope. Maybe he got a call for Superman?

She looked up at the ceiling as she stretched her arms over her head. She yelled in surprise when she spotted him floating in the air above her. When she yelled, it seemed to wake him up, which also caused him to fall from where he was floating...right on top of her. “What’re you doing?” She squirmed, trying to push him off of her.

“Sorry...” He apologized, trying to sit up unsuccessfully, “Just hold still for a second.” She finally stopped, and he sat up, moving to untangle himself from the blanket his foot got caught in when he fell.

“What happened?” Lois asked, sitting up.

“I ...fell...” He said cautiously as he dug his foot out of the blanket.

“Falling from floating?” She looked at him incredulously. “I didn’t think that was possible...What were you doing up there anyway?”

“Sometimes I float in my sleep...” He said sheepishly. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

She laughed, “You float in your sleep?”

He nodded, “Sometimes.” He demonstrated, floating above the bed, stretching out as he propped his head up with his hand. She grinned up at him, “Your life is so strange.”

“Stranger and stranger every minute,” he smiled at her as he floated back down to the bed.

Lois glanced at the clock, “We still got a few hours before it’s time to get up. Let’s try and get some rest.” He nodded, wrapping an arm around her as she curled up next to him.

Mrs. Cox knocked on the door to Lex Luthor’s office, “Mr. Luthor, a Mr. Devane on line two for you.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Cox, I’ll take it in the office,” he got up and headed toward the bookshelf after typing on the keyboard to open the secret compartment. He stepped down the steps to the secret compartment and walked past the wine cellar and into an open office where a large computer was pinned against the wall and

took his seat at the computer, pressing a button to display the video call.

Devane sat in front of the screen, “Mr. Luthor? Your information was accurate. I have the Kryptonite.”

Lex grinned, “When can I expect delivery?”

Devane nodded, “I’ll call you when I get back to Metropolis. The price is five million.”

“Done,” Lex said, pressing a button to end the call. He smiled to himself, turning in his chair.

The room was dark and poorly lit. Lois looked around nervously, “Makes Metropolis Penitentiary seem like a country club.”

“Wonder what’s taking them so long,” Clark said, looking toward the door as he tapped his pen against his notepad. There was a loud hammering noise from the other side of the door, and he looked up, “Maybe that’s him.”

The door opened, and Johnny Taylor walked through with chains on his feet and hands. He gave Lois a leering stare as the officers locked his chains to the table, “Hey, Legs...” He winked at her. Lois tugged her jacket closed and pulled her chair closer to Clark.

Clark narrowed his eyes at Johnny as he leaned forward, folding his hands on the table in front of him, “Mr. Taylor how about you stick to professional names for this interview.”

Johnny shifted uncomfortably when he met Clark’s hardened gaze, “Yeah, uh, okay,” he cleared his throat, “MISS Lane,” he nodded to Lois, “Whatdya want to meet about?”

“You requested a transfer out of Metropolis Penitentiary a few months ago...a few days after an incident with another inmate,” Lois began, reading from the file in front of her. “Seems you had a misunderstanding with a ‘shiv?’”

Johnny rubbed his right arm and nodded, “Yeah, a few trips to the infirmary made me realize Metropolis wasn’t the right place to be, uh, finishing my, uh, retirement from the Metros...if you know what I mean.”

Clark nodded, “Someone wanted you out of the way?”

“I, uh, didn’t make too many friends on the inside...apparently my sister still thinks she’s running things from the inside,” Johnny shrugged, “but I’m not the one that got into bed with the devil.”

“You think it was Toni coming after you?” Lois asked, curiously.

“Or the John she made a deal with to take the Metros out from under me,” Johnny smiled, “Either way, I wasn’t sticking around for her to finish the job.”

“You said she made a ‘deal with the devil.’ Any idea who this ‘devil’ was?” Clark asked.

“No one other than ‘the boss,’” Johnny said with a wide grin.

“Any idea who this ‘boss’ is?” Lois asked.

“No, I never met him, but my guys said he had a meeting with Toni at the Metro club after she took over...” Johnny shrugged.

Lois’ eyebrows rose, “At the Metro club?”

“You know who it is, don’t you?” Johnny leaned forward, folding his hands on the table as he laughed.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look, and Lois cleared her throat, “I think we should go.” She stood up with Clark gathering her things.

They headed for the door, and Johnny called after them. “Till next time, Toots.”

Lois breathed a sigh of relief as she closed the door to the rental car. “That guy gives me the creeps!”

“Well, as smarmy as he is...” Clark said, “He may be the first real key to connecting Luthor to ‘the boss’ and all his crimes...I think it’s time to head back to Metropolis.”

“And keep digging...” Lois said softly, “See what else we can find to connect the dots.”

"All surveillance equipment has been reinstalled at Ms. Lane and Mr. Kent's," Nigel said as he read from the status report to Lex in his study. "They were out of town for a few days, so our men were able to get in and out without any issues." He handed Lex a folder, "The background check we found on Mr. Kent."

"Mr. Kent's been quite busy," Lex mused.

"Yes, travels all around the world after college. He's shown up in remote locations around the world in time to cover 'miraculous' saves in local papers as a freelance. Always moving and never staying in one place for very long."

"Is that so?" Lex asked, flipping through the file. "Then why Metropolis? Why the Daily Planet?"

"Maybe he found something to stick around for," Nigel shrugged. "Either way it's all in there."

After the flight back to Metropolis Clark walked Lois back to her apartment. She unlocked the door and stepped inside with her luggage. Clark closed the door behind them and lowered his glasses to scan the apartment, "Oh, no."

Lois sighed, shaking her head, "Let me guess..."

"Just a sec," he turned around, pulling out his cell phone and began to dial.

"What are you doing?"

"Yes, Metropolis P.D? I'd like to speak to Bill Henderson please," he said into the phone, "Yes, I'll hold," Lois looked at him questionably, "I'm going to have Bill sweep yours and my apartment. Maybe we can use it against Luthor."

Lois stared at the pile of cameras and audio equipment that had been pulled from her apartment in disgust. Henderson looked at her in concern, "Lois? Are you okay?"

"Just a little on the disgusted side," Lois said, staring at the pile of equipment that had been found throughout her apartment.

"I'll say," Officer Jenkins said as he walked through the apartment, "Most of this stuff was in the bedroom..."

"Oh, God..." Lois winced, cradling her head in her hands.

"I guess, lucky we were out of town," Clark said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

"Yeah, lucky," Lois said, leaning against him.

Henderson shook his head as he tagged the last of the surveillance equipment, "Well if this stuff came from the same place as the other bugs you brought me I don't know what good it's going to do. The equipment had no serial numbers on them, and the signal was bouncing all over the place. The tech team at S.T.A.R. Labs is still trying to decipher the code."

"So, you're saying we're powerless against the creep that keeps trying to turn my apartment into his own sick, personal peep show?" Lois spat bitterly. "Great."

Henderson sighed, "Not powerless. They've got a great team looking into this. We'll get this figured out. For now keep having Superman check your place as often as he can so we can keep tracking this. When we do find the person responsible...and we will find them...we'll have a strong case."

"Thanks, Inspector," Clark said, gently squeezing Lois' shoulder as he watched the officers finish bagging everything up.

"I'll let you know as soon as I know something," Henderson said, motioning for the officers to leave.

Lois and Clark followed them to the door, and Lois locked the door behind them, "This is getting ridiculous."

"I know," Clark grumbled, wrapping his arms around her from behind. "Henderson said they found cameras and audio recording equipment in both our apartments. So, Luthor's trying to keep tabs on us both."

"I guess being a little paranoid and talking in the third person comes in handy," Lois mused, leaning back against him.

He leaned down to kiss her shoulder. "I'm sorry," he sighed,

"Are you going to be okay? I should probably get unpacked and do a patrol."

"I suppose," Lois sighed, leaning against him as she turned around in his arms to look up at him. She brushed her hands against his chest, toying with the lapels to his jacket as she spoke. "It's just going to be weird not having you here tonight..." He smiled down at her as she slid her arms up his chest, linking her hands around his neck as she fingered the hair on the back of his neck, "I kinda liked waking up with you floating above the bed next to me."

Clark smiled, against her lips, "I know, but Superman's gotta make an appearance tonight." Lois sighed against him. "We've been in the air all day," he murmured against her neck.

She smiled as she ran her fingers through his hair and whispered, "I know, but I don't have to like it..." He leaned in to kiss her, cupping her cheek.

He slowly broke off the kiss and ran his hand through her hair for a moment, "I should go."

"Do you have to?" She asked, leaning in to kiss him.

"Lois..." He murmured against her lips, slowly breaking off the kiss. "I would love nothing more than to continue this..." He breathed, "but you and I both know if I did..."

"We wouldn't be able to stop," Lois finished for him. "I know." She gave him a slow smile.

"I should go," he repeated, still not making any move toward the door or releasing her from his embrace.

"I know," Lois said softly, meeting his gaze.

The door opened and Lucy stepped inside the apartment, "Hey, Lois, you're back!" She hugged Lois. "Hey, Clark, spent forty-eight hours together and still can't get enough of my sister, huh?"

Clark smiled, "Yeah, how's the internship going?" He asked, trying to change the subject.

Lucy shrugged, "Pretty good. Staying busy. It's only my first week, though," she sighed, sinking into the couch with her things. "I was going to order some pizza for dinner. You staying?"

"Uh, no," Clark shook his head, offering her a smile. "I've got to get going."

"Okay, well see you later," Lucy said with a grin as she grabbed the phone and began to dial.

He leaned down to kiss Lois goodbye once more, "Good night, Lois," he whispered before disappearing out the door.

Lois nodded, closing the door behind him. She sighed, leaning back against the door for a moment and Lucy smiled at her.

"Things are definitely steaming up in the love department," Lois blushed, and Lucy laughed, "You two are cute together...Still convinced to take things...slow?" Lucy teased.

"It's losing its appeal," Lois sighed, sinking into the couch next to her sister.

"I knew it!" Lucy grinned. "So, how was California? You two definitely seem...closer..."

"It was good," Lois said with a smile, "We got a lot of useful information to bring us closer to exposing the boss."

"Maybe when you crack this story open you'll help get the Planet back on its feet," Lucy mused. "Two days in California. I'm sure they're gonna love that expense report..."

"Actually Perry paid for it," Lois said, "The Planet isn't covering the costs. We had to go cheap...plane tickets and hotel room."

"Hotel room?" Lucy pressed. She noticed the blush cross Lois' cheeks, "Spill!"

Lois shook her head with a smile. "Nothing happened. He was a complete gentleman the whole time."

Lucy laughed when she saw the twitch on the corners of Lois' mouth. "And you didn't want him to be."

Lois let out a shaky breath, "I know it's crazy...We've only been going out for a month, and I already feel..."

Lucy nodded, "Well, think of it this way," she began slowly, "You guys have been friends for a year now...so in a way, it's like you've been dating for a year...just saving the physical side for the last month."

"I guess," Lois said softly. "So scary...feels like everything's happening so fast..."

"Love's funny like that," Lucy smiled back at her. "You just got to be willing to step up and take the plunge."

Perry laid a stack of files on the conference room table, "Alright Olsen here are all the board members that are susceptible to selling their shares. I want you and Jack to team up and see if you can get them over to our side before this mysterious buyer convinces them to sell their shares."

"A little cloak and dagger," Jimmy nodded. "I like it."

"All of these guys are having financial issues, so they're susceptible to bribes," Perry said, pointing to the files.

"And you want us to make sure they don't accept a bribe from this mysterious buyer," Jack said, flipping through one of the files, "Simon Truesdale, 65, married...Woah!" His eyes widened when he saw a picture in the file, "...but not if his wife sees this."

Perry gave him a knowing smile, "Private investigators can find the darndest things."

A knock on the door interrupted them, and Perry looked up to see Bill Henderson standing in the doorway, "Bill? Can I help you?"

Henderson nodded, "I'm gonna need to sweep the office here. After the bugs we found at Lane and Kent's last night, we thought it best to check the Planet too."

"Bugs?" Perry asked, and Henderson held up a small micro camera.

"Cool!" Jimmy beamed.

"Not if you're the one being spied on," Henderson said with a grim expression. "So far we've found a few by their desks and on the elevators. I need to check the conference rooms..."

"Uh, sure," Perry nodded, standing up.

"This won't take long," Henderson reassured him.

Lois walked into the Daily Planet lobby with her coffee in hand, scanning the floor for any sign of Clark. She'd heard about the train derailment on her way to work but wasn't sure how long it would keep him. Some rescues took longer than others. She took another sip of her coffee, heading for the elevator. She frowned at the empty cup and tossed it in the trashcan. After her talk with Lucy last night she'd spent most of the evening trying to figure out things with Clark.

She definitely felt that pull to move faster with him. She knew him better than anyone, but she still had those unrealistic fears of repeating her experience with Claude. The pain and uncomfortable feeling she'd felt during sex had made her not want to repeat the experience; so she hadn't. She hadn't felt the pull or desire to until recently.

Part of her knew it was impractical to put Claude on the same level as Clark, but it was the only experience she had. Knowing Clark wasn't experienced either made her nervous. He certainly had all the parts. She smiled, recalling some of their more heated makeout sessions. The question was if she was ready to take that step again with Clark. Lately, she'd definitely felt ready.

Two hands covered her eyes and familiar lips pressed against her lips, "Guess who?"

She grinned, leaning back against him as he removed his hands from her eyes, "Hey, you," she leaned in to kiss him, "I heard about the train derailment this morning. Everything go okay?"

Clark nodded, taking her hand in his as they stepped on the elevator with a large group of people. "Yeah, uh, Superman got there in time. No injuries or fatalities," he smiled back at her as the

doors to the elevator opened to let half the group of people that were in the elevator with them off.

"That's good," Lois said softly, brushing invisible pieces of lint off his jacket, "I mean, it's good that...he, uh...got there in time..." She shared a knowing smile with him, and she could feel her stomach flutter a bit as he smiled at her. What was it about him that made her just want to lose herself in his arms? The elevator dinged once more letting off the remainder of the crowd they were sharing an elevator car with. She watched as the elevator doors closed, letting out a sigh of relief.

He smiled at her, leaning in to kiss her. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him to her as she fingered his hair as he murmured against her lips, "I missed you."

She laughed against his mouth, "You're the one that wanted to leave last night." He moved his attention to her collarbone, raining a trail of feather light kisses along her neckline as he cupped her face with his palm.

"Too tempting," he murmured.

"I know," she whispered in between ragged breaths as his arms tightened around her waist. She fingered the knot on his tie, tugging him to her as she leaned up to capture his lips with her own. She slid her finger beneath the silk of the knot of his tie, loosening it as her other hand moved up his chest, exploring the hardened muscles beneath his cotton dress shirt.

"Lois...we need...to...stop..." He reminded her, slowly breaking off the kiss. He rested his forehead against hers, and she stared at him through her euphoria-filled eyes. He was struggling to regain control of his breathing as much as she was. She cast him a sideways glance for a moment as he released her from his embrace, standing next to her as he straightened his tie.

She grinned back at him, giving him a longing look before stepping off the elevator as they arrived on the newsroom floor.

"We have a problem," Mrs. Cox laid a stack of files on Lex's desk. "The board members we thought were in our pocket seem to be evading our calls. The latest preliminary vote went against selling the Planet to LexCorp."

"That's impossible," Lex snarled as he flipped through the files. "We found all their weaknesses...They agreed to sell..."

"Do you want me to set up another meeting?" Mrs. Cox asked. "Perhaps a subtle incentive will help?"

"Yes," Lex nodded. "Set it up for this afternoon."

"There's more," Mrs. Cox added. "All the cameras from the Planet and the apartments of Lois Lane and Clark Kent have been removed...by the police."

"How did they...?" Lex shook his head in disgust.

"Our contact said this Inspector Henderson is searching every place that Lois Lane and Clark Kent visit to check for surveillance equipment..."

Lex nodded, "We'll wait a bit. Lay low then replace it."

"Very well," Mrs. Cox said with a smile.

Toni Taylor gave Lois a sneering glare as she walked into the visitor's room, "You've got to be kidding me..." She then turned toward Clark who was sitting next to Lois and smiled, "Nice to see you, Charlie."

Clark shook his head, "It's Clark. Clark Kent."

"Yes, I know," Toni said sinking down into her seat as she gave him a once over. "I've spent the last few months trying to figure out how you pulled the wool over my eyes like that...I'm usually a much better judge of character."

"Really?" Lois interrupted, placing a possessive hand on Clark's arm, "So is he."

Toni gave Lois a glare, leaning back in her chair, "So what's this about?"

"Johnny Taylor," Clark began.

"Why am I not surprised?" Toni snorted. "What did my

brother do this time?"

"He said someone was out to get him," Lois began slowly, narrowing her eyes at Toni.

"And you think I had something to do with it?" Toni laughed, looking around the darkened visitor's room, "Ms. Lane, look around? I'm in prison. I don't exactly have the best resources in here."

"You were head of the Metro Gang," Clark countered.

"For like a minute!" Toni snapped, "You know how hard it is for a woman to be taken seriously in your field, Ms. Lane, try running a criminal organization. Nobody took me seriously."

"How'd you get them to put you in charge then?" Lois asked, arching her eyebrow at her.

"I...had a, uh, partner," she sniffed uneasily.

"What kind of partner?" Clark asked.

"A...powerful one. He made sure I was able to push Johnny out and take over without any fuss," Toni said uneasily.

Lois shared a look with Clark then put on her best fake smile, "I suppose this...partner...you met him at the Metro Club?"

"Of course," she shifted uneasily.

"See, Johnny told us all about this partner of yours. He seems to think he's the...boss..." Lois smiled when she saw Toni's eyes widen and look away from her, "You know who I'm talking about? The boss that runs all the crime in Metropolis? The boss that has the police and politicians in his pocket so he can continue running things the way he has for years in Metropolis?"

"Johnny doesn't know what he's talking about," Toni said uneasily.

"Did you know someone tried to kill him?" Clark asked coolly.

"What?" Toni breathed shakily.

"Seems he kept having 'accidents' with a shiv and he finally got the hint and transferred out of state," Clark added. "Whoever you're protecting..."

"I'm not protecting anyone..." She argued.

"...can't be trusted," Clark finished.

"You don't know what you're talking about," Toni argued.

"And you don't know who you're in bed with," Clark added, flipping open his notepad, "Did you know 'the boss' approached Johnny and your father about a partnership and they both turned him down?"

Toni didn't say anything, and Lois added, "Or how about the fact that your father ended up dying from 'heart problems' not even a week after turning 'the boss' down?"

Toni shook her head, "You're lying..."

Lois tossed the report in her hand to her, "Read it yourself."

"What do you want?" Toni asked uneasily.

"The truth," Clark said softly. "Help us take him down and make him pay for what he's done to your family."

"You don't understand..." Toni shook her head. "You don't know what he's capable of..."

"Then enlighten us," Lois said, pulling out her tape recorder. "You met with him and are one of the few people out there that can point the finger. Help us bring him down."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Toni breathed.

"Nobody would."

"Try me," Lois said with a smirk.

Lois and Clark stepped out of the elevator going over their notes on everything they'd learned from Toni Taylor. "Toni has a lot of contacts with the Metros, but none of them are willing to come forward."

"Well, Toni is at least thinking about it," Clark said with a sigh, "That's something."

"I'm not holding my breath," Lois retorted.

"She may surprise you," Clark said, making his way to his desk, "She wasn't all bad. Good intentions ...went about

everything the wrong way."

"Yeah," Lois breathed, "I guess I can understand that, but she was running a criminal organization...whether she wanted to be or not. She was responsible for beatings, assaults, and attempted murders...and everyone that got injured during the Toasters' raid."

"I know," Clark said, taking a seat at his desk. "I just wish there was a way..." He stopped.

Lois recognized the expression on his face, "Everything okay?" He shook his head, disappearing toward the storage closet. "Be careful," she whispered, hearing the sonic boom from a distance.

Clark grabbed the cable of the elevator car at the last minute, stopping it from crashing down the fifty story building. The impact would have severely injured the passengers. "Easy, I've got you," he reassured through the ceiling vent that had been opened. He looked in and saw a group huddled together in the center of the car shaking. He slowly eased them down to the lobby floor where firemen and paramedics were waiting. He glared at the cable in his hand. It had been cut. Someone had deliberately cut the cable.

The firemen pried the doors opened, and he held the car steady so everyone could walk out of the elevator car. He spotted a familiar face as the firefighters gave him the okay to let go. Seeing the panic and fear on the passengers, he stepped into the lobby and approached a young auburn-haired woman, "Ms. Kahn?"

She turned around to face him, "Su-Superman, th-thank you... again," she gave him a watery smile. "I guess I've been lucky twice in a year."

He showed her his best smile and motioned for her to walk with him, "Ms. Kahn, you don't seem like the type of person to go *looking* for danger..."

"I'm not," she sniffed. "I'm a receptionist."

"You have any...enemies?" He asked cautiously.

"No..." She said slowly. "Why?"

"Twice in a year you're plummeting down a very tall building. Once off the roof and now, here in an elevator...yet you're afraid of heights," he murmured.

"It was an...accident," she said shakily.

He pulled out the cut cable he'd grabbed from the elevator, "An accident where someone deliberately cut the elevator cable?" Her eyes widened as she looked at the cable, "I want to help..." He began slowly, "Who would want to kill you?"

"So, the elevator cable was cut?" Lois asked in a shocked whisper.

"I know he's behind this," Clark breathed. "It was a warning...She's at Met General getting a work up."

Lois let out a low breath, "This is getting scary," Lois pulled out her notebook, "By the way, Henderson did a sweep at the Planet, and they found bugs in the elevator, our desks, and both conference rooms..."

Clark shook his head in disgust, "Trying to keep tabs..."

"Yep," Lois nodded, "On the positive side we are getting somewhere with the whole 'buyer' thing. Perry's got Jack and Jimmy meeting with the board members he felt were...most susceptible to a bribe."

"Is Jack...?" Clark began.

Lois seemed to sense where he was going with this, "He's with Jimmy, and they're just meeting upstairs. Don't worry. He's safe."

Clark sighed in relief, "I think I need to talk to him. Staying in Metropolis may not be the best idea..."

"What are you going to do?" Lois asked, "Ship him off to a remote island?"

"No of course not," Clark shook his head, "but maybe I can have him moved over to where Denny and his foster family are at so they'll at least be together while trying to lay low."

"It would make sense," Lois reasoned. "What about his job here, though?"

"I don't know," Clark sighed, "I'll talk to Perry."

One Month Later...

"We've got at least three possible buyers," Perry said, handing the offer letters to Lois and Clark as he closed the door behind him. "It's been a crazy few months, but we've managed to stay afloat this long..."

"But the budget cuts keep coming out of nowhere, and no one knows why the banks and advertisers aren't willing to work with the Planet anymore..." Lois argued.

"The question is who do we trust," Clark added, taking a look at the letters as Lois handed them to him.

"I agree," Perry folded his hands in his lap as he leaned back in his seat, "How are you coming with the boss research? Any leads?"

Clark shook his head, "Nothing concrete. We still have an interview with Miranda this afternoon to see if we can get any more information from her now that she's not under the influence of her pheromones..." He gave Lois a half smile before turning back to Perry, "but we'll see."

Lois blushed, recalling their experience under the pheromones, "Everyone seems to be afraid of him, but taking a fresh look at everything appears to be helping... We've found quite a few major players..."

"Well, when you crack this one open it'll be a doozie," Perry sighed, "Just be careful," he warned, wagging his finger at Lois.

"I'm always careful," Lois harrumphed, gathering her things as she got ready to leave with Clark behind her.

Lois stepped into the elevator with Clark, continuing their game as they tried to pass the time on their way to see Miranda at the Metropolis Women's Prison. "How many is that?"

"Six," Clark said, scanning his notes, not looking up.

"Dancer, Prancer, Comet, Blitzen, Dasher, Cupid, Donner..." She just couldn't think of the last one.

"That's seven," Clark said, "one more."

"Donner..." She repeated.

Clark folded his notes and turned to her with a knowing smile, "You're stuck."

"I am not stuck..." She argued before finally relenting, "Okay, I'm stuck, just tell me the name."

"Vixen," he said, leaning in to kiss her. The elevator dinged, announcing their arrival to the visitor floor.

Miranda stepped into the visitor's room, looking around laughing, "You have got to be joking. When my attorney said, I had some reporters wanting to talk I didn't expect you two..."

"If it makes you feel any better it's no picnic for me either," Lois gave Miranda a fake smile.

"We're here to talk about why you really began working on 'Revenge,'" Clark interjected, cutting to the chase before a cat fight ensued between the two women.

"What makes you think I'm going to tell you?" Miranda laughed.

"Because you don't have anything left to lose," Lois said, leaning back in her seat. "You started working on this pheromone when you were contracted by LexLabs. Whose idea was it to begin this project?"

Miranda gave them a slow smile, "Why should I trust you? If you had any sense, you wouldn't be involved with Lex Luthor..." Miranda warned coldly.

"I know," Lois said, folding her notebook in her hand. "That's why I'm not involved with him..." Miranda arched an eyebrow at her, skeptically and Lois continued, "Look; obviously there's a lot of bad blood between you and Lex. We just want to know the

truth. We think maybe we didn't give you a fair shot considering..."

"You mean considering I went crazy and lashed out at everyone in a jealous rage?" Miranda asked.

"Uh, something like that," Clark said, taking Lois' hand in his to remind her not to react how she normally would. They were gaining Miranda's trust.

Miranda looked around the empty room and whispered, "What's in it for me?"

Bruce Wayne stepped off his private jet, looking around the airstrip with a smile. A tall blonde in a sharp business suit was by his side along with an elderly man with a gray hairline and glasses. "Well, Alfred, Metropolis seems a lot brighter than Gotham," Bruce mused.

"It would seem so, sir," Alfred said, following Bruce down the airstrip. "How long will this visit be, Master Wayne?" He asked, pulling out an electronic planner to take note.

"I'm not sure. Mr. White wanted to keep this low-key, but I can't in good conscience make a purchase without help transition the changes, can I?"

"I still don't understand how the Daily Planet could be having money trouble. I mean, they're internationally known and have been around for centuries... Every journalist dreams of working there..." the young blonde said, shaking her head.

"Is that what you dreamed of Vicki?" Bruce asked with a knowing smile.

She smirked at him, "Before I fell in love with newscasting and being an anchor... yes."

"Well, if you change your mind I know the owner... He might be persuaded to find a beat job for you," he gave her a smile.

Lois gasped with a smile on her face as they walked out the door hand in hand, "Did that really just happen?"

"I think so," Clark smiled, wrapping his arms around her.

"This is it. Everything we need to connect Luthor to the crimes in Metropolis and bring him down."

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Lois warned, grabbing his hand. "We don't have anything concrete yet, but if this information Miranda gave us pans out..."

"It'll mean bringing him down for all the crimes he's committed..." Clark said with a grin on his face. "Jack will finally be safe."

"How's he doing anyway?" Lois asked concerned as they walked toward the Jeep.

"All right. He's spending time with Denny while working on his GED..." Clark said, opening the door for her to get in the Jeep.

Lois watched as he climbed in on the other side and smiled at him, "You really care about him, don't you? Even after he tried to rob you..."

"He's just a troubled kid that needed help..." Clark whispered. "I'd like to think if I had a kid in trouble like that I'd want someone to help them out like that too." Lois tensed up at the mention of 'kid,' and he turned to look at her, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said, shrugging as she turned away from him. "I just..."

"What?" He asked, concerned.

"I guess I never thought of... I mean, not that I wouldn't want to, but..." Lois stammered, "I never thought much about... kids... err... having them that is. I mean, I'm not very good with them... you saw how I was with Amy... I don't have the, uh..." She noticed Clark looking at her with a smirk and looked around self-consciously, "What?"

"Nothing," he laughed, "Just wondering how far you're going to take this..." He laughed as she smacked him. "I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I honestly didn't mean anything by it I guess I just..."

"You're good with kids, You'd make a great father, Clark," she

said softly, "But I don't have a maternal bone in my body."

"That is not true," he countered. "I have seen you with Lucy and Amy and what about those boys that were kidnapped during Constance's little illusion game? You are great with kids."

"You really think so?" She asked, uncertainly.

"I know so," he said, cupping her cheek.

She smiled up at him, "I never thought of... I mean, there's so much I want to do before..." She trailed off smiling to herself, "You think I'm being silly? Over here worrying about a hypothetical family that doesn't even exist..."

"It's just because you care so much," Clark reasoned. "I think after what you and your sister went through you don't want to put a child through that... and I can understand that..."

Lois smiled up at him, "You sure you don't read minds?"

"No, I'm just a good listener," he leaned in to kiss her.

"So, do you think about the future?" Lois asked, nervously toying with a strand from her blouse as she spoke.

"All the time," he said with a smile, "More so lately," He admitted with a grin.

"Me too... A lot lately. I mean, if the Planet went under, I'd be lost."

Clark shook his head, "Not you. You'd be back on your feet in no time."

"You think so?" She asked.

"Yeah," he reassured her, "Don't worry. We'll figure this out. The Planet isn't going anywhere."

"It better not," she grinned. "We're going to need a paper to print this story in if we want to get that Pulitzer."

Lex pressed the call button to answer another video call, "Mr. Devane."

Devane narrowed his eyes and tapped his fingers on the desk in front of him, "I'm ready to make the delivery. Are the funds available?"

"Have you authenticated the item?" Lex asked apprehensively.

"It's genuine. We've spent the last month authenticating it with S.T.A.R. Labs. Don't jerk me around, Luthor. It'd take me about ten seconds to find an alternate buyer," Devane warned.

"Aren't you forgetting whose sources turned up the existence of the stone in the first place?" Lex accused.

"No, I'm not forgetting. That and five million dollars will get you your stone. Do you want it or not?" Devane countered.

"May I see it?" Lex breathed irritably. Devane rolled his eyes before pulling out a cloth bag and revealing a large green glowing rock. Lex smiled hungrily, "I want it."

Two Weeks Later...

Lois and Clark stepped into the newsroom going over everything they'd learned so far on their research into Luthor. Lois looked at her notes from earlier as they walked toward their desks, "So, Miranda Toni, Johnny, and Monique Kahn are willing to testify and we've got Jack's statement..."

"Miranda's information on LexLabs is the biggest part I think," Clark reasoned. "Inspector Henderson said he was working with his team to get her put into the Witness Protection program since she cut that deal to testify in exchange for her freedom..."

"It was sitting there... right under our noses for months..." Lois mused, looking up at him with a grin. "Can you believe that?" She never tired of that feeling of satisfaction when the pieces all began to fit on a big scandal... and this was a big one. Henderson had assured them that within the week he'd have the warrant for Lex and this would all be over... and Lane and Kent would have the exclusive.

"It was smart of Miranda to record all her conversations with Luthor like that..." Clark grinned happily. She felt a flutter in her abdomen as he stepped toward her, rubbing the side of her arm.

"We did it..." She grinned happily, toying with the lapels to

his jacket as she looked up at him. How was it that after nearly three months she still felt butterflies when he was near her like this? It had been a year now since they'd first met and almost three months now since they'd started seeing each other. Clark had been true to his word to take things slow but now the closer they'd gotten she was growing more and more frustrated with taking things slow. After Smallville, he hadn't allowed things to get as heated as they had that night Jimmy had walked in on them. She'd been grateful he hadn't brought it up at the time, but now she was continuing to grow more frustrated. It had been fine to take things slow when she'd still been in shock after his confession, but now... Now that she knew everything she didn't want to take things slow anymore. She just wasn't sure how to go about telling him. It wasn't something you just blurted out...

She teased the lapels of his jacket, pulling him close to her as she toyed with his tie, outlining the path the red and blue pattern took down his chest as she spoke, "How does it feel to bring down Metropolis' biggest crime lord with the swipe of a pen?" She toyed with the end of his tie, looking up at him expectantly. She smiled to herself when she heard him take a sharp intake of breath when her other hand rested on his lower back from beneath his jacket.

He grinned, leaning in to kiss her, "Really... really... good." She reveled in the feeling of his lips against hers, slipping her hand daringly down his backside and grinned when he jumped slightly but didn't pull away. She ignored the whistles and catcalls around them, intent on taking advantage of the moment for as long as she could before Perry interrupted them.

Clark grinned at Lois happily as she toyed with the lapels of his jacket, toying with his tie as she spoke, "How does it feel to bring down Metropolis' biggest crime lord with the swipe of a pen?"

He smiled back at her, about to lean into kiss her when he felt her hand move daringly from his back to his buttocks. He gave her a look, telling her silently he knew what she was doing before leaning back down to kiss her, "Really, *really*... good," he whispered, capturing her lips with his as he wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her to him. He ignored the whistles around them. You'd think their co-workers would be used to the public displays of affection by now, but some still insisted on teasing.

Lois linked an arm around his neck, toying with the left lapel of his jacket as she grinned up at him, "The Fall of the House of Luthor by Lane and Kent definitely has a nice ring to it..."

"We should celebrate," he whispered, wrapping his arms around her waist, "Anywhere you want. Paris. Rome." Lois laughed, and he grinned back at her, "What? I'm ecstatic right now... after a year... he's finally getting his just desserts."

She gave him a half-smile, toying with his tie seductively as she leaned up to kiss him, wrapping her arms around his neck. The whistling continued, but he ignored it, reveling in the feeling of Lois in his arms. He didn't care about anything else in the world besides the fact that they'd finally cracked open the case on 'the boss' and the way Lois fit so perfectly against him. Her lips softly caressed his, teasing him with her tongue as she parted her lips just enough to tease him with the taste of her coffee from earlier.

The bellow of his Editor-in-Chief's voice booming across the newsroom pulled him back to the present, "Would you two get a room, already? Sheesh! No one's paying you to canoodle in the bullpen." He waved a roll of newspaper at them, "You'd think after almost three months they'd cool down..."

Clark laughed, pulling away from her slightly but keeping his arms wrapped around her waist, reveling in the feeling of her being in his arms. "Hey, Chief, publisher's on line three..." Jimmy called across the newsroom.

Perry nodded, heading for his office, "Always something..."

Lois looked over her shoulder at Perry smiling as he walked back to his office. She suspected the no-nonsense exterior he put on was just for show. Once he was in his office, she turned back to Clark, recapturing his lips with her own. What was it he had said? Something about celebrating? She didn't want to go out. She just wanted to continue doing this...maybe more...She ran her hand down his chest, seductively outlining the end of his tie that hovered just above the waistband of his pants. "Maybe we should just order in..." She whispered in his ear, giving him a wink before turning around in his arms to head back to her desk before Perry came back out and caught them again.

She caught the heated gaze Clark gave her and smiled to herself. Hopefully, she'd been subtle enough to get her point across. Confidence wasn't something she felt when she thought about finally crossing that threshold. In every other aspect of her life, she was confident and self-assured, but when it came to the bedroom...She didn't have that same confidence. She knew she was ready...they were ready, but it still scared her. After her last experience, she was nervous. She knew Clark wouldn't hurt her like Claude had. She trusted him more than anyone. He had trusted her with his deepest secret, and she trusted him with her heart. It still made her nervous, though.

She could still feel his eyes on her as she set her notepad down, trying to busy herself and think of anything but what she planned to do tonight. He had super-hearing. He could probably hear her heart hammering as she nervously fidgeted with the pen in her hand. She cast a sideways glance at him and caught his heated gaze as he readjusted his tie, looking away from her. She smiled to herself. Yes, she'd definitely gotten her point across.

Lois grinned, leaning in to kiss him once more, "Maybe we should just order in..." She whispered in his ear giving him a wink before turning in his arms to head back to her desk. He swallowed hard, not sure what to make out of that statement. It was the way she'd just said that statement...He watched her set her notepad down on her desk and fidget with her pen nervously. He could hear her heart rate pick up and caught her heated gaze as she looked back at him. He readjusted his tie nervously. She wasn't...

He caught her gaze once more and swallowed when he recognized the expression on her face. Desire. What was she trying to tell him? He wasn't given a chance to think of the implications of what she was trying to tell him for long because Perry reentered the newsroom bellowing to get everyone's attention.

"Listen up folks!" Perry barked, "I got a call from upstairs...we're expecting an announcement right about...now." The elevator doors opened, and Lex Luthor stepped into the newsroom with a smug smile on his face, surrounded by suits.

"You have got to be kidding me..." Lois muttered angrily when she saw Lex enter the newsroom.

"For those of you who don't know me, my name is Lex Luthor," Lex began standing on the balcony.

Clark stood next to her protectively, "I've got a ba-ad feeling..." He whispered.

"I, no less than you have been greatly distressed by the sea of troubles that have mired Metropolis' one great newspaper..." Lex continued.

"Oh, no," Lois breathed, shaking her head, "Please tell me this is a nightmare."

"Not unless we're having the same one," Clark muttered under his breath.

"I don't know why your advertisers have deserted you. I don't know why the banks have shut off your credit lines. And I don't know why you depleted your cash reserves through unnecessary expenditures..." Lex gave a look toward the suits behind him, "...though I have my suspicions."

"It was him. It was him all along," Lois muttered angrily.

"Shhh..." Clark warned, "Not here."

"I do know that the problems can be solved through strong leadership and fiscal responsibility. Therefore, I have taken the one step that would guarantee the future well-being of this newspaper: I bought it. I'm the new owner of the Daily Planet," Lex declared happily.

Clark picked up Perry muttering, "Judas Priest," under his breath as cheers erupted through the newsroom but Lois stood there stunned.

Clark wrapped an arm around her, "It's gonna be okay."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that..." A voice said from the crowd of suits.

Lex turned to see Bruce Wayne standing in the crowd walking toward him, "Mr. Wayne, to what do I owe this...surprise?"

"You know for someone that spends so much time researching companies before a takeover I'm surprised you didn't check the board roster this morning," Bruce said with a smile as he walked toward Lex.

"What are you talking about? It was a unanimous vote to sell the Planet to me," Lex smiled.

Bruce shook his head, "No, see you didn't take my vote into account, Lex."

"Your vote?" Lex asked shakily.

"Oh, boy...here come the fireworks," Clark reassured Lois with a kiss on the cheek.

"Yeah, see I'm a gambler. I like risk. I like doing things people wouldn't normally do. Skydiving...rock climbing...alligator wrestling," he shot Lex a knowing look, "So when I heard the stock for the Planet was for sale at such a low price I figured, why not?" He shrugged.

"You..." Lex narrowed his eyes at Bruce and tightened his jaw when he caught his gaze.

"Bought seventy-five percent of the Daily Planet shares last night? You bet I did," he smiled, patting Lex on the shoulder, "Now, Mr. Luthor, as generous as your offer is I'm gonna have to pass. I've been running Wayne Enterprises for years without any issues. I'm sure I can figure out how to turn the Planet around without you."

Lex narrowed his eyes at Bruce for a moment before pasting on a smile and looking to the crowd, "It appears I've been mistaken...your new owner, Mr. Bruce Wayne..."

Applause erupted, and Lois looked back at Clark, "Did you know about this?"

"Not a clue," He said, "but his timing is impeccable."

"I'll say," She sighed, leaning against him.

Clark watched as Bruce leaned in, whispering something to Lex. With the crowd of applause this close to him it was impossible for him to pick up what their new owner had just whispered to Luthor but it seemed to put the fear of God in him. Luthor backed away, turning hurriedly away from the balcony.

Bruce smiled, watching as Lex walked back toward the elevator and looked at the crowd with a smile, "Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Bruce Wayne. Perhaps you've heard of me? If not you should pick up a copy of Tattletale Weekly. The stories they come up with are quite entertaining." He grinned back at the crowd, "In all seriousness, I'm just a businessman with a soft spot for nostalgia. My dad used to read the Planet to me when I was a little boy and the thought of the Planet not being around..." He shook his head, "Well, I'm sure all of you share my sentiments." There was a murmur of agreement, and he continued, pacing around the balcony, "I understand the Daily Planet has undergone some hardships these past few months, and it is my goal to rectify that. The Daily Planet is a well-known household name; as well it should be. It's my goal to see that the Daily Planet remains a top seller at newsstands." He drew quiet for a moment, "to do that, I've enlisted some help to consult on modernizations

as we move into the twenty-first century. I'll be in and out of the office, but I see no reason for any major changes at this point." Applause erupted through the newsroom, and Perry walked over to Bruce to shake his hand.

"Happy days are here again!" Jimmy cheered happily, hugging them.

Lois cast a sideways glance at Clark, "Things around here are going to get interesting..."

{ "Look, obviously there's a lot of bad blood between you and Lex. We just want to know the truth. We think maybe we didn't give you a fair shot considering..." }

"You mean considering I went crazy and lashed out at everyone in a jealous rage?"

"Uh, something like that."

"What's in it for me?" }

Nigel shook his head, pausing the tape as he looked up, "Officer Jenkins the boss appreciates your loyalty. Thank you for bringing this to our attention."

Lois sunk into the couch, propping her feet up as she kicked off her shoes. She unbuttoned her blazer, tossing it to the ground and tugged her pantyhose off, rubbing her tired feet as she made herself comfortable. Henderson was supposed to call them once the warrant was ready. They were so close to having Lex Luthor behind bars. All they had to do was wait for the key players to line everything up then he would be out of their lives for good and in prison where he belonged.

She walked back to her bedroom, examining her profile in the mirror. Should she change? She pulled out one of her more silky nightgowns as she unbuttoned her blouse, smiling as she imagined Clark's hands on her. She tossed the blouse to the floor along with her skirt and bra, slipping the silk negligee over her head. She leaned toward the mirror examining herself critically. The soft silk hugged her hips perfectly, came up to her mid-thigh and swooped low enough on her neckline to tease him with the sight of the swell of her breasts without being too low cut.

What was she supposed to do? Jump into his arms the minute he showed up with dinner? Clark had said he'd meet her at her apartment with dinner. He'd expect to be eating dinner when he got back...not this. She paced around her bedroom nervously. Maybe this was a mistake. This was too forward...It wasn't her and it didn't feel natural. She peeled the silk garment off of her and began sifting through her dresser drawers trying to find something... Why hadn't she thought to go shopping?

She finally found a violet lace bra with matching boy short panties and opted to try them on. She hadn't worn anything like this in a long time...She smiled to herself, recalling the many *many* dreams she'd had about Superman so many months ago. This was different, though. He wasn't just Superman, he was Clark. Her best friend. The man she was madly in love with and the man that had waited...for her.

<< "I told you about Claude? Well, what I didn't say was this, it was one time and it was ...awful." She shuddered recalling the pain both physically and emotionally she'd suffered from Claude. "Awkward...and painful...and...I just wanted it to end so I ended up just pretending..."

"I'm sorry."

"After I found out he'd stolen my story I filed a complaint against him...He spread a lot of AWFUL rumors. I just wanted them to stop so I withdrew my complaint...but it was too late." >>

<< "I just...I want you to know what you're getting yourself into. I'm not that experienced and..."

"Lois..."

"I mean I know you traveled a lot and it's not like you wouldn't have opportunity ...I mean, you're ...YOU, but I just don't want you to be..."

"Lois, I'm not...I'm not that experienced either..."

"You're not?" >>

<< "No, actually not...at all...Lois, I'm not from here...I'm different...so I made the decision not to...cross that threshold until I could find someone I could share everything with..."

"Really? So, you're waiting for..."

"Just the right person... You." >>

She recalled their conversation a few months ago about their 'experience' and smiled. The thought of finally making love with him was causing her heart to hammer even harder. She really wanted him. She'd never wanted anyone like this. She stared at her reflection for a moment before redressing in her work clothes from earlier. This was better. Less pressure.

"She's exquisite," Lex said softly, staring at the screen. He watched hungrily as the image showed Lois slowly removing her blouse and examining herself in the mirror.

The door opened and Lex jumped, slamming the cover to his laptop closed and looked up. "Bad time?" Nigel asked, stepping into the office.

"No, of course not," Lex shrugged hastily, "Just reviewing the surveillance."

"Well, as interesting as your surveillance may be sir I'm afraid something's come to our attention that requires your immediate attention," Nigel dropped a disk on Lex's desk.

"What's this?" Lex asked.

Lois came back into the living room and glanced at the clock on the wall. Where was Clark? Maybe Superman got called away. She sunk into the couch, reaching for the remote hoping to give herself some insight into what could be keeping him.

"In other news, the armored car heist turned high-speed chase ended with no fatalities thanks to Superman showing up in the nick of time to stop the gunman from injuring any bystanders," the anchor announced.

Clark's image came on the television showing the strained expression of concern on his face as he knelt down to eye level with a young girl, reassuring her everything was fine. She smiled, seeing the familiar tenderness in Clark's eyes as he hugged the little girl before turning to the camera, "Superman, can we get a statement?" one of the reporters in the crowd asked.

Clark seemed to hesitate a moment, tightening his jaw for a moment for nodding. "The officers that responded to the call were met with gunfire and pursued the gunmen until they were stopped on the corner of Main and West. Bystanders were met with gunfire when the gunmen tried to run on foot. Thankfully no one was injured and everyone made it out in one piece. Now, if you'll excuse me?" With that he flew up into the sky, leaving the crowd of reporters to survey the scene.

Lois smiled to herself, "Never gets old." Her stomach growled, protesting the lack of food in it and she sighed, getting up to head to the kitchen and find a snack to hold her over until Clark made it back. He may have super-speed and be able to fly around the world in a matter of seconds but it still took just as long for the restaurant to cook the food. He said he was going to surprise her. Right now, she didn't care what he brought back as long as it was edible. She grabbed a box of crackers from the cabinet and began snacking on them as she grabbed a cream soda from the fridge.

"You're going to spoil your appetite," a familiar voice whispered from behind her, wrapping his arms around her.

She smiled, looking back at him as she placed a cracker in his mouth, "I got hungry."

"I brought pasta," he said, pointing to the table he had set up with the food as he ate the cracker in his mouth.

She turned in his arms to face him, wrapping her arms around him. "Smells good." She ran a hand up his chest, "I saw the news

coverage. You okay?"

He nodded, walking to the table with her, "Yeah, I'm just tired...stuff like that...never gets easier."

She leaned up to kiss him, "You do what you can," she reminded him, "Come on, let's eat."

"Sir, it seems you've left a trail," Nigel said, clicking the play button on the disk.

"Look, obviously there's a lot of bad blood between you and Lex. We just want to know the truth. We think maybe we didn't give you a fair shot considering..."

"You mean considering I went crazy and lashed out at everyone in a jealous rage?"

"Uh, something like that."

"What's in it for me?"

"She wouldn't dare," Lex said, shaking his head. "She knows what would happen..."

"Does she?" Nigel asked, "Maybe you need to get ahead of this before you wind up sharing a cell with her."

"Go on the run?" Lex scoffed, "Are you mad, Nigel?"

"Call it a suggestion," Nigel shrugged, "A strong one..."

Inspector Henderson read over the transcript of the deposition, signing off on the agreement in front of him to make sure everything that had been agreed upon was covered. He then handed it over to the District Attorney to read over.

"You're a very lucky woman, Miranda," he said. "Not many people get a chance to start over. I do hope you'll make better decisions in the future," he said signing the agreement as he spoke.

"I plan to," Miranda said with a smile.

The District Attorney handed the agreement back to Henderson, "Get this up to Judge Reynolds. I'll escort her and Ms. Hunter to the courtroom."

"You got it," Henderson nodded.

"Are you out of your mind?" Lex fumed. "I am this close to bringing Superman down and you want me to run???"

"You call it running," Nigel countered, "but I call it self-preservation. Surely you don't want to lose everything...wind up growing old...in a cage?"

"Lex Luthor will never live in a cage," Lex fumed.

"You have a weakness, Lex. Women. You do anything and share anything to bed them. Look at what happened with Miranda...with Lois Lane? My man in the police department said she's been working with those reporters to bring you down for weeks now..."

"It's my word against hers..." Lex argued. "We can fight this..."

"No," Nigel shook his head, "Miranda was smart. She has tapes. That's what guaranteed her freedom. The only way out of this is to disappear before they show up to arrest you..."

"We can get the tapes back..." Lex argued. "We're too close..." He fumed, shoving everything off his desk in a rage.

"It's over," Nigel argued, "Unless you do as I say."

Lucy Lane cradled her head in her hands as she made her way through the long line of people with the officer dragging her by the shoulder. How had this happened? She had been on a date with Jimmy, minding her own business when out of the blue this crazy lady started hitting her. Poor Jimmy didn't know what to do. What was he supposed to do? Hit her?

She'd fought back. That was it. Hit her hard enough so she could get away. How had she gotten herself arrested?

"Name?" The officer asked, filling out the paperwork.

"Lane...Lu-Lucy...Lane..." She stammered.

"Lane?" His eyebrows rose in amusement, "Like the reporter 'Lane'?"

She sighed. Of course, this wasn't something new.

Everywhere she went she had to go through the normal 'Isn't your sister the one that discovered Superman' spiel, and normally she was fine with it, but right now... "Yes, Lois Lane is my sister..." She exhaled impatiently.

Another officer approached her intrigued. He was dressed in a suit instead of a police uniform but he had a badge pinned to his belt and wore glasses. He looked a lot older than the officer that was doing her intake paperwork, "Did you say you're Lois Lane's sister?"

She cringed, nodding hesitantly. Was this going to be a good or a bad thing?

He held out a hand for her to shake, "Bill Henderson. I'm a friend of your sister's...Well, some of the time," he corrected. He took the pad from the other officer and said, "Jensen, I've got it from here..."

"But..." He began to argue.

"I've got it..." Henderson repeated a little sharper in tone. Jensen nodded and headed toward the back and Henderson turned to Lucy, "What are you in for?"

"Assault?" She squeaked out shamefully. "I swear I have never done something like this in my life. I don't know what happened. She just jumped me out of nowhere and then when I hit her to get away the cops showed up and arrested me but let her go with a warning. I mean who does that? That is so not fair. If you're going to arrest someone for getting into a fight you should arrest both parties don't you think?"

Henderson laughed, "Yep, definitely Lois' sister." He placed a supportive hand on her shoulder. "Listen, it'll probably get tossed if you have witnesses that she attacked you...This'll be the worst of it. I'll try and expedite the paperwork here so you can make your phone call and have someone pick you up..."

"I have to call someone to pick me up?" She groaned.

"I can call Lois if you want?" He suggested.

"No..." She shook her head, "Not a good idea. I, uh, I'll call my mom..." She could hear the tirade already. 'Mom is going to kill me...'

"Thanks for dinner," Lois said, sinking into the couch next to Clark as she folded her legs underneath her. "Really hit the spot."

"I'm glad," Clark said, cupping her cheek, "Any word from Henderson?"

"Nope. I'm sure he'll call when he's got the warrant ready," Lois said, cupping his hand. Her heart was hammering in her chest as she spoke. She really wanted to just...

He pulled away and leaned back against the couch, "Just a waiting game."

She frowned at the loss of contact, moving a little closer to him as she spoke, "Crazy, isn't it?" She leaned her head against his chest as she spoke, resting her hand on his arm.

He shifted beneath her touch, "What?" He asked. She could hear the slight increase in his heart rate against his chest as she slid her hand up the cotton of his dress shirt and smiled to herself.

"After a month of re-researching everything we've finally got everything we need to put Lex behind bars," Lois said softly, fingering the top button of his shirt with her thumb as she spoke.

"If nobody drops the ball," Clark reminded her, shifting away from her slightly as he spoke. "I'm still a little nervous about this. I'm not counting Luthor out yet."

"I thought I was the one that was the pessimist," Lois mused, lifting her head up to look at him. She could tell from his heated gaze he hadn't been immune to her touch, "What happened to that optimistic farmboy?" She teased.

"He discovered not everyone has a good side," he said with a wry smile. She fingered random patterns on his knee, moving up his thigh intently, watching in rapt attention as he seemed to be fighting an inner battle with himself, but he didn't pull away from

her this time. He looked at her, meeting her gaze as he caught her hand before she could move further up his thigh and he breathed, “Not with Luthor anyway.”

“Just don’t go cynical on me,” she warned.

He smiled, cupping her cheek with his palm, “No chance of that.” He fingered her hair and smiled, “Keep your hands to yourself,” he warned.

“Why?” She teased, pressing herself against him, “Am I ... distracting ... you?” She fingered the end of his tie seductively, looking at him with an impish grin.

He groaned, leaning in to kiss her, pulling her to him. She laughed against his lips as she felt him pull her onto his lap, murmuring, “God, I love you.”

He’d known something was up at the office earlier from the way she’d been touching him...kissing him. Then when he’d brought dinner back she seemed nervous all through dinner. He couldn’t pinpoint what she could be nervous about. She seemed to be holding up her end of the conversation just fine.

Then after dinner when they’d moved to the couch she’d been all over him. He kept moving away from her, hoping some distance would help him maintain some control over his body as he fought against the effect Lois’ touch was having on him.

What was she doing? He hadn’t seen her act like this since...

<<“Forget about work, forget about time, forget about the rest of the world...”>>

<<“Lois, get a grip!”

“Believe me, I’d love to...”>>

<<“Minute’s up, Clark! Come to Mama!”>>

<<“I love you, Clark. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”>>

Concerned, he checked her pupils to make sure he didn’t see any signs of her being drugged. She seemed fine. He relaxed a bit, catching her gaze. There it was. That same expression she’d had on her face in the newsroom. He swallowed hard, feeling his body responding to her closeness. God, he wanted her. He’d wanted her for a year now.

She pressed herself against him and he swallowed, feeling the soft flesh from beneath her blouse press against his chest. He caught her gaze and felt his throat go dry when he drank in the sight before him. He had a perfect view of her cleavage as she leaned against him, “Am I distracting you?” She fingered the end of his tie seductively, looking at him with an impish grin.

He groaned, feeling her hand slip up his inner thigh once more. All his resolve was gone. He leaned in to kiss her, pulling her to him. She laughed against his lips as he pulled her onto his lap, murmuring, “God, I love you.”

His hands roamed up and down her sides as he kissed her, caressing her lips with his own. She slid her thigh across his lap seductively, moving to straddle his legs as she supported herself with her knees, devouring him with her lips.

He felt a sense of déjà vu wash over him as he felt the cotton of her blouse brush against his cheek. “Clark...” She murmured, tugging at the knot of his tie as she undid it, never breaking contact with his lips as she did so.

He allowed his hands to explore her ivory skin, caressing the soft skin of her thigh, pushing the cotton of her skirt upward as he did so. “Lois...” He murmured against her lips, gently squeezing the back of her thighs as she lowered herself to his lap. He caught her gaze, cupping her cheek as he moved to brush his lips against her neck.

She leaned forward, tugging his tie through the collar of his shirt as his lips brushed against her earlobe, teasing it with his teeth. She seemed to melt against him, tightening her thighs around him. “Are ...you...sure?” He whispered in her ear, resting his hands on her hips.

She nodded, “Yes,” she murmured, reaching for the top button

of his dress shirt as he captured her lips once more, sliding her closer to him.

She gasped, leaning toward him as she kissed each layer of exposed skin she discovered from unbuttoning his shirt. He groaned in pleasure as he felt her lips against his chest, her tongue teased his hard chiseled muscles. “Oh, God...” He moaned as she raked her fingernails against his chest.

She leaned back to look at him, catching his gaze as she unbuttoned her blouse. He watched in admiration as the violet lace stared back at him invitingly. She shed her cotton blouse off her shoulders effortlessly and he leaned in to kiss her. “You are so beautiful...” He murmured against her lips as he began a trail of feather light kisses against her throat, working his way down.

A thought occurred to him and he stilled for a moment, “Wait...” He pulled away, drinking in the sight of Lois straddling him in nothing but her bra and skirt. He didn’t want to stop. It was the last thing he wanted. But this was important. “What about...?”

She seemed to sense where his mind was going and leaned down to kiss him, “I’m on the pill.”

He relaxed against her, allowing his hands to move up her back, finding the clasp to her bra. He flicked it, watching as it fell off her shoulders. “Clark, yes...” She breathed.

His other hand roamed up her inner thigh and he groaned, lifting his head to watch her face as he touched her. She seemed to withdraw from him as his hand slipped beneath her skirt. He frowned, unsure of what had just happened.

He wanted nothing more than to lose himself in her arms right here and right now but something was nagging him in the back of his mind. Her heart rate was hammering in her chest. She was scared. He moved his hand from her breast to cup her cheek, “Lois?”

“Are ...you...sure?” He whispered in her ear, resting his hands on her hips. Was she sure? Yes, she wanted him. She wanted this.

She nodded, “Yes,” she reached for the top button of his dress shirt as he captured her lips once more. She gasped when she felt him slide her closer to him. He groaned against her and she leaned down to kiss him.

She smiled against his lips. He wanted her just as bad as she wanted him. She leaned down to begin working on his dress shirt, kissing each layer of exposed skin on his perfectly sculpted chest. He was gorgeous. Perfect. Her Clark. Her Superman. She raked her fingernails against his chest and he groaned, “Oh, God...”

She leaned back to look at him, catching his gaze as she unbuttoned her blouse. This was it. No going back now. They were finally going to ... She shivered involuntarily as she anticipated the feeling of his hands on her. She kept his gaze as she finished unbuttoning her blouse, shedding it off her shoulders and allowing it to pool around her. He leaned in to kiss her. “You are so beautiful...” He murmured against her lips as he began a trail of feather light kisses against her throat, working his way down. He felt so good...

She felt him tense up and pull away from her and she looked at him in concern, “Wait...” He murmured breathlessly, “What about...?”

She recognized the expression on his face and realized where he was going with his train of thought. Protection. She’d gone on the pill after their trip to Smallville just in case. She wasn’t sure what to expect but knew whenever they did finally make love she wanted to be prepared. She smiled, cupping his cheek as she leaned down to kiss him, “I’m on the pill.”

He relaxed against her, and she reveled in the feeling of being in his arms once more. His hands moved up her back and she felt her bra fall off her shoulders. She looked down at him, unsure of what to expect. Had she lived up to his fantasies? His hands moved up her chest as he leaned forward, capturing her lips with

his own. She gasped in pleasure. “Clark, yes...” She breathed.

His other hand roamed up her inner thigh and she stilled. This was usually the part where it stopped feeling good. She recalled how it had hurt with Claude.

‘*Stop it*,’ she chastised herself.

Clark was different. She trusted him. She caught his gaze, biting her lower lip and was surprised to find a frown on his face. He moved his hand from her chest to cup her cheek, “Lois?”

Great. Now she’d killed the mood. She lowered her head, silently cursing herself.

She leaned against him, trying to recapture the moment but he slid her away from him slightly, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she winced, hearing her own voice crack. He gave her a knowing look and she sighed. “Just a little ...nervous,” she said shakily.

He sighed, pulling away from her, “Lois, we don’t have to...” He shook his head, “I can wait...I don’t want to ...I don’t want to take that step unless you’re ready.”

“I’m fine,” she reassured, “I’m just nervous...after last time...” She looked away.

“I would never hurt you,” he said softly.

“I know that.” She wrapped her hand around his. She leaned in to kiss him, sliding back onto his lap, “I’m fine,” she reassured him.

“Okay,” he said, tightening his arms around her as he leaned in to kiss her once more.

“I love you,” she murmured against his lips, linking her arms around his neck, deepening the kiss.

In the back of her mind, she heard her phone ring and groaned against him, “You’ve got to be kidding me...” He muttered.

“Let the answering machine get it...” Lois whispered breathlessly as she nibbled on his earlobe seductively.

“Mmm hmm,” he slipped his tongue inside the warm confines of her mouth, teasing her with his taste.

The sound of her mother’s voice filled the room and she pulled away from him, hanging her head in defeat, “Lois? It’s your mother! Where are you? Why don’t you call me anymore? Anyway, I need you to go down to the police station and bail Lucy out. Apparently, your sister was in a fight and got herself arrested. I’m out of town right now otherwise, I would...”

“I’m going to kill her ...” Lois whimpered against his chest.

Clark sighed, reaching for her blouse and hanging it over her shoulders. “Rain check?”

She gave him a heated gaze, “Maybe I should teach her a lesson...make her wait...” She fingered the waistband of his slacks as she spoke.

He shook his head and smiled, “You are not seriously going to leave your sister in jail overnight?”

“She’s not going anywhere...” She leaned against him, running her hand up his chest seductively. “It would serve her right for interrupting us...”

He shook his head, pushing her off of him, “We can’t do that to her and you know it. She’s probably scared out of her mind...” He whispered, sitting up to button his shirt back.

Nodding, she began readjusting her clothes, slipping her bra back on and buttoning her blouse. She stared down at him, his eyes filled with regret. Why hadn’t she disconnected the phone?

“Come on,” He helped her to her feet and she watched as he tied his tie. “Let’s go get Lucy,” he sighed.

“You gonna be okay?” She asked.

He nodded, “Just give me a minute.” He finished redressing, readjusting his tie as he spoke.

Lois grabbed her purse and headed out the door, “Come on, hopefully, it won’t take long to...” She caught the faraway look on his face and sighed, “What is it?”

He looked at her with regret, “Escaped prisoner at the Metropolis Prison,” he sighed, hanging his head. “I gotta...” He

pointed up and she nodded. Within a few seconds, he was gone, leaving her to figure out how Lucy had ended up in jail.

Nigel looked down at the gagged Toni Taylor that had been tied to a chair and smiled to himself, “I do hope you won’t take this personally. Mr. Luthor sends his regards...” He pulled out a needle and approached her.

Toni’s eyes widened when she saw the needle, fighting against her restraints. Nigel shook his head, “I’m afraid you know too much, Ms. Taylor.”

“It was a setup,” Lucy argued. “There I am, minding my own business when this mammoth of a woman starts swinging at me... I was defending myself...”

“Lucy you destroyed half of the bar...” Lois tried to argue as she walked with her sister back inside her apartment.

“I was defending myself,” Lucy repeated. “You have to believe me...I would never...”

Lois bit her lower lip, trying to calm the anger she felt right now. She knew Lucy hadn’t deliberately sabotaged her evening with Clark. It just happened. She sighed, locking the deadbolts as she spoke, “I know, Luce, but you’ve got to be more careful. Sometimes you just shoot your mouth off and get yourself in over your head...”

Lucy arched an eyebrow at her, “Isn’t this a case of the pot calling the kettle black?”

“I know,” Lois nodded, “I do it too, but I don’t get myself arrested for it.”

“I’m tired,” Lucy sighed, “Can we talk about this tomorrow?”

“Fine,” Lois nodded. She motioned toward the spare bedroom. “Get some sleep. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“Good night,” Lucy called over her shoulder.

“Night,” Lois muttered, shaking her head as she sunk into the couch. She glanced at the clock on the wall. Eleven o’clock. It had taken four hours to get Lucy out. Then another two hours to get home because of the roadblocks that had been set up everywhere due to Toni Taylor’s escape.

She sighed, “So much for tonight.” She muttered under her breath, reaching for the remote. She caught a glimpse of Clark talking with the warden on the screen and watched in rapt attention. There was a manhunt for her all over New Troy. How had she managed to escape?

Painful. That was what tonight was. Utterly painful.

“Superman!” The warden waved him over, “Glad you could make it... We set the alarms off as soon as we noticed she was missing but no one seems to know what happened...”

“She?” He asked, trying to identify who he was supposed to be looking for.

The warden nodded, “Yeah,” he pointed to the cell, “Toni Taylor.”

It was late. Too late to head back to Lois’. She was probably asleep. After helping search for Toni Taylor and finding nothing he’d given up hope of finding her and decided to head north to take care of the very painful tightness he still felt from almost making love with Lois earlier. They had been so close...

<< “Lois, you don’t know how many times I’ve thought about this...dreamt about this... >>

<< “You know if you think about it, the only time people are really honestly expressing themselves is when they’re passionate... the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they’re fighting...”

“...or make love.” >>

He landed in the Arctic Ocean, reveling in the feeling of the ice cold water against him. All he’d been able to think about from the time he’d left Lois’ apartment was getting back to her and

resuming their activities well into the night.

<<“You know this isn’t really dancing.”

“It’s not?”>>

<<“Then we’re agreed. We’ll take this slow and figure out... us?”>>

It seemed the days of them taking things slow were behind them. The idea of finally making love to Lois was enough to make him sweat. He had loved her from the moment she’d burst into Perry’s office interrupting his interview and he’d spent every day wishing and hoping for the moment she’d look at him the same way she did his alter-ego.

<<“I’m not Claude and I’m not Paul. I would never betray you like that. All I’m asking for is a chance.”>>

<<“Two days of not being able to do anything when you were under the influence of those pheromones...I guess I just kinda lost my willpower...”

“Really?”

“Two...days...”

“So, is that the limit to Superman’s willpower....Two... days...?”

“It...depends...”

“On ...what...exactly?”

“How long you’re torturing...him...for...”>>

<<“Lois...”

“You are...so...I love you.”>>

The memory of her body molded against him...Her legs wrapped around his waist so perfectly...This was not helping. The point of coming up here was to stop thinking about...

<<“So, you’re waiting for...”

“Just the right person,...You.”>>

<<“Stay with me tonight...”

“Lois, You don’t need it...I’m not going anywhere.”>>

<<“Lois, we don’t have to...I can wait...I don’t want to ...I don’t want to take that step unless you’re ready.”

“I’m fine. I’m just nervous...after last time...”

“I would never hurt you.”

“I know that....I’m fine.”

“Okay.”

“I love you.”>>

Lois turned the television off and sighed, staring at the empty living room. It was late. She knew she should just go to bed and get some sleep, but sleep was the last thing on her mind. If tonight had gone how she had planned she would be in her bedroom with Clark right now not sulking on the couch missing him.

She briefly wondered what he would do if she showed up at his door in a trench coat and lingerie. Just as quickly as the thought came to her she dismissed her. She’d never be so bold as to try to seduce him like that...A memory popped into her head and she smiled, recalling the one time she’d been bold.

<<“Lois, it’s very late...”

“Not too late I hope...for us...for happiness?”

“Oh, no! Lois, please no don’t!”

“Oh, Clark, I love you! I want to spend the rest of my life with you!”

“Lois, please go home...”

“You’re here...this is my home...”

“Lois, you don’t know how many times I’ve thought about this...dreamt about this...well something like this...but it’s not real. What you’re feeling is not real. I don’t know exactly how but there was something in the perfume that made everyone drunk on...love...Lois, I cannot take advantage of you like this...”>>

<<“Lois, I can’t take it anymore. If you really want me I’m yours...”>>

It was easy to dismiss everything as drug-induced from the pheromones, but now she knew they were anything but. It was how she felt. She loved him. She stared at the clock on the wall

once more and she sighed. It was late. She should go to bed.

<<“Lois, you don’t know how many times I’ve thought about this...dreamt about this...”>>

<<“I wanted to talk to you about...us.”>>

<<“You kissed me back.”>>

<<“I want you to have dinner with me.”>>

<<“We’ll always be friends.”>>

<<“You know if you think about it, the only time people are really honestly expressing themselves is when they’re passionate...the polite veneer of society drops away...like when they’re fighting...”

“...or make love.”>>

<<“You know this isn’t really dancing.”

“It’s not?”>>

<<“This...is probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but I never doubted I could trust you.”>>

<<“I’m sorry. This is just really hard...I need to tell you this...I’m crazy about you, but before this goes any further I have to tell you this. I don’t want to screw this up.”

“You’re not screwing anything up.”>>

<<“Then we’re agreed. We’ll take this slow and figure out... us?”>>

<<“I’m not Claude and I’m not Paul. I would never betray you like that. All I’m asking for is a chance.”>>

<<“Two days of not being able to do anything when you were under the influence of those pheromones...I guess I just kinda lost my willpower...”

“Really?”

“Two...days...”

“So, is that the limit to Superman’s willpower....Two... days...?”

“It...depends...”

“On ...what...exactly?”

“How long you’re torturing...him...for...”>>

<<“Lois...”

“You are...so...I love you.”>>

<<“I mean, you’re ...YOU, but I just don’t want you to be...”

“Lois, I’m not...I’m not that experienced either...”

“You’re not?”

“No, actually not...at all...”>>

<<“Lois, I’m not from here...I’m different...so I made the decision not to...cross that threshold until I could find someone I could share everything with...”>>

<<“So, you’re waiting for...”

“Just the right person,...You.”>>

<<“I have no regrets, Lois, I’m here with the woman I love enjoying a beautiful day at the lake. I don’t care about what could have been or what should have been. All I care about is right here, right now.”>>

<<“So, do you think about the future?”

“All the time....More so lately.”

“Me too....A lot lately.”>>

<<“I don’t know what I’d do if anything ever happened to you.”

“Oh, Clark, I love you.”>>

<<“Stay with me tonight...”

“Lois, You don’t need it...I’m not going anywhere.”>>

<<“You stayed.”

“I told you I would.”>>

<<“Lois, we don’t have to...I can wait...I don’t want to ...I don’t want to take that step unless you’re ready.”

“I’m fine. I’m just nervous...after last time...”

“I would never hurt you.”

“I know that....I’m fine.”>>

She recalled a certain item she’d packed away months ago and smiled to herself as an idea began to form in her mind...She had no intention of going to sleep anytime soon.

Inspector Henderson smiled as he read the warrant in front of him that he'd been waiting on. He looked to his team of officers he'd been assigned, barking out orders as everyone began to get suited up. There was no telling what Lex Luthor would try. He wanted to be prepared.

Clark landed on the balcony outside his apartment and stepped inside, changing into a pair of jeans and button-down shirt as he made his way toward the bedroom. He scanned the apartment, reassuring himself there were no cameras. Ever since he'd found those cameras at Lois' apartment he'd been extra cautious. He sighed in relief, shaking his head. It had been a long night. It had been hours since he'd left the prison. He still wasn't able to find Toni Taylor anywhere. She had to be hiding somewhere lead-lined. He would have to work with Lois on trying to find out where tomorrow.

'Lois...' He sighed, shaking his head. '*Don't go there. Not tonight,*' he reminded himself.

He started to unbutton his shirt and get ready for bed when he heard a faint knock at his door. Checking the time, he glanced at the clock, wondering who could be there at this hour. He headed toward the door and opened it, surprised to see Lois standing on the other side in a long trench coat. He smiled to himself, recalling the last time she'd shown up at his apartment like this. "Lois? It's late..." He began gesturing for her to come in. She smiled stepping inside the apartment as he closed the door.

"Not too late I hope..." She said, stepping toward him as she untied the sash to her coat, shrugging it off her shoulders. His eyes widened when he realized what she was wearing, "For us." She wrapped a bright blue veil around his neck and pulled him to her, "For happiness..."

She looked gorgeous. The gold bodice of her dance of the seven veils outfit wrapped around her curves perfectly. The veils connected all around the outfit so that each veil revealed more and more of her gorgeous body. "Lois..." He gasped in surprise as she pressed her small frame against him, gliding her hand down his chest as she traced random patterns downward until she reached the waistband of his slacks. "You are incredible..." He let out a shaky breath as she pulled him to her with the veils. He'd had so many fantasies about that outfit. He hadn't thought she'd kept it. All that work, swimming laps in the Artic was gone...

"I love you, Clark," she whispered huskily, slipping her hand beneath the fabric of his dress shirt, resting her hand against his chest. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you..."

He smiled recalling the conversation they'd had months ago that she was quoting. He cupped her cheek, leaning in to kiss her. He moaned against her lips and slowly broke off the kiss and whispered, "If you really want me I'm yours..." With that he lifted her up in his arms, recapturing her lips as she wrapped her legs around his waist.

She laughed against his lips, "You're supposed to let me do the dance of the seven veils first..."

"I still have the last one seared into my memory..." He whispered huskily.

"I want you..." She whimpered against his lips, taking his glasses off his face as she began to brush featherlight kisses against his face. He walked them back toward the bedroom, recapturing her lips with his own as he leaned back on the bed with her.

"I want you too, baby," he moaned against her lips as he took his glasses from her and turned to place them on the night stand then turned back to see her on his bed with her arms open and ready for him. He brushed his lips against hers before moving lower...

A loud bang echoed through the halls as the officers beat on

the door of Lex Luthor's penthouse. This was it. This was what everyone had been waiting for. He'd left messages for both Lane and Kent but got no response. He glanced at the time and shook his head. They were probably asleep anyway.

Henderson smiled to himself as the door broke open. They had the element of surprise on their side. Officers raced through the penthouse, stepping into the elevator as they headed to Lex Luthor's study.

The elevator doors opened. The rich walls that once were filled with fine art and one of a kind collections were bare. The furniture was gone. Everything was gone. "Oh, no..." Henderson groaned as he stepped out of the elevator.

The SWAT team that was with him raced through the halls of the suite, searching for any sign of Luthor, but he knew it was a lost cause. Lex Luthor had cleared the entire floor. He was gone. He had been tipped off somehow.

"The whole floor has been cleared out."

"No!!!" Henderson punched his fist against the wall. Gone. Everything was gone.

"What do you want to do?"

On the outskirts of town in the Metropolis cemetery, a tall man in black watched as a truck pulled up. Devane stepped out of the truck carrying a metal case with him, looking around. He spotted the man in black suspiciously, "You with Luthor?"

The man removed his hat and stepped out of the shadows, revealing himself to Devane, and he nodded, "You could say that."

"Mr. Luthor thought you were on the run..." Devane said with a smile.

"Leave without the stone? I don't think so," Lex smiled.

"You have the money?" Devane asked.

Lex nodded, opening the case in front of him, "Five million dollars." He pointed to the case in Devane's hands, "The stone?" Devane nodded, and Lex continued, "My information suggested the stone had been tested extensively by a University laboratory. Who else knows about its properties?"

Devane shrugged with a smile, "There were some loose ends...but they've been trimmed. Bureau 39 was thorough that way."

"And the research?" Lex pressed.

"Destroyed," Devane grinned.

"Then I'll have to take you at your word for what it's capable of," Lex mused.

"You're joking, right? I have buyers lined up for this, and you want a money-back guarantee?" Devane sneered.

"Yes, I do," Lex stared at Devane coldly.

"You're not exactly in the position to be making demands, Mr. Luthor," Devane warned.

"And neither are you," Lex pulled out a .45 automatic and motioned with it for Devane to raise his hands. Devane stared down the barrel, shakily raising his hands as Lex began to give him orders, "Put the case down and walk away. IF it works, I'll pay you your money with a bonus."

"You double-crossing..."

"Uh, uh, uh, careful," Lex warned, cocking the trigger.

Devane stared at Lex for a moment before putting the case down, turning and moving away. Lex bent down to retrieve the case and opened it only to find a plain rock painted green inside. He looked up to see Devane dart behind the truck as Devane shouted, "Now!!!"

Four other men hop out from behind the truck, opening fire on Lex as three figures appear from behind the building Lex was waiting by and return fire. One by one Devane and his men are hit and fall to the ground, but not without taking out Lex in the process. The firing stops and one of the men that had been firing on Devane and his men stepped forward, removing his ski mask as

he knelt down next to Devane, “The voice wasn’t bad, but I never felt he got the mannerisms down.”

Another figure knelt down next to him, removing her ski mask Mrs. Cox smiled at Lex, “It’s not easy playing you, Lex.”

“Nonsense,” he smiled, rolling Devane over as he patted him down. “I do it all the time... Now, let’s see...” He smiled when he felt something in Devane’s pocket, “Is that Kryptonite in your pocket or are you just glad to see me?” He smiled when he pulled out the glowing meteorite and stood up, tucking it into his own pocket, “Pay him his bonus, will you, Mrs. Cox?”

Several shots could be heard in the background as Lex disappeared into the back of the mausoleum.

The next morning, Lois sighed happily against him, curling up tighter in Clark’s arms as she slowly began to wake up. Last night had been out of this world. As they each had gotten more and more confident, exploring one another’s bodies they’d opted for more unusual places to make love in... against the wall, on the ceiling, in the shower...

He tightened his arms around her, and she smiled. “So, this is what it’s supposed to feel like,” she murmured.

“What what’s supposed to feel like?” He whispered in her ear.

“You. Us.” She turned to face him.

“Morning,” he murmured, brushing his lips against her shoulder.

“Morning,” she murmured, turning to wrap her arms around him. She glanced up and noticed the bed above them and looked around, “We’re on the ceiling.”

“Mmm hmm,” he murmured, leaning in to kiss her. “You seemed to like it so much last night...” He wiggled his eyebrows at her as he tightened his arms around her waist.

“Oh, definitely,” she breathed, leaning back as he rolled them to where she had her back to the ceiling. “I think my... legs... are getting heavy, though...” She moved her legs against him to prove her point.

“No problem,” he whispered, floating them back down to the bed. Lois sighed when she felt the cool cotton from the sheets brush against her legs. “Better?”

“Much,” she whispered, leaning down to kiss him. “What time is it?” she murmured against his lips.

Clark glanced at the clock on the nightstand, “We’ve still got a couple of...” Hours. He was going to say hours before a loud, sharp, insistent knock interrupted him.

Lois tugged the sheet to the bed over herself. “Who is that?”

“I...” He grimaced when he saw who was on the other side of the door, “It’s Henderson.”

“Maybe he’s got the warrant ready for Lex,” Lois said excitedly.

He shook his head, climbing out of bed and reaching for his shirt from the night before he handed it to her. “Here,” he quickly spun into shorts and t-shirt then waited for Lois to finish buttoning his shirt. How was it that she looked even more sexy in his clothes than she had a few moments ago, next to him in bed completely naked? She grabbed a pair of cotton shorts from the dresser to put on in the meantime, and once she nodded she was ready, he went to the door to answer it.

“It’s about time!” Henderson boomed, stepping into the apartment. “I’ve been calling you for hours... I went by Lane’s place, and her sister hasn’t seen her since last night...”

He’d disconnected the phone line when Lois had shown up last night. After the last time, they didn’t want to take any chances of being interrupted again. He’d apologize, but he really didn’t feel sorry. He fought the smile he knew was threatening to spread across his face, “I guess I had my ringer off,” he shrugged.

“Why did you turn your ringer off?” Henderson asked, following him down the steps. “You knew we were waiting on that warrant to come through...” He stopped when he spotted Lois

coming into the living room, “*Ohhh!*” He looked between the two of them for a moment as realization dawned on him, “I guess that answers that question,” he muttered under his breath.

Lois brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, ignoring the look of embarrassment on Henderson’s face, “Did the warrant come through?”

“Uh, yeah,” he said, looking at the floor, studying the cracks in the wood. “There was a problem, though...”

“What kind of problem?” Clark asked.

“Well, after I left messages for both of you...” He trailed off, “I, uh, didn’t get a response so ... I got a team together to arrest Luthor last night, but...”

“You went to arrest him without us???” Lois accused angrily.

“Including you in Luthor’s arrest was a courtesy, but you didn’t answer,” Henderson quipped. “Anyway, it didn’t do any good...”

“Why not?” Clark asked.

“He’s gone,” Henderson said grimly.

“What do you mean he’s gone?” Lois asked.

“He disappeared... along with all the tapes we had locked up in evidence...” Henderson said glumly. “Someone must have tipped him off.”

Mrs. Cox handed Lex a file, wrapping her arms around herself as she looked at the dreary surroundings. “Just a temporary situation, Mrs. Cox.”

“The explosives have been planted,” Mrs. Cox said shakily. “You just say the word and then *boom*.”

Lex nodded, “Good.” He toyed with the file in his hand, “Leave me.” He set the file down and pulled out his laptop and began pulling up the surveillance footage.

“More surveillance?” Mrs. Cox asked.

“Yes,” Lex waved her off, waiting for Mrs. Cox to leave. Once she had left he loaded the screen and smiled, “Well, well, what do we have here?” He smiled with intrigue.

Lois threw her things down in frustration as she locked the apartment. Two months of research down the toilet. Lex Luthor was missing. The witnesses are gone. The evidence is gone. He could reappear at any time, and there still wasn’t anything the police or the courts could do to hold him. She rubbed her temples, trying to will her growing temper to subside. Getting angry wasn’t going to solve anything.

She glanced over at Clark who looked just as frustrated as she felt. “What are we going to do?”

He shook his head in disgust, “Try and salvage what we can and hope we can find someone or something to nail Luthor to the wall?” He raked a hand through his hair, “I don’t know. I don’t get how he... How is he always one step ahead of us?”

“Henderson said he thought he was tipped off,” Lois breathed as she began to try to reason what could have gone wrong out loud, “Maybe there’s a snitch in the police station, or at the DA’s office...” She buried her face in her hands, “I don’t know. I guess we got to break the bad news to Perry. I’m gonna get dressed. I’ll just be a sec.”

He nodded, heading for the kitchen, “I’ll make some coffee.”

“Thanks,” she gave him a weak smile, “I’m sorry. I really thought we had him.”

“I did too,” he replied sadly, “I guess that’s why they say ‘God laughs when we make plans.’” She gave him a weak smile before heading into her bedroom to get dressed. She hopped in the shower and threw on a pantsuit then headed out into the living room where she found Clark sitting on the couch with a cup of coffee and Lucy nursing what appeared to be turning into a black-eye with a frozen bag of peas.

“Lucy!” She gasped seeing how bad the bruising was on her sister’s face. She sank down next to her, trying to get a better look

at the bruising.

"I know," Lucy sighed, shaking her head. "It wasn't nearly this bad last night. I guess I got hit a lot harder than I thought."

"I'll say," Clark said, "Keep icing it. That should help prevent any more bruising than what's already there."

"I guess I must have pissed somebody off pretty bad," Lucy said wryly.

<<"It was a setup. There I am, minding my own business when this mammoth of a woman starts swinging at me...I was defending myself...">>

Lois shot her head around looking at Lucy then at Clark. The only person, her sister, had pissed off recently had been Lex. Could he have been responsible for last night's attack? Clark met her gaze, seeming to sense the silent question in her eyes and offered her a grim nod in agreement.

"I wish I could tell you it looks worse than what it feels like but I'd be lying," Lucy teased. Lois and Clark offered her a weak smile, unsure of how to respond. Lucy glanced at the clock, "Shouldn't you be on your way to work by now?"

Lois looked at Lucy apprehensively, "Are you sure you don't need me to take you to the doctor or anything?"

Lucy shook her head, "If it gets too bad I'll give mom a call. Besides the doctor at the police station assured me there was no concussion, so I think it's just bruising."

"Maybe I oughta stay with you?" Lois offered.

"I thought today was the day you were landing the exclusive on Lex Luthor's arrest? No, I'm fine. You got work. I got cable and your stash of Double Fudge Crunch bars with a healthy stack of takeout places if I need them. I'll be fine. I don't have to go to class till Monday. I'm fine."

"But..." Lois began to argue, still uncertain about leaving her little sister.

Clark interrupted, handing her her travel mug of coffee, "Come on, you heard her. We've got a lot of ground to cover. Besides we need to at least try to make a good impression with the new owner."

"New owner?" Lucy asked.

"I'll tell you about it later," Lois promised, taking her mug from Clark. "Call me if you change your mind about the doctor," she wagged her finger at Lucy as Clark drug her out of the apartment.

"Bye Luce," he called over his shoulder, closing the door behind them.

Jimmy raced down the steps to the newsroom and headed to where Perry was standing with Bruce Wayne and a couple of the board members, "Chief! Did you hear what happened last night?"

Perry nodded, "Lex Luthor, career criminal escapes before the Metropolis P.D. could arrest him? Yeah, I heard." His jaw tightened as he spoke, "Makes me sick to think about what he could have done if he'd gotten ownership of the Planet."

"Makes me wonder what his intentions were that's for sure," Bruce said with a grim look. He shook his head in disgust, "Mr. White, I've left my numbers on your desk. After hearing it was Wayne Enterprises they were turning down the banks magically found the credit and advertisers are looking for ad space again." Bruce gave Perry a wink, "After what happened yesterday I think it was all a setup orchestrated by Lex Luthor so he could swoop in and act like he was 'saving' the Planet."

"But the question is 'why'?" Jimmy interrupted, "Why was he after the Planet?"

Perry shook his head, "I don't know, but thankfully he didn't succeed," Perry said, patting Bruce on the shoulder, "Mr. Wayne I can't tell you how grateful I am for your help."

"Any day I can put Lex Luthor in his place is a good day for me," Bruce smiled, glancing at his watch, "I've got a plane to catch. I'll be in and out over the next few weeks. Discuss the

expansion updates I talked about."

"Yeah, I'm still not so sure that's a good..." Perry began, but Bruce was already walking toward the elevator.

"We'll talk on Monday," he grinned back pressing the call button. The button didn't light up, and he frowned, "That's odd," he pressed the button again.

"What is it?" Perry asked.

"The elevator's power is out," Bruce muttered, pulling out his phone to dial maintenance.

Perry scanned the newsroom and noticed Lois and Clark still hadn't made it in and muttered, "They better not be doing what I think they're doing."

"What was that?" Bruce asked.

"Oh, nothing, I..." Perry stopped when a loud rumble from below could be felt through the floor.

Bruce laid his hand against the elevator and winced, "It's hot. There's a fire in the elevator shaft..."

Another rumble and the sound of an explosion from below could be felt as alarms began to blare, "*Get everyone out now!!!*" Perry yelled as the doors to the elevator opened and flames filled the floor as the ground began to tremble. The sound of glass shattering above them echoed around them, and Perry thought he could make out the silhouette of Superman carrying someone out at super-speed.

"We are so late," Lois breathed as they stepped into the Daily Planet lobby.

"It's Friday," Clark reasoned, wrapping his arms around Lois' waist as they approached the elevator. "Maybe no one will notice."

"Yeah right," she sighed, pressing the call button the elevator, "Hours after Lex goes into hiding and escapes arrest for all his crimes in Metropolis? I don't think so." Lois shot back as they stepped into the elevator car. "I mean, how could he just disappear?" Lois angrily fumed as she jabbed the button to the newsroom repeatedly.

Clark placed a hand over hers, trying to calm her down, "I don't know, but ...*that*... isn't helping."

"I should have called in. Did you see her face?" Lois breathed, turning to look at him accusingly.

"She said she was fine," he reassured her as he whispered in her ear. "She's a big girl, and she can call you if she needs something."

"How could he do something like that to her?" She fumed angrily. "She's just a kid."

"She's not a kid anymore," Clark reminded her. "Luthor doesn't like being challenged. If it was him. We still don't know for sure if it was him."

"Yeah, right," Lois folded her arms over her chest. "Who else did she pick a fight with since she's been in Metropolis?"

He sighed, wrapping an arm around her, "Then we'll prove it. Until then..." He pulled her hand away from the call button she kept jabbing insistently and kissed it. "We do what we can to find out what happened."

There was a sharp jolt, and the elevator halted as the lights flickered. "What was that?" Lois asked, looking around.

"I don't know," Clark said looking around the empty elevator car as he lowered his glasses, "Maybe the elevator short-circuited when someone kept jamming the newsroom floor..."

Lois smacked him playfully on the chest, "Come on, get us out of here so we can..."

"Oh, no..." Clark breathed.

"What is it?" Lois asked. Before he could respond, she saw him aim his heat vision at the cameras before he spun into the Superman suit and grabbed her by the waist to fly them through the emergency exit of the elevator car and into the elevator shaft that had filled with flames.

"Hold on..." He whispered, holding her close as he flew them

through the ceiling and crashed through the glass.

Nigel stepped into the underground bunker that was located beneath the mausoleum, turning the corner where Lex had set up his office to until it was safe to move above ground. The wall was covered with screens showing monitoring of different locations across Metropolis. The surveillance on the corner where the Daily Planet stood showed the building in flames, and Lex smiled, "Now who's laughing."

"Well, sir, I see you've made yourself at home," Nigel said, making his presence known.

Lex turned to face him with a smile, "Just doing some house cleaning," he muttered turning to look at the screen with the Daily Planet in flames again.

"So I see," Nigel said calmly, "Sir, don't you think blowing up the Planet will only make the Metropolis P.D. focus on youmore?"

"They can't prove a thing," Lex snarled angrily.

"Even so," Nigel added, "You're supposed to be laying low."

"No," Lex shook his head in anger, "I won't give him the satisfaction. I may not be in my penthouse anymore, but I refuse to give Superman the satisfaction of seeing me roll over. I can run my empire from here just as easily, but without the pretense of having to pretend to be something I'm not."

"And that is?" Nigel asked.

"A humanitarian," he winced. "All those useless charities and functions and pretending to care about this city...this city that has turned it's back on Lex Luthor!" He shook his head in disgust, "The gloves are off, Nigel."

Outside of the Planet, Lois Lane watched as firefighters, ambulatory workers, and Superman fought the flames that had engulfed the building. After making sure she was a safe distance from the building Clark had flown back into the building to rescue their injured co-workers from the explosion that had been set off when they had been in the elevator. She held a gauze to her forehead in place, keeping the pressure on the cut she'd gotten when the glass had shattered around them. One by one, friends and co-workers appeared outside the building, all in a state of shock as they stared up at what had become of the greatest newspaper in the world.

"Oh, God..." Lois breathed as she watched Clark in his Superman suit covered in soot and grease carrying Jimmy who was cradling his arm in pain.

He set him down on one of the many awaiting stretchers and turned to her, "He'll be okay," he reassured, "Stay with him?"

"Of course," she reached over to hold Jimmy's hand, reassuring him he wasn't alone. Clark then turned back to the firefighters that were struggling to get the hose line into the building. "It'll be okay Jimmy."

Jimmy gave her a weak smile, "You all right?"

"Just a minor cut," she said gently, trying to reassure him.

Jimmy grimaced looking down at his arm, "I think it might be broken. I got caught under one of the columns that blew...If Superman hadn't..." He looked up at the sky to see Superman flying the hose into the building and the firemen turning the water on full blast to douse the flames, "How many times has he just stepped in and saved our lives?"

Lois gave Jimmy a weak smile, "Yeah, he's really something."

"Lois, are you okay, honey?" Perry shouted as he pushed through the crowd that had gathered outside the Planet.

"I'm ...fine," she gave Perry a nervous smile, looking around at the damage.

"Where's Clark?" He asked in concern.

Lois pointed to the crowd, "He went to get help after Superman got us out of the elevator," Lois hoped Perry couldn't tell she was lying. It wasn't a total lie. He was getting help. Clark

was the help.

Perry scanned the crowd, "Have any of you seen Mr. Wayne?"

Lois was about to tell him 'no' when she spotted Clark carrying an injured Bruce Wayne out of the half destroyed Planet. "Oh, God!"

"He was pulling everyone out of the basement before it collapsed," Clark explained, motioning for the ambulatory workers to help Bruce Wayne.

"Thanks, Superman," one of the workers reassured, "We've got it from here." Bruce was still unconscious as the workers began to work on him.

"There's still more people inside," Clark said with a pained expression before turning to fly back inside the Planet.

Lois stared up at the wreckage numbly. Everything seemed to be going in slow motion as one by one workers from the printing room were brought out by Superman and other first responders that worked tirelessly to pull everyone out.

After what seemed like an eternity Superman nodded to the firefighters that the fire was out and the first responders on the scene nodded their agreement. "We're clear. Everyone's out. Thanks, Superman."

She watched as Clark disappeared in a red and blue blur, reappearing in the crowd behind her. The pained expression on his face spoke volumes. She pushed past the crowd to reach him, wrapping him in her arms as he held her tight. He let out a shuddered breath, holding her close, unwilling to voice the pain she knew he felt. She lifted her head from his chest, holding back the tears she knew were threatening to escape the corners of her eyes.

His hand moved to cup her cheek, and she gave him a shaky smile. He leaned in to kiss her, and she sighed against him, finding comfort in his arms as she fought against the feeling of helplessness that had taken over her for the last few hours. Everything in her life had revolved around the Daily Planet for the last four years, her friends, her co-workers...her family. Now, it was gone.

"CK!" Jimmy called out, and they slowly separated, turning to their friend who was approaching with Perry in tow. "Man, I've been looking all over for you."

Clark looked at Jimmy's arm that was in a sling, "I've been trying to help where I can. How's the arm?"

"They think it's a fracture," Jimmy said, "I've got to head over to the hospital and get a brace."

"I'm sorry, Jimmy," Clark apologized.

"Why are you apologizing?" Jimmy asked, looking around the wreckage that was left of the Daily Planet, "You didn't do this."

Perry placed a hesitant hand on Jimmy's shoulder, "Go on and get yourself taken care of. Give us a call when you're done, and someone will pick you up," Jimmy nodded, turning to head back to the ambulatory workers that were taking all injured parties to the hospital.

Clark stared up at the wreckage, watching as officers began sectioning the building off from the public, "Everyone, move back!" one of the officers called out through the bull horn.

They complied, moving toward the cafe across from the Planet. A crane pulled up to the building, and they watched in anguish as the Daily Planet globe was slowly lowered to an awaiting tow-truck. "This can't be happening," Lois cried numbly. "Please tell me this is a nightmare," Clark gave her a sympathetic look before hugging her tightly as they continued to watch.

Perry looked up at the wreckage in disgust, "Two hundred and nineteen years and in a blink of an eye it's all gone."

"We'll rebuild," Clark said. "The Daily Planet is more than just a building..."

Perry nodded, "I know, but this..." He gestured to the remains of the Daily Planet, "was the first ... and the oldest location of the Daily Planet. We have locations all over the world, but THIS is

where it all started.” He ran a ragged hand through his thinning hair, “A historic day, boys and girls. Tomorrow, for the first time in two hundred nineteen years, there will be no edition of the Daily Planet.”

“Thankfully there were no fatalities,” Lois murmured, glancing back at Clark. “We can be grateful for that.”

“Grateful?” Perry scoffed, “Lois, I’m feeling a lot of things right now, but grateful is not one of them.” He glanced over at the train of ambulances that were getting ready to leave and sighed, “I think I’m going to head over to Metropolis General and check on Jimmy and Mr. Wayne...I’ll, uh, see you two later.”

“He did this, didn’t he?” Lois asked quietly as Perry walked away.

Clark’s voice was strained as he spoke, “Yeah, I think so.”

“All those people...” Lois breathed shakily.

“I know,” he croaked, tightening his arms around her.

“Let’s get out of here,” Lois murmured, turning in his arms, tugging him with her as they headed to the parking garage a few blocks away from where she’d parked that morning. At the time she’d been irritated about being late and irritated about having to park so far away, but now she was grateful. The injuries everyone had suffered...

Toni Taylor winced as her surroundings began to come into focus. She wasn’t in her cell. She was in some dark and dreary bunker. She sat up, grimacing as a dull ache began to resonate through her head.

“I see you’re regaining your wits,” A familiar voice with a British accent spoke from the doorway.

“Nigel,” She breathed, recognizing him immediately.

“I do hope you’ll forgive the accommodations. Circumstances have changed over the past twenty-four hours,” he said, polishing an object inside a cloth, “but I’m sure you’re already aware of that.”

He knew. He knew, and he was going to kill her.

She looked around the room trying to find something she could use as a weapon if need be but found nothing. “I wasn’t going to...”

“Weren’t going to what?” Nigel asked, taking a step inside the cell.

“I was never going to....I wouldn’t betray Lex like that,” Toni stammered, hoping against hope he would believe her.

She saw the reflection of light glint against the barrel of the .45 automatic he was polishing and took a shallow breath. His eyes narrowed, and he waved the automatic in the air, “Ms. Taylor, why should I believe a word out of your mouth? You’ve already proven you can’t be trusted by talking to those reporters.”

“They came to me!” He raised the barrel to her, pressing the hard metal against her temple and she cried. This was how it was going to end. She squinted her eyes shut, anticipating the inevitable.

“Nigel, enough!” a voice from behind them shouted. Toni slowly opened her eyes and breathed a sigh of relief when Nigel removed the cold metal barrel from her temple. She held her breath as she saw Lex step into the room. “This is not what I had her brought here for.”

“She knows too much, and she was willing to talk,” Nigel argued.

“A mistake I’m sure she regrets,” Lex said, narrowing his eyes at Toni as he spoke. “Put it away,” he ordered, pushing the barrel of the automatic toward Nigel. There seemed to be some sort of unspoken battle of wits going on between them as they both stared one another down. Nigel gave Lex a glare that was met by Lex’s own piercing stare. The darkness in Lex’s eyes... she had never seen it before....how dark.

“Very well,” Nigel said, clicking the safety on and tucking the weapon safely in its holster.

“Excellent!” Lex cheered, his face softened and the debonair face that had always been there returned. “Ms. Taylor, please forgive Nigel. He hasn’t been house trained yet.” She didn’t know what to say or how to speak. She saw the dark glare return to Lex’s face as he gave Nigel a warning look before approaching her.

“Wha...” She began to say, but Lex cut her off.

“What are you doing here?” Lex asked. She nodded, and he began to explain. “I couldn’t have you testifying against me. That wouldn’t be good for either of us.” He gave a menacing look to Toni, and she swallowed hard, “Now, I like to think of myself as a reasonable person. I think that you’re an intelligent woman. Anyone that would be willing to go to such lengths to steal an organization from your own brother....that takes spunk. I like spunk.”

“I...”

“As you can see, that...*investigation* you were involved in has forced me to relocate...embrace my roots so to speak,” he gestured to the darkened room around them. “It’s only temporary. I’ll be back on top in no time, but I will be more careful.”

“Careful?” She squeaked.

“I let my guard down. Now, I’m paying the price,” Lex smiled. “I won’t make that mistake again. Now you’re either with me or against me. The choice is yours, Ms. Taylor.”

Toni caught the look between Lex and Nigel and realized the choice she was being given wasn’t that simple. If she was ‘with’ Lex, then she would live but if not...The glint of the automatic from behind Nigel’s jacket caught her attention. She knew it was the only way to get out of this alive. “With. Of course, I’m with you, Lex,” she gave him a forced smile, hoping he would buy it.

Perry made his way through the crowded emergency room that was filled with family and friends looking for answers about the status of their loved ones. The nurse at the front desk looked weary. He had taken a shaky breath before he spoke, “I’m looking for James Olsen.”

“Family?” She asked, not looking up from her computer as she typed at her keyboard.

“Friend,” he corrected.

“I can’t give you a status,” she began to say, but he cut her off.

“I know he hurt his arm. I just wanted to sit with him while they patch him up,” Perry explained.

She gave him a once-over, and he wasn’t sure if she was going to be forthcoming with any information. “All non-emergent cases are in triage. Go through the doors and hang a left then a right,” she explained, pressing a button to open the double doors for him.

“Thank you,” he called over his shoulders as he followed her directions to triage.

Ellen held up a piece of gauze that was soaked in iodine, “This is gonna sting.”

Lois nodded, preparing herself for the pain as Ellen worked on cleaning up the cut on her forehead. After they’d left the disaster scene that once had been the Daily Planet Lois insisted on seeing Lucy to reassure herself she was okay. She had been eerily quiet. As long as he’d known her, Lois always had something to say about everything, whether you wanted to hear it or not. Now, she was quiet. She hadn’t even argued when Lucy had demanded they take Lois to see their mother immediately so she could be checked out since Lois was refusing to see a doctor. He still couldn’t understand why she wouldn’t at least get checked out with one of the ambulatory workers on the scene.

Clark sat at the table watching in silence as Ellen finished tending to Lois’ injuries. “Is she okay?” He asked apprehensively.

When he’d been flying them out of the elevator, he’d been so focused on making sure they got out of there he hadn’t double checked to make sure he had her close enough to absorb his aura.

Because of that, she had been hurt. One of the cuts on her forehead was an inch away from her eye.

"She'll be fine, Clark," Ellen reassured, patting him on the hand before gathering the used gauze to throw away.

Clark glanced at Lois, still not convinced. She gave him a weak smile. "I'm fine," she said weakly. "Just a bit..."

"Shocked?" Ellen suggested, taking a seat next to her to finish cleaning up the remainder of her cuts as she began carefully plucking glass from her hair, careful not to cut her as she did so.

"You could say that," Lois said, squeezing her mother's free hand. "Thanks."

"How in the world you girls are still alive is a mystery to me..." Ellen muttered, continuing to pull shards of glass out of her hair.

"I guess you could call it Lane Luck," Lucy teased.

Ellen wasn't laughing, and neither was he. So many lives could have been lost today. It had been a miracle no one had died. A miracle that he'd been able to get out of the elevator before it was plummeted into the air and shattered on Main Street where thankfully no one had been crossing the street.

Ellen turned sternly to Lucy, "Lucy, you are not a kid anymore. You can't go around saying whatever pops in your mouth and not expect consequences..."

"I told you I was just minding my own business..." Lucy began to argue.

"Look at your face, Lucy. It looks like one of those Baboons."

"Baboons?" Lois echoed in disbelief.

"I look like a baboon?" Lucy asked, aghast.

Ellen shook her head, not paying attention to the girls at the moment as she tried to think of the name, "What was the name of that baboon with the red face? You know the one I'm talking about?" She snapped her fingers as she tried to think.

"Hamadryas?" He guessed, not sure if it was wise to add to the conversation at the moment given the expression on Lucy Lane's face.

"Yes!" Ellen pointed at him, "That's it. Hamadryas Baboons."

"Gee, thanks, mom," Lucy said sarcastically.

"Between you and your sister..." Ellen fumed.

"Yes, we get it," Lucy sighed. "We get into trouble too much. We didn't go to the right college. We didn't go into the right profession..."

"Ow!" Lois winced as the tweezers grabbed at a shard of glass that was wedged in the edge of her scalp.

"Sorry," Ellen winced; realizing she'd yanked a bit too hard. Clark watched in silence, uncertain of what to do. He'd hold Lois' hand but wasn't sure if that would distract her from what Ellen was doing.

"I'm fine," Lois reassured her, giving Ellen a smile. "Let's just get the glass out then you two can argue."

"We were not arguing," Ellen corrected, "Just voicing a difference of opinion."

"Uh-huh," Lois grinned back at them.

"Well, you're lucky you made it out of there when you did," Lucy began. "From what Jimmy was saying there were a lot of people trapped that had some serious injuries. It's lucky Superman was flying by when he was, huh?"

Clark caught Lois' gaze as he nodded, "Yeah, I just wish he'd been able to stop it before so many people got hurt."

"Well, I'm sure he did his best," Ellen reasoned.

Lois smiled at him, "He can't be everywhere at once."

"Or do everything," Lucy added.

Clark couldn't help but smile. It was becoming more and more apparent just where Lois' spirited attitude came from. "Yeah," he glanced back at Lucy, "So you talked to Jimmy?"

Lucy nodded, "He called me from the ambulance. Didn't want me to find out what happened to him from the news apparently."

"News?" Lois asked.

"Yes, apparently he was interviewed and might be on TV tonight. He's very proud of this," Lucy said with a smile.

"Uh-oh," Clark teased, "Does the Chief know about this interview?"

Perry spotted Jimmy sitting up on a cot with his arm in a sling and next to him was Bruce Wayne with a bandage wrapped around his waist with his torn shirt still hanging off of him. "Jimmy, Mr. Wayne," Perry greeted them.

"Mr. White, I'm pleased to see you made it out all right," Bruce smiled at Perry.

Perry nodded, "Yeah, I'm glad we all made it out. Superman said you were helping our guys in the printing press out of the basement. How did you get down there?"

"The stairs," Bruce shrugged, "When everyone began running for the exits I saw one of the columns was blocking the stairs so I did what I could to help get the guys out. It was nothing."

Perry gave him a look then sighed, "Well, it wasn't nothing to any of the guys you helped out. Thank you." He turned to Jimmy, "How's the arm, son?"

"I'm still waiting on my discharge papers," Jimmy explained, "I'll be in a sling for a few weeks, though."

"Good," Perry sighed, running a hand through his thinning hairline. "I'm glad everyone made it out all right."

"Me too," Bruce said with a grim expression. "If you both will excuse me I'm gonna see what I gotta do to get out of this joint. My latest purchase just blew up in my face literally, and I've got to figure out a way to explain this to my investors before they start demanding my head on a stick."

Jimmy laughed, "I like him. He's funny."

Perry nodded, "He's a character all right." He glanced at Jimmy cautiously, "You sure you're okay, son?"

"I'm fine, Chief," Jimmy reassured, "A little banged up, but I'll live."

Just then a group of officers entered the triage area. One of the officers in the middle pointed toward them, "Something we can help you with, Officer...?" Perry asked, prompting the officer for a name.

"It's Detective," The man said gruffly, "Detective Jenkins...as of this morning."

"Okay, Detective Jenkins is there something we can help you with?" Perry asked, annoyed with the man's attitude.

"Looking for a James Olsen?" He said, looking towards Jimmy.

"That'd be me," Jimmy said, "What's this about?"

"Why don't you just come with us down to the station? We'll explain it there," Jenkins said.

Jimmy began to agree, but Perry cut him off, "I don't think so. You're not taking him anywhere without telling him what this is about."

"That's none of your concern," Jenkins argued.

"I'm making it my concern," Perry countered, taking a protective step in front of Jimmy.

"Is there a problem here?" Bruce asked from behind them.

"Not if Detective Jenkins wants to explain why Jimmy needs to go downtown with him and his officers," Perry said gruffly.

Jenkins threw an annoyed look then sighed, "Fine, do it your way." He pulled out his handcuffs, "James Bartholomew Olsen, you are wanted for questioning in the arson and destruction of the Daily Planet."

"What!?" Perry asked aghast.

"You're out of your mind. I would never..." Jimmy argued.

"That's what we'll clear up at the station," Jenkins sighed, hanging his handcuffs in the air, "Do I need to use these or are you going to come with me willingly?"

Clark stepped outside to check on Jimmy, hoping to give the

Lane women a chance to deal with the obvious tension that was in the air between them. “Hi, you’ve reached Jimmy. I can’t get to the phone right now. Just leave a message and I’ll get back to you when I can.”

Frustrated, he clicked the end button and began to dial again, “You’ve reached Perry White. I’m unable to get to the phone right now. Please leave a detailed message to what this is regarding. If this is an emergency you can call me on my direct office line at 315-914-339...”

He clicked the end button again. Where was everyone? He still hadn’t heard anything from Bill Henderson on the status of the case against Luthor or whether they were able to track down Miranda, Toni Taylor or Monique Kahn.

He tapped his foot against the paved walkway as he listened to phone ring for the third time in the last five minutes. “Metropolis P.D. an unfamiliar voice answered the phone.”

‘Finally,’ he thought to himself.

“Yes, I’m looking for Inspector Henderson?”

“You mean Detective Henderson,” the voice on the other end corrected.

“Pardon?” He asked.

“It’s Detective Henderson now. He’s in with the Chief,” the voice explained, “Can I take a message?”

“Just tell him to call Clark Kent when he gets a minute.”

“Clark Kent. Got it.” The voice said nonchalantly. Before he could give his number the call ended. Clark sighed, unsure of what to make of the phone call.

“You can’t keep me in here!” Perry hollered angrily, pacing around the empty interrogation room.

The door opened and he prepared himself for the worst. He sighed in relief when he saw Henderson at the door. “They can if you keep causing a scene,” he said dryly.

“They won’t let me see Jimmy,” Perry argued, pointing toward the window. “He’s being railroaded for something he didn’t do and they’re over there...”

“I know,” Henderson sighed, lowering his voice as he approached Perry, “Listen to me and listen good. Go find a lawyer and bring him or her down here now. I can’t tell you why. I can’t tell you who. Just do it.” Perry noticed the disheveled appearance on Henderson and nodded, turning to say something as he walked out the door to the room Henderson had left open for him, “Just do it.”

“Okay, I think that’s the last of it,” Ellen said, setting the tweezers down.

Lois leaned her head forward, brushing her hands through her hair as she let out a sigh of relief. “Thanks, Mom.”

“Please try and be more careful,” Ellen urged. “You two are gonna send me into an early grave at this rate.”

“All we were doing was riding up the elevator,” Lois sighed exasperated. “How were we supposed to know the building was going to explode?”

Ellen wasn’t easily deterred, “And all you were doing at Prometheus was sneaking on board to nab an interview with the colonists when the bomb was found.”

“That was different,” Lois said uneasily, hoping to pull her mother away from her current train of thought. “It’s lucky I was there though. If I wasn’t they wouldn’t have found the bomb until it was too late.”

“Luck? Is that what they call it these days?” Ellen scoffed, “Luck is what got you and Clark thrown out of a plane?”

“Yes, but...” Lois began to argue but Ellen cut her off, intent on listing every dangerous situation she’d been a part of in the last year.

“You were just covering a story when you nearly had your eye taken out by debris from an explosion, kidnapped, and held

hostage...Are you sensing a pattern here? Because I am.”

Lois stared toward the front door where Clark had stepped out to make a few calls earlier. She wasn’t sure if that was an excuse to escape as Superman or if he really was making calls. Hopefully he wouldn’t be too long. She loved her mother, but being alone with her for an extended period of time seemed to bring out the worst in both of them; especially when she got like this.

Bruce stared at Perry incredulously, “Let me see if I’ve got this right. You want me to send an attorney down to the Metropolis P.D. to represent someone who hasn’t even been arrested yet and you can’t give me any more information than that. Does that about sum this up?”

Perry nodded remorsefully. He could hear the sarcasm in Bruce Wayne’s tone. Bruce was currently set up in the airport lobby with his laptop and phone trying to make it on the list for the next flight, but as of right now he was still on standby due to him missing his earlier flight. “I know it looks bad but I’m telling you something is wrong here. Jimmy would never do anything to hurt the Planet. He’s wanted to work there since he was fifteen!”

Bruce sighed, running a hand through his hair, “I never said he did. I’m just trying to make some sense out of all of this.” He motioned to the laptop on his lap as he continued, “As it is I’m having to rush through all those changes we talked about this morning to make sure the Planet doesn’t become a very distant memory.”

“What are you talking about?” Perry asked.

“Apparently Lex Luthor bought up all of the local papers around Metropolis and has headlines about the ‘Death of the Planet’ and editorials about ‘It was good while it lasted.’” Bruce explained showing Perry the online edition of one of the articles.

“What are we going to do?” Perry asked.

“Buckle up your seatbelts because we’re going online,” Bruce smiled, “He can fight dirty so can I. My guess is he’s wanting to control the media. For now Metropolis will get the Daily Planet printed edition from the Gotham Gazette’s printer. I’m paying more than I should but I can’t do anything about rebuilding until I get the report back from the building inspector and the fire chief.”

Perry sighed, “So we *are* going to rebuild?”

“Of course,” Bruce explained, wagging his finger at him. “We may be down but we’re not out.”

“Good,” Perry nodded. “What do you need from me to get this ...online thing going?”

“Get the stories from whatever reporters still have their laptops at home and let’s try and have an edition put together by this evening,” Bruce pulled out his phone and looked up a number, grabbing a pen and card from his briefcase as he jotted down a number. At Perry’s confused look, “My local lawyer. She’s not a trial lawyer but she can sniff out corruption a mile away.”

“Thank you,” Perry nodded, taking the card from him.

Lucy watched the exchange between Lois and her mother and sighed. No matter how hard either of them tried the ridicule seemed to come out one way or another. It was one of the many reasons both of them had such a strained relationship with their parents. Lois’ relationship was a bit more strained than hers; especially with their dad. She didn’t blame her there. Lucy had blamed Sam for Lois moving out her senior year of high school. She never understood why she’d moved or what had happened until years later when Lois told her.

Their parents were trying to work things out. They’d been talking again and seeing one another and things were good. He’d even moved back in on a trial basis then he’d slipped back into his old habits. Working late, living in his office and neglecting their mother...and them. Sure, it doesn’t sound bad to someone that didn’t have to live it.

You’re an adult. Grow up.

They're your parents.

They're not perfect.

Many of the things that she'd been told over the years ran through her mind as she recalled Lois telling her what had happened so many years ago.

Ten Years Ago...

"I still don't get why you moved out. It was your senior year of high school. Why did you move in with Peggy? It couldn't all have been from dad wanting you to go to medical school." Lucy pressed her sister.

"It was a long time ago. Why does it matter?" Lois asked.

"Because you're my sister. Because you didn't have to live in that hell hole while they split up and tore each other apart again."

"I offered you a chance to leave," Lois reminded her.

"Mom needed me," Lucy explained.

"I know. I'm sorry. I just... I couldn't be there anymore. Not after..." She stopped uncertain of how to continue.

"Not after what?" Lucy pressed. Lois didn't say anything and she let out a frustrated growl, "Are you serious right now? I am not a little kid anymore. You don't have to keep protecting me from the boogey man. What is it?"

"It was a long time ago. Why does it matter?" Lois asked, trying to change the subject.

"It matters to me," Lucy said, crossing her arms over her chest. "What happened?"

"Let's just say, I didn't live up to another expectation... I refused to go to medical school. Dad accused me of betraying the family..."

"Betraying the family?" Lucy echoed. "He's got a lot of room to talk!"

"I know," Lois sighed, shrugging her shoulders.

"I mean if anyone betrayed the family it was him. He's the one that kept having affairs and..."

"You knew?" Lois asked surprised.

"Of course I knew," Lucy scoffed. "You and mom are terrible liars... and I had the unfortunate luck of answering the phone for one of his mistresses."

"I'm sorry, Luce," Lois hung her head shamefully.

Lucy shrugged, "Not your fault. It's his," She nudged Lois on the side, "So why did you move out?"

"Dad and I got into it about my not wanting to go to medical school. He said if I wasn't going then there was no point in my being there. I agreed and packed my stuff and left."

"Famous Lane temper does it again, huh?" Lucy teased.

"Yeah, needless to say there were things said that neither of us could take back," Lois said bitterly.

"How long has it been?" Lucy asked.

"Since I talked to him or saw him?" Lois asked.

"Both," Lucy nudged her hip at Lois playfully.

"Saw him at Aunt Lynn's funeral. He saw me then turned around and left. I didn't even have a chance to say anything."

"Ouch," Lucy said softly.

"Talked to him? The night I moved out," Lois said bitterly. "How about you?"

"The night he moved out. For both. He wanted to explain," Lucy scoffed. "Do you think he'll ever change? I mean, I know he'll always be a workaholic but do you think there will ever come a time when his family actually... means something?"

"I don't know, Luce," Lois said sadly. "I hope so. I know in my head it's not realistic but I do hope that one day it'll happen. I just... I don't know."

"We grew up too fast. That's what my therapist says," Lucy sighed. "You should talk to someone."

"I can't," Lois said, shaking her head. "That's all I need after what happened this week with Claude. They'll smell inadequacy and doubt on me and I'll never get a chance to prove myself as a

reporter again."

Lucy put an arm around her, "I'm here if you need to talk."

"I know."

Present Day...

"Are you sensing a pattern here? Because I am," Ellen folded her arms over her chest, daring Lois to say something.

Deciding enough was enough, Lucy interjected, "Mom, stop. I think we get it."

"Obviously not!" Ellen looked between the two of them. "You can't hold your tongue and get beat up at a bar..."

"It was a Bar and Grill," Lucy clarified.

"And it was a set-up," Lois added, squeezing Lucy's hand as she took a seat next to her.

"Whatever," Ellen sighed, "And you can't stay out of trouble for two minutes without risking your life..."

"It was arson. How were we supposed to know someone was going to blow the building up?" Lois asked irritably.

"I don't understand you. You had this great career lined up ... both of you... and..."

"For the last time..." Lucy began irritably.

"...we don't want to go into medicine," Lois finished for her. "Mom, I'm sorry I scared you. Really I am, but trying to push Lucy and me into a career we don't like or love isn't going to solve anything."

Clark soared over Metropolis, scanning the city. It had been eerily quiet ever since the explosion at the Planet. It was never this quiet. There was still a frenzy of activity at the hospital treating the victims from the Planet explosion but there was nothing he could do to help there. He didn't have medical training and the doctors and nurses seemed to have everything under control.

He finally found Perry outside the Metropolis P.D. pacing in front of the steps angrily on his phone. He landed outside the station. Perry hadn't yet noticed him as he continued arguing on the phone, "No, I don't want to leave a message. I want to talk to someone who can tell me what in tarnation is going on... Hello? Hello?" Perry pulled the phone back and muttered under his breath when he realized he'd been hung up on.

"Mr. White?" Clark tried to draw attention to himself as calmly as he could.

"Superman!" Perry gave him an anguished look, "I, uh, didn't see you there."

"Is everything all right?" He asked.

Perry looked down at the pavement he was pacing on, shaking his head, "I'm waiting on Bruce Wayne's attorney to hopefully get some answers for me."

"Answers?" Clark asked.

"Some detectives picked Jimmy up at the hospital. They took him in the back room and I haven't been able to get any answers about what's going on. I tried talking to Inspector Henderson but all he could tell me was to get a lawyer down here now," Perry shook his fist in the air. "...and she's late."

"Has Jimmy been arrested?"

"No, not that I can tell. At least there's nothing on the New Troy Detention Center's system. No one can tell me anything... or they don't want to," Perry fumed angrily.

Clark's jaw tightened for a moment, "Let me see what I can find out." With that he left Perry to continue waiting outside the police station as he searched for someone that could give him some answers.

Lois was growing more and more annoyed with the tirade her mother was on. Thankfully Lucy had interjected to help steer the conversation elsewhere but where it had landed was just as uncomfortable. It always came back to her career choices. Both she and her father wanted her to go into medicine.

She'd been given quizzes on medical terminology starting at the age of thirteen. Dr. Sam Lane would accept nothing less than perfection from her or Lucy when it came to their careers and education. Bad grade? Memorize the textbook from cover to cover. Miss a point repeat the question over and over until you got it right.

At the time it had been humiliating but over time she grew better and better. She could even say she was grateful for being pushed so hard, but her parents' dreams for her weren't the same dreams she envisioned. She wanted to make a difference. She wanted to tell the stories no one else would tell and fight for the truth. Getting her parents to understand that was near impossible.

They spared no expense when they thought she and Lucy would be following in Sam Lane's footsteps and becoming a doctor or surgeon. When the news had been broken that she didn't want to pursue medicine the look of betrayal had been enough to cut her to the core. Another way she didn't measure up.

No matter how successful she became or how many awards or accolades she collected she would never be enough in her parents' eyes. It was a hard truth to come to grip with, but over time she had accepted it. Keeping her distance made it easier to handle that truth. She was a disappointment to them.

"I think I'm going to go," Lois said standing up from the table.

"Of course, run off when we're having a conversation like you always do," Ellen shook her head.

"I don't want to fight with you, mom," Lois sighed, looking pleadingly back at her mother.

"Hey, Lois, have you heard from Jimmy?" Lucy interrupted, looking intently at her phone.

"No," Lois shook her head.

"Who is Jimmy?" Ellen asked, intrigued.

"A friend," Lucy said nonchalantly. "I keep getting his voicemail. I've been trying to get a hold of him all morning since the explosion..."

"He may be at the hospital," Lois suggested. "Maybe it's just bad reception."

"Metropolis General is notorious for bad reception," Ellen added.

"I guess," Lucy didn't appear to be convinced.

"Lois, you still need to keep an eye on that cut. Make sure it doesn't get infected," Ellen said, cleaning up the rest of the used gauze from the table. "I don't understand why you didn't want to go to the hospital and get checked out."

"I ..." Lois drew a blank, unsure of how to explain to her mother why she didn't want to get checked out at the hospital. She couldn't explain to anyone how she had injuries and Clark didn't. She didn't want to draw attention to him being injury free after the explosion and them being trapped in the elevator.

"Well?" Ellen prompted, looking at her expectantly.

"There were a lot of people injured. Clark and I didn't want to take any attention away from the more seriously injured," she said a bit too fast, hoping her mother bought it. Lucy was watching her suspiciously as she spoke. She should have come up with a better lie. Lucy always knew when she wasn't being completely honest.

"I still don't understand how Clark got out of there without a scratch on him and you ended up with glass all over you..." Ellen rambled as she finished cleaning up the remnants of the gauze and glass she'd cleaned up, walking with them into the living room and towards the door.

Lois looked panicked for a moment and began, "Well, you see ..." She looked nervously around the room then began rambling, "Well, when Superman went back for him the glass window was already broken so Superman just flew him through the open hole."

"Uh-huh," Lucy said, not quite believing her. She was hiding something. She just couldn't put her finger on what. She wasn't sure what that look on her sister's face was about but she knew her

sister and she knew the story she'd just spun for their mother was a lie. How had Clark not been hurt? Before she could finish her train of thought a hard knock at the door brought her back to the present.

Ellen glared at the door, "Who could that be?" She got up from the kitchen table and headed to the door. She stopped when she opened the door and saw who was standing on the other side of the door bloody and bruised. "Sam?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jimmy argued adamantly. He sat in an interrogation room with Detective Jenkins and Detective Harris staring him down icily.

"Do you know how many people were injured today...almost killed?" Jenkins asked coolly.

"Yeah, I was one of them!" Jimmy said, pointing to his arm in a brace.

"Then how do you explain the tip we got incriminating you as the arsonist?" Jenkins asked.

"What!?"

Detective Harris seemed to be trying to play the 'good cop' in this interrogation soothed, "If you tell us the truth we can help you. All you got to do is tell us what happened?"

"There's nothing to tell," Jimmy argued. "Where's my lawyer?"

"He's on his way," Jenkins shrugged nonchalantly. "We'll catch him up to speed. Now about the arson..."

"Where's the Chief?" Jimmy asked, peering toward the double paned glass. He couldn't see out of it but he knew someone had to be watching. "I want my lawyer. I have not been Mirandized." He hoped whoever was watching could intervene. He wasn't an expert but he knew from what his dad had taught him years ago that he couldn't be held for questioning without being read his rights.

"You're not under arrest," Harris laughed. "Why would you need to be Mirandized?"

"I'm not under arrest?" Jimmy clarified. "Then I'm free to go." He began to stand up but Jenkins forced him back in the chair hard.

"No, you're not," Jenkins interjected. "Not until you tell us what happened."

"This is illegal!" Jimmy argued.

"So, sue me!" Jenkins laughed.

"Thanks," Sam said cautiously as he took a glass of water from Ellen shakily. Ellen didn't respond. She just glared at him coldly.

Lucy was staring coldly at their father from across the room. She glanced at her sister, meeting her gaze. After her short stint in California in an attempt to work things out with their dad Lucy had come to the realization she would never be a top priority to Sam Lane so she'd left. Lucy had always been protective of their mother so seeing him here, in God knows what kind of trouble... possibly putting their mother in danger wasn't going over well with her.

"What happened?" Lois asked cautiously, realizing no one else was going to address the elephant in the room.

"I did business with the wrong person and now the chickens have come home to roost," Sam began cautiously.

"I'm calling the police..." Ellen said, heading for the phone.

"No! Don't!" Sam grimaced, wincing as he moved his head too far to the left.

Lois stared at her father numbly, struggling to hold back tears as she found her voice, "What did you do?" Her voice was shaky and her lips trembled as she spoke.

"Don't?" Ellen challenged, "Why not?"

Sam looked down shamefully, "I guess this is the moment of truth."

"Truth?" Lucy asked, looking at Sam uncertainly. Lois had a feeling whatever their father was about to tell them had something to do with Menken and Lex. When they'd been at lunch with him that day she'd suspected he was holding something back. She couldn't prove it but she had a gut instinct that something about what he was telling them was off. What exactly she wasn't sure.

"I lied." Sam grimaced. "I knew who the boss was. Apparently, he's taking matters into his own hands now."

"You...*knew*?" Lois asked, trying to get verbal clarification from him.

"What's going on?" Ellen asked confused, "Who is the boss?"

"Lex Luthor," Lucy said bitterly. "The scum of the universe."

Their mother's eyes widened as she began to process everything that they were saying. "How long?"

"Ellen, please, it doesn't matter," he shrugged.

"It matters to me!" Ellen fumed angrily. "This *boss* your daughter has been looking into is a psychopathic killer. I want to know how *long* you *knew*!"

Sam looked at Lois for help but she crossed her arms over her chest, waiting for an answer, "Well?"

He looked at Lucy who shook her head in disgust, "Answer the question, daddy."

"Right before Allie was murdered." Sam admitted shamefully.

Lucy gasped as Lois struggled to find her voice. He knew. All this time he'd known Lex was behind all the crime in Metropolis and he'd said nothing. Did that mean he was in on Allie's murder?

"How could you?" Lois asked shakily. "Allie...He was... *good*."

"I know. I didn't want any part of it after what they did to him," Sam pleaded, "You have to believe me."

"How are we supposed to believe anything you say?" Lucy fumed angrily. "You are no better than Lex Luthor as far as I'm concerned."

"Lucy, you don't mean that," Sam argued.

"Don't I?" Lucy scoffed. "You knew what he was doing and you said nothing. You *knew* he was over there dating Lois and you didn't think to ... Oh, I don't know *warn* someone?"

"How could you, Sam?" Ellen fumed angrily, "How could you stoop so low as to You *knew* that psychopathic, sociopath was a cold-blooded killer and you said *nothing*!?"

"Superman!" Henderson looked up from his coffee in surprise as he walked back toward the station. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm trying to find out what's going on. I just spoke with Mr. White and..."

Henderson shook his head, "I can't get any more involved than I already am."

"What's going on?" Clark asked, folding his arms over his chest. "An innocent and injured kid gets picked up for questioning and no one is able to give any answers as to why."

A group of officers walked by, their conversation grew quiet when they saw Superman standing with Henderson. "Hey, *Detective*!" One of them whistled.

"Don't know whose feathers you ruffled but it's a long fall down," another one jeered.

Henderson looked down at his feet, his jaw tightened as he waited for the officers to leave. Clark glanced back at the officers with a stern glare and they ushered themselves into the coffee shop. "What's going on?" He repeated.

Henderson looked around nervously, "Not here. Find Lois and Clark. Have them meet me at O'Neal Towers at three." With that he rushed past him and headed back toward the police station.

Nothing. No explanation. No excuse. Lois stared at her father numbly, uncertain of what to make of his current disheveled appearance or how to process what had apparently happened. He'd been attacked. That much was certain. Why? Revenge. For what?

They still didn't know. Lex seemed to be coming after everyone she cared about. Panic began to run through her mind. Jimmy. Lucy said she couldn't get a hold of him. What if...

'*Don't go there.*' She glanced back at Lucy, trying to force herself to focus on the problem at hand. At least both her parents and her sister were here safe where she could see them. She couldn't panic. She had to approach this like she would any of her other investigations so they could get to the bottom of this. If she panicked she'd lose perspective and she couldn't afford to do that right now.

'*Focus.*' She told herself.

"What did they do?" Lois asked, cautiously. Her tone was cool and calm and didn't betray the emotions that were threatening to take over her.

Her relationship with her father was complicated to say the least. She loved him. He was her father. He was also the man whose expectations she could never live up to and the man who seemed to never be willing to give her the one thing she wanted, his acceptance and respect.

The fight to end all fights they'd had her senior year of high school had been a doozie. She'd told him she wasn't going to medical school. He told her she was a disappointment and there was no use in her continuing to live there. She agreed and she left. He accused her of betraying the Lane family name by refusing to follow in his footsteps.

That had been the tipping point in their relationship. She had thrown everything back in his face regarding the affairs and the way he treated their mother. How she'd turned to alcoholism when he'd left. She blamed him. He broke her mother and she just wanted to hurt him like he hurt her mother. Unfortunately, it didn't do anything but make him angry. She moved out and decided to shut the door on her relationship with her father. She'd made attempts over the years to try to have a civil relationship for Lucy's sake but he never responded. At Aunt Lynn's funeral he ignored her and walked away. That was the final straw for her.

She planned on closing the book on their relationship until the fiasco at Menken's Gym happened. She'd yet to even speak to her father after moving out until she and Clark had run into him during their investigation into Menken's Gym. It was then that she'd been given a gift. The gift of hope. She'd seen a glimmer of the man from her childhood. A man that cared about his family. She'd had hope. At least she'd had hope until now here he was trampling all over that hope again and again.

"I had an Englishman show up at my practice last night asking about my relationship with Menken. Next thing I know he's pulling out a gun and chasing me down," he shook his head in disgust. "I don't know what to do. I didn't know where to go."

"Well, you're not staying here!" Lucy spat angrily.

"Lucy..." Ellen admonished.

"What? We're all thinking it," Lucy snapped. "You partnered up with a criminal and now he's coming after you. I'm sorry but you have no right to disrupt mom's life because of your choices..." Lucy lectured angrily.

"I can speak for myself thank you," Ellen interjected.

Sam looked at her expectantly, "Ellen?"

"Lucy's right. You can't stay here," Ellen harrumphed angrily. Lucy wore a smug grin until Ellen added, "You can stay in the pool house."

"What's this?" Lex asked looking at the photo surveillance pictures Mrs. Cox had laid on this desk.

"Seems everything is going according to plan, but Henderson still won't turn. The Commissioner has put the demotion into works, but he's still not budging."

Lex took a puff at his cigar, examining the photo of Superman and Henderson, "You just have to know how hard to squeeze Mrs. Cox."

"He was seen talking with Superman earlier today. We have a tracker on him, but he's being careful. Hasn't turned on his phone outside of work. Hasn't spoken with either of those reporters or anyone else involved in the investigation into you."

"He's being smart," Lex said, taking another puff of his cigar.

"Very," Mrs. Cox added.

"Keep tailing him," Lex ordered.

Lois locked the door to her apartment and sighed in relief as she turned to the familiar setting of her home. She'd left as soon as she could. Lucy was staying at mom's to make sure their dad didn't 'take advantage' of mom's good nature. It was a mess. She headed for the bathroom to change out of her clothes from earlier that were torn and stained. She hadn't heard from Clark yet so she assumed he'd been called away. Right now all she wanted to do was change out of these clothes and wash the smell of iodine off of her. She turned the shower on, hoping to wash away the memory of today.

<<"I had an Englishman show up at my practice last night asking about my relationship with Menken. Next thing I know he's pulling out a gun and chasing me down.">>

Nigel. Nigel St. John had to be the Englishman dad was talking about. When she'd questioned Lucy further the description she gave of her attacker matched that of Mrs. Cox. That was two family members Lex had come after in the last two days. She still didn't understand why. She hated that she hadn't been able to put two and two together the night before, but admittedly she had been distracted and Lucy only had a small scratch on her cheek. There was no bruising...at least not then. Was it a warning? Revenge?

<<"I was told we were repairing injured players...then slowly they wanted them stronger and stronger...a, uh, 'Superman' if you will.">>

He had been lying. How involved was he?

<<"All he ever mentioned was a, uh, 'boss' that wanted the changes when I asked about trying to make the fighters do too much too fast with the robotic arms.">>

The brilliant surgeon she'd grown up with so many years ago would never have agreed to do what these men were asking him to do. How had he gotten involved in something like this? She had so many questions. Why had her father, Dr. Sam Lane begun working with criminals?

<<"So, still think my dad is...colorful?" Lois asked with a fake laugh.

"Uh, I'm not sure," he said with a smile. "He's ... Different.">>

The only saving grace from this afternoon was Clark hadn't been there to see how ugly the Lane family could truly be. She hated it. She hated the person she became when she became defensive with her parents. She didn't like who she was and she didn't like who they were. As the eldest she spent most of her childhood trying to shelter Lucy from the ugliness that came out between them, but there was only so much she could do.

Over the years she'd learned Lucy was just as aware of what was going on. She envied her strength. The ability to keep moving forward and love with all her heart and take chance after chance and not worry about the consequences. Lucy often told her she looked up to her but for the life of her she couldn't understand why. In her eyes Lucy was the strong one.

Sure, when it came to nabbing the bad guy she was fearless and took risks but when it came to her personal life she was a mess. Taking a risk and pursuing a relationship with Clark had been hard, scary. It had been worth it. She never regretted that decision. After Clark shared his secret with her she'd vowed to keep it and protect him at all costs. The closer they'd gotten these last few months the harder she'd fallen for him. Lucy had been right initially. She didn't *know* Superman, but she *knew* Clark; the real Clark.

<<"I'm sorry...I don't understand ...I guess I don't want to understand...how anyone can walk away from their family like that."

She gave him a soft smile, "You'd never do that...">>

He had an idealistic view of how a family should be and when he saw someone doing something to hurt their family he spoke out against it. It was part of what made him who he was. He'd grown up in a loving home with two parents that risked everything to make sure he grew up safe and loved. Knowing that and knowing he'd never shared his secret with anyone else had been humbling. Once they'd opened up to one another and admitted their feelings the rest had been easy.

She recalled the night before and every caress and touch. Never before had she ever felt so cherished and loved. Clark had a way about making her feel weak in the knees with just a look in his eyes or a touch of his hand. She'd never felt this way about anyone before. Even though she'd been quoting her drug-induced lines last night when she'd showed up at his apartment to seduce him she meant every word. She just wasn't sure if he knew that or if she was ready to tell him that.

She stepped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around herself as she began to dry off and get dressed in non-torn or bloodied clothing. She finished buttoning her jeans when she heard a knock at the window. She headed to the living room, pulling the curtain back to unlock the window.

"Hi," Clark said stepping into the apartment as he leaned in to kiss her. "I have news."

"Hi," she echoed, leaning in for another kiss. "So do I."

He folded his arms over his chest, glancing at the clock on the wall, "Feel like taking a flight?"

Lex stared at the screen in front of him, "Hold on..." He hit a button, rewinding the footage and playing it back again. He watched as Lois unlocked her window and let Superman into her apartment then Superman leaned in to kiss her and she in turn leaned in to kiss him back.

{ "Hi, I have news."

"Hi. So, do I."

"Feel like taking a flight?" }

"Well, well..." Lex mused, rewinding the footage once more. It wasn't anything as intense as the footage he'd seen from the night before with Lois and Kent but there was definitely something going on between Lois Lane and Superman. "I believe we've found our sacrificial lamb."

He watched as Superman flew Lois Lane out the window, leaving her empty apartment behind. Lex pulled out his phone, "Nigel, get me Toni. We've got some planning to do."

Clark was quiet most of the flight. Lois watched him cautiously, uncertain if she wanted to press him on what his 'news' was. She wanted to tell him about her dad but she really didn't know how. He was Superman but more importantly he was Clark. Would he look at her differently if he found out her dad had been working with Lex? She really didn't want to find out right now.

She wanted to just find the reset button and start this day over again and stay in bed where it was safe and warm and no one had attacked the Planet or Lucy or her dad. They slowly came to a landing a block away from the police station.

"Why are we landing here," Lois asked, confused when Clark landed them in an alley just outside the police station. He quickly spun out of his Superman suit and back into his street clothes.

"Jimmy got brought in for questioning in the arson and destruction of the Daily Planet," Clark explained walking with her toward the entrance of the station.

"What!? That's ridiculous. He would never..." Lois argued adamantly.

"Of course not," Clark said walking up the steps with her, "but

this Detective Jenkins seems adamant on keeping Jimmy for questioning and legally he can hold him for forty eight hours without an attorney..."

"We can't let them do that. Where's Henderson?" Lois asked as she climbed the steps with him.

"That's the thing. Apparently he lost his shield this morning and got demoted," Clark said opening the door to the station.

"What in the name of everything that is holy is going on?" Lois muttered, looking around the station. In the lobby, she spotted Perry sitting in the corner with a woman in her mid-thirties, glasses and long messy blondish brown hair. "Perry!" Lois called, heading toward them.

Perry looked up and waved them over, "I guess Superman told you?"

Lois nodded, throwing a glimpse back at Clark before nodding, "Yeah, somewhat. All he told us was that Jimmy was being held for questioning." She explained, hoping to get some more information from Perry.

The woman nodded, "What they're doing right now is legal because he hasn't been placed under arrest and therefore is not required by law to have his attorney present. They're walking a tight line on the letter of the law."

"I'm sorry, who are you?" Lois asked.

At Lois' confused expression she held out her hand to introduce herself, "Constance Hunter. I'm here to represent James, err...Jimmy."

"Has anyone been able to see him?" Clark asked concerned.

"No," Perry shook his head. "I've tried and the closest I got was being put into an interrogation room for causing a scene."

"It's a setup," Lois said bitterly.

"It's Luthor," Clark corrected. "He's going after everyone that had anything to do with trying to bring him down."

Perry's face grew grim, "Have either of you talked to Jack?"

Lois shook her head but Clark surprised her by saying, "Superman stopped in to check on him this afternoon. He's fine."

"Well, there's some good news," Perry reasoned. "Do either of you have your laptops?"

"At our apartments," Clark said.

"Good," Perry nodded, "Mr. Wayne's wanting to put out an evening edition online and he's wanting us to get everything we were planning to run to him by six." He shook his head, "There's not much you can do here." He handed them a card, "Get your stories and send them into him. See if you can find out anything about what's going on here. I'll stay here until we can get in to see Jimmy."

"We can't just leave him in there like that," Lois said angrily. "He's just a kid. They'll break him."

"He's made of stronger stuff than you think," Perry said.

"He'll be fine. He knows the law. Hopefully he can stay strong until we can get in to see him."

"Call us the minute you find out something," Clark said, wrapping a protective arm around Lois.

Lois looked back at Clark, "Are we seriously leaving him here?"

Clark shook his head, steering her toward the exit as he whispered, "No, but we are seriously leaving the building and then we're gonna meet Henderson because it's almost three. He's the one that tipped Perry off. Hopefully he can tell us what's going on."

Sam groaned, crossing his arms over his chest as he stared at Lucy, "You don't have to stay here," he said, noticing the bored expression on her face.

"Someone's got to stay here to make sure you two don't try to kill each other and considering Lois almost got herself killed today..."

"Again," Ellen interjected sarcastically.

"Yes, again," Lucy rolled her eyes as she finished her statement, "...I figured I'd be the best candidate for the job."

"This is ridiculous!" Sam scoffed, looking between Ellen and Lucy, "I'm not a child. I don't need a chaperone."

"The blood on your shirt and the bruise on your face would say otherwise," Ellen said taking a seat next to Lucy on the couch. "Don't drip any blood on the carpet. I just had it cleaned."

"It's *my* carpet," Sam snapped back.

"Not according to the divorce decree," Ellen said smugly.

Lucy let out a sharp whistle, pulling her parents' attention away from one another. "I thought you two were going to try and get along?"

"Old habits die hard I guess," Ellen sighed, "How about some coffee?"

"I'd love some," Sam said, leaning back in the recliner.

"I was talking to our daughter," Ellen said with a bite in her tone.

"Oh," Sam said self-consciously.

"None for me, thanks," Lucy sighed, glancing at her phone that began to ring, "Just a minute."

Most of the walk over to O'Neal Towers had been quiet. Clark hadn't known what to say. He'd spent most of the morning going over the events in the elevator trying to figure out what had gone wrong. Why hadn't he heard the blast before it had consumed the elevator shaft? Why had he not been holding Lois closer? She'd been hurt. If he'd just held her a little closer, she would have absorbed his aura, and she never would have been hurt. He cast a sideways glance at her, focusing on the cut and scrapes on her forehead near her left eye. "So, how's your head?"

She touched her forehead instinctually, "Fine. It's just a few cuts. Nothing I can't handle." She offered him a half-smile but frowned when she saw he didn't return it. "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing," he gave her a forced reassuring smile, "How did things go at your mom's?" She let out a groan, and he chuckled, "That bad, huh?"

"You could say that," she said, toying with his hand in hers, staring at his hand as she spoke, "Dad showed up."

"You dad?" He asked, surprised, "I thought he was..."

Lois shook her head, "So did I." She shrugged her shoulders, seeming to contemplate how to continue, "Nigel came after him last night. I'm guessing on Lex's orders."

"So, Lucy, your dad... If I'm guessing right, Jimmy..." Clark began ticking the names off on his other hand.

"The Planet," Lois supplied unevenly.

"I get the Planet, possibly Jimmy, and even Lucy, but I'm not sure why he'd come after your dad. I mean, he wasn't involved in the investigation."

Lois lowered her gaze, letting out a barely audible sigh as she breathed, "He lied." He caught her gaze just before she looked away, walking with him in silence for a moment before elaborating on the statement, "He lied about everything. Apparently, he'd been involved. Knew about everything just before they killed Allie." He watched her look at the ground apprehensively as she spoke. Sam had lied. He knew Sam had been lying when he started talking about Luthor, but he'd chopped that up to him trying to overcompensate as he was trying to smooth things over with Lois. He never would have thought...

"How deep do you think he was?" He asked cautiously.

"I don't know," she said, stopping in front of the steps to O'Neal Towers. "To be honest after him and mom started tearing into one another I kinda spaced out." She squinted back tears as she spoke. "I love him. He's my dad you know, but the choices he makes... I hate him for it."

"He seems to squander a lot of his time with questionable people," he began carefully.

"That's the understatement of the century," she sighed. "He's

staying in mom's pool house. Lucy is staying there to make sure they don't try to kill one another."

"I don't envy her," he said, recalling the cool, careful tone Ellen Lane had described her ex-husband in when he'd first met her.

"Me neither," she sighed, crossing her arms over her chest protectively. "Mom wants me to 'fix' it and stop whoever is coming after him, but I have no idea what to do. I have no idea where to even start. Look at everything that's happened today... The Planet, Jimmy, Lucy, my dad..." The tears began to fall as she listed off everyone and every thing that had been attacked in the last twenty-four hours.

"I know," he pulled her to him, wrapping his arms around her protectively as he kissed her head, "I'm sorry, Lois. I'm so sorry." He tightened his arms around her. "I should have..."

She stopped looking up at him in disbelief, "Are you seriously trying to take the blame for what happened this morning?"

"I wasn't paying attention. If I'd heard the blast none of this would have happened..." He began, shaking his head in disapproval as he chastised his actions.

"Are you out of your mind? Clark, we were trapped in an elevator with the blast from the explosion coming right at us. You got us out of there as quickly as you could...and in one piece," she squeezed his hand, leaning in to kiss him as she traced his hardened jawline with her other hand.

"You got hurt," Clark said grimly.

"Barely," she corrected, tilting his chin to look at her. "Look at me," he gave her a sorrowful look, and she moved her hands so that both of them were cradling his anguished face. "You did everything you could. You cannot be everywhere at once, and you cannot do everything at once."

She was right. It was the same thing his parents told him over and over for years. It was basically the same thing she'd told him months ago when he'd almost given up on being Superman. It just didn't feel the same to him. Things were different now. "I know that," he sulked, lowering his gaze once more.

"Then what's the problem?" Lois asked, moving her right hand to rest on his chest as she fingered the back of his neck with her other hand.

He sighed, moving his hand to cover hers as she stroked his chest softly. "You were hurt. I was carrying you in my arms. If I had just..."

"What?" Lois asked, still not understanding what he was trying to get at.

He sighed, realizing she wasn't understanding. He glanced around the semi-crowded street, lowering his head as he realized this wasn't the place for this conversation. Thankfully she seemed to sense his withdraw and nodded, "Later?"

"Later," he repeated, fingering her hair behind her ear as he traced the outline of her jawline with his hand.

She leaned up to kiss him before pulling away, "Come on, let's see what information we can squeeze out of Henderson on this supposed case they've got on Jimmy."

"What's wrong, kid?" Jenkins kicked the table and Jimmy jumped back slightly. "Getting tired?"

"All you got to do is tell us what you did," Harris added snidely, pointing to the pad and pen on the table. "This'll all be over then."

"This is illegal as hell," Jimmy snapped back angrily. "I'm not saying or doing anything without my lawyer."

Jenkins shrugged, "Too bad." He got up from the table and headed for the door, giving Harris a look before he left. Jimmy eyed Harris warily. He knew what was coming. Bad Cop. Badder Cop. He braced himself as Harris' fist came in contact with his cheek, knocking him back half a foot as he fell against the table.

"Bill?" Lois looked at the man in front of her and Clark in surprise. He wore an oversized trenchcoat and hat, unrecognizable sunglasses with metallic frames and the expression on his face was something she'd never seen before; fear. He shook his head, motioning for them to follow.

They followed him into the elevator. She opened her mouth to speak, but he shook his head, motioning to the video surveillance in the elevator. Once they arrived on the seventh floor, He motioned toward a room at the end of the hall, and they followed in silence. Once inside they saw it was an empty office space of what used to be cubicles.

Lois opened her mouth to speak after he closed the door, but he held up his hand, pulling out a small silver device with an array of buttons on it. He pressed a blue button, and she felt Clark's grip on her tighten slightly before relaxing again.

"Soundproof device I got from one of the newest members at S.T.A.R. Labs," Henderson explained.

"Thanks for the warning," Clark said dryly.

"Knocks out any surveillance equipment within a five-foot radius. With everything going on we can't be too careful," Henderson explained.

"What is going on?" Lois asked.

"Where do you want me to begin? The part where I magically got demoted this morning or where two officers that have never taken the detective's exam magically made detective overnight?" He shook his head in disgust, "By the way, one of those officers is the same one that was trying to book your sister last night. From what she was saying it..."

"It was a set-up," Lois nodded, "I know. She told me what happened."

"It's Luthor," Clark said grimly. "He's going after everyone."

"He's more than going after them. He's annihilating them."

They're railroaded Jimmy for this explosion at the Planet. Won't let anyone in the room with him."

"They can't do that," Lois argued.

"Who's going to stop them, Lois?" Henderson barked. "I told you before you started all of this... He's got every politician, judge, and senator in his pocket. He can do whatever the hell he wants."

"There's got to be something we can do," Clark argued. "He can't just..."

"Can't just what?" Henderson asked. "Spit on the Constitution and railroad an innocent man for a crime he probably committed?" He looked around the room in anger, "Newsflash! He has!"

"He's going after witnesses," Clark said. "Toni Taylor's break out of prison was probably orchestrated by him. She had a deal to get out. There's no way she..."

"Just about everyone I had statements from has vanished," Henderson said bitterly. "The evidence has disappeared. I've got nothing."

"What about Miranda?" Lois asked. "She said she had backups of backups of the tapes she turned over."

"That would be great if I knew where to find her," Henderson scoffed. "She's in the witness protection program. Only the Feds know where she is and there's no way they'd tell me after what's happened in the last twenty-four hours," he sighed, "We've got nothing... Well, nothing but Jack."

"No," Clark shook his head adamantly, "No way."

"He's all we've got," Henderson shrugged, "Unless you've got any better ideas."

"We have no way of keeping him safe," Lois interjected. "You said yourself even the FBI wouldn't trust the Metropolis P.D. right now."

"What am I supposed to do then?" Henderson asked, "There is no way I'm letting that two faced deranged sociopath get away with ruining my life like this...let alone everyone else's."

"No one is saying that Bill," Lois sighed, crossing her arms

over her chest.

"We don't want to see him get away with this any more than you do," Clark reassured, "Believe me, but we're not going to allow him access to possibly the only witness that could help put him away."

"Not the only witness," Lois corrected. At his confused look she shrugged, "We still have Miranda...maybe Toni."

"No one's been able to find Toni Taylor anywhere," Bill said with a grunt, pulling out a print out from his jacket, "...and this just came on the wire."

Clark took the print out from him and read it, "Governor pardon?"

Lois took the paper from him, "The Governor's Office of New Troy is pleased to offer a pardon for all crimes committed by Ms. Toni Elizabeth Taylor from the dates of January 11th 1991 to December 31st of 1994. Any crimes committed after said date will be treated as separate crimes and are not covered by this pardon..." She scrunched up her nose as she skimmed the letter, "I don't understand. It's basically a blanket pardon for the rest of the year."

"Exactly," Henderson said gruffly. "She's basically got carte blanche to do whatever she wants for the rest of the year without repercussions."

"This has Luthor written all over it," Clark said in disgust. "We've got to do something."

"I'm open to ideas," Henderson said, crossing his arms over his chest, "You won't let me use Jack. What are my options?"

"Not as the only witness," Lois corrected.

"Find me another witness then," Henderson said exasperatedly. "Surely the handful of people we found weren't the only ones that saw or heard something illegal Lex Luthor has done over the years. There has to be someone out there willing to do the right thing and stop him." Lois exchanged a look with Clark for a moment, and Henderson looked at her accusingly, "You know someone."

"It's not that simple," Lois began slowly.

"Answer the question," Henderson pressed. "You know someone that could testify...yes or no?"

Lois glanced at Clark pleadingly and he nodded, "We know someone he's trying to come after, but we're not willing to give you any more information unless we have a hundred percent guarantee of this person's safety."

"I can't give you that," Henderson said grimly.

"Then we can't give you a name," Lois replied defiantly. "He needs protection."

"Right now Luthor's got his thumb in every government official of New Troy. The only way you're going to be guaranteed protection is for you to go to the Feds."

"We don't have anything on him for federal charges," Clark argued. "How are we supposed to get the FBI involved?"

Henderson handed them two small metal devices, identical to the one he'd used for sound-proofing the room. "For your protection. Anytime you discuss the case. Turn it on. The bugs we found at your apartments were just the beginning. There's no telling how deep the surveillance is. If you find the right witness and combine it with what we had, we can probably get RICO charges brought against him."

"Racketeering?" Lois asked in disbelief.

Henderson shook his head, "You've been looking at Luthor for a few months. I've been looking at him for years. You have no idea how dirty he is."

"Isn't there anyone at the DA's office we can trust?" Clark asked, running a hand through his hair. "Anyone that Luthor may not have gotten to?"

"There is someone. New ADA just transferred in a month ago from Washington," Henderson began.

"Great!" Lois cheered enthusiastically, "Talk to her. See if she

can be trusted and let's see what we can do about getting Jimmy out and start piecing this case back together."

"I guess I don't have anything left to lose." Henderson pointed to the blue button on the device, "This turns the sound-proofing on and off. If you have any questions, you can contact Dr. Bernard Klein at S.T.A.R. Labs. He's the one that did the testing on those listening devices we found in your apartment. Do not under any circumstances discuss anything about this case in public." With that, he turned the device off and muttered, "I'll be in touch."

"Pheromones," Lex ticked off his hand as he scanned through his research on the man of steel, "Nightfall."

"Sir?" Nigel called from the entry way, watching as Lex paced in front of his desk with papers scattered about.

"Not now, Nigel," Lex said, pointing at the screen on the wall frozen with the image of Lois kissing Superman at her apartment. "We're missing something..."

"An affair?" Nigel suggested, mildly annoyed at Lex for not seeing the obvious.

"No, it doesn't fit," Lex said, shaking his head in defiance.

"Why Kent when she obviously can have Superman? It doesn't fit."

"Sometimes the matters of the heart are complicated...or, so I'm told," Nigel mused.

"No, the time I spent with her...I knew her. She would never do that. Where's that file on Lois Lane?" He asked.

Nigel pulled out the file from the corner of the desk, "Here, sir."

"Lucy?" Lois looked around, examining her and Clark's surroundings at O'Neal Towers as they headed out the double doors, hand-in-hand.

"Yeah?" Lucy spoke into the phone.

"How's it going? They haven't killed each other yet, have they?" Lois asked half-joking. Clark glanced at her with a questioning look, and she shook her head giving him a smile.

"No, just the usual digs and icy shoulders," Lucy said with a sigh, "What's up? Have you heard anything from Jimmy?"

"Luce, the police picked him up," Lois said hoarsely.

"What?" Lucy's voice echoed from the other line.

"I don't know what's going on, but we're doing everything we can to try and get him out..." Lois reassured.

"Where is he?" Lucy asked. "Has he been arrested?"

"No, they're too smart for that," Lois sighed, glancing back at Clark as they stepped outside. "I'm on my way back over there with Clark. We'll explain everything when we get there."

"But..." Lucy began to argue.

"See you in a few," she said before hanging up.

A young blonde sat at the desk in front of him, pencil in her mouth as her nose scrunched up, looking at the computer screen in front of her in disgust. This was the new ADA? Henderson sighed, slipping his hand into his pocket to turn on the sound-proofing device before he closed the door behind him.

She removed then pencil from her mouth and set it on the desk, turning to face him, "Can I help you?"

"I hope so," he said taking a seat across from her. He let out a long breath, folding his hands in front of him nervously as he lowered his head in his hands.

"I'm not a mind-reader," she said, tapping her fingers on her desk impatiently.

"Neither am I," he said gruffly looking up at her warily.

"O-kay," she leaned back in her chair for a moment, "How about we start with introductions?"

"That's probably not a good idea," Henderson said shaking his head.

"Excuse me?" She scoffed in disbelief.

"I need to know if I can trust you first," he explained.
 "You need to know if you can trust me?" She scoffed, "You're the one that came into my office. If you can't trust me then what are you doing here?"

"I know, I know," he held his hands up, trying to motion for her to calm down as he spoke, "I'm confusing the hell out of you, but I just need to know I can trust you before I show all my cards."

"Fine," she relented, "Mr. Whatever-Your-Name-Is, what do you want?"

"You transferred to Metropolis from D.C. about a month ago. I need to know why," he said, meeting her gaze as he folded his hands on his lap.

"How is that any of your concern?" She asked, leaning forward, folding her hands on her desk.

"I need to know I can trust you."

"You said that already," she said dryly, "but you've yet to give me any reason as to why I should trust you."

"I know," he sighed, raking a hand through his hair, "Just humor me for a minute will you?" She seemed to be contemplating her options for the moment. He wasn't sure what to expect. Here he was a complete stranger stepping into her office with no name or explanation asking personal questions and asking her to trust him when he'd yet to give her any reason to... He wouldn't blame her if she kicked him out of her office, but she didn't.

Curiosity seemed to get the better of her, and she sighed, "I left D.C. because a case I'd been following lead me here."

"What case?" He asked.

"That's confidential," she said coolly.

He nodded, "Okay, well can I ask if it has to do with Lex Luthor?" He noticed her eyes widen ever so slightly at the mention of Luthor's name and he smiled, "I guess I've got my answer." He leaned forward, folding his hands once more as he noticed her look away nervously. "Who are you working for?"

"What makes you think I'm working for someone?" She asked, trying to hide the strain in her voice unsuccessfully.

"No ADA is going to give up a job in Washington D.C. for what appears to be a step down willingly. You're getting something out of it," he pressed.

"I'm not getting anything out of this but the luxury of putting criminals behind bars," she snapped back irritably. The fire in her eyes reminded him a lot of Lois Lane when she got fired up about a case he refused to comment on.

"All criminals or just a chosen few?" He pressed.

She gave him an insulted look before scoffing, "Who do you think you are? I took an oath!"

"So did the officers sitting downtown right now trying to railroad an innocent man for a crime he didn't commit." He shot back vehemently, "Answer the question. Who are you working for?"

"Who's being railroaded?" She asked, trying to change the subject.

"Answer the question," he repeated.

"You first," she shot back.

"I asked you first."

"Why should I trust you?" She asked, meeting his gaze as a scowl crossed her face.

"Give me a reason to trust you, and I'll give you plenty of reasons to trust me."

"I'm going to need more than that." She shook her head.

His jaw tightened, and he stood up, "Very well," Heading for the door. "It was nice talking to you."

"Wait!" She stopped him as he turned to leave.

"Yes?" He asked.

"Does your reason for not trusting me, have anything to do with the case the DA just buried?" she asked.

"Maybe," he began slowly.

"Then it sounds like we have a common enemy," she said, pulling out a thin folder and placing it on her desk.

He looked at it curiously, and she shook her head, "I need a name."

He reclaimed his seat, "The name's Bill. Bill Henderson."

"Mayson Drake," she smiled back at him.

"What is this?" He asked, looking at the folder.

"The location of the F.B.I's current pending cases against Lex Luthor," she replied with a smile.

"You're with the F.B.I.?" He asked, intrigued.

"Contract," she shrugged, "I'm not an agent or anything, but I take on their cases in areas where the civil servants are...less motivated to put the bad guys away."

"That would fit Metropolis," he said dryly.

"I'm sorry about what happened to your case," she began,

"You said something about someone being railroaded..."

"Olsen." He nodded, "James Olsen."

"Your daughter moved all the way across the country to spend time with you...forgetting the last *fifteen years* of emotional abandonment and betrayal..." Ellen accused angrily as Lucy stepped back into the house numbly.

"For the love of...Ellen, it's this kind of closed-mindedness that drove us apart in the first place. You can't let the past stay where it belongs...in the *past*!" Sam shot back angrily.

"You left us! You left medicine! For what? Crackpot schemes with gangsters that want to kill you?" Ellen fumed angrily nearly in tears.

"You are just like Lois. You can't let anything go!" Sam fumed. "It is not a crackpot scheme! It is a medical miracle and ..."

Lucy couldn't take the arguing anymore, lowering herself to the floor then curled herself into the corner, covering her ears as she tried to block out the fighting. Jimmy was in danger. Lois said they were coming after him. Why would anyone want to hurt Jimmy? He was the nicest person she knew. He cared...really cared about everyone and was always there for his friends. The thought that someone might try to...

"Sam! *Shut up!!!*" Ellen growled angrily, wrapping a protective arm around Lucy as she cried. "Look what you've done..."

"*Me!*?" He scoffed, looking at her in disbelief, "I'm not the one that..." Ellen shot him a glare, and he stopped.

"I'm sorry, honey. We just won't talk to each other anymore. Please don't cry," Ellen pleaded, cradling Lucy as she continued to cry.

"It's not that," Lucy cried.

"Then what is it?" Ellen asked.

"Jimmy..." She squeaked out.

"Jimmy?" Ellen asked, not quite understanding.

"A boyfriend?" Sam asked. "Did he break your heart? Lucy, I've told you before not to waste your time with those..."

"No! It's nothing like that..." She shook her head adamantly.

"Lo-Lois called. He got picked up by the puh-police. They're trying to pin the e-explosion on h-him," she stammered in between tears.

Ellen's eyes narrowed, "he didn't?"

"No, of course not!" Lucy argued.

"Then there's nothing to worry about," Ellen reassured.

"Everything will be fine."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Sam argued.

"You're not helping," Ellen said in between gritted teeth.

"I'm just being honest," Sam shot back.

"There's a first," Ellen fumed angrily.

A sonic boom and a gust of wind filled the room. They all looked toward the bay window in the living room to see Superman standing in the middle of the room with Lois. "Superman?" Lucy

sprung to her feet as she began pouncing on him with question after question, pacing around him as she spoke. “Has there been any news? You’re going to help Jimmy right?”

“Calm down,” Lois said, wrapping a protective arm around her.

“I’m doing everything I can, Ms. Lane,” he reassured with a smile. “Unfortunately there’s not much I can do at this point.”

“Oh,” Lucy said, pulling away from Lois slightly. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m actually here to talk to you, Dr. Lane,” Superman took a few steps toward Sam.

“Me?” He asked, uncertainly.

“I understand your life was threatened,” Superman began cautiously.

“Yes, that’s correct,” he said grimly, motioning to the bruises and cuts on his face.

“I also understand you were working *with* the boss, Lex Luthor?” Superman pressed.

“There’s more to the story,” Sam said shamefully, “much more.”

“We’ve got time,” Superman said, crossing his arms over his chest, looking at him expectantly.

“Yes, Sam, let’s see you lie your way out of this one,” Ellen said snidely.

“*Mother!*” Lois admonished.

“No, Lois, your mother’s right,” Sam began cautiously. “I can’t keep lying.” He motioned toward the sofa, “You’d better sit down. This will take a little while.”

Henderson placed the silver device on Mayson’s desk, “What is that?” She asked.

“Something one of the scientists rigged up at S.T.A.R. Labs. It knocks out listening devices within a five-mile radius,” he explained.

Mayson cocked an eyebrow at him in disbelief, “Don’t you think that’s getting a little too ‘conspiracy theory?’ I mean I know Lex Luthor has his hand in a lot of pies, but...”

“How much of that case file did you read before it got buried?” He asked.

“Enough,” she shrugged.

“What about the part where he placed video and audio surveillance equipment in both the apartments and workplace of two well-known reporters to keep track of their investigation into him. I’ve had to remove devices at least three times in the last month.”

Mayson looked around the room warily, tugging her suit jacket closed nervously, “That’s ...sick.”

“Imagine someone watching your every move...in the privacy of your own home. That’s what this man is capable of. I wouldn’t put it past him to do the same to others,” he pressed.

“How do we stop him?” Mayson asked, narrowing her eyes at him. “I’ve got bits and pieces but nothing near what I need to put him away for good.”

“I thought I had him...Well, we thought we did,” he sighed.

“We?” She asked quizzically.

“I was working with Lois Lane and Clark Kent of the Daily Planet to bring him down. Kent’s file on Luthor and his theories was almost as big as mine,” Henderson explained.

“You have a file?” She asked.

“Several,” he grinned back at her. “You show me yours I’ll show you mine.”

“As you girls know I’ve always been big on testing the boundaries of medicine,” Sam began cautiously. He glanced over at the stoic superhero who was watching him with a stern look on his face. It unnerved him to see the normally cheerful and friendly superhero he’d met before so ...distant.

Lucy nodded, “That’s the understatement of the century.”

“Well, I was approached to do some research by LexLabs right before ...” He looked down at his hands, unable to continue.

“Right before Allie was murdered?” Ellen supplied for him in an even tone.

“Yes,” he let out a long breath.

“Who approached you?” Superman asked.

“Lex Luthor himself,” Sam said evenly, “I was flattered he’d taken the time to speak with me. Thought it made me someone important.”

Lois and Lucy exchanged a look but didn’t say anything.

“What did he want?” Superman asked, pacing in front of him.

“You,” he said coolly.

“Pardon?” Superman asked, not understanding.

“Your powers, your strength...He wanted me to make an army of Super-men. Didn’t tell me how or why. That’s how it all got started.”

“Yes, I’m familiar with the robotic arms,” Superman said, rubbing his chin to illustrate his memory of the fight he’d gotten into with one of the super-powered boxers.

“Well, what I didn’t tell anyone was there were plans to go further,” Sam said shamefully.

“What do you mean by further?” Lois asked, trying to get him to elaborate.

“The robotic chip I’ve been working on?” He prompted.

“You said it was supposed to strengthen dead nerves for paralytic patients,” Lucy said, accusingly.

“It did. It does,” he said firmly.

“But?” Superman prompted.

“But it also gives super-strength to the muscles and the nerves,” he said shamefully.

“Has it been tested?” Lois asked.

“Not on humans, but the tests we ran on the rats came back with flying colors. I’m afraid that’s what he’s after,” he began cautiously. “If he gets his hands on that chip...”

“He’ll have an army of super-powered criminals at his disposal,” Superman finished for him.

“Did Clark say what this was about?” Jonathan asked, setting a pitcher of iced tea on the dining table as Martha set the table.

She shook her head, “Just that something had happened and he needed our help,” she pointed to the fresh baked cookies on the counter, “Hand me that tray.”

Jonathan reached over and handed her the long platter of fresh baked chocolate chip cookies and grinned, “My favorite.”

“Clark’s too,” she let out a long sigh, “Something’s wrong. I could hear it in his tone.”

Bill Henderson set a small diskette on Mayson’s desk before leaning back in his chair, “Lex Luthor has been running crime in Metropolis like his own private chess game for years. I haven’t been able to build enough of a case against him until now...”

Mayson sighed as she pointed out, “Until it fell apart.”

“It doesn’t make sense. I had him. I had him right where I wanted him, and he just slipped out of my grasp at the last moment,” he fumed, shaking his head.

Mayson pulled out her own diskette, pushing it toward Bill Henderson. “I’ve been following Mr. Luthor since the double murder of his parents...convenient that the murder happened just as Lex was old enough to take over LuthorCorp at the age of seventeen, don’t you think?” Bill took the diskette she handed him, and she continued, “Lex Luthor’s criminal organization is bigger than the Falcone and Maroni family crime in Gotham and more powerful than the international crime organization, Intergang.”

Henderson’s eyebrows rose, “If he’s that much of a threat then why hasn’t anyone done anything about it until now?”

Mayson leaned back in her chair, turning her chair from side to side as she looked at him with an amused expression, "You of all people should know the answer to that one."

"His connections?" Henderson guessed.

Mayson nodded, "Rumor in the DA's office is there was a quick change of power at the Metropolis P.D."

"You could say that," Henderson sighed, "There are a lot of changes that came through all at once," he let out a gruff snort, "There are leaks in the department...leaks that are connected to Luthor. Innocent people are being hurt, and I don't know how to stop him by myself."

"Then I guess you came to the right place," Mayson tapped her hand on her desk, "If you have a leak in the department then you have a problem..."

"Can you help me?" Henderson asked cautiously.

Outside Ellen Lane's prestigious town home Lois stood outside, watching as Clark, still donning his Superman suit paced the backyard. The idea he'd proposed was so ludicrous she wasn't sure she'd heard him right. "I am *not* going into hiding!"

He let out a frustrated sigh, "We don't have a choice!"

"Yes, we do. You can help me figure out how Lex was able to stop those charges from being brought against him and how he was able to railroad Jimmy in such a short amount of time..."

"That is not going to happen."

"Excuse me?" She scoffed, "You wanted me to hide my father on your parents' farm..." She hissed in a hushed whisper. "...which I managed to convince him of..."

Clark folded his arms over his chest, nodding. "I don't know what else to do. You heard Henderson. The Metropolis P.D. has been compromised. Nigel is already on his tail."

"Fine! But that doesn't mean that *I* have to..." Lois argued.

"No? Every time we turn around he's planting more and more cameras and surveillance equipment. Who knows if we've gotten them all. He's got connections in the police department. It's not safe for you to be here in Metropolis."

"I am not going to just run for cover and hide. He is coming after my family!" She fumed angrily.

"Don't you think I know that?" He asked in a hushed whisper, "I am just trying to do what I can to keep everyone safe... including you."

"You cannot just hide me away every time there is a threat, Cl..." She caught herself and recovered quickly, "Su-Superman. If that were the case, then none of our investigations would ever get solved."

"There are no more investigations, Lois. This is serious! The Planet just got blown to smithereens. You and I are out of jobs..."

"Don't you think I know that?" She hissed angrily. "I was there!" He grew quiet, and she continued, "Please don't make me disappear," she said, trying to reflect a calm she didn't feel at the moment.

"The last time..."

"He sent a professional killer after my father," she said coldly. "I won't panic. Just please don't try to hide me away," she said, placing a hand on his arms that were crossed over his chest.

"Lois, please don't make my job any harder than it has to be," he pleaded with her, glancing down at her hands then meeting her gaze, "You and I both know what he's capable of." He moved to cup her cheek, "I'm just trying to keep you safe."

"How do you expect to stop him if..."

"I don't know," he sighed. "I just know that you...staying here in Metropolis is dangerous right now," he whispered, leaning in to give her a peck on the forehead.

"This is my home."

"I know," he sighed, "but if you don't do this..."

"I can handle myself," she argued flatly.

"What about your sister? Or your mom? Or Jimmy? Lois, he's

not just coming after you and me anymore. He's coming after everyone." At the mention of everyone, Lex could possibly come after she felt herself waver more and more. She hated the idea of going into hiding, but she wanted to keep her family safe. He looked around the quiet street, then back at her, "No one is safe here, Lois."

"You don't know that," She argued.

"No, I don't, but I'm not willing to take the risk of something happening to you," he said, taking a step toward her. "Lois..." He placed a hand on her arm, rubbing it up and down, "Your dad needs protection I can't offer ...and do my job as Superman right now."

"I know that," she said shakily, "He knows that. We all know that." She grew thoughtful for a moment then let out a dry laugh, "My parents first meeting your parents...on the lamb? Oy that won't be awkward at all." She huffed, running a hand through her hair.

"Come on; you know mom and dad will help. They're not going to mind how they meet them," he pointed out.

Lois sighed giving him a tight smile, "...but my mother will."

He gave her an amused smile before continuing in a solemn tone, "I don't know what else to do, Lois. If they stay in Metropolis much longer..." Clark let out a long sigh. "It's for everyone's safety."

"I'm not running," she repeated.

"How about a flight?" He offered, scooping her into his arms.

"Don't you *dare!*" She warned as he took off into the sky.

Lex sat in front of his wall of monitors, staring intently at the screens as Nigel updated him on the latest news, "It seems Dr. Lane has turned. He was caught trying to negotiate a deal with the ADA of Oakland. I questioned him with Fuentes, but he was lying through his teeth. Fuentes was put on him, but we lost him at Oakland International when he was boarding his flight. Rather than cause a scene our man updated me on the progress and has arranged transportation back to Metropolis."

"What about the Robotic Arm chip?" Lex asked, spinning in his chair. "Did we ever find it?"

"No," Nigel shook his head. "Our surveillance at Ms. Lane's showed no sign of him."

"He has more than one daughter," Lex reminded him. "Keep tailing him."

"Didn't the other Ms. Lane end up in custody?" Nigel asked confused.

"There was a...complication with that," Lex said in disgust. "Seems our arrangement was interrupted by a Bill Henderson."

"Ah, yes, the one behind the investigation on you," Nigel nodded, recalling the name.

"And the most recent Detective at Metropolis P.D.," Lex mused with a smile as he took a puff from his cigar.

"Yes, the demotion went through this morning. Detective Henderson will find his career circling the drain pool the more he tries to pursue this case against you."

"Excellent," Lex said, tapping his hand against the desk, "When do you think it'll be safe to move above ground? I enjoy this game of cat and mouse but spending my time with the dead isn't the best for my complexion."

Nigel laughed, "What about your not wanting to be a humanitarian?"

"We all have a part we must play," Lex took another puff of his cigar, "Besides I can't give my investigation into Superman the proper attention from down here. Any sign of weakness on my part will give Falcone and his thugs an invitation to move in..."

"...Or Intergang," Nigel interjected.

Lex scoffed, "Child's play. An international criminal organization run out of a department store? At least I have the brains to not use the same company in the same place twice."

“Our international contacts are still unable to push them out though,” Nigel pointed out.

“Our international contacts have gone soft then,” Lex sighed, “I can’t afford to be viewed as weak. Make it happen.”

“Very well,” Nigel sighed, “Ms. Taylor is taking care of the last witness. Then you should be safe to return. Just be sure to keep your head clear this time. You can’t afford a distraction like Lois Lane again.”

“Oh, believe me, I have my own plans for Ms. Lane, and I am anything but distracted,” Lex promised.

The sound of the sonic boom, echoing in the skies resonated around the old country farmhouse could be heard in the distance. Martha looked back and forth between her guests, “Well, I don’t know about you, but coffee sure does sound great...”

Sam Lane nodded, looking between Lucy Lane and the Kents, casting a wary look toward Ellen who was refusing to speak to anyone at the moment. Lucy looked around the farmhouse then back at the Kents, “I thought Superman said he was going to bring Lois and Clark too...”

Jonathan interjected eagerly, “I’m sure he’s on his way. Come on; they won’t be too long.” He gestured to the table, “Uh, Martha just made a batch of her famous chocolate chip cookies if anyone’s interested?”

“Chocolate is good,” Lucy nodded with a smile. She took a seat at the table. Sam and Ellen remained standing, staring one another down in an uncomfortable silence.

The back door opened and they all turned to see Clark in the doorway in jeans and a t-shirt, with a very irritated Lois Lane, “Uh, hi.”

Lois cast an annoyed look at Clark before pasting on a smile, “Hi,” she said, taking a seat next to Lucy.

“Where’s Superman? Isn’t he going to come in?” Lucy asked in concern.

“Uh, he, uh, had to fly...” Clark said hurriedly, “He said he’d be back to check in later.”

“I still don’t understand why we have to go on the lamb in the first place,” Ellen snorted, looking accusingly at Sam Lane. “How is it that after fifteen years of being divorced and you’re still finding ways to mess with my life?”

“Mom...” Lucy gave her a warning tone, “don’t start.” Jonathan took a seat across from her and Lois, handing her a cup of coffee which she took graciously.

Ellen snorted, “Of course, take his side...like always.” Lucy hung her head, and Lois squeezed her shoulder for support.

“Are those chocolate chip?” Lois asked, trying to steer the conversation back to something neutral as Clark took a seat next to her, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. She gave him an irritated glare then turned her attention back to the Kents. Martha gave Jonathan an amused look before smiling.

“Yes!” Martha handed her the plate of cookies, “Uh, Sam? Ellen?”

Sam smiled, deciding to take the offered treat. He took a seat at the table as Ellen begrudgingly took a seat at the other end. “Oh, boy...” Clark muttered under his breath as they fell into an uncomfortable silence.

“It was him. I know it was him, Lucius,” Bruce said angrily, “That cocky son of a...” Lucius Fox cleared his throat, giving Bruce a warning glare, “Sorry.”

“Mr. Wayne, you knew what you were getting yourself into when you took this on,” Lucius reminded him.

“He was coming after Wayne Enterprises, so I wanted to come after him,” Bruce shook his head in disgust, “All those people...”

“I saw the news,” Lucius said grimly, looking around his abandoned office.

Bruce wagged his fist in the air, “I underestimated him. He

blew the place to smithereens. I’ve got my people working on pushing the online edition out but ...”

“...but it’s still not the same,” Lucius nodded, “You can’t bring a knife to a gun fight, Mr. Wayne.”

“I’m starting to see that. I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s like all of a sudden the whole city has this ...darkness over it...a sickness like I’ve never seen before. Corruption on every level. Cops, prosecutors, detectives, lawyers, and who knows what else...”

“Like Gotham?” Lucius asked with an amused expression.

Bruce shook his head, “No, this is different. Gotham has always been dark...sick. This darkness that fell over Metropolis... it’s different.” He let out a long sigh, “I might be out of my depth here...or Bruce Wayne is rather. Falcone and his thugs...child’s play compared to what’s going on in Metropolis right now.”

“What do you want to do about it?” Lucius asked.

Bruce let out a long sigh, “Play hard ball,” he noted with a smile. “I’ve finished up the last of those signatures you needed. Lex Luthor isn’t going to go easily or quietly. The only way to fight someone like that is to meet every punch he throws with one of my own. Have we set up an office for Wayne Enterprises in Metropolis yet?”

“Just closed the deal an hour ago,” Lucius explained, “Sir, you just got back. Are you sure you want to take this on? Metropolis has it’s own vigilante...”

“No, they have an idealistic superhero that stands for a symbol of hope. If I’m going to fight Luthor, I might have to become that vigilante to stop him.”

“You’ll need help,” Lucius pointed out.

“I have you,” Bruce pointed out.

“As acting CEO of Wayne Enterprises I can’t go on a sabbatical while you go toe to toe with the world’s most notorious crime boss, can I?” Lucius pointed out.

“You have a point, Lucius,” Bruce sighed, “I really hate it when you do that.”

“I’m guessing you’ll need to pack light?” Lucius asked, standing up from his desk to walk toward the bookcase behind him. He hit the hidden button on the top shelf, and a hidden doorway opened up. Bruce followed him down the narrow staircase to a secluded hallway that lead them to a small elevator. “Going down.”

He pressed the button to the elevator and stepped on with Bruce right by him. “I have a new project I’ve been working on...”

“R&D?” Bruce asked.

“Applied Science Division,” Lucius corrected.

“Ah,” they arrived in the basement of Wayne Enterprises where the bat-themed inventions of Lucius’ had found a home. “Love what you’ve done with the place.”

Lucius pulled out a remote from his pocket and hit a green button. A cabinet opened up emitting an ultraviolet light from it, revealing a tall black armored suit. “Hardened-kevlar plates on a titanium-dipped fiber tri-weave for flexibility...”

Bruce touched the armband on the suit, examining the additions Lucius had made to it, “Hopefully Batman won’t have to make any appearances while I’m in Metropolis...”

“Well, you’ll be in good company,” Lucius smiled back at him, pointing at the gauntlet Bruce was toying with, “You’ll be lighter, faster, more agile...”

Bruce flinched as the armband expanded and several blades fired in a spiral motion, heading toward Lucius’ ear, narrowly missing him by a few inches as they wedged themselves into a nearby wall. “Ooops,” Bruce apologized with a smile.

Lucius looked at him with a long sigh, “Perhaps you should read the instructions first?”

“Sorry,” Bruce smiled, “Nice feature.”

“Now, the lighter weight and more agility given to you in this

new suit comes with a trade-off I'm afraid," Lucius continued.

"Meaning?" Bruce asked concerned.

"Just don't get into any dog fights and you should be okay."

Lucius explained, "The spread of the plates gives you weak spots."

Bruce sighed with an amused smile, "Well, we wouldn't want things getting too easy, would we?"

"He's quiet," Martha said, looking out the window toward the barn where Clark and Jonathan had disappeared to. Sam and Ellen had gone into town with Lucy to get some supplies for dinner, leaving Lois and Martha alone in the dining room. "He's hardly said anything since he got here."

Lois followed her gaze toward the front door, "Probably got a lot on his mind," she said bitterly.

"You both do," Martha said, placing a hand over Lois'.

Lois nodded, "I've never seen him like this before. It was horrible and awful, and I'm so thankful there were no fatalities but...He had no right to..."

Martha shook her head and interrupted gently, "One thing you have to learn about Clark is no matter how many people he saves or how much he does he will always feel like it isn't enough. I don't approve of his methods, but I do know he's just trying to keep you safe."

"When we were trapped in that elevator ... I've never seen him so scared," Lois murmured.

"He probably realized what was happening and was afraid he wasn't going to be able to get out of there in time," Martha suggested. "The important thing is you're all right, both of you. The Planet is just a building. It can be replaced but the people ... That's what makes the Daily Planet so unique. You'll rebuild."

"I hope so," Lois said growing thoughtful, "Thank you for helping hide my parents. I don't know what I'd do if..."

"It's no problem. They're welcome to say as long as they need," Martha interjected. "When are you heading back to Metropolis?"

Lois shrugged, "That's an excellent question."

Jonathan set a tree trunk up for Clark to chop and watched in amazement as splinters flew through the air as Clark's fist came in contact with the wood. The expression on his son's face was one he hadn't seen in a long time, rage. At super-speed Clark disappeared in a blue and gray blur, chopping the tree limbs into usable firewood and stripping the bark off the branches into a pile of chopped wood chips for making mulch.

"It was him. I know it was him," Clark fumed as he came to a stop, clenching his fists angrily as he stared at the piles of firewood that was now neatly stacked on the shelves which had been bare a few seconds ago.

"Clark, you can't do this to yourself," Jonathan tried to reason with him. "Giving into your anger like this is only going to give him more power. You need to calm down."

Clark unbalanced his fists, releasing the tension that had been there a moment ago as he tried to force the anger that was pulsing through his veins out. "I know," He shook his head in disgust. "I want to wring his neck but I *can't*."

"You can't stoop to his level, Clark, it's wrong," Jonathan reminded him calmly.

"Just once I wish I could just lose my temper and not have to worry about it turning into a nuclear disaster," Clark said bitterly, shaking his fist in the air. Jonathan placed a tentative hand on his shoulder, and he sighed, "When we were trapped in that elevator...Dad, I've never been so scared in my life. I have never flown that fast while carrying someone...*ever*. I was so afraid I was going to..."

"She's fine," Jonathan reminded him.

"Two hundred and fifteen people lost their jobs today.

Seventy-six of those people are in the hospital from their injuries...including Jimmy and Bruce Wayne who I found pulling the print guys out one by one from the basement," Clark shook his head in disgust. "Do you think Luthor cares? To him, it's just a game. He doesn't care who he has to hurt or kill in the process. All he cares about is winning."

"Don't let him," Jonathan said, squeezing his shoulder gently. "Obviously he sees the Planet and everyone that works there as a threat. Don't let him get the best of you."

"What am I supposed to do?" He asked, "The evidence we did have against him is gone, and all the witnesses have disappeared. Now, he's *framing* Jimmy for something *he* did, and there's nothing I can do about it!"

"Find more," Jonathan encouraged. "I highly doubt the witnesses you found are the only ones that know Lex Luthor's illegal dealings. Go to the Feds if you have to. Prove it's a frame-up. The funny thing about lies is they always come out in the end."

"I guess," Clark sighed, "It took us *months* to get this close," he shook his head in disgust. "Lois is probably still angry at me for dragging her out here, but I didn't know what else to do."

"You two will figure it out," Jonathan reassured him. "... *together*."

"How?" He scoffed, "Luthor has got an insane hold on Metropolis right now, and no one even knows where he's hiding. I'm scared to death to bring Lois back to Metropolis for fear that he'd try something..."

"You can't let your fear dictate your life, Clark," Jonathan reasoned, "Now, Lois is a smart woman. She knows how to take care of herself..."

"That's what she said," he snorted.

"Might want to listen to her," Jonathan added with a sigh, "You can't hide her here forever, and you can't go against Lex Luthor alone."

"I want to talk to your supervisor!" Constance snapped angrily at the officer that was manning the front desk at the Metropolis P.D. The officer snorted, not batting an eye, continuing to read the newspaper in front of him. "Are you listening to me? You cannot hold someone without charging them like this and..."

"Seventy-two hours," he snapped irritably.

"What?" She asked, not sure what he was referring to.

"We can hold him for seventy-two hours without charging him...unless we lose the paperwork. Then it could be longer. Who knows? Detectives are questioning him. You'll have your turn, councilor...as long as you're good and sit over in that corner and don't make a peep," he pointed to the corner where she and Perry White had been sitting.

Constance glanced at his nameplate on his uniform, "Officer Reeve did you just threaten to obstruct justice to an officer of the court?"

"Of course not," he scoffed, "I'm insulted that you'd insinuate such a thing. I'm just stating a fact. Accidents happen."

"So, Lex Luthor had you working on super-powered robotics chip?" Jonathan asked in amazement.

"Yeah, I had no idea what it was for...not until recently anyway," Sam explained with a sigh.

Martha sighed, "That man is the king of manipulation..."

"Yep," Clark added bitterly, staring down at his glass of water, "Don't like the result of a buyout then just blow the building up with everyone inside."

"Then frame it on an innocent man," Lucy added solemnly.

Ellen sighed, "I never thought the system could be so broken..."

"We'll get him out," Clark reassured Lucy. Lois nodded, giving her sister a supportive half-hug with her arm around her shoulders.

"Perry said they still hadn't been able to get Constance in there to help him," Lois said softly.

"Those scum bags should lose their badge and be thrown into a prison cell along with Lex Luthor and his cronies," Lucy spat angrily.

"Every witness against him has had some type of attack from him in one way or another. Henderson said there are crooked cops in the Metropolis P.D.," Clark explained, casting a wary look toward Sam Lane.

"Well, you all are welcome to stay here as long as you need to," Martha chimed in. "Anything we can do to help."

"I appreciate that Martha, but I don't want to impose..." Ellen began to argue.

"Nonsense!" Martha cut her off. "Your life is in danger."

"We don't know that for sure..." Lucy began to argue.

"No, we don't," Clark said softly, "but for now this is the safest place for everyone...until we can find out how to help Jimmy and stop Luthor."

"Hah!" Lois snorted, giving him an irritated look.

"Somehow I doubt that," Lucy said, ignoring her sister's outburst.

"It's not going to take a giant leap in thinking for him to figure out we're here; especially with both of you missing from Metropolis," Sam added.

Lois wore a smug expression as Clark sighed, "It's too dangerous for Lois to be in Metropolis right now." That was apparently the final straw as Lois shot up from the table and stalked out of the farmhouse, slamming the door behind her.

"You want me to go talk to her?" Lucy offered.

Clark sighed, "No," he got up to follow Lois out the door, leaving the Lanes and Kents at the table.

"So, Lois mentioned you were an artist?" Lucy said to Martha, looking for a way to break the awkward silence that fell between the five of them.

Johnny Taylor looked around the empty visitor's room warily as the door behind him sealed shut. "Hello? Anyone there?"

"Right here, Johnny," Toni said, stepping out of the shadows.

"Toni!" He cheered, "Ya scared me. What are you doing here doll face? I thought you were..."

"I had a pardon," Toni said with a smile. "Friends in high places and all of that," she said, stepping toward him. "Thought I'd come visit my favorite little brother."

He snorted, "Cut the crap, Toni! What's this about?"

"A business arrangement," she said simply.

"Lois..." Clark raced to keep up with Lois as she stalked her way toward the pond behind the barn. "Would you slow down? I can't use super-speed with your parents right inside!" She continued to ignore him, racing past the pond and fields until she finally stopped at the gate leading to Wayne Irig's property. "Lois..."

"I want to go home *now*!" She said in between gritted teeth, turning to face him as she wagged her finger in his face, "You being Superman does not give you the right to..."

"I know. I'm sorry," he apologized, noting the glistening tears that were forming in her eyes, "I was just trying to keep you safe," he said, moving his hands to her shoulders to help calm her down.

She jerked herself out of his embrace, throwing him an accusing glare, "Clark, you cannot make decisions for me about how I should live my life," she fumed angrily, pointing toward the farmhouse. "That awkward silence and hostile stares? Did you see that? That's what Lucy and I have been dealing with all day...and all of our lives! I told you I didn't want to come here." One by one tears fell down her cheeks. He took a step toward her, and she pulled away angrily once more as she fumed at him. "Why did you do this!?" She cried, balling her fist in the air angrily.

"I didn't have a choice! Luthor has got men all over Metropolis. I cannot do my job as Superman and protect you at the same time," he explained his logic which seemed a poor excuse as he watched the tears fall down her face as she looked away from him, refusing to look at him as he spoke.

"Then trust me to protect myself!" she snapped bitterly. Her tone was short and angry. She still wouldn't look at him, "I've been doing this a lot longer than you have. I have managed to get myself out of jams well before Superman showed up on the scene..."

"That is different, and you know it, Lois," he said, moving so he was in her line of sight. She huffed, turning her head to look away once more, "This isn't some petty crime ring you snuck into undercover. This is a *career criminal* that has you in his cross hairs. I'm not going to let him hurt you again," he argued defiantly, crossing his arms over his chest.

"So, what every time someone threatens my life you're just going to whisk me off? I don't get a say in the matter?" Lois scoffed throwing him an accusing glare. She was angry. He knew she would be. At least she was looking at him now.

"I didn't say that," he said, taking a step towards her. She turned to look away once more, and he sighed, hanging his head.

"No, actions speak louder than words!" She said, gesturing to the field in front of them as she turned to face him, jabbing her finger in his chest.

She was right. He knew it. He had forced her to come to Smallville with him out of fear. He was hoping to get through to her why this was the best course of action at the moment. They'd been trapped in that elevator with no way out and the explosion from above and beneath them consuming the elevator shaft around them. If he hadn't of... "I'm sorry," he said softly, "but..."

"No, buts," she cut him off. "You don't get to decide how much of a risk I'm allowed to take," she said, placing a hand on her chest as she spoke tearfully, "You don't get to just whisk me off to the middle of nowhere when you think I'm in over my head," she said, illustrating her point as she flailed her arms around her, glaring at him angrily before snapping at him, "You don't get to *LIVE* my life for me!" She fumed angrily as she clenched and unclenched her fist letting out a frustrated cry, "God, I cannot believe you did this!"

"I am trying to protect you," he argued, trying to reason with her as he took a step toward her once more.

She glared back at him accusingly. "By making me a prisoner?"

"No! Of course not!" He said, aghast at the thought.

"Really? Because right now I have no way of leaving besides Superman Express...No way of doing anything..." Her words hit home as realization of what he'd done out of fear for her safety began to hit him.

"I'm sorry," his face fell as she emphasized her point with a single jab in the chest before turning away. He sighed, following her over toward the end of the fence where Wayne had begun to repair some damage from the storm last week. "You're right. I shouldn't have forced you to come out here," he said flatly.

"Then why did you?" She snapped shakily, turning to face him accusingly, folding her arms over her chest.

"I don't know," he shrugged. "I was scared." He snorted, "Terrified." He leaned back against the fence, staring at the mud and grass, kicking it lightly as he spoke, "I almost didn't get us out of there in time."

"What?" She shot her head around to look at him.

"At the Planet. When we were in the elevator. I almost didn't get us out of there in time. The flames had already engulfed the elevator shaft and the gasoline was covering the cord. If I'd moved one millisecond slower..."

She bit her lower lip for a moment, putting her anger aside as she closed the distance between them, cupping his cheek, "But

you did. You got us out along with the rest of the Daily Planet staff that was trapped in the printing press ...”

“It could have easily been worse,” he said softly, covering her hands with his own as he wrapped them around her wrists, gently caressing them as he spoke, “Today was my nightmare. Not being able to protect you...” He hung his head, willing himself to continue.

“You can’t control everything around you, and you can’t be everywhere at once,” she reminded him.

“It’s different when it’s someone you love,” he reminded her, cupping her cheek as he spoke, “I’m sorry I brought you out here like this. I just didn’t know what else to do.”

“Does this mean you’re going to take me home?” She asked, gazing up at him through her tearstained eyelashes.

He sighed, cupping her cheek as he encircled his other arm around her waist, “Yes,” he said softly, “I’m still worried about Luthor, but you’re right. We can’t hide.”

She let out a long breath, resting her head against his chest as he tucked it snugly beneath his chin, “Dang straight, I’m right.” She swiped at the tears that had escaped during her outburst, “I get why you did it, but you cannot ever do this again. No matter what. We are supposed to be a team. Partners.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” He apologized, “I get so used to trying to protect everyone around me as Superman...I forget.”

“Don’t let it happen again,” she said, sighing against his chest. He held her close, resting his hands on her back, reveling in the feeling of her in his arms.

His fears still remained in the back of his mind, “Lois, I can’t protect you in Metropolis...not how I need to.” He let out a long sigh, “I have no idea how to fight him, Lois.”

“I’m not running away from this.” She moved her hand to rest on his chest.

“I know, I’m sorry I tried to make you,” he said softly, running his fingers through her hair, “Lois, if I ever lost you...” his voice cracked slightly, “I’d be losing myself. I love you...I...”

“I am right here,” she reassured him as she ran her hands up his chest, resting them on his broad shoulders, “Can we please go home now?”

“Okay,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her, sealing his lips over hers as his right hand moved to stroke her cheek.

Her anger at him from earlier and his fears of the what-ifs slowly began to disappear as he concentrated on the feeling of her in his arms. She giggled against his lips, leaning against him as he staggered backward, leaning against the old wooden fence.

“I’m right here...” She repeated against his lips, running her hands up and down his chest as she leaned against him. The weight of them both against the wooden fence caused it to give away, and they fell to the ground. He turned to make sure he took most of the fall, cushioning her fall as they fell to the ground together. He felt a sharp pain in his back and grimaced.

“Sorry,” she giggled, leaning up to kiss him. He groaned, feeling the pain run down his spine once more. “What’s wrong?”

He rolled over, pulling her with him as he staggered to his feet, “Clark!” She pointed to a large scrape on his forearm. “You’re bleeding...”

He grimaced, looking around the field for any sign of Kryptonite, the only substance he knew that could injure him. “Let’s get out of...”

“Oh, my God!” She gasped, pointing to a glowing green rock from beneath the fence post that had become unearthed when he’d fallen on the fence with Lois.

“Let’s get out of...” He couldn’t finish his sentence, feeling the effect of the Kryptonite on him more and more the longer he stayed in the vicinity.

“What about...?” She didn’t finish. He fell to the ground in pain, unable to voice his thoughts in anything more than a muffled groan. “Clark!!”

“What are you doing?” Johnny asked as Toni grabbed him by the collar, pulling him to her.

“I’m sorry. This has to look real...” She whispered in his ear. “I’m going to stab you, and you are going to escape. Go underground and don’t come near Metropolis or you’re dead.”

“Wha...?” Johnny stammered, uncertain of how to respond to what she’d just told him. “Toni, wait, Toni, no!” He yelled when he saw the sharp hair stick in her hand.

“I’m sorry, Johnny.”

The room was spinning. The pounding of his head centered around his temple. Slowly he began to open his eyes, wincing at first from the pain as he peeled his eyes open. The bright light from the sun shone into his eyes, and he grimaced in pain, letting out a soft moan.

“Are you okay?” Lois asked, kneeling down to look at Clark, brushing the hair out of his face. His back. He could feel a burning sensation along the small of his back and tried to force himself to sit up.

“Easy there, tiger,” Sam Lane said from behind him, pushing his shoulder back down on the ground. “You were unconscious for a good couple of minutes. You need to lie back and give yourself a minute.”

“I’m fine,” he said flatly, trying to sit up once more.

“Clark, maybe you should listen to Sam,” his dad interjected from the other side of him. “That was a nasty fall you took.” Lois pushed him back down, keeping her hand on his chest.

He sighed, “Fine. How long do I have to sit here for?”

“Just let me give you a once over to make sure you don’t have a concussion,” Sam said, pulling out his ophthalmoscope, shining the bright light in his eyes. “You really should be more careful. That broken fence could have been a lot worse on you.” He stared back at Sam, following the light as he instructed him. “Okay, everything looks fine.” He patted him on the shoulder.

Upon hearing that he pushed himself up, taking Sam’s offered hand to help him stand up. “Thanks,” he said, trying to catch his balance.

“You gonna be all right?” Sam asked, eyeing his unsteady balance warily.

“I just need a minute,” he said, taking a shaky breath.

Lois wrapped a protective arm around his waist, “Come on, let’s get you inside.”

“I’ll need the names of the detectives you think are on Lex Luthor’s payroll and any information you can tell me about the suspect they have in custody,” Mayson said, jotting down notes on her legal pad.

Henderson shook his head, “It’s not that simple. He’s not even in custody.”

Mayson’s jaw tightened as she scowled, “You said he was picked up by patrol and brought to Metropolis P.D.”

“Yes, that’s correct.” Henderson said, with a nod, “...but his paperwork was never processed.”

“Are you telling me we have detectives holding a suspect without processing and obstructing justice?” Mayson asked, her eyes narrowing as she spoke.

“That’s what I’m telling you,” Henderson repeated.

“Sounds like you’ve got a whole slew of crooked gumshoes in the joint,” a voice said as Mayson’s door flung open.

Henderson and Mayson both turned to see a tall man with dark brown hair and chiseled features standing in the doorway of her office. “I’m sorry Ms. Drake, he just came through without...” Her assistant tried to explain.

Mayson sighed, recognizing the man immediately, “Mr. Davenport, what brings you to Metropolis?”

He snorted, “Director Padelski got a call from Mr. Wayne

about corruption in the Metropolis P.D. on a toxic level. Wants the place cleaned out.”

“So, I’ve heard,” Mayson said as a petite blonde appeared behind him, putting a folded paper on her desk. “What is this?” Mayson asked.

“Federal warrant to search the premises of Metropolis P.D. and arrest any officers we find connected with coercion in the Luthor case,” the young woman said.

“And you are?” Mayson prompted.

“Agent Wallace. Christina Wallace, Ms. Drake,” she said, offering her hand to shake Mayson’s.

Mayson took it standing to her feet, “Davenport, Agent Woods, this is Inspector Bill Henderson.”

“Actually I’m...” He began to argue.

“He was just demoted for trying to serve a warrant for Lex Luthor last night. He’ll be your expert on the case,” Mayson cut him off, ignoring the panicked expression on his face.

“Your department’s dirty,” Davenport said flatly.

“I know,” Henderson said in disgust. “I had no idea how dirty it was until now.”

“You sure we can trust him?” Woods asked, eying him critically.

Davenport looked to Mayson who nodded, “He’s clean.” She walked toward them, “Well, looks like it’s our lucky day, huh, Henderson?”

Back at the Kent farm, Lois had managed to successfully stagger Clark far enough away from the meteorite so he could regain his strength to make it the rest of the three and a half acre hike back to the farmhouse without help. Lois remained quiet, mulling over everything as they approached the farmhouse in the distance.

One minute they had been making up after his boneheaded move of trying to force her into hiding the next he’d been unconscious on the ground and...bleeding. Clark had been bleeding.

<< “Do you remember when we dealt with that guy, Trask...I told you he *THOUGHT* there was a meteorite that could kill ... Superman?” >>>

A few months ago she thought that poisonous rock was a myth. Now, she knew it was a dangerous weapon. A dangerous weapon that was still out there and capable of harming Clark. She glanced at him, watching as he placed a hand on his lower back where he’d fallen. It was obvious he was still hurting even if he didn’t want to admit it.

<< “Bureau 39 was shut down from what we’ve been able to tell, and my dad said they haven’t seen any other sign of Kryptonite on Wayne Irig’s property...” >>

The fears she’d had months ago of someone finding the Kryptonite and using it against Clark were seeming less and less like an unwarranted fear and more of a likely possibility. They had stumbled across the meteorite by accident. Who knows what someone could find if they were actually looking for the lethal substance? They could use it against Clark, or they could sell it to someone looking to harm him. The market on this substance would probably make it as valuable as any street drug in Metropolis.

<< “Luthor and the rest of the world don’t know that Kryptonite exists,” Clark sighed. “As long as it remains a figment of Trask’s imagination then there’s nothing to worry about.” >>

The only saving grace for her sanity at the moment was the fact that Clark’s secret was still safe. If Lex ever found out, he would try to use it against him so he could finally take care of his ‘Superman Problem.’ She wouldn’t let that happen.

“Lois?” Clark squeezed her shoulder as they walked up the steps to the front porch where Martha and her mother were sitting.

“Huh?” Lois asked, confused, realizing she’d been lost in

thoughts so much she’d been oblivious to the conversations going on around her.

Martha smiled, “Ellen and I are gonna head into town.”

Ellen nodded, “Martha offered to take me to one of her art classes. I’ve never been to one and thought...while I’m here...why not?” She looked at Lois carefully, “Are you all right?”

Lois nodded, “Sounds fun.” It was strange seeing her mother like this. The woman that had warned her off of men and drowned her sorrows in a bottle of tequila was long gone. In her place was a vibrant woman that seemed intent on making the most of life and trying new things. It still surprised her how well her mother and Martha seemed to have connected with one another. Her mother didn’t make friends easily, but Clark’s mom seemed to have a knack for making everyone feel at home.

“Lois, are you okay?” Ellen asked.

“What?” Lois asked, realizing she must have missed out on another part of the conversation. The annoyed expression on her mother’s face told her she had indeed missed something. “I’m sorry I was ...someplace else.”

“So it would seem,” Ellen muttered dryly before glancing her up and down, “I mean this in the nicest way possible, but you two look like hell.”

It was Martha’s turn to circle around them, “You do look pretty tired.”

Lois caught Clark’s gaze and noticed him mouthing something to her. She focused on the motions, trying to make out what he was saying. ‘Don’t tell her.’ She gave him an annoyed look. Did he seriously think he could hide something like this from his mother?

“Lois??”

Lois looked back to see Martha looking at her expectantly, “Yes?”

She smiled warmly at her, “Uh, did you ever decide if you two were staying the night or...?” She cast a glance at Clark quizzically who looked at Lois.

“Um, still thinking about it,” Lois said rather quickly. Clark gave her a quizzical look but didn’t say anything. Clark pasted on a smile as Martha listed off where the leftovers from dinner were.

“If it’s not safe for us in Metropolis what makes you think it’s safe for you?” Ellen asked.

She caught the raised eyebrow on Clark’s expression before throwing him an annoyed look, “Well, we can’t exactly stop Lex away from Metropolis, can we?” Lois retorted, “Someone has to stop him...to help Jimmy.”

“We’re not saying not to help your friend or to stop investigating Luthor but considering everything that’s happened...” Martha shrugged, “Maybe you oughta lay low for a few days.” She glanced at Clark with a tightened jaw, “Even Superman can’t run on fumes forever.”

“We’ll think about it,” Lois said hurriedly, glancing back at Clark for a moment, “but is there even room?”

“There’s a spare bedroom in the attic and in the hayloft if need be,” Clark explained. “There’s room.”

“Well if you do decide to stay, Ellen and Lucy are in your old room,” Martha explained as she gathered her things to head out. She leaned in to hug them both, before whispering, “Don’t think you can fool me for a minute.” Lois overheard Martha whisper in Clark’s ear who gave her a half-smile and nodded before Martha turned to say, “Be back in a bit.”

With that both her and Ellen headed to the old Ford pickup truck in the driveway and headed out. They watched them leave and waved before turning to head inside. Lois noticed Clark seemed to still be in pain. “How are you feeling?”

“A little shaky but I’ll be okay. I should be back to a hundred percent in no time.” He reassured with a sigh. “Sorry.”

“One of those holes in your brilliant plan coming to light, huh?” Lois asked sarcastically, throwing him a twisted half-smile.

He let out a heavy sigh, "I thought we were done arguing." He took a seat on the couch in the living room.

Lois looked at him with an annoyed look, "I'm still a little mad."

"I know," he murmured, leaning his head back against the couch as he let out a long sigh. "I'm sorry."

She took a seat next to him, and he threw her an apologetic smile, "...but I'm also worried."

He let out a long breath, "It'll be okay," he reassured her, leaning in to kiss her.

Lucy padded her way into the living room with a bag and handed it to Lois, taking a seat on the love seat across from them. "What's this?" Lois asked.

She pointed to the back door where Sam and Jonathan had just come in, "A couple of burner phones," Lucy explained. "Clark's dad gave them to me."

"Burner phones?" Clark echoed, pulling a few of the plastic packaged phones from the bag to examine them. "Why did ...?" He stopped himself, "Never mind. I don't even want to know."

"Hey, son, how are you feeling?" Jonathan asked, taking a seat in the recliner next to the sofa Lois and Clark were sitting on.

Sam took a seat next to Lucy. He glanced at Clark with a look of concern, "Are you sure you don't want to go to a hospital? You really don't look good. After that fall..."

"Fall?" Lucy asked curiously.

"He, uh, fell on the old fence by the Irig property," Lois said hurriedly avoiding her sister's gaze. If there was anyone that could tell she was lying it was Lucy.

"I'm fine, Sam," Clark smiled back, "I'm just a little sore is all."

Lucy gave Clark a sympathetic look, "My first year of Junior High I got talked into taking riding lessons by mom. Got thrown off my horse and cracked a few ribs..."

"You never should have been on that horse, to begin with," Sam said gruffly, "Your mother had no right to..."

"It was a birthday gift," Lucy cut him off, ignoring her father's ramblings as she continued. "Anyway, it was one of my favorite memories...before the fall."

Lois smiled at her sister, "What was that horse's name?"

"Diamond in the Rough," Lucy said proudly.

"Oh right. You were going through your Aladdin phase," Lois sighed, recalling the name.

"Careful or I'll start singing," Lucy teased.

Clark laughed, and she saw the twinkle in Lucy's eyes as she contemplated her next move. Her lips pursed for a moment before she leaned back against him, seeming to admit defeat for the moment.

"This is quite a place you have here, Jonathan. I would never have thought you could fit so many people in a house this size," Sam mused, looking around.

"Martha and I did some updates a while back after the fire in the barn. We had enough money left over to make some additions. Martha's always a good hostess, so she likes having room for when family comes to visit from Wichita," Jonathan explained.

"The addition looks great. Better than any contractor in Metropolis ever would have done that's for sure," Sam said with a smile.

"I'll be sure to pass the compliment on to Martha and Wayne," Jonathan said with a smile. There was a lull in the conversation as they looked from one another, all knowing this was anything but a social call.

Lucy glanced at the time on the grandfather clock. "Almost seven in Metropolis. I wonder if they've processed Jimmy yet."

Lois frowned, looking at her sister sympathetically, "We have his attorney sitting down there on standby ready to get him out the moment they do. I just wish they'd go ahead and book him so we can get him out."

"You and me both," Clark sighed, leaning his head against hers as his arm wrapped around her shoulders from behind.

"Jimmy's a smart kid, but I don't know that he'd be able to survive in jail very long let alone prison. These are serious charges they're trying to pin on him," Lucy sighed tearfully. "I just don't understand how all this happened."

"I wish I knew," Clark sighed, "Believe me, but they can only hold him for 72 hours without booking him. Bill Henderson said he was going to..."

"...try to. He just got demoted, so I don't know how much pull he'll have," Lois reminded him.

"He's going to try and do what he can to help Jimmy," Clark conceded her correction.

Lucy looked at them in concern, "What happens if we can't?"

California Institute Penitentiary issued a statewide alert.

"Inmate AW6958 Johnny Taylor, alias Anthony Taylor, Bad Habit Taylor, escape from California Medical for routine ligament repair. Inmate is thought to be armed and dangerous..."

After dinner, the elder Kents had retired for the evening along with Sam and Ellen, leaving Lois and Clark with Lucy on the porch. "Mom's out for the night I think," Lucy said, leaning back in the wooden rocker.

"I think Sam is too," Clark murmured against Lois' hair as he swung with Lois on the porch swing. "It's been a long day...for everyone."

"Thanks for staying," Lucy said softly, leaning back to look at the stars. "Mom and dad would have driven me nuts without you guys here."

Lois smiled, leaning back into Clark as she spoke, "I'll admit I really didn't want to stay..." She glanced back at Clark a moment before looking at Lucy, "...but I'm glad I changed my mind."

"Me too," Lucy said, tapping her hand on the arm of the rocker, "It's quiet out here." A twinkle formed in her eyes and she looked at Lois with a grin, "Hey you know what we should do?"

"What?" Clark asked, uncertain about the expression he saw on Lucy's face. It was the same expression Lois got when she hatched one of her infamous plans.

"Wait here," She said, heading back into the house with a grin.

"Do I want to know?" Clark asked.

Lois laughed, "She's harmless." She turned in his arms to sit up and face him, "How are you feeling?"

"Just a little sore," he shrugged. At her concerned look, he elaborated, "I've never come in direct contact like that before... Well, no that's not entirely true. I had to touch it when I threw it into the pond over there..." He said, pointing at the pond across from the barn.

"Oh," Lois grew quiet, following the direction of his hand with her eyes. He caught the wistful expression in her eyes as she turned her gaze back to him, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

He let out a long sigh, pulling her to him as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders, "You scared me," she murmured softly against the cotton of his t-shirt, resting her chin against his shoulder. She ran her hands up and down the length of his shoulders, fingering the material carefully.

He captured her right hand with his, intertwining it with his fingers as he laced his digits snugly between the wedges of her fingers, bringing their joined hands up for him to kiss. He turned to look at her, stroking her cheek with his hand, "I'm sorry. I wish you didn't have to see that."

Her face dropped, looking at the floor as she studied the cracks in the wood floor, "You were hurt. I've never seen you hurt before," she said shakily, leaning her head against his chest.

He nodded, tightening his arm around her waist, resting his chin against her head, "It was a big chunk of Kryptonite," he admitted slowly.

“How long does it take to, um...” She lifted her head, fingering his chest playfully as she looked up at him, “heal.”

He smiled back at her, leaning in to kiss her as he murmured, “A few days was how long it took last time.”

“So are you...completely vulnerable?” She asked, running her hands up and down his sides gingerly as she spoke.

“Depends,” he shrugged, running his hand down the curve of her back, resting at the hem of her shirt.

“On what?” She asked, slipping her hand below the hem of his t-shirt.

The screen door opened and she pulled her hand back, looking back at Lucy with a smile, “Surprise!” She pulled out a small bottle of tequila and a few small glasses from the kitchen. “I figured after today we all needed a drink.”

Lois let out a low whistle, “Mom is going to kill you...”

Clark laughed, “Are you sure you want to be drinking with your mom ...?”

Lucy nodded, “I’m only going to have a few shots then I’ll brush my teeth and take a shower, so I don’t smell like alcohol when I go to bed. Not my first rodeo, Clark.” Lucy began to pour liquor into the glasses then reached for her purse to pull out a bottle of Aspirin.

“What’s the Aspirin for?” Clark asked.

Lois bit her lower lip trying to suppress her laughter, “The anti-hangover kit of Lucy’s.”

Lucy handed them both a large bottle of water. “For every drink, you drink water. Don’t forget to take the Aspirin or you will regret it in the morning.”

Clark looked at the two pills Lucy had handed him skeptically. Even in his weakened state, he wasn’t sure how much affect Aspirin would have on him let alone alcohol. At Lucy’s prompting, he shrugged and swallowed the two white pills with a swig of water and took the glass Lucy had offered him.

“Let’s see what should we toast to...?” Lucy asked, looking back at them for suggestions.

“World peace?” Lois asked sarcastically, taking her glass from Lucy.

“Superman!” Lucy cheered, lifting her glass in the air,

“Wherever he is. Fighting the big bad Luthor and helping Jimmy any way he can...and keeping us safe.”

Lois smiled, “Here here.” She took a sip of the cool liquid, wincing as the burning feeling hit her throat. Lucy laughed, and she scolded, “Shhh...”

“To good friends,” Clark said, lifting his glass Lucy had just refilled.

“Here here,” Lucy said, raising her glass to take another sip.

“Careful,” Lois warned, “She’s notorious for getting people drunk with that heavy hand,” she said, pointing at Lucy who was pouring some more tequila in their glasses.

“Excuses excuses,” Lucy teased. “She just doesn’t want to admit she’s a lightweight.”

“I’m not the one that ended up at the Alpha Phi Alpha Frat House too plastered to remember t-ping the Technology Lab at Met U,” Lois laughed, taking another sip of the liquor, leaning closer to Clark as she rested her head against his shoulder.

Lucy laughed, “I forgot about that.”

“I didn’t,” Lois laughed, leaning into Clark, fingering his thigh for a moment. He caught her gaze as he took another sip of his drink.

“So what about you, Clark?”

He turned to Lucy who was looking at him expectantly. “Me? No, I don’t recall waking up at any frat houses...”

Lucy and Lois laughed, and she continued, “No, do you have any funny drunk moments?”

He shook his head, “No, I’ve never been drunk before.”

“Liar,” Lucy laughed, “Come on everyone’s been drunk at least once.”

He shook his head, “I guess I have a high tolerance.”

“Challenge accepted.” Lucy laughed, pouring some more liquor into his glass. “Clark, have you ever played ‘I never...?’”

As the night wore on, they had finished about half of Lucy’s bottle of tequila. Clark felt a strange warmth throughout his body as he held Lois close to him. He wasn’t sure if it was the alcohol or the Kryptonite, but he was definitely feeling...good...relaxed. More relaxed than he’d felt in weeks...months even.

“Okay,” Lucy let a lazy smile spread across her face as she let her eyes twinkle at Lois, “I’ve never...been thrown out of a plane.”

Lois laughed, “I guess that’s us.” She leaned forward to take her glass and took a drink, but Clark didn’t move.

“Maybe he doesn’t understand the rules,” Lucy whispered not so subtly.

He laughed, “I didn’t get thrown I jumped.”

Lucy laughed, “Why would you...” Then she rolled her eyes, “You know what? Nevermind, moving on...”

Lois took a drink then looked back at her sister, fingering the glass for a moment, “I’ve never...” Her face spread into an impish grin as she finally thought of her challenge, “tried to get into a club with a fake ID.” He couldn’t help but chuckle at the way her eyebrows wiggled at Lucy as she spoke. It was clear who this ‘I never’ was directed at.

“That’s me,” Lucy said, taking a drink.

Clark laughed, “Yeah, I figured.”

“Are you feeling any...buzz yet?” Lucy asked, tapping the side of her glass with a smile, looking at him curiously.

Buzz? He wasn’t sure what he was feeling at the moment. He felt warm and relaxed. He glanced down next to him where Lois had reclaimed her position curled up next to him and smiled. He looked back at Lucy and noticed the look on her face. Why is she staring at me? Oh, right buzzed. Am I buzzed? He opted for the most truthful answer at the moment and smiled back at her, “Not sure yet.”

“Okay, Clark, your turn,” Lucy said, pushing the bottle of tequila toward him to fill the glasses with.

He sighed, taking the bottle from her and pouring the same small amount in each glass, “I’ve never...run from a police officer.” He grinned at Lois who burst out laughing, taking the glass he handed her.

“I think that’s both of us, sis,” Lucy laughed, taking a drink.

“Okay, I’ve never...spied on people with bino-CULA-rs or other vision gizmos?”

Clark laughed, taking a sip of his drink with Lois, “Guilty as charged.”

Lois twirled her glass in her hand for a moment as she thought of hers, “I never...skipped school,” she said with a grin.

“Mmm mmm,” Lucy shook her head, “Yes you did.”

She shook her head, “No, I didn’t.”

“Journey concert Junior year we won tickets...” Lucy prompted.

“Oh, yeah,” Lois laughed, “That was fun.”

He sighed, taking a drink from his glass. Lois looked at him with amusement, and Lucy laughed. “I guess that’s all three of us.”

Lois bumped his hip, “Details?”

“Nuh-uh,” he shook his head.

“Oh, come on, I told you mine!” Lois shot back.

“She has a point,” Lucy pointed out. “...and according to the rules if you don’t spill you have to drink.” She gave him an impish grin, “So which is it going to be?”

He pointed to the bottle, “I guess I’m going to drink.”

“Spoil sport,” Lois shot back.

“I’ll second that,” Lucy said, pouring more in her glass.

“You two are no fun,” Lois sighed, leaning back against him.

"I'll get it out of you eventually..."

"I'm sure you will..." Lucy teased with a giggle. "Okay, Clark, your turn."

He looked at Lois with a grin then said, "I've never...needed stitches." Lois sighed, taking her glass from him. To his amusement, Lucy grabbed a glass too.

"Mmm," Lois took a drink, "That's both of us."

"I've never...been seduced," Lucy said in a fit of giggles. He noticed how Lois' eyes did a little dance when she turned to look back at him for a moment, catching his gaze as her cheeks turned a dark shade of pink before leaning her back against him. Yes, he could no longer claim innocence in the art of seduction after last night. He felt his cheeks grow bright red at the memory of Lois' body intertwined so perfectly with his. "Ha! I knew it!" Lucy cheered when their faces betrayed them. "Okay, both of you have to drink now."

He grinned, reaching for his glass, sighing as he took a drink. The hint of lavender against his nostrils continued to tease him as Lois inched herself closer and closer to him. He let out a shuddered breath before taking another drink. Definitely more relaxed.

"Okay, my turn," Lois sat up straight, pouring more liquor into the glasses. "I've never...been so drunk I left my friends on top of a water tower when the cops showed up and forgot where I was the next morning." Lois laughed recalling the incident.

Lucy crinkled her nose, taking a drink. "That was one time..."

"Okay, I've never..." He looked between the two sisters as he tried to force his mind to think of something he'd never done. "been accused of being drunk because I'm too clumsy." He grinned at Lois, recalling an incident early in their partnership with Inspector Henderson and a breathalyzer.

Lois groaned, giving him a mock glare before reaching for her glass. Lucy gave her a questioning look, and Lois was all too willing to share the details as she ran her hand up and down his upper thigh with her generous touch, grazing just high enough to be tempting but not high enough to be dangerous in their very public setting. He could feel himself melting into the back of the porch swing. If he still had his powers, he was sure there would be a handprint to show for her efforts. "Henderson just doesn't know when to leave well enough alone." At Lucy's inquiring look she sighed, "I got accused of being drunk because I kept tripping over my long skirt when we were out on assignment." Lucy laughed, and Lois shook her head, "It's not funny. I had to take a breathalyzer to convince him I was sober. He wouldn't believe Clark."

Lucy laughed harder, "Oh, my God...that's awesome." She cleared her throat, sitting up, "Okay, I've never...been in handcuffs."

Lois shook her head, "Yes you have!"

Lucy crinkled her nose, "When?"

"On your date with, uh, what's his name...Tony? Tommy? Timmy?"

"Oh, Todd." Lucy grinned, recalling the incident. "Yeah, note-to-self, don't straddle the state line yelling 'I'm in two places at once' when you're underage drinking. It doesn't end well."

Clark laughed, leaning up to grab his glass, "I guess that's all of us then."

Lucy looked at him in surprise, "Clark Kent the rebel, huh?" She teased. "Okay, spill."

"Nope," he shook his head, taking a drink.

"Oh, come on!" Lucy laughed, "I'll tell you how Lois ended up in handcuffs in her Sophomore year of college."

Lois thankfully took pity on him, "Sophomore year of college spirit week I came to class dressed as Cindy Lauper for the decade day. Anyway one of the instructors seemed to misinterpret the outfit and accused me of being in a gang..."

Lucy laughed in peals of laughter, "Tell him what you did

next..." She said in a sing-song voice.

"I might have kicked him in a very sensitive area and called him a chauvinistic, sexist pig...right before I transferred out of that class." Clark laughed, leaning into Lois as she told the story. He could imagine her being just as much of a handful back then as she was now.

Lucy let out a soft giggle as she added, "Assault with a deadly weapon of high heels and hairspray!"

Clark grinned at Lois with a lazy smile, "So did they make you check your heels and hairspray in the big house or..."

She swatted at him, "Ha, ha, very funny." She sighed, running her hands through her dark locks, "It was not the big house. I was placed in handcuffs by the campus security and released when the real police showed up. So there!"

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, sis," Lucy teased. She pointed to the glass in front of him, "Drink up Clark. You don't share you have to drink."

He nodded, taking the glass, holding it up and taking a drink. He was definitely starting to feel the effects of the alcohol. He felt the sting in his throat once more and then turned to Lucy, "Your turn."

Lucy nodded, taking the bottle and beginning to pour, "I've never..." She looked right at Lois before grinning, "been sent to the principals' office for sneezing." Clark laughed, and Lois chuckled, leaning forward to take her refilled glass from Lucy, "Drink up, sis."

"I swear our Algebra teacher just hated me." She took a drink before continuing. "I sneezed in class, and my teacher asked me to step out of the classroom." He fought to suppress his laughter but was failing miserably, and she continued, "and before you ask, No, I'm not joking. I didn't hear incorrectly..." She then continued, "She then proceeded to tell me how incredibly rude it is to sneeze while someone is speaking...as if I had a choice in the matter."

"How dare you give in to normal bodily functions when she's speaking. Gosh, Lois, how rude!" Lucy said sarcastically.

"Yeah I know, right? Imagine if everyone gave into their bodily functions. There would be chaos..." Lois laughed, "Anyway I voiced my...ahem...displeasure at being singled out when others can get away with other bodily functions without so much as a second glance...and found myself sitting in the principal's office for my smart mouth."

"She has a problem with authority," Lucy supplied as if it wasn't obvious.

"I have a problem with stupid people in authority. Big difference," Lois said lazily, leaning closer to Clark as she ran her hands up his chest. He grinned lazily at her, catching her gaze as she slowly licked her lips. He was in so much trouble.

"I've seen the error in my ways..." Lucy laughed, pushing the bottle to Lois, "Your turn."

Lois leaned forward to take the bottle from Lucy and began to pour, "I've never..." She gave Lucy an impish grin before saying, "got arrested for trying to ride a shopping cart down 15th Avenue outside MetroMart while too wasted to stand up straight..." Her eyebrows raised into an arch as she fought to suppress the laughter she was holding in, causing the swing to vibrate against him.

The look on Lucy's face said it all, "Okay okay, good one." Lucy leaned forward to take a drink from her glass and supplied, "...but *who* dared me?"

"I didn't think you'd *do* it," Lois shrugged.

"When have I ever been known to turn down a dare?" Lucy grinned before turning her attention back to him, "All right, Clark, you're up."

He nodded, taking the bottle from Lois to pour into Lucy's glass, "I've never..." He glanced at Lois before grinning, "cried in public from a song."

Lois sighed, "It was a SAD song."

"Yes, it is," he agreed, "I just never cried listening to it."

"What song?" Lucy asked, taking her glass and handing Lois hers.

"That song mom used to play on the record player all the time..." Lois snapped her fingers. "I can't remember the name..."

"How does it go?" Lucy asked.

Lois began to hum the beat, "I lifted her head, she looked at me and said 'Hold me darlin' just a little while.' I held her close; I kissed her our last kiss..."

Lucy immediately recognized the tune, "Oh, I remember," she began to sing, "I found the love that I knew I would miss but now she's gone, even though I hold her tight..."

"Yes!" Lois sighed, "What is that song? It's going to drive me crazy..."

"Last Kiss," Clark supplied, wrapping his arm around her shoulders," by J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers..."

Lois nodded, leaning her head back against his shoulder as she and Lucy joined together to finish singing the song together, "...I lost my love, my life that night. Oh, where oh where can my baby be? The Lord took her away from me. She's gone to heaven, so I got to be good. So I can see my baby when I leave this world..."

Lucy sighed, "I haven't heard that song in ages. Mom used to play it every night."

"Mmm hmm," Lois nodded, turning to face him as she brought her legs up, so they were laid across his lap. He let out a long breath as she snuggled closer to him, offering a perfect view down her v-neck cut shirt as her hand moved up his upper arm, tracing the outline of his bicep. He fought the urge to say 'to hell with this game' and focus on activities both his brain and his body found more enjoyable at the moment.

He was definitely more than a little buzzed now. Especially with the double shots, he'd been forced to take when he didn't want to tell about his time in handcuffs or skipping school to avoid an uncomfortable talk about his developing powers in Junior High. Explaining it was Superman in handcuffs, and it was Superman's powers developing when he was skipping school wasn't something he couldn't very well tell Lucy. Lois sighed against him, and he let out a shuddered breath. He felt the soft flesh from beneath her shirt press against him. "Okay, Luce, your turn."

Lucy nodded, readjusting herself in her seat, "Okay, I've never...been naked in public." Her eyes did a little dance, and he groaned, leaning forward to take a drink. Lois gave him an impish grin, leaning her back against him.

"Details?" Lucy prompted, "I'm very curious now."

He sighed, hoping he could tell this story without giving himself away. It was taking everything in him to carry on a coherent conversation at the moment. The combination of the liquor, the scent of Lois' perfume and her closeness were all making it hard for him to concentrate. His head was swimming as glanced at her jean clad thighs pressed up against him. "Uh, around the time of Nightfall I lost my memory and was found...wandering around..." He gave a twirling hand gesture as he spoke.

"...without any clothes," Lois finished for him with a grin, wiggling her eyebrows at him. "Luckily some homeless guy felt sorry for him and gave him something to wear and took him to the Mission on Fifth Street where he was recognized and brought to Henderson who called me."

Lucy's face fell into a frown, "That ... is a very depressing story. I was expecting a high school dare or something." She sighed, "I'm sorry you lost your memory Clark, but I'm glad you got it back."

He smiled back at her, glancing at Lois as he tightened his arm around her, "Me too."

Lucy set her glass down, knocking it over, spilling out the half-melted ice. "Oops."

"I think that's our cue to stop," Clark laughed, leaning over to help Lucy try to clean up the mess. He didn't trust himself to stand

just yet.

"Are you at least a *little* buzzed?" Lucy asked, looking at him with a smile, "Cuz I think I might be wee bit ..."

"Plastered?" Lois offered with a giggle.

"Intoxi-cu-lated..." Lucy said carefully as she stood up, "Whoah!" She grabbed the edge of the rocking chair for a moment before turning back to look at them with a grin.

Clark grinned at her, "You okay?" It was clear he wasn't the only one having balance issues at the moment.

"Just getting my bearings. Not my first rodeo," She grinned back at him as she let out a yawn. "I am going to bed...after I take a shower...and pee. Definitely need to pee." With that, she grabbed the glasses and the bottle of tequila and staggered toward the door.

After the screen door closed, Clark looked back at Lois, "Should we be worried about her making it to the bedroom okay?"

Lois shook her head, "Nope there's no stairs. She'll be fine." She leaned in to kiss him, "So, does Superman get drunk?" He could smell the liquor on her breath as she ran her hand seductively down his chest, toying with the cotton of his shirt.

"Not usually," He said with a grin. She grinned back at him, staggering to her feet as she pulled him with her, "Whoa," He felt his head spin as he stood to his feet.

"What's wrong?" She asked, leaning on his shoulder for balance as she adjusted her footing.

"I might be a little..." He searched for the right word, and she laughed.

"Clark Kent are you drunk?"

"No, I don't get drunk," He repeated, leaning in to kiss her, tightening his arms around her waist, "Superman doesn't get drunk."

Lois laughed, linking her arms around his neck for a moment before moving them to his waist to give him some support as they made their way down the porch steps to head to the spare bedroom for the night. Hopefully, there wouldn't be too many stairs involved. "Come on, flyboy, let's get you to bed..."

"Anything you say..." He lifted her into his arms, groaning as her limbs wrapped snugly around him as he proceeded to make his way toward the barn. He silently cursed the meteorite that had taken away his ability to whisk her with him at super-speed wherever he wanted to go.

'This is what it feels like to be normal.'

Finally finding his balance he carried her as fast as he could, chuckling as she shrieked in laughter, "Clark!"

Lucy sat down on the couch trying to make sense out of what she'd just seen and heard. Her sister was obviously more than a little tipsy as well as Clark who had drunkenly murmured loud enough through the windows for her to make out what they were saying.

"So, does Superman get drunk?" Lois had asked. Even in her intoxicated state, she could make sense out of what Lois was saying. Why was she asking about Superman?

"Not usually...Whoa," Clark had responded.

How would he know?

"What's wrong?"

Lucy laughed when she realized Clark had been indeed more than a little buzzed.

"I might be a little..."

"Clark Kent are you drunk?"

Yep, she'd succeeded.

"No, I don't get drunk Superman doesn't get drunk."

Why did he keep referring to Superman?

"Come on, flyboy, let's get you to bed..."

Flyboy?

Lucy sighed, setting the rinsed glasses on the counter and putting the bottle of Tequila back in her bag. She headed to the

bathroom to get ready for bed. Something was definitely going on with Superman and those two, but right now she was half drunk and in no condition to be trying to figure out just what that was.

The room was small but had the bed positioned by the window; a sitting area in the corner with a padded rocking chair, and a wooden dresser and shelf had been built into the wall for storage. After him almost falling down a few times she'd convinced him to hold onto her while they made their way up the steps to the newly renovated spare room in the hayloft. She could feel the alcohol taking its effect on her as they staggered into the room, leaning on one another.

"Nice...very...pre-tty," she commented on the room as Clark managed to close the door behind them.

His arms wrapped around her from behind, nibbling on her ear, "Saved money on labor...thanks to super help," he whispered, leaning her back against the door, planting his lips on hers as his hands roamed up and down her sides seductively.

"How are you feeling there, big boy?" She asked, toying with the hem of his cotton t-shirt. She could feel the warmth of his breath against the nape of her neck as her back came in contact with the wooden door.

"Warm," he whispered with a grin on his face. "I feel warm." He nibbled on her ear, tugging on her earlobe with his teeth.

Lois laughed, running her hands up and down his chest, "Yep, definitely drunk. We're drunk."

"Nuh-uh," he shook his head. "I've seen drunk before. I'm not...drunk."

Her hands ran up his chest as she outlined his lips with her tongue, tasting the remnants of the tequila on him as he stroked her cheek with his palm. She slowly broke off the kiss, leaning back as she eyed him appreciatively. It was entertaining to see him like this. He had a sloppy grin on his face as he let out a long breath, "I'm hot." He began to pull his shirt off and ended up tangled in the mess of cotton. She laughed, taking pity on him as she helped him shed the garment from his limbs, tossing it to the floor. He sighed, leaning back against her, slipping his hands up the back of her shirt.

"Very," she breathed against his lips, eying his perfectly chiseled six-pack and hardened muscular chest smooth as a baby's bottom. She fingered his chest, brushing her hand against the velvety smooth skin as she took his glasses off, folding them in one hand as he recaptured her lips. In the back of her mind, she recalled him taking the glasses from her and placing them on the shelf next to the door.

"There is one positive point about being stuck here till my powers decide to come back," he whispered against her lips with a sly grin.

She laughed, "What's that?"

"I don't have to scan every room to make sure there aren't any cameras when I want to do...this." He leaned in to kiss her once more, settling more of his weight against her as he leaned her against the door, caressing his lips against hers. A soft moan escaped her lips as the intensity behind the caress of his lips grew. "...or this."

His hand moved to stroke her face as he moved his attention to her jawline, feathering light kisses along its path as she gasped out his name, "Cla..." She smiled against him, "You scan every room...every time?" Her hand wrapped around his shoulders, feeling the hardened muscles beneath his velvety smooth skin.

"Mostly." He brushed his lips against hers, "I didn't last night. I was...distracted." She laughed when he pressed his weight against her more firmly, "Are you still mad at me?" He breathed in her ear.

She shook her head, "I was mad about how you brought me here."

"I know." He breathed, shaking his head, "I shouldn't have..."

"But...after talking with your mom and Lucy ...I think it was the right call." He looked at her with a smile.

She nodded, "I just wish you hadn't tried to force me."

"I'm sorry," he sighed, stroking her cheek. "I won't ever do that...again."

She linked her arms around his neck, smiling, "I know." She leaned in to kiss him, and he moaned against her lips, tightening his arms around her waist. His hands slipped up the back of her shirt once more, this time his hand slipped below the clasp of her bra. She moaned against his mouth.

She felt his hand slip below the clasp of her bra and whispered, "We should stop."

"Why?"

She laughed, leaning closer to him, "You're drunk."

"So are you," he whispered, huskily, stroking her cheek.

"You're beautiful you know that..."

"Smooth talker," she observed, fingering the tip of his nose with her forefinger, "Neither of us is in any condition to..." His mouth found its way to her throat, creating a heated trail downward as she struggled to string her thoughts together.

"Cla..."

"You feel good," he whispered, holding her close.

"So do you," she sighed, running her hands through his dark locks.

"I love you," he whispered, stroking her jawline.

"I love you too, but right now... you need to get some rest..."

She whispered, "...and sleep it off."

"I don't want to rest," he argued, stroking her cheek as he leaned in to press his lips against hers, tracing the outline of her lips with the tip of his tongue, teasing the part of her lips with the hint of liquor that lingered on his breath. She moaned against him, allowing him to pull her into his arms. "This is so much better than resting..."

"Clark..." She gasped as he moved his attention to her right ear, tugging on the lobe with his lips.

"We need to stop..." She whispered as he began pulling her shirt out of her jeans. "You're drunk."

"...and so are you," he whispered, slipping his hand up her shirt, brushing his palm against her navel.

"I don't want to take advantage of you...wouldn't be..." She sighed against him as his hand moved up her shirt once more.

"Maybe I want to be taken advantage of." He whispered huskily, "Besides I'm not...that drunk." To prove his point, he pressed his hips against hers, brushing his lips against the nape of her neck.

She felt the clasp to her bra come undone and sighed heavily as he slipped his hands beneath the fabric. "You're drunk." She repeated, more of a statement rather than an accusation.

He nodded, "Uh-uh."

"Is that a 'yes' or a 'no'?" She laughed. He removed his hands from under her shirt, slipping them to the waistband of her jeans.

"If I am ...drunk...I'm not that...drunk." He breathed huskily. He unfastened her jeans.

"Isn't there a rule about taking advantage of someone if they're...Oh, Clark..." She sighed against him when he slipped his hand beneath her shirt once more. "...not in their right mind."

She could feel his breath against her neck as his fingertips moved in a magical motion upward. "I am in my ...very right mind..." He reassured her. "I'm not doing anything I hadn't thought about doing before...I just don't have my... inhibitions to stop me."

"Sounds a bit like those pheromones..." Lois recalled lazily.

"You were *verrry* lucky I wasn't affected by that spray," he whispered huskily.

"What would you have done?" She breathed curious as to what his answer would be.

"Not hidden in the other room while you were sleeping the

effects from that spray off,” he pressed his solid form against hers, and she let out a soft moan.

“You said you weren’t attracted to me,” she recalled his argument the day they were arguing about him not being affected by the pheromones.

“I lied,” his voice cracked slightly as he leaned forward.

“I know,” she sighed against him.

“I love you,” he whispered softly, “I tried to hide it for...a... long time.”

“I think we were both hiding,” she said, stroking his cheek.

“Maybe we should stop ...hiding I mean,” he grinned back at her, “I like this.” He leaned in to trace the contours of her lips with his tongue, running his other hand up and down her side as he teased the soft skin of her navel, tracing the waistband of her jeans with his thumb as he spoke.

“I thought we ...were.” She ran her hands up the back of his neck, fingering his hairline.

“We are, but I don’t say what I really want to...” He breathed against her neck, nibbling on the sensitive flesh.

“Which is what?”

He leaned into her, stroking her cheek as he whispered, “That I love you Lois Lane and I want ...everything with you.”

“Everything?” She repeated, curious.

“Everything.” He nodded, nibbling on her ear. “I want to marry you...” She felt tears begin to form in the corners of her eyes as he spoke. “have kids...” He whispered against the nape of her neck with a sigh, “build a home together,” He stroked her jawline, glaring back at her with an intensity she’d never seen before. The passion and love she felt reflected back from him hit her like a wave as he spoke, “and grow old... together.”

“Oh, Clark...” She breathed softly, unsure of what to say.

“I want to die when I’m 110 years old in your arms. I want a lifetime with you, Lois...” He trailed off softly, “...but I’m so afraid of scaring you off...I don’t say it.”

“Why would that scare me?” She asked, tracing his jawline as she spoke.

“Because you scare easily in relationships,” he whispered. “You bury yourself in your work and get angry and mad to try and hide...because you’ve been hurt and you ...don’t want to be...hurt again.”

“That’s very observant...for being three sheets to the wind,” she noted, fingering the back of his head as she spoke.

“I’m a very observant guy,” he whispered, brushing feather light kisses against her jaw as his hand moved below the waistband of her jeans.

She let out a shuddered breath, feeling his breath against her neck, “Yes, oh, yes, you are,” she sighed happily.

“Do you want me to stop?” He whispered in her ear.

“Oh, God, no...” She whispered, pulling him to her. His lips came crashing down on hers as they lost themselves in one another’s arms, intent on forgetting the troubles that still loomed in the air back at home in Metropolis.

The hours seemed molded together with the detectives’ condescending comments and questions echoing through Jimmy’s mind. He sought solace in the one place he could find peace; his mind as sleep urged him on, but Jimmy knew he couldn’t give in completely. There was no telling when his tormentors would return.

The slamming of a clipboard hitting the metal desk his head rested against jolted Jimmy awake from his half-asleep state. “Wake up you maggot!” Jenkins snapped kicking the table against him hard.

“Well you want to tell him the good news, Jenkins?” the detective he’d come to know as ‘Harris’ asked. He could tell from the smirk on his face whatever the news was it wasn’t good for him.

Jenkins shook his head, grinning from ear to ear, “Oh, no, Harris, you got the warrant. You tell him.”

“Warrant?” He asked confused. “You can’t get a warrant without evidence...” What was he saying? Everything they’d done from the time they’d brought him to the police station had been against the law, but they didn’t seem to care.

“Don’t need it,” Jenkins shrugged, “Imminent danger.”

“Imminent what?” Jenkins shoved a copy of an editorial by Perry White with a red ‘x’ on it criticizing the NIA in his face. He scrunched up his face, as he read the unfamiliar writing on the paper, “What is this?”

“Oh, you don’t recognize it?” Harris asked, “It’s our smoking gun. Your place was littered with anti-Perry White articles and anti-Superman articles that dared come against the NIA...”

“What?” Jimmy scoffed, throwing the paper back down on the table, “You’re out of your mind. No one in their right mind is going to believe this.”

“Judge Stephens did,” Jenkins added with a smile. “He was deeply troubled when it came to light that our young James Olsen was the son of an NIA spy...”

“You’re a liar,” Jimmy shook his head in disgust. “My mom’s a photographer, and my dad’s a structural engineer...”

Harris snickered in laughter, “You poor sap!”

“Don’t believe me?” Jenkins laughed, placing a file in front of him.

Jimmy did his best not to react as Harris opened it up and revealed his dad’s picture with a file on the assassinations he’d been a part of.

Structural engineer.

That’s what his dad had told him he was in sixth grade.

A structural engineer.

‘No, it’s not true...What if it is?’

“Today’s your lucky day, Mr. Olsen,” Harris added with a satisfied grin.

“Thanks to the evidence we collected and the explosives we found there’s more than enough to put you away for the rest of your life you miserable piece of...”

“Explosives?” Jimmy croaked in shock. He was being railroaded. These dirty cops had no intention of finding the real villain. They had planted evidence and were now going to ruin his life and...

“James Olsen, you have the right to remain silent...” Jenkins pulled him up from his seat and placed his hands behind his back as he slapped the metal cuffs on him, continuing to read him his Miranda Rights with a sick satisfaction.

Off the coast of the Gulf of Mexico a team of approximately a hundred men including crew, specialized engineers and supervisors worked tirelessly into the night. Unbeknownst to any of the crew below deck a man that was not a part of the crew had hacked into the rig’s mainframe and was working just as tirelessly ...against them.

A sharp ringing in his ears resonated as Clark’s super-hearing came back at full force in the early hours of the morning.

<<“Help! It’s going to blow!”>>

<<“Turn it off!”>>

<<“I can’t!”>>

<<“The rig is going to blow!”>>

<<“Someone help!”>>

<<“Superman help!!!!”>>

Still holding his head, Clark sat up easing himself out of Lois’ arms, “Lois?” He shook her gently.

“Hmm?” She wasn’t quite awake, but he didn’t have time.

“I’ve got to go. There’s an oil rig on...”

“Okay,” she said sleepily. “Go.”

He didn’t wait for her to finish. Within a blink of an eye, he

had changed into his suit and was headed toward the Gulf of Mexico as fast as his super-speed would let him.

Lois felt the cool sheets against her as she rolled over, frowning when she felt the empty spot where Clark had been a few hours before. She was still half-asleep but she half-recalled her conversation with him early this morning. What had he said? An oil spill?

Anxiety ran through her as she realized the questions she'd never asked.

Was he ready?

<<“Are you okay?” Lois asked, kneeled down to look at Clark, brushing the hair out of his face.

“Easy there, tiger,” her father said, pushing his shoulder back down on the ground when Clark tried to sit up. “You were unconscious for a good couple of minutes. You need to lie back and give yourself a minute.”

“I’m fine,” he said flatly, trying to sit up once more.

“Clark, maybe you should listen to Sam,” his dad interjected. “That was a nasty fall you took.” Lois pushed him back down, keeping her hand on his chest.>>

Her mind was still slightly in a fog from not being quite awake combined with her being drunk last night. A slow smile spread across her face at the memory of the night before. It had been fun, cutting loose with Lucy and Clark last night.

He’d definitely been drunk...even if he did insist on denying it.

Uninhibited with every thought and caress.

<<“You were verry lucky I wasn’t affected by that spray.”

“What would you have done?”

“Not hidden in the other room while you were sleeping the effects from that spray off.”

“You said you weren’t attracted to me.”

“I lied.”

“I know.”

“I love you...I tried to hide it for...a...long time.”

“I think we were both hiding.”

“Maybe we should stop ...hiding I mean,” he grinned back at her, “I like this.”

“I thought we ...were.”

“We are, but I don’t say what I really want to...”

“Which is what?”

“That I love you Lois Lane and I want ...everything with you.”

“Everything?”

“Everything...I want to marry you...have kids...build a home together...and grow old... together.”

“Oh, Clark...”

“I want to die when I’m 110 years old in your arms. I want a lifetime with you, Lois...but I’m so afraid of scaring you off...I don’t say it.”

“Why would that scare me?”

“Because you scare easily in relationships.”>>

A thought occurred to her as she began to recall more of her short conversation with Clark this morning.

Oil rig. He’d said something about an oil rig.

How long did it take for him to recover after being exposed to Kryptonite?

<<“How are you feeling?”

“Just a little sore, I’ve never come in direct contact like that before...Well, no that’s not entirely true. I had to touch it when I threw it into the pond over there...”

“Oh...You scared me.”

“I’m sorry. I wish you didn’t have to see that.”

“You were hurt. I’ve never seen you hurt before.”

“It was a big chunk of Kryptonite.”

“How long does it take to, um...heal.”

“A few days was how long it took last time.”

“So are you...completely vulnerable?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”>>

Two days. Last time it had taken him two days. It hadn’t even been twenty-four hours.

What if ...

She bolted out of bed and quickly got dressed, heading toward the farmhouse to hopefully find out more about the oil spill Superman was helping with.

Lucy stared up at the ceiling fan, letting out a long sigh. She’d been restless for most of the night. Unable to get her sister’s comments out of her mind. She got out of bed and headed toward the bathroom to start getting dressed. Her mother was still sound asleep.

<<“So, does Superman get drunk?”>>

Why was Lois asking if Superman got drunk? What did it matter to Clark?

<<“No, I don’t get drunk Superman doesn’t get drunk.”>>

Why was Clark talking about Superman getting drunk? Was she missing something?

<<“Come on, flyboy, let’s get you to bed...”>>

What was that comment about?

Flyboy?

She’d heard her sister call Clark ‘Farmboy’ from time to time but never ‘flyboy.’ Something about the whole exchange seemed ... off...like she was missing a really big clue. The way they were talking...

Clark came to Metropolis at the same time as Superman.

He came out of that window without a scratch on him.

He jumped out of that airplane with Trask.

‘No, this is ridiculous,’ she told herself. ‘Is it?’

Why else would he and Lois be talking about Superman getting drunk? Why else would Lois be calling him ‘flyboy’?

If it was true and she wasn’t ready to admit that what she suspected was true yet...How long had she known? It had to have been recent. When did she stop talking about Superman?

‘The date.’ Lucy recalled. She’d had to practically shove Lois towards Clark the night she’d told her about her breakup with Lex and Clark’s admission. Was that when he’d told her? Or had she figured it out on her own? There was no telling with Lois.

Lucy stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, shaking her head. “This is ridiculous. He’s not...I saw him bleed. He was bleeding yesterday. Superman doesn’t bleed.”

She leaned toward the tub to turn the shower on, “Too much alcohol.” She told herself.

“We’re hearing now that Honeybraun Industries’ oil rig off the Gulf of Mexico hit a fuse and due to a mechanical error that is unclear at the moment a fire has been ignited on the rig. Superman is on the scene with rescue workers and has been working tirelessly to rescue the one hundred man crew from the rig. The Coast Guard has been working with Superman to help keep the fire at bay, but it is unclear how much progress they have made...”

“Oh, my God...” Lois breathed staring at the television screen numbly. Martha placed a supportive hand on her shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze.

Jonathan’s face was grim. “The preliminary reports are saying sabotage.”

“Is he going to be okay?” Lois asked in concern, looking at the coverage that had zoomed in on Clark’s oil covered face as he pulled four more crew members from the fire, flying them toward the coast where ambulatory workers were waiting.

Jonathan nodded, looking around the room cautiously. No one else was up yet. “Usually when one power comes back they all do. I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

Lois visibly relaxed, looking back at the screen in dismay, “Who would do such a thing?”

Lucy stood in the doorway of the Living Room, watching as Lois sat with the Kents, staring at the footage of the Superman rescue. The expression on her face wasn’t of a friend being concerned or of a journalist intrigued by the story unfolding before her. It was of a woman in love concerned for the man she loved. The man she was staring at was Superman.

If there was one thing Lucy knew beyond a shadow of a doubt it was that Lois Lane didn’t cheat. It wasn’t in her nature. So the only possible explanation was what she’d been theorizing before... Clark Kent, mild mannered reporter and Kansas farmboy was also the man of steel that was currently working tirelessly to save hundreds of oil rig workers from being caught in the explosion that had just ignited another half of the rig.

It made so much sense yet at the same time it didn’t. How had he been hurt yesterday if he was Superman?

“All systems are a go,” Nigel said, handing Lex a hanger with his Armani suit.

“A perfect disaster to help LexCorp acquire Honeybraun Industries at a competitive rate,” Lex said happily. “Assets are unfrozen?”

“All clear,” Nigel said with a satisfied nod, “Judge Stephens thanks you for your generous campaign donation.”

“Always willing to support our justice system,” Lex said happily, slipping his suit jacket on as he examined himself in the mirror. “Is the press ready?”

“Waiting for you, sir,” Nigel said, gesturing toward the elevator.

“Let’s not keep them waiting,” Lex said, walking with him toward the elevator, “It’s good to be home.”

Lois stared at the screen numbly as Lucy placed a supportive arm around her. There he was in the flesh, smiling for the camera and waving at the crowd: Lex Luthor. This was the man Lois and Clark suspected of numerous crimes and the man responsible for attacking her father. This man was walking around free while they were in hiding.

“That scum sucking psychopathic...” Lois muttered under her breath.

Lucy glanced at her father who was watching the screen numbly with the Kents. Ellen was busying herself in the kitchen, refusing to acknowledge what was happening on the television.

“Good Morning,” Lex’s smile smoothed across his face as the flashes of cameras reflected off his face. “I’m sure all of you have heard the rumors of the attempt to bring charges against myself and my company. Let me assure you they are just that, rumors. LexCorp has committed no crimes, and neither have I...”

“Yeah right...” Lucy muttered.

“Which brings me to my latest news, I’m pleased to announce LexCorp has recently acquired Honeybraun Industries and will be merging LexTel Power and Energy with Honeybraun Industries Gas and Power...”

A barrage of questions erupted from the crowd of reporters. Lucy glanced at Lois whose eyes had widened at the mention of Honeybraun Industries—the same company that owned the oil rig that exploded this morning.

“Oh my God...” Martha gasped, covering her mouth as she shook her head. Jonathan placed an arm over her shoulder. Her dad stared numbly at the screen, his face was flushed white as the reality of everything seemed to be sinking in him further and further.

“Yes, I’m aware of what happened on the Gulf this morning and I assure you LexCorp will be working around the clock to ensure the cleanup is handled swiftly with minimum . No, I do not

believe the pending FERC investigation will delay the merger...”

Jonathan clicked the television off, “Enough of that monster,” he muttered, getting up and heading toward the back door in a huff.

Lois’ body shuddered against her and Lucy tightened her arms around her, “It’s okay, sis.”

Thirteen.

That was the number of men that would not return home to their families.

Clark let out a long breath as he flew toward the Arctic, hoping to wash the stench of failure he felt within himself in the ice cold water.

Sabotage.

That had been what the Fire Marshall had been discussing with the OSHA Inspector that had arrived on the scene as he’d been leaving.

Sabotage.

Someone had deliberately caused this accident. Someone had knowingly put over a hundred men’s lives at risk along with the lives of everyone surrounding the Gulf area; including the innocent wildlife. Why?

That was the question he kept coming back to. Why would someone do such a thing? Why would someone create such a disaster?

Thirteen.

His mind came back to those he wasn’t able to save once more. He knew he had done what he could, but he still felt remorse for what he couldn’t do. Despite all his powers, he was only one man; one man that carried the world on his shoulders. Right now, the world seemed focused on the thirteen men and their families that would be getting the news that their loved ones wouldn’t be coming home.

Thirteen bodies.

Thirteen families.

Thirteen lives lost.

He let out a long sigh. He would get to the bottom of this. He would find out who was behind the sabotage and bring them to justice. Luthor may have destroyed the Daily Planet building, but he hadn’t destroyed the free press. He and Lois may not have an office to go to, but Bruce Wayne was still publishing online editions and working on getting the Daily Planet printed out of Gotham until they could rebuild. An expose, and exclusive on the sabotage of Honeybraun Industries’ oil rig would make for a great front page article.

He grimaced when he remembered there was no ‘front page’ on the online paper distributed at the moment. It wasn’t a paper that people could pick up at newsstands and read on their way to work. It was a webpage on the World Wide Web.

Who knew how many people would read it there?

‘Patience.’ He reminded himself. ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day.’

When he returned to Smallville, he would discuss a game plan with Lois. They needed to bring Luthor to justice along with all his lieutenants. The Boss had reigned over Metropolis for far too long. Hopefully, Perry would have some news on Jimmy so they could get more insight on the corruption in the Metropolis PD and find out what exactly they were up against. He hated not being able to help his friend. Unfortunately, it was the very wheels of justice he worked hard to defend that were holding his friend hostage at the moment. A bitter reminder of how far Luthor’s reach was in Metropolis and how hard he would fall when he finally put Lex Luthor behind bars.

Toni Taylor stepped off the private jet, following Mrs. Cox toward the limo parked outside the gate. The woman in front of her emitted of confidence and power: something she’d yearned for when taking over the Metros. That had been her first mistake. Her

second had been trusting Lex Luthor.

Now, months later she had gone from one prison to another. At least in Metropolis Prison, she knew where the walls were and what to expect. With Lex, it was a dangerous balancing act. She had to keep him believing she was on his side long enough for her to plan her escape.

At least now he'd stop coming after Johnny.

He was safe now.

Lex took a long puff from his cigar, looking over the contracts he'd just signed. "Thank you so much for your cooperation, Mr. Campbell," Lex handed him his copies of the contract. "I'm so glad we could come to an understanding."

"Well, who is the FERC to come between good business?" Campbell tapped his briefcase to emphasize his point as he turned to leave. "As of midnight tonight Honeybraun Industries and all of its subsidiaries become the property of LexCorp."

"Excellent news," Lex said, watching as Campbell turned to leave, bumping into none other than Bruce Wayne as he opened the office doors.

"Mr. Campbell, this is a surprise," Bruce remarked as he held his hand out to shake the wary Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Head Commissioner's hand.

"Mr. Wayne, always a pleasure," he said all too quickly as he rushed past him and headed toward the elevators.

Bruce turned to watch the commissioner leave then turned back to Lex with a knowing look, shaking his head, "You're a piece of work, aren't you, Lexy?"

Lex cringed at the nickname, "We're all past boarding school nicknames don't you think, Squeaks?"

"Ah, touché," Bruce remarked with a knowing look, "So let me guess, the investigation into Luthor Power acquiring Honeybraun Industries will be closed and no conflict of interest will be found...thanks to a generous donation to his campaign next year?"

Lex's eyes narrowed, but he didn't acknowledge Bruce's accusation one way or another, "What are you doing here? Not enough late night parties in Gotham?" He snapped his fingers, "Oh, I know, you finished going through all of Gotham's elite for companionship so now you've got to expand the horizons..."

"You're one to talk," Bruce shot back snidely. "No, I just wanted to let you know I've settled in a nice penthouse apartment downtown." He walked toward the room length windows on Lex's balcony and pointed, "How do you like the improvements we made last month?"

Lex's face scowled as he saw Bruce point to the new additions of WayneTech—three additional stories to the building—making it the tallest building in Metropolis. "I...noticed." Was all he could manage through gritted teeth.

"Top two floors are the penthouse apartment. I figured with all the rebuilding I'll have to do for the Planet..."

"Rebuilding?" Lex scoffed incredulously.

"Of course I can't have the Daily Planet out of commission," he pulled out his blackberry typing in a few keys as he spoke, "In fact..." He showed Lex the screen on his phone and Lex grimaced. A website. Bruce Wayne had set up an online paper for the Daily Planet. "We're publishing online as we speak. We're the first paper to do so...Should make things interesting, don't you think, Lexy boy?" Bruce patted him on the shoulder as he gestured toward the WayneTech towers across from LexCorp, "Looks like we're going to be neighbors."

"Well, I suppose you've thought of everything, haven't you?" Lex spat bitterly.

"Oh, are you sulking?" Bruce admonished, putting an arm on Lex's shoulder, "With all the good you do for Metropolis you should be ecstatic to have someone nearby to help lift the burden. Now granted now you won't have a cover for laundering some of

that dirty money, but hey maybe you can resort to focusing on those legitimate businesses of yours."

"I don't know what you're talking about Bruce. That paranoia is going to get the best of you if you're not careful," Lex remarked coolly.

"Paranoia? Is that what they call it?" Bruce said, stepping toward Lex. "How long are you going to keep playing games with this kid's life?" Bruce asked, cutting to the chase.

"I don't know what you're referring to," Lex said airily.

"Of course you don't," Bruce sighed, running a hand through his hair. "What is it going to cost to get James Olsen cleared of the ridiculous charges you have against him?"

"You act like I have some control over the unfortunate charges against this young man?" Lex shrugged in confusion, "I have no control over who the police find culpable in arson or...terrorism any more than you do, Mr. Wayne."

"That's the game you want to play, huh?" Bruce sighed, "I know you think you're invincible and no one can touch you Lexy, but just remember those skeletons in your closet will come out eventually, and it wouldn't take much to convince a certain team of reporters to do a little digging and point them in the right direction..."

"You forget if you take me down you take Wayne Enterprises down, Mr. Wayne," Lex said, grabbing Bruce by the collar roughly, "You play the act of billionaire playboy well, but I invented it. I am a *GOD* in this city."

"Seems like you've got some competition in that department," Bruce remarked snidely, glancing toward the television set showing Superman's rescue of the Honeybraun Industries' oil rig from earlier that morning. "Really, Lex, I would have thought you could be at least a little more creative than mass murder to get what you want."

"Well, I was always a fan of the old-fashioned gangster style." Lex shrugged, "At least when I took over LuthorCorp I didn't waste my talents playing chicken with my daddy's company." Lex's eyes narrowed as he met Bruce's steel gaze. Yes, he'd hit a nerve. "You waste your time fiddling away with your latest toys and blowing your money on charities that wouldn't spit on your grave..." Bruce's jaw tightened, and Lex continued. "You're nothing but a spoiled brat with too much time on his hands because your parents never gave you the ..."

"Watch yourself, Lexy," Bruce snapped, grabbing him by the collar.

They stared one another down angrily, millimeters from one another with their gazes locked in a cold hard stare. The sound of Bruce's phone ringing broke the tension, and he pulled his phone out to answer, "Bruce Wayne." A few moments later Bruce nodded to Lex, "This isn't over Lexy," then turned to his phone call, "Of course Mr. White. Just send Mr. Kent to my office, and we'll sort out the details."

Perry White stood in a dark room with Constance Hunter. It had been just shy of twenty-four hours from the time Jimmy had been brought in for questioning when they finally received the call that Jimmy was in the system. He had been fingerprinted, booked, and charged with attempted murder and making a terroristic threat. Where these allegations had come from was beyond Perry's line of reasoning. It was evident Jimmy Olsen was the scapegoat in a larger scheme. There was no way he could do what he was being accused of. The only logical explanation was a conspiracy to railroad Jimmy for someone else's crimes. He just didn't have the evidence to back it up.

He and Constance went back and forth with the deputy clerk on getting approved for visitation with Jimmy. After several hours of negotiating with the District Attorney's office and the warden, they were granted twenty minutes of visitation.

Twenty minutes.

It seemed like a meager amount of time given how long they'd held Jimmy for questioning without an attorney. Perry stared at the large metal door warily, "What's taking them so long?"

"Who knows?" Constance shrugged, squinting her face in disgust. Her disdain for the situation was just as evident on her face as it was his. She narrowed her eyes toward the door, looking at her watch to check the time.

Terrorist Threat.

That was the charge against Jimmy. After stopping by his apartment to shower and gather his and Lois' research into Luthor and his laptop, he checked in with Perry and found out the police had finally charged Jimmy. While it was a relief they'd finally charged him so they could get an attorney in the room with him, it was still frustrating that there had been enough evidence to bring charges against Jimmy.

There were so many things he couldn't prove, but he knew Luthor was behind this. Unfortunately, he had no idea where to begin looking for him. The man had become a ghost after Bruce Wayne had purchased the Planet and destroyed Luthor's plans to get his claws in the Planet. He still didn't know what Luthor's attempts to gain control of the Planet were about and he didn't know what to expect from the man now.

Everything they thought they'd had against Luthor fell apart in less than twenty-four hours. Now they were starting from scratch. Perry had arranged a meeting with Bruce Wayne to find out what they could of Bruce's plans on rebuilding the Planet while Perry was tied up with the Jimmy scandal. He planned on using the meeting to find out what he could of Bruce's history with Luthor. It was apparent the other day that the bad blood between the two men was more than just a tiff over ownership of the Planet.

Clark landed outside the WayneTech towers in Metropolis, finding a secluded alleyway behind the office buildings he quickly spun into a suit and tie then headed inside WayneTech. The doorman requested identification then sent him toward the desk clerk sitting by the elevators.

"Yes, can I help you?" the clerk asked.

"Is Mr. Wayne available?" He asked, "I'm Clark Kent with the Daily Planet and I..."

The clerk shook his head with a chuckle. "Mr. Wayne just called down to let us know you'd be coming by Mr. Kent." He handed Clark a visitor's badge, "Eleventh floor, fifth door on your right."

Jonathan stared at the tractor in front of him, lifting the hood to begin working on rebuilding the engine. It wasn't something he usually tried to do without Clark here, but at the moment he felt like he could lift the tractor without any help. The adrenaline pulsing through his veins gave him a sense of power that made him feel invincible. He was angry. He was furious. He'd listened to Clark and Lois tell him and Martha of how Lex Luthor had committed truly heinous acts against humanity. It was easy for him to reassure his son that he couldn't stoop to his level and he would figure out a way to bring the man down. Today was different.

It wasn't just Metropolis Lex Luthor was coming after now. It was the world. He had attacked an innocent crew for what reason? All those families and lives were put in danger so he could acquire a company? Even without evidence, he knew it was true. Seeing what the man had done to his son and Lois only fueled his anger toward Lex Luthor. The man was a monster.

"Need some help?" Sam asked grabbing the chain for the crane to pull the motor out of the tractor.

Jonathan looked at the doctor in surprise and chuckled, "If I could wring that monster's neck with my bare hands I would," he muttered angrily.

Sam nodded, "Believe me there'd be a line." His face grew sorrowful, "I can't believe he fooled me for so long."

"He's a master manipulator...or at least that's what Clark's told us," Jonathan said hurriedly, not wanting to give too much away about Clark's and Lex Luthor's history together.

"I hate that I've put everyone at risk like this. I thought I was doing something...good. Helping paralysis victims regain control of their muscles and live to fight another day. That was the goal."

"It's an admiral goal, Sam," Jonathan reassured, placing a hand on his shoulder. "So many victims of car accidents or soldiers injured in combat could benefit from it."

"When this is all over I'd like to do that. Use the super chip to help." Sam shook his head in disgust. "I hate that I allowed myself to be manipulated like that though. Ellen can barely stand to look at me. Lucy won't hardly speak to me, and Lois...who knows what she's thinking?" He huffed in disgust. "She's always been extremely overprotective of her sister."

"They have a strong relationship," Jonathan nodded, "It's good they have that. We, uh, were never able to give Clark that and it's something we regret every day."

"It's hard to know what the right decision is," Sam remarked softly. "Clark's a good man. I'm thankful he came into Lois' life when he did. She's become more...open, grounded."

"I like to thank they complement one another," Jonathan said with a smile. "Clark is a good man, but he can be just as boneheaded as the next. Lois keeps him on his toes, reminding him not to take himself so seriously. Sometimes he needs that." "I think they both do," Sam said softly, glancing toward the barn, "Speaking of Clark, uh, haven't seen him around this morning. Where is he?"

Jonathan tried not to panic and smiled, "Uh, he, uh had to help out Wayne Irig this morning with getting the roof of the old barn replaced. Wayne can't do heights like he used to."

'Hopefully, he buys it.' Jonathan thought to himself.

Martha watched as Jonathan slipped out the back door and headed toward the tractor. Lois and Lucy stood numbly in the living room, staring at the television that Jonathan had just turned off. The sound of scrubbing from the other room caught her attention. She looked toward the kitchen and saw Ellen had buried herself in there with all the cleaning supplies, taking a scrub brush to the tile countertops.

"Ellen?" Martha tapped her on the shoulder as she scrubbed ferociously at the tile.

"Wha?" Ellen turned around, jerking her head toward her in surprise, "Oh, Martha, you scared me," she looked around at the appliances she'd pulled out and frowned, "I'm sorry. I saw a spot, and I was trying to..."

"It's okay," Martha reassured, placing an arm around Ellen's shoulders, "Ellen, are you all right?" Martha asked in concern, taking note of the current disarray the kitchen was currently in.

"Why wouldn't I be all right?" Ellen muttered as she scrubbed, "The man that has systematically destroyed all of our lives and forced us into hiding is out there walking free as a bird."

"Ellen, we're all upset," Martha began.

"Did you know I had to pull fifty-seven shards of glass out of Lois' scalp yesterday?" Ellen breathed shakily. "Fifty-seven. I counted as I pulled each shard out of her hair, her scalp, her forehead..."

"Ellen," Martha sighed, kneeling down to sit on the floor next to her. "I get it. Believe me..."

"Do you?" Ellen asked, "Sam was working *for* him. Making some super-chip...all the while putting his daughters at risk...For what?" Ellen spat bitterly, "I can't even go home," she said in a harsh whisper.

"You'll get through this. We all will. Lois and Clark are going to bring him down and expose him for the monster he is."

"What if they can't?" Ellen asked. "He's already turned the tables on them once. What if they can't stop him?"

"Mr. Kent, good to see you," Bruce said, gesturing toward his desk as Clark followed him in the office.

"Thanks for meeting with me Mr. Wayne. I was surprised to hear you were still in Metropolis." Clark said taking a seat across from Bruce.

"After what happened yesterday I thought it'd be best for me to stay close," Bruce remarked with a grimace. "Tragedy what happened to the Planet."

Clark frowned as he recalled the injured coworkers he'd pulled out of the burning building yesterday, "There were a lot of people injured."

"Thankfully no fatalities," Bruce added.

"Small miracles." Clark quipped. "Any thoughts on who might be responsible for the attack yesterday?" Clark began hesitantly.

Bruce nodded, "Well, you're a smart man, Mr. Kent, who do *you* suspect?"

Clark's eyes narrowed slightly, "I have my theories." He began hesitantly.

Bruce nodded, "Like a certain multi-billionaire that resurfaced conveniently after the charges against him were dismissed?"

"For example?" Clark shrugged with amusement.

"Convenient, wasn't it?" Bruce remarked bitterly, "Luthor always liked to play dangerously." He let out a long breath, "but I suspect you didn't come out here to talk hypotheticals."

Clark nodded, watching at Bruce turned his monitor toward Clark to show him his screen. Clark saw report after report on Honeybraun Industries acquisition show up on Bruce's screen and remarked, "Keep coming back to the fact that there is no evidence though."

"Evidence can disappear and appear if you have enough pull." Bruce grimaced.

"So I've noticed," Clark spat.

"I'm doing everything I can to help Jimmy. I know it wasn't him."

"Is anyone actually investigating?" Clark asked.

Bruce shook his head, "They think they've got their guy. Why would they?" Bruce pulled up some schematic plans for what looked like a satellite.

"What is this?" Clark asked. Pointing to the screen.

"Oh, just something that was pointed out to me by an old colleague of mine when I began asking why it was so important that Lex Luthor acquire Honeybraun Industries.

Clark's eyes narrowed at the mention of the oil rig's owner. "People were killed this morning."

"A lot more are going to be if someone doesn't put a stop to him," Bruce said bitterly. "Ever hear of the Annihilator?"

"Military weapon satellite from the Cold War," Clark nodded. "What about it?"

"What if I told you that the Annihilator was more than a theory but an actual design that was put together by an energy company's weapons' division back when they were still contracting nuclear arms weapons for the military?"

"I'd say, go on..." Clark said, folding his hands in front of him.

"If someone just happened to find these plans they could use them to build the satellite weaponry or even convert the plans to something a little more...local," Bruce continued, pulling up plans for the annihilator that showed a handheld weapon with rounded rims at the barrel.

"Nuclear weapons used on the streets of Metropolis could be...deadly," Clark remarked bitterly.

"And a perfect weapon to use against a certain superhero that has been stopping a certain boss..."

"Boss? How do you know about the boss?" Clark asked, leaning in toward Bruce.

"I make it my business to do my research before diving in on my acquisitions. The Planet is an acquisition and still very much in Metropolis. We may not have a building yet, but the presence is here."

"Why are you telling me this?" Clark asked in concern.

"You seem to have a lot of...luck getting ahold of Superman. I thought maybe you could warn him and get him to help us bring Luthor down," Bruce said meeting Clark's gaze.

Clark shifted nervously under his scrutinizing expression.

"Even if he wanted to help...there's not much he could do. There is no evidence."

"Maybe you're just not looking in the right place," Bruce said with a knowing smile. "You and Ms. Lane are both celebrated, reporters. I'm surprised neither of you has thought to look in his past before now."

"What do you mean?" Clark asked, "His records are sealed, and there's no way anyone could..."

Bruce placed an envelope on the desk and smiled, "Only Lex's records are sealed, but the other individuals involved..." Bruce shrugged.

"Why do I get the feeling you know more than you're letting on?" Clark inquired, taking the envelope from Bruce cautiously.

"Lex and I go back to boarding school.... never got along," Bruce smiled back at him. Clark wasn't sure how much he believed that but nodded for Bruce to continue, "Lex never was good about letting go of old grudges." He stood up, pulling a key out of his briefcase, "You may need this." He handed it to Clark.

"Thank you, Mr. Wayne," Clark said standing up to shake Bruce's hand.

"Tell Superman to be careful," Bruce said with a grimace.

"Lexy boy was a psycho even back in grade school. After his parents had died he got worse. There is no line he won't cross."

"I'll let Superman know," Clark reassured. "If you hear anything about Jimmy..."

"You and Mr. White will be the first ones I call," Bruce nodded.

Clark pulled out a card from his pocket and jotted down a number on it, "We're laying low right now so try to be discreet with this number."

"Probably for the best," Bruce acknowledged, walking with Clark toward the exit. Clark turned to look at him, still trying to make up his mind about the billionaire, "Trying to make up your mind about me?"

"Let's just say I haven't had the best of luck with philanthropists," Clark acknowledged with a raised eyebrow.

"I haven't had the best of luck with reporters," Bruce added.

"But you're helping me. Why?" Clark asked.

"I guess I trust you more than I distrust reporters," Bruce smiled.

"And more than you distrust Lex," Clark added.

"You don't pull any punches do you, Kent?" Bruce asked, extending his hand for Clark to shake, "Well, I guess we'll have to learn to trust one another," Bruce remarked with a smirk. "Thanks for coming by Mr. Kent."

Clark nodded, "I'll be in touch."

"How you doing kid?" Perry asked as the door to the visitor's room closed behind Jimmy. He was in a dark blue inmate uniform. His face was bruised and had cuts on it. Perry knew the answer to his question before he even asked it.

Jimmy sighed, "I've had better weeks."

"I'm Constance Hunter," Constance extended her hand for him to shake as he approached the table to take a seat.

"James Olsen," he said with a wince as he sat down.

"Jimmy, you okay?" Perry asked.

"Just a welcoming present from my roommate," Jimmy winced, "I'd say it's nice to meet you but I don't think these are

the ideal circumstances for meeting anyone,” Jimmy said bitterly.

“No, they’re not,” Constance said seriously, taking a seat across from him. “I’m your attorney. I’ve been hired by Mr. Wayne to provide the best defense I can, but in order to do that I need to know everything.”

Jimmy met her gaze and nodded, “First and foremost, I didn’t do this and I won’t say I did.”

“I understand,” Constance said with a heavy sigh, “This is obviously a setup. The evidence they have is lacking...”

“Not to mention holding him illegally for almost a day,” Perry added with a bite in his tone.

“We’ll get to that later,” Constance added. “What do you know about these terrorism charges?”

Jimmy shrugged. “They’re saying my dad was NIA and that was why I blew up the Planet but it’s a bunch of bull...”

“No one believes that, Jimmy,” Perry reassured him.

“My dad’s a structural engineer,” Jimmy said. “I haven’t seen him since I was sixteen. He was catching a connecting flight to Shanghai...”

“We’ll need to find him to help throw these accusations out. Do you have a number for him?” Constance asked, jotting down notes in her notepad.

Jimmy sighed, “I think my mom might. We kinda lost touch.”

“That’s okay,” Constance reassured, handing him the notepad. “Give me all the numbers you have for him and your mom, and I’ll get my investigator on it,” Jimmy nodded, grabbing the pen to write on the notepad.

“How soon before we can get him out of here?” Perry asked in concern.

“Depends on the judge,” Constance said with a sigh, “He’s been charged with some serious crimes.”

“Might as well give that up, Chief,” Jimmy scoffed, “I’m not getting out of here until you find out who really blew up the Planet.”

“Now son you can’t think like that.”

“No, he’s right, Mr. White,” Constance said with a sigh.

Jenkins stepped into the unmarked car, glancing around to see if anyone was watching. “I said get in!” Fuentes snapped at him.

Jenkins jerked his head down and closed the door behind him. Fuentes revved the engine and took off, heading toward the other side of town.

“Hey! Slow down man!” Jenkins admonished.

“No time,” Fuentes spat back. “You’re on strict orders from the boss to make sure the case against James Olsen sticks. To do that we can’t be seen together.”

Jenkins rolled his eyes, “Yeah yeah yeah.”

“You got it?” Fuentes asked, reaching his arm over to Jenkins.

“Background info on Sam Lane, Lois Lane, Lucy Lane, and Ellen Lane. Driver’s License information, criminal history... Everything you need,” Jenkins said with a sigh as he handed him a large manila envelope. “Not much on any of them though. No arrests. Some parking tickets but that’s about it.”

“Figures,” Fuentes remarked. “What about his former partner?”

“Menken?” Jenkins handed him the file. “Everyone hired at Menken’s gym and their backgrounds.” He handed another file to him.

Fuentes saw the size of the envelope and grinned, “Perfect.”

Lois stared numbly at the television. It had been hours since the news circuits first picked up the tragedy in the Gulf of Mexico. There was still no sign of Clark. Thankfully Lucy seemed too hungover to notice, and her parents were too concerned with the drama of what was happening with Lex to pay Clark’s disappearance much attention.

“Preliminary findings are pointing to possible sabotage for the

oil line leak which led to the explosion that took place this morning,” the newscaster read off as the footage showed the amateur video of the rig exploding earlier that morning.

“Investigators currently have no other leads...”

“I think that’s enough of that,” Lucy took a seat next to her and grabbed the remote, clicking it off in the process.

“Luce!” Lois admonished, grabbing it back from her forcefully.

“You’re going to drive yourself crazy watching that,” Lucy said. “Almost everyone made it out alive. Superman left a few hours ago. Blah blah blah. Same thing they’ve been saying for the last three hours.”

Lois sighed, leaning her head back against the couch as she looked at her sister with a half-smile. “I guess it wouldn’t hurt to do something else.”

“That’s the spirit,” Lucy grinned. “If you want some entertainment you could come out to the field and watch dad try and drive a tractor...”

Lois laughed, “What???”

“Oh, you know daddy....Always the perfect guest: offering to, clear the table, cook, clean and apparently in Smallville he tries to impersonate a farmer.”

Lois laughed at the thought of her clean shaven father getting himself dirty; much less trying to drive a tractor.

Lucy grew quiet for a moment, “Mom seems to be enjoying the peace and quiet here.”

Lois nodded, glancing toward the back porch where Martha and Ellen were sitting with glasses of lemonade chatting away. It did appear that her mom was at least making the best of the situation. Who knew Smallville was just what the doctor ordered for all of them to recharge?

“Perry called me,” Lucy stated softly.

Lois sighed, placing a supportive arm around her sister. “I’m sorry, Luce.”

“I don’t understand how they can do this,” Lucy whispered hoarsely, pulling away from Lois.

“It’s not legal,” Lois said flatly. “Not that it makes much of a difference.”

“So is Superman going to help us break Jimmy out?” Lucy asked with a smile.

Lois chuckled at the thought, “I don’t think he practices breaking criminals OUT of jail, Luce.”

“Jimmy’s not a criminal,” Lucy countered.

“He’s got to be cleared the legal way, Luce,” Lois reasoned.

A familiar voice from the other side of the room added, “Unfortunately Lois is right. Superman can’t pick and choose the laws he upholds. Just like the officers can’t pick and choose which laws they defend.”

Lois and Lucy turned to see Clark dressed in jeans and a t-shirt with an open flannel shirt walking toward them. He took a seat on the other side of Lois, wrapping an arm around her. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and never let go, but with her sister sitting right there she knew it would raise suspicions regarding his absence today.

Thankfully Lucy didn’t say anything. Instead, she opted to challenge Clark’s statement, “Even if it’s a crooked officer that’s gotten Jimmy behind bars in the first place?”

Clark hung his head, meeting Lucy’s anxious gaze, “Superman can’t break the law, Lucy.”

“Then maybe we need to,” Lucy pressed.

“Luce...” Lois began.

“I’m serious. Jimmy is going to be in jail with a bunch of criminals and ...” Her tirade quickly escalated into a panicked tone as she rambled on about her fears for Jimmy’s safety.

“Luce...” Lois interrupted, trying to get a word in edgewise.

“He’s never been to jail.”

“Lucy...” Lois tried again.

“He’s never even had a tattoo.”

“Lu..” She found herself cut off again and let out a long sigh. She gave Clark a frustrated groan, and he offered a sympathetic look as Lucy continued her tirade.

“He could get hurt or worse, and it’ll be all our fault for leaving him in there...”

“Lucy!” Lois shouted, trying to get her sister’s attention. “Calm down.”

“We’re well aware of the danger he’s in, but no one,” Clark gave Lois a warning glance before turning back to Lucy, “is going to break him out.” Lucy shook her head in disbelief as Clark continued, “We’ve got an attorney working on getting him released. Bill Henderson is working on getting the DA on our side. I know it is....painful sitting here not being able to do anything to help him but right now you just have to trust that everything is going to work out.”

“Trust?” Lucy scoffed in disbelief, “Trust? Why should I? I mean, you think you know someone and then...” She stopped herself for a moment before continuing, “I used to trust the police. I used to believe that the law worked to keep the bad guys in jail and the good guys out, but now...”

“We’re going to beat this,” Clark promised. “He’s going to be okay.”

“You don’t know that Clark,” Lucy argued. “No one can promise that.”

“You’re right,” Lois interrupted, sensing her sister’s tone was growing more and more desperate, “We don’t know that, and we can’t promise anything. We can try. We can do everything in our power to find out who is behind this and stop him.”

“We know who’s behind this,” Lucy spat bitterly.

“We have no proof,” Clark reminded her.

“So how do we get the proof we need?” Lucy asked, folding her arms over her chest and leaning back into the couch.

“We do what we do best,” Lois said with a grin.

“Investigate,” Clark said with a smile.

Sam crinkled his nose as Jonathan continued his story, “There’s Corn-O-Rama, Corn Queen Pageant, the Husk-Off, Popcorn, creamed corn, corn on the cobb...”

“That’s a lot of corn,” Sam stated, uncertainly.

“It’s a lot of fun. Before those agents went crazy on us, Lois had a good time when she came out here with Clark earlier this year.”

“I’ll take your word on it,” Sam said, guiding the motor back into the tractor as he spoke. “I think this baby’s just about done.”

“Nothing like a hard day’s work to spruce up your appetite,” Jonathan said with a look of satisfaction.

The car door caught his attention, and he turned to see Martha and Ellen approaching them with several bags, “Jonathan can you two give us a hand?” Martha pointed toward the bags in the back of the truck.

“Did you leave anything in the store?” Jonathan teased.

“Very funny,” Martha smiled back at him. “I got enough for a few days. I thought you could grill up some burgers and I got some fresh apples from Mazie to make some apple...” The rest of Martha’s statement fell on deaf ears. Jonathan knew exactly what Martha had plans to make with Mazie’s apples. Her famous apple pie.

Lucy sat across from Lois and Clark at the table in the den watching them cautiously as Clark relayed the information ‘Superman’ had told him earlier in the day. She still wasn’t sure what to believe. Throughout the day she’d watched her sister and the Kents trying to determine if their reaction to the disaster in the Gulf was that of concerned parents or that of concerned citizens. Lex Luthor coming back to Metropolis like nothing had happened had been hard for everyone to take. The man that was trying to

railroad Jimmy was out free as a bird while Jimmy was being framed for heinous crimes. It wasn’t fair.

“I haven’t heard anything from Henderson, but I did get a chance to bring our files and laptops from our apartments so we can work on finding something on Luthor,” Clark explained, pulling out his laptop.

Lois nodded, sharing a look with Clark before grabbing a file box from him, “Nice of Superman to give you a lift.”

There it was. That look Lois and Clark kept sharing whenever they talked about Superman. There was something there. She knew it, but could the explanation really be that Clark was Superman? Could Superman be the same man that teased her sister and threw darts with Jimmy and cooked dinner for them on late nights of research and homework?

“It was nice of Superman to give you a ride back,” Lucy commented as she took a sip of her water. “You’re lucky to have a friend like that, Clark.”

Her mind was screaming at her that the pieces didn’t fit. How could Superman bleed? How could he bruise? How could he get drunk? A thousand thoughts were running through her mind at the moment as they went through the disarray of papers on the table of notecards and post-its. Organized chaos.

“Uh, yeah,” Clark said shifting under her gaze slightly, “I caught him after the incident this morning.”

“How’s he doing?” Lois asked, placing a hand on his. It was a silent gesture not lost on Lucy.

She watched as Clark’s eyes locked with Lois’ and then his hand moved to her cheek, stroking her jawline silently before turning to answer, “He’s still upset about the men that lost their lives this morning, but he’s hanging in there.”

That statement intrigued Lucy. Clark seemed to have a lot of first-hand knowledge of Superman’s feelings and thoughts. Lucy felt a twinge of sorrow as she took in Clark’s statement. Superman was upset about the men that lost their lives. She watched her sister place a hand on his chest and move to rest her head on his shoulder. Lois opened her mouth to respond, but Lucy interjected instead, “I’m sure he did everything he could.”

Clark gave her a weak smile then murmured, “Thirteen families have to bury their loved ones because of what happened this morning.”

“That’s not Superman’s fault...or the crew’s for that matter,” Lois added.

Lucy shook her head, “Whoever sabotaged that rig to blow up this morning has those men’s lives on their head.” She grew quiet for a moment then added, “Of course we all know who that was.”

Clark’s face grew grim, “Not definitively.”

“That pesky detail of evidence again,” Lucy sighed, running a hand through her hair.

“Yeah,” Lois gave a weak smile.

The front door opened and they turned to see Jonathan and Sam with two large grocery bags in their arms with Martha and Ellen right behind them, “Hope everyone’s hungry,” Jonathan called, heading into the kitchen. Clark got up to follow them into the kitchen and help, leaving Lucy with Lois.

“So,” Lucy said softly bringing her glass of water to her lips and taking a drink.

“So,” Lois said, handing her a stack of papers, “Why don’t you make yourself useful and help me organize these.”

Lesley Prescott knew everything about everyone in her neighborhood. She prided herself on being the one person that knew the dirt on all her neighbors and their spouses. If someone was having an affair, splitting up, or even in danger of being evicted from the country club she knew about it. Which was why it was a surprise to her that a tidbit of information on the elusive Ellen Lane hadn’t landed in her lap as it should have. When she’d inquired about the younger woman’s travel plans, she’d been

evasive, leaving a key for watering the plants and instructions to not discuss her travel plans with anyone.

She finished watering the last of Ellen's orchids, frowning at the pristine awards from the National Garden Club of New Troy that sat displayed on her window sill. When she opened the door to leave she felt a hard push as a burly man with a large box stood above her, "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Well, I never have..." She muttered grimacing at the dirt she now had all over her from falling into the flowerbed outside the door.

"I'm so sorry," he pulled out a handkerchief, reaching out to brush the dirt off her stained white blouse, "Let me get that."

"I've got it!" She snapped, grabbing the cloth from him.

"Of course ma'am, I'm so sorry. I was just looking for an address to deliver this package to and I..."

She eyed the large package in his arms curiously, trying to spy the name on the label, "Oh, well you're in luck. I'm head of the neighborhood association. I can tell you everything about everyone. What's the address?"

He smiled, glancing down at the package, "It's for an Ellen Lane," he read off.

"Ellen?" She frowned, "Oh, she's out of town. Won't be back for quite some time." She reached toward the box which he was able to successfully pull away from her.

"You don't say," he looked like he was hiding a smile, "Any idea when she'll be back?"

"They didn't say," she fingered his arm, "but between you and me I think she's gotten herself into quite the pickle."

"Really?" He grinned, "What makes you say that?"

"Well, you didn't hear it from me but I have it on good authority that she left out of here with Superman."

"Superman?" He whistled, impressed, "Really?"

"Superman's apparently really close with her daughter, the reporter," she gave a crooked smile, "If you know what I mean."

"Of course," he nodded. "So Mrs. Lane had a flight from Superman. When was this?"

"Yesterday afternoon," she said airily, "Apparently they'll be gone for an indefinite amount of time."

His face broke into a broad smile, "Well thank you, ma'am; you've been most helpful."

"Don't you want to leave the package?"

"No, it's a certified package. I have to get her signature."

"Pity," she frowned.

"Yes, it is."

Vicki looked around the new set of her news broadcasting station, taking in the lights and cameras, "Bruce you shouldn't have..."

"Well you always said you wanted to see your name in lights, Vicki," he motioned to the illuminated lights on the desk with 'Vicki' embossed on the front.

"It's beautiful." She whispered, leaning in to kiss his cheek, "Thank you Bruce."

Lex threw his phone on the receiver, hoisting the intercom system it was connected to upward and heaving it across the room in frustration. Unsatisfied with the trajectory of the phone he cleared his desk of the papers with the swing of an arm, knocking the contents of the desk to the ground.

Bruce Wayne had done it again.

He had outplayed him again.

Every satellite feed that LNN relied on for airing the news station had been booked well into the twenty-first century. Every satellite feed that ironically was owned by LexCorp yet had been leased out to WayneTech for the new "Vicki Vale Show."

If he canceled the contract, he'd be looking at paying over five billion dollars in legal fees and breach of contract fees. If he let the

show continue LNN would have nowhere to air, and he would lose revenue from advertisers that would surely sue for the mishap.

"Probably did it on purpose..." Lex muttered under his breath as he fought the anger boiling over inside him, willing his temper down as he began to plan his revenge.

"Yes, Mrs. Olsen, this is Perry White..." Perry spoke into his phone as he glanced around the crowded waiting area, watching as Constance argued with the guard, trying to finagle another visit for tomorrow with Jimmy.

"Yes, I called you about Jimmy?" There was a loud shriek in his ear before he could make out what she was saying.

"No, no, nothing like that. The reason I'm calling is we need to get a hold of Jimmy's father," there was a dead silence on the other end and then she mumbled a number for him to call before abruptly hanging up.

He sighed, glancing down at his hand he'd jotted the number down on and began to dial.

Sam Lane took a sip from his coffee as Lois and Clark finished relaying what Clark had learned during his trip to Metropolis that day, "So, this Bruce Wayne? Is he someone we can trust?"

"Honestly, I'm not completely sure," Clark began. "We don't know a whole lot about him."

"We'd just met him a few days ago." Lois explained, "But Perry had met with him and seemed to trust him. He has a pretty good judge of character," she shot Clark a smile as she finished her last statement.

He smiled back at her before turning back to Sam, "Luthor isn't going to stop until he's sent the message to everyone that he is unbeatable. He's challenging anyone who's dared stand up to him." He cast a worrisome glance toward Lucy, "Hence why we moved everyone out here for safety."

"What about Jimmy?" Lucy asked, taking an empty seat next to Sam, "He's still locked up."

"Yeah," Clark said grudgingly, "Jimmy has been charged, but there is no way it will stand up in court."

"The charges against him are laughable really," Lois added, "I spoke with Perry, and he's reaching out to Jimmy's dad to get the terrorist and NIA connection tossed. Once that charge is gone, we should be able to get him out on bail."

Sam was quiet for a moment before stating, "It's not going to be that easy." He glanced at Lois then at Lucy before continuing, "This would work if you were dealing with honest people, but the people we're dealing with aren't honest. He's being set up to send a message. That's how Luthor works. We need to send a message right back."

"How?" Lucy scoffed. "We're not exactly on a level playing field right now."

"Lois and I were planning on going back to Metropolis to see what we can dig up on Luthor's past..." Clark began.

"Now hold on right there!" Sam cut him off, "If it's too dangerous for us to be in Metropolis it is too dangerous for you two. You need to be smart about this and..."

"We can't just sit around and do ...nothing," Lois argued. "We have to do this."

"So what are we supposed to do until then?" Lucy demanded, "Sit around and wait for you to give us the bat signal? No, if you're going. We're all going."

"That's right," Sam added. "We need to fight this monster together."

"It's too..." Clark found himself cut off again.

"Too what? Risky? Dangerous?" Lucy prompted, "What makes you think you can take those risks but we can't?"

Clark glanced at Lois who shrugged her shoulders. There was no reasonable explanation he could give them. By Lucy's

standards, it was either all or nothing. He relented, "You're right."

"So what is it going to be?" Sam asked, "Are we staying or going?"

Clark looked at Lois, "It's up to you."

"Bruce?" Vicki approached him with a worried expression, "We're set to air in thirty minutes and the power just cut out."

"What???" Bruce asked in disbelief. "That's not possible."

Vicki pursed her lips as she chuckled, "Impossible as it may be that's the situation. What do you want to do?"

He groaned, looking around the room as he tried to form a plan, "I think I have an idea. Have your lighting technician meet me at the hardware store."

"But Bruce..."

Lois let out a long sigh as she finished packing her bags. Clark watched her silently, "You sure about this?" He asked cautiously, worry evident in his tone.

She let out a long breath and turned to him with a smile, worry lines visible on her face as well, "I'm sure. We have to help Jimmy and the only way to do that is to bring Lex down."

"I know that," he sighed, "I'm just not sure about bringing your father and sister along." He shook his head uncertainly, "I can't be everywhere."

"They know the risks," Lois reminded him. "They want to help, and daddy wants a chance to make things right. With his knowledge of Lex's plan for the super chip maybe we can use it on building a case against him."

"Has he made a decision about testifying yet?" Clark asked.

"He said if we can get another person willing to testify with him he'll do it. He just doesn't want to be the entire case. It's a guaranteed bounty on his head."

"I can understand that," Clark reasoned. "The question is, who?"

"Well, according to a source of mine, there was a breakout at Oakland Prison. Johnny Taylor escaped," Lois hoped he could see where she was going with the information.

"When was this?" Clark asked surprised.

"This morning when you were in the Gulf," Lois said softly. "I think it was a setup."

Clark's face hardened, "He put all those lives in jeopardy..."

Lois closed the gap between them, placing a hand on his arms that were folded across his chest, "How are you doing?"

His head hung as he moved his head from side to side, trying to find the words, "I don't know. I've had so much happen in the last few days my head's still reeling from it all."

"How about," she looked around to make sure no one was around before moving her hand on his chest to draw the 'S' symbol, silently asking about Superman.

"I'm okay I guess," He shrugged. "I woke up, and all my powers seemed to be at a hundred percent."

"Seemed to be?" Lois asked concerned.

"I didn't exactly have a chance to test them out," he pointed out, softening his gaze he moved his hand to cup her cheek.

"And the Kryptonite?" Lois asked hesitantly, uncertain how to voice her concern over his exposure the day before to the poisonous rock.

"Dad said he and your dad got rid of it. It's been destroyed," he reassured her.

"Good," Lois sighed, "I guess it's better we found the Kryptonite, rather than a Trask-wannabe finding it."

Clark nodded, "That chunk was bigger than the one Wayne Irig found a few months back."

Lois let out a shaky breath, "Do you think there's any more out there?"

He rested his head against her head and spoke, "I don't know. Mom said she was going to try and check that area and see if they

found any more, but right now, who knows..."

"You scared me," He looked at her in concern, and she continued, "I know you told me it was real. I thought I understood...but seeing you on the ground like that..." Her voice cracked as she spoke and he put a hesitant arm around her shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he wrapped his arms around her protectively, and she rested her head on his chest, resting her arms around his waist as he spoke.

Lois leaned her head against his shoulder. "Clark?"

"Hmm?" He asked.

"Don't scare me like that again," she said quietly, wrapping her arms around him.

"I'll try," he reasoned, leaning in to kiss her.

"Only if you promise not to scare me with your half-baked plans," his eyes twinkled with laughter.

"My plans are not half-baked," she argued.

"Dangerous. Risky," he ticked off each point with a finger.

"You can't catch criminals by following all the rules," Lois pointed out.

"You can't stay out of trouble by constantly taking risks," he retorted with a smile, moving to cup her cheek.

"You're just as bad about jumping in without looking as I am," she pointed out, leaning in to kiss him, "You just do it with a cape." With that she pulled away, turning back to the luggage she was packing.

Fuentes grinned as he pulled out his phone, "Hey, Boss? Yeah, it looks like the Lanes are laying low. Apparently, *Superman* took them out of town."

He listened to his instructions and nodded, "You got it boss. I'll head over there now."

Clark had left to do a scan over their apartments and check in with Bruce Wayne on having a safe place in Metropolis where her father could stay. Leaving Sam to explain everything to their mother who—by the sounds of what was coming out of the barn—was not handling the news well. Outside the barn, Lois sat with her sister listening to Sam and Ellen argue about the decision to go back to Metropolis. "This was why I didn't want you two coming with us," Lois sighed.

"She'd be mad no matter what," Lucy pointed out.

"You have no consideration for anyone do you?" Ellen's voice echoed from inside the barn, "Not only do you put your family in danger by meddling with this...*Monster*..."

"Now, Ellen, you don't understand the severity..."

"I understand just fine." Ellen scoffed, "Go! Put yourself and your daughter at risk again. While you're at it, maybe you can get Lucy AND Lois to watch them kill you. I mean it's not enough for your daughters to see you beaten to a pulp. Why not add the burden of watching their father die to it, right?"

"You are blowing this out of proportion, and you know it," Sam retorted.

"No? You think going back to Metropolis isn't going to raise any red flags?" Ellen scoffed. "You got in bed with the MOB, Sam. Organized crime. Guns. Bullets. Ring any bells?"

"Don't you think I know that? That's why I'm going back to Metropolis! I have to fix what I've done. I have to protect"

"How?" Ellen scoffed, "How are you going to protect them when you can't even protect yourself?"

The slamming of the door echoed outside, and Lois and Lucy quickly scrambled to their feet to avoid their father as he stormed out of the barn angrily.

"Big mistake," Lois muttered.

Lex took a puff of his cigar, contemplating the latest news he'd received. Superman had helped Lois Lane's family leave

town without being detected by him. Why would the man of steel go to such lengths for her?

He pulled out the tape he'd been playing earlier in the aftermath of his destruction of the Daily Planet. The image showed Lois Lane stroking the man of steel's face and catching his gaze for a moment before pulling away.

He rewound the tape and played it again.

There was obviously something going on there. What exactly he wasn't sure yet.

He pulled out his cell phone and began to dial, "Nigel, get ready for stage two..."

Lois took a deep breath before entering the barn where she found Ellen gathering herself. The pain and worry on her face were evident. "Mom?" She pulled out a bottle of water with some aspirin, "I thought you could use this."

Ellen took the bottle of water and aspirin from her and muttered, "I doubt a pill can relieve the years of neglect and betrayal."

Lucy poked her head in from behind her, "Try two."

Ellen rolled her eyes, "You two are hopeless." She took two aspirin and placed them on her tongue, taking a swig of water and swallowing them before walking with Lois and Lucy back toward the farmhouse, "So you're heading back to Metropolis?"

"We are," Lois said confidently. "It's time we start doing what we can to expose Lex for the monster he is and put a stop to the destruction he's doing to Metropolis."

"Pig-headed. Just like your father." Ellen dismissed, looking toward Lucy, "And you're okay with this?"

"I'm going too," Lucy acknowledged as Ellen let out a sigh. "Mom, it's not as bad as it seems."

"Not as bad?" Ellen scoffed, "I'll remember that for your headstone. She said it's not as bad as it seems."

"Mother, don't be so dramatic," Lois retorted. "We're not going to leave Lucy where she'll be in danger. She'll be with me the entire time."

"Oh, well that makes a difference," Ellen retorted sarcastically, "You get kidnapped what once a week and get thrown out of planes about once every three months so she SHOULD be safe."

"We'll have Superman helping out too," Lucy added. "He's just as invested in bringing down Lex Luthor as we are."

"Really?" Ellen asked incredulously, not quite believing her.

Lois glanced at her sister in surprise before adding quietly, "Yeah, he's agreed to keep a look out for us and is helping with our investigation."

"Lunatics," Ellen stated, crossing her arms over her chest. "Surrounded by lunatics." She grew quiet for a moment before stating, "I thought I knew him. He was a brilliant surgeon. I was his loyal nurse. We had it all...until." She let out a long sigh, "Well you girls know the rest."

Lucy glanced toward Lois then back at their mother but didn't say anything. Lois softened, trying to find the right words to say, "I know. It was a really bad thing that happened."

"He is just so...*selfish*," Ellen fumed angrily.

"He's trying to help," Lucy pointed out. "He's trying to fix what he did. Mom, I know you don't understand, but he's trying to mend things between all of us. If you would just..."

"What?" Ellen narrowed her eyes at Lucy, "Let it go?"

"Well..." Lucy began, but Ellen cut her off before any formal response could be formed.

"I am so sick and tired of that phrase tonight I could scream." Ellen jumped into her tirade, "You think I don't want to let it go? You think I enjoy sitting here worrying about you two. I've got one that won't choose a career path and another that's practically married to her job, dangling above the jaws of death like she's going to get a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. I'm

your *mother*. That's what I do. I worry. I fret. I stress. I worry every second of every day whether you're in danger or not. When you say, you're going to traipse around a city with thugs and hoodlums looking for a way to get back at your father....I *worry*."

Lois glanced at Lucy, neither daring to say anything. Ellen looked at them both anxiously, trying to decide what to do next. Her eyes shifted to the night sky as the sound of the now familiar sonic boom echoed from behind the farmhouse.

"Well, I guess that's your ride," she huffed angrily as they reached the driveway to the farmhouse.

A tall man with salt and pepper hair glanced around the New Troy Airport, looking for the man that had called him earlier. Luckily he'd been in between assignments to make the detour in his travel plans. He still wasn't sure how much he could help, but he would try.

A tall man with a thinning hairline and gray hairs stood with a woman in her mid-thirties with glasses and a briefcase, holding a sign with a name he recognized. He took a deep breath and approached them, "You must be Mr. White?" He extended his hand to shake, "Jack Olsen."

Agent Davenport laid a black and white photo on Mayson's desk, "Mark Fuentes, AKA Rage Bomber. He was caught by our surveillance team with this detective outside the precinct."

Mayson pursed her lips, "Is it enough to charge anyone?"

"Not yet," Agent Woods chimed in, "but it is enough to get a warrant to put him under surveillance."

Mayson nodded, "Do it."

"Our team has found a connection between this detective and several officers in both the prison and the department. We're thinking there might be a connection between these officers and the escape of the prisoner, Toni Taylor the other night," Davenport added, tapping the file in his hand as he spoke.

"Wouldn't surprise me," Mayson mused, turning her chair from side to side as she contemplated the information she'd been given.

"Inspector Henderson seemed to think this 'boss' was behind all the crime in Metropolis." Woods began hesitantly, "Our theory is his reach is stretched outside of Metropolis and into parts of Washington as well."

Mayson let out a frustrated growl, "How does this happen? How does one place get so...?"

"Corrupt?" Davenport suggested.

"Broken," Mayson said sadly.

"If we work together on this we should be able to bring him down in no time," Agent Woods reassured.

"I hope so," Mayson sighed.

Jack Olsen sifted through the paperwork Perry White had handed him, trying to make sense out of what was happening to his son. "How is this even considered a terroristic act?"

"Well, that's where your help will be needed, Mr. Olsen,"

Perry explained, "The state's case is that because you're in the NIA Jimmy attacked the Planet in retaliation of editorials printed against the NIA in support of...you," Perry cocked an eyebrow, showing he didn't believe the charges.

"Where would they get this idea?" Jack asked, "I mean, I..."

He stopped for a moment, remembering he couldn't give himself away, "I'm just a, uh, structural engineer. I'm no spy," he chuckled at the last statement.

"We're not sure," Perry sighed, "That's where you'll come in. Once we can get the charges of you being connected to the NIA dismissed their whole case falls apart."

"Really?" Jack felt like the wind had been knocked out of him.

Did someone know?

How could they know?

Even his wife and son didn't know what he really did.
 "Well, I'll do what I can to help, Mr. White," he was quiet for a moment before asking the question he'd been dying to ask since the plane landed. "Can I see him?"

Lucy set down her suitcase and leaned back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. The apartment appeared to be in the same shape it was when they'd left it. The melted bag of peas she'd been nursing her bruised face from the other night still laid on the corner of the bed. Everything was the same yet different.

Is he or isn't he?

That was the question that kept racing through her mind. The entire flight back she'd tried to get Superman to talk, but he remained his usual stoic self, flying her back to Metropolis. Nothing recognizable that she could associate with Clark Kent.

What would Lois do?

Lois.

She wasn't sure what to think about her sister at the moment. If what she suspected was true her sister had been knowingly deceiving her for months. She wasn't sure how she felt about that. She wasn't even sure if she knew what she thought she knew.

"Argh!" Lucy yelled into the throw pillow in frustration before tossing it to the ground.

A Bruise. He had a bruise.

Superman doesn't bruise.

He was bleeding.

Superman doesn't bleed.

He was drunk.

Superman doesn't get drunk.

Why was he being so shady about his connection to Superman?

How did he know things that only Superman knew?

What was that comment about 'Flyboy'?

None of it made sense.

The sound of the telephone ringing caught Lucy by surprise.

She reached over to answer it, remembering that Lois wasn't home, "Hello?"

"Lois?" the gruff sound of Perry White's voice echoed on the other side of the telephone.

"No, Mr. White this is Lucy," she corrected.

"Ah, I've got an update on Jimmy's case. Can you have Lois and Clark meet me outside the Planet when they get in?" Perry asked.

"Uh, sure," she began, uncertain when they would actually be getting in. Lois had taken all the information they had on Lex Luthor and moved it out of the apartment for safe keeping. She still wasn't sure where it had been moved to or when her sister was coming back. "I'm not sure when she'll be in though."

"She's not answering her cell," Perry added in a gruff tone.

"I'll have her call you when she gets in," Lucy reassured. "Mr. White?"

"Yes?"

"How is he?" Lucy asked, uncertain if she wanted to know the answer.

"He's a strong kid. He's hanging in there," Perry reassured. She could hear the strain in his voice.

"Yeah," Lucy said sadly, glancing at the door sadly. She heard a hard knock coming from the front door, "I've gotta go, Mr. White. Someone's at the door."

"Be careful," he cautioned.

Lucy had already hung up and was on her way to answer the door when he finished his statement. She opened the door and found a Lex Power crew standing outside the door, "May I help you?"

The older man nodded, "Monthly service call. It'll only take a few minutes, Ma'am,"

Lucy eyed the balding man uncertainly. He pulled out his

credentials, and she relaxed, "Okay." She opened the door for them to enter the apartment.

Vicki Vale smiled at the cameras which were hooked up to portable power generators along with the lights and special effects. It wasn't ideal, but it worked. Bruce had a lighting contractor and electrician come out and help hook the system up so that everything was powered by a separate generator so they could do the show by rotating the generators.

"Welcome back everyone. I'm Vicki Vale, and you're watching the Vicki Vale Show," Vicki smiled into the camera. "Our first story this evening is something very dear and close to my heart, the destruction of the Daily Planet. A young man has been charged with this heinous act, an innocent young man. I for one want to know what we're going to do about it. We cannot continue to let corruption plague this city."

"Welcome back everyone. I'm Vicki Vale, and you're watching the Vicki Vale Show," Vicki smiled into the camera. "Our first story this evening is something very dear and close to my heart, the destruction of the Daily Planet. A young man has been charged with this heinous act, an innocent young man. I for one want to know what we're going to do about it. We cannot continue to let corruption plague this city."

Lex clicked his remote to turn the footage off on Vicki Vale, "Always one step ahead," he muttered under his breath. A knock on the wooden door frame behind him caught his attention, and he spun around in his chair to face the intruder, "Nigel, any updates?"

Nigel handed him the file in his hands, "Our men were able to find information on the location of young Jack and his brother off the Coast of the Caribbean. It appears he's listed as a material witness along with..."

Lex's eyes narrowed, "Along with who?"

"Dr. Sam Lane," Nigel spoke cautiously.

"And the computer chip?" Lex asked.

"Gone. All the notes were destroyed," Nigel explained.

"Any update on a location on him?" Lex asked.

"None."

"Send Fuentes to the Caribbean and Toni after Dr. Lane," Lex ordered, lifting a cigar from his case, "Keep an eye out for Lois Lane. She may have been in hiding, but she won't stay that way for long. I want to know the second she returns to Metropolis."

"Yes, sir."

After dropping their research off with Perry and leaving Sam with Bill Henderson to go over what he knew during his time at LexLabs Lois and Clark arrived at his apartment. He unlocked the front door, lowering his glasses as he scanned for any listening or monitoring devices. "Anything?" Lois asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

He shook his head, "We're clear." He closed the door behind them and locked the deadbolt before turning to face Lois. "How are you doing?"

"Okay, I guess," she didn't sound very convincing. He wrapped a supportive arm around her and guided her into the living room. "Are you sure having everything at Perry's is the safest thing right now?"

He nodded, "We have backups at my folks, but for now keeping everything there is safer for everyone. He said he wanted to go through what we had too and try and find what he could on Luthor. Another pair of eyes can only help."

"Daddy's still not sure about testifying," Lois said, sinking into the soft cushions of his couch.

Clark took a seat next to her, stroking her jawline with his palm, "Neither is Jack."

"I don't know if we'll be able to build a strong enough case," Lois' voice cracked as she spoke. "How do three hundred and

fifty-seven videos get up and walk out of police custody without leaving a trail?"

Clark's head rested against hers, reaching his hand out for hers as he spoke, "One thing I've learned over the last year is to expect the unexpected. Luthor had to have people on the inside warning him about what was coming down. We need to find out who."

"Explains how he disappeared before getting served with the arrest warrant," Lois mused aloud, lacing her fingers in between his and resting her head on his shoulder.

"Yep," Clark muttered bitterly, stroking the top of her knuckles with his thumb. "We underestimated him. We won't do that again." He turned to look at her, "I have a feeling Lucy was right about Luthor being behind that oil rig explosion."

"I had the same feeling," Lois whispered softly, moving closer, so her legs were curled up on his lap as she rested her head on his chest. "He's out of control."

"All those people..." Clark muttered bitterly, pinching the bridge of his nose. Lois moved her hand to cup his cheek, catching his gaze.

"Clark, it was not your fault," Her words hit a nerve. How was it she knew he was blaming himself for those lives he wasn't able to save? His lips tightened, forming a thin line and she turned to look at him, cupping both sides of his face as she repeated, "It was not your fault."

"If we had just..."

She put a finger to his lips, silencing him, "It was not your fault." She repeated once more. He debated whether he should try to discuss the what-if scenarios he'd been replaying in his head since that morning or just let her win this argument for a moment. The inner debate soon became a moot point when she whispered, "Kiss me."

He happily obliged, pulling her closer to him as he sought her lips out with his own, lightly at first then growing with more intensity as he sought her out hungrily. He couldn't get enough of the feel of her lips on his or the way that her mouth parted open just enough for him to taste the remnants of her coffee from earlier. Needing to feel her body against his, he pulled her on his lap, so she was straddling him, increasing the contact between them with each caress. He pleaded for more as his lips shuddered desperately into her mouth, pulling passionately on hers. She willingly gave in, deepening the kiss until it became frantic, eager, demanding.

"I'm...right...here," she reassured him, running her hands up and down his chest as she loosened his collar, unbuttoning his black button down shirt one by one and tightening her thighs around his torso.

"I...need...you," his voice cracked in between heated kisses, running his hands up and down her upper thighs.

"Everything's fine," she reassured him, tugging the cotton shirt from his jeans as she pressed herself against him, "Kiss me."

He obliged, running his hands through her hair as he fingered through her dark locks, feeling the softness against his fingertips. Unwilling to break contact but desperate for the closeness he knew was sure to follow he stood up, wrapping her legs around him as he carried her to the bedroom.

"Clark!"

Two men in an unmarked car sat outside Clark Kent's apartment complex. After watching the couple enter the apartment the first man made the call, "Sir? We've just spotted them. Yes. Both of them." He nodded to his counterpart who began pulling out surveillance equipment, "Outside? Yes, sir."

"You are so sexy," Clark murmured, whispering feather light kisses against her throat, slipping his hands beneath the hem of her t-shirt he'd released from its neatly tucked home in her jeans that now lay discarded on his bedroom floor. She fingered the buttons

of his shirt, popping them open one by one as she helped shed him of his shirt.

"So much better..." She said with gratification as her eyes lingered on his chest, running her hands up and down his shoulders seductively. He groaned his approval, slipping his hands beneath the hem of her shirt and she whispered, "Kiss me." She leaned her head back against the mattress, staring up at the ceiling as he fingered the waistband of her cotton panties, "Love me."

"I love you." He whispered in her ear, "I need you so much, Lois."

"Oh, don't stop, Clark," she pleaded with him as her hands wandered down his chest. He watched mesmerized as she threw her head back, concentrating on his hands and their exploration of her soft curves. She reached up to remove his glasses, folding them and placing them on the nightstand behind them.

He stroked her cheek, capturing her lips with his own, feeling the moisture between her legs pool against his naked torso. His mouth came crashing down on hers as he thrust his tongue against her lips, demanding entrance. His hands found their home between her legs as he hungrily sought the taste of her tongue on his. She made a small sound in the back of her throat, pleading for more.

She drew her hands through his hair until they clasped the back of his neck, pulling him to her as she met his tongue in the warm confines of her mouth, teasing him with her taste.

Bill Henderson eyed Sam Lane hesitantly, "This super chip as you call it. When did you first learn of the intentions your employer had for it?"

Sam leaned forward to speak into the microphone Henderson was using to record the conversation. "I discovered my employer, Lex Luthor and Max Menken's intentions for using the super-chip to create a super-powered army of criminals right before my friend Allie Dinello was murdered."

"How did you come about this information?"

"I overheard a conversation between the two of them in Max Menken's office."

"Did you see Lex Luthor enter or leave Max Menken's office?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes I saw him enter and leave the office of Max Menken."

"When was this?" Henderson asked.

"Three hours before Allie Dinello was murdered."

"Do you have reason to believe Allie was murdered by anyone other than Max Menken?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who?"

"I believe Lex Luthor ordered the murder of Allie Dinello when he refused to cover up the use of robotics in the boxers at Menken's Gym."

"How long have you worked for LexLabs, Dr. Lane?"

"I was offered a chance to create a breakthrough medical miracle by Lex Luthor after Menken was murdered."

"You say murdered?" Henderson pressed. "It was ruled a self-defense shooting."

"If you say so," Dr. Lane's face was grim.

"You don't believe it was an accident?"

"After what I've learned over the last year nothing surprises me anymore."

"What was the purpose for this super-chip?" Henderson asked.

"To murder Superman and become the most powerful man in the world," Dr. Lane's lips tightened into a thin line with his last statement.

Nigel programmed the monitors in the office as Lex readied himself, "Cameras have been set up. As long as our friendly neighborhood alien stays away, you should be able to monitor

what's going on at both Mr. Kent and Ms. Lane's residence without detection."

Lex took the remote from Nigel and ushered him away, "Be sure to reward the boys for their diligence." Nigel nodded and left, leaving Lex alone with the monitoring system once more. He clicked the remote, and the image of Clark Kent's and Lois Lane's apartments filled the screen side by side.

Clark floated himself and Lois upward to the ceiling, meeting Lois' gaze he cupped her cheek, devouring her lips with his own as he lost himself in her arms. "Yes, oh, yes..." She murmured against his lips incoherently.

"Oh, Lois..." He buried his face into her hair, breathing her scent in deeply. His body shifted against hers as he rejoiced in finding solace in the arms of the woman he loved. "God you're incredible, Lois... You mean everything to me."

She reached up to stroke his jaw. "Oh, Clark," he leaned in to kiss her. "I love you so much."

"What is this?" Lex snarled at the screen, hitting button after button. Nothing on the screen of Clark Kent's apartment other than empty rooms. Nothing on the screen of Lois Lane's apartment other than empty rooms. No audio. No nothing. "Nigel!"

He had received the call that Lois Lane and Clark Kent were spotted and the surveillance system had been set up. Now, they had disappeared.

Where had they gone?

Jimmy sat in his cell, watching at the guards moved up and down the halls. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat. He was always waiting for the next bomb to drop. The charges against him were serious. They were untrue, but they were serious. Right now he didn't know how far this frame up would go.

How corrupt was the justice system?

A knock at the cell door caught his attention and Jimmy stood to his feet as he'd been instructed on his intake for when a guard entered the cell. "James Olsen. You've got a visitor. Your sister."

He started to say he didn't have a sister but thought it a bad idea. Knowing Lois, she's probably lied her way in to see him. Hopefully, she had some news on their investigation and could shed some light on the plan to get his name cleared.

Jimmy arrived in the visitor's room, and to his surprise, it wasn't his friend he saw, but his girlfriend, Lucy Lane. "Lucy, what are you doing here?" He took a seat across the table from her.

She pushed a stray hair behind her ear and gave him a watery smile, "I had to see you."

Nigel returned to the underground office where Lex had his surveillance system displaying the apartments of Lois Lane and Clark Kent. "Well, where are they?" Lex demanded. "You said you had men on the ground. They couldn't just disappear."

"Sir, they've assured me that Lois Lane and Clark Kent went inside the apartment and have not come out," Nigel reassured.

Lex motioned to the screens, "Well then I suppose they've both gained the power of invisibility..."

Nigel sighed, realizing he wasn't able to provide an answer that would satisfy his employer, "They've assured me..."

"Yes, yes, they've assured you. Where are they?" He motioned toward the empty apartments on the screens before throwing his remote through the screens, shattering them in an instant. Lex glared at Nigel angrily, "Find her."

Nigel stared at the static that now filled the shattered screens and bowed his head before silently retreating.

Detective Harris stepped out of his car and headed toward the

City Hall steps; a sly grin spread across his face as he patted his new detective's badge in the right breast pocket with his shield. It was a dream come true.

"Detective Harris?"

He looked behind him and saw a group of six men and women dressed in dark suits. Feds. They smelled like Feds. He groaned, uncertain what his options were at the moment.

"Don't even think about trying to make a run for it." A hard metal object hit the back of his neck, and he lifted his hands up in surrender.

"Mind telling me what this is about?"

The first man that had called his name pulled out his badge to identify himself, "Agent Davenport with the FBI. I think you and I need to have a long chat about your new boss."

"Commissioner Thompson?" He asked, confused.

"Lex Luthor," Davenport corrected, his eyes narrowing as he motioned for him to follow.

Lex stood in the middle of his underground office surrounded by billboard after billboard covered in everything he'd learned about the man of steel. Images of Lois Lane with Superman covered one board while the others were filled with articles by her and Clark Kent.

Another article had been circled in red. The missing Superman article by James Olsen and Lois Lane. Another billboard had images of each member of the Daily Planet with notes scribbled on them of interactions with the man of steel.

How was he still so far away from finding Superman's secret identity?

What was he missing?

In the rejected pile of possible aliases, the top photo had a large 'x' across it. The photograph showed Clark Kent.

The next morning Lois sat with Clark, reading over the latest 'online' version of the Daily Planet on her laptop as they worked on the follow-up on the sabotage of the oil rig and the recent sale of Honeybraun Industries to LexCorp.

"I think that's everything on the Honeybraun Industries story. I still don't get what his angle is. They're just an energy company like LexCorp," Lois sighed, pushing the send button with the click of the keyboard.

Clark shook his head, "Not from what I was reading." He set his laptop down, showing her the screen he had pulled up. Under a different Alias, an international article showed the owner of Honeybraun Industries shaking hands with the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, holding up a contract for the photographers.

"Is that...?" Lois gasped in surprise.

"Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia. Signing a deal with HB Weapons. Apparently, HB Weapons is Honeybraun Industries. They don't manufacture in the US. They don't sell to the US, but they do make weapons... a lot of them. The stuff these guys make LexCorp's Weapon's Division look like child's play. They've got everything from sonar-powered bombs that paralyze the enemy to drones that shoot armies from the sky. Most of this stuff isn't even legal."

"So, if Lex bought Honeybraun Industries..."

"He bought HB Weapons as well along with every weapon they've sold, making dirty deals with third-world countries," he pulled up another photo of Akbar Rafsanjani, the leader of Iran.

Lois reached over him, scrolling through article after article he'd been sent from his contact, Matt Young with the NIA.

"Who's this Matt Young?"

"A guy that helped me on a gun runner story some years back," Clark explained. "He was just a field agent back then. He's moved up and now heads up the International Trades in the NIA. Has a lot of contacts with the UN."

"If Lex has this..." Lois pointed to a large satellite on the

screen with Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq.

"I know." He grimaced, glancing at the time he reminded her, "What time did Lucy say we needed to meet Perry at the Planet?"

Lois shrugged, "I don't know that she actually gave a time. Just to meet him at the Planet."

Clark reached for the phone, dialing Perry's number. Lois continued scrolling through the articles and images on Clark's computer. "Hey, Chief?"

"Clark, good to hear from you. I spoke with Lois' sister yesterday. I've got some news," Perry explained on the other end of the line.

"What kind of news?" Clark asked, glancing at the screen that showed Lex Luthor and the leader of Honeybraun Industries shaking hands at the press conference, confirming the sale to LexCorp.

"We might have a break in Jimmy's case. Can you meet me in front of the Planet in say...half an hour?"

Lois pulled up the record detailing the sale of HB Weapons to LexCorp and the patent transfer to Lex Luthor. Lois' face fell in dismay as she ran a hand through her hair. "Clark? Are you still there, son?"

"I'm here, Chief," he reached over to close the lid to his laptop, squeezing Lois' hand, "We'll see you in a few."

"Clark..." Lois breathed, turning to look at him.

"I know. Believe me, I know. We've got to get going. Perry said he's got a break in Jimmy's case. We can sort through this later."

Lex paced across the room, barking orders as Mrs. Cox and Nigel scrambled to jot down his orders in a frenzy. "Every surveillance we've tried has been thwarted. Superman cannot be everywhere. We need something undetectable."

"Lex, if I may?" Mrs. Cox attempted to interrupt but was rewarded with a cold stare.

"Superman has a secret identity. Now, I don't know where he lives. So I can't set up surveillance on him, but I do know who he associates with. Keep Lois Lane under constant surveillance."

"But..." Mrs. Cox began to argue. The cold stare she received back made her think better of it.

"Get LexLabs on this immediately. There has to be a way to keep her under surveillance without alerting Superman. Find a way and get it done."

"Yes, sir," Nigel nodded his agreement.

"Now about the testing on the Kryptonite..."

Lois stared at the building that had once held such prestige and meaning. It seemed so broken without the Daily Planet globe hanging high from the front of the building. In its place were blackened sheets and graffiti stained concrete. "This is depressing."

Clark wrapped a protective arm around her from behind, "We'll rebuild." He reminded her, "It's just a building."

"Gone." Perry approached them from behind in a gruff whisper, "All gone." He looked up toward the building with them. "Still hard to believe someone would do something like this."

"And pin it on Jimmy of all people," Clark muttered bitterly, making his disapproval of the situation clear.

Perry nodded, "They said the incendiary device that did this was in traced to materials they found in his apartment. Jimmy says he's never seen or heard of any of the stuff. It's a frame up if I ever saw one."

"What is Jimmy's lawyer saying?" Lois asked.

"Unless we can get Jimmy's father to disprove the connection to the NIA Jimmy will be facing federal charges in federal court," Perry began.

"Over my dead body," Came a voice from the corner of the Planet. Lois and Clark looked to see a tall man in a suit with salt

and pepper hair, carrying a briefcase. He approached them with his hand extended, "You must be Lois Lane and Clark Kent. Jimmy talks about you quite a bit in his emails."

"Emails?" Lois asked.

"We stay in touch while I'm traveling." He explained, shaking her hand, "I'm Jack Olsen, Jimmy's dad."

"Pleased to meet you," Clark said, shaking his hand. "How soon do you think we can get Jimmy cleared of this mess?"

"That's going to be up to the courts," Jack sighed. "I don't have the kind of clearance the police seem to think I do," He smiled good-naturedly, catching Clark's eyes for a moment before turning away. "The most important thing right now is to get rid of the NIA charge and then the rest should fall apart."

"How do we do that?" Lois asked.

Perry patted Jack on the shoulder, "Jack here has agreed to submit to a polygraph to prove he is not an NIA spy. Constance is requesting a statement from the NIA to confirm Jack Olsen is not employed by the NIA," Lois noticed Jack visibly tense at the last statement as Perry continued. "We should have this whole thing thrown out within the week."

"Great," Lois smiled, uncertain of how convinced Perry was of his promise.

Lucy followed Lois and Clark into the apartment, carrying the boxes of files, "Geez, did you leave any for anyone else?" She asked, setting them down on the coffee table.

"Jimmy's case files," Clark explained, setting a box down next to Lucy's. "We're trying to pick everything apart so we can help Constance get him cleared."

"Good idea." Lucy said, looking at the files, "Where do we start?"

Lois opened the lid to the first file box, "I guess we start here." She handed Lucy a large envelope titled 'DP Arson 10:01 Left Perimeter.' Lucy took the envelope from her and began to open it. Lois reached in and began pulling out envelopes with similar files with the same note written on them. She handed a stack to Clark and began to open them.

"They're pictures," Lucy breathed, showing the image of the Daily Planet in flames.

"Oh," Lois said, looking down at the stack of envelopes in her hand. Was she ready to look at these? She glanced back at her sister who had thankfully placed the photograph back in her lap, meeting her eyes with a concerned expression. She grimaced as she looked at the familiar images. Images of the panicked faces that had surrounded her that day and the look of dread on Clark's face when they'd been trapped in that elevator flashed through her mind.

'Don't go there,' She reminded herself.

"Lois?" Lucy waved in her direction. Clark gave her arm a gentle squeeze. She looked back in surprise. "Are you gonna be okay?"

"Fine," she gave a forced smile that neither of them was convinced of.

Lucy sighed, taking the stack of envelopes from her, tossing them in the box and carrying it toward the dining room, "No you're not."

"What are you doing?" Lois asked.

"I'm going to sort through the photos. You find anymore you can bring them to me. You two see if you can find anything else in the other two boxes," Lucy called over her shoulder.

Lois visibly relaxed, grateful once again for her little sister's ability to read the situation and take over without being asked. Clark reached over and opened the second box, grabbing the lid from it. She sighed in relief when she saw a stack of reports on top. Boring reports that didn't show her friends and co-workers on the worst day of their lives.

"Here." He handed her a stack of folders on top for her to start

sorting through.

She grabbed the top file and opened it. It was the preliminary report from the Fire Marshall on the arson. ‘Incinary device containing C12 found in an unmarked package. Numerous incendiary devices found inside elevator shaft...’

Lois stopped reading, pushing the images of the elevator shaft being engulfed in flames as Clark flew them through the glass window at the top. The heat that had surrounded them had been terrifying but she never once doubted he’d get them out.

The look on his face that day, though. That had scared her. He had been terrified of not getting everyone out. He’d been terrified of not getting all those men out on the oil rig explosion. It was just another example of how personally Clark took all his rescues.

She glanced over at him, reading through the police report on Jimmy and reached for his hand, squeezing it gently. He glanced back at her, and she saw the same dread she felt reflected in his eyes. She rested her head against his shoulder as he wrapped an arm around her. They continued sorting through the reports in silence, trying to make sense out of the case that was being brought against Jimmy.

Fuentes landed outside the airspace on the private jet provided to him by Lex Luthor. He breathed in the fresh ocean air, looking around the peaceful surroundings as he pulled out his phone, “Boss? We’re here.”

Mayson clicked the inside of her mouth with her tongue as she paced in front of Detective Harris in the interrogation room Agent Davenport had set up in the DA’s office. “Harris, let’s talk.”

Harris looked back between Mayson and Davenport that sat across from him, “What’s to talk about?”

“Let’s start with Luthor,” Davenport said with a smile.

“Nice guy. Don’t know him that well. Next,” Harris shrugged.

Mayson raised an eyebrow then started laying photograph after photograph out for him, showing surveillance images of Harris with Nigel St. John, Mark Fuentes, and several members of the Metros. “These were just taken within the last forty-eight hours. I have more,” she waved a manila envelope in her hands.

“Can’t prove nothing,” He scoffed, looking at the pictures warily.

“Let’s see, this is you talking to Mark Fuentes a few hours before he showed up at Ellen Lane’s residence and tried to break in. A nosy busy body recognized you from your photo,” Mayson pointed out. “Then we have you here exchanging what looks like an envelope of money for some information with Mr. St. John a known spy and assassin the FBI has under surveillance. Were you selling Girl Scout cookie recipes, Harris? Oh, I know you were signing up for Highlights.” Mayson’s eyes darkened, slamming both hands on the table causing him to jump.

“I’d start talking if I were you,” Davenport warned as he cleaned off his glasses, “I’ve seen her mad and it ain’t a pretty sight.”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” Harris argued.

“No?” Mayson pulled out another photo of Harris and Jenkins at Bill Henderson’s desk, pulling classified photos out and snapping photos of them. “Bet you didn’t know you were on Candy Camera, huh?” Mayson’s mouth twitched as she fought the smile that was threatening to overtake her face when she saw the beads of sweat drip down Harris’ forehead. “Still so sure about the no talking stance or should I go on?”

At LexLabs Dr. Gretchen Kelly had begun work on Lex’s request for an undetectable monitoring system. She handed a blue substance to Lex in a bottle, “I’ve liquified our sonar detection system, revolutionizing the world of surveillance. Superman can’t see or hear it because it doesn’t give off a sound and it’s practically invisible to the naked eye.”

“Sonar? Like a bat?” Lex asked.

She smiled, “Yes. Exactly. Bats are able to detect things around them by setting off a sonar signal. That’s how our earlier device worked, plugging into the power system instead of actual sonar. This will show you everything.”

“Keep talking,” Lex instructed, intrigued by what he heard.

She handed him a small round device, “Plug this into your computer, and it’ll act as an invisible feed, showing everything that is happening in the area treated. It only lasts 12 hours at a time though.”

His face scowled, “Only twelve hours?”

“It’s still in the testing stages, Lex,” Dr. Kelly explained.

“It’ll have to do for now,” Lex reasoned with a worried expression.

Lucy stretched her arms up over her head, looking at the progress she’d made. She glanced toward the living room where Lois and Clark had made piles on the floor of the different pieces of evidence against Jimmy. “Anything?” She asked, walking into the living room with her third cup of coffee.

Lois looked up from the floor where she had parked herself in front of the line of reports. “It all seems circumstantial at best.” She sighed, running a hand through her hair, “I mean, if I were prosecuting this case I wouldn’t take it to trial.”

Lucy took a seat across from Lois, reading the report in front of her, “Receipt for purchase of C12?” She scrunched up her nose.

“From a public computer that Jimmy happens to have access to,” Clark added bitterly, placing another folder in the stack, “Here’s more on the NIA angle.”

“Thanks,” Lois placed it in the taller of the three stacks in front of her.

Lucy let out a long sigh, taking a sip of her coffee, “You don’t think there’s anything to that, do you?” She glanced at the stack of files, her eyes widening as she took in the difference between the evidence of the actual explosion and the evidence that Jimmy’s dad was actually in the NIA.”

“I don’t know,” Lois said softly. “Perry said Jack denied being a part of the NIA, but the reality is we just met him. From what Jimmy has said over the years he wasn’t really close with his dad.”

“For argument’s sake, even if his dad is in the NIA it doesn’t give any more water to their sorry excuse of a case,” Clark added. “There is no way Jimmy would do this. There is no way this is anything but a carefully orchestrated set-up.” Lucy glanced toward him. He had his sleeves pushed up to his elbows a pencil tucked behind his ear and his hair ragged from running his hand through it a thousand times that day. It was evident Jimmy’s case was getting to both her sister and Clark.

“I just wish we could convince the judge of that,” Lucy said sadly.

“We will,” Lois reassured her, placing a hand on her shoulder. She smiled at both of them, “I hope so.”

“We’ve got a request in to get the tapes from all the businesses around the Planet that day. Hopefully there’s something somewhere showing what happened that day that can help lead us to the real arsonist,” Lois explained.

“I’d love it if it leads right to Lex Luthor’s doorstep but we all know that’s wishful thinkin—”

She noticed Clark fidgeting in his seat, wiggling his finger in his ear, looking at Lois. She nodded, and he stood up, “I-I’m gonna take a break and stretch my legs. I’m seeing double. How about some dinner?”

“A little early, but sure. I could eat,” Lucy smiled, “Maybe some Chinese?” She pointed at the phone, “We could order in...”

“I was just gonna go pick it up. It’ll be faster,” he explained, already standing up and heading for the door.

“The closest Chinese restaurant is all the way across town. You don’t have a car.”

"It's not that far," he said with a smile, opening the door to leave. "I'll be back in a bit."

"But..."

Before she could argue any further, he'd already left. Lucy looked at the closed door in dismay turning to her sister who seemed oblivious. "Lois?"

Lois had a pencil in her mouth, sifting through another file, oblivious to what had just happened. "Hmm?" She scrunched up her nose, penciling a note on the report in her hand.

Lucy waved a hand in her sister's face, "Earth to Lois!"

Lois looked up, "What?"

Lucy pointed to the empty seat on the couch, "What is up with your boyfriend? He just said he's going to go for a walk and pick up lunch... on the other side of town?"

Lois looked at her confused for a moment then shrugged, "Yeah, he'll be back. What's the big deal?"

Lois stared back at her with an inquisitive look. What's the big deal? That's her sister—prize winning investigative journalist's—reaction? She could press it but seeing how deep Lois was into Jimmy's case she thought better of it. "Nothing." She reached over her, "Hand me that report on the evidence they collected from Jimmy's apartment."

Davenport paced the office of Victor Talley, Director of Major Crimes with the FBI, "I don't have time to get a warrant from some hung-over judge. Just give me the go-ahead, Victor, and I promise — as soon as this is over — you can brand my rear end with the Fourth Amendment."

"In seventy-two point bold," Victor stated.

"In seventy-two point bold," Davenport agreed, recognizing the phrase from numerous conversations he'd had with the director over the past year.

Talley looked at the file on his desk, "Davenport, this is too big."

"Which is why..." Davenport began to argue.

"We have to mind our 'p's, and 'q's, on this one. Can't let him slip through the cracks again. Get Judge Stephens to sign off on this, and you have the go-ahead."

"Stephens???" Davenport scoffed, "Victor are you out of your mind???"

"He's the one assigned to this case."

"He's dirty."

"He's the judge."

"He's in Luthor's pocket."

"Prove it," Victor said, handing the file back to him with the warrant request. "The answer is no."

Outside Metropolis Savings and Loan Clark landed still hearing the alarm but not seeing anything out of the ordinary other than a guard on the front steps looking around confused, "Sir?"

The guard waved and approached him at the same time the alarm stopped. "Thanks for coming, Superman but it was a false alarm. The security system just went crazy all of a sudden. Sorry to take your time."

Clark gave a reassuring smile, "No problem at all." He moved toward the steps to leave and felt a numbing pain run through his body.

"Superman? Are you okay?" The guard asked, looking at him in concern.

The pain slowly subsided, and Clark looked around, trying to see if there was anywhere he could pinpoint as the source of the pain. Panic filled his mind and realization dawned on him that kryptonite was nearby. Thankfully wherever it was, didn't appear to be close enough to affect him. "Yes," he managed, scanning the crowd of people and parked cars around them. There were too many to check. He still felt weak, but his powers appeared to still be intact. He sighed in relief, "I'm fine...now."

Around the corner Mrs. Cox pulled out her cell phone, smiling as she hummed to herself, "Lex? Project K is a go ahead. We have the genuine article." From beneath her coat, she pulled out a necklace with a large glowing green rock.

That evening, after dinner and Lucy had gone to bed, Clark updated Lois on what had happened at the bank.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Lois asked for the tenth time, placing a supportive hand on Clark's shoulder.

"I'm fine." He reassured her, "A little weak but nothing a few hours in the sun won't cure."

Her head rested against his shoulder in relief, "I thought you said it was all destroyed."

He grimaced. "The piece Trask had was destroyed, but as we found out this weekend, it's still out there."

"What are we going to do?" She asked, "You can't go on rescues with that stuff out there."

"Lois, I can't just ignore cries for help. You know that." He cupped her cheek as he spoke, "Especially not now."

Her face scrunched up into a scowl, "Because of Lex."

"Because of Superman," he said, tilting her head to look at him. "I can't just abandon everyone because of a threat like this. It's not who I am, and it's not who Superman is."

"You could get hurt," she reminded him.

"So could any officer or first responder that puts their life on the line every day. I'm not going to let whoever this is, win. I'm not going to run and hide and let innocent people be hurt because of a threat."

"Clark?"

"Hmm?" He looked down, meeting her gaze.

"What if Lex has the Kryptonite?" She asked in a soft whisper barely audible for even his super-hearing.

"Lois," he turned to cup her cheek, rolling so he was facing her on his side. The thought had occurred to him when he'd felt the familiar numbing pain earlier. It appeared Lois was having the same thoughts. The same fears.

Unshed tears filled her eyes as she spoke, her voice cracking, "Clark, I don't think I could stand by and ...If anything ever happened to you. If he..."

He pulled her to him, silencing her fears with his lips, "Lois," he stroked the outline of her jaw, resting his forehead against hers, "Nothing is going to happen. We don't even know for sure that Luthor has it." She gave him a 'yeah right' look, and he sighed, continuing, "Even if he does there's not guarantee on how he'd even use it."

"If he has it. He'll use it," she said bitterly. "Let's not kid ourselves."

"Fair enough, but he probably doesn't even know what he has," Clark reasoned, not quite believing it himself.

"Other than it makes Superman weak?" She asked, narrowing her eyes as she spoke. He nodded, shaking his head. She reached up to stroke his cheek, "Just promise me you'll be careful."

"Always." He ran his fingers through her hair, "Lois, nothing will ever keep me from coming back and being where I belong." He pressed his solid frame against hers, "Right here by your side." He moved both hands to cup her face on both sides as he leaned in to seal the promise with a kiss.

A bloodied Johnny Taylor made his way through the Oakland P.D. scanning the desks until he found who he was looking for. Toni tried to free him. What she didn't know was his 'escape' wasn't warranted. He'd already cut a deal with the Feds the week before to turn evidence against the boss and the other organizations that he'd dealt with during his time as head of the Metros.

Now that plan was blown to smithereens if he couldn't get

some help. Recognizing one of the officers he approached his desk with a groan.

"Yes, can I ...?" The officer's eyes widened, "Oh my God! Geez! Johnny, what the hell happened to you?"

"Get me the DA. I'd like to renegotiate the terms of our deal," Johnny breathed unevenly as he sank down in the chair, lifting his arm that had been sliced and revealing the stab wounds from inside the prison from his sister.

Bruce Wayne walked through the debris of the printing press floor of what used to produce the world's largest and most globally known newspaper in the world. The Daily Planet's online presence was helping somewhat but the days of people turning to technology instead of the paper on their front porch were not here. He needed to get production moved to Metropolis. It was costing him an arm and a leg to keep printing Metropolis' Daily Planet in the Gotham Gazette's printing room. He half suspected they were charging him more for helping the competition.

"Over here, Mr. Wayne," the Fire Marshall pointed toward the elevator shaft where they said the fire started.

Behind him, Michael Clemmons, Judge Stephens, and Constance Hunter followed the fire marshall through the debris. "Now you can where these white spots are," he pointed to the wall. "That's where the fire started. He pulled out a charred square metallic device and handed it to Bruce, "One of these bad boys was pinned to every single floor. Luckily Superman was able to disarm them, so only one floor got the blast. If he hadn't..."

"The entire building would have collapsed," Bruce finished for him.

"Olsen sure did a number on this place," Clemmons commented. "How many people were in the building?"

"Three hundred give or take," Bruce answered glumly seeing the twinkle in Clemmons' eye as he continued to sway the judge.

"James Olsen set this fire and tried to bury three hundred people in it, your honor. You cannot give a man like that bail."

"Excuse me? James Olsen is innocent until proven guilty." Constance interrupted, "I'd appreciate if you'd refrain from trying to taint his honor against my client."

"What's to taint?" Clemmons scoffed, looking around the room, "We're standing in the evidence right now."

Bruce decided to chime in, seeing the pained expression on Constance and Judge Stephens' faces. "I hate to interrupt, but Mr. Clemmons I can't have you labeling James Olsen as the arsonist in front of my staff unless he's been charged and convicted." He gestured to the suits behind him, "We're all upset and affected by this. The reality is we don't know for sure James Olsen is responsible. If there's even a smidgen of a chance he could be innocent isn't it your office's job to get to the truth?"

DA Clemmons shifted slightly, "It's my job to see justice is served. Right now serving justice is making sure James Olsen stays behind bars so this..." He gestured to the charred walls around them, "never happens again."

"And what if he's innocent?" Bruce asked.

"What if he's not?" Clemmons asked, turning on his heel to follow Judge Stephens toward the exit with Constance Hunter.

Bruce hung back, watching them. "Interesting group. Bond hearing?" The Fire Marshall asked.

"Yep," Bruce sighed, looking around. "Tell me the truth. How much are we looking at on repairing this place and getting it ready to open again?"

Fire Marshall shook his head, "You're looking at a couple hundred thousand easy to clean up the damage and fix the structural damage that's been done." He pointed his flashlight at a long beam across the room that had two temporary metal columns on each side holding it up. "That's the beam Superman was holding up when that column over there," he pointed to a large column in the middle of the room that had split in two, "gave out.

It's a miracle nobody was killed that day."

"Thank God for small miracles," Bruce said with a sigh. "So how long will it take to get this place back up to code?"

"Eh, depends on your engineer, but if you get a good crew, you're looking at maybe six or eight weeks give or take."

"Six or Eight weeks???" Bruce shouted, surprised by the number.

"It's a lot of damage."

"It's the Daily Planet. We can't be closed down that long. It'll cause us to lose all our advertising contracts."

"I don't know what to tell you," The Fire Marshall shrugged, "Thank the guy that did this."

Bruce sighed, running a hand through his hair, "Okay, when we get the damage repaired who do we call for the inspection. I don't want to be waiting any longer than I have to..."

The Fire Marshall pulled out his card, "You can call me day or night. Just have your checkbook ready and have everything up to code and I'll take care of you."

"Thanks," Bruce took the card and shook his hand. "I appreciate all your help." An idea came to him, "Marshall? Do you think I could hold onto the device that was used in the arson? I'd like to run it through one of my labs at LexLabs."

The Fire Marshall was thoughtful for a moment before deciding, "I don't see why not. The police have the other devices. One missing isn't going to kill anyone, right?"

"Right," Bruce smiled.

He handed it over. "Good luck." With that, he motioned for Bruce to follow him out of the exit.

Once outside, Bruce pulled out his phone, walking away from the group, "Lucius, I need you on the next flight to Metropolis."

Lois watched Lucy pour herself a cup of coffee as she gathered her things. "Don't let anyone in that you don't know."

"I know," Lucy sighed, taking a sip of her coffee.

"No study buddies or boyfriends," Lois continued as she gathered her things.

"Lois, when have I had time for either of those things?" Lucy asked annoyed.

"Ask to see ID if anyone comes to repair anything or fix anything..." Lois continued.

"I know I know," Lucy cut her off. "I'll be fine. Go!" She pushed Lois toward the door.

"Just be safe," Lois said, turning to face her before she left.

"I will. Now, go! You're going to be late," Lucy closed the door behind her.

Lois thought about opening the door and confronting her about shoving her out the door but thought better of it. Clark had a 747 rescue early that morning, so she was able to shrug off his disappearance as him going home before Lucy got up.

Last night she'd had to feign ignorance on Clark's slip about it 'not being that far' when Lucy confronted him about the Chinese restaurant he'd picked up dinner from. They really needed to get better about his excuses. She wasn't sure, but she was sure Lucy suspected something was up.

This morning Perry had left a message for them to meet at WayneTech Towers to discuss the future of the Planet. After almost a week they were finally going to get some answers. Working from home was great now and then but doing it full time wasn't ideal. She needed structure. She needed a place to go and a place to be. Research databases and faster internet and interaction with her co-workers.

She missed the hustle and bustle of the daily routine she'd established over the last few years with Clark and Perry and Jimmy and even Cat. When that had been taken from her, it felt like her world had collapsed. Finally, it seemed she would have some answers.

Lucy Lane sighed in relief after closing the apartment door behind her sister. She loved Lois. She did, but sometimes she could be really overbearing. She went back to the table where she'd left the photographs she'd been sorting through the day before.

Nothing seemed to stick out.

No face.

No image.

Nothing.

A hard knock at the door interrupted her thoughts. She set the stack of photos back down on the dining room table and padded her way across the room to answer the door. "I'm coming I'm coming," she muttered to herself. She jerked the door open, "Yes?"

"Special delivery," the courier handed her a large package with a stamp 'Daily Planet.' on it.

"Uh, thanks," Lucy said, taking the envelope from him, closing the door behind her. Curious she tore the package open, pulling out a tape with a letter attached to it and read it aloud.

//CK -

Here's the still images from the first half of the businesses. I should have the rest ready by tonight.

-Alan//

Lucy began sifting through the still images, matching them up with the photos in evidence. She spotted the angle the photos were taken from and found the ones from where the fire started according to Lois' notes. From the stack of still images angled at the Daily Planet it looked like these images had the perfect angle of anyone going in or out of the back entrance of the Daily Planet.

"Well, if I was going to plant a bomb I certainly wouldn't go through the front," Lucy reasoned aloud, pulling her seat up at the table as she began laying the images out side by side.

Clark stepped looked up at the prestigious WayneTech Towers, readjusting his tie as he approached the tall double doors. After stopping the 747 from crashing and landing it safely in an abandoned field he'd done a quick patrol then headed back to his apartment for a quick shower and change.

After checking his messages he found out about Bruce Wayne's announcement and impromptu meeting. He spotted Lois standing with Perry and smiled, walking towards her as he spotted the familiar faces in the lobby. "No idea where she is. I think we've lost a few people..." Perry was saying with his back to Clark as he walked up to them.

"Hey," he leaned in to kiss Lois on the cheek, wrapping his arms around her from behind.

"Hey," she smiled, "Did everything go okay?"

He nodded, "I spoke with Superman and got a few quotes from him on the 747 that had engine failure this morning." He reassured her, turning to Perry who was watching them with an amused expression.

"Kent, glad you could make it." Perry said then turned to business, "What's this about a 747?"

"Third plane in the last week to have engine failure flying over Metropolis," Clark explained. "Superman suspects there's something more going on than meets the eye."

Perry was about to respond when a hush fell over the crowded room, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you for meeting me here today." Bruce's voice echoed through the large lobby as he came down the tall spiral staircase with three men dressed in expensive suits and another in more casual suit and glasses standing closest to him.

"I'm sure you're all wondering what you're doing here?" Bruce walked through the crowd of Daily Planet employees, pulling out a laptop as he pulled up a display on the screen. To Clark's horror it was an amateur video of the Daily Planet explosion. There was a murmur of outrage in the crowd, "I'm not

showing you this to upset anyone. I'm showing you this to remind you that each and everyone of you are survivors, capable of adapting and growing with..." He glanced at the screen, drifting off from his point of thought for a moment before resuming his speech, "There were devices like this," the man in glasses held up a charcoal burned metallic device for everyone to see. "On every single floor. Only one of them went off and look what happened. We can thank Superman for stepping in when he did."

"Yeah, well, he should have stopped it from going off to begin with," Ralph muttered in the crowd.

"Excuse me???" Lois snapped, taking a few steps toward the walking slimeball to confront him, "Have you no shame?"

"Yeah, I do, but I got a real problem with the fact that we're all fixin' to be out of a job and ain't got no place to work because he didn't douse the fire when he saw it." Ralph snapped back.

"He's Superman!"

There was a murmur of agreement and disagreement amidst the crowd. Clark grimaced, tightening his jaw. What they didn't know was he did put the fire out when he saw it. He got him and Lois out of the elevator shaft, destroying each incendiary device he saw on his way up to the ceiling they broke through. By the time he went back it was too late. All he could do was douse the fire where he could and keep carrying as many people as he could out.

He saw Lois balling her fist and wrapped an arm around her from behind to pull her away, "Don't," he whispered in her ear.

At the same time Bruce attempted to intervene, "There'll be none of that. What makes you think you don't have a job Mister...?"

"Simms. Ralph Simms." Ralph sneered with a roll of the eyes, "Well, considering the place is boarded up and listed as condemned I'd say it's safe to say we're out of a job."

"Haven't we been publishing stories?" Bruce inquired, looking around the room at the dismayed faces. "We've had fourteen publications online in the last week and we've had one edition sent out to Metropolis subscribers..."

"But not on newsstands," Ralph reminded him. "How's the paper planning on...?"

"Can't report on sports when you're getting laughed out of sporting events by other newspapers asking if we're even in business," Steve pointed out.

Bruce held his hands up trying to calm the crowd that was growing restless, "All right, I hear you. All of you. You're right. Things are...challenging right now, but let me assure you no one is losing their job. What happened was..."

"Yeah, I heard it was Olsen," one voice said in the crowd.

"That's what I heard."

"I never liked that kid."

"He wouldn't do that."

"Oh, come on!"

"Hey! Hey! That's enough!" Perry barked at the crowd.

"Perry's right," Bruce continued. "None of that. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Olsen is innocent until proven guilty and that's how he'll remain with everyone's reporting in this newspaper as long as I'm in charge." He narrowed his eyes toward the part of the crowd where the comments about Jimmy's guilt had come from.

Bruce walked toward the double doors the three suits were standing in front of, "The Daily Planet will be rebuilt but to Mr. Simms point we need an office. We need a place to print. We need to put newspapers on the newsstands. We need to keep the Daily Planet here in Metropolis where it's always been."

There was a murmur of agreement amidst the crowd and Lois looked back toward him smiling. "Knows how to build up the suspense doesn't he?" She whispered.

"Which is why," the double doors opened revealing a large office, "The Daily Planet will be working from here at WayneTech

Tower.” He motioned for them all to follow. “State of the art computer systems with the best research databases,” he pointed toward desks on an upper balcony, “We’ll have the research department here.” He then pointed to a group of cubicles, “Some of the beat reporters here,” he then pointed toward some offices on the other side, “and here.” He directed them to an office in the corner. “Perry, your office will be there.”

Some of the workers from the printing press spoke up, “What about printing?”

One of the designers added, “And Marketing?”

Bruce nodded, reaching for connecting doors that were at the end of the hallway, “Follow me,” behind the double doors was a state of the art printing press with offices aligned on the upper balcony above it. The crowd was awed into silence, taking everything in. “There’ll be some learning curves of course. You were used to working with much older systems. Once everyone gets up to speed we’ll have you up and running in no time.” He patted the man with glasses next to him, “Mr. Lucius Fox will help with the transition. He’s one of the most trusted engineers and advisors at Wayne Enterprises.”

“Who gets the offices?” One of the reporters asked.

Clark rolled his eyes when he saw it was Steve from Sports again. “Who cares?” He muttered to himself.

Lois nodded her agreement, crossing her arms over her chest as she voiced his opinion for him. “Who cares, Steve? It’s a place to park your behind while you snore instead of write.”

“Hey, I do not...”

“Hey Hey Hey! Enough all of you!” Perry bellowed. “Now. Mr. Wayne has made a generous offer for us all to work together in keeping this paper running. It doesn’t matter who gets what office...”

“Yeah, cuz you already have one,” Ralph sneered to himself.

Clark rolled his eyes exasperated when he realized he was the only one that had heard that comment. Bruce interjected, “Offices will be assigned by your editor. I won’t be a part of that. Operations will be run by Perry and the Publishers.” He nodded toward Perry.

“Just as they always have,” Perry reminded them. “Now, Mr. Wayne has the contract for the rest of the week for the printing to continue at the Gotham Gazette to allow enough time for us to get up to speed on the new machinery and computer systems. I suggest you stop complaining and start working,” he barked at the crowd. “Senior writing teams and smaller departments will use the upstairs offices. Keep in mind this is all temporary.”

“That’s right,” Bruce reminded them. “As soon as we get the go ahead from our engineers and the fire marshall we plan on reopening. I plan on implementing the updated systems in the new Daily Planet building as well so get used to these databases.” There was a loud thunder of applause as Bruce turned everything over to Lucius Fox preparing to train them on the new email database system.

Nigel handed Lex a remote, setting up the surveillance system to connect to the newly replaced monitors on the walls. “Our team at LexLabs has the new sonar system setup in Lois Lane’s apartment, sir.” He pulled up the footage with the click of a button and smiled, “Anything they say or do, will appear for your viewing pleasure.”

“This is more like it, Nigel,” Lex said happily as he took the remote and pointed it at the screens. There was a flicker, and then the screen showed Lois Lane’s apartment. Lucy was gathering her things and heading out the door.

“Oh, my God,” Lucy gasped, grabbing a photo from the still frames she’d organized by angle around the room. She knew that man. She recognized him.

Even out of uniform.

The officer that had arrested her the other night.

There it was plain as day.

The smoking gun.

If she could only prove it...

She rummaged through the paperwork Lois had on the floor until she found what she was looking for, “Ah-ha!” She cheered when she found the police report.

‘Arrest made by Detective Jenkins.’

She grinned in triumph, “Got you.” She grabbed the stack of photos and her pursed, heading for the door. Just as she was about to turn the knob she felt a hard knock against the wooden door. “Um, who is it?” She called to the otherside of the door.

“New Troy Pest Control,” the man on the otherside called. “You got to have a treatment everyday for a few weeks. Landlord found rodents down the hall.”

Rationalizing the story in her head, she opened the door. He pulled out his credentials for her to see. She examined them carefully before nodding, “Come on in.” She opened the door for them to enter the apartment.

“This state of the art system will allow you to run more than one search at a time,” Lucius Fox pointed to the screen showing how easily you could search for anything in the system. Background checks, police records—You name it. It was there. “Designed by Mr. Wayne himself this system allows you to work smarter not harder.”

He turned to the crowd of reporters huddled in the large conference room, “Any questions?”

At the Metropolis P.D. Lucy stopped by the clerk’s desk, “I’m looking for Bill Henderson. He’s a friend of my sister’s. I was supposed to drop this off and completely airheaded...”

“Oh, I can give it to him,” the clerk offered with a smile.

Lucy pasted on her biggest smile, “No, that’s okay. I was told to give this directly to Bill Henderson.”

He pressed a button on his desk and a long beep could be heard, “Bill? You expecting a visitor?”

“Maybe. Who is it?” Bill’s voice echoed from the intercom.

“Lucy Lane,” Lucy whispered for him.

“A Lucy Lane.”

There was a murmur then Bill responded, “Send her back.”

“All reporting teams will share offices on the risers with one photographer,” Perry barked out. “No exceptions. Anyone not teamed up will have a cubicle. Any questions?”

“Yeah, who gets which office?”

“How about when do we get back to work?” Another asked.

“Yeah, I’d love to get started.”

“Been too long.”

“Let’s stop the tutorial and start hitting the pavement.”

Perry nodded, smiling at the reporters, “Everyone will be assigned an office. Mr. Fox will set your laptops up so you are connected to the network and then you can get started. Any other questions?”

Lucy approached Bill Henderson’s desk clutching the package in her arms for dear life, “Hi, Bill,” she offered a smile to him that made her cheeks ache.

He looked up from his desk, meeting her gaze with a raised eyebrow, “Lucy, a bit early for a social call, isn’t it?”

She smiled at him, “Yeah, I was up all night thinking. Couldn’t sleep,” she explained, looking around.

“Thinking?” He prompted.

“About a lot of things,” she said, noticing the looks she was getting from the officer that had arrested her a few nights ago peering at her and Henderson. Deciding a bit of a diversion was

needed she continued with a twinkle in her eyes, “Bill, do you know I’m a psychology major?”

He followed her gaze then met her eyes with a nod, following what she was saying, “Really? No, I never knew that.”

“Yeah, my parents think it’s a waste of time. At first I thought I’d go into child psychology but now after everything that’s happened. I’m thinking of minoring in criminology. What I would *love*...” She dazzled him with a smile as she said, ‘love’ and continued, “...is to see how you use psychologists in the police investigations. Maybe get a tour of the place?”

He watched her face light up with a smile and realization hit him that she wasn’t asking for just a tour. He stood up, reaching for his suit jacket, “That’s an excellent idea. Let me show you around.”

Perry laid a third docking station on the large desk, pointing it toward the window, “I, uh, well I didn’t want to leave the kid out so I figured we’d leave this as a placeholder for Jimmy.”

Lois placed a hand over Perry’s as he released his grasp on what was supposed to be Jimmy’s working station. “I’m sure he’ll appreciate that, Perry.”

“Yeah,” Perry’s jaw tightened and his lips thinned into a thin line, “I’ll have Alice bring that board here so you two can start piecing things together. Go ahead and bring what you have on Jimmy’s case too and we’ll see what we can do about finding the holes. With this new research system we can nab Luthor and free Jimmy at the same time.”

“Sounds good to me,” Clark said with a grim expression.

Henderson pointed toward the long hallway, “That’s the lockers for all the detectives.” He watched as two beat cops walked past them, making sure they were out of earshot then turned to whisper, “Okay, what’s up?”

Lucy pulled out a photo from her notebook, “Recognize anyone?”

Henderson’s eyes widened as he looked at the image Lucy was holding. He’d heard Jenkins and Harris talking about their open and shut case on Jimmy. He’d heard the ‘evidence’ but he hadn’t seen any of it. This was the first time he’d seen any images of the Daily Planet arson. It was a landmark. The place you went when you came to Metropolis. The building had been there for over two hundred years. Now with it gone...

“That,” she pointed at a man in a dark hat with sunglasses and a t-shirt and jeans. “Right there.” She tapped at the picture.

“Jenkins,” Henderson breathed grimly.

Mrs. Cox handed Lex the necklace in a lead box, “Now you can have what you’ve always wanted: the destruction of Superman.”

Lex stared at the glowing green meteorite in wonder, “Superman’s achilles heel is a stone. A rock,” he chuckled at the thought. “Oh, it would be so easy to destroy him now. See him suffer. Lure him out and crush him like the miserable bug he is.” He slammed his fist on his desk.

“Sounds like a perfect plan, Lex, what’s stopping you?” Mrs. Cox asked with a grin.

Growing thoughtful at the prospect of killing his arch enemy, Lex smiled, “That would be too good for him. Killing Superman is easy, but destroying him. No, that is the ultimate goal.” A sinister expression fell on his face and he paced around the room reflecting on his plans for Superman.

“He’s taken so much from me. Destroyed my reputation. Shaken the faith this city has in me. For that he must suffer. In order to do that I must know the truth.” His eyes went dark, “I must know the name he hides behind so I can repay his misdeeds and destroy him by taking everything and everyone he holds dear in this world.” He gave an impression of an explosion, “So there’s

nothing left but a footnote of the man the world once called Superman.”

“What about Lois Lane?”

“What about her?”

“You’re still pining over her and obsessing over her.” Mrs. Cox noted, “She’ll be your weakness, Lex. Destroy you if you’re not careful.”

“On the contrary she’ll be what I use to destroy him when the time comes. Our man of steel holds a candle for Ms. Lane as do I, but she will be what I use to lure him out and destroy him. I’ll make him watch as I take her for myself...ridding the world of that miserable gible, Kent in the process,” his face scowled in disgust.

“And what if she won’t have you?”

His face fell dark as his eyes blackened, “I will not be denied. I’ll give her the chance to come willingly, but if she won’t, I’ll take her by force.”

“Before or after you kill Superman?” Mrs. Cox asked. Lex smiled at her, a sinister expression fell over his face. He didn’t answer, opting to open the hidden wall panel to reveal his surveillance of Lois Lane’s apartment.

“Please state your name for the record.”

“Dr. Samuel Lane.”

“Do you specialize in biochemical engineering, correct?”

“Yes, with a focus in engineering robotics and sports medicine over the past ten years.”

Davenport folded his hands on the table, “Tell me everything about the superchip you were asked to engineer.”

Lucius Fox typed in a few keys, pointing triangle shaped remote toward the monitor on the wall which brought up six screens. “Mr. Wayne likes to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to technology. Each office is equipped with a six quadrant projector. You can control it with this like you would with a mouse or keyboard.” He moved the remote around, looking at the screen as he did so, then turned the remote on it’s side, opening up a keypad and typing a search.

To their amazement the search results ran on the first quadrant of the screen. Lucius then turned to the laptops stationed on the desk and hit a few keystrokes, “This makes it easy for presentations. Just hit the project key and it’ll duplicate itself here on the screen. You can choose full screen or quadrant,” Lucius instructed.

“What are you doing?” Lucy hissed as Bill Henderson escorted her out of earshot of the other lieutenants. “This is your evidence. Go arrest him.”

“It’s not that simple,” Henderson hissed between gritted teeth. “Luthor’s got his fingers in just about every politician’s pie. Jenkins works for Luthor. It wouldn’t take a lot of muscle for them to kill this case just like they did with Luthor’s case.”

“But...”

“You need someone higher up.” Henderson ran a hand through his silver lined hair, “This isn’t a job you can handle on your own. This is dangerous. If you want to help your friend then you need to let the Feds do their job.”

“Feds?” Lucy asked confused.

He looked around to make sure no one was listening, “The FBI is working on an investigation external from the Metropolis P.D. on Luthor.”

“Does Lois know?” Lucy asked.

“Uh, not yet. I haven’t had a chance to bring her and Kent up to speed,” Henderson sighed, looking around as one of the newer detectives walked towards them.

“Henderson,” he nodded.

“Harris.” He gave half smile. Harris turned to look at Lucy as

he walked by giving her a wink. Henderson waited till he was gone and then hissed, "You need to get out of here. It's too dangerous."

"Why does everyone keep saying that to me?" Lucy harrumphed, grabbing the package she'd handed to Henderson earlier. "This is a police station. It's supposed to be safe."

"Supposed to be being the operative word there."

That evening, Lois and Clark were gathering the files they had on Jimmy's case, trying to make sense out of everything. "We can bring these into the office tomorrow and start trying to make some sense out of all this," Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair. After finishing up their training with Lucius Fox Perry had sent everyone back home to start gathering everything for the next day and start bright and early the next morning. She and Clark had gone back to her apartment to see if they could make any headway on their research with Jimmy's case and get everything organized for the next day and taking their research into the office.

Clark nodded, "Alan never did get us those tapes. I'll have to check with him tomorrow." He sifted through the stack of papers on the table. "Here's the stuff on Jack Olsen."

"You gotta admit they do have a pretty strong case on him being in the NIA," Lois said sadly, flipping the corner of the tall stack of papers in front of them.

"Doesn't mean Jimmy blew up a building. That whole motive so..." Clark shook his head in disgust.

"Do you think Jimmy knows?" Lois thought aloud.

"I don't know." He sighed, "I doubt it. The way he talks about him..."

"Yeah," Lois said sadly, "Perry said Jimmy's lawyer is trying to get another bond hearing." Clark reached over to grab her hand, squeezing it gently. She looked up at him and gave him a weak smile, turning to rest her head on his shoulder.

"Where's Lucy?" Clark asked, trying to change the subject.

Lois shrugged, "I don't know. I got home and found a note on the counter that she had to run some errands."

He frowned, looking at the time, "Getting kind of late, isn't it?"

She opened her mouth to respond then closed it when she heard the familiar sound of her front door unlocking. "Speak of the devil."

Lucy opened the door with a scowl on her face, slamming the door behind her, "Ungrateful, pig-headed..." She muttered incoherently as she stalked through the living room, tossing a package on the couch and throwing herself on it in a huff.

Lois looked at her sister cautiously, not sure how to approach her without knowing what was wrong. Thankfully Clark took the initiative and asked the question they were both thinking at the time, "Something... wrong?"

"No, of course not. What could be wrong? I find evidence that a cop—Yes, a cop—was seen entering the back entrance of the Daily Planet at the same time the reports say the bombs were planted and do you know what your friend Bill Henderson wants me to do?"

"Uh..." Clark couldn't even finish his thought as Lucy flew into another tirade.

"That's right! Nothing! Zip! Nada!"

"Luce, I'm sure Bill..." Lois tried to interject.

"He agreed with me. I mean, he saw the pictures, but he won't do anything? No calls to investigate. Nothing," Lucy fumed angrily.

"What pictures?" Clark asked, trying to steer her back and hopefully calm her down.

"These," Lucy tossed him the package she threw down. "When you look at the stills from 8:45am on the left angle from the ATM you can see clear as day that officer Jenkins," she pointed out as he pulled the first stack of images out of the sleeve.

"Oh, I'm sorry 'Detective Jenkins.'" She corrected herself with sarcasm.

{ "When you look at the stills from 8:45am on the left angle from the ATM you can see clear as day that officer Jenkins." }

Lex tapped his hand on his desk, watching the exchange between Lois Lane and her sister. His face scowled up and he tapped the button on his desk, "Mrs. Cox?"

The door opened and she appeared, ready to serve. "Yes, Lex?"

"This Detective Jenkins. How important is he to the organization?" He turned in his chair to face her.

She shrugged. "Only been with us for the last four months," she reasoned.

"Expendable?" He asked.

"Everyone is," she reasoned.

"It seems Ms. Lane is finding connections between him and the arson of the Daily Planet," he spat out bitterly. "I want to be sure this doesn't end up at my doorstep. It stops with him."

"Of course," she nodded with a smile.

"I'm starting to see double here," Lucy complained, setting the stack of images down.

Lois glanced at the clock, "It is getting late." She agreed, rolling her shoulders back and forth. Clark rested his hands on them, massaging the crevice between her shoulder and neck lightly. She wasn't sure but she could swear she felt him loosen the muscle with a blast of heat vision.

"Yeah," Lucy sighed, rolling her neck back and forth as she spoke, "I think I'm gonna go check in with daddy tomorrow and see if there's anything new on his case."

"I thought Bill Henderson had him in protective custody," Clark wondered aloud, continuing to massage Lois' shoulders. Where did he learn how to do that? She could feel the tension easing out of her neck with each caress.

"He does," Lucy sighed. "I just want to see how the case is doing and maybe see if I can talk with the agent that's heading up the investigation and see if he'll look into this Jenkins guy."

"Do you want me to go with you?" Lois asked, turning to give Clark better access to her neck as she spoke.

"Sure," Lucy shrugged. "The more the merrier," She let out a long yawn. "But for now I'm going to call it a night. Don't stay up too late."

"Night Luce," Clark called after her. He placed a kiss on Lois' shoulder, "Better?"

She turned half-way around to face him and grinned, "Almost. You missed a spot." She ran her hand down the length of his silk tie, watching with a grin as he took in a sharp breath when her fingertips lingered on his belt buckle.

He kissed the side of her neck, pulling her toward him, "Here?"

"Not quite," She grinned, looking back at him as his hands came to rest on either side, gliding up and down her ribcage as he began placing more heated kisses along her collarbone.

"How about here?" He whispered, bringing her on his lap, pressing himself against her back as he nibbled at the sensitive skin along her jawline.

"You're getting very..." She breathed, fingering his upper thigh behind her. His body stiffened against her and he let out a mutter she could tell was his version of a curse. He withdrew his arms from her, pulling away, "What is it?"

"I gotta go," he explained with a long breath, getting up and heading for the door. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I look forward to it," she whispered, lingering her gaze on him as she watched him leave. She leaned her head back against the cushions, fingering her sides where Clark's hands had just been moments ago. "Wow..."

Bloody and bruised Jenkins fell to the concrete, hearing the echoes of his attackers' voices in his head.

"Remember Detective Jenkins what the boss has given you so generously can be taken away. Don't ever forget that."

A sonic boom could be heard a few feet away. He lifted his head up, wincing in pain as he tried to open his right eye, "Su—"

Superman knelt down next to him, "Detective Jenkins? Are you alright?"

After waiting an hour for Clark to return and not seeing any sign of him Lois decided to go ahead and get ready for bed. It didn't look like she was getting her boyfriend back tonight. Just as she was finishing up her shower, a knock on the front door caught her attention. She grabbed a towel, wrapping it around herself as she reentered her bedroom.

The knocking continued. She sighed, grabbed a robe, and slipping it on as she went to answer the door. Peeking through the peephole, she saw Clark on the other side and smiled to herself. She really needed to get him a key. She looked down at herself, grinning as an idea began to form. Lucy was asleep after all. She quickly shrugged the robe off, tossing it in the corner and unlocked the seven deadbolts one by one.

She smiled when she saw him take a sharp intake of breath, seeing her standing in front of him in nothing but a towel, "Hey," she whispered in a sultry tone, leaning her head against the doorframe.

"Hey," he whispered, stepping in the apartment and closing the door behind him.

"You didn't want to use the window?" She teased.

"The door's a little less conspicuous," he reasoned, leaning in to kiss her as he walked with her further and further into the apartment. "Lucy asleep?"

She nodded, pressing her body against him. He let out a shallow breath as she ran her hands up and down his chest seductively. She grinned, noticing the wet spot on his shirt when she pulled away, "Sorry, just got out of the shower."

His eyes did a little dance, "I noticed."

She grinned, looking up to meet his very heated gaze. Her mouth went dry, "I see." He pulled her toward him as she finally found her voice, "Everything ...okay?"

She felt a shiver run down her spine as he whispered in her ear, "It is now."

Her mouth opened, but nothing came out, forming an 'oh' as she felt her bedroom door against her back, "Cl..."

He lifted her up into his arms, fingering the knot that kept her towel securely wrapped around her, "I'm not liking that towel very much right now."

"No?" She asked.

"No," he echoed, leaning in to kiss her as his hand tugged at the front, watching hungrily as it slipped to the floor.

"No..." Lex snarled watching the footage in front of him. Clark Kent wrapped his arms around Lois Lane as he pressed himself against her, putting his hands and lips in places Lex had only dreamed of going.

"I'm not liking that towel very much right now."

"No?"

"No..."

"No...no, no, no, no..." Lex fumed angrily at the screen.

Lex stared at the screen in anger. He couldn't pull himself away from the screen, staring as the couple quickly lost themselves in one another's arms. He couldn't seem to look away as Clark Kent explored Lois Lane's body thoroughly in ways he'd only dreamt of. A fantasy he would never see come true. That she'd give herself to willingly to that ...hack was beyond his comprehension. Just as Lois Lane reached up to remove Clark

Kent's glasses, the screen flickered, and the monitor went dark.

Lex let out a long huff, realizing the twelve-hour limit had been met.

That evening, Mrs. Cox reappeared in Lex Luthor's study, polishing her 9mm. "Detective Jenkins has been sent his warning. He won't be talking to anyone about his involvement in the organization."

Lex smiled, walking across the room to embrace her, "I knew I could leave everything in your capable hands, Mrs. Cox."

"What are personal assistants for?" She asked with a laugh.

Lois drew random patterns on Clark's chest letting out a long sigh, "I don't think I can move."

He let out a low chuckle, kissing the temple of her forehead, "Good. We can stay like this all night as far as I'm concerned." He gestured to her naked torso still wrapped around him.

"Hmm, you won't get any argument from me," she whispered, resting her head on his chest.

"Hopefully we didn't wake your sister," Clark thought aloud.

"I know she's been pretty stressed about Jimmy the last few days."

"I think we all are," Lois said sadly, resting her head into the crook of his shoulder, stroking his arm. Her face lit up and she sat up, "Oh! Almost forgot!" She reached toward the nightstand, rummaging through the drawer until she found what she was looking for. He couldn't help but admire the sight of her hunched over with her back to him, recalling their recent lovemaking with a smile.

She turned to face him, handing him a small silver object as she leaned up to kiss him. "Here." She slowly pulled away, "One of Lucy's old keys. I figured it would make things easier when you have to come and go as Superman."

He smiled, stroking her cheek, "Thank you." He leaned in to kiss her, running his hands through her hair, "I'll get a key made for you too," he whispered against her lips.

"I love you," she whispered. "More than I ever thought I could ever love anyone." He brushed away the few tears that escaped as she spoke. "These past few months have been... amazing. I know the past few days have been hard but there's no way I could have gotten through any of it without you."

"Or me without you," he cupped her cheek, "I love you, Lois. You are everything to me. You have no idea how many times I've felt like giving up and then your encouragement always gave me the nudge I needed to keep fighting."

"Oh, Clark," she leaned in to capture his mouth with hers. "I love you, so much. I don't know what I'd ever do if I lost you." The last statement was a mere whisper as he felt her body shudder against him.

His jaw tightened, holding her close, "I'm not going anywhere. We'll figure this all out. Before you know it Luthor will be behind bars rotting for the next nine hundred years where he belongs and Jimmy's name will be cleared."

She gave him a weak smile, "I hope so."

"We'll get his name cleared," he promised. He still didn't know how but he knew one way or another he would find a way to clear Jimmy's name. Although he wasn't sure how at the moment. They kept hitting roadblock after roadblock in all their attempts to get to the truth. He wasn't so sure if Jimmy's dad could be trusted. There was definitely a hike in Jack's pulse when Perry had mentioned talking to the NIA.

"How?" Lois asked, "Every agency seems hell bent on working against Jimmy. They've closed the case. No one is investigating except us and Lucy."

"Well, then we'll just have to keep digging and find irrefutable evidence on who was behind the bombing of the Planet." He let out a soft sigh, running his hands through her hair, "Jimmy's innocent. At the end of the day the courts will see that."

"I hope so," she sighed, running her hand up and down his chest, "Lucy said when she saw him last he looked pretty rough. No one's able to get in to see him now except his attorney."

"We'll figure this out," he promised.

She nodded sadly, resting her head against his chest as she drew random patterns up and down his bicep. He wasn't sure how much he believed his own statement but he hoped Lois would. He needed her to. They laid in silence, holding one another until they both gave into exhaustion from the stresses of the day.

Agent Woods sat across from Jack as he stared at her with a smirk, "I'm going to have you go through all of the events leading up to your involvement with Mr. Luthor. I don't want any smart comments or jokes. This is for the courts to hear and the judge won't appreciate any sarcasm. Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Jack said with a sigh.

She pressed the record button on the recorder, "Starting from your first interaction with Mr. Luthor..."

Clark watched as the sun from Lois' bedroom window reflected off her mirror and onto the bed just a few inches away from her collarbone. Her body was still entangled with his, wrapped securely in the cotton sheets. He couldn't help but grin, recalling their previous night's activities.

"I love you, Lois Lane," he whispered, outlining her jawline.

She sighed softly in her sleep and he smiled, holding her close to him, "I want to marry you." He whispered, knowing she couldn't hear him.

It took everything in him not to say it; to ask the question that had been on his mind for the last few weeks. He knew he was completely in love with her and there was no one else for him. He'd finally found someone he could share everything with, but asking her to be his wife in the middle of the chaos that had erupted over the past week wasn't how he wanted to ask her. It wasn't how he wanted her to remember their engagement, trying to bring down Luthor and having her family stay in hiding. No, he didn't want to taint the memory with the chaos they were currently living in, but he wanted to ask her soon.

"I love you," he murmured, leaning in to kiss her shoulder.

She sighed against him and whispered, "I love you too."

Lois lazily stretched her arms over her head, sighing as she felt two strong arms encircle her waist and two familiar lips press against her shoulder, "Morning."

She smiled, turning to see Clark lying next to her, "Morning."

His hands moved up her ribcage until they finally found their resting place joined just above her ribcage as he kissed her neck, "Do you have any idea how sexy you look first thing in the morning?"

She turned her neck to allow him better access, moving her hands to stroke his face, "Tell me."

"I love hearing you call my name when you're sleeping and feeling your skin against mine," he murmured against her cheek.

She opened her mouth to respond only to find it covered with his. He rolled them over, so she was facing him, settling himself between her legs. She sighed against him, gripping his shoulders and wrapping her legs around his torso as telling her soon turned into showing her.

Lucy sleepily padded her way into the kitchen to fix herself a cup of coffee. She'd been exhausted last night. She didn't even remember her head hitting the pillow when she fell asleep. Now today was a new day. Bill Henderson hadn't been entirely unhelpful yesterday, just infuriating with his lack of initiative in helping her.

If she could find the agent in charge of the Lex Luthor investigation maybe she could get them to ...

"Ow!" She winced when she tripped over a hard leather object coming out of the kitchen, running into the end of the couch. She looked down, seeing what it was she tripped over and raised her eyebrows. It was a shoe. A man's shoe.

A muffled moan came from the other side of the apartment. She glanced toward her sister's room and blushed, realizing what she was over hearing. Seeing the empty bathroom that was connected to both rooms she sighed to herself, "I think I'll skip the shower this morning," She muttered to herself, heading for her room to get ready.

Lois ran her hands up and down Clark's chest seductively, resting her head in the nook between his shoulder and arm and held her securely, "Where did that come from?" He chuckled and she rolled over so she was hovering above him, resting her arms on his chest folded as she gave him an impish grin, "Is it just me or does it seem to get better and better?"

"Well, you know what they say," he whispered, cupping her cheek as he outlined her jawline with his thumb and index finger. "Practice makes perfect."

She raked her fingernails against his chest as she nodded her head, brushing her nude body against him. "I am a perfectionist," she whispered as he nibbled at her neckline.

"I know," he murmured against her skin as he slipped his hand in between her thighs. "You're insatiable. What am I going to do with you?"

"I have a few ideas..." she whispered, hovering over him as she felt him begin to respond to her touch.

"So, do I..." he murmured.

"Oh, Clark..." she moaned in pleasure leaning forward. "I don't know how we're going to make it through the day..."

"Who cares?" He whispered in her ear, "We still have another hour before we have to be at the office."

"Lois?" The bang on the bedroom door to her apartment caused both of them to look up.

"Oh, God..." Clark groaned in agony. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Lucy..." Lois muttered, covering her face with her hands. "I'm going to kill her..."

"Lois?? There's some Pest Control guy here..."

Clark stifled his laughter, and she covered his mouth with her hand, "Shhh..." She then called over her shoulder, "Okay, let them in."

"I did," Lucy knocked on the bedroom door. "They've sprayed everywhere already."

Clark was suppressing his laughter by biting his lip. Lois glared at him when he continued to stifle his laughter unsuccessfully. "It's not funny. Quit laughing."

"It's either laugh or cry at this moment..." He said glancing downward.

"I know. I'm sorry..." she whispered then turned her attention back to her sister, "So what's the problem?"

"They've sprayed everywhere but your room," Lucy said annoyed from the other side of the door.

"Oh," Lois looked down at Clark, her face full of remorse as he pulled away from her.

"Guess it's time to get up," Clark reached for his boxers from the night before.

Lois reached for a tank top and shorts from her dresser, throwing them on and turning back to Clark, "Are you going to be okay?" She asked concerned.

He nodded, sitting on the edge of her bed in his boxers, "I'm going to need a minute..."

Lois sighed, exasperated with her interrupted morning as she watched the Pest Control crew leave the apartment. Clark had excused himself into the bathroom then just as quickly

disappeared to tend to a call for Superman, leaving her to get ready for the day. She stared at the boxes from the night before with a frown, "I guess I'll have Perry send someone to get these later," she muttered to herself.

Lucy had already left to grab breakfast once she and Clark had exited her bedroom so she wasn't an option for helping. They were supposed to meet at the Federal Building in thirty minutes. She still wasn't sure what exactly Lucy hoped to accomplish with talking to their dad about the investigation. He'd already told them what he knew, didn't he?

She reentered her bedroom, crinkling her nose at the smell. She'd have to remember to talk to the landlord about the hours he sent Pest Control to her apartment. She shuddered involuntarily recalling how bad their timing had been this morning.

She shook her head, trying to break herself from her reverie. *'Focus.'* She reminded herself. *'Work.'*

Perry White grinned ear to ear as he unlocked the impromptu office for the Daily Planet. The training sessions from the day before had been grueling and the changes were well ahead of any other newspaper. He hoped his team would be able to keep up.

Bruce Wayne was young and used to change. He wasn't. He was willing to change with the times as needed to ensure the growth of the paper. "Mr. White?"

Perry turned to see Lucy Lane, Lois' little sister rounding the corner towards him, "Lucy, darlin' what are you doing here?"

She held up a package as she tried to catch her breath, "I think I've found something and I was hoping you could help."

He took the package from her curious, "What'd you find?"

"The real bomber," she panted. "Proof that Jimmy's being framed."

{ "Lois?? There's some Pest Control guy here..."

"Okay, let them in."

"I did. They've sprayed everywhere already."

"So what's the problem?"

"They've sprayed everywhere but your room."

"Oh..."

Lex snapped the remote down on his desk angrily, watching as a disheveled Lois Lane and Clark Kent came out of her bedroom. It was obvious what they'd been doing. Anger pulsed through him as he watched Clark Kent lean in to kiss Lois Lane.

"How dare she?" He muttered to himself. "How dare she betray me with that...hack?" He fumed angrily.

"Detective Jenkins," Perry laid a picture of the detective out for Victor Talley to see. Then laid a crime scene photo of the arson from the Daily Planet. "He was there. Out of uniform."

"That's not a crime," Victor Talley pointed out.

"No, it's not, but given that he was supposed to be on duty at the time of the arson across town it makes it awfully suspicious," Lucy pointed out, setting a copy of the police log in front of him.

Talley's eyebrows rose, "Where did you get this?"

"A reliable source," Lois said, folding her arms over her chest.

Talley smirked, "I'll bet." He let out a long sigh, "Look, I feel for you. Really I do. The FBI wants Luthor behind bars as much as you do. Given the extent of his reach in the government and the threat to national security it's a top priority."

"Why do I sense there's a 'but' here?" Clark asked.

Talley sighed, "Yes, Mr. Kent, there is a very big 'but' here because as informative as this is it wasn't obtained by legal means. Now, everything we receive after this is tainted."

Lucy gave a sigh of despair, "But this proves he's corrupt and..."

"...and he's entitled to rights," Talley reminded her. "I'll contact IAB and get them to open a case on him. Hopefully nudge them in the right direction, but I can't accept this. I can't even

acknowledge I've seen this or it could tank the entire case. Grapes from the poisonous tree if you will."

"But..." Lucy began to argue.

Perry stopped her, interjecting, "Thank you for your time, Director Talley."

"Are you out of your mind??" Lucy snapped, throwing her things on the couch as they reentered the apartment. "We have evidence this officer is...dirty and he's doing nothing. You can't argue? Fight?"

"What's to argue, Luce?" Lois asked, "You heard him. If we get them to investigate from information you obtained illegally it'll get the case thrown out."

"You don't know that."

"Yes I do," Lois shot back. "I've seen it happen. I have been in the courtroom and watched an entire prosecution's case get thrown out because of one officer's mistake. It's called due process."

"It's not fair," Lucy cried. "I just wanted to help."

"I know," Lois took a seat next to her, "and you will."

Lucy dabbed at the tears that had escaped, "They won't let me see him. Figured out I wasn't his sister and now they won't let me see him."

"I'm sorry," Lois hugged her, holding her close. "We're going to figure this out, but we can't have you trying to chase down criminals by yourself. It's not safe."

"Are you really trying to lecture me on safety?" Lucy asked with a crooked smile.

"Well, considering we're supposed to be laying low, yeah," Lois smirked. "I promised mom I'd look after you."

"I'm not a child," Lucy snapped, folding her arms over her chest.

"I know but I still worry," Lois said, resting her head against her sister's. They sat in a comfortable silence for a moment. "I've got to get the rest of this back to the office." She motioned at the boxes she'd left in the living room this morning.

Lucy followed her gaze, "When's Clark gonna be back from his appointment?"

Lois shrugged, trying to give her best 'I don't know' expression. She really didn't want to think about Clark's 'appointment' at the moment. He'd left to answer a call for help and given what had happened earlier with the Kryptonite they both knew it could be risky. Someone had Kryptonite and they didn't know who or what they would do with it.

"Uh, not sure." She pasted on a smile, "Here. Help me with these?" She motioned to the boxes. Lucy nodded, following her out to the Jeep with the other box.

When they arrived at WayneTech Clark was waiting for her in the lobby, "Hey, you." She leaned in to kiss him.

"Hey," he leaned in to stroke her cheek before taking the file boxes from her. "These Jimmy's case files?"

"Yep," Lucy smiled following them inside. She let out a low whistle when she entered the office space, "Nice digs."

Bill Henderson let out an exasperated sigh, "Mike, I can't help you if you won't talk."

Mike Jenkins looked over at Bill Henderson with a snort, "Why would you want to help me?" He motioned to his bruised face, "Do I look like I need help?"

"Yeah, you do." Henderson leaned forward, "I know you're scared. Probably think you can't turn to anyone or do anything but you'd be wrong." He ran a hand through his hair, "Let me help you."

"Is that everything?" Lois asked, placing the last box on the 'research table' in the office. It took everything in her to divert her eyes away from Clark's backside as he leaned over to lift the

boxes they had lined up on the floor to move them.

'Bad. Bad thoughts.' She reminded herself, noting how many feet he stood from her at the moment. Fifteen. It was an office but it was small. Very very small... for two or more people. Three desks had been pushed together and dual monitors had been set up on either side with laptop docking stations. It was cramped but it was home for now.

"I think so," Clark reassured her, turning to dazzle her with his mega-watt smile that made her weak in the knees.

Distraction.

She needed a distraction.

Work.

She needed to work.

Eying the board where they'd begun to pin suspected lieutenants and crimes to Lex several months ago she crossed the room and began removing the pins one by one.

"What are you doing?"

"Trying to re-strategize," she explained, pulling out a large stack of Post-Its.

"What do you mean?" Clark asked, walking toward the bulletin board with her.

"We keep treating Jimmy's case like it's separate from Lex, but it's not. We know he's behind this so we need to prove it," Lois explained, jotting names they suspected of being involved down and pinning them to the board.

"How?" He asked.

"Follow Bruce Wayne's advice." She said with a smile, "Dig into his past."

Bruce looked over Lucius Fox's shoulder, watching as he tinkered with the metal device he'd been given by the Fire Marshall. "Anything?"

Lucius continued to tinker, "From what I'm able to see, Mr. Wayne, this is no ordinary incendiary device. There's micro chips inside the firing mechanism which tells me this bomb was set off from a different location."

"Can you trace it?" Bruce asked.

Lois watched as Perry waved goodnight to them, "Don't stay here too late." He called over his shoulder. "Rome wasn't built in a day."

"Night Chief," Clark waved at their editor, closing the door behind him so as not to be disturbed.

Lois turned her attention back to her notes on what they had pinned to the board. They had been going over their research for the last few hours, and her mind was growing wary. It was disheartening to learn how demented Lex's father was and even more heartbreaking to hear how loving his mother was. A child trapped in a twisted world of games by none other than Lionel Luthor.

She glanced at Clark then back at the board. Most of the staff had already left for the evening, leaving her, Clark, a few stray employees trying to dig into their stories and the printing press guys next door. Perry had taken them off of any local news for the time being so they could focus on exposing Luthor and clearing Jimmy's name. It seemed a harder task than anyone thought.

Clark walked toward her, placing a supportive arm around her shoulders. She smiled to herself as she sank back against him, smelling the hint of his cologne against her nostrils before he pulled away once again. She fidgeted in her long skirt when she caught herself staring at him as he leaned against the desk to grab another pen.

Working in close quarters was definitely getting to her especially given how 'active' they'd been over the past week. It wouldn't take a lot of imagination to entertain thoughts about him that were less than professional. Her gaze wandered over the muscles of his back, admiring how tight his blue dress shirt

stretched against his muscles and reminded of the memory of those muscles beneath her fingertips. Her mind dreamily flashed back to this morning with him in her bed, naked and ...

"Lois?"

She looked up, breaking herself out of her fantasy and back to the present. "Huh?"

"You said you wanted to go over what we've got?" Clark prompted, taking a seat in the desk chair across from where she was standing.

"Oh, right," she tucked a stray hair behind her ear, turning toward the board and away from her very distracting partner and boyfriend. She glanced at the notepad in her hands and began reading off her notes as she paced in front of the board, "Lionel Luthor, founder of LuthorCorp. Two PhDs in biochemical engineering and macroeconomics from Yale University. Married to Lillian Luthor."

Clark tapped his pen against his notepad and interjected, "Luthor's mother. They both died in a fire on Lex Luthor's seventeenth birthday, allowing Lex Luthor to take over LuthorCorp. Rebranding it as..."

"LexCorp," Lois finished with a shudder. She stopped in front of him, noting the worry lines on his face as he continued going through their notes.

"Police suspected foul play, but no evidence was ever found linking Luthor to the deaths of his parents," Clark added, looking back at the board. "Think this is what Bruce was talking about?"

Lois shrugged, leaning back against the desk, perching herself on the corner, crossing her legs as she turned back toward the board, "I don't know." Her face scrunched up, "Where does Jimmy fit into all of this?" She gestured to the other side of the board where Lex Luthor's name was at the top, and four mysterious lieutenant names were below him along with known criminal organizations linked to the boss. The Planet explosion was on another post it with a question mark.

Crazy.

Lois Lane was driving him absolutely crazy.

Clark watched from across the room, ignoring her racing pulse and the very clear distinct scent of her perfume that teased his nostrils, reminding him of other very familiar scents. Was it always going to be like this? Being in close quarters with her only seemed to heighten the fantasies that continued to drive him mad day and night every time he looked in her direction. All he'd been able to think about was purple lace. The hint of purple lace he'd seen when she'd gotten up from the desk earlier and began pacing around the office, ticking off notes on what they'd found out so far.

She was trying to crack their investigation on Luthor open, and here he was hindered and crippled by the thought of purple lace. He watched in torture as she slipped the end of her pen in her mouth, chewing on the tip of it as she stared down at her notepad.

She reclaimed her seat on the edge of the desk, and he watched in agony as her skirt hiked up just enough for him to get a full view of her shapely legs and the purple lace of her thigh highs. Was she trying to torture him? No. She was completely professional. Her attire was professional. She wore a lavender pencil skirt that came just below her knees and had a tasteful split on the side up to her knees. That split. That was the culprit to his torture. The purple lace never would have been staring at him if it weren't for that split in her skirt. Her violet sleeveless top went well with her skirt and suit jacket that laid forgotten on the back of her chair.

Her face scrunched up, "Where does Jimmy fit into all of this?" She gestured to the other side of the board where Lex Luthor's name was at the top, and four mysterious lieutenant names were below him along with known criminal organizations linked to the boss. The Planet explosion was on another post it

with a question mark.

“Don’t forget the oil rig,” Clark added, finding his voice as he made a note and got up to add it underneath Lex Luthor.

“HM Weapons,” Lois interjected, making another note and handing it to him. His super-hearing teased him once more with the sound of her lace thigh highs brushing against one another, and he shifted uncomfortably where he stood.

“Illegal weapon deals,” Clark jotted down and pinned it to the board.

“So what’s the connection?” Lois asked with a sigh, “How does him taking over LexCorp connect to all of ...this?” She gestured to the other side of the board.

Noticing her dismayed expression, he crossed the room and walked toward her, perching himself on the edge of the desk next to her. Trying to calm her nerves, he wrapped his arms around her and whispered in her ear, “I don’t know, but we’ll figure it out.” He reached for her hand, stroking the top of it with his thumb.

She smiled at him, reaching up to stroke his cheek before reminding him, “Jimmy’s bond hearing is tomorrow. What if they don’t let him out?”

“Then we keep digging,” he promised, leaning in to kiss her. She returned the kiss with enthusiasm, outlining his lips with the tip of her tongue. He groaned against her lips, listening to the torturous sound of purple lace rubbing against one another once more as her thighs rubbed together once again.

He slipped his hand boldly between her thighs, finding the lace edge of her thigh highs that had been torturing him for the last half hour. He leaned her back against the desk, tracing the length of the garter belt straps beneath her skirt, groaning against her lips, “You’re killing me with these.”

“Then we’re even,” she murmured against his lips, running her hand up the back of his backside. He settled himself between her legs. “I want you so bad.”

“I want you too.” He ran his hands down her sides, “so bad.”
“Oh, Clark.”

The next day, Mike Jenkins sat in his hospital room staring at the television screen as footage of the Olsen trial played out. “We’re here in front of the courthouse with James Olsen’s attorney, Constance Hunter. Ms. Hunter, can you tell us why you requested another bond hearing after the first request was denied?”
“The people are accusing Mr. Olsen of being things he isn’t and doing things he hasn’t. I believe once the judge sees this the ridiculous charges against him will be dismissed. This is an overreach by the prosecution at the very least by an overzealous prosecutor looking to use my client as a stepping stone into the Governor’s office.”

Lois and Clark met Bill Henderson and Perry outside the courthouse after going through the metal detectors. “With Detective Jenkins in the hospital I’ve been asked to help the DA’s office with handling the Olsen case.”

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, pacing in front of him, “Excuse me??”

“I don’t for one minute believe Jimmy’s guilty but I’ve got to do my job,” Henderson explained.

“Your job is to protect the innocent, Bill,” Clark pleaded with him. “Jimmy’s innocent.”

“With me heading this up I’ll be able to determine that for sure.” Henderson reassured, “But the trial will go forward unless we find another suspect with enough evidence to convince the judge.”

“So, you’re going to open an unofficial investigation? See if you can find the real culprit?” Lois asked.

“No,” Henderson shook his head, looking down at the tile floor.

“What??” Lois fumed angrily.

“I want the son of bitch that did this as much as yall do but Jimmy is innocent,” Perry pleaded with him.

“I’ve got my orders, Perry,” Henderson sighed, “I can go over the evidence again and see if I can point the investigation in a new angle but without the Police Commissioner’s approval there won’t be any new investigation. I’m sorry. My hands are tied.”

“That boy hasn’t been given a fair shot since this happened and you know it,” Perry interjected, wagging his hand in Henderson’s face.

“He’s a kid being railroaded by Luthor,” Clark hissed vehemently in a harsh whisper. “You said yourself you didn’t believe he was guilty. Why can’t you open the investigation?”

“It’s not that simple,” Henderson warned. “There are a lot of players involved in this. People with a lot of power and a lot of muscle that don’t want to see Luthor in jail.”

“Then what makes you think you telling them anything is going to make a difference? DA Clemmons is taking on this case himself. Seems to think it’ll be a political move,” Perry fumed bitterly.

“I’ve got a contact in the DA’s office that’s agreed to help,” Henderson reassured.

“She?” Lois asked, uncertainly.

A young blonde wearing too much make up for Lois’ taste approached them, juggling a handful of folder jackets, “Bill!”

Bill Henderson smiled and approached her, taking some of the files from her. “Mayson, good to see you.” He pointed toward the group. “Mayson Drake, I’d like you to meet the people I was telling you about. Perry White,” he pointed to Perry.

“Nice to meet you,” she gave him a firm handshake. Perry nodded but didn’t say anything.

“Lois Lane,” he pointed to Lois.

She gave Lois a once over before extending her hand, “I’ve read your work. Impressive.”

Lois stared at her for a moment, debating if she could trust this woman. “And you are...?”

“Deputy DA. Just moved here,” Mayson explained, pulling her hand back in as she shifted her gaze toward Clark who still had a scowl on his face about the bomb Henderson had dropped on them. She moved toward him, “You must be Clark Kent.”

He nodded, standing up straight to take the hand she extended to him, “Yeah.” He pulled his hand back, still frowning, “What’s your office going to do about Jimmy? Are you really going to put an innocent kid away while the real bomber walks free as a bird?”

Mayson bit her lower lip, contemplating her response as she continued to linger her gaze on Clark. Lois could feel every hair on the back of her neck stand up as she watched the exchange. Who did she think she was? She opened her mouth to interject but found herself cut off by Mayson’s response, “I’m not handling that investigation, Clark. I can promise you that I would never prosecute a case where I thought the defendant was innocent. Like I told Bill I want to put Lex Luthor behind bars. That’s my goal. He tells me you all want the same thing. I thought maybe we could work together on that?” She gave a dazzling smile that Lois was sure worked for Mayson in the past.

“So you want to put Lex behind bars. Who doesn’t?” Lois interjected. “So far I haven’t heard a reason why we should trust you.”

Mayson arched an eyebrow at her, “Nor, I you, Ms. Lane.” Her face scrunching up as she turned to face her. “I’m willing to help but if you don’t want my help then...”

“Now hold on just a minute here,” Perry interjected, “Lois, you and Kent have been working this Luthor angle for months and gotten nowhere.”

“That is not—”

“Why don’t you work with Ms. Drake here and see if you can put your heads together to crack this sucker open and bring Jimmy home?” He looked between the two of them, “Sound fair?”

"Fine," Lois harrumphed.

"Great," Mayson smiled, pulling out her card as she jotted something down on the back of it. She turned to Clark, "Oh, Clark, here's my card. If you need to reach me, ahem," she smiled, "after hours? My personal number's on the back." She turned toward Lois, "I look forward to working with you, Ms. Lane." One of the bailiff's waved for her in front of the courtroom across from them and she excused herself.

'I will not kill her. I will not kill her.' Lois reminded herself as she tried to calm herself down, offering a sarcastic, "Subtle."

Lois couldn't help but smile as she watched Clark hand the card to Perry before walking toward her, placing an arm on her shoulder before whispering, "Calm down."

"I'm calm," she harrumphed, folding her arms over her chest, rubbing her upper arms up and down as she watched Mayson leave, "Anyone seen Jimmy's dad?"

Perry nodded, "He's in there with Constance going over his testimony one last time," he pointed to a room marked 'private' across the hall.

"The people are accusing Mr. Olsen of being things he isn't and doing things he hasn't. I believe once the judge sees this the ridiculous charges against him will be dismissed. This is an overreach by the prosecution at the very least by an overzealous prosecutor looking to use my client as a stepping stone into the Governor's office."

Lex Luthor took a puff from his cigar, eying the crowd outside the courthouse with a smile. "Phase One of your plan is complete," Mrs. Cox said, looking to him with a smile.

"On to Phase Two."

"Where's Jimmy?" Lois asked, looking around the courtroom. "It's a bond hearing," Clark explained. "He'll be on the monitors but he won't be in the courtroom."

"What?" Lois asked, aghast, tears forming in her eyes.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Stephens!" The bailiff called out.

Bruce sat in his office going over the preliminary report Lucius had provided him with from the incendiary device they'd found in the wreckages. He wasn't sure how to prove it but he knew Lex Luthor was behind this. He hoped this device would lead him to LexCorp's doorstep, putting his rival out of commission for good.

"Bruce?"

Bruce looked up to see a very ticked Vicki Vale standing over him, tapping her heel impatiently with her arms crossed. "Uh, Vicki, this is a surprise."

"How long are you going to continue to play games?" She huffed, pacing in front of him.

"Games?"

She gave him an annoyed smile, "I went to the studio and imagine my surprise when half the crew isn't there. When I started calling to ask why they said they'd gotten new jobs... with LNN. *All of them.*"

"I'll take care of it, Vicki. I'll get you a new crew before you go back on the air," he reassured her.

"Bruce, that's not the point!" She shouted exasperated. "You can't just keep buying your way out of this. This... whatever it is with Lex Luthor has to stop."

"He started it," he reminded him.

"And you need to end it." She took a step toward him, placing a hand on his cheek, "Please Bruce, be the bigger man?"

"The people are accusing Mr. Olsen of being things he isn't and doing things he hasn't. I believe once the judge sees this the ridiculous charges against him will be dismissed. This is an

overreach by the prosecution at the very least by an overzealous prosecutor looking to use my client as a stepping stone into the Governor's office."

Lucy set the remote down on the table in front of her, watching in rapt attention as the newscasters debated on Jimmy's guilt or innocence. She stared at the image still of Detective Jenkins holding a duffel bag and walking toward the Daily Planet's back entrance.

Bill Henderson wouldn't help her.

The FBI wouldn't help her.

She'd have to do this on her own.

Mike Jenkins stared at the crowd, watching as the newscasters continued to comment on the trial. He took a sip of his water, wincing as he felt it hit the back of his throat. He felt his throat tighten from the strain and began coughing uncontrollably. Realization dawned on him as he reached for the call button by his bed to page a nurse, but it was too late.

His arm began to spasm, feeling the muscles in his hand lock up as his throat slowly closed up.

Jack Olsen approached the witness stand, taking his seat. The bailiff approached, "Please raise your right hand," he instructed, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth so help you God?"

"I do," Jack nodded, taking his seat.

Constance Hunter approached with a smile, "Mr. Olsen, please state your name and occupation for the record?"

"Jack Olsen. I'm a Structural Engineer," he smiled back at her.

"Not an international spy?" She pressed.

"No," he smiled back at her, "Not that exciting."

"Why do you think the prosecution has accused you of being a spy?" Constance asked.

"They have a weak case. You gotta admit. It's a great story, but the reality is even if I was... a spy. My family would never know about it. So that motive for their case goes out the window."

"What do you mean?" Constance pressed.

"Think about it, in all the James Bond films and spy movies we've seen no one ever knows if he's a spy or not. It's a mystery. Do you honestly think the NIA would be any different?" He smiled.

In the gallery, Lois clenched her hand over Clark's listening to Jack Olsen's testimony, "Why doesn't he just write NIA Spy in big bold letters and hang it over his head?" She whispered.

"Shhh," Clark cautioned her, "We don't know that for sure."

"Give me a break. Listen to this guy," Lois whispered back, pointing toward the judged, "Look at the judge. He doesn't believe it either."

DA Clemmons approached Jack Olsen with a smarmy smile on his face. "Jack, can I call you 'Jack?'" He asked, pacing in front of the witness stand.

Jack's jaw tightened and his mouth formed a thin line, "I guess."

"You tell a great story of conspiracies and dangerous villains all working against your son" He smiled, "You'd do anything to help your son, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course," Jack said edgily.

"Including lie under oath?"

"Of course not!" Jack scoffed offended.

"Your honor!" Constance shot up from the defendant's table. "Move to strike!"

"Sustained!" The Judge pounded the gavel, "Watch it Mr. Clemmons."

"You say you're a structural engineer but no engineering company has heard of you," he paced in front of Jack.

"Well that depends on who you're talking to," Jack smiled

back. “Just like with your case against my son. You ask one officer he says he’s guilty and you ask another and he says he’s innocent. All a matter of perspective.”

“Your honor, permission to treat the witness as hostile?”

“Objection!”

“Your Honor!” Clemmons argued.

“Granted!” Judge Stephens pounded the gavel once more.

“Your Honor I strenuously object!” Constance shouted.

“Noted.” Judge Stephens waved her off, “Continue your cross examination, Mr. Clemmons.”

“Mr. Olsen, you say you’re a structural engineer, is that a true statement?”

“Yes.”

“But you don’t give us a company, a project, anything...”

“I’m a contract worker. I go where I’m needed.”

“Or where you’re assigned,” Clemmons corrected.

“No.”

“Isn’t it true you’re a structural engineer for the NIA? You get hired to blow things up and collect intelligence across the borders?”

“I...”

“I’m waiting, Mr. Olsen!”

“Your honor I object to this line of questioning! It has no merit...”

“You opened this line of questioning counselor.” Judge Stephens turned to Jack, “The witness will answer the question.”

Jack’s eyes narrowed, “Even if I were how would that make my son guilty? How would my involvement in an organization that keeps this country safe cause my son to be guilty of this ugly crime? You have no case. No motive. Your evidence is weak at best. You’re reaching, Mr. Clemmons. I’ve known Jimmy his entire life and he would never do the things you’re accusing him of...”

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’,” Clemmons’ eyes narrowed.

“He didn’t do this.”

“Your Honor!” Constance shouted.

“The witness is excused,” Clemmons waved Jack off.

“You’ll rot in hell for this! He’s a kid! An innocent kid!”

“You’re excused Mr. Olsen!”

{“Lois?? There’s some Pest Control guy here...”

“Okay, let them in.”

“I did. They’ve sprayed everywhere already.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“They’ve sprayed everywhere but your room.”

“Oh.”

{“I’m not liking that towel very much right now.”

“No?”

“No.”

Lex clicked the remote once more, rewinding the tape and playing it back again.

{“I’m not liking that towel very much right now.”

“No?”

“No.”

He scowled, watching as Lois willingly gave herself over to that hack partner of hers.

How dare she?

Alfred Pennyworth’s image displayed on the screen as Bruce continued typing away. “Wayne Tech’s launch party is scheduled for the end of the month, sir. Shall I set the location for Metropolis, sir?”

Bruce looked up at the screen, “It looks like I’ll be tied up here for at least a few months, Alfred, so any social gatherings we can move here would be best.”

“Right, sir,” Alfred made a note and continued, “Master Dick has requested a change in uniform.”

“No,” Bruce cut him off before he could continue.

“But you didn’t even hear his request, sir.”

“If it has anything to do with flames or fireballs like the last request the answer is ‘no,’” Bruce smirked. “How about the background checks on Wayne Enterprises new clients? Did we get those back?”

“Yes, everyone but one came back clean. I’m sending you the report now, sir,” Alfred explained.

“Which one?” Bruce asked, his interest piqued.

“HM Weapons.” Alfred said, “It’s an international alias for Honeybraun Industries.”

“Who just got bought by LexCorp,” Bruce’s face was grim.

“Yes, well their practices before LexCorp attained them weren’t exactly of the humanitarian either. You should be receiving the report now, sir.”

A flashing icon appeared in the bottom of his screen and Bruce clicked on it, reading report after report on illegal arms dealings HM Weapons had been a part of in the last ten years. “What was he trying to ship?”

“Uranium. A Lot of it, sir.”

“Cancel the order.”

“Yes, sir.”

Lois sat numbly in the gallery with Clark watching as Constance and Perry argued in hushed whispers on the other side of the courtroom. “It’s fixed,” she muttered aloud. “The whole damn system is rigged.”

Clark gave her shoulders a supportive squeeze. “He didn’t have a chance did he?”

“Nope,” Lois muttered bitterly, staring at DA Clemmons who was all smiles as he approached the bench with Judge Stephens, shaking his hand.

Brian from research squeezed his way through the crowd and tapped Clark on the shoulder, pulling him back to the present, “Clark?”

He turned to look at him, “Brian? What are you doing here?”

He held up a thick manilla envelope and smiled, “Remember when you asked me to see if anything odd happened with WayneTech and LexCorp?” He asked. “Well, this couldn’t wait...” He handed him the file and whispered, “I wouldn’t open that here if I were you.”

They nodded, making their way out of the courtroom and following Brian out into the hallway, “What is it?” Clark asked in a hushed whisper.

“Apparently LexCorp’s newest acquisition had their shipping partner back out on them,” Brian grinned. “Go ahead take a guess. I dare you.”

“I don’t know,” Lois shrugged, “ONeal Industries?”

“Nope. Wayne Enterprises. They canceled an order of 900 kilos of Uranium with HM Weapons; now a subsidiary of LexCorp.”

“Nine hundred kilos?” Lois repeated. “That’s like...”

“Sixty-four Trillion dollars down the toilet,” Brian gave a low whistle. “If I were Luthor right now I’d be pisssssseddd.”

Lois gave Brian a weak smile, looking at Clark who had a stern look on his face, “Uh, thanks for bringing this by, Brian. Let us know if you come across anything else, will you?”

“Oh,” he held up his hand and pulled a folder out of the envelope and handed it to them, “Apparently there’s some war going on between LexCorp and WayneTech. They’ve been going at it for years apparently, but here recently it’s gotten more vicious. WayneTech bought all of LNN’s timeslots, and LexCorp canceled their power...”

“Bruce Wayne finds out the project is for Luthor and he cancels it,” Clark rolled his eyes in disgust. “Great.”

“Guess they never learned to play nice as kids, huh?” Brian teased, “Anyway, I’ll see you guys back at the office.”

"Thanks, Brian." Lois called after him before turning to Clark, "Well?"

"I don't even know how to respond," he muttered in disgust. "Maybe Superman needs to pay Mr. Wayne a visit? Find out what's really going on between those two but right now..." He gestured to the DA and Judge Stephens walking out of the courtroom surrounded by a mob of reporters, "I'm going to take advantage of the distraction of the DA and see if I can get in to see Jimmy."

She gave him a quick kiss, "I'm going to check in with Lucy and probably work from home the rest of the day. This..." She shook her head in disgust, "I just can't."

"I know," he nodded, holding her close. "I'll come by once I'm done here."

"Okay," she whispered, leaning in for one last kiss before watching him approach Constance and Perry. There seemed to be some questioning before she nodded her head and motioned for Clark to follow her. She sighed, hopefully, Clark would be able to get in to see Jimmy.

Lucy was finishing her notes on the last photo still when the front door opened. She looked up to see Lois holding her laptop and a large stack of file jackets in her arms, "Hey, sis."

"Hey," Lois' face fell when she saw her. "Did you hear?"

"Yeah," Lucy sighed, running a hand through her hair. "I'm not sure why anyone's surprised. The whole case is a conspiracy."

"Yeah," Lois said with a sigh, taking a seat next to her, "What are you doing?"

"Recording movements," Lucy explained, pointing at the stack of photo stills she'd gone through already.

"Movements?"

"Detective Jenkins," Lucy explained. "He goes in with a duffle bag and comes out with nothing. Where did the duffle bag go?"

"Probably burnt to a crisp by now, Luce," Lois reasoned aloud.

"Or not," Lucy shot back, "It's gotta be worth a shot."

"Okay," Lois shrugged her jacket off, taking the stack of photos from her. "Hand me a pile."

"Here," Lucy handed it to her.

"We missed you at the courthouse."

"I needed to do this," Lucy said softly. "Jimmy didn't need me there. He had you guys. He needed me doing this. No one is looking into this, so I'm going to."

"We're looking into it," Lois shot back with an annoyed look.

"No one official," Lucy corrected.

Footage of Detective Jenkins talking with Bill Henderson in the hospital played on the large screen, "It appears we have a problem, Lex."

"Handle it, Mrs. Cox. You know what to do," Lex ordered with a puff of his cigar.

"Of course Lex," she smiled back at him slowly as she jotted down a note in her planner, "And what do you plan to do about the canceled order of Uranium from Wayne Enterprises?"

"Cancelled?" His brow furrowed, "All of it?"

"All 900 kilos," she sighed. "Do you want me to find another buyer?"

"I need it to power the satellite and complete testing on our latest project. Get me that uranium. I don't care if you have to carve it out of the Iranian's dead hands. I want it here now," he ordered.

"Yes, Lex."

"CK!" Jimmy smiled when he saw his friend in the room. "I've never been so glad to see anyone in my life."

Clark smiled weakly. Jimmy could tell the stress of everything

had taken a toll on him, "How are you?"

Jimmy shrugged, trying to deflect, "Well, the room's small and drafty. The company's not much to speak of, but on the other hand, the food stinks."

"Jimmy," Clark looked pleadingly at him.

"I'm hanging in there, CK," Jimmy reassured him. "It's hard." He was quiet a moment before adding, "I didn't do this. You believe me, right?"

"Of course, I believe you, Jimmy. We all know you would never do anything like this. It's a set up plain and simple."

"So how do we get the judge to let me out of here?" Jimmy asked.

"By finding the guy that did do this." Clark ran a hand through his hair, "Jimmy is there anything you remember from that day? Anything at all that may help us?"

"I've been racking my brain for the last week trying to think of anything that could help but so far nothing. Nobody stood out. Nobody out of the ordinary."

"What about someone you know, acting out of the ordinary?" Clark asked.

"What do you mean?" Jimmy asked.

"Luthor's reach is long because he pays the right people to talk," Clark explained. "Maybe it's someone you know, that we know and wouldn't suspect?"

"Like who?"

"I don't know," he sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Lucy suspects that Officer...uh, I'm sorry *Detective* Jenkins is involved, but I'm not sure how."

Jimmy's face scrunched up as the wheels began to turn. "Jenkins? The beat cop?"

"Yeah," Clark nodded, "Why do you remember something?"

"I saw him and Steve talking outside the Planet that morning. Steve said they went to the same gym."

"Steve the sports guy?" Clark asked.

"That's the one." Jimmy rolled his eyes, "Can't stand that guy."

"Me neither," Clark muttered.

"How's Lois?"

"She's good." Clark smiled, "Worried about you. We all are, but she's good."

"Tell her I'm okay and not to worry. The Tai Chi she taught me has really come in handy."

He smiled back at him, "I'm glad to hear that."

"Thanks, CK."

"For what?"

"Fighting for me." He smiled at Clark, "You're a good friend."

Lucy sighed, taking a look at everything she'd gathered on the screen stills happily. "I think that's everything."

Lois began pulling out one of the folder jackets, opening it to reveal a stack of weathered looking file folders in her hand, "Yeah, now onto fun reading."

She pointed to the other folder in her sister's hand, "What's that?"

"A list of everyone Lex Luthor ever came in contact with from the time he was seven years old when his parents moved him here from Central City," Lois explained

Lucy flipped through the large stack of papers, "Yikes."

"He's hiding something. When I first tried to interview him all he did was evade questions about his past. Not once has he given me a real interview...or any other reporter for that matter."

"No, instead he tries to marry them," Lucy gave her a teasing look, but Lois didn't smile. "I'm teasing Lois you know that. You didn't know what he was like otherwise you never would have... Heck, I'm the one that pushed you into the relationship with the guy."

Lois let out a long sigh, "Sometimes I look at all this and

wonder how I was fooled for so long.”

Lucy wrapped her arm around Lois and nodded her head, “You and I both have this awful trait where we try to see the best in people despite evidence to the contrary staring us in the face.”

“Claude.”

“Jake,” Lucy reminded her. “But it looks like you’ve broken that streak. Clark seems...like a good guy. You seem happy.”

“He is.” Lois smiled, “I am. We are.” Her smile spread across her face, “I’ve never known anyone like him, Luce. Don’t think I ever will.”

“Love bug,” Lucy teased.

“Mmm, you have no idea,” Lois said. “I love him...really really love him in a scary and terrifying forever...pretend to like his taste in music, let him eat the last piece of chocolate kind of way.” She let out a soft chuckle as the words she spoke hung in the air.

Lucy stared at her stunned, “The Last piece of chocolate, huh?” She let out a low whistle, “Something you need to tell me?” She picked up Lois’ hand examining it.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re giving chocolate away is a commitment. Just checking,” Lucy grinned. She was quiet for a moment, “You must really love him.”

“I do.” She pulled her hand back, “I really do.”

“I’m happy for you,” Lucy rested her head against Lois’ shoulder. “You deserve that.”

Lois turned on her side to face Lucy, “Thanks, Luce.”

“Hey, Kent, how ya doing?” Scotty James, the youngest Medical Examiner in Metropolis and also the most honest welcomed Clark into his office as he finished jotting down his notes from his latest autopsy.

“Scotty,” Clark nodded to the young medical examiner as he stepped into his office, “How are you?”

The young man looked worse for the wear, “Third one this week.” He whispered hoarsely.

“One? He asked, taking a seat at Scotty’s desk as he was finishing jotting down notes in his file.

“Heart failure in the middle of a crowded hospital with doctors and nurses all around,” the young man tossed his pen across the desk in disgust. “Tell me that makes sense to you.”

“I’m not a doctor.” Clark answered carefully, “but it does sound suspicious. Who were the other heart failure victims this week?”

He shook his head, “A couple of nobody’s. I had a dock worker, age sixty, divorced and healthy then kaput. Then I had a young nursing assistant; yes a nursing assistant that keeled over in the middle of her shift.”

“What’s the connection?” Clark scowled, realizing the death of Detective Jenkins and the other two victims were most likely related. He’d been too late when he’d heard the radio calls asking for an ME at Metropolis General when Detective Jenkins had been found unresponsive in his hospital room.

Another victim of Lex Luthor.

Another life lost.

He’d diverted disaster after disaster all afternoon. Airplanes being detoured and running out of fuel. Ships lost in the middle of the Atlantic and out of fuel. Each one said the same thing.

“There was a flicker on the navigation system and a long beep, and then it was back again.”

Since they all relied on the navigation systems to guide them, it usually took the pilots and crew hours until they realized what was going on and by then they were out of fuel or completely lost.

Now it seemed there was another mystery in the mix. Unrelated victims dying of heart failure. Scotty leaned back in his chair, folding his arms behind his head, “That’s the sixty-four billion dollar question.”

After doing a quick patrol around the city to ensure himself everyone and everything was okay, he headed back toward Lois’ to catch her up on everything he’d learned only to get a distress call from a news helicopter outside the city. “What is going on today?” He muttered to himself, detouring mid-flight to help.

Lex pressed a button, watching on the screen as Superman arrived on the scene to save the helicopter minutes before it hit the ground. He pressed another button, watching, waiting for a response.

Nothing.

He frowned, turning the dial up he watched the man of steel’s face scowl as he looked around. After holding at almost max-speed, he lowered the dial and watched as the man of steel’s face relaxed.

“It seems we have some reprogramming to do,” Nigel ordered the technicians. They all scrambled around them as Lex pulled out his cigar, taking a puff of it, staring at the screen in concentration.

“I want him gone, Nigel.”

“Then why not use the Kryptonite? Why all these tests, sir?”

“Because I don’t want him simply gone, Nigel. I want him destroyed. I want to know who he is so I can break him...and everyone and everything he holds dear.” He took a long puff of his cigar and exhaled the smoke slowly.

“And if who he cares about most is Ms. Lane, sir? What then?”

“This is war.”

Lois watched the coverage of the near miss helicopter crash from earlier and winced. Clark had barely gotten there in time. Looking at his face on the screen she could tell he was tired. It seemed as if all day the news reports had nothing but disaster after disaster that Superman was being called to.

Helicopter crashes.

Airplanes detouring.

Missing ships.

She wasn’t sure, but her reporter’s instincts told her there was something more to it than a coincidence. She glanced at the time, seeing how late it was she sighed. Clark probably wouldn’t be coming by tonight. She frowned, looking around the apartment, feeling lonely without Clark there.

Lucy was curled up on the couch clutching her notes on the still images she’s been going through earlier. They’d made it halfway through everything before she’d finally fallen asleep. Lois picked up one of the throw blankets and placed it over Lucy, readjusting her head on the pillow, so she didn’t wake up with a crick in the neck. “Night, sis,” she whispered, giving her a peck on the cheek.

“Superman! Can we get a statement?” Lois turned her attention to the television, seeing Clark’s face on the screen as the news team he’d rescued attempted to land an interview with him.

His face was grim as he turned away, unwilling to speak to the camera. She grimaced, watching as the red and blue blur disappeared in the night sky. The day’s stresses were taking a definite toll on him.

She cast a sideways glance at her sister who was still slumbering blissfully unaware of the stresses of the day. She really missed Clark. She toyed with the idea of surprising him at his apartment for a moment before getting up from the couch and heading to her bedroom.

He had given her a key.

It would be a waste not to use it, right?

Clark landed on the balcony of his apartment, scanning to make sure the apartment was still clean of any monitoring devices. He’d barely been by for more than a shower and change of clothes the last few days, opting to spend the night at Lois’ instead. He

didn't find any bugs thankfully, but he did find a surprise guest.

Smirking to himself as he stepped inside and spun out of his oil covered suit and into shorts and a sleeveless tank. He closed the window behind him, making sure the window was locked, and the curtains were closed securely before turning to face his guest.

"Hi," Lois looked at him with an impish grin, her trenchcoat securely wrapped around her as she sauntered toward him.

He noticed the black silk stockings she wore and black heels, groaning his approval, "Hi."

"I saw the helicopter crash," she ran her hand over his right shoulder briefly, fingering the fabric of his cotton shirt.

"Yeah," he frowned, recalling the series of rescues he'd had throughout the day.

"Are you o-kay?" He watched mesmerized as she pushed the hem of her trenchcoat up, massaging her upper thighs as she revealed the hint of black lace and blue silk beneath the mundane tan material.

He stared at her thighs intently, responding slightly distracted as he let himself be led into the living room. "I'm perfect...now." His arms encircled her waist, running his palms up and down her sides.

"Good," she whispered, running both hands down his chest seductively. "Because I have a surprise for you." She pushed him back against the couch, moving to straddle him.

"I like surprises," he whispered, running his hands up and down her sides.

"I know." Her thighs tightened around him, and she whispered, "You'll really love this one." She whispered a kiss against his ear.

The next morning after getting dressed for the day and having breakfast Clark caught Lois up on everything he'd learned from Jimmy the day before.

"Steve? As in Steve the Sleaze? That Steve?" Lois asked in surprise.

"That's what he said," Clark sighed, taking a sip of his coffee. "Unfortunately, Detective Jenkins isn't around to verify that." He shook his head in disgust.

Lois placed a supportive hand over him, "We'll figure this out."

"I know," he sighed, taking her hand in his.

"Did Jimmy say anything else?" Lois asked.

"He said your Tai Chi lessons are helping," he grinned at her, getting up from the table to rinse out their cups. "He's hanging in there."

"Lucy fell asleep going through the ...Oh, crap!" She got up from the table and headed for the phone.

"What?" He asked her as she began to dial her number frantically.

"I forgot. I can't believe I forgot." She put the call on speaker as she listened to the phone ring repeatedly before the voicemail message came on. "Crap," she muttered, hanging up the phone. "I forgot to let her know where I was."

He raised his eyebrows at her, "Lois! She's going to have a cow!"

"I know, I know. I was distracted and not thinking..." She sighed, "I wonder where she is."

"Maybe she left you a message?" He suggested, finishing up rinsing the coffee mugs in the sink.

She redialed her number then hit * and her access code. "You have three new messages."

Lucy's chipper voice filled the air when Lois hit the play button, "Hey sis! So, I woke up and this crazy thing happened: you weren't home. Not sure where you went, but I'm going to assume you're either working or at Clark's and not panic right now. Just saying, a phone call would have been nice...Call me."

Clark gave Lois a disapproving look, and she blushed,

shrugging her shoulders and mouthing, "I forgot." Clark shook his head, and she sighed, "I'll call her mobile and leave a message, so she knows I'm okay..."

The beep of the voicemail playing another message interrupted her thoughts when the familiar voice of Mrs. Cox filled the room, "Hello, Lois Lane. I understand you and your partner are looking for information on Lex Luthor."

Lois glanced at Clark who rose from the couch to stand next to her as they listened to the rest of the message.

"Something about the key to his downfall?"

Clark rested his hands on her shoulders, running them up and down her arms while they listened to the woman she knew had in-depth knowledge of Lex's criminal history taunted her through the voicemail message.

"If you want to know Lex's weakness and how to bring him down meet me at the mausoleum tonight at seven. Don't be late and come alone."

"Not in this millennium." Clark breathed, "It's a trap."

"I know." Lois said, leaning back against him, "but still they don't know we know that..."

"No," he shook his head defiantly folding his arms over his chest.

"You could come. Maybe we could finagle some information out of her," she turned to face him, resting her hands on his folded arms.

"It's too dangerous," his lips tightened into a thin line.

"We can't just sit around and do...nothing." She pulled away, pacing around the room, "This is the closest thing to a real lead we've got." She pointed at the answering machine to emphasize her point.

"What about Bruce Wayne?"

"What about him?" Lois scoffed, "You said yourself you don't trust him."

"I never said that...exactly," Clark edged.

"Oh, really? What changed?" Lois asked.

"Nothing. I'm still a little suspicious about his intentions. There's not a whole lot we know about him, and there's that history with him and Luthor..."

"Well, maybe we can ask Mrs. Cox about that tonight?" Lois suggested.

"Lo-is...No," he shook his head.

Lois crinkled her nose looking at her planner, "I'm not going to have time to change after work. Maybe if we stop by the apartment before work. We'll be a little late."

"I'm serious. I'm putting my foot down. This is too dangerous."

"Uh-huh." Lois looked at him in disbelief.

"I'm serious." He added, "There is no way..."

Thunder clapped in the night sky as they made their way toward the Metropolis Mausoleum. Lois glanced over her shoulder to see Clark right behind her. "See anything?" She asked cautiously as they entered the iron gates.

Clark lowered his glasses, scanning the area and shaking his head. "Cemetery's right over there," he pointed. "There are a few people at some of the graves but no sign of Mrs. Cox."

"This place is spooky," Lois muttered, looking around at the gravestones.

"It is a cemetery, Lois," Clark pointed out, resting his hands on her shoulders. Thunder clapped once more, and a strike of lightning hit across the street.

"Oh, geez!" Lois jumped back, and Clark instinctively wrapped a protective arm around her.

"I've got you," he whispered.

"A cemetery. It had to be a cemetery," she muttered, climbing the steps to the mausoleum.

"Well..." He stopped mid-sentence getting a familiar look on

his face.

Lois winced, looking at him in concern, "What is it?"

He motioned toward the sign that read Perpetual Pines Cemetery and pointed at the top of the hill where a short man stood at a gravestone.

Lois didn't understand. "I'm not sure what..."

He lowered his glasses and shook his head, spinning at super-speed into his suit and whisking her to the hill with him. She felt a gust of wind rush through her hair and on her face. She looked around to see a short man in his mid-forties standing at a grave marked 'Waldecker.' Clark had landed her a few feet away and was approaching from the sky. She still didn't understand the problem until she heard the man's words, "I can't afford to keep Sister in the rest home past the end of the month, and being as how I am just worthless as a one-legged bird dog, well..."

The man raised the gun toward his temple at the same time lightning struck, and Clark landed next to him, grabbing the gun to stop him from using it on himself.

The man looked at Clark in his Superman suit, shaking his head in disgust, "Well my goodness..."

Clark didn't give the man a chance to recover, diving into a speech he had made countless times when trying to talk people down from suicide attempts, "Sir, please listen to me: Life is a precious gift. Every new day that we're alive is another chance to be the best that we can be."

To Lois' surprise, the man scoffed, "Oh, puh-leeze, what would you know about it, Mr. Nothing-Can-Hurt-Me- And-I-Don't-Need-Money-To-Live...?" The man looked Clark's Superman costume up and down critically, "...and didn't anybody ever tell you that two primary colors just do not work together?"

Clark gave him a small smile, "You can criticize my appearance, or you can talk about what's really bothering you. Which would you prefer?"

On the other side of the cemetery, Lex exited his limo dressed in black. He wore an oversized hat to hide his face and a long dark coat with a hood that hid his face. "Where is she?" Lex snapped, looking around.

"She'll be here," Mrs. Cox reassured, pulling a cigar out of its case for him. She held out a lighter for him to light it and he took a puff.

"It's 7:03. She's late," he stated.

A lightning bolt lit up the sky, and they both turned to see Superman standing with a man holding a gun at the top of the hill. Lois Lane stood a few feet away watching, "I think that answers our question, Lex."

"So, what with Wandamae being, um, in need of professional help and all, and me getting that very very bad advice about how biodegradable golf clubs were the wave of the future and I better get in on the ground floor, you can see how my life just is not worth living anymore," the man explained in a babble that would make Lois Lane's babbling look mild. "I feel so guilty; my daddy went to an early grave." He pointed to the grave behind him, touching the tombstone gingerly, "This one right here, in fact. Making all that money, and what do I do, I just go and lose every last bit of it in one fell swoop."

Clark took a deep breath, glancing at the man for a moment before finding his words, "Sir, Metropolis General Hospital has a referral service for counseling and therapy..." He fisted the pistol in his hands, crushing it into a small steel ball to ensure the man wouldn't be attempting to take his life again with it. The sound of a security guard a few feet away getting into an altercation with Lois caught his attention. He needed to cut this short. "...people you can talk to, people who can help you see that life is worth living."

He handed the man the steel ball and patted him on the

shoulder before flying toward Lois.

"You're coming with me!" The guard grabbed Lois by the arm, tugging her toward the mausoleum.

Lois pulled her arm back and argued, "Hey! Get your hands off of me, you jerk!"

"Is there a problem here?" Clark's stern Superman tone filled the air and Lois raced toward him.

"No problem. I just found this lady trespassing..." The guard explained. "Gotta document it."

Clark glanced at the time, "There are still people visiting loved ones here. How is Ms. Lane trespassing?" His eyes narrowed at the question.

Lois knew exactly what Clark was getting at. The guard was probably one of Luthor's goons sent to spook her. She glanced at Clark then at the guard, watching as the guard took a few steps back, "I guess I'll just let her off with a warning this time..."

"You do that." Clark said sternly, "And tell Luthor if he wants to talk to Ms. Lane he has to go through me first."

He took another step backward, and Lois couldn't help but laugh when he turned to run, "Nice work, partner."

"Are you okay?" He asked, taking her wrists in his hand to examine.

"Fine," she reassured, placing a hand on his chest. "Thanks for the backup." He smiled, turning to cup her cheek, leaning in to kiss her. The rain began to pour around them. Superman scooped her up into his arms, flying them out of the downpour.

Lex watched the scene unfold from a distance, seething as he watched Lois Lane willingly give herself so freely to the man of steel. His eyes narrowed as Superman's hand moved to cup her cheek and his jaw tightened when he saw him lean in to kiss her.

She didn't back away.

She didn't push him away.

The man Superman had saved earlier watched as Superman disappeared in the night sky, shaking his head, "Easy for you to say." He looked down at the ball of metal in his hand and threw it to the ground, "Well, Mama, I guess I won't be joining you and Daddy after all. Not at this particular time anyhow." He half-heartedly kicked at the steel ball, watching in amazement as the steel ball flew into the sky, disappearing beyond the clouds.

"Oh, my..."

Another lightning bolt lit up the sky. By the mausoleum, Lex Luthor watched in amazement as the steel ball disappeared into the sky, glancing back at Mrs. Cox he puffed on his cigar, "Get LexLabs on the phone now."

Lois was covered in rain. Her hair and clothes were drenched when they headed back at her apartment. Clark wasn't any better. His cape and spandex were soaked along with his hair. Rain droplets were dripping down his face. "Lucy is probably buried in those files."

His forehead tightened as he scanned the apartment, "She's asleep," he corrected.

She pressed her face against his spandex soaked suit as he floated toward the window to her apartment, "Let's get out of this rain."

He opened the window to her balcony and landed in the living room with a wet thud, turning to close the window behind them. "I still can't believe that officer wanting to file a police report instead of looking for that guy impersonating a security guard."

She wriggled herself out of her overcoat, tossing it to the ground in a wet heap on the ground. She reached for the end of her blouse to wring the water from it. "I'm soaked," she complained, watching as Clark turned around from locking the windows,

staring at her drenched blouse and pants with a lingering gaze.

The corners of his mouth twitched, "I...can tell." He attempted to clear his throat mid-sentence as he worked on trying to detangle his cape which was a wet heap of red fabric, dripping on the living room floor at the moment.

"You're no help." She finished wringing the rest of her blouse out.

"Can I help it if I'm enjoying the...view?" He smiled, pulling her to him, "Come here."

She glanced at her sleeping sister on the couch, "Lucy is right..."

At super-speed she found herself whisked into the bedroom and pressed against the locked door. He grinned back at her, running his hands up and down her sides seductively, "Better?"

She nodded, running her hands through his damp hair, wedging his hair between her fingers. He captured her mouth with his, thrusting his tongue inside hers. His hands found themselves inside her blouse, helping her shrug the wet garment off. It was soon joined by her dress pants and stockings.

Her hands ran up and down the back of his suit, "How...do you...take this...off?" She murmured against his lips. He moved her hands to the hidden zipper at the collar, and she grinned against his lips. Her hands clamped around the back of his neck, tugging the zipper down. She let out a soft moan when she saw him peel the top half of the spandex off his chest. The cape still wrapped around his shoulders and she stared at him hungrily. His eyes locked with hers. A moment later and a gust of wind later he was in her arms, stripped down completely. "Tell me."

"Yes," she sighed happily against him, wrapping her arms around him as the room around them disappeared.

Lex watched as the scene unfolded before his eyes. The technology LexLabs had been able to develop for surveilling Lois Lane seemed to finally fit the bill against Superman. Although at the moment he wasn't sure if it was the surveillance system or Lois Lane that was preventing him from spotting the latest surveillance on Lois Lane's apartment. For now, he didn't care.

{*"Tell me."*}

{*"Yes."*}

Lucy bit her lower lip, trying to remain as still as she could. Had she just seen what she thought she saw?

She peered over the edge of the couch and noted the wet heap of fabric on the floor with a small puddle shaped like boots leading from the window to the middle of the living room. Nope. Definitely hadn't imagined it.

The sound of something hitting the door frame in Lois' room caught her attention and Lucy winced, realizing what she was hearing. Yes, she had definitely seen it.

Lucy sat numbly in her room. She'd debated whether to move for fear of running into either her sister or Superman. Or was it Clark? He definitely sounded like Clark in the living room. The way he'd been talking to Lois...

She shuddered involuntarily, recalling the intimate conversation she'd overheard.

Lois was sleeping with Superman. That much was certain. The question was whether she was cheating on Clark or not. If he and Superman were the same person, she wasn't cheating. But if they weren't... She shook her head, unwilling to let her mind go there.

'*She wouldn't do that.*' Her mind told her over and over.

'*There has to be another explanation.*'

'*Bruises. Blood. Superman doesn't bleed, does he?*'

{*"Lois?? There's some Pest Control guy here..."*}

{*"Okay, let them in."*}

{*"I did. They've sprayed everywhere already."*}

"So what's the problem?"

"They've sprayed everywhere but your room."

"Oh."}

{*"I'm not liking that towel very much right now."*}

"No?"

"No."}

The tape clicked over to another image as Lex seethed angrily, watching the footage over and over again. Mrs. Cox watched from the doorway, uncertain if intruding was wise at the moment.

{*"I'm not liking that towel very much right now."*}

"No?"

"No."}

"How dare she??" Lex fumed, clicking the remote angrily.

The image of Lois Lane and Superman filled the screen. First showing them in the living room and then in the bedroom.

{*"Tell me."*}

"Yes."}

{*"I love you..."*}

The screen began to flicker, and Lex cursed under his breath. Watching the screen in rapt attention as it closed in on Lois Lane as her mouth opened to say something just as the screen went black.

The next morning Lucy rushed out of the apartment, gathering her things and being sure not to run into her sister or Super err Clark at the same time. There were too many questions and unknowns she had at the moment and trying to make small talk while her head was still swimming was not high on her priorities at the moment. There were much larger issues to deal with at the moment.

Lois frowned, poking her head into her sister's room, looking around the apartment, "That's odd." She looked at the time.

"What's odd?" Clark asked, giving her a kiss on the shoulder as he hugged her from behind.

"Lucy. She's not here," Lois said offhandedly as she turned in his arms.

"Maybe she wanted to get an early start?" Clark suggested, wrapping an arm around her, "Speaking of which we're going to be late if we don't get a move on."

Lois nodded, reaching for her coffee, "Yep, don't want to keep Bill Henderson wait..." She stopped when she recognized the expression on his face. "What is it? What do you hear?"

"Fire on Fifth and Broad," he explained giving her an apologetic look. "I'll try to meet you there."

"Okay," she nodded, watching him leave out the door with a goodbye kiss. "Love you," she whispered. After gathering her things she headed out the door, bumping into the Pest Control crew. "Oh, I'm sorry I'm on my way out..."

"It'll only take a minute ma'am. Has to be done daily to keep the pests away after the infestation..."

Lois mulled her options over then caved, "It'll only take a minute?"

Above Metropolis Clark flew through the sky, heading toward Fifth and Broad street where he'd heard the sirens and calls for help earlier.

"Help! Someone help! My poor Muffin!"

He scanned the area and saw emergency personnel were on site ... Along with a very familiar looking man dressed in a bright spandex outfit and mask.

'No, it couldn't be...' He thought to himself.

"Dogs are twenty-nine ninety-five." His super-hearing picked up on the conversation between the woman and the man from the night before.

Clark grimaced, heading toward the calls for help to intervene.

Across town an elderly woman watched her home burning in flames as she argued with a mysterious stranger offering to help. "Oh, please you have to help me. My muffin is ..."

"Is muffin a dog or a cat?" the man asked, standing before her in long red spandex with a blue cape and mask.

"A dog," she cried. "She's just a wonderful dog. Please help me."

The man made a note in his notebook, "Dogs are twenty-nine ninety-five." The woman's eyes widened in horror, and he continued with his statement, "A small price to pay for being plucked alive from the snapping jaws of certain death."

Clark did his best not to panic as he handed the elderly woman her frightened pup after he shot a long blast of freezing breath on the fire, dousing the area to prevent the fire from causing any more damage. The firemen cheered. The woman thanked him. The man that had been trying to negotiate pricing instead of using his gifts to help crossed his arms over his chest and approached him. His tone was condescending as he spoke, "Well, excuse me, Mr. Boy Scout, there's not enough work for both of us? Do I horn in on your action?"

Clark glanced at the crowd that had begun to form and whispered, "Can we go somewhere and talk?"

The mysterious man shook his head, "If you want to provide your services for free, that is entirely up to you, but I personally have bills to pay."

"Can we go somewhere and have a private conversation?" Clark asked, noting the crowd that had begun to gather.

"I'm not greedy, my prices are real reasonable, and I'm not an ogre, I'm gonna throw in a little pro bono work."

Clark sighed, uncertain how to get this man away from the crowd. Thinking money might be the key he offered, "How about if I pay you to come with me and have a talk?"

The man held up a finger, pointing at his cape, "Now you know, that brings up a point I have always wondered about: Where do you carry things like money in that outfit?" He lifted up his cape and pointed to a hand stitched pocket, "I sewed in some pockets underneath here, but it's a lot of trouble gotta fumble around for the zipper, zip it open, zip it closed, and I'm afraid velcro would kind of pucker up the fabric and just absolutely ruin the lines. What do you do?"

Clark suppressed a groan. What did he do? He didn't go around charging people for saving their lives. He didn't need to carry money in his Superman costume. Biting the inside of his lip and suppressing the urge to grit his teeth he leaned in and whispered menacingly, "If you don't come with me, I will follow you everywhere you go from now till the day one of us dies, and I will save everybody before you do."

The threat was clear, and he was willing to carry it out if it meant keeping this con artist from taking advantage of innocent people who happened to need help. The man looked at him in shock, "Well, my goodness you don't have to get nasty about it. All you had to do was ask. How rude."

Henderson closed the door behind Lois, looking through the window of the conference room cautiously, "I thought this was a meeting with you and Kent." He motioned toward the desk where Mayson was sitting pen ready.

"Something came up. I'll catch him up later," Lois explained.

"What's this about?" Mayson asked, tapping her pen on her notepad. "I don't exactly make a habit of coming in the office on a Saturday."

Lois ignored the comment, diving right into her questions as she took a seat across from Mayson, setting her notepad on the desk, "Have either of you questioned Jimmy on what he saw that day?"

Mayson shook her head, "He was interrogated non-stop for 72

hours by Detectives Jenkins and Harris."

"We haven't yet," Henderson interrupted, "Why?"

"Lucy and I've been going through the surveillance footage outside the Planet around the time of the bombing."

Henderson smirked, "She showed me. I told her to leave that to the police. I don't need her trying to play hero and getting herself killed. That goes for you too."

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, "Did she tell you she spotted one of your officers outside the Planet?"

"It's been noted," Mayson interrupted. "We're following up on it, but with his death..."

"Death?" Lois asked in surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"You don't know?" Henderson asked in surprise. "He was found in his hospital room unresponsive. The preliminary report shows a drug overdose."

"Drug overdose?" Lois asked, "What kind of drugs?"

"We won't know till we get the autopsy back," Mayson cut him off. "Which will be released to the press. There's been quite a bit of evidence implicating Detective Jenkins in wrongdoing."

Lois raised an eyebrow looking at Henderson, "Why am I just hearing about this?"

"We just received information this morning implicating him in the prison break of Toni Taylor and the evidence tampering in the Luthor case," Mayson explained. "You understand we're only sharing this as a courtesy."

"Fine," Lois harrumphed. "So what does that mean? Are you going to arrest Lex?"

"Not quite," Henderson shook his head. "We can prove the case was tampered with. That's huge. We've just got to rebuild the case. The evidence. With Jenkins gone no one knows where any of this is."

"We've got the FBI working with us on trying to rebuild the case, but we'll take all the help we can get," Mayson added.

"And Jimmy? What happens to Jimmy?" Lois asked.

"His case will continue to go to trial unless we can find evidence implicating someone else of the crime or irrefutable evidence he didn't commit this crime," Mayson explained.

"He didn't!" Lois snapped irritably. "If you would just...talk to him. You would know that."

"I'm sorry I'm trying to bring down the organized crime that's been plaguing this city for years and spreading into Washington," Mayson snapped sarcastically.

"So Jimmy doesn't matter."

"I didn't say that."

"Hold it! Both of you!" Henderson snapped. "Now look, I get it we're all stressed. We're overworked and looking over our shoulders, but we can't turn on each other." He looked at Lois, "I'll talk to Jimmy this afternoon and see if he can give me any information that might help find another suspect."

"You're right," Mayson nodded. "I'm sorry. I just really want to bring him down. I hate dirty cops. They make for a dangerous city and a bad way of life."

"You're telling me," Henderson muttered.

"I want him brought to justice as much as you do, Mayson," Lois said softly.

Mayson made a face, "Didn't you used to date him?"

Lois shifted uncomfortably, "That was a long time ago. I didn't realize then what kind of person he was."

"He's a master manipulator," Mayson agreed.

"Thankfully Lois has seen the light. Her and Kent have been instrumental in helping build the case against Luthor," Henderson explained. "It was Kent's idea to start the investigation in the first place."

"Really?" Mayson asked intrigued. "When was this?"

"About a year ago roughly," Henderson explained.

Mayson's eyes shone in appreciation, "I'd love to sit down

with him over dinner and a glass of wine and..." Lois narrowed her eyes at her and Henderson cleared his throat, shaking his head at her, "I mean, I would like to know what helped clue him in on Lex Luthor's misdeeds. So many people have been fooled for so long," she covered for herself.

"I'm sure you would," Lois rolled her eyes. She spotted the narrow of Henderson's right eyebrow, and decided to change the subject, "It's Steve."

"What?" He asked.

"Steve. The sports guy. Steve the Sleaze?" She prompted.

Recognition hit him, and he looked at her in disbelief, "Steve. Steve?"

Lois laid a photo of Steve and Jenkins outside the Planet down for him and Mayson to see. "Jimmy spotted them outside the Planet around the time the Fire Marshall said the bombs were planted. I don't know if he did it or if it's a coincidence, but no one else went in or out those back doors."

Henderson picked up the photo to examine it closely. "Steve?"

"Steve," Lois repeated softly.

"Ms. Lane, I don't know what else to say. I can try but the way the judge has been ruling..." Constance shrugged, rummaging through her office. "Do you have any idea what I'm up against?"

"You're up against a monster that has it in his head to railroad Jimmy for something he didn't do. Let me talk to him. Let me help him. Give him hope. Let him know he's not alone."

Constance looked at her with a weak smile, "Ms. Lane..."

"Lucy, please," she corrected.

"Lucy, I want those things too, and in a perfect world we'd have those and more, but right now you're up against evil and corruption and greed."

"So how do we fight it?" She asked.

"With the truth."

On top of the WayneTech Towers, Clark paced the rooftop with the mysterious man sitting on the edge, kicking his legs freely. So far he hadn't gotten any answers. "But how could that have happened? I've been struck by lightning before. My powers never been transferred."

"Well, don't look at me, all I know is one minute I was a ninety-pound weakling and the next minute I was a ninety-pound Hercules, and I like it a whole lot better this way."

"Well, I can understand that Mr. —" He stopped short, looking at him apologetically, "What should I call you?"

He pulled out a small dictionary from the pocket he'd been pointing at before and flipped to a page. "Do you know, I haven't quite decided on a good enough name yet. What do you think about Brawny Man? No? How 'bout Magnificent Man?"

Clark sighed, trying to get him back on track. "I'm sure you'll find the perfect name, but right now I want to talk to you about right and wrong."

"Well, all right, if you think you know so much more about it than I do," the man scoffed indignantly.

"One would think," Clark thought to himself before diving into the uncomfortable conversation, "You can't charge people for saving their lives."

"Well, my goodness me, if that's not worth a little something, what is?" The man scoffed. "And excuse me, but I am simply playing a legitimate if somewhat unique trade in an increasingly service-oriented economy." Clark sighed, shaking his head as the man stood up, continuing his spiel, "I would think you'd welcome the help. You may be Superman, but even you can't do it all by yourself." With that, he flew off.

"Great," Clark muttered to himself. He made his way toward the Metropolis P.D. to catch up with Lois and update her on the latest news. He flew toward the East side of Metropolis looking for an alley to change in when an alarm from a military gunship

rang in his ears, "Mayday! Mayday! Ghostship to Mission Control we have lost all navigational control! Repeat..."

"Not my day," Clark muttered to himself, detouring toward the gunship in distress.

"Is it true?" Lucy asked, cornering Jack Olsen in the lobby of the Metropolitan Hotel.

"What do you think?" He asked grimly, not looking at her.

"I think one of my good friends is about to pay for a crime he didn't commit because his father didn't think it pertinent to prepare his lawyer with the fact that he's a..."

"My career choice has nothing to do with this. The fact that the prosecution is relying on it so heavily..."

"Nothing to do with it? It has everything to do with it. You lied to Constance, to Perry, to Jimmy. You put his entire life and this case at risk for what?"

"Just a little thing called National Security," Jack Olsen pulled her by the arm into a nearby conference room. "Don't you think I wanted to say something? Don't you think I wanted to help? I couldn't."

"So your career is more important than Jimmy's life?" Lucy scoffed. "Great to know. I'll pass along the message."

"Sometimes I have to do things I don't agree with, to ensure the safety of the millions of people I'm entrusted to protect. You wouldn't understand."

"No, I understand completely. You're married to your job. Your kid comes last on the list of priorities," Lucy spat out bitterly. "I know the type."

"That is *not* true," he shot back angrily. "I would do *anything* to protect Jimmy. *ANYTHING*."

"Then do it," she snapped back angrily.

"Another one?" Lois asked in disbelief, taking a bite of her pasta as Clark caught her up on everything that had happened that morning with the military gunship that had its navigation system tampered with that morning. After her meeting with Henderson they'd met back at his apartment to go over everything.

"Ships. Planes. Trains. Now fighter jets are being affected," Clark said bitterly. No one seems to know what's causing it."

"Same flicker?" Lois asked.

He took a bite of his fry and nodded, "Same story every time." He glanced at the chaos she'd made in his apartment with the files she'd been sorting through. "What's with the, um, organized chaos?" He did his best to suppress a chuckle.

"Did you know Detective Jenkins died of an overdose yesterday?" Lois asked, pointing to the preliminary report from the coroner. "We have to wait for the toxicology report to come back but..."

Clark hung his head, recalling the radio call he'd overheard the day before. "Yeah, I heard. Must have slipped my mind last night with everything else going on."

Lois gave him an annoyed look but didn't press, "Henderson said he's going to try to get a statement from Jimmy. Hopefully, there's something he can use to find the real arsonist and free Jimmy once and for all."

"If they can find a real judge sure," Clark muttered, "Those rulings yesterday were disgraceful. He's probably bought and paid for by Luthor."

"Wouldn't surprise me," Lois sighed, "Feels like the whole justice system is working against him."

"Bill said that Deputy DA wasn't. Maybe we can talk to her and get her to start investigating Jimmy's case?" Clark suggested. Lois shook her head, "Mmm, mmm, nope. Not a good idea."

"Why not?"

"She's not interested in Jimmy's case. She's interested in bringing Lex down," Lois said.

"Aren't we all?" Clark asked. "It couldn't hurt to ask."

"I already did. Didn't go very well," Lois sniffed, taking another bite of her lunch.

"When was this?"

"In my meeting with Henderson."

Clark made a face, "Bill didn't mention the DA being there."

"Surprise guest," Lois sniffed. "She was very upset it was only me there."

"Were you able to at least get her to think about looking into Jimmy's case? I mean his case is connected to Luthor's corruption, right?"

"I don't know. I guess, maybe? I did learn they got some evidence implicating Jenkins in Lex's evidence tampering and in Toni Taylor's escape."

"That's good," he said. "Maybe we can find where he stashed the evidence and get Luthor charged once and for all."

"Unfortunately it's not that easy," Lois sighed, rolling her eyes, "The FBI is trying to rebuild the case, and Henderson said he's working closely with Mayson on this which means we'll be working closely with her."

"Lois, she can't be that bad," Clark smirked, putting a hand on her shoulder.

She leaned back on the couch, turning to face him, "She is that bad. It's annoying. She's annoying with her snide remarks and her pushy attitude and... Did you see all that makeup she was wearing? Is she trying to win a case or enter into a beauty pageant?"

Clark rolled his eyes, knowing full well what Lois was hinting at. "I've only got eyes for one woman," He took her hand in his, running his thumb across her knuckles, leaning in to kiss her.

"I know." She smiled back at him, stroking his cheek before changing the subject, "So, what do you think is causing the navigation systems to go out of whack?"

He shrugged, "Not sure but that wasn't even the worst of it this morning."

"What do you mean?" Lois asked, looking at him

"Well," he sighed, reaching for the remote on the coffee table, "I caught a little of it on the news circuit on the way back. I'm sure they're still running it. See for yourself." He turned the television on, changing the channel to 'LNN' displaying the images of the mysterious man from earlier on the circuit with a question mark superimposed over the amateur footage of him negotiating prices with an older woman.

"What in the world?" Lois looked at him in shock.

"A new superhero has arrived in Metropolis. You can call him for help, but it's gonna cost you!" The newscaster said, showing a copy of a receipt on the screen.

"What??" Lois gasped, in shock, leaning toward the television to read it.

"A small price to pay for being plucked alive from the snapping jaws of certain death," the sound of the man's voice came over the television.

Lois looked back at Clark who shook his head, "Don't get me started." Lois looked at him quizzically, the question she was thinking clear on her face. "I don't know," he shrugged, leaning back into the couch, "He said after the lightning struck us he had my super powers."

"Do you feel any... different?" She asked.

"No," he shook his head in disbelief. "I've been struck by lightning before, and this has never happened."

Lois glanced at the television, "Well, what did he say when you talked to him? I mean, charging people for saving their life..."

"I know," he sighed, "but talking to him isn't exactly easy. He doesn't think there's anything wrong with what he's doing."

"Who is this mysterious superhero? Where did he come from?" The announcer echoed through the living room.

Lois reached over and clicked the television off, "Clark, you're going to have to make a statement...or he is."

"And say what?" He asked.

"Say?" Lois echoed not understanding. "Say what happened, so no one associates this guy with you."

"No, Lois, this can't get out." He shook his head adamantly, "It'd be chaos."

"You can't continue to let people think you...approve of this guy's...diluted ethics? It'll ruin Superman's reputation."

"And if it gets out that Superman's powers can be transferred?" He pressed. "What then? Every rescue. Every disaster. Superman would be mobbed by people wanting his superpowers. Thinking they deserved superpowers."

"So, what's your plan? Do nothing?" Lois asked, "You can't let him continue like this."

"I don't know that I've got much of a choice at the moment." He sighed, "Listening to me isn't exactly high on this guy's priorities. All he cares about his money."

"Then you need to make him listen," Lois reasoned. "Maybe start with finding out who he is and..."

Both the apartment phone and their cell phones started ringing at the same time. Clark sighed, "I guess we should figure out what we're going to do about this from the Planet-side while we're at it."

"That's probably Perry." Lois said, reaching for her cell phone, "Hello?"

Sure enough, it was Perry on the other end, but not about the latest superhero. "Lois, it's Perry. I need you and Kent to meet me at the Metropolis Federal Building in half an hour. We've got a serious crack in the Luthor case."

"Okay, we'll be there," Lois nodded, watching as Clark stepped into the kitchen to take his call. "Any updates on Jimmy, how he's doing?"

There was a long pause then Perry stated glumly, "I, uh, haven't been able to see him since they processed him."

"Oh," Lois breathed softly. "Maybe we can talk to Constance and see if she can..."

"She's already doing what she can Lois. Right now, I want her focused on winning this case not Jimmy's visitations," Perry's voice was strained. "Anyway, meet me at the Federal Building on Fifth, and I'll explain everything there."

The resounding click of the phone and monotone beeping of dead air echoed on the other end. Lois sighed, setting the phone back on the receiver just as Clark reentered the room. "Who was that?"

Clark made a face, "Bruce Wayne. Wants to make sure the Planet is working on the exclusive on the mystery superhero so the Publishers can be 'reassured the Planet is still the best of the best.'" Clark did air quotes over Bruce's statement, showing his disdain for the message with a scowl on his face.

"He's right," Lois said cautiously.

"Lois..." Clark began to argue, but she cut him off.

"Look, I'm not happy about it, but it's true. After everything that's happened people need to believe...to trust in the Planet. We can't sit on the biggest story of the year because it happens to make Superman look bad. We have to investigate and..."

"And what?" He asked. "What are we supposed to write? Superman went to save a guy from killing himself and ended up accidentally giving him super powers? That's reckless journalism, and you know it."

"Okay," she acknowledged, "So we can't tell the world the whole truth, but we need to print something. We need to find this guy and talk to him. Make sure he doesn't tell anyone how he got his powers either."

"I guess I'll tell him we were working on it then," he said not so convincingly. He really wasn't sure what to think about the new owner. In some aspects, he was great with his hands on approach, but in others, he wasn't so sure.

"That would be a start." She smiled, "In the meantime, we've

got to meet Perry in front of the Federal Building then we can start digging into this mysterious man's past. Find out who he is so we can..." Realization dawned on his face she stopped mid-sentence seeing the expression on his face. "What is it?"

"Waldecker," he snapped his fingers.

"What?" She asked, not following.

"The grave he was standing on. '*Waldecker*' was the family name carved on it," Clark explained.

"Great," Lois grabbed her notepad to begin jotting down notes. "Do you remember anything else?"

Clark pointed at his left hand, "He had a tattoo on his left hand." He reached for a notepad and began sketching at super-speed, showing her the design sketched out in pencil.

"Not bad. Although I'd prefer a more simple design that screams 'brand me for eternity,'" she teased.

"Hah, ha," he said sarcastically, "I figured we could show it around and see if anyone recognizes it. Help us identify our mystery Waldecker."

Lois nodded her agreement, reaching for her briefcase. "Hopefully it won't be too hard. How common a name is 'Waldecker'?"

"A small price to pay for being plucked alive from the snapping jaws of certain death."

Lex clicked the remote in his hand, freezing the frame as he tapped the remote against his chin, contemplating for a moment. "Well, well, what do we have here?"

"Let me guess; you're starting the new mysterious superhero's fan club and needed a picture," Bruce's voice echoed in Lex Luthor's study.

He turned in his chair to face the unwelcome visitor, "Mr. Wayne, to what do I owe this...surprise visit?"

"Oh, just wondering how long you think you can keep the power off at WayneTech," Bruce smiled a dazzling smile at Lex.

"Depends on how long it takes you to void that contract."

"I bought those timeslots fair and square," Bruce argued.

"How was I to know it'd interfere with your business?"

Bruce gave his best innocent look, but Lex knew better, "You knew exactly what you were doing. Don't think you can play me."

"Can't I?" Bruce asked, looking around the empty room, "Let's have a little history lesson, shall we?"

"Let's not," Lex snarled. "Get out!"

"Turn the power back on and give Vicki her time slots and I'll gladly leave," Bruce shot back.

"Never."

Bruce took a seat across from Lex, leaning in as he folded his hands on the desk, "Then I guess you'll just have to get used to me. Tell me something, do all your investors know about your past with Preston Carpenter? You know, the guy serving quadruple life sentences in federal prison for trying to make his own stories at the STAR?"

Lex's eyes narrowed, "I don't know what that has to do with me."

"He and I had an incredible time chatting earlier..." Bruce's eyes narrowed, "about the good old days. It seems the little stunt at Prep School wasn't your only issue growing up, Lexy."

"You know nothing," Lex shot back dismissively.

"I know enough," Bruce said in a cold, menacing tone. "Go ahead. Play your games. See what happens. Just remember I have my limits."

Clark sifted through the files in his hand, trying to make sense out of the information he'd learned from the medical examiner a few days ago and the surges that kept happening around Metropolis, sending the technology systems into a tailspin. "So what have we got here?" Lois asked.

"Floyd Ryan. Age sixty. Dock worker. Divorced," Clark read

off.

"Anne Margot. Age twenty-nine. Married."

"Then we've got Mike Jenkins. Age forty-five. Divorced," Clark added. "No connection."

"Well, these two have only been in Metropolis these past six months," Lois pointed out, tapping on the files for Anne and Floyd."

Clark nodded, looking at the background checks, "Moved here from...Gotham?"

Lois gave Clark a look, "Don't."

"I didn't say anything," Clark sighed, rolling his chair back to grab a box from the table he had their research on Luthor at.

"I know what you're thinking," Lois said.

"I wasn't thinking anything," He said, pulling out a stack of files from the box and setting them in front of him.

"Uh-huh," Lois added, not believing him for a minute. "What are these?"

"Unsolved or mysterious murders in the past year on the stories we were working on," he explained. "Trying to see if there's a connection."

Lois grabbed the first file and read the name, "Antoinette Baines?"

"Alfred Carlton," Clark added, setting another file down in front of her.

"Carlton? The psychiatrist?" She looked at him perplexed as he flipped through, finding the ME report.

"Ah-ha!" He pointed at the cause of death on the Medical Examiner's report, "Cause of Death: Unknown: Possible Heart Failure. Toxicology report read inconclusive."

"Okay, so that makes four victims of heart failure," Lois reasoned. "You still don't have a connection."

"Or maybe I do," He said, frowning as he spotted one of the lead investors in Carlton's research. "Funded by LexCorp and..."

Lois frowned when she saw the name, "Wayne Enterprises."

Clark cast a dirty look toward Perry's office where Bruce Wayne had just walked in. Lois sighed, "It says here LexCorp was the main investor though."

"But Wayne Enterprises was investing in Carlton's research. Research he was using to test on troubled kids; using them as guinea pigs ..." Furious he got up and started pacing around the room.

"Clark, surely you don't think he supported that testing? I mean we've both worked with him. He doesn't seem..."

"I don't know what I'm saying. I honestly don't know him well enough, but I do know his company's name keeps popping up. First with these ridiculous fights with Luthor...HM Weapons and their sixty-four trillion dollar deal...Now, this?"

Lois sighed, "If you feel that strongly about it then maybe you should have Superman go have a little chat with him about it, but so far I haven't seen anything that screams lunatic or psychopath."

"Maybe he will," Clark said, tapping his fingers on the desk.

"Great," Lois sighed, reaching for another stack of files. "So heart failure? Was there any drugs found in any of their systems?"

Clark read the reports, "Nope. They all came up clean."

"So whatever is being used is able to fly under the radar of the toxicology reports."

He nodded, "But maybe not all of them." He reached for the phone and began to dial.

"Who are you calling?" She asked.

"STAR Labs."

Agent Davenport set the recorder on the table, "Please state your name for the record please."

"Jonathan Marcus Taylor the Third," he spoke into the microphone.

"You were the leader of the gang called the Metros were you not?" Davenport asked, jotting down his notes.

“Yes.”

“You were approached by a mysterious figure called the boss to give up your hold on the Southside of Metropolis. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Who approached you?”

“There were several people. There was an old guy kinda creepy looking. St. John. He works for the boss and a lot of the big criminals in the city. Rumour is he was a spy for the British Empire before coming over here. Knows how to break a guy in half in two minutes,” Johnny explained, tapping his hand on the table, “Then there was the woman. Built well if you know what I mean. Curves in all the right places but lethal.”

“Do you know this woman’s name?”

“She called herself Mrs. Cox,” he said with a smirk. “But I ain’t seen no ring on that dame’s hand, and she wasn’t acting like any married woman I’ve ever seen... If you know what I mean.”

After getting the okay from Scotty and Bill to request another lab run the tests on the four victims Lois and Clark had made their way back to his apartment, trying to make sense out of everything they’d found so far on their latest superhero.

“A hundred and thirty-seven?” Lois looked at the list in front of her in disbelief. “How are there a hundred and thirty-seven Waldeckers?”

Clark took the list from her, “I guess we’ll have to get a little more creative in tracking this guy down.”

Lois groaned, rubbing her temples as she buried her head in her hands. “This is so not my day.”

“Any word on Henderson about his investigation into Steve?” Clark asked, wrapping his arms around her from behind and placing a kiss on her temple.

Lois shook her head, looking back at him. “No, and I don’t think we’re going to hear anything else today. I guess we’ll have to pick this up on Monday.”

He nodded, rubbing her shoulders as she leaned back against him, “You talked to your mom today?”

Lois nodded, “She’s good. Staying busy. Your mom’s introduced her to some of the town, and you’ll love this...she’s actually trying to help ‘plan’ the corn festival Ellen Lane style.”

“Oh, boy,” He sighed, “Well, at least she’s keeping herself busy...not worrying.”

“Oh, us Lane women are multi-taskers. She’s still worrying and makes sure she lets me and Lucy know all the time.” Lois sighed against him, “I know it’s gotta be tough not being able to do anything...living with practical strangers for the most part.”

“As soon as this is over I’ll bring her back home,” he promised. “I would have preferred if we had all stayed out there, but...someone had other ideas.” He smirked at her.

“We wouldn’t have gotten near as much done staying in Smallville, and you know it,” Lois shot back, leaning her back against him as she whispered, “Besides it hasn’t all been bad.” She ran her hand down his inner thigh as she spoke, causing him to jump. “Having you around all the time definitely has its benefits.”

He leaned in to kiss her, tightening his arms around her. He groaned his approval as she slid onto his lap tightening her thighs around him, deepening the kiss.

He did enjoy the extra time he’d been able to spend with Lois trying to keep a watchful eye on her. They still hadn’t talked about his ‘drunk confession’ last week. He wasn’t sure if she hadn’t brought it up because it frightened her or if she was distracted by everything else going on around them.

He wanted to marry her. He wanted to start his life with her. He just didn’t want to taint it with memories of the destruction Luthor seemed to leave in his wake. When Lex Luthor was safely behind bars, he would ask her. He had a feeling he already knew the answer. She hadn’t pulled away when he’d made his

declaration to her. The night they’d first made love when she’d been quoting her confession of love to him from a few months ago her heart had been hammering in her chest. He knew the answer, but he wasn’t leaving anything up to chance when it came to Luthor.

It seemed every time they took a major step in their relationship Lex Luthor made a major play against them. At first, he’d thought it was from him monitoring them, so he’d taken extra precautions in making sure their apartments were bug-free. So far he hadn’t seen anything out of the ordinary with the exception to some low radiation he’d seen in her apartment the other day. He’d chopped it up to the chemicals being used by the Pest Control but still felt uneasy about it.

“Clark?” Lois waved her hand in front of his face, and he turned toward the very annoyed face of Lois Lane.

“Hmm?” He asked, pulling her closer.

“Are you obsessing again?” She asked, running her hand down the front of his shirt, tracing the length of his button down shirt.

“Obsessing me?” He chuckled, trying to throw her off the trail of where his thoughts had been a few moments ago. They definitely weren’t ready to talk about his suspicions.

He let out a soft groan as she turned in his arms to face him, kissing his neck as she whispered, “Usually when I kiss you you’re a little bit more focused.”

He smirked back at her, “Oh, I can focus...” He whispered, gathering her in his arms as he carried her toward the bedroom.

“Clark!” She shrieked in laughter, wrapping her legs around his torso. “What about the food?”

“I’ll warm it up.” He promised, nibbling at her earlobe seductively, “after we work up an appetite.”

She moaned her approval when his lips came over hers, leaning her against the bedroom wall. “Yes, please,” she cooed in approval. His hands ran up and down her sides, massaging the sensitive flesh beneath her blouse. She helped him brush the cotton blue shirt off his shoulders, allowing it to fall to the ground as he focused his attention on her jawline, whispering his lips along its path and down her neck while his hands massaged her bare legs from beneath her skirt.

“I love it when you wear these short skirts,” he whispered, trailing further down her neck and to her collarbone as he spoke against her skin.

She giggled against him, fumbling at the buttons to her blouse. “Much easier to work with, huh?”

His hands moved beneath her floral skirt as he groaned his approval. Her soft sighs echoed in his ears as he concentrated on the feeling of her in his arms. She finished unbuttoning her blouse and shrugged it off her shoulders, allowing it to fall to the ground. “So gorgeous.” He groaned his approval, murmuring featherlight kisses against her chest. A hard knock at the front door intruded on his thoughts, and he groaned, glaring at the front door. “You’ve gotta be kidding me,” he muttered, burying his face into the nape of her neck with a sigh.

“Who is it?” She asked, running her hand through his hair, fingering the strands seductively. “Maybe they’ll go away if we ignore them?”

“New Troy Pest Control!” a man hollered from the other side of the door.

He groaned against her neck, debating on answering the door or not. He didn’t have any appointments for maintenance and interrupting what he was doing right now was not high on the list of priorities.

“I’m in no condition to be answering the door,” he finally whispered huskily, closing the gap between them and sealing his mouth over hers in a fiery kiss.

“Oh, thank God!” She whimpered against him, “Yes, Clark.”

There were a few more knocks before their intruders finally

left, leaving him and Lois to concentrate on more urgent matters well into the night.

Monday morning LexLabs was busy with activity. Many lab workers scurried around with the excitement of having Lex Luthor at the lab. He paid them no mind however focused on his goal at hand.

Dr. Kelly pulled up her notes, motioning for Lex to look at her notes, "Transfer of Superman's powers. I've begun experimenting. You said it was during an electrical storm?"

"Outside the Mausoleum." Lex said, taking a seat at her lab, "There was a lightning strike on a handgun they were both holding and..." He slammed his hands together, "Then there were two."

Dr. Kelly grew thoughtful for a moment, "Electricity alone wouldn't transfer the powers but with a conductor...It's definitely possible."

"Is it reproducible?" Lex inquired, stroking her cheek as he spoke.

"Very," she acknowledged in a throaty whisper.

Jimmy glared at the familiar image of his father on the other side of the table, careful to keep his cool with the guard still in the room. He sank into his chair, placing both hands on the table, watching as the guard left the room and turning toward his father to confront him, "What are you doing here?"

"How ya doing, son?" Jack asked, trying to steer the conversation toward Jimmy.

Jimmy rolled his eyes, giving a sarcastic sigh, "I'm fine, I'm fine. Dad... On trial for attempted mass murder and now thanks to your testimony... Terroristic Threat. I'll probably get kicked out of the country, but I'm fine." He narrowed his eyes at him, "What are you doing here? It's been..."

"A couple of years, I know."

"Three," Jimmy corrected.

"Three?" Jack acknowledged skeptically.

"And... you know... five before that," Jimmy added sadly.

"But who's counting?" Jack shrugged.

Jimmy gave a rueful smile, "Yeah. Who's counting?" Finally tired of the small talk Jimmy shook his head in disgust, "You've got a lot of nerve showing up here."

"I'm here to help."

"Yeah, I noticed. Thanks to you the sketchy motive they had against me has been confirmed. Thanks for that by the way. Couldn't have warned my attorney before taking the stand?"

"I'm trying to do what I can to help, Jimmy," Jack said earnestly. If he were a few years younger and more naive Jimmy might have believed him. He did his best to bite his tongue as Jack continued. "I'm worried about you, son. When Perry called and told me what happened... I wanted to do what I could to help sort this out. I know I can't always be here to protect you, but..."

That was too much. "Always? How 'bout *EVER*?" Jimmy scoffed.

"You're in some hot water Jimmy. Hot water from your friends messing with very serious characters. When this 'boss' decides someone's trouble, then that person and his family, friends, household pets all get burned."

"Why do you care?" Jimmy scoffed, "It's not like you've made some big show at trying to be a father. Real fun trying to explain why my dad is never around for birthdays or sporting events or awards...ever."

"I never claimed to be father of the year."

"Hardly," Jimmy scoffed. "You walked out."

"I was thrown out."

"You were never home."

"I was trying to protect you. You and your mother."

"You should have told me," Jimmy said angrily. "You should have told mom."

"I had to keep you safe."

"By lying to me? I'm your son!"

"And I'm your father. It's a father's job to protect his children from everything...even himself."

Jimmy finally found the courage to ask the question he'd been wondering since he'd discovered his dad was working with the NIA, "Are you a good guy or a bad guy?"

Jack shrugged, "Depends on who's asking."

"Your son."

Jack sighed, "Right now, I'm about the best guy you could have in this situation, but you have to trust me."

"Like you trusted me?" Jimmy asked.

"Jimmy..." Jack sighed. "Do you have any idea what you're up against?"

"No, but I have a feeling you do."

"I do." Jack sighed, "God help me I do. I need to know everything you were working on that week before the Planet was bombed."

"Why?"

"Because whatever you were working on probably put a target on your back," Jack explained.

Crash after crash had kept Clark busy well into the afternoon when he finally found himself having time to think. Sixty-four trillion dollars wasn't something to be taken lightly by either billionaire. What was Luthor doing with all that uranium? Why was Wayne Tech partnered with HM Weapons? The longer he thought about it the more questions he had. Realizing he wasn't going to get the answers he needed without having a talk with Bruce Wayne he headed toward Wayne Towers, finding Bruce Wayne in his office with Lucius Fox.

He hovered outside the open window, landing on the balcony and keeping his famous Superman pose. It took a minute, but Bruce Wayne turned and saw him standing there, his expression was empty as he walked toward the balcony, unlocking the latch.

"Superman is it?"

"Mr. Wayne," he nodded, stepping inside the office.

He turned back toward Lucius Fox, "I'm gonna need a minute, Lucius."

"I'll be in my lab," Lucius nodded, stepping out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"So, obviously we don't need introductions. What can I help you with, Superman?"

"You can start by putting answering a few questions I have about your dealings with Luthor."

"I take it your not a fan," Bruce observed.

"Let's just say we've never seen eye to eye," Clark still wasn't sure if he could trust Bruce Wayne and didn't want to give too much away.

"Fair enough," Bruce admitted. "What do you want to know?"

Clark watched as Bruce took a seat at his desk, tossing a soft stress ball that had been worn down in the air and catching it. "Luthor was trying to bring almost a thousand kilos in uranium stateside. Your company was listed as the shipping company."

"I canceled that order as soon as I heard about it," Bruce interjected.

"But Wayne Enterprises was listed as a partner of HM Weapons," Clark pointed out. "What is your relationship with them?"

"What does HM Weapons have to do with this?" Bruce asked.

"What do you know about HM Weapons?" Clark asked, dodging the question.

"Answering my question with another question," Bruce observed. "Nice deflection."

"I'm not deflecting. I'm careful," Clark corrected. "You have no idea what I've been dealing with..."

"From Luthor?" Bruce pressed, "I can imagine."

"No, you can't," Clark shook his head. "You have no idea what he's capable of."

"Do you really think I get into business without doing my research?" Bruce stared back, following Clark's pace with the turn of his head. "I run a multi-billion dollar corporation. I've dealt with bullies like Lex Luthor before."

Clark thought about asking how he planned to deal with Luthor but thought better of it, steering the conversation back to the reason for his visit in the first place. What is he building? Why is he trying to bring that much uranium over here?"

"How should I know?" Bruce asked tossing his stress ball in the air, staring at it as it moved above him.

"You were partnered with him," Clark pointed out.

"I am NOT partnered with that sycophant!" Bruce shot up angrily, getting into Clark's face.

"Then how did Wayne Enterprises end up with a multi-trillion dollar deal with LexCorp?"

"I canceled it," Bruce spat back emphatically. "I canceled it the minute I realized it was for him."

"What were you doing working with HM Weapons in the first place?" Clark pressed. "Do you have any idea what they're doing over there?"

"Do you always question people you first meet like this or am I just special?" Bruce shot back.

"Do you always deflect when you don't want to answer the question?" Clark pointed out.

"Who says I'm deflecting?"

"Then answer the question," Clark challenged, narrowing his eyes at him. "What is he doing?"

"I don't know," Bruce repeated adamantly. "I never connected the dots between Luthor and HM Weapons till recently when I canceled the deal. Before you go and ask again, Wayne Enterprises had a contract with Honeybraun Industries. That was it. There was no contract with HM Weapons. I'd never heard of them before."

"They're an illegal arms company supplying terrorists with weapons of mass destruction all around the globe. Focused mainly in the Middle East," Clark supplied. Bruce seemed genuine.

Bruce let out a low whistle, "And Luthor's got his claws in that company?"

"Yeah," Clark said bitterly.

"When I discovered Luthor had a hold in the deal I canceled it."

Clark sized him up, taking in his sincerity. "Okay."

"Okay, what?"

"Okay, I believe you," Clark said.

Bruce shook his head, "You don't like me very much, do you?"

"I don't know you," Clark corrected. "Given my history, I try to be cautious until I've made my mind up about someone."

"And what does your mind tell you?" Bruce asked.

"You seem genuine. I guess I can understand how you could be fooled by Honeybraun Industries. The entire US government had the wool pulled over their eyes with its shady dealings."

"If what you're saying is true..." Bruce shook his head, "I'm not the only shipping company out there. That's over a trillion dollars at stake. There's now way Luthor just let that go."

Clark sighed, "I know. I have a feeling whatever it is it can't be good for Metropolis."

"Nothing Luthor does is good for anyone but himself," Bruce said bitterly.

"You seem to have a history," Clark observed.

"A long one." He rolled his eyes, "Another time...you know when you're not still suspicious of me?" He smirked at him.

{ "I'm not liking that towel very much right now." }

"No?"

"No." }

{ "Don't stop." }

"Never." }

{ "I'm not liking that towel very much right now." }

"No?"

"No." }

{ "Tell me." }

"Yes." }

Lex watched in a bitter rage as Lois Lane gave herself again and again to his enemies...both of them. He took another drink of his scotch, feeling the smooth liquid hit the back of his throat as an eerie calm came over him.

It seemed he hadn't known her at all.

His grip tightened on the remote as he watched the image of Lois Lane in Clark Kent's arms then again in Superman's. It didn't make sense. Everything he'd learned of her background in his thorough investigations had told him she was faithful, loyal. So why would she cheat on Clark Kent if she could have Superman?

Why bother with a relationship with her partner at all if she could have the most powerful man on Earth?

Something didn't jive well with the information he had. He continued to mull it over then clicked the remote to change the screen back to the live feed of Lois Lane's apartment. There had been zero activity all weekend, and his crew had been unsuccessful in infiltrating Clark Kent's apartment to apply the solution. He didn't dare let his mind wander too long on what he and Lois Lane could have been doing to keep them occupied all weekend.

His grip tightened further around the remote as he muttered, "I will not be made a fool."

{ "What is all this?" }

"Every tattoo parlor in Metropolis. The new superhero has a tattoo on his left hand. We thought tracking down the parlor might help identify him." }

"What is all this?" Lucy motioned to the list Lois was sifting through as she took a bite of pizza.

"Every tattoo parlor in Metropolis," Lois explained, pointing to the list. "The new superhero has a tattoo on his left hand. We thought tracking down the parlor might help identify him."

"How many have you gone to so far?" Lucy asked, taking the list from her.

"Well I've called all the ones on this list," Lois pointed to the column with the red circle around it. "There's only sixteen that specialize in custom works. I've got some appointments tomorrow to see if any of them recognize this piece." She pulled up the sketch Clark had drawn.

Lucy admired the sketch. "Nice. Did you draw this?"

"No, Clark did," Lois said offhand, then backtracked, realizing she may have given too much information with her statement. "I mean, did you know he was such a good sketch artist?" She gave a chuckle, "Who knew, right?"

Lucy gave her an odd look and smiled, "Right."

Lucy watched as Lois continued to make call after call inquiring about any family members that could be related to the mysterious man that had gained superpowers. Clark still hadn't returned, and she hadn't said anything. It was clear finding the new superhero was important, but she couldn't tell if it was important because it was a story or because there was something he might know that could endanger Clark's identity.

After taking some time to reflect over the weekend and burying herself in research on Jimmy's dad, she'd become even more convinced that Clark was Superman. She still didn't know how to explain him being injured in Smallville but she assumed she would find out one day.

There was no denying it. Lois Lane was head over heels in love with Clark. There was no way she would cheat on him. So,

the only explanation for what she'd witnessed the other night and what she'd been privy to over the past few weeks was Clark and Superman were the same.

For now, she would remain quiet while she decided what to do with the information. Clark kept his identity hidden from the world for a reason. He'd saved both herself and her sister countless times. She wouldn't repay him with betrayal.

The next afternoon, Clark walked with Lois down Eighth Avenue, eying the sketchy neighborhood warily, remind me why we're doing this in person?"

"Well, my contact at the Dermal Emporium recognized that sketch as belonging to the 'dermal artiste' Allegra Vennum. Her place is just down here," she pointed at the building at the end of the street with a couple of bikers in front of it.

"Of course it is," he muttered under his breath.

Lois looked back at him with a smile, taking his hand in hers, "You ever been?"

"Been?"

"To a tattoo parlor?" She pressed with a grin.

He laughed, "Think about it Lois why would I ever go to a tattoo parlor?"

"Well, you said yourself you weren't always invulnerable." She gave him a flirtatious wink, "Never got talked into it during high school just to see?"

He grinned back at her, "No, have you?"

"Once," she admitted. "My friend Molly from college wanted to get matching tattoos with her boyfriend, Ryan. Somehow I got talked into coming for moral support."

He gave a light chuckle, "I'm sure you were a very good companion."

"Lucy wanted me to talk her into getting bones and skulls tattooed on her," Lois laughed letting out a soft sigh, "I just couldn't do it."

"You know speaking of Lucy," Clark began hesitantly, "What's been up with her lately?"

"What do you mean?" Lois asked, not sure what he meant.

"I don't know. Something just seems...off. I know we're all stressed, but this is different. She seems more intuitive...asking more questions. Have you noticed that?"

Lois pursed her lips for a moment, trying to recall her conversations over the past few days with her sister. She seemed to be mulling things over before she spoke, "Now that you mention it, I guess it is kinda odd. She didn't even ask where you were during the oil spill when we were Smallville which I was grateful for at the moment but now..."

"Now what?" He pressed, not sure if he wanted to know the answer.

"It makes me wonder if she might suspect something," Lois said softly, motioning with the flying symbol they used for Superman.

"How would she?" He wondered aloud.

"I don't know," Lois shrugged. "She's always been pretty bright. Maybe she noticed something in all the chaos over the past few weeks."

"Should we ask her?"

Lois shrugged, "It's up to you." They stopped a few feet away from where the bikers were sitting outside. She lowered her voice, turning to face him, "With everything else we've been dealing with is that really something you want to confront right now?"

"I don't know. I guess I just want to know."

"What if she doesn't know? You risk her finding out if you confront her," she pointed out.

He sighed, realizing she was right, "Do you think she knows?"

"Honestly, I don't know," Lois admitted, "but if she does know she'll say something eventually." She grew thoughtful for a moment.

A thousand questions raced through his mind as the reality of the situation began to sink in. If Lucy knew what would happen? Would he be able to trust her? What if she let it slip to someone? What if...

"Hey," she squeezed his hand, "You can trust her. You know that right? She might be a little free spirited, but the one thing she values above anything is friendship and trust. She'd never tell anyone...if she knew."

"I hope you're right," he released a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. "Maybe I should wait till this is all over and try to talk to her then?"

Lois nodded, taking his hand in hers as he pulled him toward the shop titled, '*Allegra Vennum's Dermal Emporium.*'

Monique looked around the office she was in nervously, "What's this about?"

"Protection," Bill Henderson said, taking a seat across from her between two other women she didn't recognize.

"What kind of protection?"

The first woman with blonde hair and a gray suit interjected, "Your protection. We need to know what it would take for you to testify."

"I told you before I'm not doing that," she hissed. "You saw what happened before. It fell apart. He has deep pockets and connections everywhere. It won't matter what you do. He'll find me and come after me. I have a family now. I can't risk..."

"We understand that," Henderson reached across the table to place a hand over hers. "Believe me we do. I've lived your fear. All of us have." He glanced between the two women. "You can't continue to live in fear any more than we can continue to let him corrupt our justice system. An innocent kid is going to go to prison for a very long time if we don't do something."

"He'll just send his goons out once he's locked up. You can't stop him," Monique snapped irritably.

"We can if we know the names of the goons and lock them up with him," the other woman interjected, handing her her card, "I'm Agent Woods with the FBI. You know Inspector Henderson and this is the DA that is willing to build a case against the boss, Mayson Drake. So are you going to keep giving us reasons why we can't do this or help us find ways we can? We've already started building our case on testimony from informants and lower lieutenants on his payroll. You're not alone."

Monique looked between the three of them, "There are others? How many others?"

Lois kept a possessive hand around Clark's waist as they interviewed Allegra Vennum who seemed more interested in sizing Clark up like a piece of meat. Lois pointed to the tattoo on the wall, "Did you design this?"

Allegra seemed oblivious to her question, circling Clark's other side, "It would look fabulous on you." Her tone was sultry as she whispered, "You have such a nice..." Lois' eyes narrowed when she saw Allegra eye Clark's rear end without any shame. "...body." Clark shifted uncomfortably, placing an arm around Lois' waist as she continued, "Hard and smooth. Like polished steel."

Lois pointed to the design once more, doing her best to remain professional as she reminded herself over and over again that they would get more information with honey rather than vinegar. "Ms. Vennum, if we could get back to the story. Maybe a little less..." She sharpened her tone as she narrowed her eyes, "Eying my partner and a little more information?" Allegra frowned but seemed to stop circling Clark who readjusted his glasses, tightening his arm around Lois, "Did you do this tattoo?"

"Dermal design," she corrected.

"Yes. Dermal design," Lois chuckled with a forced smile she thought would split her face in half. "Dermal design. Little guy with a Southern Accent?"

"It would have been on the back of the left hand," Clark added.

Allegra scrunched her nose up, "Yeah, I hate it when I have clients put my work in such small areas." She eyed Clark's chest longingly, "I really love working on a big canvas."

Lois cleared her throat, pulling her back to the present and Lois pointed at the design once more, "This one?"

Allegra sighed, "Yes, a little guy with a Southern accent."

"Do you remember his name?" Lois asked. "Might have been a last name of Waldecker?"

"Names? You want me to remember names?" She asked, baffled at the thought.

"Do you keep records?" Clark asked.

"Do I keep records?" She echoed, motioning for them to follow her toward the office.

Inside she sat at the desk, sifting through a plastic bin of diskettes until she found the one she was looking for. "Ah-ha!" She put it in the computer and smiled, "It'll just take a sec."

After a few minutes and a few keystrokes, she scanned the directory, "White, Wallace, Winslow, Waldecker!" She printed the record out, "William Wallace Webster Waldecker."

"That's a lot of 'W's," Lois commented.

"Don't ask him about it. Trust me," Allegra made a face before turning to open the door to the office for them to exit.

Later that evening, back at Lois' apartment, Lucy was camped out on the couch going through the case files on Jimmy. Lois and Clark were sitting at the dining table, finishing up dinner and going through everything they'd found out that day on William Waldecker. Lois poked a fork in her pasta, twirling it as she read off her notes, "William Wallace Webster Waldecker. Not married. Both parents are dead."

"One sister. Wandamae," Clark added. "Kinda sad."

Lois nodded her agreement, taking a bite of her pasta, "Was there anything he said the other night that might give you a hint as to where we might find him?"

Clark shook his head, taking a bit off his own plate, "Nothing more than what we found out. The family moved here from Little Big Holler, Tennessee 25 years ago." He sighed, "He wasn't exactly in a sharing and caring mood the other night, Lois."

"Well, we have a name," Lois reasoned. "Maybe we can talk to the sister?"

He grimaced shaking his head, "Lois she's in a mental institution. I doubt any information we get from her would be reliable."

"Well then what do you suggest?" Lois asked.

"You could call this number," Lucy pointed toward the television, turning the volume up.

"What number?" Clark asked, standing up from the table to walk toward the television with Lois.

The screen showed the new superhero now branded with an 'R' on his chest. The announcer read off the advertisement spiel, "In trouble? Need help no mere mortal can provide? Call Resplendent Man. Instant service, reasonable rates."

Lucy pulled out her phone to dial and Lois stopped her, "What are you doing?"

"Calling him. See if he shows."

"Better pull out your checkbook," Clark pointed at the screen which showed the number, '1-900-0-1-RES-Q-U.' In small print beneath that: \$3.98 for the first 15 seconds.

"Look, he even charges for the call," Lois scoffed. "How greedy can you get?"

Lucy put her phone on speaker, "You have reached the voicemail of Resplendent Man. If your situation is a bona fide emergency press 1; if you can wait a little while, press 2; if you'd like to join the Resplendent Man Fan Club for a really teeny-tiny nominal fee press 3; if you..."

Lucy clicked the end button. "What an ogre."

Clark's face tensed and Lois recognized the look on his face, "Um, Clark, do you think you could run down and grab some more cream soda? I drank the last one."

He smiled, grateful for the excuse and left. Lucy smiled and turned to Lois, not saying anything about Clark's exit. "So Lethal Weapon's on. You feel like a Mel Brooks marathon?" She rolled her eyes, "I'm in need of some serious distraction right now."

Lois smiled, taking a seat next to her, "Sure."

Tommy Garrison stepped out of his cab, heading up toward his apartment when he spotted a familiar man in a black suit approaching him, "I got nothing to say to you." He shot back over his shoulder.

"Mr. Garrison, we just want to help."

"Then leave me alone, huh?" He snapped. "I was doing fine till you came around."

"You're hustling and gambling for the boss. You call that fine?" Davenport asked, grabbing him by the collar, "What happened to you, huh? You were the greatest prize fighter. Challenging Superman in the ring then what happened?"

"Superman destroyed my career! The boss is helping me."

"No, the boss is taking advantage of you. You destroyed your career by choosing to cheat. You chose to have that operation again and again and again," Davenport spat. "Where's your morals, Garrison? Greatest prize fighter caught in the biggest scandal in sporting history and look where you are now? You're angry? Good. Be angry, but make sure you're directing it at the right person."

"Who? You?" Garrison scoffed.

"No, the boss," Davenport shot back. "He's the one that did this to you. Put you in this predicament. Make him pay."

Lucy watched Lois from across the sofa sipping her coffee. She'd been reeling for the last few days with so many questions, and she still wasn't sure what to think about the latest revelation. Clark Kent was Superman. Her sister was dating Superman. She must have sounded so idiotic when she'd been comparing the two over dinner with their mom. No wonder he knew where to get the best food because he could fly around the world in a few minutes.

"What?" Lois asked, defensively looking around.

"Nothing." Lucy shrugged with a smile, "I was just thinking, this is nice. Us working together. I feel like I'm finally getting a chance to see why you do what you do. Why you fight so hard... Put yourself at risk the way you do. You're trying to get to the truth. I get that."

It was the truth she did enjoy working with Lois...and Clark. The more time she spent with the two of them, the more she saw the similarities between the superhero and Clark Kent and the more she saw what Lois saw in him. He was a genuinely good guy who happened to spend his spare time stopping asteroids and lifting rockets into space.

Lois smiled, turning on the couch to face her sister, "It has been nice spending this time with you." She sighed, fingering the stray thread on her blouse before adding, "Thinking of making a jump from Psychology to Journalism?"

Lucy cringed, "No, I don't think I'd go that far. I may look at getting my Investigator license. Freelance with the DA's office or a reputable law firm? I kinda like digging into these cases like this and finding what the police investigators missed."

"Or you could be a police investigator," Lois pointed out, setting her coffee mug on the table.

"True," Lucy reasoned. "I would have to cancel my internship with Metropolis Family and Children Services."

"I guess it depends on what you want to do more," Lois reasoned. "Help those wrongly convicted or looking at hard time or help children that have been through hell and back?"

Lucy smiled sadly, "Can't I do both?"

"I'm sure there's a way," Lois smiled warmly back at her sister.

"When did you get so optimistic?" Lucy teased.

"I think that's Clark's influence. He's rubbing off on me," Lois admitted shyly.

"I'll say," Lucy teased, "but in a good way." She pursed her lips for a moment before adding, "You both seem...happy. He's spent the night a few nights, and you've spent the night at his place. Things are getting serious, huh?"

"Yeah," Lois smiled ear to ear, "Very."

"Thinking about...wedding bells?" Lucy edged cautiously.

"Maybe," Lois giggled, and Lucy eyed her sister cautiously curious what her answer was or if there even was an answer. Had she even discussed these things with Clark yet? "I love him, Luce. I know he loves me. For now, that's enough. Trying to sort through the other stuff...we don't have the time right now and honestly figuring that out amidst Jimmy's case wouldn't be fair to Jimmy or to us."

"Have you talked about it?" Lois shook her head shyly, and Lucy pressed, "Then how do you know?"

"You mean aside from the fact that he's practically moved in to keep an eye on both of us?" Lois teased. Lucy smirked at her, and she sighed, "Some things may have slipped that night we were drinking. He hinted at some things." She smiled, "We haven't talked about it. I'm trying not to bring it up, but it's driving me crazy." She laughed, "I'm not good at sitting on information."

Lucy knew all too well about Lois' inability to sit on a good story or not press an issue. It amazed her that her sister was actually not pressing something this important. She said Clark had let something slip the night they were drinking. How ironic that she'd begun to suspect something that night too.

"So, if he asked you to be his tomorrow what would you say?" Lucy asked, looking at Lois curiously.

"I..." She sighed happily, "I'd say 'yes.'" She admitted shyly.

The corners of Lucy's mouth twitched into a broad smile, "No second thoughts?"

Lois shook her head, and Lucy smiled. "Good. Because I've kinda gotten used to having him around to cook meals. I have lost a few inches from not eating out so much," She pointed to her waist, "I'd hate to have to gain it all back because you choke."

Lois took the pillow on the sofa and hit her with it, "Choke? Really, Luce?"

"Well, what would you call it?" Lucy teased in laughter. "I do have one request though, could you keep it down a little. You two are *loud*." Lucy watched as Lois' cheeks both burned red with embarrassment as she continued. "I mean, what are you doing rearranging furniture in there? I used to think Lacey was bad..."

"Okay, okay, can we stop having this conversation now?" Lois said, burying her face in her hands.

Lucy looked over at her, "It's nothing to be ashamed about. You have a love life. A thriving and active love life. Just remember some of us like to sleep before one in the morning," Lucy patted her on the shoulder with a grin.

"I'll try to remember that," was all Lois could manage to say as she watched Lucy gather the coffee mugs and take them into the kitchen. She scanned the forgotten file boxes in the corner she'd been going through earlier. "I'm going to go put these up. Make some walking room in here."

Lucy nodded, rinsing the mugs out as Lois carried the package of pictures toward the bedroom. "I'm going to make some more coffee..." She heard a knock at the door and sighed, "...after I answer the door."

Lois laughed from the bedroom, "Always something."

Lucy chuckled, "You have no..." She stopped when she saw Lex Luthor standing on the other side of the door, "idea."

"Ms. Lane," Lex crooned tightly, "Always a pleasure." He

attempted to step into the apartment, and Lucy slammed the door against him.

"That was a mistake," he replied coolly as the door hit his hand where he had blocked it from closing.

"Lois!!!"

Lois heard a loud crash and what sounded like a whimper from her sister and bolted out of the bedroom, "Luce?"

She stopped cold in her tracks when she saw Lucy on the floor of the living room with blood covering her right temple. She saw Lex standing over her with a pistol aimed toward her sister. "Lex," she breathed. "What did you do?"

"Oh, your sister and I had a disagreement. She'll be fine once she gets medical treatment..." He said casually, waving the pistol around the room.

She raced for the phone to call an ambulance only to have the cold barrel of his gun pointed under her chin as his bony fingertips ran down the front of her blazer. His breath reeked of old scotch as he whispered in her ear, "Now you know it's not that simple my darling."

"Lex, please," she whimpered against him tearfully, "She's hurt."

She tensed up as his mouth pressed against her neck, "Oh, Lois, darling, I've missed you so terribly." He breathed in her ear, tugging on the button to her blazer. Panic ran through her mind as he pressed himself against her whispering, "It's time you and I had a nice long chat about your latest lover. I'm not one to share."

After stopping the out of control car from hitting the bridge and ensuring the driver arrived at the hospital safely, Clark decided to take a patrol around the city to see if he could find this Resplendent Man and have a few words with him.

It didn't take long to find him.

On the roof of Luthor Towers, x-raying the locker room of the Metro Gym across the street from it. "You've got to be kidding me," Clark muttered.

Realizing he was aimed at the Women's Locker Room Clark decided to take action before anyone's dignity became compromised. "Whoo hoo hoo, take it off, girls..." Resplendent Man cheered.

Crossing his arms over his chest and lowering himself to where he was blocking Resplendent Man's view completely Clark cleared his throat in an attempt to make his presence known as he stared the man down.

"Do you mind?" Resplendent Man scoffed, throwing his arms up in the air.

"Actually, I do mind," Clark growled, glaring at him angrily. "I have tried to be patient. I've tried to be understanding..."

He scoffed, waving Clark off. "Get a grip here. Do I tell you what to do? No, I do not. I would appreciate the same courtesy from you."

Clark let out a long breath, fighting the urge to throw this man into the next galaxy. "You will take this to heart. You will memorize it; you live by it: The strong do not exploit the weak. The powerful do not attack the defenseless, and you do *not* use your x-ray vision to spy on women in a locker room!"

He met his eyes for a moment before brushing him off once more, "Oh, puh-leeze! What planet are you from? Try to grasp this; it is not a tough concept: You may not like what I do, but there isn't a blessed thing you can do about it." With that, he flew off into the night.

Clark let out a frustrated growl, heading back to Lois' apartment. "Great."

"*Help!!!! Cl...*" The sound of Lois' cry for help reached his ears, and he skyrocketed toward her apartment as fast as he could move.

'Lois.'

Lois turned to face Lex accusingly, “What did you do to her?” “That’s of no concern right now,” he grabbed her, pulling her to him as he hissed in her ear, “I know what you’ve been doing Lois. I know everything.”

All nerves went on edge as she felt his fingertips slip up the front of her blouse, fingering the silk buttons with intrigue. “Get your hands ...off of me.” She struggled to free herself from his grasp.

“You know, I really don’t take being ordered around very well, Lois.” He tightened his grasp on her arm, pulling the pistol up and pressing the barrel against her neck, “It seems you’ve gotten to know everyone’s superhero quite well. Every woman’s dream I suppose,” the barrel pressed hard against her throat as he hissed in her ear, “It seems I underestimated you.”

The soft moan of her sister from across the room reminded her of how time was of the essence even if Lex seemed oblivious to that at the moment. “Lex... let her go...Please.”

“Ah, ah, ah,” he warned, the cold barrel of the pistol moved between her legs, nudging them apart as he whispered in her ear, “I know all about your secrets, Lois. I’ve been watching for months as you let Kent woo you while you tossed me aside. “She did her best to suppress the urge to throw up. As long as he was distracted, she had the upper hand. She eyed the door across the room, a few feet away from where Lucy was lying. If she could just... The top button of her blouse came undone, and he pushed the fabric apart, tracing the outline of her newly exposed bust with the edge of the cold barrel.

“You’re sick.” She spat out venomously, “I told you to stay the hell away from me.”

“There you go making orders again, Lois, Lest you forget who is in control here?” He ran the pistol against the fabric of her blouse, pushing the fabric further apart, revealing the blue and black corset she’d bought for Clark as a surprise. “I see you certainly didn’t disappoint.”

She cringed moving slowly toward the door with his hands exploring her soft curves with a pistol pressed against her. She felt his hot breath on the nape of her neck and whimpered, “Please, let her go, Lex.”

“Say it again,” he ordered, running the barrel of the gun against her neck, licking the side of her neck as he did so.

She let out a frustrated growl before repeating herself again, “Please, Lex let her go.”

“Much better,” he cheered, setting the pistol down on the shelf behind him, reaching up to grab her jaw to look at him, “See? As long as you play along no one will get hurt.”

“Play along?” Lois asked in revulsion, pulling her blouse together to regain some sort of dignity with the threat of the pistol gone. She felt the knob of the front door behind her and sighed in relief knowing freedom wasn’t far away, “You attacked my sister...” She hissed angrily.

One by one she worked on unlocking the locks behind her. His grip tightened on her, “This can go easy or hard on you, Lois. Either way, I’m not leaving here till I get what I want.” He smoothed the side of her face as he hissed in her ear, moving his hand to her throat.

“What is it you want?” She hissed back, “I already told you...”

His grip tightened around her throat, and he hissed, “Stop giving orders, Lois, you are in no position to be telling me what to do.”

One more lock then the chain and she would be home free. She cringed as she felt him press himself against her. ‘Don’t panic. Don’t panic,’ she told herself.

“I never would have thought the great Lois Lane would hold back. Who would have thought after all the corruption scandals and exposes it would take an alien in a cape for you to corrupt

your morals.” He fingered the open flap of her blouse possessively, “I know.” He hissed in her ear.

Her blood ran cold as he pressed her against the door, keeping a firm grasp on her throat, “Oh, that’s right I know all about your affair with Superman. What I can’t seem to figure out...”

‘No,’ she struggled against him trying to calm her nerves and the panic rising in the pit of her stomach.

“You’re out of your mind,” she hissed, struggling in his grasp, trying to gain just enough leverage against the door so she could push him off of her.

“You’re going to tell me everything you know about Superman,” he hissed in her ear. “I know you know. I watched you spread your legs for him...so willingly.” His face scowled in disgust.

‘What did he just say? He had been watching? Affair with Superman?’ He had been watching her and Clark? All nerves went on alert as she struggled against him.

“You’re going to tell me his secret identity...”

‘He doesn’t know.’

“What are you talking about?” She hissed at him, “You’re insane.”

“Give me a name,” he ordered, tightening his grasp on her throat.

“Go to hell!” she snapped, turning to unlock the chain.

“No, I *am* in control here! **ME!!!**” He hissed back at her, grabbing her by the throat and shaking her, “You are going to tell me...one way or another!” The smell of old scotch hung in the air as he hissed at her, “Nine months of being patient and you give it up for...*KENT*...” She cringed as he licked her ear whispering, “Really, Lois? He’s so beneath you...Tell me something, who excited you more, hmm? Kent or Superman?”

Her blood ran cold as the reality of his words hit her. He’d been watching her. Watching her and Clark...and Superman. How?

“Give...me...his ...name!”

“I’m not telling you anything you monster!” She spat in his face, lifting her right leg into a swift kick between his legs, delivering a hard blow to his crotch. He released his grasp on her, doubling over in pain.

“Oh! You little bi...!” He groaned in agony.

She swung the door open and headed straight toward her neighbor, Mrs. Myers across the hall, banging on the door frantically. She had to get an ambulance here to help Lucy. She had to get her help. “Help!!! Cl...”

The door opened, and Mrs. Myers looked at her in concern, “My dear, what happened?”

“My sister’s...been attacked...call the police...ask for... Henderson...” She said in between ragged breaths.

The elderly woman started to open the door all the way to let her in when her eyes widened, and she warned, “Get inside *now!!!!*”

Lois turned to see Lex advancing toward her with a look of rage on his face. Knowing there was no way to get inside her neighbor’s apartment without putting her in danger too. She did the only thing she could think of to do. “*Help!!!!*”

She winced as she felt the hard blow to the back of her head, “You are going to pay for that, Lois.” She could feel her abdomen tighten as Lex’s hand clamped over her throat, tightening and causing her vocal cords to stiffen. He pushed her back toward her apartment.

“Get ...your ...hands...off of me!” She spat.

“You don’t leave...until...I...tell you...to ...leave...” He slammed the door shut, pinning her against it with one hand on her wrists, the other on her throat and his body pressed against her thighs, effectively pinning her in place. “I would have given you everything...” His grip tightened on her, “**EVERYTHING.**”

“Cl...” She attempted to cry out but found her vocal cords

unwilling to cooperate.

"What do you think Kent is going to do?" He mocked, "Don't you understand I could commit murder in the middle of the streets in this city and get away with it...Lex Luthor is a name that means something...and you...You think you can betray me and not suffer the consequences?"

She grimaced as he pressed himself against her. She struggled against him, but she couldn't move her arms or her legs from the hold he had on her... The more she struggled, the tighter his grasp became. She opened her mouth to scream, but nothing came out.

'No.'

"I saw you take him in your bed, Lois. Spread your legs so willingly for that alien," he hissed in her ear as she struggled against him. "Who is he? I know he has a secret identity. There is no other explanation. The globe messages talked of an infant coming to Earth..." His grasp loosened on her throat as he ran his hot breath hit her ear, tugging at her refastened blouse, "Give me his name!"

She hocked a spit wad at his face, "Drop dead!"

He released his grasp on her wrists to wipe the spit off his face, and she took advantage of his distraction, propelling her left leg toward the back of his knees to knock him off balance.

'Weapon.' She needed a weapon. Recalling the rifle her grandfather had left her she raced toward the kitchen where the storage closet was only to be stopped by Lex grabbing her from behind.

"How dare you!?" He fumed angrily, lifting her off the ground in his rage as he carried her back into the living room. She lifted her feet up to try to kick him only to find herself kicking air as he hissed, "I am Lex Luthor...I am **GOD**..." He threw her toward the couch, hitting the edge of the coffee table with a thud.

She winced as she began to see spots. He advanced toward her in a rage. She reached behind her, feeling her purse from where it had fallen in her collision with the table. Recalling the items she'd stored in there for self-defense she began digging through the leather purse frantically as she backed away from him.

Where was it?

He squatted down next to her, grabbing her by the jaw and forcing her to look at him as he tossed the purse to the side, "Give me that name!"

"Rot in hell!" She spat back through gritted teeth.

He slammed her head against the floor, gripping her by the back of her hair. She reached out to find anything she could use against him, feeling woozy as he struck her again. "You will tell me!" He raged.

'Clark, where are you??'

Her hand closed over a small metal object, recalling the feel of the switchblade she'd kept in there for protection. She tightened her jaw, "Get ...off of ...me...you bastard!"

The derogatory term was met with a slap across the face. She winced as she felt the blow but smiled inside when she felt his grasp on her loosen against her. She flipped the switchblade open, eying his upper thigh and recalling what her grandfather had told her many years ago.

<<"Right in the inner thigh. Twist it, so the wound doesn't close. He'll never be able to get it up again.">>

"Let go...of ...me..." She spat, balling her fist over the blade as she felt his coarse lips against her ear once more.

"Who is he!? Give me his name!!!" He slammed her against the floor once more, but she was able to stiffen her neck muscles enough to brace herself so as not to hit the floor as hard as before.

'Come on Clark where are you?'

"Rot in hell, you sociopath!" With that she reached up, stabbing his inner thigh and twisting it for good measure, pushing him off of her and rolling toward the door to get away. A shiny object glistened from the corner of her eye.

'The pistol.'

She headed toward the bookshelf to grab it. Lex's hands grabbed her from behind, pressing her against the wall with a hard shove as he taunted her, "You're going to pay dearly for that one, Lois. I've trained with the masters for years do you really think you can stop me with a flimsy switchblade!?" He threw her into the bookshelf causing the contents to fall on top of her. She backed away from him, edging toward the door as he came down on top of her.

"Get off of me you *monster*!" She struggled against him, trying to find the leverage she needed to escape his grasp. She felt behind her, looking for anything she could use. His hand closed over her throat as he brought the bloody blade up for her to see, brushing it against her collarbone, wiping the blood from it on her and licking it off. Then she felt it. The cold hard metal of the Swiss and Wesson in her hand and smiled.

"Get...off of me!" She hissed at him, cocking the trigger and pointing the barrel at his throat. His grasp around her neck, loosened as he released her, backing off of her as she stood to her feet, keeping the aim trained on him.

"You wouldn't dare..." He growled.

'Come on Clark where are you?'

"Try me!" Lois kept her aim on him, looking around the room. Lucy. Where's Lucy? She heard a gun cock and looked to the side seeing Lucy standing with their grandfather's old 1866 Winchester Rifle. It was a collector's item. Not loaded, but Lex didn't know it.

"Get the hell away from my sister now!" Lucy bloody and bruised held their grandfather's rifle aimed at Lex's head. "You think I'm playing?" She asked when he didn't move, "I will blow you into the next century and not think twice about it! Don't test me!"

"Easy," he said with a suspenseful calm. "Let's not do anything rash." He slowly rose to his feet.

"Lois, are you okay?" Lucy asked, not taking her eyes off Lex as he eased himself into a standing position with both hands up. She positioned herself between Lois and Lex.

Lois smirked to herself, feeling the adrenaline that had been pumping through her dissipate as she fell into a coughing fit. She set the pistol down on the ground in front of her as she tried to catch her breath. "Cl..." She whimpered out as she coughed for air, trying to find her voice again.

Lex's eyes narrowed at her, "Not even a call for your favorite superhero?" You try to call for Kent? What do you think he's going to do?" He laughed.

"Plenty!" a familiar voice said, from behind them, grabbing Lex by the collar and hoisting him up, slamming him against the open door frame, "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kill you!"

Lois gasped for air, rolling on her side as she coughed frantically. "Cla..."

"Luce, are you and Lois okay?" Clark asked, not taking his eyes off Lex, holding him firmly in his grasp.

"I think so." Lucy set the rifle down and knelt down next to Lois, "Just breathe. In and out. I've got you."

She helped Lois fasten the buttons to her blouse that had come undone in the struggle. Lois mouthed a silent *'thank you'* to her sister.

"I stabbed ...him," she stammered out. "He kept ..."

"It's okay," Lucy breathed, holding her close. Lois felt the warm tears from her sister's cheeks hit her hair, "Oh, Lucy I thought..."

"I know. I'm sorry." She whispered in her ear, "I faked losing consciousness. I'm fine." Lois turned to look at her in shock, uncertain what she'd heard or what she knew.

"Is she okay?" Clark asked over his shoulder, not taking his eyes off of Lex for a moment.

"She's really banged up," Lucy said, running a hand over the back of her head.

"Ah!" Lois cried out in pain.

"I'm sorry." Lucy held her close. "I'm right here. It's okay. You're safe."

"You sick bastard..." Clark raged, slamming him against the bookcase before hoisting him up and pinning him to the wall Lex had held her at just minutes ago, "If you so much as breathe in her direction again I will hunt you down and make you wish you were never born!" Lex struggled against Clark who held him firmly against the wall. The sound of sirens outside could be heard, and Clark narrowed his eyes at Lex, "The police are on their way." Lex chuckled sending a chill down her spine. Clark tightened his grasp on Lex as he hissed, "Mind letting me in on the joke?"

"The joke is you, Kent. Do you really think your police aren't being paid by LexCorp? Or your Governor isn't having his campaign fund filled by LexPower's donation fund? Every official. Every judge owes me a favor." He chuckled, "You think they'll turn their back on me for a..." He scoffed looking at Clark, "reporter? Tsk tsk tsk. No, here's what's going to happen. Your police as you call them will file a report which will be lost. No arrest will be made...and I'll be back to finish what I started..."

Clark tightened his grasp on Lex, "I don't think you understand. You coming near Lois or Lucy ever again is out of the question. You hurt them. I will hurt you." Lex struggled against Clark as he tightened his grasp on him, "You want someone to pick on; someone smaller and weaker than you? You seem to think I'm all of those things. So go ahead, take your best shot." He dared him, "But if you come near Lois again I will make sure you feel pain in places you never even thought could bleed."

Lex laughed, "Be careful what you wish for, Kent."

Lois shuddered against Lucy, uncertain what Lex meant by that. She didn't have a chance to ponder it too long though. Bill Henderson entered the doorway of her apartment with a group of female officers and another fellow detective she recognized, Betty Reed.

"Close the stairwell off. Nobody comes in or out. Survey the neighbors. I want statements from everyone on what they overheard." Henderson turned to Clark, "Kent, let him go."

"Not unless you're planning on tossing him into the nearest sewer and sealing the exits," Clark snapped, tightening his grasp on Lex with a scowl.

"That'll never happen, Kent." Lex shot back, "What are you going to do? Kill me? You don't have it in you."

"Kent, don't do anything stupid," Henderson warned.

Lois watched as Clark's grip tightened on Lex for a moment. He seemed to be debating whether to release him or not before throwing him to the ground in disgust. "Come near Lois again, and you won't be so lucky!" He hissed angrily.

"Officer, did you see that?" Lex pointed at Clark as he brushed himself off. "That's assault."

"Lois?" Clark knelt down in front of her, running a hand up the side of her face gingerly.

"I'm fine," she said hoarsely, not quite believing herself.

"She's got a really nasty cut on the back of her head," Lucy said, releasing her hold on her and moving to the side so Clark could take her place.

"Here. Let me take a look," he whispered, gingerly titling her head forward as he wrapped his arms around her from behind. "We need to get you to a hospital."

"Why don't you let us figure out what's what around here, Mr. Luthor," Detective Reed snapped, pointing toward one of the officers. "Detain him for now while I talk with Ms. Lane here. Henderson, you and the boys step out in the hall to question him."

She took a shallow breath, and Clark's arms tightened around her, "It's okay. Just breathe." Clark said, holding her close. "I'm so sorry. I never should have..."

She sat numbly, staring at the scurry of activity as one of the officers placed Lex in handcuffs, escorting him out into the hall.

"Kent, come with me," Henderson motioned for him to follow.

"I'm not leaving," Clark said adamantly.

"Look..." Detective Reed crossed her arms over her chest in annoyance as she stared Clark down.

"I'm *not* leaving," Clark repeated.

Detective Reed looked to Lois, "Ms. Lane?"

"I want him here," Lois said, resting her hand over his.

Detective Reed sighed, "Fine, but I don't want to hear any interruptions from you. Keep your mouth shut the entire time, or I will have one of those boys escort you out. Are we clear?"

"Crystal." Clark loosened his grip on her waist, opting to hold her hand in his, stroking her knuckles gingerly as he held her. She relaxed against him, fighting the urge to pull herself out of his arms as she watched Lucy's wounds be treated by the ambulatory workers and Detective Reed moved to question her about what happened.

"Clark..." She could feel her defenses start to give away, "What if he's right? What if they can't hold him? What if..."

"Shhh," He soothed, stroking her cheek as she buried her face in his chest, "Don't think about that. Both you and Lucy are injured. They can't ignore that. No matter how much money he throws at the Governor."

Lois watched as the ambulatory workers loaded Lucy onto a stretcher and sprung to her feet, "Is she going to be okay?"

"Your sister has a blunt force trauma to the back of the head and is pretty banged up. We're taking her down to Metropolis General to get a work up and make sure there isn't any internal bleeding."

"But..." Lois began to panic at the idea of her sister not where she could see her.

"I'll be fine, sis," Lucy whispered hoarsely. "I have no doubt you'll be joining me down there soon."

"Once we get this documented I'll have an ambulance take you over to Metropolis General for treatment," Detective Reed explained.

Lois tightened her grasp on Clark's hand, holding it for dear life as Detective Reed turned her attention to Lois, "Ms. Lane, I'm going to need you to come into the bedroom so we can document all of your injuries." She eyed Clark with a critical eye, "Mr. Kent you'll need to stay here."

"No!" Lois surprised herself with how loud she shouted then repeated herself more softly, "No. I, uh, I want him with me."

"Your choice." Detective Reed said, pointing her toward the door as she held up a camera. Once the door was closed behind them, she instructed her, "I'll need you to strip down to your underwear. We'll get these taken as quickly as possible." She pointed toward the door. "Just stand against the door there."

Lois nodded mutely, removing her jeans swiftly, looking down at the blue lace boy short panties she'd gotten to match the ensemble. She winced when she saw the purplish bruise that was on her hip along with a long scratch. Her blouse soon followed, and she saw the scratch marks and bruises on her chest and arms. Her wrists had red and purple marks around them from where Lex had held her. She suspected her back was just as mangled.

"Ms. Lane, I'm sorry, but you're going to have to remove that," Detective Reed instructed.

She took a deep breath, hanging her head as she whispered, "I'm going to need some help. Lucy..."

Without a word Clark was by her side, helping lower the zipper of the strapless corset that had been intended as a surprise for him but would now be considered evidence. Lois did her best to suppress her tears as she felt the garment she'd fought so hard against removing earlier fall to the ground. She heard Clark's sharp intake of breath and looked down seeing the claw marks and blood along her back and chest where the corset had been. He wrapped his arms around her protectively, "It's gonna be okay," he whispered in her ear, placing a kiss on her cheek.

She nodded, pulling away from him as she followed Detective Reed's instructions. She avoided his gaze as she rotated 180 degrees while Detective Reed took photo after photo of her. She cringed, wondering if it was such a good idea to have Clark be in here. Having him see what Lex had done...

'What he tried to do,' She reminded herself. He'd had every intention of forcing himself on her, and she'd fought him tooth and nail, but Lucy and Clark had stopped him. He'd saved her just as he had countless other times. Lucy had saved her. She cringed, recalling Lex's hands on her after the last photo was taken, "I...I need a shower."

"Once you sign your statement and the scene has been surveyed properly," Detective Reed instructed, "Now are you sure that's all that happened?"

"Yes," Lois snapped irritably. "He knocked me around after attacking Lucy. I got free and tried to run for the door. He grabbed me again, and I fought him again. He tried to choke me..." Her hand moved to her neck instinctively. Clark grabbed a robe for her, helping her in it without a word.

"You didn't lose consciousness? Black out?" Detective Reed asked.

"No."

"And he didn't..." She motioned toward her torso as Lois held herself self-consciously.

"No," Lois snapped bitterly.

"What's going to happen to Luthor?" Clark asked, wrapping a protective arm around her waist.

"That's up to the judge," Reed reminded him.

"Tonight," he clarified. "What's going to happen to him tonight?"

"Well, assault of any kind with a weapon is an automatic felony. He'll be placed under arrest and arraigned then his army of lawyers can fight it out in the morning, but no judge is going to arraign him tonight."

Lois sighed in relief, "Now about the stab wound..." Detective Reed began.

"You have got to be kidding me!" Clark fumed.

"Mr. Kent, one more outburst and you'll be outside!" Reed warned. Clark's arms tightened around her, and his mouth thinned to form a long straight line, but he didn't say anything. Reed continued, "About the stab wound... You don't have to convince me or Henderson or even any of those officers out there that this was self-defense but you may have to convince the DA, and you may have to convince a judge."

"Won't the pictures be enough to prove what happened?" Lois asked.

"Should be," Detective Reed handed her the SD card. "We got a little problem at the police department. Computer glitch. Mind making me a copy?"

Lois smirked, realizing what Reed was hinting at but not saying, "Yeah."

Outside Lois Lane's apartment, Henderson continued to question Lex Luthor. "I don't think you understand the predicament here, Mr. Luthor. I have two women that that were attacked. Eyewitnesses say you're the assailant. I have a man who witnessed you attacking one of those women. I have a hallway full of people claiming they heard you threatening Ms. Lane and heard you hit her repeatedly..."

"All hearsay," Lex scoffed. "I did no such thing. I would never harm Lois."

"The neighbor across the hall watched you grab her and force her back into the apartment? That's hearsay? The same neighbor that called the cops. Those marks on Lois Lane's neck say something completely different."

"Those marks were put there by Mr. Kent. I was simply defending myself against him when you arrived. You saw what an

animal he is," Lex shot back.

Henderson tightened his jaw when he realized what Lex was trying to imply. "Your courtroom games and dirty business dealings might work for you with other cops but not with me. I know what I saw. I know what happened here. If it were up to me, I'd be taking Kent's suggestion and locking you in the sewer you belong, but fortunately for you, we have a justice system."

"Yes Fortunately, Detective."

Henderson smirked, controlling his tone as he took a step toward him, "What do you think, Luthor? If you goad me, I might attack you, and you can get this charge thrown out? Not a chance. We're doing this by the book. This is one charge you'll never escape."

"Don't like your job I see," Lex threatened. "I'll be sure to pass the message along to the Police Commissioner."

"You do that," Henderson warned. "You don't scare me. You're pond scum. Do you know what they do to men who beat women in prison? It's not pretty."

"She'll never press charges! You'll see! I'll be back home before you've even finished your shift," Lex bragged.

"If you think Lois Lane is going to cower down to the likes of you you're out of your mind. She's going to press charges. She's going to sit there and smile while they lock you in the cage you belong in and throw away the key."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Lex warned. "I have a reach far beyond this city, Detective."

"And that reach is getting shorter and shorter," Henderson warned. "You may have connections. You may have influence, but the law is the law. Anyone caught in the act of an assault with a deadly weapon is immediately placed into custody, and a temporary restraining order is granted. Congratulations, Luthor. You're finally in the system."

"Ms. Lane, you need to get to a hospital," Detective Reed insisted.

"I just feel...dirty...with him touching me." Lois ran her hands up and down her shoulders. "I need a shower."

"You need to go to the hospital," Reed insisted.

"Detective, I'll make sure she goes," Clark insisted. "Just give her some space."

Detective Reed toyed with the toothpick in her mouth, thinking for a minute. "You've got twenty minutes. Shower and change then we're taking you to the hospital. No, if ands or buts." She held up the bag of clothing that had been tagged as evidence from earlier. "We're doing all of this by the book."

Clark handed Lois a change of clothes which she took graciously, "Thanks." With that she left the bedroom, heading into the bathroom to shower and change.

She leaned over to turn the water on, letting it warm up. She brushed the terry cloth robe off her shoulders, hanging it on the hook over her door. Then it hit her. She stared at the reflection of herself in the mirror.

Bruised.

Scratched.

A victim.

'No.' She told herself, pushing the thoughts out of her head.

<< "Nine months of being patient and you give it up for..." KENT...">>

<< "So, tell me who excited you more, hmm? Kent or Superman?">>

<< "Be careful what you wish for, Kent.">>

<< "I'm not leaving.">>

<< "Kent, let him go.">>

She stepped inside the shower, relaxing as she felt the hot water hit her skin. Her mind continued to play over the events of the evening over and over again. She rocked herself back and forth as she sank to the bottom of the shower stall in tears. She held

herself as her body shook in uncontrollable sobs.

Two strong arms wrapped around her and she jumped, turning to see Clark covered from the spray of the shower head, "It's okay. It's just me," He reassured her, wrapping his arms around her as he held her close.

"You'll get soaked," she sobbed, leaning her wet head against his chest.

"I don't care," he whispered, holding her close. "I'm right here, Lois. I'm not going anywhere."

"It was horrible..." She cried as he reached up to turn the water off, turning her in his arms, so he was cradling her.

"I'm right here, honey," he whispered, placing a protective kiss on her temple. "I'm not going anywhere," he repeated.

She shivered against him, "You're soaked."

"Here." He reached for the towel that was hanging from the wall and pulled it down around her.

She looked back at him in his completely drenched suit and glasses with his hair matted down from the shower. She couldn't help but smile at him. He hadn't even bothered to take his shoes off when he'd entered the shower. "I love you," she whispered, leaning in to kiss him.

"I love you, Lois," his hand moved to cup her cheek, holding her to him. After a few minutes, he asked, "You feel any better?"

"Not really," she admitted bitterly.

"I think Detective Reed's about to force her way in here. Why don't we get dried off so we can get you checked out." Lois nodded her agreement. She was about to argue her point about him being wet again when steam began to rise from his shirt as he applied his heat vision to the once drenched suit he was wearing so that the water that had filled his clothes was now completely gone.

She smiled back at him, "That must come in pretty handy."

He stood up and helped her up, "You have no idea." She felt the warmth from his heat vision run over her, drying her from head to toe with ease.

"Thanks," she whispered.

"Here we go," Henderson said with a smile, walking Lex into the holding cell. "Fresh meat boys. Richest man in Metropolis caught attacking a woman tonight."

"There will be hell to pay..." Lex warned as Henderson slammed the door shut.

"You bet!" He watched as the crowd of thugs that were sitting in the holding cell began to surround Lex with menacing looks. He smirked to himself. It was only for tonight, and he knew Luthor would find a way out until they had a more solid case against him but seeing him pay at the hands of street thugs for what he'd done to Lois Lane made him feel warm and tingly all over. He was sure Lois and Kent wouldn't mind him taking matters into his own hands.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Clark asked, following Lois into his apartment.

After spending hours at the hospital and going over what happened over and over and over again with Henderson and Reed Lois was exhausted. When they'd arrived at the hospital, Lucy was up and around. Lois had been examined from head to toe and been cleared to be released, noting she had a minor concussion and several scrapes and bruises.

She'd fought against being admitted stating she could stay with him. The doctor didn't like it, and neither did Reed, but Lois insisted on not being admitted. Lucy had already been admitted and would be released in the morning pending a clean bill of health from the doctor in the morning. Once visiting hours were over, they'd left and come back to his place to get some rest.

He'd already called Perry to let him know they wouldn't be in the office for a few days. He hadn't told him what had happened.

He wasn't sure if Lois wanted Perry to know. Thankfully Perry hadn't pressed him too much on the issue. He'd asked about the story on the news superhero.

"I'm fine." Lois said irritably, "I just wish everyone would quit asking me that."

"Okay," he sighed, walking toward the kitchen, "I'll make some tea."

He watched her run her hand through her hair, and he noticed her wince when she hit the large knot on the back of her head.

"Sounds good," she nodded. "Tea is good." She took a seat on his couch, pulling her knees up under her arms as she curled up on the couch.

"Are you hungry?" He asked from the kitchen, "I can whip up some dinner if you'd like or I can pick us up something."

"No." She shook her head, rotating her shoulders as he reentered the living room with two cups of tea. She turned toward him, taking the cup he offered and he did his best not to react when he saw the swollen marks on the side of her head where she'd said Luthor had struck her. "Thanks."

He looked down at his mug, tightening his jaw, "I'm gonna get you some ice for that." He could feel her eyes on him. He'd never felt so torn as he did right now. All he wanted to do was hold her and never let go again while at the same time he wanted to show Luthor what it felt like to be attacked by someone bigger and stronger than him. He grabbed the ice pack his mom had left in the freezer from the last time they'd been out to visit and headed back into the living room only to find Lois standing behind him with her arms crossed. "Here." He held up the ice pack and gingerly applied it to the side of her face.

She winced, placing her hand over his as he held it in place, meeting his gaze, "Are you okay?"

"I'm not the one with the knot in the back of my head," he said softly.

She moved closer to him, running her hand down his arm, "No, but everything that...ha-happened. Him threatening you like that."

He shook his head, "Let him. I don't care," he whispered, running his hand through her silky strands, wincing when he felt the bump.

"Clark..."

"You're going to need to keep this ice pack on that bump tonight. That should help with any swelling and reduce any signs of bruises, but you may have a mark." He looked down at the floor, unwilling to meet her gaze. If he looked at her, then he'd see what Luthor did again and then he might just might do something he regretted like giving into his urge to take him out of jail and drop him on the nearest desert island he could find to keep him from hurting her again.

"Clark..." She repeated, brushing tears out of her eyes. Her voice was strained from holding back the tears.

It broke his heart to see her like this. Fueling his rage at Luthor even further. But right now Luthor was behind bars. If he had anything to say about it, that's where he would stay. Right now Lois was hurting. He just didn't know what to do. The glossed over statement she'd given to the police told him that there was a lot more that happened than she was willing to say. He looked into her brown eyes, glistening with tears, outlining her jaw with his thumb and sighed, "I don't know what to do," he said softly. "Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

She stepped into his arms, and he wrapped his arms around her, kissing the temple of her head, "Just hold me, okay?" She whispered against his chest.

"I can do that," he whispered, leaning down to kiss her forehead.

He lifted her into his arms and strode purposefully towards the bed. "What are you doing?"

"Putting you to bed," he stated firmly, propping her up with

pillows and laying the ice pack on the side where she had the swollen eye. She smiled, stroking his cheek for a moment before he pulled away, turning to leave the room. "Where are you going?"

"I was going to make up the couch..." He began, stopping mid-sentence when he saw the hurt look on her face. He sighed, coming toward her cautiously, "Lois, what is it?"

"The couch?" She cried, looking around the room. "Clark..."

He knelt down to look at her, "I just thought you'd want your space." He explained, stroking her cheek. Tears welled in her eyes, and he sighed, "Hey, what is it?"

"You won't hardly touch me. You will hardly look at me. I'm black and blue all over and repulsive and..."

"Lois, look at me," he whispered, "There is nothing wrong with you. Nothing. You are the same vibrant, gorgeous, sexy woman I fell in love with and continue fall more and more madly in love with each day."

"Really?" She asked, not quite convinced.

"Really," he repeated, cupping her cheek, "Nothing will ever change the way I feel about you."

"Then why are you acting like I'm made of glass? I won't break. Talk to me."

"I'm angry, Lois. I'm furious." He fumed angrily, "If I'd gotten there a minute or two earlier I could have..."

"Clark, this is not your fault!"

"He hurt you," he whispered hoarsely. "He hurt you, and I wasn't there to protect you." He hung his head, "Lucy's in the hospital..." He grimaced, looking at the bruises and markings on her neck, "You should probably be too." He ran a hand through his hair, "I'm sorry. I'm trying to keep myself from going over there and throttling him or dropping him in the middle of a deserted island where he can't hurt anyone else..." He fumed angrily. "I don't know what to do or think or say right now. I'm sorry."

She sat up, sitting on the edge of the bed to face him, reaching out to stroke his cheek, "Kiss me."

"Lois," he sighed, shaking his head, hearing her heart hammering in her chest "Your heart rate's over 90 beats per second."

She pulled him to her, "Then slow it down. Please just kiss me?" She pleaded, holding his face in her hands, so he was looking only at her. "I need you. I need you to kiss me and hold me and love me and make me forget everything."

Seeing the sincerity in her eyes and hearing the pleading tone in her voice he knew he couldn't deny her. "If you want to stop just say the word," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her, cradling her in his arms as he leaned her back against the bed.

"Just love me, Clark."

"Always," he whispered, holding her to him.

"He will never learn, will he?" Nigel took a long puff from his cigar, staring at the monitors around the room in disbelief, "Well, it seems we have a problem on our hands, don't we, Mrs. Cox?"

Mrs. Cox turned, pursing her lips as she stared at the screen, "I suppose I'll call Judge Stephens. Do we erase the tape?"

"Yes, but keep a copy. In case he gets out of hand again, we need leverage."

Agent Davenport held up a large blue vest for Sam Lane to put on. Sam nodded, holding his arms out, "This will keep you protected from the neck down. We'll have a protective unit on you at all times, Dr. Lane. Do not, and I repeat, do not try to evade your protective unit. That is your lifeline. That is your protection. You lose your protective until you lose your lifeline. Got it?"

Sam nodded his understanding, "I understand, Agent Davenport."

"Jack," Agent Woods chastised, "He's a material witness. Let's not scare him before we get him into protective custody, hmmm?"

Davenport locked his gaze with Sam Lane, "What you're doing is very brave, Dr. Lane. Follow the rules, and you and your family will come out of this alive."

"That's the goal," Sam acknowledged shakily.

Around the corner, Toni Taylor watched in a black SUV as four federal agents escorted Sam Lane into a Lincoln town car and pulled out into the street. Smiling to herself she followed keeping a safe distance to avoid detection.

Clark held Lois against him, examining the marks on her face critically. He was lying on his side with his arm propped to support his head as he watched her sleep. She hadn't talked about it. He wasn't sure if she'd ever be ready to talk about it. The scene he'd seen when flying above her apartment, trying to survey the scene before moving in had been enough to chill him to the bone.

Lois had pulled a gun on Luthor and Lucy had pulled the rifle on him. Lois was never one to give anyone an easy fight. From the marks all over her body, he could tell Lois had fought Luthor with everything she had in her. What he didn't know was what could have possessed him to attack her. Luthor never did anything without a reason. So why now? It couldn't be from jealousy or being rejected. That had been months ago. Why now?

She began to stir, squinting up at him with a slow smile, "Hey," she whispered, moving her hand to stroke his cheek.

"Hey," he outlined the side of her face with his palm, "How'd you sleep?"

She rolled over, so she was facing him, cradling her head in her hand as she propped herself up, giving him a flirtatious smile, "Really good surprisingly. I think it helped having my incredibly sexy boyfriend here all night."

"Glad to be of service," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her, cupping her cheek gingerly and running his thumb against her once swollen cheek. "Still tender?" He asked.

She shook her head, "The only part that's sore is where that cut is from where I landed against the bookcase." She rubbed the back of her head to prove her point, positioning herself in his arms. "Is it bad?" She asked cautiously.

"Is what bad?"

"The bruises?" She asked shakily.

He shook his head, looking at the marks on her face cautiously, "I kept the ice pack on it for most of the night. It's a bit tender, but it doesn't look nearly as bad as it looked last night." He glanced down toward her hip where the clear imprint in purple and black could be seen where a round object that looked a lot like the barrel of a gun was exposed.

She followed his gaze, pulling the sheet up over her, "So, no black eyes?"

"Yellow and purplish on the side," he said hoarsely, clearing his throat, running his hand over the bruise on her hip, "You want to talk about it?"

She sighed against him, wrapping her limbs around him as he ran his hands up and down her back, taking in the bruises and cuts that had faded slightly since last night and the ones that had gotten worse. Her neck was covered in claw marks from where Luthor had his death grip on her throat. There were yellow and purplish markings showing his fingerprints against her neck.

He ran his lips against her throat lightly, keeping a close listen to her heart rate if he were to frighten her again like last night. He'd stayed up most of the night watching her to make sure her breathing remained level throughout the night. She'd stirred several times not quite awake, fighting the imaginary demons that plagued her mind. He'd held her close, reassuring her she was safe until she'd drifted off to sleep again.

"Lucy said he forced himself into the apartment then knocked her in the back of the head without even thinking twice," she began slowly. "She was conscious though. The whole time. She

said she was waiting for the right moment so she could either escape or get help.”

“Smart thinking on her part. Though she was pretty banged up,” Clark said stroking her cheek, “You both were.” Tears welled in her eyes, and he held her close, nuzzling her cheek, “It’s over.”

“I just don’t understand how I could be so wrong about someone,” she whispered hoarsely.

“Honey...” He moved to cup her face, seeing the tears falling down her cheek one by one.

“He had a gun, and he pointed it at my throat, and he tried to choke me again and again, and I tried to get away and I couldn’t. I couldn’t breathe,” she whimpered against him in giant sobs as he held her trembling body against him.

“I’m so sorry, sweetheart,” he whispered, pressing his lips against her forehead, “I shouldn’t have made you talk about it.”

“No, I need to. I need to tell you...” She argued, gripping his shoulders tightly as she rested her head against his chest. Her hand ran up his chest slowly, and her breathing was heavy.

“Lois?” He looked at her in concern.

“You remember the other night after the storm?” She prompted.

He smirked, “When I inadvertently created a walking superhero disaster named Resplendent Man? Yeah, I remember.”

She gave him a weak smile, “Yeah and we went back to my apartment and...” She stopped, taking a shaky breath trying to find her words.

“And you took advantage of Superman?” He smirked, wiggling his eyebrows at her, “Yeah, I remember that very fondly.”

“You weren’t exactly innocent,” she chuckled before her face fell again.

“Lois?” He cupped her cheek.

“When he was attacking...me.” She began tearfully, “He said he’d been...*watching*...us.”

His hand stilled against her cheek, “What??”

“There’s more.” She placed her hand over his, “He knows Superman has a secret identity...” He blanched at her statement, and she soothed, “but he doesn’t know who. He said something about the globe and you coming here as a baby and...”

He got up out of bed, scanning the room for any listening or video monitoring devices. After assuring himself, there were none he disappeared in a red and blue blur, “Stay here. I’m going to check your apartment. Don’t answer the door. Don’t answer the phone.”

“Clark...” She began to argue, but he was already gone.

“Lex!” Gretchen Kelly looked at the bloody and bruised figure of Lex Luthor as he stumbled into her lab. “What happened?”

“Just a...minor complication, my dear,” he soothed, hunkering down in the chair beside her computer. “This twelve-hour sonar monitoring system is getting old very fast, and I’m growing tired of waiting.” He spat.

“I’m working against science, Lex. You have the sun and the vaporization process that evaporates the substance. I’m working with a new soluble...”

“Let me see!” He reached for the vial in her hand with a harsh grasp.

“It’s a gel,” she explained. “It still emits the small dose of radiation that the other had but it’s staying power is longer...in the tests I’ve run.”

“How long?” He asked.

“Lex, it’s not ready for...”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion, doctor. How *long*!?”

“Twenty-four hours roughly.” She watched in frustration as he stood up, striding out of her lab in a huff. “But that’s just an estimate,” she said under her breath.

When Clark landed outside Lois’ apartment, he did not expect to find Lex Luthor sitting in the middle of the living room with a smug smile on his face. His face was bloodied and bruised as he polished his pistol in his hand.

Clark’s jaw tightened as he advanced toward him, his cape billowing behind him as he grabbed him by the throat, hoisting him up from the couch. Something rolled beneath the sofa as he did but he was too focused on his rage at Luthor to pay it any attention. All he could focus on was his blind whole consuming rage. Knowing how he had hurt the woman he loved over and over again. “Luthor! You’ve got a lot of nerve...”

“Well, Superman, I’d like to say this is a surprise but given what I witnessed the other night...” Lex spat back.

The reminder that Luthor had been watching him and Lois, spying on their most intimate moments fueled his rage further. Intent on putting the fear of God into him and giving this animal a taste of his own medicine as a reminder of who he was dealing with he grabbed him roughly, skyrocketing through the window and into the sky, “Do you know how I easily I could kill you!?”

He landed at the top of Luthor’s penthouse. The tallest building in Metropolis. Where he looked down on everyone around him and where he had issued his first warning a little over a year ago. Luthor looked down at the street below and hissed back, “Superhero breaking his code of ethics? My, my that must be an impressive power Lois Lane holds over you, Superman.”

The blind rage he felt was consuming. It would be so easy to just snap him in two. “If you so much as breathe in her direction again I will hunt you down and make you wish you were never born!” His grip tightened on him, and he shook him in the air, tightening his jaw in a square as he scowled, fighting the urge to break him in half for what he’d done to Lois.

“I’ll breathe wherever I want,” Luthor snapped back, “You can’t be everywhere at once and getting what I want from Lois Lane won’t be hindered by you or your lackeys at the police department or that hack you call a friend, Kent...”

“Don’t be so sure about that!” With that he dropped him over the edge, letting Luthor fall down the three hundred story building as he screamed in terror. The same terror Luthor had put in Lois. Just as Luthor was about to hit the pavement, he grabbed him.

“You!” Luthor snarled back in a rage as he flew him back to the top of the Penthouse. This time on the roof.

“I know what you did you animal!” He hissed back, hoisting him up by the neck so he could see the street below them.

“You think you can break me?” Luthor taunted, “I am Lex Luthor! The...”

Clark threw him over the building once more, flying next to him as he fell to the ground, watching as Luthor’s face turned to terror, “You think you can do anything you want. Hurt anyone you want, and there won’t be consequences? You’ve gone too far, Luthor!” At the last second, he caught him again then flew in the air, just above the penthouse’s roof, “I’ve seen the marks on her neck. I’ve seen the bruises where you hurt her...” His grip tightened on Luthor’s neck, hoisting him up as Luthor wriggled in his grasp. He shook him in his grasp. It would be so easy.

He wanted to break him in half.

He wanted to give him a scar for every mark on Lois.

He wanted to make him so scared he couldn’t go to sleep with the lights off.

He wanted to make him cry the way he’d made Lois cry.

He wanted all of those things.

He just couldn’t do it.

It went against everything he stood for. He landed on the roof of the penthouse and threw him to the ground roughly, reaching down to grab Luthor’s collar and pulling him to him, so he was mere millimeters away from him as he issued a cold warning. “This is a warning; you stay away from her or I promise you next time I won’t be there to catch you.” He pushed him back to the

ground.

Lex brushed himself off laughing, “Ah, the hero saving his heroine. Classic,” he spat back. “Do you really think that’s all it takes to finish me? Throw around a few threats, and I’m gone? I own this city. One call to a judge and I’m free. One call to a senator and the file and charges disappear. I’m unstoppable!” He came to a stop in front of Clark, so he was a few millimeters away from his face.

“That ego is going to be your downfall, Luthor,” Clark warned, crossing his arms over his chest in his famous Superman stance, floating in the air him. “I’m going to put you away for the rest of your miserable life.”

“To do that you have to have someone willing to go against me and trust me there is no one willing to take the stand against the great Lex Luthor.” Lex took a step toward him.

“There’s always someone,” Clark warned. “No one likes a bully, and that’s exactly what you are. A spoiled little rich boy that never got told he couldn’t have his way. I am going to be sitting front row when the judge sentences you and I will personally build your prison brick by brick and seal the lock with you inside.”

“Ah, the challenge. The battle!” Lex smiled, patting himself on the chest, “The day will come when you will bow down and kneel before me.”

“Your fear is showing, Luthor.” Clark hissed back, reaching to grab Luthor by the collar, “Come near Lois again, and I will break you like a twig.”

Lex chuckled, “So little you understand about the human heart and the depths to which a man will go for love.”

Clark scoffed, “If you call what you did to Lois love then you are sicker than I ever imagined you to be.”

“What a simple world you must live in Superman. An alien, unable to understand true love.” Lex snapped back bitterly, “You think I don’t love her? Too consumed with evil to feel?”

“Try too selfish to care about anyone but yourself,” Clark scowled at him. “You don’t hit someone you love. You don’t choke someone you love. You don’t hold captive someone you love. You don’t try to kill someone you love,” he hissed back at him in anger.

“Lois is a different creature. Independent and strong willed. Breaking that will takes a...special touch,” Luthor spat back smoothly. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Stay away from her.” He spat back coldly, “If you hurt her. I will hurt you. If you come near her again, I will make sure you feel pain in places you never thought could bleed.” He hit him roughly against the chest as he turned to leave.

Lex’s face softened as he stared back at him intently for a moment, “Well, then until next time! Let the battle begin!” Clark ricocheted into the sky, heading back to Lois’ apartment to examine it for bugs Luthor may have planted.

Clark scanned the apartment for any sign of bugs.

No video monitoring.

No audio monitoring.

Nothing.

He looked around the rooms for signs of anything out of the ordinary. The low radiation he’d seen the other day from the Pest Control spraying illuminated off the walls with his enhanced vision. He frowned. There was no way that was from bug spray. It was too much, and it was ...everywhere.

Remembering something had fallen from Luthor’s jacket when he’d picked him up earlier he checked under the couch and found more signs of the low radiation from whatever it was that was sprayed everywhere.

On the floor, he found a small vial of blue liquid. He knelt down to pick it up, examining it and found the same radiation he’d seen on the walls. Whatever it was he was sure STAR Labs would be able to find a way to remove it from Lois’ apartment. Until then

it looked like she would need more than one change of clothes...

After dropping the vial he’d found at Lois’ apartment off at STAR Labs in the custody of Bill Henderson Clark did a quick scan around the city, ensuring himself there wasn’t anything going on that would require his attention. He’d ignored a few cries for help last night that ended up being minor, but he still hated ignoring any plea for help.

Outside the bakery he spotted Resplendent Man coming out with a bag of bagels, munching. He gave one of the passersby a weird look, “Superheroes have to eat too.”

He landed in front of the man with a loud thump, crossing his arms over his chest as he stared at him coldly, “We need to talk,” he said with a stern stare.

“I have nothing to say to you,” Resplendent Man shot back over his shoulder.

“You either come with me now, or you’re going to inherit a red, yellow, and blue shadow for the rest of your life!” Clark snapped irritably.

Resplendent Man gave an eye roll as he contemplated his next move. He took a bite of his bagel, “Fine. But I’m bringing the bagels.”

“Fine.”

Above the city, Clark paced around the roof top angrily, “Do you know what was happening while I was confronting you about your ridiculous behavior last night? A woman was being attacked.”

“That’s not my fault.”

“I’m not saying it is,” he shot back. “I’m saying your behavior has consequences.” Clark tried to implore. “Do you think I enjoy sitting here going over basic manners and decency with you? No! I have a life. I have responsibilities. People that count on me to do my job; which I cannot do if I’m constantly chasing you around.”

“Then quit doing it!” Resplendent Man shot back. “I don’t need you harassing me.”

“I don’t need you taking advantage of innocent citizens. If someone’s in immediate danger, you help them. You don’t negotiate prices or charge them for rescuing them. That makes you no better than any common street criminal asking for money for protection against their gang.”

“I’m not a criminal!”

“Then act like it. Be a hero. Be a symbol. Do good,” Clark snapped back. “Do NOT take advantage of those weaker than you for your own gain.”

“I need to make money. I gotta have money to eat.”

“Then get a job!” He snapped. With that he ricocheted into the sky, leaving a very bewildered Resplendent Man behind him.

Unseen by him was a tall man in the shadows, watching from the shadows in the doorway of the roof access. He pulled out his phone and began to dial, “Mr. Luthor?”

Lois stared at her reflection in the mirror, fisting the side of the countertop as she glared at the marks. Bruises and scratch mark all over. Flashes from the night before came back in a whirlwind as she touched the side of her cheek where the swelling had been at its worst last night. It had faded for the most part but was still extremely tender. Yellow and purplish marks all over.

<< “You don’t leave...until...I...tell you...to ...leave...” >>

<< “I would have given you everything...” >>

<< “Don’t you understand I could commit murder in the middle of the streets in this city and get away with it.” >>

<< “Nine months of being patient and you give it up for... KENT...” >>

<< “Give...me...his ...name!” >>

<< “I saw you take him in your bed, Lois. Spread your legs so willingly for that alien.” >>

<< “Tell me something, who excited you more, hmm? Kent or Superman?” >>

<< “You’re going to tell me his secret identity...” >>

<< “I know you know. I watched you spread your legs for him...so willingly.” >>

<< “Who is he? I know he has a secret identity. There is no other explanation. The globe messages talked of an infant coming to Earth...Give me his name!” >>

<< “Not even a call for your favorite superhero?” You try to call for Kent? What do you think he’s going to do?” >>

She could still feel the cold hard metal of the Smith and Wesson in her hand from when she’d pointed it at Lex’s throat. If he hadn’t of stopped...

She shivered self-consciously, running her hand through her hair as she turned toward the shower stall to step in. The warm water ran down her back, and her mind continued to flash back to the events of the evening.

<< “I faked losing consciousness. I’m fine.” >>

<< “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill you!” >>

<< “Be careful what you wish for, Kent.” >>

<< “I’m not leaving.” >>

<< “Ms. Lane, I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to remove that.” >>

<< “It’s gonna be okay.” >>

<< “Now about the stab wound...” >>

<< “Kent, let him go.” >>

<< “You’ll get soaked.” >>

<< “I’m right here, honey.” >>

<< “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.” >>

<< “You won’t hardly touch me. You will hardly look at me. I’m black and blue all over and repulsive and...” >>

<< “There is nothing wrong with you. Nothing. You are the same vibrant, gorgeous, sexy woman I fell in love with and continue fall more and more madly in love with each day.” >>

<< “He hurt you and I wasn’t there to protect you.” >>

<< “If you want to stop just say the word.” >>

Lois shivered against the water as her hair, face and back soon became soaked from the shower’s spray. She held herself, rocking back and forth, replaying the events from the day before over and over. Uncontrollable sobs escaped her lips as realization slowly came over her.

Lex knew Superman had a secret identity.

Lex knew she had a relationship with Superman.

Lex knew she had a relationship with Clark.

What if he put two and two together?

What if he figured out he was Superman?

What if...

“Lois?”

She heard Clark on the other side of the door. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she patted her face, trying to hide the evidence that she’d been crying. “Yeah?” She called out hoarsely.

“You okay?” He asked, cracking the door open. She could see the familiar red boot in the doorway.

“F-fine,” she said weakly, not really convincing even herself.

“Lois?” She heard him sigh. “What do you need?”

“I don’t know,” she croaked out in tears. “I just...” Her voice trembled as the tears became too much for her. She heard felt a cool breeze against her face and in an instant two strong arms wrapped around her as the familiar male lips of the man she loved pressed against her cheek. “It’s okay. Just let it out.”

“Oh, Clark,” she turned in his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him soundly. His hand moved to cup her face, fingering the wet strands of hair as she whispered her incoherent murmurs against his lips.

He groaned his approval, moving them against the back wall of the shower as he feathered soft kisses along her jawline. She rotated her head, giving him better access to her neck as he moved

down, running his hands down her sides. She could feel the familiar tightness in her belly as the warm tingle spread through her nether regions. She ran her hand through his hair, feeling a greasy substance in his hair and wrinkled her nose. “You’re filthy.”

He laughed, pulling away as he reached behind her for the bottle of shampoo. She got a good look at him covered in grease and soot that was dripping down his back. “Oil fire on the pier.” He murmured, pouring the liquid in his hand to massage into his hair. She gave him a questioning look, and he nodded. “Everyone got out all right.”

The smell of the oil and soot mixed with the cool mist of his shampoo hung in the air as he began to massage the contents of the bottle into his hair. She glanced outside the shower and saw the Superman suit and boots equally dirty on the floor. After he’d rinsed his hair out, he hung his head down for her inspection, “Better?”

She ran her hand through the silky strands now smelling of cool mist. “Much,” she whispered, leaning into him as she wrapped her arms around his neck. “Oh, Clark,” She rested her head against his chest as he wrapped his arms around her. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” He whispered, looking back at her.

“This is all my fault. If I had just listened to you in the beginning about Lex, none of this would have happened. Lucy wouldn’t be in the hospital, and your identity wouldn’t be at stake and...”

He silenced her with a kiss, tracing the frame of her face with his palm. The water from the shower spraying on his back, forgotten. He slowly pulled away, resting his head against hers, keeping his palm on her cheek as he spoke, “I want you to hear me. Really hear me. This is not your fault. You didn’t do anything wrong. You called for help, and you did everything you had to to survive. I’m just sorry I couldn’t get there faster.” He let out a long breath before adding, “Luthor is the only one to blame here.”

Lois squinted her eyes tightly as she whimpered, “He was watching us.”

He let out a long breath, holding her close, “I think I found ... something. I’ve got Henderson taking a look at it. Not sure what it was. For now, I think it’s best if you and Lucy stay here. I can get a better mattress for the pull out couch and set up a divider, so there’s a little privacy. It’s not much, but...” He shrugged.

“It’s better than going back to that apartment.” She smiled up at him weakly, “I don’t think either of us is going to be ready for that just yet.” He looked at her tenderly, cupping her face with his other hand. “Do you think they’ll let her get discharged this morning?”

He shook his head, “I don’t know, but we won’t find out sitting here,” he motioned toward the water behind him and flicked it at her. “It’s getting cold.”

“One billion dollars,” Lex said with a puff of his cigar, pacing in front of Resplendent Man. “You let Dr. Kelly repeat the transfer, and you’ll have riches beyond your dreams. A new home for your sister, what is it? Mrs. Lincoln?”

Resplendent Man looked at him nervously, “How do you know about my sister?”

“I make it my business to know everything about everyone I make deals with,” he said nonchalantly. “You won’t become rich with your penny here, penny there. You wouldn’t be able to pay for that expensive home for long...even if you started charging double. No one likes you. No one needs you. Work with me, and you’ll have all the money you need to take care of Wandamae.”

“If I don’t?”

Lex shrugged, “Do you really want to go down that road?” A smile smoothed over his face, and he pulled out his checkbook, “So, I assume we have a deal?”

Lucy set her things down on the couch watching as Clark finished setting up the divider in the alcove. He'd set up a temporary rod for a makeshift closet and had sheets and blankets out for making up the couch. It had been a long and tiresome day. Once she'd been discharged, she'd tried again and again to talk to Lois about what happened but been shut down repeatedly.

She didn't want to talk about it.

It had taken her what felt like hours to inch her way into the kitchen without being seen in order to get their granddaddy's rifle. Her vision had been blurry and the room spinning, and she'd felt like she was going to hurl the entire time. She hated the fact that she hadn't been able to do anything sooner.

"The fridge is stocked. Sheets and extra blankets are in the closet." Clark pointed to the closet he was referring to and shrugged, "It's not much, but..."

"Thanks, Clark," she said, cutting him off.

It had been a long day for all of them. She'd been discharged then subjected to more questions from Detective Reed and Henderson. The night before she'd been too woozy to comprehend everything that was going on. The doctors had given her a sedative to calm her down, and she'd been useless on answering questions at the hospital. All her clothes had been taken in as evidence ... covered in blood. Her injuries photographed. It was humiliating.

Luckily Lois had thought to bring her a change of clothes when she and Clark had come to the hospital. It had been reassuring to feel her fuzzy robe and socks on her instead of the thin drabby old hospital gown. The bruises and marks on her sister... The things that man had done... had said...

She shuddered to herself. If she hadn't already known Clark was Superman, there would have been a very awkward conversation for the two of them to have. Was that it? Maybe Lois didn't want to confront the accusations Lex had made against her? Maybe she thought...

"Luce, it's gonna be okay," he said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "Henderson said the case the FBI is building is pretty strong. With your dad testifying..."

"And going into witness protection," Lucy added with a light chuckle that was more nervous than anything. "I didn't even get to say goodbye."

"Henderson said once Luthor and his lieutenants have been brought down he should be able to return to his life. It's just..."

"Too dangerous," Lucy nodded. "I know." She grew thoughtful. "Does mom know?"

Clark shook his head, "Lois doesn't want her worrying."

Lucy could feel tears filling her eyes, "If that rifle had been loaded I would have blown him to smithereens," she whispered hoarsely. "I have no idea how you kept yourself in control last night."

Clark's jaw tightened as he looked down at the floor, unsure of how to respond. "I wanted to kill him," he admitted. "Still do." He glanced toward the bedroom where Lois was sleeping.

"He's monster," she whispered shakily.

"He'll spend the rest of his life rotting in prison for all the pain he's caused," he said firmly.

"How can you be so sure?" She asked.

"Because I believe justice is more than just how many politicians you can buy off. It's about truth and decency. You can only push the boundaries so far."

"I hope so," she whispered, running her hands up and down her shoulders, rocking back and forth. She glanced toward the bedroom. "She won't talk to me. Not really. Not like she used to."

"I know." He sighed, running a hand through his hair, "Just give her time."

She pointed toward the stack of file boxes in the corner, "Is that all of them?"

"Yeah, I don't think Lois is going to feel like going into the

office anytime soon. I thought I'd bring everything here so we can keep working on this."

"Determined as ever to bring the scum bag down, right?" Lucy gave him a weak smile. "I really hope he gets a cell mate with a love for beating up abusers."

"One can only hope." He sighed, "Night."

"Thanks, Clark," she whispered, watching him disappear behind the pocket doors of the bedroom.

Bruce Wayne stared at the vial in front of him, "What is it?"

"I was hoping you could tell me," Henderson said, folding his arms over his chest. "It was found in the victim of an assault's apartment. The scientists at STAR Labs were stumped when I took it over there yesterday."

"Then why bring it to me?" Bruce asked skeptically.

"Wayne Tech has the most innovative scientists on its team. Hiring the brightest of the brightest. I thought maybe you could see what they couldn't."

Bruce eyed the vial uncertainly, "I'm going to need some time, but I'm juggling a lot right now, Inspector."

"The assailant was Lex Luthor," Henderson added, hoping the extra incentive would be enough for Bruce Wayne to put this at the top of his priority list.

"I'll get Lucius on this and get back to you," Bruce said, closing his fist over the vial.

"Kent?" Perry knocked on the door, opening the office to see Clark huddled in a mountain of paperwork, "Uh, what is all this?" He asked eyeing the large stack of files on one side of the desk.

"Police reports," Clark explained glumly, not looking up.

"O-kay," he said cautiously, looking around the office

uncertainly, "And where's Lois? She call in sick again?"

"She's working from home," Clark said, looking up as he folded his hands on the desk, propping them up on his elbows.

"Uh-huh," Perry eyed Clark and the stack of papers, "Everything...okay, son?" He arched his eyebrow at him.

"Sure," Clark shrugged.

Perry peered over Clark's shoulder, eying the report in front of him. "Who's Monique Kahn?" He asked.

Clark sighed, "One of the witnesses in the first case against Luthor." He held up the picture of her face beaten and bruised, "This is why she refused to testify. The FBI is working with her now to see if they can get her to change her mind."

"And this one?" He asked, flipping through the file, "Dr. Alfred Carlton? I thought this was a drug overdose."

"So did the medical examiner," Clark bit out, pulling out the pictures, "But look at the ligature marks on his hands. He was tied down."

"And you're thinking this is all Luthor?" Perry drawled, taking a seat next to him.

"He didn't give them to himself," Clark muttered bitterly.

"Uh-huh, and while you're..." He gestured to the stack of files around the desk, "working on this. What is your partner doing?"

"She's...uh, working on research from home," Clark explained. "She and Lucy are working on trying to disqualify the witnesses in Jimmy's case."

"Clark, son," Perry set a hand on his shoulder, "You sure there isn't something you want to talk about?"

"No," Clark turned his attention back to the police report in front of him.

"Okay," Perry got up, heading out of the office. He wasn't sure what was going on, but something had happened. "If you need to talk my door's always open."

One Week Later...

Lucy glanced toward her sister as she fired shot after shot with a cold stare toward the target on the firing range. Everyday this is

what she did. Every morning they came to the shooting range, and she fired one after another, shots at the targets.

The buzzer rang, and she stopped, pulling her protective glasses back as the target moved toward them to examine. "Nice. Almost all in the red," Lucy commented.

Lois gave her a weak smile. Her bruises had all but faded, and the marks on her neck were all that were left, noticeable only if you tried to look for them. She still wouldn't talk about it. "I think I'm done for the morning," she said, packing up her pistol and unloading the cartridge.

"You were kinda a badass out there," Lucy said with a smile. "Getting really good."

"That's the idea," Lois said in a noncommittal tone.

Lois took a sip from her coffee, taking a seat at the dining table. It was hard for her to go out even for a cup of coffee so Lucy and grabbed them some from the coffee cart down the block. She still felt so vulnerable being out in public, having everyone see what Lex had done to her. The reminder of what had happened. The reminder of not being in control.

"Lois?" Lucy waved her hand in front of her face, "Did you hear a word I just said?"

"Right, I heard you," she smiled. "Henderson said they're looking to set Jimmy's court date. I get it." She took another sip from her coffee. "It's not that I don't care. I've been ...distracted lately. I'm ..."

Lucy placed a hand on hers for a minute. "I know, but this is serious. We've got to get back to work. It's been a week since the attack. Clark is doing what he can, but ...Lois, I miss my sister."

"I'm here," she shrugged, not so convincingly.

"No, you're not," Lucy shot back bitterly. "You don't talk. You don't smile. You're like...this shell of a person that looks like my sister, but you certainly don't act like the Lois Lane I know."

Lois bit her lower lip, fighting the urge to snap a retort back that would be equally as offensive. The problem was she couldn't. She couldn't think. She couldn't eat. She couldn't do anything but relive her nightmare over and over again. She couldn't look in the mirror without being reminded, and she couldn't go out without people staring. She had yet to go into the office since it happened. She hadn't talked to Perry. She was stuck.

"I'm sorry, Luce. I just...I can't right now. I'm..."

"He is going to get away with everything if you don't snap out of this!" Lucy fumed.

"Don't you think I know that?" Lois hissed vehemently. "I know. I'm reminded every day when I turn on the news, and I see his smug face on there talking about rebuilding the police department and supporting the city as if he's some sort of savior."

"Then fight! Do something. Don't just sit there and shoot at targets and stay on the sidelines. You keep on with the small stories here and there, but you won't touch anything related to Lex."

"I can't," Lois argued back, tears forming in her eyes as her emotions began to bubble over. "Do you think I enjoy this, Luce? I had to sit there and watch you lie in a puddle of blood. I had the barrel of his pistol pressed so hard against me it's still black and blue. I have claw marks and finger marks all over my neck from where he tried to choke me. Scars on the back of my head from where he beat me. I can hardly stand to be touched because it just reminds me of him on top of me trying to choke the life out of me. I am doing the best I can under the circumstances!"

Tears fell down her face as she recalled how much had been taken from her that night. Try as she might she couldn't bring herself to let Clark hold her for more than a few minutes. They hadn't made love since before the attack. Here they were sharing a home, a bed but unable to share their bodies as they had so easily once before. She hated herself for it. She hated Lex for it. She hated it.

"Don't you think I know that?" Lucy hissed back, "God, I wish I could forget it just once, but we don't have time to sit around and feel sorry for ourselves. They are going to set a court date, Lois. Jimmy is going to be convicted and sent away for the rest of his life for something he didn't do!"

"Luce..." She brushed the tears from his cheek.

"I know it's tough. I know it's painful, but you've got to do something to snap out of it. Get into counseling. Talk to someone, or hell go drag Clark into the bedroom for a few hours...Release it. Do whatever you need to get rid of that stick up your ass but do something! Jimmy's life is at stake!"

"I have to go." With that she got up from the table, grabbing her purse and slamming the door behind her.

"Steven McQueen," Mayson read off as she paced in front of the elderly man, reading from the file in front of her. "Divorced three times. Two kids. Two houses. Known amongst your peers as 'Steve the Sleaze'" She made a face of disgust as she set the file down on the table.

"That's me," he chuckled nervously.

She took a seat across from him, tapping her fingers on the table, "Something you want to get off your chest, Steve?"

He eyed her legs crossed beneath the table and leered, "Yeah, where do you dames get those skirts? Stuff like that just mmm mmm mmm..."

Mayson ignored the comment, pulling out a tape player and opening it to place a cassette in it silently. Without a word she stared him down pushing play, "I didn't know what was in the bag. I didn't ask questions. I delivered it to the Planet ... A guy named Steve McQueen. I had no idea, Bill. You gotta believe me."

She hit stop and looked up at him, "That's the recorded statement Detective Jenkins made a few hours before his death. Putting you with a bag at the Planet the day it exploded."

"Don't prove nothing. We went to the same gym. He was bringing me my gym clothes. Nothing else."

"So, if I get a search warrant to search your house for this gym bag? I'm going to find it?" Mayson asked.

"Search away. I ain't got nothing to hide," he sneered.

"Okay, thanks for letting me know," Clark said, hanging the phone up with a click. He shook his head in disgust, throwing the pencil across the desk. Nothing. The police had done a search of Steve McQueen's apartment and found nothing linking him to the bombing of the Planet. No sign of the gym bag with the explosives but they did find his membership to the gym, proving his story of getting gym clothes from Jenkins. Since Jenkins had been linked to the escape of Toni Taylor his confession to Henderson wasn't going to hold much water.

A knock at the door caught his attention. He turned to see Lois standing there in her sleeveless high collar button down top and matching capris. "Hey," she said, closing the door behind her. "I figured with it being lunch hour I could come in here without drawing a crowd."

He gave her a half-smile, eying the way her white capris molded her curves perfectly, "I think you'll always draw a crowd." He got up to walk toward her, leaning in to kiss her cheek. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay." She shrugged, toying with the top button on her top.

"How is...?" She glanced toward the files, "It seems like that stuff just doubles overnight, doesn't it?"

He nodded, resting his hand on her shoulder as he led her to her chair to have a seat. "I'm going over some of the police reports on all the deaths we've had related to our old stories. Trying to see if I can prove a connection. Henderson said the FBI is pretty close to tying everything together and making an arrest that will stick."

"That's good, right?" She whispered nervously. He swallowed hard as he saw the top button of her blouse come undone. It had

been over a week, but it might as well have been a year. It was torture being this close to Lois and not being able to hold her and touch her the way he wanted; the way he always had. He hated that Luthor had taken that from them.

Another button came undone. He looked away. What was she doing? He could hear her heart hammering in her chest, but her tone remained subdued.

She leaned forward, offering him a perfect view down her blouse and causing his body to respond. "I mean, the sooner they make an arrest, the sooner we can put all this behind us?" Another button came undone, and he could make out the hint of white lace on the edge of the cotton fabric.

He could feel his mouth going dry as he fought to form a coherent sentence, staring at the ivory flesh that had become forbidden for him to touch for the past week. "Yeah, but we've still got a lot of work on proving Jimmy's innocence. I just spoke with Henderson. They, uh..." He swallowed hard watching as she toyed with another button, seeing the lace playing peek-a-boo with him and furthering his desire for her.

"They what?" She asked, running her hand down the front of her blouse seductively.

"They, uh," he swallowed hard, watching as another button came undone, revealing her white lace bra to him. "They, uh, didn't find anything at Steve's house." He watched her in anticipation as she ran a hand down her abdomen, resting on the waistband of her capris. He was unable to take his eyes off of her. He glanced toward the door, seeing that the blinds had been closed and the door locked. He could feel his body temperature rising, shifting in his chair uncomfortably as his desire for her grew more unbearable. He would definitely need a trip to the Arctic to cool off.

The zipper lowered, and he spied the white lace on the waistband of her panties and groaned. "I miss you," she whispered seductively as the cotton capris fell to the floor.

He couldn't help but groan in response when he saw her stripped down to her panties with her top half unbuttoned. "I miss you too, baby," he whispered, watching as her hands moved up and down her body seductively.

She grinned impishly, "Do you want to touch me?"

His mouth went dry as he struggled to find his voice, "Only if you want me to." He bit his lip, watching as she finished unbuttoning her blouse.

She stood up, walking over toward him as she shed her blouse, brushing it off her shoulders. He swallowed hard, taking a deep breath as she slid onto his lap, so she was hovering above him. He leaned in to kiss her. She grinned back nervously, and he cupped her face, "You sure about this?"

"Does this answer your question?" She ran her hands up and down his chest, tracing the length of his silk tie, sighing as she fumbled with his belt buckle. He leaned forward, brushing his lips across her chest. She gasped out in pleasure, "Don't stop."

It wasn't as convincing a plea as she normally made to him when they made love, but it was encouraging. She wasn't pushing him away. He heard a hike in her heart rate as she ground her hips against him, turning him on more and more with each movement but something in the back of his mind kept shouting at him to stop.

She moved closer, supporting herself on her knees as she unfastened his belt buckle. "I love you, Lois," he whispered against her.

"I love you," she whispered hoarsely, fingering the hairs on the back of his neck.

"You're so incredibly sexy," he whispered, brushing his lips against her neck lightly. She flinched slightly, and he pulled back, looking at her in concern, "Lois?"

"Just a little skittish," she explained, pressing her body against his as she lowered the zipper to his trousers. "I'm fine."

There it was again. The voice nagging in the back of his head.

Something was wrong. He moved to cup her cheek, "Lois, you're not fine. What's wrong?" She looked down, and he whispered, "You're not ready, are you?"

"I'm sorry," she whispered ruefully. "I want to. I miss you so much, but..." She looked down tearfully, "I thought if I just forced myself it would make it easier."

"Force yourself?" He shook his head, disgusted at the thought that Lois thought she had to force herself to do anything with him, "Honey, I don't want you to have to force yourself to do anything. You were assaulted. It's going to take time." He reached for her blouse forgotten on the floor. "When we make love again it will be because we both are ready." He gestured to their current predicament, "Why don't you get dressed before someone tries to break the door down coming in here." He gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

"I'm sorry, Clark."

He shrugged, "I'm not. This will give me a little..."

inspiration." He wiggled his eyebrows at her as she got up, to put her capris back on. She perched herself on the edge of the desk, and he watched as the white lace disappeared behind the long line of silk buttons.

'So close.'

Lois bit her lip, watching him for a moment, "I guess I should go." She pointed to the door.

He nodded, watching her leave with regret. He hated this.

Lois readjusted her hair, so the side of her face was covered as she stepped into the office space that had become the makeshift newsroom of the Daily Planet. So close. They'd been so close. Then she'd panicked and...

She shuddered recalling how Clark had felt pressed up against her just moments ago. It was clear how badly he wanted her. Her body still tingled from where his hands had been...his lips...

She keyed in her code for the door to leave when she saw the one person she'd been trying to avoid for the last week; Perry.

'Crap.'

"Whoa there! Hold on, 'darlin'," Perry said, when he saw her trying to leave. "Lois? Where in tarnation have you been? I can't get any answers out of Kent. What in the Sam Hill..." He stopped mid-sentence when she shot him a pleading look. She met his gaze and realized he had seen it. The bruises. The marks.

"Perry, I really don't want to talk about this right now," she said hoarsely.

He was already examining her neck, "Who did this to you?" The vein in his forehead was already popping out of his forehead.

'Who did this to you?'

Was this the question she was going to have to answer every time someone saw the scars?

Biting her lip, she bit out her assailant's name venomously, "Lex."

"My office...now," he whispered hoarsely, not giving her a chance to argue.

"Great," she muttered.

"Kent!!" Perry bellowed as he guided her toward his office.

"This just keeps getting better and better." She thought to herself.

Lois watched as Clark closed the door to Perry's office then turned his attention toward Perry, "What's up, Chief?"

"What's up?" Perry mimicked outraged, "What's up is your partner looks like she's been run over by a stampede of wild buffalo with marks all over her from Lex Luthor and I'm apparently the last to know! What is going on?"

"Chief..." Clark started.

"That was my idea," Lois interrupted.

Perry sighed, trying to portray a calm he obviously didn't feel at the moment, taking a seat at his desk and folding his hands on

the desk. “Your idea?”

He looked toward Clark who nodded, placing a supportive arm around her. “She didn’t want anyone to know what happened.”

“And when I asked you if there was something going on earlier last week you said nothing?” Perry prompted, holding a pencil up and staring at it intently.

“Yeah,” Clark said, tightening his hold on Lois, “I was respecting Lois’ wishes. You know how quickly gossip flies around here.”

“Okay, I can understand that,” he began, looking to Lois. “You didn’t want anyone to know?”

She shook her head, “No.”

His lips tightened as he asked, “What happened?”

“Luthor broke into her apartment and attacked her and Lucy,” Clark said, running his hand down her shoulders.

“Judas Priest!” Perry lowered his head in his hands, “Lois, honey, why didn’t you just tell me what was going on? I need to know these things. What did you think I was going to do? Tell Ralph?”

Lois shook her head, “No, I just...I don’t know.”

“Okay, okay,” Perry shook his head, “Have you been checked out? The doctors?”

Clark nodded, “She and Lucy were both examined at the hospital.”

“Lois, are you okay to work or do you need to use some of your time off?” Perry pressed. “If you want to work from home that’s fine. I just need to know.”

She glanced toward Clark, holding his hand before turning back to Perry, “I want to work. I want to help bring him down and nail the bastard to the wall.”

“Okay,” Perry nodded, “Then let’s do it. Why don’t you two update me on what you’ve got?”

Lois sat curled up on the bed in one of Clark’s old t-shirts watching as he got ready for bed. That afternoon had been awkward, to say the least. Going over everything they’d learned about Lex with Perry and giving him the reader’s digest version of what had happened during the attack with Lex along with his knack for getting out of custody with Metropolis P.D. He’d signed his own bond releasing him on an OR bond with the condition he stayed away from Lois. It wasn’t much, but for the most part, he seemed to be following the orders.

“So, Lucy said Jimmy’s supposed to be getting a court date soon,” she began slowly.

He nodded, shaking his head as he climbed into bed with her, “I know. I still can’t believe how many brick walls we keep hitting on this. Henderson said they didn’t find any sign of explosives at Steve’s place.”

“Well, why would they when they were all planted at Jimmy’s?” Lois asked, leaning back against her pillow, rolling on her side as she watched Clark toss his t-shirt on the floor and climb under the covers with her. She watched the way his muscles rippled beneath the skin, letting her gaze linger over his pectorals and recalling how he felt pressed up against her earlier.

“The problem is proving that though,” Clark sighed, leaning over and placing his glasses on the nightstand. He turned back to her, cupping her cheek, “Maybe I can see if we can find any surveillance footage near Jimmy’s apartment and see if anyone saw anything.”

“Mmm hmm,” she wasn’t focused on what he was saying at the moment. Instead, she was focused on his shoulder, recalling the many times her nails had dug into it as he’d...

‘Bad thoughts.’

Another thing that had been taken from her.

Lucy was right.

She needed to do something.

She needed release...somehow. She wasn’t particularly fond of the idea of talking to someone about this. The idea of losing herself in Clark’s arms had its appeal, but how was she supposed to do that when she could hardly stand to be touched?

“Lois?” He whispered, tapping her on the shoulder, “You okay?”

“Yeah,” she said a bit too quickly. His hand moved down her arm, and she closed her eyes, focusing on the warmth of his touch. He leaned forward to kiss her, pressing his lips against hers. She smiled against his lips, feeling his tender touch against her cheek. He nuzzled the side of her face with his nose, running the bridge against her cheek.

“I love you, Lois,” he whispered, brushing his lips against her jaw.

She took a deep breath, pulling him toward her. He groaned his approval against her lips, allowing her to guide him to her. She sighed, feeling him as his torso settled in between her legs. She could do this. She needed to do this.

His hands ran up the side of her thighs, kneading the flesh gently. He lowered his head, inching himself down her body until he was eye level with the hem of the t-shirt that hugged her curves, running his hands over her hips seductively.

Her mind briefly flashed back to the attack as his hand ran over the bruise on her hip. He lowered his lips to the black and blue skin, kissing it tenderly. ‘Clark.’ She reminded herself. ‘Don’t think about the attack. Just think about Clark.’

He moved his attention to her abdomen, running the edge of his tongue against the sensitive flesh. “Clark...” She sighed his name, feeling her body begin to relax like it hadn’t in over a week against his soft caresses.

He ran his hands up and down her legs, and she sighed, feeling his hand brush between her legs, nudging them further apart. “You okay?” He asked.

“Yes,” she breathed in a raspy whisper, running her fingers up and down his shoulders, feeling the velvety smooth skin against her palm. His body pressed against hers and she felt her blood run cold, recalling the events from her attack in whirlwind flash. Her breathing became ragged, and he ran a hand down her side.

“I’ve got you,” he reminded her.

His fingers began to slowly stroke over the front of her shirt, kneading the soft flesh beneath the cotton. “Yes, Clark,” she whispered, feeling her defenses slowly fade away as she concentrated on the feeling of his magical fingertips moving against her.

“Let me love you, Lois,” he lowered his head, dipping it beneath the hem of the oversized shirt she wore, running the edge of his tongue up her abdomen.

“Cl...” She cried out, feeling the doubly surreal feeling of his mouth and hands on her like they hadn’t been in weeks.

“Let me love you,” he repeated, whispering against her abdomen. He crawled his way downward, hovering over the purplish bruise on her hip in the shape of the barrel of the pistol Lex had pressed against her.

He ran his hand over it gingerly before pressing his lips against the wounded skin, moving further down until he was settled in between her legs. She could feel his body pressed up against her and sighed her approval as he ran his hands up and down her thighs, inching himself back upward, kissing each layer of skin in his wake until he was lying next to her at eye-level. His hands moved to cup both sides of her face, outlining it as if he were trying to memorize it and he whispered, “Do you want me to stop?”

“No,” she whispered hoarsely, “Just make me forget.”

He brushed his lips against hers tenderly, caressing her mouth with his. She moved her hand to trace the hairs on the back of his neck, wedging the silky strands between her fingertips. The tip of his tongue traced the outline of her lips, nudging at the part of her

lips for entrance. His hands fingered her hair gingerly as he slipped his tongue inside her mouth, teasing her with his taste.

He rolled them over, settling himself in between her legs. She could feel him press against her and sighed happily, "Yes."

"Let me love you," he whispered again, leaning back into her, settling his weight fully on her. He felt good. So very very good pressed up against her. He also felt...suffocating as his lips pressed against her jaw.

"Cl..."

<< "You don't leave...until...I...tell you...to ...leave..." >>

<< "I would have given you everything..." >>

<< "Don't you understand I could commit murder in the middle of the streets in this city and get away with it." >>

Flashes of Lex hovering over her ran through her mind as she struggled to focus on the present. His lips caressed her jaw, moving down to her neck and she whispered.

"Clark..."

<< "Not even a call for your favorite superhero? You try to call for Kent? What do you think he's going to do?" >>

His lips caressed the side of her face, nibbling at her earlobe and she tensed, "Stop."

He pulled away, looking at her in concern, "Lois?"

"I'm sorry..." She whispered tearfully, unable to find the words to explain what had happened.

"It's okay, honey. Shhh," he soothed, smoothing the sides of her face with his hands.

"No, it's not," she whimpered against him tearfully. "I need..." She reached between their bodies and he stopped the path of her hand midway.

"It doesn't matter. What does matter..." He ran a tentative hand over her shoulder, "What happened?"

"I don't know," she admitted nervously. "I was fine one minute and then...I wasn't." She looked back at him tearfully, "I'm *so* sorry, Clark, I..."

He rested his head against hers, "It's okay. We'll get through this. It was just...too soon. That's all." He placed a kiss on her forehead.

"I think it had to do with you being on top of me," she admitted remorsefully.

He looked at her confused, "But this afternoon..."

"You were kissing my neck." She whispered tearfully, "I hate this."

"It's just going to take time," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her before pulling away.

She stared down at his boxers as he sat up trying to regain control of his body, "I'm sorry."

"It's okay; really," he leaned in to kiss her before getting up from the bed. "I'm gonna take a shower and... I'll be right back."

Lois nodded, watching him leave with regret. She sighed against the pillows, reaching for her t-shirt from earlier. She listened as the shower turned on from the bathroom. She could make out Clark's soft moans. She closed her eyes, focusing on the familiar sounds that were now so far away.

It wasn't *fine*.

Nothing about this was *fine*.

Morgana Lynn looked around her shop, polishing the silver knob on the display. It had taken a lot of planning to get everything how she'd wanted. She was always so careful to plan ahead. She'd prepared her shop with the money she'd had tucked away in her savings from when she'd worked at LexLabs.

She frowned, recalling her time at LexLabs. At the time she'd thought she was the happiest woman on Earth. She had a great career a man that showered her with gifts and attention, and then the other shoe fell.

He'd dumped her. It had taken careful planning to plot her revenge, but she'd done it well. Made sure when the police needed

to find evidence against Lex they had it. Now, here she was in her little shop with a new life and a new name. No one would ever know.

"Miranda?"

She turned, startled out of her reverie by the stranger standing in her doorway.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Agent Davenport with the FBI. I hear you had some tapes of Lex Luthor and his criminal dealings and I'd like to talk to you about them..."

She crossed her arms, a slow smile smoothing over her face, "What's in it for me?"

Three days of going back and forth with the Metropolis P.D on getting the video footage examined. In the meantime, Lois was starting to work with Lucy on digging into Lex's past while they waited to hear on a hearing date for Jimmy. All leads were bringing them to dead ends so left with no other alternative she decided to give Bruce Wayne's advice, dig into Lex's past.

So far all she'd come across was generic history.

Orphaned at seventeen just a day before his eighteenth birthday.

Spent most of his childhood in boarding school at Westminster Abbey.

Outside of the suspicious timing of his parents' death, there was nothing that stuck out.

"Hello?" Lucy waved her arm in front of Lois' face. "Earth to Lois!"

"Huh?" Lois looked over at her sister who was giving her an annoyed look. "Sorry, lost in thought."

"No kidding," Lucy muttered under her breath.

Lois gave her an annoyed look, "What is it?"

"I said there isn't a whole lot in his past other than this Westminster Abbey he went to," Lucy pointed out.

"Look into his past...or someone he shared a past with," Lois nodded, realizing what Bruce Wayne may have been hinting at with Clark.

"What do you mean?" Lucy asked.

"He said to 'look into his past' but his past is sealed...but maybe someone he went to school with isn't." Lois reached over to grab one of the yearbooks she and Lucy had gotten copies from the printer of.

"What does that even mean?" Lucy asked.

"Something that Bruce Wayne told Clark," Lois said, skimming through the first yearbook.

"When?" Lucy asked.

"When we were in Smallville," Lois sighed, turning the page.

"Oh?" Lucy nodded, "Right, when he came to Metropolis?"

Lois looked up from the glossy pages of the yearbook in front of her, meeting her sister's eyes, "Yeah." She watched for a sign from Lucy of any deception or confusion but saw nothing.

<< "I faked losing consciousness. I'm fine." >>

"Must be nice to be able to do that," Lucy commented, flipping the page of the book in front of her.

"Do what?" Lois swallowed hard, uncertain where this conversation was going.

"Go wherever you want whenever you want without having to deal with travel agents. Must be...nice," Lucy smiled at her.

"Nice," Lois echoed. "Uh, I'm not sure what you mean. Clark still has to..."

"You guys are friends with Superman right?" Lucy asked, stopping her before she could deny anything.

"Yeah," Lois shifted nervously.

"He gives you flights where you need to go," Lucy prompted.

Lois tucked a hair behind her ear, watching her sister nervously. Did she know? Or did she think she knew? She recalled the confrontation with Lex and swallowed. They hadn't talked

about it. She'd been avoiding it for weeks now. "Uh, yeah, but he's just a friend."

<< "I faked losing consciousness. I'm fine." >>

"That's what I said," Lucy pointed out, critiquing her with a crooked smile, "Lois, are you okay?"

"Fine."

"You don't look fine."

"I'm fine!" Lois snapped.

"Okay," Lucy took a sip of her water. "You're fine."

"Kent, I'm not sure what you expect to find from old autopsy reports," Henderson said laying a large box on the table in front of him.

"I'm not sure either, but it's just a hunch," Clark explained, pulling a large stack from the file box until he found the report he was looking for.

"What does Professor Carlton's death have to do with anything?" Henderson asked.

"Could be nothing or it could be something," Clark said, looking through the file, "Are these the originals?"

"Yeah," Henderson nodded. "We have online copies of course too, but these are the originals..."

"Can I make a copy of this?" He handed Henderson the file.

Henderson sighed, "You gonna tell me what this is about?"

"Just a ...hunch," Clark explained evasively.

"A hunch?" Henderson raised his eyebrows at him. "Great." He turned to the copy room to make a copy, leaving Clark in the empty conference room with the file box. Once Henderson was out of view, He flipped through the files at super-speed, looking for any signs of deaths with unknown causes related to heart failure in the last year.

After taking mental note of the names, he'd found he put the files back just as Henderson returned with a copy of the file. "Here you go, Kent. An autopsy on Alfred Carlton. Enjoy."

"Thanks, Bill." Clark took the file with a smile.

"Anything else I can help with?" He gave him an annoyed look.

"Not unless you can tank the case against Jimmy?" Clark suggested half-joking.

"You know I can't do that."

"I know." Clark sighed, "Thanks for your help."

Lois glanced at Lucy over the top of the yearbook she was staring at. Why hadn't she remembered what Lucy had said until now? She was conscious the whole time. She'd heard the accusations from Lex and had said...nothing. Did she know about Clark? The more she thought about the predicament, the more anxious she became.

"Hey look Bruce Wayne went to Westminster too," Lucy held up a page with the young Bruce Wayne on it looking discouraged and aloof dressed in his uniform for the class picture.

"Yeah," Was all Lois could manage as she tried to plan her form of attack to find out what Lucy knew.

"Haha, Oliver Queen," Lucy giggled, pointing at a picture of the young billionaire with braces and a very bad haircut.

"Nice."

"Nice?" Lucy looked at her in disbelief. She set the book down and folded her arms over her chest, "Okay, what gives?"

"What?" Lois asked, not sure what she was referring to.

"You!" She motioned up and down. "Nice? I show you a picture of a billionaire in braces and a haircut that looks like he was run down with a lawnmower and all I get is nice? Where're the sarcastic comments? Where're the comical digs? Nice?"

"I'm ... distracted," Lois explained half-heartedly.

"Uh-huh," Lucy said, not believing her for a minute. "I think we're all distracted Lois, but it hasn't made us all lose our sense of humor. What gives? What's going on?"

"Nothing."

"I don't believe you."

"Well, that's too bad," Lois huffed, turning away.

"So you don't want to talk about it?" Lucy prompted.

"I didn't say that," Lois edged cautiously.

"So you do want to talk about it?" Lucy asked.

"I don't know."

"Okay," Lucy grabbed the book once more and began flipping through the book once more, keeping an eye on Lois out of the corner of her eyes.

Lois sighed, knowing full well what Lucy was doing. "That isn't going to work on me."

"What isn't?" Lucy asked innocently.

"That. Your...look..." Lois pointed at Lucy defensively. "You think I don't know what you're trying to do, but I do."

"What am I trying to do?" Lucy asked.

"Trying to get me to talk."

"About what?"

"About what you..." Lois caught herself mid-sentence. "Nice. Real nice." Lois rolled her eyes.

"Would you just talk to me?"

Lois looked up at her cautiously. "I don't know if I can."

Lucy hung her head in frustration, "Oh for the love of God! Just spill it! You're mad at me about something. What? What did I do?"

"You didn't...do anything," Lois clarified. "I just..."

"What?" Lucy asked.

"You said you didn't lose consciousness...the night of the attack," Lois stated softly.

"Oh," Lucy sighed, leaning back in her chair. "Lois..." Lucy began cautiously, "I froze. I didn't know what to do."

"When were you able to get to the rifle?" Lois asked, fingering the corner of the book in her hand cautiously.

"I'd made myself into the kitchen when you ran out the door," Lucy dabbed at the corner of her eyes. "Before I could get to the phone he had drug you back in and..." Tears began falling down her face.

"Oh, Luce..." Lois sighed, moving her seat closer, "It's okay."

"No, it's not. I was right there, and I couldn't hardly do anything. If I'd just been able to stop him from coming in..."

"He was trained by professional killers in the art of martial arts. I doubt you could have done anything," Lois explained solemnly.

"Right," Lucy said softly, looking at Lois with a frown. "So?"

"So, how much did you hear?" Lois asked.

"About?"

"Everything," Lois clarified, narrowing her eyes at her.

"I heard everything," Lucy said avoiding her gaze.

"And?"

"And what? The guy's a lunatic. I know you'd never do anything like that," Lucy scoffed, taking a sip of her water.

"Right. Well good."

"I mean, honestly the whole theory is kinda ridiculous, right?" Lucy laughed, "Could you imagine Superman walking around town as any other guy. The idea is...laughable."

Lois gave a light chuckle with her sister. "Of course. Laughable."

"Anyway, I know you used to have a little crush on him but it's clear as day how much you love Clark. People in love don't cheat," Lucy added with a smile.

"Thanks," Lois smiled at her.

"Anytime," Lucy said, grabbing the yearbook from earlier. "Now let's see if there're any other billionaires in here we can make fun of..."

Eight days.

That was how long it took to get copies of the security camera

stills from Metropolis Savings and Loan across from Jimmy's apartment complex. Eight days. Lois and Clark had been working tirelessly with Lucy and Constance on trying to disqualify the numerous witnesses that had been listed on the discovery for Jimmy's court hearing next month.

He was supposed to enter a plea. A plea that would decide his fate for possibly the next thirty years. The DA had offered a plea deal of twenty-five years with no parole if he pleads guilty. He wasn't guilty. They just needed to prove it. Agent Davenport had pulled some strings at the FBI to get the tape released directly to Inspector Henderson. Now they just needed to find something to help prove Jimmy's innocence.

"Ugh, why are all these images in black and white?" Lois groaned, going through the images stills.

"Budget cuts?" Clark shrugged, sifting through another stack at super-speed. "Hand me the next one."

Lois nodded, handing him another stack as she reached for another image. He flipped through the images then stopped, "I think I found something."

"What is it?" Lois asked, peering over his shoulder.

"I may be mistaken, but isn't that Detective Harris? One of the guys that interrogated Jimmy?"

"Interesting how he has a Metro Gym bag too," Lois mused, looking at the bag critically.

Clark lowered his glasses, looking at the photograph with his enhanced vision and frowned when he zoomed in on the open zipper of the bag.

"What is it?" Lois asked.

He set the photo down and shook his head, "Definitely not gym clothes," he said with a smile.

"I'll call Henderson," she said.

"I'll call Perry," he said.

Lex stared at the screen in anger. He had watched every second. Every miserable second of every video of footage trying to find the proof he needed. Trying to find proof of what he suspected. After his confrontation with Superman, he'd buried himself in his work and concentrated on taking a second look at everything, trying to piece it together. It disgusted him to no end to watch as Lois Lane lost herself in Clark Kent's arms. He hated seeing it again and again, but he had to suffer through. The words from Superman earlier rang in his mind. There was something there...

Nothing made sense.

His drunken attack had been a cry of desperation to get to the truth. The truth that appeared to be staring him right in the face this whole time but he'd been too blind to see it.

{ "You're everything to me, Lois. " }

Lex stared at the screen, clicking a button on the keyboard.

{ "I'm not liking that towel very much. " }

{ "You're getting very... What is it? " }

{ "I've gotta go. " }

{ "Oh, Cl... " }

{ "Lois... " }

{ "You are... so... I love you. " }

"That face..." Lex stared at the screen, looking at the screen that was paused. Lois' hands were fisted through Clark Kent's hair. His glasses were askew with her straddling him on the couch. Lex clicked a few more buttons, zooming in on the image of Clark Kent with his hair pushed back and glasses halfway off. Without those glasses, he looked exactly like...

"Now that makes sense..." Lex mused.

{ "You're everything to me, Lois. " }

"Well, Superman, it looks like I've finally found your weakness... and the perfect revenge..." Lex laughed, lighting his cigar. "This is too perfect."

Lois stepped into the busy police station, scanning the desks for the familiar face she was looking for. In the corner, she spotted the tall woman with curly red hair pulled back talking to a few officers as she poured a cup of coffee. She met her gaze from across the room and motioned for her to follow her to one of the empty offices.

"Ms. Lane, I must say I was a bit surprised to get your call." Detective Reed said, setting her cup of coffee down on the desk. "What can I help you with?"

She sunk down into the chair in front of her, toying with a strand of string on her blouse nervously, "I've been tied to explosives. I've been kidnapped and tied over a boiling pot of witch's brew. I've been thrown out of a plane without a parachute... I've had a trained assassin try to kill me," she whispered hoarsely.

Detective Reed gave her a confused look, "Yes, I'm aware of your reputation for getting into tight spots, Ms. Lane."

"He came by my apartment after he got out. Did you know that?"

"Yes, we're aware. Superman informed us." Detective Reed shook her head, "If we would have been called instead of him escorting Mr. Luthor to his penthouse we could have arrested him."

"Why? So he can just buy another judge to let him out?" Lois asked bitterly. She saw Detective Reed's arched eyebrow and stopped, "I'm sorry. I'm angry and..."

"That's understandable," Detective Reed said softly.

"I'm supposed to give testimony to the DA on what happened," Lois said shakily, looking down at her skirt as she toyed with the hem.

"I heard Luthor's lawyers are trying to get assault charges dropped and call it self-defense since you stabbed him," Detective Reed said, tapping her hand on the desk. "I told you he was going to fight dirty."

"With Mayson Drake as the DA," Lois shook her head in disgust. She really didn't like that woman.

"She's new but tough and fair," Detective Reed reassured her. "You'll be fine. Just tell the truth." She reached out to touch her hand, and Lois flinched, pulling away, "Are you okay?"

"I think there's something wrong with me. All these life and death situations and I was always able to turn to Clark. Now, I just... I can't," Lois said shakily, "I can hardly stand to be touched..."

"You were assaulted," Detective Reed reminded her, "Attacked in your own home. Hell, he tried to kill you. That's a lot to come back from."

"But I've almost died before, and I never had a problem being touched. Not like this. I feel... numb." She hissed out, "I don't know what to do."

Detective Reed pulled a card out of her pocket and wrote a number down on the back, "This woman works miracles. She does one on one and group therapy for survivors of rape and..."

"I wasn't raped," Lois cut her off.

"You were assaulted. A lot of the time a survivor's reaction is the same after any violent crime." She handed her the card, "Call her. Let her help you."

"Thanks," Lois said shakily.

Sam Lane stared at the woman pacing in front of him nervously, "Can I get you something to drink?" He asked uncertainly.

"No, I don't want anything to drink!" She fumed angrily. "How did this get so complicated?" She muttered under her breath.

"Something to eat, maybe?" He pointed toward the fridge.

"No," she shook her head.

"What can I do for you? What are you here for?"

She pulled her scarf off her face, revealing it to him, "I'm supposed to kill you, Dr. Lane," she pointed her 9mm at him.

He held his hands up, looking around the room for something he could use to help him escape. "I see."

She let out a long breath and sighed, "There's a man watching. Watching to make sure I 'kill you. If I don't, he's going to kill me. It's not personal."

"No of course not." He let out an uneasy laugh, "Just my life. My wife, my children."

"Like I said I'm supposed to kill you." He caught a gleam in her eye then realized what she was saying wasn't what she intended to do.

"Then I guess we're at an impasse."

"Oh my God!" Jimmy hissed horrified at the sight of Lois Lane covered in faded bruises when he entered the visitor room. "Lois?"

Lois ran a hand through her hair, "It looks worse than it is."

"Who did this?" Jimmy asked angrily.

"Lex," she said vehemently.

"Lois?" He looked at her in concern.

"Can we talk about something else?" Lois interrupted, "I haven't seen you in weeks. This isn't exactly what I wanted to talk about. I'm fine. I'm dealing with it. Lucy and I are staying with Clark until he's locked up for good. End of discussion."

"Okay." Jimmy sighed, "Can I ask how you are outside of..." He pointed toward the bruise on her neck.

"Fine." Lois said, "Stressed." She shrugged, "How are you?"

"Oh," he looked around with a sarcastic grin on his face, "Just living the dream."

"You're staying safe?" She asked, fingering the edge of the table.

"As well as I can," Jimmy shrugged. "Had a few tiffs with a few inmates trying to prove themselves but nothing I can't handle." He gave her a warm smile. "How's Lucy?"

"She's good," Lois grinned. "You know actually she's been a huge help in us trying to get to the bottom of this mess. She's even looking into classes to become an investigator."

"An investigator? Like for the police?" He asked surprised.

"She's actually really good at it. It wouldn't be just for the police. She could work anywhere. Law firms, Public Relations."

"That's great. I'm happy for her. I'm sure she'll do great," Jimmy said softly.

"You okay?" Lois asked concerned.

"I'm fine. I'm just tired of being stuck here and missing out on my life," he said defeated. "Keep wondering how long you guys are gonna stick through it before you give up on this useless cause that is my life."

"Jimmy!" Lois scolded, "This is *not* a useless cause. You're innocent, and we're going to prove it."

"Yeah, how?" Jimmy asked, "From what my dad said this is all the work of some pretty high up people. Face it, Lois, I'm screwed."

"You are not screwed," Lois shot back. He gave her a look of disbelief, and she sighed, running a hand through her hair once more, "Yes, things are...dreary right now. We have more against us than for us, but the reality is you are innocent. We're going to prove that. The DA is talking to Steve to find out what he saw or didn't see outside the Planet. From what I understand Bill was able to get a statement from Jenkins on tape before he..."

"Was murdered?" Jimmy prompted with a knowing look.

"Yeah, not scary at all that the guy that was helping railroad me ended up dead."

"You saw your dad?" Lois asked, recalling his earlier statement.

"Yeah," Jimmy sighed, "He came to see me after the hearing. We talked."

"That's good," Lois acknowledged.

"It might have been more of me yelling at him than talking," Jimmy admitted sheepishly. "Still really mad at him but I get it now I guess."

"Understandable," Lois said cautiously.

"He thinks this is a setup for getting into something I wasn't supposed to get into."

"Like what?" Lois asked.

"I don't know. At first, I thought Luthor cuz you know that was the main thing we were working on." Jimmy said with a sigh, "but the more I'm thinking about it, the more I'm wondering if it wasn't something else."

"What else were you working on?" Lois asked, pulling out her PDA to jot down her notes.

"There was Ralph's corruption scandal in City Hall. There was Luthor of course. Then there was that story on a few judges trying to make a bid for the Senate..." Jimmy ticked each one off his hand.

Lois tapped her fingers on the table. "Any chance those judges were involved in the City Hall corruption?" Lois wondered aloud. "Would have made a bid for Senate pretty hard."

"I don't remember," Jimmy admitted. "I never finished it."

Lois grew thoughtful, "I'll check around and see if anyone knows anything. Could be nothing but again it could be something worth looking into."

"Meanwhile you know where to find me." Jimmy shrugged, "Just let me know when you find something?"

"Sure," she smiled back at him, standing up as she turned to leave.

"Lois?"

"Hmm?" She turned back to look at him.

"Smile," he grinned at her. "You're getting closer. It's okay to smile and celebrate." Lois gave him a smile that he could tell wasn't exactly genuine but it was a start.

One Week Later...

"Bruce Wayne. Lex Luthor. Oliver Queen. Bob Fences. George Stephens. Mark O'Brady," Lucy ticked off the names as she laid the images of each rich and famous man in his late teens on the table.

"All went to boarding school together," Lois finished for her. "All different careers."

"Except these two," Lucy pointed at the images of a young Lex Luthor and Bruce Wayne. "Both of them built up their father's companies, and both have made them grow into multi-billion dollar companies. Both are bitter rivals. Constantly one-upping one another in the business world and in social circles."

"I've noticed," Lois commented dryly. She flipped through the copies they had of the yearbook with the pages marked where the young men were on. "Looks like there were friends at one point or another." She flipped the page and showed Lucy the picture of Lex and Bruce posing together outside of a classroom, flexing for the camera jokingly.

"Looks like it," Lucy agreed. "I wonder what happened?"

Lois turned the next page and saw an image of the group in a 'Firearms Club' posing with long hunting rifles. She shuddered, putting the page face down on the table. Flashes from the night of Lex's attack came back, and she stood up, pacing around the room.

<< "You don't leave...until...I...tell you...to ...leave..." >>

<< "I would have given you everything..." >>

<< "Don't you understand I could commit murder in the middle of the streets in this city and get away with it." >>

<< "Nine months of being patient and you give it up for..." KENT..." >>

<< "Give...me...his ...name!" >>

<< "Tell me something, who excited you more, hmm? Kent or

Superman?” >>

<< “*You’re going to tell me his secret identity...*”>>

“Lois?” Lucy looked up at her in concern. “You okay?”

“Fine,” Lois said, running her hands up and down her arms for a minute, “I think I need to get some air...think.”

“You want me to come with you?” Lucy asked.

“No, I’ll be fine,” Lois said, grabbing her things and heading out. She closed the door behind her, resting her head against the front door of Clark’s apartment after locking it.

“Murder,” Clark pointed at the image of Alfred Carlton.

“Murder.” He pointed at another image of Max Menken,

“Murder.” An image of the recently deceased Jules Johnson.

“Murder,” Perry laid the images of the recent gang that had broken into the Planet months ago and held them hostage. “All of them found in the Bay one by one.

Clark bit his lower lip, shaking his head, “You can’t tell me they’re not related.”

“According to the police, they are,” Perry rolled his eyes.

“Of course he’s signing their bonuses,” Clark muttered.

“Who’s signing what?” Clark turned around to see Lois standing in the doorway.

“Hey,” he crossed the room to greet her with a light hug, “How are you?”

“Feeling a little restless,” Lois explained walking around the office nervously. “What are you working on?”

“Uh...maybe you shouldn’t...” Perry intervened, shaking his head ‘no.’

“I’m fine,” Lois argued. “I want to see him nailed to the wall as much as you do.”

Perry shook his head, “Fine.” He wagged his finger at Clark, “Don’t let her get herself into any more trouble.”

“I’ll do my best, Chief.” Clark waved after him.

Lois gave him a warning look, “You’ll do your best?”

“What?” He chuckled, “He’s just worried about you.”

“I know,” Lois admitted quietly. Sifting through the pictures on the desk. “So what is all this?”

“Murdered victims we suspect are linked to Luthor,” Clark explained.

“Jules Johnson?” Lois asked.

“Heart failure. In the middle of a date,” Clark explained.

“Alfred Carlton?” Lois asked.

“Autopsy read as unknown heart failure,” Clark pointed to the file and handed it to her, flipping to the page he was referring to.

“What do you think it is?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know,” Clark shrugged. “I wish I knew.”

“This is too dangerous Master Wayne!” Alfred warned through the video conference as Bruce began suiting up with his gear, pulling his cowl over his face and checking each gadget built into his suit with caution.

“He’s not going to learn until someone makes him listen.” The distorted voice came out in a dark echo in the room, “Send the jet.”

“If someone links the appearance of a certain bat vigilante going around beating up criminals in Metropolis with the appearance of a certain billionaire...”

“I know what I’m doing Alfred,” Bruce shot back. “The jet.”

“Very well, Master Wayne. Don’t say you weren’t warned...” He typed a few keys in on his side, and the sound of a monotone beeping could be heard on Bruce’s wristwatch.

He typed in his confirmation code and said, “Don’t wait up.”

Lois stared at the cluttered desk in front of her kicking her calf nervously as she and Clark waited for Bill Henderson to return with news. He’d taken the evidence they’d found to Michael Clemmons, the DA in Jimmy’s case. Hopefully, the evidence

showing Harris with the explosives in his possession before the search warrant had been granted for Jimmy’s residence would be enough to get the explosives they found tossed from the case.

Clark reached over and squeezed her hand, “It’s going to be okay.”

She looked over at him and smiled. It had been a long and torturous few weeks. She’d been getting better at letting him touch her, but she was still nowhere near ready to take that final step and resume what had been a very active sex life before the attack. Clark had been more than understanding the other night when she’d called a time-out in the middle of their lovemaking.

She was still working through a lot of her fears and flashbacks. Detective Reed had recommended a therapist that seemed to be helping. She just wished it would work faster. She hated sharing a bed with Clark and not being able to touch him or be touched the way she wanted.

“No, go,” Henderson shook his head, taking a seat at his desk where she and Clark waited impatiently.

“What??” Lois snapped outraged, standing to her feet.

“You’ve GOT to be kidding me!”

“DA Clemmons thinks he has a solid case and Judge Stephens agrees with him,” Henderson rolled his eyes.

“Corrupt Neanderthals trying to railroad...” Lois muttered under her breath. They had him. They had Harris with the explosives that were used to blow up the Planet, and the DA still wasn’t willing to drop the case against Jimmy.

“What was that, Lois?” Henderson asked.

“Nothing,” Clark said not giving her a chance to repeat her insult. “Is there a way around them?”

Henderson shrugged, “Get the Superior Court Judge to take over or get Judge Stephens to step down. The judge is the only one that can override DA Clemmons’ decision.”

“Of course,” Lois said sarcastically, “Meanwhile Lex is walking free as a bird for trying to kill Lucy and me. Nice. Great to see my tax dollars at work.” She was being bitter. She knew it. They knew it too, but she was right. Lex had been on station after station promoting his new Weapons Division of LexCorp. Meanwhile, she and Clark were struggling to put the pieces back after his attack. How he was able to walk around as if nothing happened and Jimmy sat in lockup waiting for trial she would never understand.

“Lo-is...” Clark placed a supportive arm around her, giving her a disapproving look.

“Fine. Sorry, I mean with the exception of you and Detective Reed,” Lois clarified.

Henderson smirked, “I get it. Believe me, I get it, Lois. How he got any judge to get him arraigned that quickly I still don’t know.”

“Doesn’t help that Luthor was only charged with Aggravated Assault,” Clark added bitterly.

Lois squeezed Clark’s hand, holding it tight. He had hit the roof when he learned they only charged Lex with aggravated assault. The marks on her neck and wounds on the back of her and Lucy’s head proved otherwise.

“You can thank the Police Commissioner for that one. If I had my way, it would have been Attempted First Degree Murder and thrown away the damn key,” Henderson shot back.

Lois gave Bill Henderson a sympathetic look, “I know you did everything you could, Bill. I do appreciate it. I just...” She shook her head in disgust, “This whole system and the lengths people are willing to go for Lex...”

“I know,” Henderson said bitterly. “We’re doing what we can on our end to keep you safe.”

“What do you mean he’s missing?” Davenport shouted into his phone, “You better be kidding me. You better be joking.”

“Agent Davenport?” His secretary waved for his attention,

“You’ve got a visitor.”

He held up his hand, “Just give me a minute, Marci.” He then turned his attention to the caller on the other end of the phone, “Listen here and listen good. You better find him. You better find him and find out what happened. There is supposed to be a unit on him at all times...”

“Agent Davenport!” Marci repeated more loudly.

“I gotta go.” He slammed his phone down and turned back to Marci, “Yes, who is it?”

She opened the door for his visitor, “Mr. Garrison, Agent Davenport will see you now.”

Davenport stared at the rugged man, waiting for Marci to close the door behind him. “Tommy, good to see you.”

“So how does this work?” Tommy asked, “I tell you what I know and you what? Throw him in the can? Protect me?”

“You tell us what you know and your testimony combined with the other witnesses will but Lex Luthor away for the rest of his life. Protection is guaranteed, but we’re not just taking him down we’re taking his entire organization down. When we’re done there will be no one left to order anyone to do anything.”

“Okay,” Tommy nodded, “So what do you want to know?”

“Whatever you want to tell me.” He motioned toward his desk for Tommy to take a seat.

Lex Luthor stepped out of LexLabs with his man servant, Asabi, “Be sure to send an extra bouquet to Dr. Kelly this week. She’s been working extra hard on the latest project, and I don’t want her getting discouraged.”

“Yes, Mr. Luthor,” Asabi said, opening the door for him to enter his limo.

Lex slipped inside, and Asabi closed the door behind him. A moment later Asabi entered the front driver’s seat and pulled up the divider as the limo pulled out into traffic.

“Asabi, I think I want to try that new blue crab that Chef Andre got in tonight. Call him and make sure it’s prepared when we arrive.”

There was no answer.

Lex looked at the unfamiliar road he was on. “Asabi?”

The divider lowered, and a dark figure in a cowl turned around to face him. “Asabi’s taking a nap. I’ll be your tour guide Mr. Luthor.”

“Who are you?”

“Your worst nightmare.”

Lois Lane was jealous. She could admit that. But if it weren’t for Mayson Drake constantly leering at her boyfriend while going over her testimony against Lex she wouldn’t have a reason to be.

“Ms. Lane?” Mayson prompted, tapping on her desk to get her attention. “Do you need a minute?”

Lois shifted in her chair, sitting up as she uncrossed and recrossed her legs. Clark placed a hand in her lap, taking the hand that had been gripping her knee in his as she spoke and squeezed it gently. She looked at him and smiled before turning back to Mayson, “Could you repeat the question?”

“When in the attack was it that you stabbed Mr. Luthor?”

Lois squeezed Clark’s hand, taking a deep breath, “I had just tried to run to the kitchen to get the rifle.”

“The unloaded collector?” Mayson clarified.

“Yes.” Lois breathed softly, “Um, he grabbed me from behind. I was trying to kick him off of me, but I couldn’t get any leverage. He threw me against the couch, and I hit the coffee table...” She could feel Clark tense. “I remembered the switchblade I kept in my purse for protection and started looking in my purse for it.”

“Where was Mr. Luthor at this time?”

“Coming toward me,” Lois bit the inside of her lip, trying to calm herself.

“Ms. Lane, do you need a minute?”

“No,” Lois said hoarsely, fighting the tears as she spoke. “He grabbed me by the jaw...and...banged my head against the floor...” She took a shaky breath and Clark moved to put an arm around her for support, “He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...”

“So he was choking you?” Mayson clarified.

“Yes,” Lois said numbly. “I tried to kick and punch, but I couldn’t get him off of me.” She cringed, tightening her grip on Clark. “He loosened his grip on my throat and licked the side of my neck, giving me enough time to grab the switchblade.”

“Which you stabbed him with?”

“Yes,” Lois stated mutely.

“Okay,” Mayson made some notes before closing her notebook, “I think that’s all I need right now. Lex’s lawyer is going to try to twist this around anyway he can. I want to be prepared for everything he may try to throw at us.”

“It didn’t even faze him,” Lois said.

“What?” Mayson asked, jotting her statement down in her notebook.

“It didn’t faze him. It didn’t stop him. It didn’t slow him down.” Lois said with a bitter tone, “So why does it matter? He broke into my home. He beat my sister. He beat me. He taunted me. Called me every degrading name in the book while he tried to choke the life out of me again and again and wouldn’t stop until he had the barrel of his pistol pointed at his throat. There is no defense for that. There is no twisting that,” Lois snapped, grabbing her things and standing up.

Clark sat next to Lois, holding her hand as she gave her testimony to Mayson Drake. It took everything in him not to react as she described the terror she went through. “Um, he grabbed me from behind. I was trying to kick him off of me, but I couldn’t get any leverage. He threw me against the couch, and I hit the coffee table...”

He tensed up, feeling his blood boil at the thought of anyone hurting Lois. Ever since he’d come to Metropolis and met her, every time her life had been in danger he’d been able to help her in time. This time he hadn’t. This time he’d been on the other side of the city confronting an immoral man about his actions while wearing a cape and playing superhero.

Ever since his confrontation with Resplendent man he hadn’t seen or heard anything from him. He wasn’t sure if he should be relieved or suspicious. These days he didn’t have time to be either of those things. Lois was still recovering from the scars Luthor had left on her; both physical and mental. The case against Luthor for racketeering was growing stronger and stronger, and Henderson had assured them an arrest would be made by the end of the month. Unfortunately, that case wouldn’t stop the impending case against Jimmy.

“I remembered the switchblade I kept in my purse for protection and started looking in my purse for it.”

“Where was Mr. Luthor at this time?”

“Coming toward me.” He heard Lois’ hike in her heart rate as she continued to relay the attack to Mayson. He wanted to tell her to stop. He wanted to tell her she didn’t have to do this but he knew he couldn’t. Lex Luthor had hired the best of the best, Sheldon Bender. Bender’s plan was to call Luthor’s attack one of self-defense, claiming Lois had attacked him. The only way around that was for them to give testimony of what had happened. The pictures weren’t enough. The hospital records weren’t enough.

“Ms. Lane, do you need a minute?”

“No.” He saw the tears fall down her cheeks and sighed, moving closer to her. “He grabbed me by the jaw...and...banged my head against the floor...” He placed an arm over her shoulders and kissed her head, grateful to be allowed to touch her. It had been weeks since they’d been what he’d call close. Ever since

Luthor's attack...

She shuddered against him, grabbing his hand as she whispered venomously, "He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat..."

"So he was choking you?" Mayson clarified.

"Yes," Lois said numbly.

It was one word, but it tore him to the core. Knowing what this man had done to her and what he was getting away with...It would be so easy to fly over there and drop him off the tallest building and rid the world of the evil that possessed him. But he couldn't do it. It went against everything he stood for. If he resorted to killing, he was no better than Luthor. So, for now, he stayed by Lois' side and helped her recover while working with Perry and sometimes Lucy on getting Jimmy exonerated.

"I tried to kick and punch, but I couldn't get him off of me." She cringed, tightening her grip on him. "He loosened his grip on my throat and licked the side of my neck, giving me enough time to grab the switchblade."

<<"He loosened his grip on my throat and licked the side of my neck, giving me enough time to grab the switchblade.">>

<<"He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...">>

The words hung in the air as Clark came to terms with what had happened to her.

No wonder she couldn't stand for her neck to be touched.

<<"I miss you.">>

<<"Do you want to touch me?"

"Only if you want me to.">>

<<"He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...">>

<<"I'm sorry. 'I want to. I miss you so much, but...I thought if I just forced myself it would make it easier.'"

"Force yourself?">>

<<"He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...">>

<<"I think it had to do with you being on top of me.">>

<<"He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...">>

<<"You were kissing my neck.">>

<<"He climbed on top of me and ...had his hands...around my throat...">>

<<"I hate this.">>

He'd climbed on top of her.

He'd beaten her.

He'd strangled her.

If she hadn't of stopped him would he have tried to force himself on her? There was no doubt in his mind that Luthor was capable of it. A cold chill ran down his spine as a new understanding came over him.

It wasn't just aggravated assault.

It was attempted murder.

It was kidnapping.

It had been kidnapping as he held her against her will while she screamed for help. Help he'd been too far away to give her.

That was why in the beginning she couldn't stand for him to hug her in bed or make love to her because it reminded her of when Luthor had been on top of her...choking the life out of her. That was why it was hard for her to relax against him when he held her.

He'd just recently been able to kiss her neck without her freaking out. They'd found as long as she could see him and knew what he was doing it didn't set her off. This meant no more surprise kisses or hugging from behind. Her therapy sessions with Dr. Young were helping her deal with everything, and they were making progress, but it still had been almost a month since they'd made love. Almost a month since he'd been able to hold her like he wanted and kiss her senseless without being afraid of hurting

her.

He let out a muttered curse barely audible to the human ear as Mayson continued.

"Which you stabbed him with?"

"Yes," Lois stated mutely.

"Okay," Mayson made some notes before closing her notebook, "I think that's all I need right now. Lex's lawyer is going to try to twist this around any way he can. I want to be prepared for everything he may try to throw at us."

"It didn't even faze him," Lois said numbly, staring straight ahead as her grip on him tightened.

"What?" Mayson asked, jotting her statement down in her notebook.

"It didn't faze him. It didn't stop him. It didn't slow him down." Lois continued, the bitter tone growing more and more intense with each word. "So why does it matter? He broke into my home. He beat my sister. He beat me. He taunted me. Called me every degrading name in the book while he tried to choke the life out of me again and again and wouldn't stop until he had the barrel of his pistol pointed at his throat. There is no defense for that. There is no twisting that," Lois snapped, grabbing her things and standing up.

He got up and followed Lois out of Mayson's office, "Lois, honey, wait up..." He called after her.

She stopped in the middle of the courthouse lobby, leaning against one of the columns for support as she stared numbly at the crowd. He stopped in front of her, and she whispered, "He's going to get away with it."

"No, he's not." He took a step forward but kept a foot of distance between them. "I won't let him."

"What if it's not up to you?" She asked.

"There's always the put the fear of God into him approach," he whispered back, half-joking. He'd told her about finding Luthor at her apartment, but he hadn't told her what he'd done to him. He hadn't told her about confronting him or throwing him off the roof of his penthouse or even him daring Luthor to come after him. It had taken everything in him not to crush him like the bug he was.

He didn't want to worry Lois any more than she already was.

He just wanted Luthor to feel a fraction of what he'd put Lois through. The terror that ran through her mind when he'd forced himself into her apartment and attacked her.

"Clark..." Her face softened, "You can't do that." She looked around to make sure no one was paying attention to their conversation and lowered her voice. "Superman can't do that."

"Why not?" He shot back.

"Clark..." She sighed, taking a step toward him, placing her hand on his chest, "He's supposed to stand for hope and justice."

"It would be serving justice." He pointed out, brushing his hand through her hair, "I just want him to suffer for what he did to you."

"I know." She leaned forward to kiss him, "Please don't do anything stupid like threatening him. The last thing we need is him trying to make a trip to Smallville and dig up you know what." There was a flicker of the lights for half a minute and then all power restored. "What in the world?" Lois asked, looking around. The lights flickered back on, and Clark held her close. "What was that?"

He was about to respond when his face froze with a familiar expression. "What is it?"

"Someone's in trouble."

Lois nodded, "Go." She leaned in to give him a peck on the lips. "Be careful."

"You sure you're going to be okay?" He asked.

"I'm in a courthouse surrounded by police. I'll be fine." She shooed him, "Now go."

On the roof of Luthor Towers, a mysterious jet hovered above

the city with Lex Luthor strapped to a long cord attached to the jet. Clark sighed, cursing his luck as he flew toward the flailing billionaire.

"You have got to be kidding me." Clark folded his arms over his chest as he hovered in front of Luthor with a grim expression on his face.

Luthor was hog-tied with duct tape over his mouth and his hands and feet restrained by duct tape to the long cord that was wrapped around both sets of limbs. Luthor struggled in his restraints looking at him pleadingly. He could very easily leave him there to suffer at the hands of whoever had done this to him. It would be so easy...but he couldn't.

"This changes nothing," Clark barked, grabbing him by the collar as he burned the cords off him and flew upward, taking the jet with him which he found to be operating at cruise control. He forced the jet down as he landed on the roof of Luthor Towers, throwing Luthor to the ground.

Lex peeled the tape off his mouth, "Madman. A bat of some sort..."

"A bat?" He looked at him in disbelief before turning back to the jet to examine it. "You just can't stop pissing people off, can you?"

Just as he was about to open the cockpit the jet fired upward, and Clark followed at super-speed, leaving Luthor to find his own way off the roof.

Lois took a deep breath and walked up the steps of the familiar building in front of her. She'd walked those steps a thousand times, but it was different now. Scary. Traumatizing. She'd been told in therapy that the only way to deal with what happened was to face it head on...when she felt ready. Was she ready? She didn't know, but she knew living the way she was right now was not something she wanted to continue to do.

She fidgeted nervously as she saw the familiar door in front of her and pulled out her key. '501' the door read.

"Well, here goes nothing," she whispered to herself, pulling out her key.

Clark watched from a distance as a man dressed in a dark suit with a black cowl over his face with pointed ears held up a remote device, guiding the jet toward him. He frowned in disapproval as he landed in front of him. "Who are you?"

The dark echo of what was obviously some sort of distortion device echoed out. "Call me the garbage man. Just trying to take out the trash."

"I'm not sure how you do things where you're from, but here in Metropolis we let trials by judge and jury decide someone's guilt, not a..." He looked up at him, "What are you?"

"I'm Batman."

"Batman?" Clark repeated in disbelief with a light chuckle.

"Something funny?"

Clark smirked, trying to control his disbelief in the situation. "No, just trying to figure out what you're doing here in Metropolis."

"Same as you. Trying to help."

"You make a habit of stringing billionaires up by your toys."

"He was never in any danger."

"Says you," Clark corrected. He stared at him hard, frustrated that whatever material his suit was made from contained lead preventing him from x-raying his mask.

"Don't bother. I've lined my suit with lead to prevent any accidental discoveries."

"I see you've done your homework," Clark commented.

"Unfortunately I can't return the compliment."

"I like it that way."

"Why did you go after Luthor?"

"He needed to feel fear. Real fear."

"Fear? Why?"

"The same reason you were caught plummeting him down from Luthor Towers, again and again, catching him at the last minute." At Clark's surprised look he smirked back at him.

"Research."

"What do you want?"

"Justice." With that he slipped into his jet offering a quick wave before calling out, "I'll be around."

Lois looked around the apartment, recalling the nightmare she'd lived weeks ago.

Here it was.

Her apartment.

Her home.

The place she'd called home for years.

Now it seemed to be a shell of what it once was. Tainted with the memory of Lex and what he'd done. The peace of mind she used to carry was gone. The sense of security she felt in this room was gone.

She took a seat on the couch, holding the edge for dear life as she stared at the ground, recalling every strike and every breath she struggled for under Lex's grip. She scowled in anger as she felt her fury pulse through her veins.

She'd lost so much that night, but she refused to let him continue to rob her any longer. She stood to her feet, dabbing her eyes as she headed for the bathroom to gather the few things she needed and headed out.

Clark hovered outside the Metropolis Power and Energy Tower where the new skyline elevator that had been advertised as the tallest elevator, giving visitors a chance to see the city like 'Superman' was stuck mid-flight with thirteen passengers banging on the doors frantically.

"Just stay calm," he mouthed to the group through the glass doors as he examined the mechanics of the ride. It looked like the only way to open the doors would be to turn it on it's side, putting the group at risk of fall out. He examined the pole that the device was gripping and found a safety lock to release so he could move the elevator to the bottom by force. With a hard shove, he was able to get the group down to the ground and force the doors open.

"Oh! Thank you, Superman!" The group cried all at once their thanks as they rushed out.

"Just maybe take the stairs next time," he smiled at them. He turned to leave, heading back to the office. That was the third one in the last week. Power surges all throughout the city were causing outages and shortages everywhere. No one could pinpoint where it was coming from.

"So, I've got class tonight," Lucy explained as she finished gathering her things. "It might be a little late when I get out. Do you want me to call ...?"

Lois shifted uncomfortably under her sister's gaze. She knew what she was hinting at, and she wasn't about to have this conversation with Lucy right now. It had been almost a month now since the attack...since she and Clark had made love. Most of that had been from her still healing and him not wanting to hurt her. Then there had been the mental scars.

She felt...ready. She definitely felt that pull toward him every time he kissed her but she wasn't sure if she was ready for that step and he wasn't pushing her in either direction either. She suspected that after the fiasco with her failed attempt at seducing him, he was afraid of pushing her before she was ready and ending with both of them disappointed again.

It was hard. They were both stuck in this limbo unsure of what to say or do, and it was driving her crazy. She missed him. It was frustrating. Clark had been doing extra patrols on nights Lucy was at class to make up for the nights she was there so as not to arouse

suspicion. He was still buried in his files of Luthor trying to find the connection with the mysterious deaths plaguing Metropolis. She and Lucy were looking into Westminster and Lex's history there. So far nothing concrete but she did have an interview set up with one of the headmasters. She hoped some light would be shed on his past.

"I don't know," Lois shrugged. "I guess do whatever you want."

"Okay," Lois nodded. "I think I'll spend the night with Lacey tonight. We're going to be studying for the test next week. It'll be good. I can study. You and Clark can have some...alone time without the annoying sister in your hair."

"You're not annoying," Lois smiled at her.

"Uh-huh," Lucy nodded. "Thanks for the lie but I know better." She glanced at the box Lois was struggling to grab, "You want some help with that?"

"Thanks," Lois smiled handing it over to Lucy. "Jimmy's case files. Clark wants to compare them with what we have on the mysterious deaths around Metropolis. See if there's a connection."

"I like the way Clark thinks," Lucy grinned. "Maybe we can pin all of this on Luthor. Kill two birds with one stone."

"Lex, I'm not sure I understand..." Dr. Kelly began to argue. "A bat? Flew you over the city..."

"Not just a bat. It was some...Batman...of sorts," Lex brushed her off dismissively. "I want to get this operation up and running. How much longer before you can begin testing?"

"I've just about replicated the lightning," Dr. Kelly said, motioning to the crystal tube in front of her. "Once I've got it perfected we should begin testing of the transfer."

"Excellent. Once Superman's powers have been transferred to me successfully we can begin Phase Three."

"Which is?" Dr. Kelly asked.

"Take everything he cares about and make him suffer as I pluck every thing away from him one by one." He took a long puff from his cigar. "When I'm through with him, he'll wish death on himself ...and I'll give it to him."

Lois watched Clark as he poured over his notes. Here they were at seven o'clock at night alone and instead of taking advantage of the empty office — or even an empty apartment — they were working. Lucy was starting her classes to take her investigator's license, so they had three nights a week of uninterrupted time alone.

Dr. Young had encouraged her to take the steps out of her comfort zone and keep trying. It was hard. On one hand, she was scared of pushing the boundaries and repeating the situation they'd been faced with after her failed attempt at seducing him. On the other hand, she wanted to lock the office door and have Clark take her right on the desk she was perched on just as he had a little over a month ago. She felt a ripple run through her belly as she recalled how he'd felt pressed up against her as their lovemaking had been in such a frenzy he hadn't even bothered to undress her completely.

"What are you working on?" She asked, toying with the hem of her skirt nervously.

"The Mayor's press conference about the power surges going on this week," Clark said, tapping his pen against the notepad he was reading from. "I don't know. There's just something about them that seems..."

"What?" Lois asked curiously, staring as his hand moved across the page at super-speed, jotting down more notes. She grinned shyly. It always amazed her to watch him do some of the most simple tasks with his powers.

He turned in his chair, "I'm not sure. Just something seems off about the power surges going on. Can't put my finger on it."

"It is the middle of the summer. Maybe not enough power to

run the air conditioning?" Lois suggested. "We had that issue last year with the heat wave."

"The nuclear reactor Luthor was boiling," Clark corrected bitterly. "It was never a real heat wave."

"Well, whatever it was," she shrugged, "Maybe it's related."

"I guess." He looked back at her, setting his notepad on the desk and turning to her. "Henderson said Detective Harris is being charged with evidence tampering."

"That's good, right?" Lois asked, watching as his muscles rippled beneath his shirt as he folded his hands behind him, leaning back in the chair. She really really wanted to touch him.

"Yeah, Constance can use it in Jimmy's case. The arraignment is scheduled for next month." She looked down, reminded of the fate their friend was in. He sighed, leaning forward to take her hand in his, kissing the side of her palm, "If we can get Luthor brought down before the arraignment this case will fall part with it."

"What if it doesn't?" She whispered hoarsely. "We still don't know who all is on Lex's payroll."

He stood up, walking toward her. He placed a hesitant hand on her cheek, and she heard him sigh in relief, holding the other side of her face, "We're going to figure this all out. I promise."

"I know. It's just getting kinda scary," she said softly, moving her hand, so she was covering his as it held her face.

"I know." He rested his head against hers, "I really wish I could just take you home and kiss you all over...Make all of this go away." He ran a hand down the length of her shoulders.

"I'm not stopping you," she whispered, toying with the end of his tie.

"I don't want to scare you," he fingered the strands of her hair.

She looked down at her lap, pulling his hand down with her gaze. "I don't want to be scared either, but...I don't want you afraid to touch me either."

"Then what do we do?" He asked.

"Tonight, we go back to the apartment, close the bedroom door and take advantage of the hour and a half we have of uninterrupted time together..." She ran a hand up his chest as she slipped her arms around his neck. "...and take it from there."

Clark landed in his Superman suit on the ledge to the balcony of his apartment, leaning in to kiss Lois as he carried her inside, striding purposefully toward the bedroom. He set her down on the edge of the bed and she kicked her shoes off. With a quick spin and change, he reappeared in front of her in jeans and the black button-down shirt she loved seeing him in so much.

She smiled her approval at the change of clothes, leaning forward as he knelt down, so he was eye level with her. He ran his hands down her shoulders, taking a seat next to her. She leaned in to kiss him, running her hand over his cheek as he kissed her back. His hands moved to cup both sides of her face, deepening the kiss.

She sighed against him as he leaned them back on the bed, rolling them on their sides, so they were facing each other. "I love you, Lois," he whispered against her lips.

"I love you, Clark," she ran her hand up and down his chest, fingering the top buttons of his shirt. His hands moved up and down her sides with a featherlight caress, kneading her sides as he tugged on her lips with his teeth.

He slowly broke off the kiss, resting his head against hers as he cupped her face, running his hands down both sides of her cheeks, "What do you want?"

"You," she sighed shakily, fingering the top button of his shirt, "I really want you...I miss you so much, Clark." She could feel tears burning the corners of her eyes.

He moved to cover her hand with his, meeting her gaze as he leaned in to kiss her again. His other hand moved to smooth his palm over the length of her leg and she sighed against the mattress.

"I miss you too, baby," he murmured running his hands up the hem of her skirt.

Fuentes sighed as he took a puff of his cigarette, staring at the small farm he'd been sent to. Mr. Luthor wanted to know everything he could about the Kents. He looked around in disgust, uncertain how much information he'd be able to get in the drably old town. He definitely didn't fit in.

"I hate small towns."

Lois stretched her arms over her head, rolling over as she slowly awoke, recalling the previous night with a smile. After weeks of walking around on eggshells around each other she and Clark had finally talked ...and a lot more. He was still hesitant about crossing that threshold after everything that had happened and he didn't want to spook her, but for the first time in a long time, they'd fallen asleep in one another's arms not afraid the other was going to break.

The sound of the door closing perked her interest. She swung her legs over the side of the bed and padded her way to the living room where Lucy was still sleeping, and Clark was carefully placing a few rows of file boxes in the kitchen.

"What's all this?" Lois asked, looking around as Clark pulled out a stack on the table.

"Henderson just sent these. Copies of Detective Harris' arrest warrant and the police report and his statement to the DA and the Commissioner; plus, IAB's file on him."

"Nice," she grinned, "How'd you swing that?"

"Discovery. Constance will be by to pick up her copies in a little bit," he explained, leaning in to kiss her. "How'd you sleep?" She smiled back at him, "Good. You?"

He brought her hand to his lips, "Better than I have in weeks." he whispered, pulling her toward him.

"Me too," she whispered, leaning back to kiss him as he ran his hands up her sides.

He nuzzled her cheek, running his hands up her ribcage, "I've missed this. Missed...us. Last night was incredible." He pressed his lips against her cheek. He moved his other hand up her ribcage and joining it with the other, "I love watching your face when you're that happy." His hand slid up and down her chest seductively.

She grinned back at him, hearing her sister stirring from the next room, "You better behave. Lucy's right in the next room." She pulled away from him, "Tonight?"

He leaned in to kiss her before releasing her from his embrace, "Anytime. Anyplace. Anything you want, baby."

"Anything?" She wiggled her eyebrows at him with a heated gaze.

Lucy padded her way into the kitchen, searching for a cup of coffee. "Coffee..." She smiled, pouring herself a cup, unaware of the flirtatious teasing she'd interrupted.

Lois took a seat across from Clark and smiled at him. He mouthed, '*Anything*,' to her and she grinned, bringing her own cup of coffee to her lips to sip.

"Did these file boxes triple overnight?" Lucy asked, looking at the new boxes on the counter.

"New discovery files. I made us a copy. Constance will be on her way to pick them up this morning," Clark explained.

"Great." Lucy sighed, "I just finished going through all those stills."

"No video stills I promise." He smiled back at Lucy, "Just fun reading." He opened the top file box and showed her, "Everything on Detective Harris' involvement with the Planet bombing."

"No clue why Clemmons won't drop Jimmy's case when he's clearly got another defendant with a pretty solid case," she eyed the boxes warily.

Lois shook her head, "Not a..."

The lights flickered on and off for a minute then restored themselves. Lucy looked around, "Another power surge."

"I wonder what's causing them," Lois commented.

Clark shook his head, "No clue." He read through the report in front of him, "Either of you heard of a John Black?"

Lex paced around the underground lair, watching the lever hooked up to Resplendent Man and a rat they were testing the power transfer on. It had been weeks since they'd begun testing but they were getting closer. A blinding flash filled the room, and he stood back, staring at the lever once more.

Gretchen Kelly turned the switch off, "Still nothing. I don't understand."

"I don't understand either." Resplendent Man added irritated, "With all the money you have couldn't you afford a more decent lab than this?"

"Shut up," Lex hissed, turning to the dial and cranking it up.

"What are you expecting that rat to do?" He added.

"Shut...UP!" Lex snarled.

Dr. Kelly glared at Resplendent Man, "I'd do what he says." She pointed to the metal plate he was standing on. "Shut up and concentrate."

"I don't think concentration has anything to do with it. It's just the electricity and the conductor playing off each other somehow," Resplendent Man argued.

"Just shut up anyway," Lex hissed, pulling his protective glasses down again. "Do it again!"

It had been a long and tiring day. After meeting Headmaster Winslow and basically getting the typical line and brush off she and Clark had been sifting through the mess that was their research on Lex's background to see if there was anything that could point them in the right direction. Lucy was getting dinner with her study group while she and Clark were finishing up a stir fry he'd thrown together. After finishing up dinner, they'd begun sorting through what they had on Lex's past to see if anything lined up. So far nothing stood out.

Lois ran her hand through her hair with a long sigh, "Another dead end."

"Well, it was a long shot," Clark reasoned aloud as he set his phone down. "We do have that interview with Samuel Hale tomorrow."

"Yeah if he doesn't stonewall us like the rest of the former faculty. What is it that makes everyone want to shut down when you mention Lex Luthor's name?" Lois hung her head, burying it in her hands.

Clark moved his arm to wrap around her shoulders, leaning in next to her, "We'll figure this out."

"When?" Lois asked, allowing herself to be pulled into his arms, cradling her head in the crook of his shoulder. "Jimmy's basically sitting there rotting ...waiting for what will probably be a fixed trial for something he didn't do. The police are no help. The DA is too busy padding his conviction rate to care." She let out a long sigh, "It doesn't make any sense."

"I know," Clark sighed, leaning in to kiss her forehead. "I've been trying to connect him to some of these mysterious deaths and still haven't heard anything back from STAR Labs."

"The mysterious heart failure," Lois commented. "What a mess."

"Mysterious heart failure. Mysterious power surges that I have a feeling Luthor is behind and don't even get me started on that Batman character..."

Lois giggled, "Well, maybe you can partner up and take shifts."

"No way." Clark shook his head, "I may not approve of the things Luthor did but stringing him up from a jet and flying him around the city hog tied like that was..."

Lois laughed harder, “Tempting?”

He smirked, “Very, but it still wasn’t right. I just...don’t know if I can trust someone that’s willing to do something like that.”

“Did you ask him why he did it?” Lois asked, turning to look at him.

“He said something about justice then left,” Clark rolled his eyes.

“I would have loved to have gotten a picture of that,” Lois laughed harder.

“It took a lot of restraint not to leave him there,” Clark admitted sheepishly.

“I’m sure,” Lois whispered, leaning into him, running her hand up his chest. “It is nice to be able to laugh about it though.”

He gave her a weak smile, “Yeah.” He turned to cup her cheek. “It’s good to see you smile.”

She grinned, leaning in to kiss him. He smiled back at her, “What was that for?”

“For being you,” she whispered back, stroking his cheek. “It’s been a rough few weeks for...the both of us.” She leaned in to kiss him again, linking her arms around his neck, “You’ve been wonderful.” She ran her hands through his hair, holding him close as she kissed him again, “Understanding.” She ran her hands down the front of his chest. “Generous,” she murmured against his lips, grinning as he pulled her on his lap.

“I really like where this is going...” He whispered, brushing his lips against hers, running his hand down the small of her back.

She sighed happily against him as he nibbled at the nape of her neck. She rotated her neck to give him better access. She could feel that familiar tightness in her belly. His touch remained gentle as her hands moved up and down his chest. She shifted slightly, trying to find a comfortable position on the couch. “Clark...”

“Hmm?” He murmured against her as she ran her hands through the dark silky strands of his hair.

She took a deep breath before she found her voice to croak out what her body had been demanding for the past week, “Bedroom. We need more room...”

He nodded mutely, standing up and carrying her toward the bedroom, not losing contact with her mouth as she wrapped her legs around his torso. “More room.” He echoed, walking her into the bedroom.

“Good.” She sighed happily, tugging at the top button of his shirt. “I miss you. I...” She sighed happily as he laid her down on the bed, careful not to put all his weight on her, rolling on his side. She shook her head, pulling him toward her, “Make love to me, Clark...”

A loud hum echoed in the room and the lights flickered for a moment. “No, no, no, no,” Clark hung his head in defeat. “Not now. Please dear God not now...”

Lois bit her lower lip to suppress the curse she knew was on the tip of her tongue. Everything went dark. “Crap.” Then just with every other power surge he got that familiar expression on his face.

Only this time it was more annoyance than anything as he looked at her with regret, “I’m so sorry...”

She nodded, releasing him from her grasp, “It’s okay. Where is this one?”

“Underground Subway...” He sighed, standing up and taking his glasses off, setting them on the night stand.

The lights flickered back on, and she sighed, “Well, there’s something.” Lois observed wryly.

Clark spun into the familiar red, yellow and blue suit, leaning in to kiss her, “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Be careful,” she whispered. He nodded and within a blink of an eye he disappeared in a red and blue blur, flying out the window at super-speed.

Lois rolled over, grabbing a pillow from the bed and yelling into it in frustration as she hit the bed with her fist. “So close...”

The next morning Lois frowned when she found Clark’s side of the bed empty. After he’d left last night, she’d stayed up to watch the coverage on the destruction of the latest power surge. She’d fallen asleep around one. Several subways were stuck on the track, and emergency crews were down there trying to free all the passengers. One of the trains had hit another causing a three-train pile up at one station. The estimated injury count was in the thousands.

Lois finished getting dressed and began gathering her things, finding Lucy in the living room finishing up her coffee, dressed for the day. “You’re dressed early,” she commented.

“I’ve got to meet Constance for my deposition this morning,” Lucy explained offhandedly, staring at the news coverage on the television. “Have you seen this?”

“Yeah,” Lois nodded solemnly.

“They said Superman and the emergency crew are still down there trying to get everyone out of the wreckage.” Lucy shook her head, taking a sip of her coffee. “I wonder what caused all this. The power surges I mean.”

Lois shrugged. “I don’t know. They keep happening more frequently though.”

“You going into the office today?” Lucy asked.

“Yeah,” Lois said, grabbing her bag. “I’ve got an interview with one of the former headmasters of Westminster this afternoon.”

“Still digging huh?” Lucy grinned back at her. “I hope all of this lands right on Lex Luthor’s doorstep so we can lock him away for the rest of his miserable life.”

“Me too.” Lois gave a half-smile.

“Have you been able to get in to see Jimmy yet?” Lucy asked, changing the subject.

“Yeah. We talked.” Lois looked down recalling her conversation with Jimmy. “He’s hanging in there.”

“I still don’t understand why they’re making me wait ninety days just because I happened to misrepresent my relationship with him. It’s so...”

“Unfair?” Lois suggested.

“Yes!” Lucy sniffed. “I just want to know how he’s doing. Talk to him.”

“I know.” Lois took a seat next to her putting an arm around her shoulders. “You will. We’ll get his name cleared. I promise.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t deliver on,” Lucy warned.

Lois sighed, unsure of how to respond. “Uh, do you need a ride?”

“Sure.” Lucy stood up to put the coffee cup up. “Just give me a sec, and I’ll be ready.”

Lex took a long puff of his cigar, taking a look at the morning paper. “We’re getting closer,” he stated, letting out a long puff of smoke.

“Still nothing concrete?” Mrs. Cox asked.

“No, but the meter readings are promising,” Lex sighed looking over Mrs. Cox’s shoulder as she pulled up his calendar for him. “What do we have planned today?”

“Your meeting with Judge Stephens is in half an hour. You’re also scheduled to give a statement with the Mayor about the Power Surges and the underground subway accident from last night.”

Lex tapped his finger on the line highlighted in green. “Have we received the report back on the sample we sent to LexLabs?”

“Yes, our labs are working on turning the meteorite into a powdered substance as you requested. It seems to share some of Superman’s resistance to destruction, but the scientists have been successful in their latest tests. Would you like me to get a sample?”

“No, let them finish. I’ve waited long enough,” Lex said with a sigh. “I don’t want anything hindering my revenge on

Superman.” He took another long puff of his cigar, taking the silver darts from his desks and throwing them across the room one by one. “Once I’ve taken his powers and everything he loves I’ll hold him captive as he withers away into the meager hack he is!”

“Super powers will only make you more charming Lex,” Mrs. Cox cooed, running a hand through his hair seductively.

“Yes, I will watch as he finally sees I have won. He took it all from me; now it’s time I return the favor...” He walked toward a picture on the bookshelf of his office. “Starting with the lovely Ms. Lane.”

Mrs. Cox frowned, “And you don’t think your last encounter with her will be a problem?”

“Once I explain my intentions and show her she can have the man with the powers and the debonair Lex Luthor she fell for all will be forgiven,” he said smugly. “If not, I’ll have to find another way to convince her.”

Lois leaned over the table, sifting through her files on Lex and his classmates on one side and sifting through the mysterious deaths Clark was sure were connected with Lex on the other side. In the middle was everything they had on Jimmy’s case.

“Detective Jenkins.” Lois wrote on a notecard, pinning it to the board. “Dead.” She turned back to the notecards and jotted down another note. “Detective Harris.” She wrote on another card. “In custody.” She tapped her hand on the file in front of her and wrote, “John Black.” She wrote on another card. “In custody.”

“Morning,” Clark’s arms wrapped around her from behind, his hands resting on her ribcage as he outlined the shape of her sides with his palms, leaning in to kiss her.

She grinned against his lips, tracing the dark silky strands of his hair with her fingertips, sighing against him. “Morning.” She eyed him appreciatively, turning to gaze over his muscular figure in a dark gray suit with a dark blue shirt. “You’re late.”

“I know.” He apologized, “But I did write up the story on the subway accident last night. Perry’s already putting it into copy.”

She grinned back at him, “Nice work, partner. I’m trying to sort through this mess and make some sense out of it before our interview with Mr. Hale this afternoon.”

“Looks good. You forgot his brother,” Clark whispered in her ear, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind.

She smiled, feeling his hands wander up and down her ribcage as his arms tightened around her. “Brother?”

He nodded, pointing at John Black. “His brother Pete Black was charged as a co-conspirator.” He leaned in to kiss her neck, “Sorry I couldn’t get back sooner.”

She turned to him, seeing the worry lines on his face as she stroked his cheek, “Clark, it’s fine. You were needed elsewhere. I get it.”

“I know, but...” He let out a long sigh.

“Oh, I plan on collecting,” she purred with a grin. “Barring any major disasters that is.”

He frowned, holding her close, “They’re getting worse.”

“I know,” she said solemnly. “You still don’t have any clue to what’s causing them.”

He shook his head, “Nope, but I guarantee when I do find out it’s probably going to be pointing somewhere other than Luthor just like it always does.”

“Your Honor,” Mrs. Cox opened the door to Lex’s hidden office, pointing him toward the tall staircase. “Mr. Luthor is in the lab. Just go straight down.”

“Lex?” Stephens called out.

“George!” Lex cheered happily. “Come on in...” He gestured toward the office with large screens on the wall displaying the latest results on project marked ‘K’ with a green crystal spinning on a forty-five degree axis.

“I see you’ve been busy,” Stephens noted looking around.

“What is this about?”

“The case against Mr. Olsen,” Lex commented. “It’s becoming more and more expensive to keep hiring people to clean up your dirty work.”

“Isn’t that what I paid you to do?” Stephens asked with a bite in his tone.

“You paid me to make sure you won this election. You were the one that wanted Olsen framed. I did that as a courtesy but keep pushing, and your little scheme is going to come undone. I won’t have my name connected to this. Find a decoy.”

“No, I’m not going to find a decoy!” Stephens spat. “He knows too much. If he gets out...”

“He could ruin you? Take away your fortune and good name?”

Lex mused, “Maybe but if it comes back to me George you’re going to have punishments far worse than a sullied reputation.”

Former Headmaster Samuel Hale was an elderly man in his early sixties. Short and athletic as he served tennis balls toward the wall, bouncing from one side to the other to avoid the ricochet. Lois and Clark approached him as he took a break, dabbing the sweat off his forehead with a towel. “Mr. Hale?”

He turned to face them with a warm smile, “Ms. Lane and Mr. Kent I assume?”

“Yes,” Clark held out his hand to shake, “I’m Clark Kent, and this is my partner, Lois Lane.”

“Lane and Kent,” he smiled, recognizing the names. “You two have made quite a name for yourselves.” He took a sip from his water bottle motioning for them to follow him to the bleachers. “You said on the phone this was about Westminster?”

“Yes,” Lois interjected, “More to do with some students that went there during your time there?”

“You got shut down by the Headmaster didn’t you?” He chuckled.

“Mr. Wallace encouraged us to explore other avenues in finding the information we were looking for,” Lois explained meekly.

“And you thought an old retired headmaster might want to spill the beans to a couple of reporters looking for dirt on...” He motioned toward the envelope in her hand, “Who is it?”

“Lex Luthor,” Lois said, pursing her lips.

He chuckled, “Of course. That kid never knew how to stay out of trouble a day of his life.” Lois glanced back at Clark, and he nodded. Samuel Hale sighed, “Well, it’s no skin off my back. What do you want to know?”

Lois pulled out a photocopy of two pages from the yearbook. “These four. Seem like they’re friends here.” He nodded but didn’t say anything. She pulled out another photocopy, “Then here they’re hating each other. Bruce Wayne hinted that something happened but won’t say what.”

“Well, he wouldn’t want to point the spotlight on his own misdeeds,” Hale said with a sigh.

“But you would?” Lois asked.

“I never was good at that whole keeping a secret thing.” He smiled back at the duo, “but I’d really like to get changed and get some grub. The club’s got a great sushi bar. Meet me inside in ten, and you pay,” he winked at them heading toward the locker room.

Lois looked back at Clark trying to make sense out of what just happened, “What just happened?”

“I think he just agreed to spill the beans if we bought lunch,” Clark said.

Lois sighed, adjusting her wallet in her purse, “This better be good.”

Sam Lane looked around the tall building in confusion, “I don’t understand. Why are you doing this?”

“You’ll have to forgive Ms. Taylor, Dr. Lane. Keeping you in the dark was my idea.” Sam Lane’s eyes widened when he saw

Bruce Wayne enter the room.

"You're ... Bruce Wayne?"

Bruce nodded, extending his hand, "And you're Dr. Samuel Lane. It's an honor to meet you, sir."

Sam looked around the dark room uneasily as he took Bruce's hand, "Wh-What am I doing here?"

Bruce pointed to the long hallways in the room they were in. "Underground offices and bunkers. Stocked with food. You can call Alfred from the video call right here, and he'll get you anything you need."

"Anything I need?" Sam asked confused.

"You're going to be staying here for awhile," Bruce explained. "When we received word that Luthor ordered a hit on you and your family we took measures to prevent it from being taken out. Toni works for me," he explained, pointing to the young blonde behind him. "She had to make it look like she was carrying Luthor's orders out. Staying here will keep you safe."

"But what about my family? My daughters?" Sam asked panicked, "Ellen?"

"Trust me, sir, your daughters are safer where they are now than they would be anywhere else in the world."

"How can you know that?" Sam asked. "If he came after me he'll come after them and..."

"I'm told Superman is keeping a close watch over both of them," Bruce explained. "As for your ex-wife, she's safe. The man that was sent after her and the Kents was an undercover FBI agent. They're laying low, but they're safe."

"How do you know all this?" Sam asked, confused.

"I have a vested interest in bringing down Lex Luthor. He did a lot of things to a lot of people over the years. Seeing him finally see justice is all I'm after right now."

"Just justice?" Sam asked, not sure if he believed him.

"Maybe a little revenge too," Bruce admitted. "He hurt someone I cared very deeply about. I wasn't strong enough to do anything about it back then, and I regret it everyday. Seeing him pay for his crimes will bring this person justice. That's all I want."

An elderly man in a suit jacket entered the room, "Master Wayne?"

"Alfred!" Bruce cheered, "Alfred, this is Dr. Lane. He's the one I told you about."

"Yes," Alfred nodded, "The doctor."

"Not for several years," Sam admitted sheepishly.

"Lucius will get you set up in the lab to continue any research you want," Alfred explained, pointing toward the lab. "I'm told your fascination is robotics?"

"Uh, hmm, yes, robotics and bioengineering," Sam explained, following the elderly man toward the blue-lit room.

"Biggest scandal to ever take place at Westminster Abbey in over a hundred years. The brightest of the brights...if you can pay the bill that is."

"Must be an exclusive list," Lois commented, taking a sip of her coffee.

"It was," Hale admitted. "You had to have an old rich background to secure a place for your child there. It was top of the line education...until it wasn't."

"What do you mean?"

"What I'm about to tell you will never get confirmed. The records are destroyed. The witnesses paid off."

"We understand," Clark said.

"Darlene Richmond. First year at Westminster she disappeared one night. The apple of everyone's eye. All the girls wanted to be her. All the boys wanted to be with her. Last seen leaving the grounds with one Alexander Luthor the Third."

"Who was she?" Lois asked, jotting down her notes.

"Daughter of an ambassador. Rumor was she ran away. Rumor also was that she changed her name and appearance that night..."

"Well, you know what they say about rumors," Lois commented with a smile.

"Oh, I haven't told you the best part."

"Which is?" Clark asked.

"The night Darlene disappeared was the same night there was a fire at the Luthor mansion that killed both Lionel and Lillian Luthor in their sleep." He smirked as he took a bite of his crumb cake. "Mmm Mmm, I love a good crumb cake. Don't you?"

"How are we coming, Lucius?" Bruce asked, looking around the lab that had been set up for Lucius to examine the incendiary device found at the Planet. "I've got the Planet opening in less than eight weeks, and I'd like to be able to give some good news to Perry White on the Olsen case."

Lucius typed in a few keys on his laptop, and the screen flickered filling with unending rows of binary code. "It's still decoding, but we're pretty close to finding where the signal came from." Bruce frowned at his response and continued, "But I do have some good news on the compound you brought in a few weeks ago." He pointed toward the other side of the lab, handing Bruce a pair of protective glasses.

"What are these for?" He asked.

"Just put them on, Mr. Wayne."

Bruce did as instructed, and to his surprise, the room turned into a grid. "What in the world?"

"Sonar detection. Innovative science at it's best. From what I was able to gather this substance here was sending signals off somewhere within a hundred mile radius."

"And what would someone be able to receive from this signal?" Bruce asked.

"Everything. Audio. Visual. It's like a live transmission straight into the recipient's hard drive."

"That's what I was afraid of," Bruce muttered. "Any ideas on removing it?"

Lucius smiled, handing him a large spray bottle, "It'll smell, but it'll do the trick."

"What is it?" Bruce asked.

"Dish detergent and vinegar," Lucius shuddered at the combination.

Lois propped herself on the edge of the desk, watching as Clark pulled out the files from the mysterious deaths over the past year. "What are you looking for?"

"Anything I can find that might link these guys with Luthor's parents or with this Darlene character."

"You think that's the connection?" Lois asked curiously.

"It would make sense," Clark observed with a shrug, typing at his keyboard at super-speed. Lois watched the display as images of each of the victims without a connection to Lex were pulled up. "All the deaths with 'heart failure listed in the past year were at least somewhat related to a story we were working on with connections to LexCorp." He pulled up an image of a young man in his mid-thirties, "John Reynolds. The helicopter pilot giving Dr. Baines her 'ride to freedom.'"

"We know that was Lex we just can't prove that," Lois said, looking back at him as she watched the screen.

"Alfred Carlton. Johnny Taylor Senior." Image after image pulled up and Clark turned to the mysterious disappearance of the woman named 'Darlene' from Lex's past. "The list goes on and on." An old missing ad with a black and white picture pulled up on the screen and Clark continued typing away at super-speed showing the history of Floyd Ryan, Anne Margot, and Mike Jenkins...and last but not least Beverly Cox.

"Oh my God!" Lois gasped staring at the image in front of her.

"The real Mrs. Cox. Murdered two days after Luthor's parents." Clark moved the window to another screen and showed the current image of the woman they knew as Mrs. Cox next to the

missing ad for 'Darlene Richmond.'

"Let me guess, everyone that we can't link to Lex we can link to Darlene," Lois guessed in a bitter tone.

"Yep, meet Darlene Richmond," he gave a grim expression. "Her butler. Her childhood friend. Her former doctor..." He then pulled up the image of Mrs. Cox "And the real Mrs. Cox."

"We've got to get this to Henderson," Lois breathed shakily.

"My thoughts exactly." Clark folded up the laptop and put it in i's bag. Just as he was about to walk with her toward the elevator another power surge hit. He let out a long breath. "I swear someone's doing that on purpose."

Lois sighed, taking the bag, "I'll get this to Henderson. Go. Be safe." She leaned in to kiss him when the familiar expression crossed his face again.

"I will. You be careful too. If this is what we think it is...and she thinks you know...You could be in danger."

"More so than I already am?" Lois teased.

"Just be careful," he pleaded.

She nodded, and he gave her one final kiss goodbye.

Judge Stephens took a long breath as he entered his chambers, ready to start the day. "Julius?" He called out to the court services officer, "What's the schedule this morning?"

"Oh, the schedule is clear, your honor." An unfamiliar man that was sitting in his office said, standing up to greet him. He pulled out a badge, "Agent Davenport, FBI. I'm afraid you won't be hearing any cases today your honor...or any other days until we get some things cleared up."

"I'm sorry?" He scoffed, "What are you talking about?"

A thick folder filled with receipts was laid on his desk. "Caribbean Imports. HB Weapons. LexCorp. Carlin Industries. All paying for your honor's very luxurious life style. How many vacation homes do you really need? Seventeen? Eighteen?"

"That's none of your business!" Judge Stephens scoffed.

"These companies mean nothing to me."

"Really?" Davenport laughed, "Let's see, it seems like every time you received a payment you made an order in one of these company's favor. I'm not an expert or anything, but that sounds like bribery to me."

"You two are out of your mind!" Henderson warned as Lois followed him into the empty mediation room in the courthouse. "Researching Luthor? Not just Luthor but his parents? Westminster? Do you have any idea what kind of heat I'm going to be against if I try to pursue this with a witness that has nothing to back his story up?"

"Bill, he killed that woman. Are you really going to let him get away with another murder?"

"How do you expect me to charge him, Lois?" Bill mocked, "Oh, I know let me get the former *drunk* Westminster Headmaster with a sullied reputation to write a note for the judge. I'm sure that'll go over great!"

"He was forced to cover up a missing person case and act like this girl didn't exist. This girl that obviously helped Lex and is *STILL* helping Lex get rid of witnesses that could prove she'd stolen this poor woman's identity," Lois spat back. "Do something!!"

"Get me the evidence!" Henderson shot back. "I'm already burning both ends of the candlestick."

"So you're not going to do anything?" Lois asked in shock.

"I didn't say that. I said right now it's not enough to take to a judge so I can't charge him."

"What do you need?" Lois asked.

Lucy followed Lois into the penthouse study of Luthor Towers, "Clark is going to KILL you!" Lucy hissed in a harsh whisper as they checked the floor to make sure there was no sign

of Mrs. Cox or Lex.

"Lex is making his statement with the mayor with Mrs. Cox by his side. It's the perfect opportunity," Lois whispered back. "He'll understand." She pulled out her lock kit from her jacket and fiddled with the door marked, 'Beverly Cox' on it.

"Do the words murderer mean anything to you?" Lucy asked as Lois opened the door.

"Do the words '*shut up*' mean anything to you?" Lois shot back. "Stop talking. You didn't have to come."

"Yeah like I'm going to let you do this by yourself..." Lucy muttered under her breath. "I just got you back to normal after your last encounter with Lex."

"Stop talking." Lois whispered, "Look around for anything personal of hers that could link back to Darlene Richmond."

"This is a bad idea," Lucy muttered, closing the door behind her as they entered the office. "What about due process? Fruit of the poisonous tree?"

"All I'm going to do is take pictures of what I find and tell Henderson where he needs the search warrant. No stealing. No tampering with evidence. Now, are you going to help me or argue with me some more?" Lois asked in a huff.

"When Clark kills you for risking your neck...again. I'm helping bury the body."

"Just make sure I'm in the casket upside down so you can kiss my ass," Lois shot back sarcastically. Lucy glared at her and Lois rolled her eyes, "Just help me look."

In the hidden office behind the staircase, a dark figure slipped down the stairs, booting up Lex Luthor's computer system with a click of the button, "Never use your enemy as a password, Lex. You're too obvious."

"Anything in the desk?" Lois asked, flipping through the papers in the last drawer.

"Nope. Everything is creepily organized in here. No personal effects. No nothing. Lots and lots of appointment books and project files."

Lois closed the final drawer then turned to the bookcase. "What are you doing?" Lucy asked.

"I spied Lex coming out of a hidden office behind his bookcase. I'm seeing if Mrs. Cox's office might have the same setup." She grinned when she found what she was looking for, "War and Peace." She pulled the book forward, and the bookshelf slid open, revealing a hidden staircase.

"After you?" Lucy motioned to the steps.

After finishing up the cleanup on the traffic intersection where there had been a fifteen-car pileup Clark headed back home to change. He scanned his apartment before landing and frowned when he saw no sign of Lois or Lucy. He glanced at the time, uncertain if they could have gone out for dinner. He quickly spun back into his street clothes from earlier after closing the drapes and window securely.

"Lois?"

He walked into the kitchen and found a note on the fridge.

//Doing some research for Henderson.

Be back soon.

Don't worry.

- Me//

He chuckled at the note from Lois then frowned when he saw another note from Lucy at the bottom.

//Your crazy girlfriend is breaking into Lex Luthor's penthouse to find evidence.

If we're not back by seven.

Send help.

-Lucy//

The note floated in the air as he spun into his suit on the way

toward Luthor Towers. He spied Luthor still at the press conference with the Mayor and Governor below and sighed in relief. Although it did make him feel better that Luthor wasn't there it didn't change how dangerous this situation was.

"Who are you?" Lucy asked when they came face to face with a dark hooded figure at the bottom of the stairs.

"A mutual acquaintance," was the response.

"You're the Batman," Lois said, recognizing him from the description Clark had given her earlier.

"You've heard of me." He smiled, looking around, "I'd say it was nice to meet you but breaking into Luthor's hidden office isn't exactly the best hosting atmosphere." He waved them toward the stairs.

"What? No! I came here for a reason..." Lois argued.

"It'll have to wait," Batman said, pulling out his watch to show the coverage of Luthor's press conference coming to a close.

A gust of wind filled the air, and she heard a familiar voice, "What are you doing here?"

"Superman!" Lucy looked over at him in surprise.

"Same as your friends here. Looking for evidence." Batman waved a mini disk in the air.

"It'll never hold up in a court of law," Clark argued angrily, crossing his arms over his chest. "No, but it'll give me the clues I need to make sure the police are on the right track." He smirked at them, "If I were you I'd get out of here before Luthor gets back. He left City Hall five minutes ago. It's a ten-minute drive." With that, he shot a cord in the air and swung toward the window near the roof.

Clark stared at the mysterious figure, watching as he exited through the window. "So did Clark send you?" Lucy asked.

Remembering their current situation Lois sighed, turning toward the very annoyed superhero. "I said not to worry."

He shook his head, "Let's go."

After dropping both Lois and Lucy off at the apartment and returning again as Clark with the excuse of covering the press conference from earlier Clark was quiet the rest of the evening. He still couldn't believe Lois had done something so boneheaded and dangerous. He hadn't said anything, afraid of losing his temper and giving Lucy, even more, evidence to suspect a connection between him and his alter ego. He'd remained quiet, mulling over what to say until after Lucy turned in.

Lois set her laptop down on the counter, turning to face him as he finished cleaning up his coffee mug from earlier. "So, are we going to talk or are you going to just continue to ignore everyone all evening?" She asked, breaking the silence.

"Not sure what to say," he said, shaking his head. "I asked you to be careful, and your response was to break into Luthor's office."

Lois frowned, checking toward the living room where Lucy was sleeping. "He wasn't there," she whispered. "I was trying to find something...to tie that Darlene character to Mrs. Cox."

"By breaking and entering?" Clark challenged, crossing his arms over his chest.

"By taking advantage of the moment," Lois challenged.

"Lois, you could have gotten yourself, and Lucy killed," Clark snapped in a harsh whisper.

"I couldn't afford to wait for..." She looked again just to be sure then continued. "You know who. I'm sorry I scared you, but I wasn't going to just sit around and do nothing...We're so close." She held her fingers together to emphasize her point.

"You should have waited for me," he argued. "You want to bring him down? Fine. I want that too. What I don't want is to have this case tossed because you and Lucy decided to play detective." A loud beeping noise hit his ears, and he sighed, "I... I've gotta go. Keep the doors locked and don't go on any more

adventures while I'm gone."

"Fine," Lois harrumphed, watching him change into the suit at super-speed. He let out a long sigh then flew out the window. "Great," Lois muttered to herself.

Above Wayne, Towers Clark landed on the roof where a monotone beeping sound had attracted his attention. He found the mysterious Batman typing away on a portable device. "Do you mind?"

Clark motioned toward the computer and Batman nodded, turning the sound off. Clark sighed in relief. "You're playing a dangerous game. You could have gotten them killed."

"I didn't ask them to follow me," Batman shot back. "They showed up. I was trying to get your girlfriend out of there when you showed up."

"She is not..." Clark began to argue, but stopped when Batman smirked at him. "It's complicated."

"I'm sure." He handed Clark a copy of the mini disk. "You want Luthor?" He nodded, "Here are the breadcrumbs."

"Thanks?" Clark said uncertainly, taking the disk from him.

"We're on the same side, Superman. We both want Luthor to pay for his crimes. Why don't you stop trying to do this alone and accept some help?"

"Help?" He asked, "You don't exactly have the best image." Clark snorted, crossing his arms over his chest.

"No, but I have stealth skills that allow me to get into places your flashy costume won't let you go," Batman shot back. "Not exactly subtle, is it?"

"My mother made it for me," Clark said sternly, growing impatient with the conversation.

"As I said, not subtle." He looked back at Clark, "Luthor has you in his crosshairs. Me not so much."

"You have a real problem with him, don't you?" Clark asked, noting the tone of Batman's voice.

"He killed someone I cared about. Let's leave it at that."

"I'm sorry," Clark apologized. "I didn't know."

"It's in the past," he said walking toward the edge. "Take a look at the disk. It's all of Luthor's black market files. Maybe more." He waved at Clark, "See you around." He disappeared, shooting a cord across the street and swinging into a hidden alley. Clark shook his head, uncertain of his encounter with the mysterious man. He did things differently, but he seemed intent on the same goal as he and Lois, finding a way to stop Luthor. It couldn't hurt to check out what he'd found.

When he arrived back home, Clark found Lois curled up in bed, fast asleep. He changed out of his suit and into boxers and a t-shirt, leaning in to kiss her forehead before turning the light out. He still had the disk Batman had given him earlier. Knowing full well he wouldn't be able to sleep without knowing what was on it, he headed for the kitchen to boot the laptop up and begin sorting through what his mysterious swinging friend had found.

Fuentes pulled out his phone, "Yes, sir?" He looked around nervously. "The Superman problem has been taken care of. No witnesses and no evidence." He nodded as he listened, looking around the Kent farm he was on. "No, sir, no problem at all." He hung the phone up and looked toward the Kents and Ellen Lane, "Remember, you cannot be seen. No neighbors. No deliveries. Nothing."

"I don't understand." Ellen said softly, "Why are you helping us?"

"Let's just say I know a bad deal when I see it," he sniffed.

Lois groaned when she woke up the next morning, finding Clark's side of the bed not slept in again. She heard the rapid typing from out in the kitchen and swung her legs over the side of

the bed, heading into the kitchen to find Clark typing away at his laptop at super-speed. Her eyes widened slightly, and she glanced into the living room to see Lucy still sleeping. She walked up behind him, taking a seat on the chair next to him. "Lucy is going to catch you one of these days," she commented.

He shook his head, not looking up from the screen. "I've had my super-hearing tuned in to know when she wakes up. Trying to get through these files."

"What files?" Lois asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Blackmarket files of Luthor's criminal organization," Clark said grimly. "He's got everything from bought and paid politicians to a detailed list of hired guns to handle enforcing his business..." He shook his head in disgust.

"Nice. Where'd you get all that?"

"Our rope swinging friend from last night," Clark explained, not looking up. "He was the one calling..."

"Oh, so you weren't avoiding me," Lois asked cautiously.

He looked up at her in surprise, "Avoiding you?"

She shrugged, "Well..."

"I was upset and annoyed that you didn't listen, but I'm not going to avoid you." He said taking her hand in his. "We have enough issues trying to find any time alone these days." He whispered, gesturing toward the laptop.

She gave him a slow smile, "Tell me about it." She leaned in to kiss him. "I'm sorry I scared you. I just...panicked when Henderson said he couldn't do anything with what we had."

"Lois, he's not going to get away with this," Clark promised, taking her hand in his.

"He already has," Lois said, shaking her head. "Nobody is going to go against the man signing the big fat endorsement checks for them to run for office." Something clicked in her mind, and she stopped.

"What is it?" He asked.

"That's it," she whispered, recalling her conversation with Jimmy.

"What's it?" He asked.

"Politicians," she breathed. "What politicians did he have on his payroll. Can you pull it up?"

"Couple of senators. The Mayor. A few judges..." Clark read off.

"What judges?" Lois asked, "Does it say?"

"Ryan. Menken. Stephens and..."

"Stephens?" Lois asked, "As in George Stephens? The same judge presiding over Jimmy's case?"

Clark nodded, "The very same." He looked at her in concern. "What is this about?"

"Jimmy said he was researching a dirty politician in City Hall. Stephens was fixing to run for Senate..."

"You think it might have been related?" Clark wondered aloud.

"Lex has no real reason for going after Jimmy," Lois pointed out. "What else is on there?"

The more they dug, the more and more everything was coming together. The original video of

John Black and Detective Jenkins from inside the Planet exchanging money, directions, and the bag with the explosives in it had been on the disk, marked as 'insurance' to ensure John Black cooperated and kept his mouth shut.

"John Black's rap sheet," Lois tapped her hand on the paper, reading the rap sheet in front of her.

"Background check and notes from Agent Davenport," Clark said, handing the notepad to her, "He'll basically do anything he's paid to do: break in, plant explosives, anything." Clark smirked as he added, "He's also a class world snitch." He took a bite of his potato chip.

"Snitch, huh?" Lois read through his file. "What's his

connection to Jenkins and Harris?"

"According to the surveillance tape, Harris and Jenkins were passing off the explosives to John Black who..." Clark pulled out the security stills of John Black pulling out the explosives from the bag he was handed. "...planted the bombs."

"So, who hired him?" Lois asked. "Surely Lex didn't do this himself."

"Nope," he pulled out the statement they had from John Black earlier that day, "The Boss hired him to plant the bombs, clean out the detective's apartments and to arrange a switch of medication in Detective Jenkins room...all through an offshore account. No face to face meeting though."

"Really?" Lois said, taking the statement from him.

"Looking back at our original case against him..." Clark pointed at his notes, "Just about every criminal element in Metropolis was paying protection money to this shadowy figure they called The Boss. If we can get your dad and Monique to testify that Luthor is the boss..."

"We'll have him," Lois said smugly.

"Smoking gun," Clark whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

"Jimmy's as good as free."

"Even with a corrupt DA and Judge?" She asked.

He grinned, pulling out the mockup of Perry's next edition for her, "Apparently a new judge is being assigned to the case. He's holding an evidentiary hearing after Henderson brought his attention to the new evidence. We just gotta wait."

One Week Later...

The courtroom seemed to double in size as the judge entered the room. "All rise for the Honorable Chief Justice Patterson!" the bailiff called out.

Jimmy looked to Constance who squeezed his hand as he stood to his feet. It was the first time in weeks he'd been in something other than a jumpsuit with a number printed on it. His number.

N04999. He'd had to memorize it for every bed check. Every meal. Every visit. Everything. N04999. Now here he was in the courtroom with a surprise court date he hadn't even been told about with a completely different judge. He scanned the empty gallery behind him and to his surprise spotted Lois, Clark, and Lucy waiting with Perry a few rows behind him.

Clark nodded to him with a supportive smile, and he nodded, turning his attention back to the judge as he took his seat. "The court will now hear the case of The State vs. James Olsen in this evidentiary hearing." Judge Patterson banged his gavel, "Counselors?"

"Uh, Your Honor?" DA Clemmons looked at the judge in surprise.

"Something wrong, Mr. Clemmons? Spit it out," he gestured for DA Clemmons to speak.

"I'm just trying to understand the need for this hearing. Judge Stephens already ruled..."

"Well, Judge Stephens isn't here, is he?" Judge Patterson gave Clemmons a stern look. "And before I waste the taxpayers time and money on a case where you have two defendants charged for the same crime I want to hear the evidence. As Chief Justice I think I've earned that right, don't you?"

"Yes, your honor," Clemmons stammered.

Jimmy looked over at Constance who was smirking to herself but didn't say anything.

"The state will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that James Olsen maliciously..."

"Save the theatrics, counselor. Evidence. Where is your evidence?" Patterson repeated.

"My, my evidence is that..." He stammered.

Patterson hung his head in frustration, pointing at the case jacket in front of him, "I have evidence from the lead detective on

this case pointing at two other individuals responsible for this crime. Where is your evidence to keep your case against James Olsen open?"

Constance decided to intervene as Clemmons began sifting through his file jacket nervously, "If I may, your honor?" She held her hand up.

Patterson nodded, "Please!"

"What DA Clemmons and the state have yet to acknowledge for these past few weeks is how weak their case is. James Olsen was first charged for this crime by the very officers being indicted for the same crime. It is a clear attempt at scapegoating James Olsen for their crimes..."

Patterson gave DA Clemmons a stern look, "Is this true, Mr. Clemmons?"

"Your honor! James Olsen's father was proven a spy for the NIA! He sat in this courtroom and admitted so much on that stand!" He pointed to the witness stand.

"I don't care if he's the Jolly Green Giant! What does that have to do with this case?" Judge Patterson asked.

"I..."

Patterson, fed up banged his gavel, "I'm citing malicious prosecution against the District Attorney's office and demanding James Olsen be released from custody immediately. This case is dismissed for lack of evidence *with* prejudice." He glared at Clemmons as he scribbled on the case jacket in front of him, "Mr. Clemmons I want to see you in my chambers when we're done here." He snapped irritably before turning to Jimmy. "Mr. Olsen, the court apologizes profusely for this gross injustice. You are free to go."

"Judge Stephens will have to face the Bar Committee and is looking at federal charges," Davenport explained as he paced in front of his director. "It didn't sit well with me that so much effort was being put into framing this kid for a crime he didn't commit, so I did a little digging. Apparently one of the reporters at the Planet, Ralph was fixing to run a big expose on Stephens corruption. Guess who did the research?"

"James Olsen," Victor said, looking at the evidence in front of him.

"Stephens was on Luthor's payroll so Luthor took care of the problem for him so he could keep his bought and paid for judge happy. It turns out; the next move was for him to run for Senate. If this story had been run like it was supposed to it would have ruined Stephens and any chance of him winning a seat in the Senate."

"So that's why Luthor tried to buy the Planet? To stop a story?"

"No, he was trying to control the media. He had all the television networks in Metropolis, and now he wanted the print. Stopping that story was just an added bonus," Davenport explained. "We've got eyewitness testimony linking Lex Luthor to all 'boss' crimes in Metropolis and," he pointed to a large briefcase on his desk, "I've got him on tape admitting to it all."

"Go pick him up," Victor nodded.

"Yes, sir."

Mayson Drake pushed through the doors of the Metropolis P.D. with Bill Henderson and Agent Jack Davenport and Agent Christine Woods in tow. "Listen up, everyone! This is a Federal Warrant issued by the Federal Court to take over all pending investigations at the Metropolis P.D. Everyone step away from your desks and line up against the wall. I don't care about your rank, tenure, or name. Everyone line up!"

Lois felt her legs quiver of anticipation as she stared at the pink and white bag in front of her. It had been over a month since her attack. Six weeks to be exact. Her scars and bruises had faded.

The aches and pains were gone. All that was left was her emotional roadblocks that had kept her and Clark from resuming what had been a very active love life.

They'd come close. Very close.

It had taken time, but the more the bruises healed, the more comfortable she came with letting those close to her in again; especially Clark. With some encouragement from her therapist and some very heated make-out sessions with Clark, she'd been able to work through her qualms about him lying on top of her and even having her neck touched. He was still very hesitant since her failed attempt at seducing him a month ago. It had been too soon. She knew that now. She was angry with herself and angry at the world for what had happened. It amazed her how patient Clark had been, finding different ways to show how much he cared in a look or caress.

It was something they both knew would take time. She pulled out the red and black garment, holding it up to herself. She was ready. They were ready. She ran her hand over her chest, imagining Clark's hands on her for a moment and smiled. She'd been ready for a week now, but the timing seemed to be working against her. She'd planned this evening out for the last few days, ensuring nothing would get in the way.

Jimmy was out of jail and had been practically joined at the hip with Lucy. Tonight was supposed to be a celebration dinner for Jimmy's release and the announcement of the reopening of the Daily Planet in just six short weeks. Bruce Wayne had gone all out for this black tie affair, and she had every intention of celebrating in her own way once she and Clark got back to his apartment.

After slipping the new lingerie on with a long floor-length burgundy gown, she examined herself in the mirror. Ever since Clark had let it slip how much he liked seeing her in burgundy, she'd made an effort to find every form fitting outfit she could find in the color. Tonight was no different. The sheer material that hung on the silk skirt of her dress accented her curves in just the right way. The lace beaded bodice added the right texture and contrast with her sheer shoulder length straps.

She checked her makeup one last time before she checked the time. Almost six thirty. Just as she began to wonder if a disaster had come up on Clark's patrol her answer had been answered by the news coverage on the television, "Another power surge has gripped the city this time knocking out the power for the entire Metropolis Transit Authority's transit line. Four trains filled with passengers are currently trapped on the line..."

Lois sighed, grabbing her purse as she saw the image of Superman flying through the tunnels, "Be careful," she whispered, turning to leave, locking the door behind her.

Ralph popped the bottle of champagne and poured the bubbling liquid into everyone's glasses with a broad smile, "Here here!"

"Thank you, everyone, for joining us tonight," Bruce Wayne held up his glass of champagne, looking toward the other members of the press and his investors with a smile, "While you're all eating my food, drinking my liquor..." There was a chuckle in the crowd, "I wanted to make two very big announcements. Our first is the reopening of the Daily Planet has been confirmed with all the inspectors. We will be moved back into the original Daily Planet building starting end of next month."

There was a loud eruption of applause in the crowd. Lois heard Jimmy and Perry whistle from the corner she was standing in and smiled. Not that it wasn't nice to have a more up to date office complex to work in, but there was something comforting about being in the Daily Planet newsroom again amidst the hustle and bustle.

"Our next announcement has to do with a certain young man this paper has worked tirelessly to see cleared of any wrongdoing," Bruce continued, looking toward Jimmy. "The

amount of corruption that allowed the injustice of his arrest to go on for as long as it did still astounds me. Welcome home, Mr. Olsen!”

Jimmy grinned ear to ear, holding his glass of champagne up with one hand and his other arm around Lucy. Lois smiled, looking around the room, watching her young friend finally enjoy his freedom. It was long overdue. “I’m not that great at speeches so bear with me,” Jimmy chuckled, looking around the room with a grin. “I just want to thank you guys for everything you did for me. You never gave up even when every door kept slamming in your face; you never gave up. Thank you.” He looked tenderly at Lucy who smiled back at him. Everyone clinked their glasses and took a sip. Jimmy looked back at Lucy and leaned in to kiss her before turning away nervously.

Lois caught the gesture keeping a mental note to ask Lucy about it later as she took a sip from her glass. Two strong arms wrapped around her waist from behind and she grinned feeling Clark’s lips press against the back of her neck, “Hey, you,” he whispered, running his lips down the curve of her neck.

“Hey,” she handed him his glass, “You missed Jimmy’s speech.”

“Subway underground got trapped from another power surge. Superman had to move the train to the next station,” he explained, running his hands up her ribcage, nibbling at the sensitive flesh on the nape of her neck. “You look ... incredible,” he whispered huskily.

“We’re in public,” she reminded him, not making any move to discourage him. She smiled to herself as his hands nestled themselves inside the shawl she had draped over her shoulders and rested hands against her ribcage just high enough to be treading on dangerous territory but low enough to be considered appropriate for public.

“When has that discouraged you?” He whispered in a teasing tone.

She giggled, turning to look at him, “Would it be terrible if we left early?” She reached behind her, running her hand up his thigh as she sighed.

He was wearing a black tux with a crisp white button down shirt, and he really looked good. She’d planned on teasing him on the dance floor a little before dragging him back to the apartment to the very big bed they shared... but the idea of staying here any longer than she had to when her mind kept reminding her of her plans...

“You look gorgeous,” he whispered in her ear.

She eyed the dark tux he was wearing and how it fit him in just the right place, “You look very...” She let out a soft moan, running her hand down his left thigh, “I had this long night planned but...”

He jumped slightly when she reached a little higher and grinned back at him, “Lois!” He whispered, moving her hand away from his thigh, turning her in his arms to look at her.

She grinned nervously, “I, um, it’s been a long week,” she whispered shyly, linking her arms over his neck as she whispered, “And an even longer six weeks.” She moved closer, running her hands down the front of his chest seductively, “Six very long weeks without any...”

“Hey, CK!” Jimmy interrupted, walking up to them. “What happened to you? Lois said you were caught in traffic?”

Clark chuckled nervously, “Yeah, I, um, was on the Transit when it stalled from another power surge earlier. It took a few hours to get out of there,” he explained quickly to his young friend, “Uh, how are you doing?”

“Good.” Jimmy nodded, “Ms. Hunter says I’m due some compensation since the Metropolis P.D. was deemed at fault with the connections to Harris and Jenkins. Got an offer this afternoon,” he let out a low whistle. “Let’s just say I won’t have to worry about my student loans any more if I take it.”

“That’s good.” He patted his young friend on the arm. “You deserve that and more for what they put you through.”

“Who deserves what?” Lucy asked, walking up to them with a glass of champagne in her hands.

“I was just telling CK about the offer I got this afternoon,” Jimmy explained, catching her up.

“Crazy how much money gets thrown at you when the Chief Justice slaps an Ethics Violation against the District Attorney’s office, isn’t it?” Lucy rolled her eyes.

“Well, at least they’re cleaning up the corruption,” Lois pointed out. “A new police commissioner has been named. The cops that were found to be on LexCorp payroll have been placed on leave pending an investigation from IAB. It’s a start. It’s not a solution yet, but it’s a start.”

“Definitely,” Clark nodded, tightening his arm around her waist.

“Hey, after all the things I saw I’m just glad to be out and away from the jail and courthouses,” Jimmy grinned. He patted Clark on the shoulder, looking between him and Lois, “Thanks for sticking by me. I know with everything else going on it wasn’t easy to stay on my case but you did, and I really appreciate it.”

“Anytime,” Lois said, then nodded toward Lucy, “You know Lucy helped out a lot. She helped find the image still with Jenkins in it.”

“That’s how they were able to find the real bomber,” Clark added.

“It was a joint effort.” Lucy reassured Jimmy, “But enough about the case. It’s supposed to be a party. Have fun.” She threw Lois a quick wink before dragging Jimmy toward the open dance floor where several couples had already made their way and were dancing to the live band’s music.

Clark laughed, “I’m not sure if that was a subtle hint to leave or follow them.”

Lois grinned back at him, “I’d be okay with the former. Do you realize this is the first time we’ve had a single night alone together in eight days?”

“It’s been a busy few weeks,” Clark reasoned, pulling her closer.

“I’ll say,” Lois breathed as she molded her body against his.

He groaned against her, “Keep that up, and ...”

She looked around to see if anyone was paying them any attention and whispered in his ear, “Maybe I want to ...” She trailed off, meeting his surprised gaze, slipping her arms around his waist. He looked really *really* good in his tux. Black really was his color.

“Maybe I want to take you home and kiss every inch of your body...” He leered at her hungrily.

“Let’s get out of here,” she whispered.

They made their way into the apartment, not breaking contact for a minute as Lois pulled Clark to the bedroom.

“You sure you’re...oh!” Clark groaned his approval as she reached between their bodies, fingering the waistband of his trousers. He sighed his approval, running his hands down the back of her dress. His jacket fell to the floor as she began working on the buttons of his dress shirt.

“Yes.” She whispered against his lips, “Very ready.”

He lowered the zipper to her dress, exposing the black and red silk beneath. She turned her head, looking back at him with a seductive smile as the dress fell to the floor. She took a seat on the edge of the bed, leaning halfway back and giving him a chance to take the sight of her in.

“You were saying?” She whispered innocently, but there was nothing innocent about the gaze she was giving him or the very incredibly sexy lingerie she had on.

He closed the door behind him, being sure to lock it as he strode toward her, looking around the room that was set up with

candles around the bed. "Perfect."

She ran a hand down her long legs seductively, "You like?" "Perfect," he repeated again huskily, moving to where he was standing over her next to the bed. She smiled, repositioning herself on her knees as she hooked her arms around his neck. He gazed down at the red and black silk and lace corset wrapped around her body so perfectly. "You look...wow..."

She loosened his bow tie, then began working on the buttons to his shirt, "You are overdressed, Mr. Kent," she whispered, leaning in to kiss him.

"Am I?" He teased his eyes dancing.

She ran a hand through the back of his hair, "I've been planning tonight for a few days."

"I can tell," he glanced down at the ensemble she wore.

"Wanted it to be special," she whispered in his ear.

"You look...gorgeous," he whispered, cupping her cheek.

She eyed him appreciatively, "You're still overdressed."

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to him, "Let's see what we can do about that..."

Dr. Kelly threw the switch and the room filled with a blinding light. Resplendent Man and the rat both lit up in an electric blue as the meter needle dropped down slower. She stared at the rat and Resplendent Man with a curse when nothing happened, "I am duplicating cloud-to-ground lightning... The negatively charged atoms move downward to meet the positively charged — That's it! That's it! I didn't account for the action of the return stroke!"

She typed a few buttons on her keyboard and Lex came to stand behind her. "Have we got it?"

"I think so," she smiled. "One way to find out." She flipped the switch once more, and the room flashed in electric blue once more.

Clark smiled to himself as he watched Lois sleep. Everything seemed to finally be falling into place. A federal order for arrest had been issued for Lex Luthor's arrest in connection with racketeering. Jimmy was home safe, cleared of all wrong doing, the real bombers of the Planet had been charged and would be serving time for their part in the arson of the Planet. Now, six weeks after Luthor's attack they were finally back in a good place again. She was back to being his Lois. Fearless, and bold, jumping in without looking and fighting with all her might for what she thought was right.

He brushed a stray strand of hair out of her face with his thumb, smiling down at her. Her legs were still entangled with his from the night before. "I love you, Lois Lane," he whispered softly leaning in to kiss her.

She sighed against him, "I love you too."

He smiled, running his palm down the side of her cheek, "Morning."

"Morning," she whispered back with a grin, stretching her arms up over her head.

"How'd you sleep?" He asked.

"Better than I have in weeks," she smiled at him, looking at him through her long eyelashes.

"Good," he sighed, leaning in to kiss her, rolling them over, so she was cradled in his arms securely as he stroked her cheek, meeting her gaze. "I've missed you...this," he whispered.

She reached up to outline his jaw with her palm, "I've missed you too...so much." She leaned in to kiss him. "You've been... incredible through all of this. I don't know how I would have gotten through it without you."

"I'm just sorry I couldn't do more," he whispered back. She rested her head against his cheek, and he held her close. There were so many things he wanted to say. Finding the right words right now seemed impossible so he settled for a simple statement. "You know I was thinking maybe we should get a moving truck."

"A moving truck?" She looked at him confused.

"For you to move in here...officially," he whispered shyly.

She grinned back at him, "I think I'm already moved in."

"I don't mean moving here because you're in danger and half your stuff is back at your apartment." He whispered, cupping her face with his cheek, "I mean move in here because you want to."

She smiled back at him, bringing her right leg up over his hip, "Okay."

He smiled back, leaning in to kiss her. "Okay."

The lights flickered, and there was long hum from the kitchen. He groaned, pulling away, "What now?"

"At least we got one night free," Lois offered, watching him get out of bed and spin into his suit at super-speed.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," he promised.

Davenport read off the list of charges, "Let's see, George Stephens. What do we have here?"

"I've already asked for my attorney," Stephens interrupted.

"I'm just talking. You don't have to respond," he shot back. He let out a low whistle. "Westman, huh? So you went to school with all the muckety mucks like Bruce Wayne, Bob Fences, Lex Luthor...huh?"

"Is that a question, Agent Davenport?"

"Just making conversation," Davenport shrugged. "Geez, you're so sensitive. You gotta learn to lighten up."

"If you think you're going to get me to break down and confess or give you anything you're..."

"Who says I need you to give me anything?" Davenport asked. "Seems to me you're set up nice and pretty...until you take the fall."

"What are you talking about?" Stephens spat irritably.

"Who's your attorney, Sheldon Bender?" Davenport asked.

From the nod of Stephens' head, he knew he was right. "You called him almost a day ago, and he still hasn't shown up. Wanna know why?" Stephens didn't respond. "Oh, it's okay this is completely off the record. The reason why your attorney isn't calling you back is he's busy setting you up to take the fall for this whole scheme of Luthor's. This morning over five hundred million dollars in transactions magically appeared in your offshore accounts."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Stephens scoffed.

"I never kid about money." Davenport laid the printouts in his hand in front of Stephens. "So, it seems to me like you've got two options: You could either a) go along with this ridiculous charade and not cooperate with us and be Lex Luthor's fall guy. Or you could b) cooperate with us and give me what I need to seal the lock on Luthor's cage for the next nine hundred years." He held his hands up, giving the impression of teetering a see-saw. "A or B. A or B. Tick tock your honor."

"I want immunity."

"I can't give you immunity."

"Then what can you give me?"

"I can recommend a lighter sentence and save you from losing your bar license after you serve your time. So instead of serving twenty to life, you'd be looking at around ten years. You could be out in five on good behavior."

"And the money?"

"It all has to go back."

"What about my family?"

"They'd be protected. We can ensure a new identity for you and your family after your release." He handed him the proposed plea agreement. "You agree to surrender your bar license for the time of ten years and serve your sentence in a minimum security facility. In return, you will be reinstated after the terms of your agreement have been met to practice law in the private sector. Which is a lot better than you deserve."

"It's not that simple. It's not just black and white..." Stephens

tried to argue.

"Tick tock. Tick Tock," Davenport counted down.
"Give me a pen."

"No, mom, I haven't heard from daddy yet," Lois said with her cell phone cradled between her neck and shoulders as she helped Lucy move the rest of her boxes from her bedroom of her old apartment and into the main living area.

"Why? Because I guess the FBI doesn't think calling us is high on the priority list when they're trying to keep him out of sight. I don't know, mom."

Lucy mouthed to her 'Have you told her?'

Lois shook her head adamantly, "Yes, I know this is hard on you, mother. Well, I'm sorry you had to double your medication... Yes, I know medication isn't cheap, mother."

Lucy made a symbol with her hand imitating the tirade Ellen was on, and Lois shushed her, 'Stop it.' She mouthed.

"Over?" She sighed, "I don't know mom. Lex Luthor is still on the run. No one's been able to find him...I know you want to come back to Metropolis but...Of course, we want you back. Don't be ridiculous! It's just not safe," Lois shuddered, looking around the apartment. "Yes, I know what I'm talking about, Mother. It is not safe. You have no idea what that man is capable of...and..."

Lucy grabbed the phone, "Mom, sorry we're going to have to let you go. I think we've got a lead on Lex Luthor. Call you back soon. Love you bye." Before she could give Ellen Lane a chance to respond, she hung up the phone, clapping the flip phone closed.

"Lucy!" Lois admonished.

"Someone had to do it, and you certainly weren't going to." Lucy rolled her eyes, "It took you weeks to get yourself back to a somewhat normal self, and I'm not going to have you go off the deep end again from listening to mom."

Lois sighed, "You're a little on the over the protective side you know that?"

"Yeah, well I learned it from this really annoying and bratty sister of mine," Lucy grinned, hooking her arm over her shoulders.

"Bratty?" Lois glared back at her, "Who are you calling bratty?"

"Hmm, you're right. Bossy. Bossy," Lucy corrected.

Lois laughed, looking around at the apartment in disarray, "You sure about this?"

Lucy nodded, "Yeah, it's time. After what happened I can't live here, and I *know* as sweet as Clark has been keeping me at his apartment with you I'm cramping on you guys' alone time.

Marcy's got an extra room at her place, and she's only charging half of what the typical rent is for a room on that side of town. I'll be fine." She still wasn't sure she liked the idea of Lucy moving that far away; especially with Lex's whereabouts still unknown.

"But Luce..."

Lucy rolled her eyes, "Lois, I'll be fine. I promise. If Lex Luthor shows up, I'll be sure to have my 9mm handy..." She winked at her.

"Not funny," Lois shot back.

"I know. Too soon," Lucy sighed, resting her head on her shoulder. "I'll be fine. It's like a block away from Jimmy's and from what Bill Henderson said it's on his route home so if you're that worried you can have him check on me if it makes you feel better."

"I just might," Lois said with a soft smile. "It's just weird you being in Metropolis and not...living together."

"I know," Lucy smiled back at her. "I'm surprised you put up with me for as long as you did." She bumped her hip, teasing her. "I am going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too, Luce," She sighed, looking back toward the stack of boxes. "What time is the moving truck coming?"

"In about half an hour," Lucy explained, looking at her watch.

"I guess we got more done than I thought we would have this morning."

"Yeah," Lois whispered with a smile.

"When's Clark coming back with those pizzas?" Lucy commented, "I'm getting hungry."

"Oh, he'll be back as soon as he can." Lois said quickly, "Sometimes it takes the place a little longer to get the pizza just right."

"I'll have to get him to show me where he finds these places. How is it we lived in Metropolis all our lives and never found any of these authentic restaurants he's found in less than a year's time?"

Lois shrugged, "I don't..." The jiggle of the keys in the front door echoed and they both jumped. Lois looked over at the door as it cracked open with the chain still on it. "It's fine..." She said nervously. "That's probably Clark right now."

"Yeah," Lucy nodded nervously.

"Lois?" Clark's voice echoed from the other side of the door, and they both sighed in relief.

"Coming!"

"See? We're both jumping like rabbits at the slightest sound," Lucy shot back. "It's time."

"Microchips were ingrained into the silver with a small set of tongs when positioned right onto the muscle will turn an ordinary muscular tissue into..." Sam applied the chip to the tissue to demonstrate. "Something extraordinary."

"Remarkable," Lucius commented, looking at the change through the microscope.

Clark finished unpacking the last of Lois' boxes from the truck into the living room and smiled to himself. She had gone with Lucy and Jimmy to help Lucy unpack at her new roommate's place, and he suspected probably inspect the place. He'd had to practically shove Jimmy out the door when he'd offered to stay and help unpack. Thankfully Jimmy had been more interested in spending time with Lucy at the moment. Once they were gone a super dash to the truck, and a few minutes later everything was in the apartment. He'd wait for the actual unpacking of boxes when Lois got back. For now, it was perfect.

His hand closed around the black velvet box in his pocket. It had taken everything in him not to say anything these past few weeks, but now that the stress had subsided and the case against Luthor was moving forward; it was the perfect time. He was going to ask Lois to marry him tonight.

Dr. Kelly threw the switch and the room filled with a blinding light. Resplendent Man lit up in an electric blue as the meter needle dropped down slower. She stared at the rat carefully lifting the glass casing.

Resplendent Man looked at her annoyed, "What do you expect that darn rat to..."

In a brown blur, the rat disappeared, burrowing a hole into the wall behind them. Lex came up behind Dr. Kelly, running his hands up and down her shoulders, "You've done it, darling."

"We've done it, Lex," she corrected, leaning into him for a soulful kiss.

Six Months Ago...

"What am I doing here?" Fuentes looked around the room uncertainly. "You can't talk to me without my lawyer."

"Your lawyer will be here soon enough," Agent Davenport said, taking a seat across from him. "I'm here to cut you the deal of a lifetime...if you want it that is."

"Deal? What kind of deal?" Fuentes asked curiously.

"Help bring down Lex Luthor."

"No way," Fuentes scoffed. "I'm not going anywhere near that

...

"Well, then I guess you'll enjoy your fifteen to twenty-year sentence in Federal Prison. I hear the government is really cracking down on terrorism." Davenport stood up walking toward the door.

"Wait!" Davenport turned back to Fuentes.

"Yes?"

"What do I have to do?"

"Get him to trust you," Davenport said with a smile.

Present Day...

Ellen paced around the farmhouse nervously. "How long do we have to stay hidden?"

Fuentes looked toward the window cautiously, "I haven't gotten word yet that they've gotten Mr. Luthor in custody yet. Once him and his team are in custody it'll be safe," he reassured her.

Jonathan pointed to the table, "Ellen, why don't you have a seat?" He stood up, crossing the room to her, "All this pacing is making all of us nervous I think."

Ellen nodded, taking her seat next to Martha who was quietly sipping her iced tea. "I'm not nervous I'm angry. I'm scared and..."

"What is it?" Martha asked, placing a hand over hers.

"I don't know how to explain it," she said hoarsely.

"Something is...wrong. Really really wrong. I can sense it. I can feel it. Ever since they left last month..." Ellen said shakily. "She doesn't call. When I do get her on the phone, Lucy is cutting the conversation short." Ellen wagged her finger in the air, "Something is wrong."

Martha looked toward Jonathan unsure what to say. She squeezed Ellen's hand, "Hopefully this will be over soon, and you can get to the bottom of it."

"In breaking news tonight, a federal warrant has been issued for reclusive billionaire and philanthropist, Lex Luthor. He's being charged with racketeering and conspiracy to commit fraud on a federal level. A list of alleged dirty politicians made its way to all news networks late this afternoon. If this list is confirmed we're looking at having almost the entire Senate and House replaced. This could be a turning point in next year's election..."

"Lucy get unpacked okay?" Clark asked, helping Lois fold up the last of the empty boxes they'd unpacked.

Lois nodded, setting the folded box with the stack behind her, "Yeah, she's unpacked and already enjoying some time with her roommate." She grinned, "She's nice."

"I think you're a little over-protective," he noted with a smile.

"Me? Never," she laughed sarcastically.

He smiled back at her, setting the last of the boxes in a pile on the floor. "You miss her?"

"A little." She admitted sheepishly, "but she was right. It was time."

"She didn't move back to the apartment," he reminded her. "She's in a safe neighborhood."

"Lex is on the run...again," Lois said softly.

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to him. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you." He promised, leaning in to kiss her cheek, "or Lucy."

"I know," she sighed, leaning back into his arms. "I think I'm still in reactive mode. Ever since the Planet..."

"We've all been in survival mode," he added, understanding. "It's over though," he reminded her. "He's on the run, but from the police scans I've heard this evening, they're getting pretty close. They've got Nigel in custody along with his manservant, Asabi."

"Mrs. Cox?" Lois asked shakily.

"Still on the run," Clark said, cupping her cheek. "I'm sure

when they find her they'll find Luthor."

"You know what I want?" She whispered, leaning into him.

"A Pulitzer," he grinned back at her.

"Besides that," she swatted him playfully. "They don't review those till after Kerth season which isn't until October."

"Right, sorry. Three months away," he grinned. "You were saying?"

"Yes," she stepped toward him, running her hands up his chest and looping her arms around his neck, pulling him to her. "I was saying what I really really want is to go flying with you and not have to think about the insanity that's been going on these past few months."

He grinned back at her, "Well I was going to suggest a flight after dinner..." He began, taking her left hand in his, pulling it toward him as he interlaced his fingers with hers. "I thought maybe we could go out..."

"With Lex still on the run?" Lois looked at him wryly. "Every place within a fifty-mile block has to abide by a nine o'clock curfew."

"Yeah, but see I've got this friend that owes me...constantly butting in at the worst time with these calls for help...owes me a free flight or two. Anywhere you want."

Her eyes sparkled, "Anywhere?"

He looked at the time, "It's only five in the afternoon in Venice right now. There's this really great place I want you to try..."

"Sounds like you've got this planned out," she observed.

"I figured we were both in need of a night out," he whispered, cupping her face.

"I could do Venice," she smiled at him, leaning in to kiss him. "Just give me a few minutes to shower and change."

His eyes did a little dance, "I'll be right here."

"We know you were Luthor's right-hand man. We know you helped him run his organization." Davenport paced in front of Nigel St. John with a smug grin. "You cooperate and tell us where he is, and this will go a lot easier on you."

Nigel stared coldly back at him, "What makes you think I'd do anything to help you, Mr. Davenport?"

"Because I think beneath that English accent and code of loyalty you're no different than any of the officials we had drug in here. You want to save your own skin."

Nigel stared at him with a scowl, "I've yet to hear an offer that interests me, Mr. Davenport."

Lois felt the cool breeze against the back of her neck and smiled against the blue spandex as Clark pulled her closer. The lights of the city below came into view as they came in for a landing in a small street. She gave him a peck on the cheek as he set her down on her feet, "Thanks for the flight."

He smiled, pulling away to change back into his charcoal suit. Within a blink of an eye, he was readjusting his glasses and taking her hand, walking her toward a small restaurant named, '*Venezia in Amore*'

She looked around the intimate setting as they walked up the steps, "The view is beautiful here," she breathed, looking out at the canal.

Clark smiled, cupping her cheek with his palm, "I hadn't noticed." She was wearing a long black knit dress with spaghetti straps, and her hair was curled, hanging down to her shoulders.

She blushed, leaning in to kiss him just as the host returned to the door. "Signore Kent!" He greeted with a smile, holding the menus in his hand. "I see you brought your signora," he spoke in a thick Italian accent but knew his English well.

He guided them to their table outside, overlooking the canal and the city as the sun began to set. Their server came within a few minutes with a bottle of wine and glasses. They placed their

orders, and he left them to enjoy the view.

"This is incredible," Lois breathed, looking out at the gondolas with lanterns and gondoliers taking people across the Grand Canal.

"Venice was one of the first places I came to when I was traveling after college. I came across this place by accident. It's small and quaint, but the food is incredible," He smiled at her, holding his glass up, "The company's even better this time though."

She grinned, holding her glass up to meet his in a soft clink, "To good company." She took a sip of her wine, letting the flavor resonate on her tongue as she looked back at Clark.

It had been an intense few months. To think it had only been six months ago that they had narrowly escaped the hostage situation at the Planet and she had been casually dating Lex Luthor... It scared her to think what might have happened had she not taken Clark's advice to heart. Had she not asked him about his warning...

Would she ever have figured out the darkness that laid beneath Lex Luthor? Would she ever have figured out how much Clark meant to her? Or would they still be trying to find the courage to say the scary words?

He took her hand in his and smiled, "Do you feel like dancing?" He motioned toward the dance floor where a few couples were dancing to the soft music that was playing. She didn't understand any of the words, but they sounded nice.

"Sure," she smiled, taking his hand and allowing him to lead her toward the dance floor. He stopped to tell the host something in Italian she couldn't quite make out then led her on the floor where other couples were slow dancing.

His arms encircled her waist and the familiar tune of the song they'd danced to many months ago on their first date came out of the speakers.

*You're the light; you're the night
You're the color of my blood
You're the cure; you're the pain
You're the only thing I wanna touch
Never knew that it could mean so much, so much
You're the fear; I don't care
Cause I've never been so high
Follow me to the dark
Let me take you past our satellites
You can see the world you brought to life, to life*

She looked back at him in surprise. He shrugged, pulling her to him, "I figured since it was the first dance you didn't run out of my arms..."

She laughed, linking her arms around his neck as he pulled her close, "I just wanted tonight to be special," he whispered. "We haven't had a whole lot of time to focus on anything outside of work in a while."

"Thank you," she whispered, leaning in to kiss him once more, tracing the outline of his lips with her tongue. She could taste the wine from earlier on his lips as she ran her hands through the hair on the back of his head.

*So love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do
What are you waiting for?
Fading in, fading out
On the edge of paradise
Every inch of your skin is a holy grail I've got to find
Only you can set my heart on fire, on fire
Yeah, I'll let you set the pace
Cause I'm not thinking straight
My head spinning around I can't see clear no more
What are you waiting for?*

Lex watched in rapt attention as the half of the Kryptonite he'd had turned into a powder form slowly mixed in with the paint, turning the white liquid into a bright glowing green. "Don't spill a drop," he ordered.

Mrs. Cox nodded, "The trap is set," she said, handing him a small lead box. "The remnants. Not all of it was able to be ground down."

"Excellent," he smiled to himself, "Get the cell ready."

"Yes, Lex," Mrs. Cox nodded her agreement.

After dinner and a very rich chocolate dessert, Lois collected on her request for a flight with him. Just above the clouds, he wrapped his cape around her, holding her close. "You warm enough?" He asked.

She grinned up at him, linking her arms around his neck, "Very," she purred, leaning in to kiss him.

"Good," he whispered back.

"Tonight was wonderful." She sighed against him, resting her head on his chest, "Thank you. It was just what I needed... what we both needed." She grinned up at him shyly. "I love you, Clark Kent."

"I love you, Lois Lane." He whispered back, "Always have."

She leaned closer to him, running both hands up and down his chest, "Let's go home," she purred seductively.

He grinned ear to ear, and she looked at him perplexed, "What?"

"You called the apartment home," he whispered with a smile, stroking her cheek.

"Well, I'm moved in now. You're not changing your mind are you?"

"Not in this lifetime." He leaned in to kiss her once more.

They landed on the balcony, Clark leaned in to kiss Lois once more, holding her close as he stepped into their home. He set her on her feet then spun back into his suit taking a step toward her, "I don't think I'll ever get tired of watching you do that," she whispered.

He took a step toward her and whispered, "How about this?" He leaned in to kiss her, cupping her face.

"That too..." She nodded her approval as he pulled away.

"You're everything to me, Lois," he whispered solemnly. "I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you in my life."

"Oh, Clark," she stroked his cheek, pulling him to her.

"Lois," he whispered, cupping her face with his hand. "I love you. I've always loved you." He pulled out a velvet box from his pocket and knelt down in front of her.

"Clark..." She whispered, grinning back at him ear to ear.

"Lois Lane, will you..." His face tensed up in pain and he stopped mid-sentence.

"Clark?" She saw him holding his chest in pain.

"Krypt—" He whispered in a low groan, staggering to his feet, looking around.

"Oh, what a touching moment. So sorry to interrupt." Sarcasm dripped from Lex's voice as he appeared before them, holding a lead box with a familiar green glowing meteorite, approaching them with a sinister grin. "Superman!" Luthor crooned with an evil grin, at Clark's surprised look he laughed, "All this time ... you've been keeping a little secret..."

"Clark..." Lois breathed in a panic.

Clark put himself between Lex and herself, "Stay back."

"Yes, wouldn't want to put you in any danger," Before she knew what had happened she felt a cold burst of air against her, propelling her against the wall.

"Lois!" Clark super-spined toward her, catching her at the last moment. He set her down near the window and whispered, "Get out of here now."

"Clark..."

He leaned in to kiss her and whispered, “Go.”

She watched as Clark advanced toward Lex, toying with the idea of staying then finally giving in to her better judgment she turned toward the balcony to climb down the fire escape.

“Ah, ah, ah,” a voice from behind her said. She felt a sharp needle hit her throat as a cold cloth came over her mouth. She fought against the slumber of darkness trying to take over her, but it was no use.

“Luthor!” Clark growled, cautiously advancing toward him.

Luthor sped from one side of the room to the other, taunting him. “Such freedom! Exhilaration. Now I know why you enjoy looking down on us mere mortals.”

Still reeling from the pain of the Kryptonite and the fact that Luthor was in his living room with powers all Clark could manage was, “How?”

“You were never one to dance around were you?” Lex said casually, grinning as his close proximity made him double over in pain. “After seeing how generous you were with your powers and how greedy our latest superhero was, I thought it prudent to ... take matters into my own hands.”

A hard blow against his ribs sent Clark reeling as he felt the burning sensation of the Kryptonite’s close proximity. In the corner of his eye, he spotted Mrs. Cox hovering over an unconscious Lois Lane. Panic coursed through him, “Lois...”

He was getting weaker the longer he was exposed to the Kryptonite. He had to get away from Luthor, but he had to get to Lois before...

“Your days of dancing around with Ms. Lane I’m afraid are through.” A burning sensation filled his chest as he looked down to see his shirt had been burned open, “Not so tough now when the shoe is on the other foot, are you?” He grabbed Clark by the collar pulling him toward him and bringing the Kryptonite to him. “Who would have thought the flying alien *God* could be destroyed by a *rock*!” He shoved the poisonous stone in his side, then pulling it out covered in blood. Clark groaned in agony as he whispered, “I’m going to enjoy watching you die...”

Clark stared him down coldly, struggling to release himself from Luthor’s grasp. He could feel his grip loosening. He had to get to Lois. “Lois...”

Luthor brought the rock toward him, and he pushed him back with everything he had, keeping the poisonous stone away as he struggled against him. A hard blow to his abdomen and he saw Luthor wince. “No!” It burned like hell, but he hit him with all he had. To his surprise, he heard Luthor groan in pain. Maybe he wasn’t fully invulnerable?

The sound of a familiar whipping noise and a clang from a metal object hitting his window caught his attention. “There’s only room for *one* Superman!” Lex hissed in his ear, throwing him to the ground with a powdery residue that burned as it came into contact with him. He cried out in agony, feeling the burning sensation resonate through his body from where the Kryptonite hit him.

Luthor kicked him in the ribs, “Hardly even a fight left in you. Superman?” He scoffed, “When you’re ready for me to finish you off you can find me at the mausoleum at Perpetual Pines. Until then...” He straightened up, “Mrs. Cox, gather Ms. Lane. We have a flight to catch.”

“No,” he whispered hoarsely. He could feel the pain. He could feel his body weakening. He felt a gust of wind in his face, looking where Lois had been just seconds ago. “Lois...”

Without even stopping to change he ricocheted out the open window, feeling his body weakening as he tried to zero in on Lois’ heartbeat. His super-hearing was coming in and out. Without the sun to help him heal from his exposure to the Kryptonite the struggle to keep above the clouds was futile. He hovered above the bay, feeling the gravitational pull lower him further and further to

the ground until he crashed into a dark alley behind the fish market.

He winced in agony, feeling his weakened body starting to give into the pain that was overtaking him. ‘Lois...’

It hurt. Lois tried to move but felt like a weight was on her chest. She felt a breath of cold air enter her lungs and gasped in surprise causing her to cough in a frenzy. Her eyes fluttered open, and she gasped in surprise, seeing the dark walls around her.

A slow clap from the other side of the room echoed around her. She sat up slowly, taking in her surroundings. Wherever she was, she was in a cage. “Two hours and thirteen minutes. I’ll have to have Dr. Kelly adjust the next dosage.”

“Lex? What am I doing here? Where am I?”

“Well, since your flying friend and you decided to dismantle everything I’ve worked so hard to build I’ve decided to repay the favor by taking everything he cares about ...before I kill him.”

“What is wrong with you?” She spat out bitterly. “Why am I here?”

“You are what Superman cares about most in this world. The key to his destruction,” he smiled smoothly taking a step toward her as she moved back, “Obviously things are different now that I know the truth, my dear...”

“The truth?” She feigned ignorance, recalling the revelation Lex had made back at the apartment.

“I behaved horrendously, and you have every right to be angry with me, but I know given time you’ll forgive me just as I’ll forgive you.”

“Forgive you?” She scoffed, “You attacked me. You tried to kill me.”

“If you had just told me the truth none of that would have happened.” He brushed her off, “I’ve lost everything. My fortune. My good name. Everything but my feelings for you.”

“No, I... I could never... I mean...” She shook her head adamantly, “You’re deranged. After everything you’ve done, how could you expect ...?”

“Yes, I’ve done terrible things. But I did them for you. Provoked by the blinding light of your beauty. If you can’t forgive me...” He shrugged, “Maybe some quality time alone will help you see reason.” He moved toward the exit, locking the door behind her.

The Pain. It ached all over.

‘Lois.’

He fought against the burning pain as he forced his eyelids up with a loud groan. A bright yellow light shone into his eyes and he groaned.

“I wouldn’t try to move just yet,” a familiar voice said from behind him. “Those sun lamps have only had a few hours to work.”

Clark looked around at his unfamiliar surroundings. It was dark. Like a cave. “Where am I?” He croaked out, trying to focus on his surroundings and bring the image in more clearly.

“An underground cave long forgotten,” the voice said, moving toward him with a red glowing liquid. “According to my research. This stuff seems to counteract the green. You can sit there and suffer in pain as it slowly eats away your insides or let me administer it into your system. Your choice Superman.”

Clark looked down at his attire, seeing the suit and boots on. A costume change he didn’t remember making. “Don’t look so surprised.” The familiar voice changed to another voice he recognized as he removed the cowl from his face. “I didn’t think lying in a ditch as half Clark Kent and half Superman boded well for you.”

“Thanks,” Clark managed, still fighting the pain from inside him.

“So, decision?” He waved the red solution in the air. Clark

nodded and winced as he felt a hard prick in his arm. It burned. Whatever the substance was that Bruce had just administered. It burned like hell but only for a moment. The pain he felt on his insides was slowly subsiding and the burning slowly dissipated.

"Thank you," Clark breathed, releasing a long breath as he sat up, looking around the room. It looked to be some sort of lab of sorts with computer screens on the far wall. Taking a deep breath, he kicked his feet over the side of the table he was on.

"Not really setup for medical care here," Bruce gave a half-grin.

"It's fine. Really," Clark said, standing up, rubbing his arm. "What was that stuff?"

"Appears to be the same as that green substance you were exposed to just slightly different molecular structure," Bruce explained, typing on the keypad as he pulled up the reports from his scientists. "I believe you called it Kryptonite?"

"How did you...?" Clark began to ask, but Bruce cut him off.

"My team found some near where the green substance was found on the Irig farm." At Clark's concerned look Bruce continued, "I've had a tail on Luthor's men for months now. When they showed up sniffing around, I had my team dig up the area for anything Luthor might be looking for. It's safe in lockup. No one comes down here but me. No one examines anything down here without my say-so."

"He sent people to Smallville?" Clark asked, concerned.

"I'm told an undercover agent with the FBI was the assigned man. Your family isn't in any danger," Bruce reassured. "You wanna tell me what happened? How'd you end up in the ditch of Southside covered in powdered residue of Kryptonite with your suit exposed; half in costume and half-out. I may not know you that well but I know enough to know you wouldn't risk your identity like that..."

"He has my powers," he said solemnly. "I don't know how but he has them. He overpowered me and..." Clark grew silent. "He has Lois."

"Then I guess we better get to work on getting your powers back," Bruce said, typing in a few keys. "It may take a few hours but..."

"I don't have a few hours," Clark argued. "Lois is in danger."

"You don't have your powers. How do you plan to fight a super-powered Luthor?"

"I don't know," Clark argued, "but I've gotta do something." His expression was grim, "I can't just sit by and do nothing."

"I may have an idea," Bruce said, walking toward the intercom at his desk, "Alfred, get Lucius on the phone. Tell him I need him to bring the Super Chip Prototype he was working with Dr. Lane on..."

"Wait a minute..." Clark interrupted, "Super chip? Dr. Lane?"

"Luthor ordered a hit out on his top scientist. Big mistake. Seems Ms. Taylor had been hired by the FBI to work as a double agent. She brought Dr. Lane into FBI protection, and we orchestrated a ruse to make Luthor think Dr. Lane had been killed when in fact he'd been hiding out here in Metropolis the entire time."

Panic crossed Clark's face as the news sunk in. "He doesn't..." He motioned to his costume.

"No. Nobody knows but me...and I'm assuming Ms. Lane?" He looked at Clark for confirmation.

"So what is this Super Chip going to do?"

"Give you an advantage over Luthor and help you heal faster. It'll dissolve after forty-eight hours though."

"That's convenient," Clark said uncertainly.

"We're sticking a foreign object in your body via needle the cleanest way to allow your body to get rid of it the better," Bruce said with a smirk.

A knock at the door and the loud hum of the elevator doors caused Clark and Bruce to look toward Lucius Fox as he stepped

into the dimly lit room. "Mr. Wayne," Lucius nodded toward the billionaire dressed in his Batman gear from the neck down then toward Clark, "Mr...Superman?"

"Lucius? The chip?" Bruce asked impatiently.

Lucius nodded and pulled out a small blue and red needle with a gold chip inside the syringe. "I hope you know what you're doing Mr. Wayne."

Bruce ignored him, taking the needle and turning back to Clark, "Moment of truth."

"Let's do it," Clark nodded his agreement.

Clark landed outside the mausoleum in Bruce's Batman jet. "Thanks."

"Be careful. Luthor isn't above anything. Believe me, I know," Batman warned him exiting the jet a few feet away. "How's the arm?"

"Sore. But I'll live," Clark brushed it off, looking around the area for any signs of an entry. His powers still hadn't returned. No super-hearing. No x-ray vision. No Heat vision. No flying. The only thing he had now was the enhanced strength from the super chip of Dr. Lane's. If Dr. Lane was right then, it would give him the advantage he needed to be able to stop Luthor once and for all.

"Over here," Clark stopped, finding a loose lamp at the entrance. He turned it, and a secret passage opened up.

Bruce came up behind him. "Never a good idea to come in through the front door."

"You got any better ideas?" Clark asked.

"There's a weak stone in the back. I can..."

"I don't have time," Clark said, brushing him off. "I've got to find Lois." Before he could hear his response, he'd already left Batman above ground while he worked his way through the underground tunnels to find Lois.

A bright blue light illuminated in the next room. He watched from the corner as a very drained Resplendent Man stood on one side of a panel with Lex on the other and a young blonde pulled the lever to force the shock of both men through what looked like a large lightning bolt in a long tube behind them.

"How about now?" Dr. Kelly asked.

Lex punched a hole through the wall behind him. "We're getting closer, but it's still not maintaining. Every exertion keeps draining the powers."

"And he's getting weaker..." Dr. Kelly said, looking toward Resplendent Man.

'Weaker?' Clark thought to himself. *'If he's taking the powers from Waldecker and they're not staying...'* An idea began to form in his mind. He looked down the long corridor, willing some sign of his enhanced vision or hearing to kick in but nothing came. 'Eenie, meenie, minie, mo...' He chose the left corridor, praying it would take him to Lois.

"This wasn't part of the deal," Resplendent Man argued angrily. "You can't just hold my sister hostage like this."

"You tried to back out of our deal," Luthor snarled, grabbing him by the collar, "I thought having a reminder of what's at stake nearby would ... encourage you to do the right thing..." A slow smile smoothed over his face with an eerie calm, "Was I wrong?"

Resplendent Man sensed the darkness in Lex's tone and thought it best not to argue. "No...no, of course not."

Code after code had been typed into the keypad lock but nothing so far. Lois jumped back in surprise with a yelp when she saw metal bars rise up from the ground with a green hue. Green. Lois glared at the bars around her. The bars were green. Which most likely meant Kryptonite.

'Focus.' She told herself. *'Pull it together.'*

The lights flickered in the room, and she heard the cries from down the hall. "What in the world?" She wondered aloud.

"Lois!!!" She heard Clark's voice from the tunnels behind her. "Clark!" She turned to see him at the entrance.

She looked around her in dismay, "Don't come any closer. It's Kryptonite and..." She stopped when she saw him stagger toward the cell.

"I'm not leaving," he said between ragged breaths.

To her surprise he began to pry the cell door open, throwing it to the ground. He cried out in agony as he pried the cell bars open, "Clark!"

He was in pain. That much was certain but he was doing it. Despite the pain from the kryptonite he was doing it. Once there was enough room for her to step between the bars she closed the distance between them, helping pull him away from the poisonous bars. "Are you all right?"

She leaned in to kiss him, running her hands up the sides of his face, feeling the clammy skin against her palms, "Are you? How did you even...?"

"Your dad's super-chip," he explained, hurriedly. "I'll explain later, but right now..."

"Clark, about earlier...when you were..." She interrupted.

He shook his head, "Please not here and not now." He leaned in to kiss her. "I don't want an answer like this." He leaned in to kiss her once more, this time with more intensity. His face didn't feel as clammy as before.

"He knows," she said shakily.

"I know." He rested his chin against her forehead.

"He has your powers."

"I know," he said shakily. "He's got Waldecker in some room down there hooked up to some machine, but the powers he's got... they're fading. They're not staying. If I can get him to run them out..."

"Then it'll be a fair fight," she noted, realizing what he was getting at.

"That's good to know," a voice behind them said.

Lois turned to see the Batman with bat-shaped keypad. "Your boyfriend didn't want to wait..." He stopped mid-sentence, examining the bars from the cell Clark had just pried open. "You never do anything the easy way do you?"

Clark let out a shuddered breath, holding her to him, "No time."

Batman tapped the bars sniffing, "Paint. Kryptonite Paint."

"How do you know about Kryptonite?" Lois asked in surprise.

"You'd be surprised at the things I know, Ms. Lane," he responded examining the key lock on her keypad.

"What are you doing?" Clark asked.

"Trying to get rid of the Kryptonite cell bars. They seem to be activated by this code lock," Batman explained. "I figured you'd appreciate the help."

Clark gave him a rueful smile, "Thank you."

"Every little bit helps."

"I've tried every code," she whispered. "The last one made this happen." She pointed to the glowing green bars.

A loud ping could be heard and a click as the cell bars rose up into the ceiling and into the ground. Batman nodded, "091293." He looked at her with a smirk, "Mean anything to you?"

"The day Clark started at the Planet," she whispered, glancing at Clark.

Clark nodded with a grim expression, "And the day of the White Orchid Ball."

Lois grimaced, "The day I met Lex."

"Apparently you made quite an impression." He smirked at the two of them.

"How do we get out of here?" Lois asked.

"We've got to get Waldecker out first," Clark said. "He may not be the best guy, but from the look on his face...it's obvious he's not here of his own free will."

"Could have someone in one of these cells," Batman observed.

"I'll take the left corridor and see what I can find. Meet you at the stairwell."

"Wait..." Before Clark could get his attention, Batman disappeared through the corridor, swinging from a rope he'd flung into the ceiling.

A gust of wind brushed against her face and she turned to see Lex standing in front of them, "Well, well, well, what do we have here?"

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" Lex mocked, advancing toward them with a sinister glare.

"Lois, get back..." Clark warned, placing himself between her and Luthor.

"Yes, please do. So you can have a better view...of your fallen hero!" Lex shot a beam of heat vision toward them and Clark knocked her to the ground, rolling them out of reach.

"Be careful," she whispered in his ear before he helped pull her to her feet, meeting her gaze and giving her a silent plea to 'run'.

She nodded as he turned back toward Luthor. "Luthor!" He growled, advancing toward him. He felt like he had the wind knocked out of him as Luthor sped toward him, grabbing him by the neck.

He found himself hoisted up and thrown into the wall as Luthor taunted with a smile, "Shouldn't you be listed under the endangered species?"

Clark shook himself off, dusting the debris off of himself, smiling when he saw Luthor's surprised expression. "That all you got?"

Taking advantage of Luthor's surprise he tackled him to the ground, "You can't defeat me..." Lex mocked, hoisting him up and grabbing him by the neck once more as he slammed him against the wall, holding him in place. "I know you don't have your powers you ...hack! Such a powerful weapon that Kryptonite is...took months to refine it down into a powder...and render you into the weakling you really are!"

Clark grabbed Lex's hand, pulling his fingers back one by one with the help of the super-chip, watching with a smirk as Lex's face changed from cocky to shock as he slowly began to overpower him, forcing him to the ground as he slammed him against the wall with his arm.

Lex met his gaze uncertainly, "Your...your powers...How is this?"

"Do you know how easily I could kill you!?" Clark slammed Lex against the wall with a jerk, holding him by the collar in anger.

"Probably," Lex breathed hoarsely.

"I warned you you son of a..." Clark growled angrily.

Lex peeled his fingers back, flinging him back against the wall. "You really think you're any match for me?" Lex taunted. "Unlike you ...*ALIEN*...I have no weaknesses!!"

Clark smirked, looking at the blood dripping down Lex's hand from where he'd freed himself of Clark's grasp, "You sure about that?" Before Luthor could respond, he tackled him to the ground, holding him at bay as he hissed, "Not so cocky now that your powers are fading are you, Luthor?" He tightened his grasp on him. "What part of the word '*no*' don't you get, Luthor?"

Lex chuckled, and Clark slammed him against the ground, "You sick, twisted, two-faced sociopath, you could have killed her!"

"I knew what I was doing..." He reached in his pocket. A nauseating pain filled Clark as he loosened his grip on Luthor. To his horror, a tall cage fell around them with green bars...green glowing bars.

"Bars won't hold me, Luthor," Clark managed to moan out as he groaned in pain.

Luthor scowled, kneeling over him as he taunted, "Oh? I think

they will.”

“Tick tock tick tock...” Nigel sang aloud, “I wonder how your president would feel if he knew how unwilling you were to negotiate for him. I say I want all charges against me dropped. You say no. I say I can give you everything you ever wanted to know about Mr. Luthor and where he is hiding and his plans for this city and you still say...no,” Nigel mused. “Why?”

“You’re a murderer and a thug. I’m not letting you back on the streets.”

“Your decision,” Nigel mused with a smile.

Lucy slammed her phone down in frustration. “What’s wrong?” Jimmy asked, looking at her in concern.

“I don’t know,” she said grabbing her things hurriedly. “I can’t get ahold of Lois or Clark.”

Jimmy followed her to the door, “Where are you going?”

“I’ve just got to make sure everything’s okay,” she said hurriedly. “I’ll be back in a jiff.”

“Wait!” He called after her. “I’m coming with you!”

Lex danced around the cage taunting Clark as he cowered in pain from the green glowing bars that surrounded him. “You thought you could destroy me? Take everything from me? Well, now who’s the one with the fear of God in him?” Lex hissed in his ear, taunting him, “How long I’ve feared you, envied you... yet never really knew you.”

“I’ve been assured by my men that your parents and Ms. Lane’s mother have been taken care of...” He continued to taunt him.

Clark did his best not to react, recalling Bruce’s reassurance that an undercover FBI agent had been assigned to Smallville. “You won’t get away with this...”

“Oh, I already have...” Lex snarled happily.

Clark glared at the blood on Luthor’s hand. He stared at the blood as he tried to will his body and mind to ignore the nauseating pain. Luthor was weak right now. No powers. Now was his chance.

Lois watched from the corner as an unfamiliar woman adjusted the dials on a machine hooked up to Resplendent Man and an empty metal dial. “What are you doing?”

“Adjusting the equilibrium,” the woman snapped. “I thought I told you to shut up.”

“Wandamae isn’t going to understand any of this...”

Resplendent Man argued. “You’ve got her trapped...”

“Oh, she will be fine.” The woman rolled her eyes, “Mrs. Lincoln thinks Abe had a bad night at the theater.”

“What???” He snapped outraged.

Lois looked around the dark hallway to see if she could see any sign of this Wandamae they were talking about. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a woman in a long dress and bonnet that looked like it was from the early 1900’s tinkering with the metal bars of her cell.

“That’s got to be Wandamae.” She thought. “Where is he at?” She looked around for Batman.

A dark voice behind her whispered, “His sister was in a cell around the corner.” He pointed to a woman dressed in something out of the early 1900’s.

“Shhh...” She whispered, “They’re going to hear you and...”

“And pull a gun on you?” Lois jumped when she saw the woman from before holding a pistol aimed toward her. “I see you’ve found our little friend.”

Lucy unlocked the front door of Clark Kent’s apartment cautiously. It was eerily quiet. She spotted the candles that had burned down to the wick. There was glass shattered near the

balcony. “Get the candles,” Lucy said hurriedly.

“Should we call the police?” Jimmy asked, blowing out each candle one by one.

“Not yet,” Lucy said, looking around. “I gotta figure out what happened here.”

“Isn’t that the police’s job?” Jimmy asked, watching her look around the room.

“It was also their job to investigate the arson of the Planet and look how that turned out,” Lucy shot back. A small green glowing object in the corner caught her attention. “What in the world is that?”

“Point taken,” He said.

She looked down at the small glowing stone, reaching out to grab it. She’d never seen anything like it. Under careful examination she saw hints of blood on the floor around the stone next to a lead box. A greenish hue washed over her as she stared at the rock.

Memories from after Lois’ trip to Smallville came back to her.

<< “You should have been there, Luce. It was insane. This government rogue agent was convinced this rock or meteorite would kill Superman. He started beating on Clark as if that would get Superman to show up.”

“Did he?”

“No. Of course not. We were in Smallville.”

“Do you think this meteorite really can...kill him?”

“I don’t know.” >>>

“What is that?” Jimmy asked.

Lucy placed the stone inside the box hurriedly, “Um, it’s a collector item of Clark’s.” She slammed the lid shut. “I’m just going to put this up.”

“Is that blood??” Jimmy asked, looking at the floor critically.

Luthor kneeled down in Clark’s face taunting him, “I may not be able to live the life I once had before you but rest assured I’ll make emperors kneel at my feet.”

“They’ll never cave...to the likes...of you,” Clark croaked out.

“Says the man that wasted his time playing hero with the gifts the Gods bestowed on him?” Luthor laughed, “That’s the difference between you and me. While you waste your good fortune away, I, on the other hand, would conquer and enforce...” He smiled slowly. “A true God among men.”

“They’ll stop you...” Clark warned.

“I think not.” Luthor hissed, “You’ll see. As you rot away in this cage...watching as everything is taken from you. Your parents. Gone. Your home...Well soon Metropolis will be mine once more. Thanks to the weapons I’ve secured from HM Weapons I’ll hold the entire world at my mercy... and last but not least, the lovely Lois Lane.”

“You stay away from her...” He hissed back, choking into a coughing fit.

“Ah, yes, the hero fighting for his love,” he sniffed, “Now that I’m the best of both worlds it won’t take very long to woo Ms. Lane back into my arms...” He pat him on the cheek condescendingly, “I may even let you watch as I take her as my bride...”

“She’ll never...”

“Oh, but time has a strange way of working its magic...Just look at what it’s done for you. Taken a woman who barely looked at you...” He gave a light chuckle. “The strongest man in the world...masquerading behind a pair of glasses and a cape.”

“You don’t...love her...could never...love anyone...but your...self.” Clark hissed angrily.

“You could never understand real love...between a real man and a woman. How could you?” He taunted, “You think the fling you shared could compare?” He let out a long sigh, “No, an alien like you could never understand how to love a woman like Lois

Lane.” He chuckled, “You give her an inch she’ll take a mile. Much too independent. That spirit has to be broken and...”

Taking advantage of Luthor’s distraction he tackled him to the ground, holding him at bay as he allowed Luthor to exert himself, striking blows. He grunted in pain but kept his hold. Even with the Kryptonite around him, he could still take the brunt of Luthor’s strikes thanks to the super-chip. “You come near her ever again I’ll kill you,” he growled angrily.

“How ... Is this??” A light bulb went off, and Luthor chuckled, “Of course, the chip. You have Dr. Lane’s Super-Chip.”

Clark smiled when he saw blood coming down Luthor’s arm, “Looks like your time’s up...”

“I still have the upper hand...” Luthor snarled. “This entire place has been lined with Kryptonite hidden on every turn. You’ll never escape. Give me ...that chip!” Luthor growled, fighting against him.

“Your fear’s showing, Luthor,” Clark warned, tightening his grip on him. He could feel the sweat dripping down the back of his neck as he held Luthor at bay. He couldn’t let him leave. Couldn’t let him get another charge of powers from Waldecker.

“I think it’s yours that’s showing Kent!” Luthor grabbed him by the throat, tightening his grasp on him. “There’s always a limit to how much you can take...Stealing my technology?” Luthor clucked his tongue, “Tsk tsk tsk, now is that any way to treat your best enemy?”

“I’m insulted.” A familiar dark voice said from behind. “I thought I was your best enemy.”

“And where do you think you’re going, Ms. Lane?” A voice called from behind her. She turned to see the blonde woman from earlier, pointing a gun at her, Batman and Wandamae.

“Who are you?” Lois breathed, inching herself in front of the oblivious Wandamae.

“Dr. Gretchen Kelly, lead researcher at LexLabs and your worst enemy.” She aimed the gun toward Lois as she looked toward Batman, “Who are you supposed to be?”

“Batman,” he said with a dark whisper as she cocked the trigger, aiming it at Lois, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“I don’t like to see Lex upset, Ms. Lane and you leaving would make him very upset.”

“That’s too bad.” Lois said, backing away from her, “Because we’re not sticking around.” Once there was enough distance she delivered a swift kick to Dr. Kelly’s hand, knocking it to the ground.

She heard a hissing noise from behind her as she reached down to grab the gun and turned to see Dr. Kelly tied up in a tight-fitting rope with a bat shaped clamp securing the rope in the front. “Thanks.” She aimed the gun on Dr. Kelly and smiled, “You were saying?”

“Where’d that nice man go?” Wandamae asked, looking around.

Bruce looked down at his radioactivity sensor that had gone off during his confrontation with Dr. Kelly. After securing her, he’d made his way back to where he’d left Clark. Knowing Luthor he’d probably triggered some other booby-trap lined with Kryptonite. Which meant Clark was going to need his help.

He swung into the dark corridor seeing Clark on top of Luthor inside a glowing green cage. “What is it with you and cages?” He asked, pulling out his handheld computer to override the system.

“You!!!” Luthor snarled angrily upon seeing him.

“Let’s make this a fair fight, shall we?” The kryptonite cage around them soon lifted up, and Clark sighed in relief.

Clark stood to his feet, keeping his hold on Luthor, “It’s over, Luthor!”

Luthor just glared back at him, laughing, “Never.”

Lois kept the gun trained on Dr. Kelly as she made her waddle her way into the blue-lit room. “Wandamae!” Resplendent Man called out happily.

“Tad!” She cheered happily.

“What is this? What are you doing here?” Lois asked, waving the gun at Dr. Kelly,

“Stealing my powers,” Resplendent Man answered guiltily. “He made me do it. He said he was going to kill Wandamae if I didn’t.”

“Who?”

“Lex,” Dr. Kelly answered with a grin.

“He’s powerless now,” Clark said, throwing Luthor to the ground in a heap at Batman’s feet.

Batman cracked his knuckles, “Good. It’ll be a fair fight then.”

“Who are you?” Luthor snarled, backing away from him.

Batman cracked his knuckles, approaching Luthor with a growl, “Someone that wants justice.”

“Wait!” Clark intervened, stepping between them as Batman pulled out a bat-shaped spear, “What are you doing?”

“Making him pay!”

“No!!!”

“Ms. Lane,” Resplendent Man called out, “You have to believe me I didn’t want any part of this.” He now had stepped down from the dial he was on and had helped secure Dr. Kelly in a bind with an empty pipe to ensure she wouldn’t escape out of the binds she’d been secured in by Batman.

“Shut up you little maggot!” Dr. Kelly called at him.

“He was going to kill my Wandamae!” Resplendent Man continued.

“It’s okay,” Lois reassured him. “She’s safe now.” She motioned to the young woman who still appeared to be confused about what was going on.

“Lucy, what is going on?” Jimmy asked, watching as Lucy hurriedly cleaned up the blood stain on the wood floor.

“I know my sister. She wouldn’t want to come back to the apartment like this,” Lucy said hurriedly. I’m sure she’s fine.”

“Oh? Is that why you called Henderson to open an unofficial missing person case on her and CK?” Jimmy asked, kneeling down, “What is going on?”

“Nothing,” Lucy said hurriedly, pushing past him as she rung the paper towel out in the sink.

“You just destroyed evidence,” Jimmy said in a panic. “What if something bad happened to them? What if...?”

“If ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ were candy and nuts we’d have a Merry Christmas,” Lucy shot back. “Everything is fine,” she repeated.

Jimmy stared at her angrily, “Everything is not fine! CK and Lois could be...” A sharp knock at the door interrupted their fight. “Who is that?” He asked annoyed.

“Window repairman probably,” Lucy said with a sigh. “Let him in.”

“Oh, more destruction of evidence,” Jimmy muttered to himself. “Great.”

“I’m going to put you away for the rest of your life,” Bruce sneered as he approached Lex.

“You and what army?” Luthor mocked him, “You’ll never be rid of me.” He backed away from him.

“Put it down!” Clark warned, reaching for the spear.

“You don’t know what he’s done!” Batman snarled. “You’re going to pay.”

“What is it with you heroes and wanting your revenge? What? What have I supposedly done now?”

“Oh, this isn’t recent. You killed a young woman many years ago, and you’re going to pay.”

Realizing who he was talking about Clark reached out to grab the spear from Bruce, "No! Don't!!"

"After everything he's done ..." Bruce snarled, "I'm helping rid the world of this scum bag once and for all."

"You do it and you're no better than him," Clark warned, grabbing him from behind and holding him down.

"He's a murderer!!" Bruce hissed. "Let me go!"

"I am NOT letting you do this!" Clark hissed in his ear.

"She was an innocent girl, and he destroyed her," Bruce snarled as he fought against Clark. "Let go!"

"Not a chance!" Clark warned, "He's going to see justice but not at your hands."

"You don't understand..." Batman hissed angrily.

"I understand plenty, but you don't have all the facts."

"He's a murderer."

"True but not for who you think," Clark said in a harsh whisper. "That night Darlene Richmond disappeared is the same night Luthor's parents died. Two days later a woman by the name of Beverly Cox was murdered...and in her place a woman who looked strikingly similar to..."

"What are you saying?" Bruce looked back at him, his struggling in Clark's grasp came to a halt.

Clark met his gaze as he released him, and took a deep breath, "She's not dead...but she's not the same person you knew."

"How is this possible?"

"She's been working with him this whole time. Helping him commit crime after crime," Clark explained, handing the picture to Bruce. "She's killed at least twenty people that we know of."

Bruce stared at him in dismay, "She was a good kid." He managed weakly.

"Not anymore." Clark said solemnly, "I'm sorry."

Bruce looked around, "Where'd Luthor go?"

Luthor had inched his way toward the exit and was almost at the stairwell when he looked back to see Superman holding Batman back. He could still escape. He could still get another charge of powers and...

"Going somewhere Lex?"

He came face to face with the beautiful Lois Lane holding a gun on him with Resplendent Man and Wandamae behind her.

"We're going to put you away for the rest of your life!"

Resplendent Man said in a growl. "No one hurts Wandamae and gets away with it!"

"Ah, my dear, Lois, I see you've found my little pet project..." He glared at Resplendent Man, "Just a few modifications and rest assured Superman's powers will be mine. Then we can be together once more..."

"Are you out of your mind?" Lois hissed. "I don't want anything to do with you!" She scowled back at him in disgust, "You think it's his *powers*? That's what you think!?"

"You're not getting any more powers," Resplendent Man shot back. "I'm done taking orders from you!"

"Then I suppose Wandamae will have to find a new home for her...special care," Lex glared back at him sinisterly.

"You monster!" Resplendent Man argued.

"And you wonder why I didn't want to be with you?" Lois shot back. "This! The games and the manipulation and the power play you try to force on others...Trying to prevent a sick woman from getting medical care? You are *sick*!"

"Let's not mix words Lois. It was obvious Superman seduced you with his powers..."

Lois glared at him angrily, "He most certainly did *not*!"

"Oh, puh-leaze, someone sure does think highly of himself..." Resplendent Man muttered. "I'm sure your radiant personality had a lot to do with that one, buddy!" Lex glared at him but Resplendent Man glared back, unaffected by his intimidation tactics knowing Wandamae was safe.

"You want the truth? Here's the truth, plain and simple. I didn't *love* you. I thought I *respected* you, but that went out the window the minute I learned what you were *really* doing to the people of Metropolis. Murder? Testing on Children. Testing Superman by blowing up buildings!?"

"Kidnapping a mentally ill woman," Resplendent Man added.

"A means to an end," he remarked, "Surely you can understand there are casualties in war."

"On a battlefield. Not on the streets of Metropolis where innocent people expect to be safe," Lois shot back.

"You should be ashamed of yourself," Resplendent Man said with a low growl.

"There he is!" Clark's voice echoed down the hall.

Luthor looked to see both Superman and Batman coming toward him from either side. The sound of sirens could be heard from outside. Panicked he looked between the heroes.

"We called the police," Lois said smugly. "From Dr. Kelly's phone. How long have you been stringing that poor woman along?"

Seeing the escape ladder leading up to the roof he made a break for it, "You'll never take me alive!"

"It's over Luthor!" Clark called after him.

"The police have the entire block cornered out. There's no escape."

As he climbed the ladder he heard the door to the stairwell open. Panicked he looked around. He would never give them the satisfaction of taking him alive. He spotted the fuse box on the wall and reached for it.

"Waldecker, cut the power lines, now!" Clark called out.

Just as he reached for the cables inside the box everything went dark. "You can't cheat justice, Luthor," Batman called after him. A moment later he felt someone drag him off the ladder as handcuffs were slapped on his wrists and shackles on his ankles.

"It's over," the familiar voice of Inspector Henderson said smugly.

Once Luthor was taken away kicking and screaming Lois turned toward Clark in the candlelit corridor, "Are you alright?"

He reached over to wrap his arms around her, "I am now. " He cupped her cheek, "Are you?"

"I'm fine." She smiled back at him. She looked back toward Bruce who was fiddling with the machine Dr. Kelly was working on with Resplendent Man hovering over him. "What is he doing?"

"Trying to find a way to make the machine drain his powers," Clark said with a chuckle, "Apparently being a superhero isn't all it's cracked up to be."

She smiled, leaning into him, "I was so afraid..."

"I know," he sighed, holding her close. "Me too." He kissed her forehead, "It's over."

"Finally," she said with a grin.

"Finally," he repeated, cupping her cheek. "God, I was so afraid I wasn't going to get to you and he was..."

"I'm fine," she reassured him, leaning in to kiss him.

"I love you," he murmured against her cheek.

"I love you too." She whispered, "So much...which is why I wanted to..."

He stopped her, "Please not here."

"But..."

"I really don't want either of us having this night linked to the memory of when I asked ..." He tightened his lips into a thin line. It was hard for him to even say it. "Not now. Once Luthor's behind bars and secure under maximum security with no hope of escaping we can talk about it and ..."

"Okay," Lois said, taking a shaky breath. "It's okay." She gave him a weak smile.

"I think we've figured it out," Bruce interrupted, motioning for them to follow him. He pointed a flashlight toward the wall,

"We did solve one mystery already."

Lois and Clark looked where he was pointing. The power lines were plugged into the machine, "It's hooked into the powerlines..."

"The power surges," Lois breathed. "That's what's been causing them."

"Bingo," Bruce said. "They were close, but the telemetry and negative positive settings were reversed. I think it's ready for us to test."

"Test?" Clark looked at him confused.

"Time to return the powers to their rightful owner," Bruce said with a smile.

"Is it safe?" Lois asked concerned.

"I'm about 99% sure it'll work," Bruce said. "It's up to you, but Mr. Waldecker wants the powers gone."

"Okay, let's do it," Clark nodded. He stepped onto the dial Bruce pointed to and watched as Resplendent Man did the same.

"Let me know when you're ready," Bruce said.

Clark took a deep breath, preparing himself as Lois lowered the goggles over her eyes to protect them from the light. "Now."

The room filled in a bright illuminating light. Lois watched as the dial slowly moved back down. Bruce turned the switch off and looked to the two men. "How do you feel?"

"Sore," Waldecker said.

Clark took a deep breath, stepping off the dial, "How do you feel?" Lois asked, looking at him.

He tightened his muscles, and started testing his powers. All were coming in perfectly, "Super," he whispered.

Six Weeks Later...

LEX LUTHOR INDICTED!

LEXCORP BANKRUPT

LUTHOR CHARITIES TAKEN OVER BY SUPERMAN FOUNDATION

DAILY PLANET REBUILD SUCCESS

Lois walked with Clark toward the Planet where Perry had asked them to meet him. Things had been awkward the last few weeks. Finding out that Bruce Wayne was none other than the mysterious Batman and that he knew Clark's identity had been a lot to digest but also having Clark not want to talk about his proposal while he was still dealing with his testimony against Luthor in the Federal Trial had been even harder.

He'd said they could talk about his proposal after the trial. The decision had come down on Monday, and it was now Wednesday. Thursday Lex would be sentenced, and this mess would be behind them. Then hopefully she and Clark could talk about a certain question he had been in the middle of asking her when Lex had arrived at his apartment.

Thanks to Bruce's help they'd been able to scan the entire apartment to make sure no residue of the poisonous rock was left. Clark had brought her mom back to Metropolis after dropping Lex off at the FBI. Their father had come out of witness protection once all the lieutenants had been picked up. Darlene Richmond had been caught trying to flee the country. They'd been surprised to discover that she had been the love interest of both Bruce and Lex. When she hadn't returned after Lex's parents' murder and Lex had, Bruce had assumed the worst. It had come as quite a shock to learn that she'd become a professional killer under the teachings of Lex Luthor.

Every agent and every lieutenant had been arrested at the same time, preventing Lex to reach outside the prison walls to intimidate witnesses while awaiting trial. It had been the perfect arrest. The perfect case. Now, it was over.

"So, how are you feeling?" Clark asked, taking her hand in his.

"Good," she smiled back at him. "I think I'll frame this one."

She pointed to the story with her and Clark's by-line on it under the title, 'Fall of the House of Luthor: Federal Corruption Exposed!'

"That one was a good one." He smiled back at her.

"Was?" She challenged.

"Sorry," he apologized. "It's a very good story."

"Much better." She grinned back at him, tightening her hand around his, "How are you? I mean, now that the trial's over?"

"Well, there's still the sentencing..." Clark pointed out.

"I thought Bruce said he was handling that," Lois noted critically.

"He is, but I still want to be there." He stated solemnly, "Make sure the cell door is locked tight, and he can't get out again."

"And him knowing about..." She gave him a flying signal they had begun to use when talking about Superman in public.

"Considering he's being dubbed insane and sent to a mental institution I highly doubt that will become an issue. Bruce said he's recommending he's sent to Arkham so he can keep an eye on him."

"Good," Lois said softly. They approached the Planet in silence, finding Perry in front with Bruce Wayne and a crowd of their co-workers outside the front of the Planet.

"Mr. Kent," Bruce nodded, "Ms. Lane," He gave them both a firm handshake. "Thank you for coming."

"I didn't know we had a choice," Lois observed looking around. "Looks like the Planet's just about ready."

Perry grinned ear to ear. "We open up tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" She grinned, "Really?" It had been cramped working with Clark in shared office space, but once Jimmy had been released, it had become even more cramped. She'd found herself working in the Conference Room and floating everywhere to have space to work. It was hard.

Given everything that had happened these past few weeks with Clark being consumed with Lex's case and adjusting to living together after the attack, it would be good to have some normalcy again. There was something so comforting about the big Daily Planet globe. She watched with a grin as the crew unveiled the globe on top of the newly expanded building of the Daily Planet.

The staff that had been working to keep the Paper running the past few months from Wayne Towers was huddled in front of the building, staring in awe at the familiar globe. There were cheers and applause scattered throughout.

"That's not the best part of the news though," Perry grinned, pulling out an envelope. "As you know this time of the year is the time for Kerth Nominations..."

There were some scattered hollers in the crowd, and Perry motioned for them to settle down. "This year's nominations I'm proud to say, included three nods for reporters from the Daily Planet."

"One of these was written during the time the office was displaced, showing true potential," Bruce interjected.

Clark wrapped an arm around Lois with a knowing smile, "You've got it in the bag."

Lois gave him a half-smile and whispered, "Good luck."

"The first nominee goes to our very own Ralph Simms for his series on Political Corruption in City Hall." Perry read off. "Congratulations son. That was top notch work."

"Thanks, Chief," Ralph called out.

"Our next nominee goes to Catherine Grant, and her expose on Arthur Chow and his illegal gambling deals." Lois did her best not to laugh, recalling how angry Cat was when she had been dumped by the billionaire for a belly dancer. In revenge, she'd written an expose on his dealings with the illegal gambling casinos.

Bruce interjected, "Unfortunately, Ms. Grant is no longer with the Planet. After the arson, she moved to California to pursue a career in the Fashion Industry. We wish her the best of luck."

"I'm told she will be coming to the awards this year though,"

Perry reassured them. “The last nominee he grinned ear to ear as he read, “Well, it’s actually a team.” His eyes sparkled as he looked toward Lois and Clark. She grinned, bumping her hip with Clark’s.

“They’ve worked hard to make a name for themselves this year, and cracked open some of the biggest cases like the more recent ‘Fall of the House of Luthor Series.’ However, the story getting the nod this year is the ‘Metamide Series on Assassin Darlene Richmond.’ Congratulations to both Lois Lane and Clark Kent on their first nomination as a reporting team. In the newspaper business, this is when we say you’ve arrived.”

Clark leaned into kiss her, whispering, “Congratulations, Ms. Lane.”

“Congratulations, Mr. Kent,” she whispered back.

There was an eruption of cheers and congratulations all around as Bruce Wayne motioned for everyone to follow him inside to show them the new facilities. The same technology everyone had gotten used to at WayneTech was now running the Daily Planet. The setup was the same with their familiar desks and Perry’s office. It was home.

“Hey, huge congrats!” Jimmy said, offering her a big hug. “You and CK will cream Ralph.”

Lois chuckled, “Yeah, I’m sure we will.” She spotted Clark in the corner of the newsroom talking with Perry. He kept looking in her direction then back again.

“So, Lois?” Jimmy interrupted her thoughts, “I’ve been meaning to talk to you about Lucy...”

“Lucy?” Lois asked, pulling her attention back to Jimmy.

“Yeah,” he said uneasily. “I’ve been going over this over and over in my mind and I still can’t make heads or tails about what happened last month...”

She looked back at him in concern, “What do you mean?”

“Remember when Lucy told you she cleaned up CK errr yours and CK’s apartment after your run-in with Luthor?”

Lois shifted uncomfortably, “Yeah.”

“She didn’t tell you the whole story,” Jimmy whispered.

“There was blood...and a broken window. She cleaned it all up. Why would she do something like that?”

“She said she wanted to make sure the place was cleaned up by the time we got back. It’s just the way Lucy is,” Lois said hurriedly. When Lucy had given her the ‘unusual rock’ she’d found and told her what had happened it had confirmed her suspicions that she knew about Clark, but she never said anything. Now here Jimmy was trying to figure things out...

“I guess, but...Lois, that was evidence. What if something had happened and the police needed it?”

“Lucy would never destroy something she knew was evidence. She knew how traumatic I was about returning to the apartment after what had happened with Lex a few months ago. She just didn’t want us going through that again.”

“I guess...” He gave a weak smile, still not quite convinced.

Deciding she needed to distract Jimmy, she arched an eyebrow, “Why do I get the feeling this isn’t about what happened last month but rather what’s going on...or *not* going on between you and my sister?”

“What are you talking about?” Jimmy chuckled nervously.

“Let’s see, you two have been connected at the hip since you got out. I saw that kiss the night of your congratulatory dinner. What’s going on?”

Jimmy ran a nervous hand through his hair, “When she came back she said she wasn’t ready for a relationship. I’m respecting her wishes and giving her her space.”

“That was nearly seven months ago!” Lois said in surprise then said in a huff, “Talk to her.” She patted him on the shoulder. She then pointed toward Perry, “I’ve gotta go talk to the Chief.”

“Talk to her?” Jimmy muttered to himself.

Lois walked up to Perry, spotting Clark in conversation with

Bruce about what she could only imagine was related to their recent friendship as crime fighters. “Hey, Chief,” Lois said pulling Perry’s attention to her.

“Lois!” He smiled, “How you doin darlin’?” He grinned broadly, “Congratulations on your fourth nomination.”

“Thanks, Chief,” she said with a grin. “I guess this is a first for me. Sharing a nomination.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out,” Perry reasoned.

“So what were you and Clark talking about earlier?” She asked, cutting to the chase.

“Uh, Graceland,” Perry said rather quickly.

“Graceland?” Lois asked, looking at him in confusion. “Yes, Graceland. Great place. Been there thirteen times. Did you know that’s where Alice and I had our Honeymoon?” Perry began rambling about his last trip to Graceland and Lois looked back toward Clark who was still in conversation with Bruce Wayne. Something was definitely up.

“I’ve got the keys. You can just drop them...” Bruce stopped and turned. Clark followed his gaze, “Ms. Lane, Congratulations on your...what is this third nomination?”

“Fourth,” Clark corrected before she could respond, wrapping an arm around her.

“Thank you, Mr. Wayne,” she said in a careful tone, looking between the two men. “Why do I get the feeling you’re trying to change the subject the minute I walked over here?” Lois asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

“No clue,” Bruce said, handing her a glass of champagne.

“Here. Cheers.” He held up his glass.

She clinked her glass with his and Clark’s, but Clark could tell she wasn’t buying it for a minute. He suppressed a chuckle. She’d just have to wonder for another twelve hours. He’d been working with Perry and Bruce on this for weeks now.

After everything that had happened after his botched proposal he wanted to make sure it was a happy memory for both of them. He’d toyed with the idea of taking her back to Venice and doing a reset of that night, but after everything, he thought a new approach would be best.

“You’re not fooling me.” Lois said, “I know you’re both hiding something.”

“You must be one of those kids that never had a surprise party growing up,” Bruce commented.

“Nope.”

“Pity,” Bruce remarked. “So much fun.”

Lois looked at them critically, arching her eyebrow at them. Clark cleared his throat, hoping to distract her, “Uh, did you hear anything on the trial for Darlene?” He asked, turning to Bruce.

Bruce shook his head, “No, I’ve done my best to stay away from that case. The person she’s become...” Bruce scowled, “She’s not the same person I met at Westminster. I don’t know if that’s Luthor’s doing or some of her own, but the choices she made...”

“What’s scary is how long she and Lex were using that formula of Dr. Carlton’s to silently kill people that got in their way.” Lois took a sip of her champagne.

“If you two hadn’t have put two and two together a lot of families wouldn’t have gotten justice.” Bruce said wistfully, “It still eats me up that Wayne Enterprises got mixed up with a character like Carlton to begin with. Taking advantage of those kids like that...”

“Sometimes we see what we want to see,” Lois said giving Clark’s hip a gentle nudge.

“Believe me, I know all about...” A call on his cell phone pulled Bruce and Clark back to the present. Bruce looked down at his phone and grimaced. “I’ve gotta take this.” He patted Clark on the shoulder, “I’ll see you around.”

Lois turned to look at him, “Well?”

“Well, what?” He shrugged.

“What’s going on? Why are you over here having secret meetings with Perry and Bruce?”

“Who says I’m having secret meetings?” Clark asked.

“What were you talking to Bruce about?”

“He was congratulating me....us,” he said, cupping her cheek.

“What was that about a key?” She asked.

“Uh, he’s got a new jet he’s wanting to test out,” he shrugged.

“Ah,” she nodded, not quite believing him. “And Perry?”

“Congratulating us on the Kerth,” he grinned.

“And?” She looked at him expectantly.

“And nothing,” he chuckled nervously. She was really cute when she got all worked up.

“Oh, really,” she grinned back at him as if she’d caught him in something.

“What?” He asked.

“Perry said you were talking about Graceland.” She smiled, leaning in to kiss him, “I don’t like surprises.”

He grinned, “Who said anything about a surprise?”

“I’m going to find out what you’re hiding.”

“I’m sure you will.” He leaned in to kiss her.

The next morning, Lois Lane walked through the doors of the Daily Planet, taking note of the quiet lull in the lobby. Today was the first day the Planet’s Metropolis office would be open for business. The first day she and Clark and Jimmy and everyone would be back working at the Planet since the bombing.

She spotted Perry standing by the elevator doors, looking around the lobby that seemed less populated for it being the first day back. “Morning, Perry, what are you doing down here so late?” She glanced at her watch, “You’re usually elbow-deep in red ink by now, aren’t you?”

He pressed the call button for the elevator and motioned for her to get on. She looked behind her, watching as he waved at her from the closing doors. Curious but uncertain what to make of her editor’s peculiar behavior she pressed the button for the newsroom, listening as the elevator hummed to life. She tried not to think about the last time she was in the Daily Planet elevator.

‘*Stop it.*’ She chastised herself. ‘*Everything’s fine.*’

Before she knew it, the elevator dinged, signaling the arrival on the newsroom floor. Or at least she thought it was the newsroom floor. She stepped out of the elevators and found the room was completely dark, minus the led candles that were lit, leading to the center of the newsroom. She glanced at the wall where the elevator doors had just closed, eying the ‘wallpaper’ that had been taped up. It was the first article she and Clark had written on the sabotage of Prometheus. She touched the print that had their first by-line together.

She turned toward the stairs where another article was taped to the railing of the stairs with a red circle around the by-line. She smiled when she recognized the article as her first one on one interview with Superman. Next to it was an article she recognized. The one-on-one interview Clark had written announcing Superman’s intention to stay in Metropolis. The article he’d ‘scooped’ her on and sent her on a wild goose chase at the Metropolis Sewage Reclamation Facility. A small smile spread across her face as she made her way down the steps finding article after article she and Clark had written together. The Invisible Man. The Smart Kids. Finally, she reached the bottom of the steps and found the article on the boxing scandal with Menken’s Gym. The first article they’d written as partners.

The soft brush of cold air crossed her face, and she looked up to see Clark standing in front of her, “I couldn’t leave that one out. First article we wrote as partners.” He smiled, reaching out to cup her cheek.

Overwhelmed, she looked around the room that was illuminated by candles and newspaper articles, “Clark, what is

going on?”

He pulled her to him, taking her hand in his, pointing to the next article that was taped on the first column in the newsroom pit, “This one is special. You were convinced to have a bad time, but by the end of it you were having fun.”

Lois smiled, recognizing the article as the one she’d written on Jason Trask’s demise. “That was when I realized you were more than just my partner, but my friend,” she recalled.

“Mmm, hmm,” He guided her to the center of the room where a heart shape had been formed with the candles, “We both realized that.” His fingers laced between hers, holding her palm in his as he met her eyes with his.

She stroked his cheek, “Clark, what is all this?”

“The walk down memory lane?” He grinned back at her.

“Something like that,” she whispered.

“I love you.” He whispered, “I almost lost you.” His voice cracked at his last statement.

“Clark...” She stroked his cheek.

“I almost lost you, and it made me realize how precious life is. I don’t want to waste another second without saying what’s been in my heart since the beginning. I love you, Lois Lane. I have loved you from the moment you barged into my interview with Perry. I have loved you during every fight. I have loved you during every close call we’ve both been in. I love you when you babble. I love that you cry when you get mad. I love the way you refuse to give up. I love the way you light up when you’re on the tail of a good lead. I love that you demand truth and justice in a world that is so broken, demanding it be a better place. I love that you make every day, everything, and every moment that much better. I love the way you crinkle your nose when you’re trying to figure a problem out. I love the way you steal my clothes. I love the way you keep your organized chaos in everything you do. I love the fact that I can smell your perfume when you get ready in the bathroom for days. I love you, and I have loved you through it all. I have never and will never stop loving you.”

Lois felt tears forming in her eyes as he spoke, pouring his heart out to her. She bit her lower lip, holding back the tears as he continued, holding her hands in his, “I told you before I want to grow old with you. I want everything with you, Lois. I want to die in your arms when I’m 110. I want it all with you, now. Not, six months or a year from now. I want it all with you, now. I want to start our life together and never look back. You save me from myself without even realizing it.” He motioned to the room around them, “This. *All of this* wouldn’t be possible without you, Lois. Every article here. The building we’re standing in. All of it is because of you. I can’t imagine my life without you standing by my side. You are the first person I want to talk to when I wake up and the last person I want to talk to when I go to sleep at night. You complete me.”

He dropped to his knee, pulling out a familiar black velvet jewelry box, opening it to reveal a ¾ karat diamond ring, “Oh, my God! Is that for me?”

He smiled back at her, “It is if you want it to be. Will you marry me, Lois Lane?”

She didn’t need to think. She didn’t need to ponder. Immediately she knew the answer.

“Yes. Oh, my God! Yes! A million times yes,” she cried, wrapping her arms around him. His mouth found hers, cupping her cheek as he ran his hands through her hair, holding her to him as he slipped the ring on her finger.

His arms encircled her waist, and the lights around them came on. In the back of her mind, she could hear a soft ping of the elevator and cheering from her co-workers. Slowly they pulled apart and saw Perry with the crowd, pointing everyone to the Conference Room that was decorated with balloons and a large ‘Congratulations’ banner.

From Perry's office, Lucy watched with a small smile as Clark held Lois close. The ring on Lois' hand sparkled against the overhead lights in the Newsroom. "Good for you, sis," she whispered. After all the chaos she had been through with Lois and Clark the more determined she became to keep Clark's secret; even from him. It was safer this way. She suspected Lois knew that she was onto them after she had given her the green meteorite she'd found, but she continued to pretend she didn't know her now future brother-in-law moonlighted in tights. She pretended not to know and let Clark feel a sense of security around her. Maybe one day she'd tell him but today was not the day.

One hand settled on her shoulder from behind, and she jumped, turning behind her to see Jimmy holding a piece of cake, "I stole a corner piece." He handed it to her.

"Thanks," she grinned back at him.

"Pretty cool, huh?" Jimmy pointed to the crowd where Lois and Clark were standing. "How do you feel about your big sister getting married?"

"All I can say is it's about time," Lucy grinned. "They seem to really love each other."

"Yeah, well they were really good friends; helps make for a good relationship," Jimmy observed.

"True." Lucy sighed, taking a bite of her cake. "We're really good friends too, you know."

"I know." He nodded with a smile. "You fought harder for me than anyone from what Lois said."

"I couldn't let them lock you up for something you didn't do," Lucy whispered quietly.

"Thank you for that, Luce. These past few weeks have been... intense. You've been a good friend," he whispered taking her hand in his.

"A good friend," she repeated. Not sure what to make of his statement.

"Yeah," he smiled at her. "You said you wanted to be friends when you moved back. Nothing complicated."

"And you've been great at being a *good friend*," she emphasized '*good friend*' once more.

"Something bothering you?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes! You!" She huffed, "How much more do I have to spell it out for you before you Get a freaking clue??"

"Spell what out?" He asked confused.

"This!" She grabbed him by the face and pulled him to her, capturing his mouth with hers. Before he could react, she pulled away then said, "You really should pay more attention, Jimmy."

With that, she got up to head toward the newsroom where Lois and Clark were still shaking hands with fellow co-workers looking to congratulate them.

"Whoa!" Jimmy whispered to himself, before getting up to follow Lucy, "Hey, Luce, wait up!"

Maniacal laughter filled the halls as four strong guards carried an enraged Lex Luthor to his cell. Due to the warning, Superman had given them about Lex Luthor's attempt at suicide he had been forcibly placed in a straight jacket and shackled to prevent him from harming himself.

"No, no, I don't belong here. Don't you know who I am?" Lex raged as he fought against his restraints.

They stopped in front of a large iron door, and the taller of the guards pounded on it three times. The door unlocked, revealing a tall blonde in a lab coat with a dark green mini skirt and pale gray blouse that was just barely professional. "Dr. Quinzel," the first guard cleared his throat, seeming to have a battle with gravity of the eyes as he forced himself not to look down, keeping her gaze as he spoke.

She shook her hand at him, stroking his cheek seductively, "Oh, Dave, how many times have I told you? Call me Harley."

"Yes, ma'am, uh, Har-Harley..." He stammered,

uncomfortably as she toyed with his collar, gazing at Lex with a quizzical expression. Lex watched as the doctor continued to toy with the guard just before he let out a soft groan she turned her attention to Lex.

"You must be, Mr. Luthor. I've been waiting for you," she slinked toward him seductively running a hand through his hair. "All that money and prestige... just to wind up in Arkham Asylum with every nut bag that's had a grudge against the mythical Batman. Trying to bring down a legend. You boys will never learn, will you? Quite a fall from grace isn't it, Lex?"

Fury filled him as she pointed out how far he'd fallen from his failed attempts to bring Superman down only to have himself thrown into a mental institution and have him stripped of everything: his power, his money, his good name, and most of all... Lois Lane. Superman would pay for this along with his new friend, Bruce Wayne. He just had to bide his time.

"Alexander Luthor, transferred from Shady Brook Hospital of New Troy with a recommendation for isolation."

"Really? Let me see that." She grabbed the file from which the guard was reading. Her eyes sparkled as she read the report in front of her, "My, my, Lex, you have been a bad boy, haven't you?" He glared at her angrily, not trusting himself to speak without giving too much of himself away. "Kidnapping attempted mass murder, arson... tsk tsk tsk... Well, don't worry, Lexy," He cringed at the pet name as she ran a hand through this hair once more, "we've got just the thing to fix you right up..."

She turned to the guards, "Put him in with Mr. J." Her nose scrunched up with a smile as the guards around him laughed, carrying him toward the cell at the end of the hallway.

"No isolation?" Dave asked.

She laughed, "Since when do I take recommendations seriously. I know what I'm doing. Toss him in with Mr. J for a few hours, and we'll meet for our first session after lunch." She then stroked Lex's face, "You're in luck. Today is red jello."

The hallway where the maniacal laughter seemed to be getting louder and louder. "What is this? You can't do this..." He argued, trying to gain some sort of leverage to free himself but found the efforts futile as the metal door opened, revealing the distorted figure of a man with clown makeup and scars along his face. Immediately he recognized who he was face to face with and he struggled against the guards. "No! No! No!!!!"

"Meet your new roommate, Lex. I'm sure you two will be best friends." One of the guards jeered as he threw Lex to the ground. Laughter filled the room as the painted faced man approached him with a grin.

Soft waves hit the shore on a small island off the coast of the Caribbean. The sandy white beaches were scattered with children as they played on one side of the beach. On the other side was a small quaint out of the way luxurious beach house with green shuttered windows and matching doors. On the front door, a '*Do Not Disturb*' sign hung loosely on the silver knob.

Inside the room the window was left open to allow the soothing sounds of the ocean as a couple laid together, tangled up in one another. Clark glanced over at Lois with a slow smile, "Hi."

"Hi," She whispered back, turning in his arms to face him. "I had the strangest dream. I dreamt we actually got married yesterday."

"Really? That's weird. I had the same dream." He smiled back at her, taking her left hand in his, running his thumb over the newly placed wedding band. "I love you, Mrs. Kent."

"I love you, Mr. Kent," she giggled, pulling him into her arms for a soul-shattering kiss.

THE END