

Birthday Surprise

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Summary: On a boring Tuesday evening Kristen has to spend her birthday working by herself at the music store. Then the most popular boy on campus comes into the store and things take a very unusual turn.

Author's Notes: I do not usually write Lois and Clark stories but the idea for this little 'short' story just came out of left field one day and demanded my attention. Once I began writing it the thing just began to grow and grow until what started out to be a short little vignette snowballed into a much longer and more complicated story. So, for what it's worth, here is my second Lois and Clark story.

Just a little shout out to Nan Smith: This story was inspired by the incident of the waitress with the green bracelet in her "Home" series, but the incident in my story involves different characters and goes in a radically different direction.

This story starts many years after the end of the series and involves Lois and Clark's oldest son.

Disclaimer: *This story is based on the television series "Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman". The recognizable characters and settings in this story are the property of D.C. Comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions, and anyone else with a legal right to them, and I have no claim on them whatsoever, nor am I profiting by their use. The story, however, is a product of my own imagination. No infringement on copyrights is intended. This story is presented merely for the enjoyment of fans.*

Chapter 1

Kristen glanced around the quiet music store where she was working. It was Tuesday evening and the store was empty except for her. She rested her chin on her hand and sighed as she looked out the front of the store into the nearly empty mall. There were no kids in the store because most of them were at the free concert being given in the park by a currently popular local rock group. Kristen had really wanted to go to that concert but her boss had scheduled her to work nearly every evening this week since he would be out of town. To top it off, Stephanie, who was a senior at her school and was supposed to also be working today, had called in sick so Kristen was here alone tonight. What a lousy way to spend her seventeenth birthday.

Thinking of her birthday brought her attention to her new bracelet. It was a birthday present from her older brother, Christopher, along with the matching necklace and earrings. Her brother was in his first year in college and wanted to go for a degree in geology. He was also an amateur jeweler. By combining his interest in collecting unusual stones with his interest in creating jewelry and his natural artistic flair, he had managed to make a modest amount of spending money by selling his creations. He had also come up with some very beautiful pieces for their mother. The set that he had made for Kristen's birthday had crystals that were her favorite color mounted on silver jewelry that had been shaped into Celtic interlacing designs. The resulting pieces were exquisitely beautiful.

Christopher looked nothing like an artistic craftsman. He was six foot five and built like a football linebacker. In fact, he did love football and was going to college on a football scholarship as a linebacker on the varsity team. Kristen was barely five foot even and very slender of build, with long wavy brown hair and dark eyes set in a delicate pixie-like face. At first glance, those that didn't know her would have taken her for thirteen or fourteen years old. Two more mismatched siblings would be hard to find, yet they had always been very close.

She was brought out of her distracted reverie by the sounds of someone flipping through the CD racks and glanced over toward the front of the store. The Johnson boys were there and the oldest was surreptitiously watching her. Those three were trouble and she knew by the look on the oldest boy's face that they were up to no good (as usual). She picked up the phone, ready to call security if necessary. The oldest boy said something to his two brothers and the three of them turned and walked out of the store, acting all casual and innocent.

A minute later she walked over to where they had been and found a stack of CDs, that had all come from that part of the rack, shoved underneath the rack where they would normally not be noticed. She pulled them out and, after checking that they were still sealed, put them back where they belonged. Well, that had managed to kill a few more minutes of her boring shift. She glanced around and, seeing nothing else to do, went back to the checkout counter and back to her daydreaming.

After a few minutes Kristen was again gazing around the store in boredom. Her gaze fell on the poster of Superboy hanging on the opposite wall and she sighed. They had just gotten in a shipment of those posters last week. She had bought one that same day and it was now hanging on the inside of her bedroom door.

The only good picture of Superboy had been taken by an amateur photographer who had been lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. The photographer had sold the picture for a small fortune and now Kristen was staring at a blown-up two-foot by four-foot copy of that same picture. It had apparently been taken just as Superboy was lifting off. It showed him facing three quarters toward the camera, looking upward, his arm raised and tilted slightly forward, and about a foot above the ground.

Superboy had first appeared about eight months ago during one of the worst thunderstorms in recent history. A light rain had suddenly and unexpectedly transformed into a massive monsoon-level downpour. The suddenness of the terrible storm had taken everyone by surprise and caused a massive chain reaction pileup on the interstate. Over a hundred cars had been involved. Her own father had been caught in the middle of it, though he had fortunately been unhurt, and the car had only lost a bit of paint from the front bumper and the left rear fender. Emergency crews had been unable get through because of the blocked highway and the heavy rainfall.

Superboy had showed up with Superman. The two of them had quickly transported the paramedics and their emergency equipment to the scene. Then under the paramedics' direction, Superboy had worked on freeing people trapped in their cars, starting with the most seriously injured first. As soon as he got them out of their vehicles the paramedics treated their injuries enough to stabilize them. Meanwhile, Superman had dealt with two tanker trucks that had jackknifed and had started the chain reaction pileup. One carried gasoline, the other liquid oxygen. A very dangerous combination if ever there was one.

Once Superman had dealt with the tanker trucks he began transporting the injured that had been stabilized to the local hospital while Superboy had continued helping the paramedics remove and treat the remaining victims. After all of the injured had been taken care of they had transported the uninjured

motorists with disabled vehicles to a local shelter. Finally after all the people that needed help had been taken care of Superman and Superboy had moved all the badly damaged vehicles off to the side of the road.

Superboy's first appearance caused quite a feeding frenzy in the general media and over the next few days several names were suggested in the newspapers for the new young superhero including Superson, Superman Junior, Superman II, Superkid, and Superboy. In the end Superboy had stuck.

Since that time Superboy had appeared about a half dozen times though he had yet to stick around long enough for anyone to interview. The only thing that Superman had said about him was to acknowledge that Superboy was his son. Kristen's mind wandered to the radio report that she had heard on her way to work a few hours ago. While Superman had been busy in West Virginia rescuing a couple of dozen coal miners from a collapsed mine, Superboy had rescued several people from a burning building in uptown Metropolis.

Kristen was thinking that if there was a son of Superman then there must be a wife of Superman somewhere out there. This led to her picturing herself encircled in Superboy's strong arms as they both lifted off into the sky together. She sighed again. Oh, to dream the impossible dream.

Her attention was drawn back to earth by the sound of someone entering the store. She looked over and was surprised to see the 'other' object of her romantic fantasies as Jonathan Kent entered the store. She sighed again. Jonathan Kent, oldest of the four Kent children, was the most popular senior at her high school. He was one grade ahead of her and the hottest guy on campus, a tall athletic drop-dead hunk with a personality that invited friendship. The rumor was that he was currently going with the head cheerleader but the word was also going around that it was strictly casual and he was still available. She called out a standard greeting to him as he headed toward the back half of the store.

Trying to look casual, Kristen moved out from behind the counter and started straightening the display racks. After a short interval she slowly began working her way toward where Jonathan was browsing the classic rock section. Her heart was pounding as she was desperately trying to get control of her emotions and work up enough nerve to actually speak to him.

As she got closer she saw him start frowning and shake his head a couple of times then his face got very pale. It looked to her like he wasn't feeling well at all. She became afraid the he was going to become very sick right there. Then he swayed and grabbed the edge of the nearest display rack. Kristen's nervousness immediately turned to worry and she quickly approached him, ready to help. "Jonathan, are you OK? You don't look so well."

Jonathan's face twisted in pain. He pitched forward. She reached for him as he fell over, his head bouncing off the edge of the rack, accompanied by a tearing sound. Then his head banged hard on the tile floor as he collapsed. Kristen knelt at his side as she cried out. "**Jonathan!!**" He was lying face down, unmoving on the floor. Oddly enough, in the back of her frantic mind, she noticed a foot long piece of his shirt was hanging from the display rack beside him.

Jonathan's face was turned to the side and his glasses had been knocked askew. His eyes fluttered momentarily then closed. She tentatively reached out and touched him. "Jonathan?" He shifted slightly and emitted a painful groan. She gave his shoulder a gentle nudge. "Jonathan, say something." This time he didn't move. "Oh God Jonathan, please don't die on me." She was beginning to feel the edges of panic as she gently turned him over to see how badly he was hurt. Her mind seemed to have gone numb as she stared uncomprehendingly at what she saw. His glasses slipped halfway off his face and his shirt was ripped wide

open showing blue, red and yellow underneath.

Then her eyes went wide and she gasped as she finally comprehended at what she was looking at. Under Jonathan's torn shirt was deep blue spandex with a very familiar red and yellow shield in the center of his chest. She glanced up at the Superboy poster on the wall then back down at Jonathan. This was impossible! It couldn't be! But the resemblance, now that she was aware of it, was uncanny. She reached out to remove the skewed glasses and smoothed his hair back only to see Superboy's face fully emerge.

Jonathan let out a groan as his face screwed up, wincing in pain. This seemed to snap her out of her stunned state. She looked past the CD racks toward the front of the store. She couldn't let anyone see Jonathan ... or Superboy like this. She jumped up and ran over to the front of the store and closed the metal gate. It wouldn't prevent anyone from looking into the store but it would keep anyone from getting close enough to see Jonathan on the floor behind the CD display racks.

She ran back to the checkout counter and picked up the phone to call 911. She stopped after pressing 9 and, shaking her head, hung up the phone. She couldn't call for the paramedics because then they would see what Jonathan was wearing and his secret would get out. They probably wouldn't even know how to treat him anyway. For that matter who would know how to treat a sick Superman? What should she do? Who could she call for help without giving away Jonathan's secret? For a second she considered simply yelling out "Help Superman!" But then she thought better of it. If Superman showed up at the mall it would bring all kinds of unwanted attention.

Then inspiration struck. His parents!

Who would know better how to help Jonathan than his own parents? They surely already knew about his secret. She got the phone number for the News Department of the Daily Planet and called.

A male voice answered. "Daily Planet News Room. James Olsen speaking."

Kristen responded. "Please sir, it's urgent that I speak to Lois Lane or Clark Kent."

The man responded. "May I ask what this is about?"

She paused a moment, debating over what to say. Finally she just blurted out. "It's about their oldest son, Jonathan, he's very ill. Please let me speak to one of them."

There was a pause filled with muffled voices then a female voice came on the line. "This is Lois Lane. Who are you and what is this about my son?"

Kristen took a deep breath and tried to pull herself together. "This is Kristen Mathers at the Music Trading Company in the Metro Center Mall. Jonathan was in here when he suddenly passed out in the middle of the store. When he fell he tore open his shirt and after I saw what he was wearing underneath I thought I should call you instead of 911."

There was a gasp at the other end of the line then some more muffled voices. A new male voice spoke. "We'll be right there. Please don't let anyone else near him."

She responded. "The store is empty and I've already closed up the front gate so no one else can come in." She swallowed nervously as she glanced over at Jonathan's barely visible prone body. "Please hurry. He doesn't look so good and I'm scared he could be dying."

"We'll be there as quickly as possible." Then the line went dead.

Kristen paced nervously for several seconds then returned to check on Jonathan. He continued to show signs of feeling pain despite being unconscious and the bruise forming on his forehead looked very nasty. Her mind swirled with questions and guesses. How could he be hurt? Everyone knew that Superman and Superboy were invulnerable. If Jonathan was Superboy then that

would mean that his father, Clark Kent, must be Superman. Then the realization finally hit her still dazed mind. Clark Kent was Superman? Superman and Superboy were walking around among them disguised as ordinary people? Could she be mistaken about Jonathan being Superboy? Yet the more she compared the poster to Jonathan the more certain she was that they looked identical. If he really was Superboy then what could have done this to him?

Less than two minutes later she heard a sound at the mall entrance and looked up to see two people standing at the front gate. She recognized Lois and Clark from the posters on the sides of the city buses advertising the ‘Hottest Reporting Team in Town’. She cried out in relief as she ran toward the gate to let them in. “Oh, thank goodness you’re here.”

As she reached the front of the store Jonathan’s father suddenly groaned in pain and grabbed at the gate, then collapsed to the floor. “**Clark!**” Lois cried out as she knelt down next to her fallen husband.

Chapter 2

Kristen stared down at Mr. Kent in horror for a second. Her right hand came up to her mouth as she backed away from the gate. She ended up in the corner between the wall and the checkout counter.

Lois looked up at Kristen and her eyes got huge. “Where did you get that bracelet?”

Kristen stared back at Lois for a stunned second then she looked uncomprehending at the object in question for another second. “It ... My brother made it for me as a birthday present.”

“Get it away from them.” Lois demanded.

After a second’s hesitation, Kristen glanced around then ran into the office at the back of the store. She looked frantically around the little office, uncertain what she was looking for until she spotted the store floor safe in the back corner of the room. She took off the bracelet and dropped it into the safe. She started for the door then stopped. The matching necklace and earrings! They were made from the same things as the bracelet. She took those off as well and dropped them into the safe. By the time she got back up to the front of the store, Clark Kent was starting to stand up. She approached cautiously but Clark (Superman?) seemed to be rapidly getting better. Kristen quickly opened the gate and let Jonathan’s parents in then closed it again.

“What did you do with the bracelet?” Lois asked.

“I put it in the safe back in the office. I didn’t know what else to do.” Kristen replied as they reached Jonathan who was still lying on the floor unconscious. “Is he going to be all right?” She asked worriedly as she and Lois knelt down to either side of Jonathan’s unconscious body.

Lois looked up at Clark, who was by now looking almost normal. He pulled his glasses down to the end of his nose and stared at Jonathan over the top of them. “Are they back already?” Lois asked Clark.

“Most of them. The exposure was fairly short.” Clark replied cryptically as he continued to stare at Jonathan. Finally he relaxed. “He’s got a very slight concussion but other than that he should be just fine in a day or two.”

Kristen looked at Clark in confusion then it hit her. X-ray vision. Superman could see through things. He could look inside Jonathan’s head and see how bad he was hurt. Her eyes got wide as the magnitude of what she now knew really began to sink in. Clark Kent of the Daily Planet was Superman and his son Jonathan was Superboy! And the shiny green stones in her jewelry must be that mythical Kryptonite that she had read about in the tabloids! She was now privy to three very explosive secrets! She suddenly felt the weight of these secrets settle on her very young shoulders.

Lois and Clark both saw the look on her face as those revelations hit her. Kristen looked over at the Kents, who were

both looking back at her as her mind swirled with uncertainty. She knew, and they knew that she knew. What would they do about it?

Their attention was drawn to Jonathan as he stirred and groaned. Kristen and Lois both tentatively reached out to touch his shoulder at the same time. “Jonathan, wake up.” Lois encouraged. “Are you OK?” Kristen inquired.

Jonathan stirred again. Every joint and muscle in his body ached terribly. He opened his eyes to see both his parents and the pretty girl that worked in the music store looking down at him. He blinked. Why did his whole body hurt so badly? He tried to sit up and groaned from the pain in his joints.

Clark knelt down and placed his hand on Jonathan’s shoulder. “Don’t move, son. Just lay there for a while. Give your body a few minutes to recover.

Jonathan looked from his father to the pretty girl to his mother. “What happened?”

To everyone’s surprise it was the Kristen that answered. “It was my new jewelry. I ... I think it had pieces of Kryptonite in it. When I got too close to you, you collapsed.”

Jonathan’s eyes opened wide in surprise and fear as he glanced down at his torn shirt and the tell-tale suit underneath it. The girl knew!

“I’m so sorry.” Kristen continued. “It’s all my fault that this happened to you.”

Clark responded. “You shouldn’t blame yourself. There’s no way you could have known.”

Lois jumped in. “Where did you get that bracelet?”

Kristen looked up at Lois. “My brother made it for me as a birthday present.”

Clark inquired. “Where did he get the green stones?”

Kristen shook her head. “I don’t know for sure. I think he said that he got them at a flea market or something.”

Clark turned to Lois. “Honey did you bring that lead lined bag with you?”

In answer she pulled what looked like a clutch purse out of her bag. “I have it right here.”

“We need to get rid of that kryptonite.” Clark remarked.

Lois responded. “I’ll take care of it.” She stood up and addressed Kristen. “Show me where you put the bracelet.”

Without a second thought Kristen led Lois back to the small office. She was unwilling to get any closer and pointed to the floor safe in the back corner. “It’s in there.”

“Is it locked?” Lois asked.

Kristen shook her head. “No. I don’t know the combination so I left it unlocked.”

Lois crouched down and cautiously opened the little floor safe. There in the bottom of the safe she could clearly see the deadly green glow coming from all four pieces of jewelry. She took the glowing jewelry out of the safe and placed it in the lead lined purse. She snapped it closed then looked up to see Kristen watching her with a very forlorn look on her face.

Kristen sighed deeply. “I really loved those pieces. My brother designed them just for me.”

Lois stood up and placed one hand sympathetically on her arm. “Don’t worry, after I’ve gotten rid of these crystals I will have a jeweler friend replace them with similar looking stones. It won’t glow in the dark any more but other than that, you won’t be able to tell the difference.” The two of them exited the small office and met Clark and Jonathan over by the checkout counter. Lois held up her bag. “I got all the pieces.”

“Good.” Clark responded then addressed Kristen seriously. “Kristen, I hope you know that you must not tell anyone what you have learned here tonight.”

Kristen shook her head vigorously. “Oh no, sir.” She then looked solemnly back at Clark. “I would never tell anyone about you or Jonathan ... I promise.”

Clark gave her a half smile then turned to Jonathan and Lois. "It's about time that we were heading home."

Taking the hint, Kristen hurried over and opened the front gate to let them out. She stood there watching as the Kents walked to the nearest exit and out of the mall. She continued to stand there as her gaze shifted to the spot where Clark Kent had collapsed such a short time ago, her mind a maelstrom of swirling thoughts and emotions. After several minutes she shook herself and glanced at the clock. It was eighteen minutes until closing. She looked around. The mall was nearly empty. She shrugged her shoulders and locked up for the night which took about ten minutes.

When she got to her car she fumbled with her keys and dropped them twice. She was shaking from delayed reaction to the evening's events. She leaned against her car and rested her head against the roof. Once she got into her car she rested her forehead against the steering wheel as she tried to calm herself down. Nearly twenty minutes later, after she got herself under better control, she started her car and drove home. She was totally unaware of the lone figure in blue and red standing on the roof of the mall watching over her.

Kristen finally got home just before ten. She found her brother in his workshop working on a new piece of jewelry and engaged him in a conversation about what he was making. Eventually she casually got him onto the subject of the green crystals. He told her that he had purchased it at that 'First Saturday' flea market out on highway 122. It had been the only piece that the seller had. The seller claimed to have bought it at a road side stand in Kansas. He told her that he had used most of it making her birthday present but he still had a little piece of it left. He hadn't decided yet what to do with it but he was considering taking it to the college geology department lab to get it analyzed to find out what made it glow the bright green color. She told him that someone had seen her jewelry at work and, when told about her brother, had expressed an interest in buying any more of those stones that her brother might still have. Her brother considered it for a minute then stated that he would be willing to sell it for a reasonable price.

The next day might have been a fairly ordinary day for Kristen. The big difference was her acute awareness, from the moment she had woken up, that she carried inside her several secrets of earth-shattering significance. At the breakfast table her mother noticed her slightly subdued demeanor. She attributed it to Kristen having to work through her birthday and decided to talk to her husband about doing something special for her this weekend. Kristen always loved going to Centennial Park. Maybe they could all spend the day in the park together.

As Kristen approached the school that morning she noticed Jonathan entering the school just ahead of her. She didn't think he was even aware that she was less than ten feet behind him. She followed him observing his well-developed body from behind, up until she stopped at her locker. As she was getting her books out of her locker she kept thinking that there had been something about Jonathan that just wasn't quite right but she couldn't put her finger on what it was.

Kristen went to her classes and chatted with her friends. Naturally two of the more common topics were Superboy and Jonathan (the hottest guy in the school) Kent. Though a bit more reserved than her usual self, Kristen still gushed over those two just like her friends. At one point when they were comparing and contrasting the two boys under discussion, she smiled to herself and wondered what they would think if they knew what she knew. She found it amusing that the two guys that nearly every girl in the school drooled over and that her friends were currently comparing and contrasting happened to be one and the same.

Once during lunch, while she and her friends were eagerly

talking about the latest school gossip, Kristen spotted Jonathan on the other side of the school cafeteria eating with his usual group of friends. She noticed that the big nasty bruise that had been forming on his forehead was well developed now. She also noticed that he didn't seem quite as chipper as he normally was. Then she finally realized what it was that had seemed a little off about him this morning. His step hadn't had its usual easy going self-confident spring.

That evening at the music store was just as dead as Tuesday had been. She called the Daily Planet and got hold of Clark Kent. After a few flustered moments she finally told Clark about her discussion with her brother last night. He asked her if she could act as intermediary for Lois to buy the remaining piece of that stone. She said that she would try.

Thursday was much the same as the day before. Kristen only caught a glimpse of Jonathan once during lunch. He looked a bit better. The bruise was well developed by now and he still didn't have the usual spring in his step. When a spate of laughter broke out in the group around Jonathan, one of the school's football players clapped Jonathan on the back and Kristen clearly saw him wince.

She frowned worriedly. Superboy shouldn't wince like that. He caught bullets in his bare hands. That pat on the back, hard as it might have been, should not have had any effect on him. Had that damn bracelet of hers taken his powers away permanently? It hadn't stopped Superman. According to the radio this morning Superman had been busy most of last night dealing with a major explosion and fire in New Mexico. She felt an intense desire to go over and ask Jonathan if he was going to be all right but couldn't quite work up the nerve to do it.

That afternoon Lois came by the mall shortly after work and gave her the lead lined bag and some cash. That evening after Kristen got home she bought the last piece of the kryptonite crystal from her brother with the money that Lois had given her. She put the kryptonite in the lead lined purse and then stored it in her backpack. Having that stuff in her possession made her very nervous but she had no intention of letting out of her sight until she had put it safely in Lois Lane-Kent's hands.

Chapter 3

Friday morning Kristen had a test in algebra class. She was so distracted by worry about Jonathan and worry about the piece of kryptonite in her backpack that she was barely able to work her way through the test. At lunch she looked for Jonathan but didn't see him over with his regular group. The rest of the day she wondered what had become of him. Had he somehow felt the effects from the kryptonite in her backpack and been driven from the school by it? Had the exposure to that kryptonite hurt him more than expected?

Once she got to work that afternoon she put her backpack under the counter where she could keep an eye on it. She wasn't able to call Lois right away because of a sudden influx of kids hitting the mall right after school. About an hour later, just as the Friday evening school kid rush was starting to ease up, Stephanie showed up for work, late but no longer sick. Kristen let Stephanie hold down the counter while she went back to the office to call the private cell phone number that Lois had given her. She reported that she had gotten the last piece of the stone from her brother and had it with her up at the mall. Lois said that she would be up there in about a half hour.

Almost forty-five minutes later Lois showed up at the music store and Kristen quickly pulled out the lead lined bag and handed it over to her. Lois opened it, glanced in then quickly closed it and thanked Kristen for all that she had done.

As she was shoving the bag into her purse Clark and Jonathan both came into the store. Lois went over to join Clark and they

both stood by the front looking back and smiling at her while Jonathan walked right up to Kristen at the counter. She noticed that Jonathan was wearing a baseball cap low on his forehead so that it hid the bruise there. He was also carrying a small package about the size of a book. "Hi, Kristen." Jonathan greeted her with a shy smile.

"Hi, Jonathan." She responded. She paused a moment then asked. "I didn't see you at school today. How are you doing?"

Jonathan's smile got a bit wider and she noticed a bit of a twinkle in his eye. "My parents took me to see a special doctor to make sure I was OK after what happened Tuesday." He lightly tapped his forehead. "It seems that I'm fully recovered." His grin widened a bit more. "Do you think you could take a quick break so we could talk?"

She looked over at Stephanie who was now looking back at her with eyes as wide as saucers. "I'm going to take my break now, Steph." Then she came around and joined Jonathan.

As they headed away from the counter Kristen noticed that Lois and Clark had apparently already left. Jonathan led them to the mall food court where he bought them both sodas. Then he led her over to an empty table.

After they sat down he placed the package on the table in front of him then reached out and took both her hands. "Kristen, I wanted to thank you for everything you did for me this week."

She shook her head. "But it was all my ..."

"No it wasn't." He interrupted her. "Kristen it wasn't your fault. You couldn't have known." He tilted his head and smiled. "It was what you did after that matters. As soon as you discovered my secret you took all the right steps to protect me and my little family secret." He pushed the small package toward her. "This is for you ... sort of a combination late birthday and thank you gift."

Kristen opened the package then gasped in horror when she saw her own jewelry in the box. She looked up to see that Jonathan was smiling and apparently unaffected. She looked back down and realized that, although they all looked just like the last time she had seen them on Tuesday, the green stones were no longer glowing. When she looked back up at Jonathan he definitely had a hint of laughter in his eyes as he spoke. "Mother took your jewelry to a friend of the family. Superman once stopped a robbery at his jewelry store and saved his life. He replaced the dangerous stones in your jewelry with duplicate stones that were the exact same color." He tapped the bracelet with his finger. "Those new stones he put in are real emeralds."

Kristen's eyes opened wide at his revelation. "That must have cost a fortune. I really shouldn't accept this."

"Nonsense." Jonathan responded. "Mom only asked him to replace the stones with something that would look the same. When she told him that the pieces belonged to a high school girl that had sacrificed these pieces to help Superman and Superboy, he insisted on using some uncut man-made emeralds that he had on hand. He personally cut and mounted the stones exactly like the original crystals and then told mom that it was the least he could do for Superman and the girl that had given away her jewelry to help Superman." He patted her hand. "Now try them on and let's see how they look."

Kristen picked up the pieces and looked at them. In normal light it was impossible to see any difference in the stones. Then she put them on. She was so glad to have them back. They were doubly precious to her now. They had been made by her brother as a birthday present then restored to her by Superman's family. She looked up, a slight shimmer in her eyes. "Thank you, Jonathan."

"You're welcome, Kristen." He glanced down at his hands a moment then looked back up at her, his expression less self-assured, almost shy. "Ah ... Kristen, you know the Senior Prom is coming up pretty soon and, ah, I was wondering if you would

be interested in going with me?"

Kristen stared at him for several seconds in stunned surprise before she could respond. "But I thought you already had a date to the Prom."

Jonathan chuckled. "Not yet. You're the first one I've asked." He tilted his head. "Well, do I have a date now?"

Kristen shook herself. "Ah, sure. Yea, I'll go with you." She looked down at his hands that she had just realized were again holding hers, then swallowed the lump in her throat where it joined the butterflies in her stomach and looked back up into his eyes. "I would love to go to the Senior Prom with you."

"Great!" Jonathan responded. He glanced at his watch. "I probably should be getting you back to your store." He stood up without letting go of her hand then helped her up. Jonathan kept a firm hold of her hand as he walked Kristen back to the music store. As they came in Stephanie's eyes again got wide when she noticed that Jonathan still had a hold of Kristen's hand. With a promise of "I'll call you later," Jonathan turned and left the store.

Staring at Kristen's slightly dazed expression, Stephanie asked her. "What was that all about?"

Kristen responded with a sigh while still gazing out the front of the store. "Jonathan Kent just asked me to the Senior Prom." Then she leaned back against the counter and sighed again.

Only the fact that it was attached kept Stephanie's jaw from hitting the floor. "You're joking." Her gaze then shifted to the bracelet that Kristen had not been wearing earlier and her eyes got even wider.

"Nope." Kristen responded. "I'm dead serious. Right out there in the food court he asked me to the Prom."

Later that evening as she entered her home, singing a song that had just been playing on the radio; she was greeted by her father. "Hi there, princess, you sure are in a good mood." Paul tilted his head noticing that his daughter was practically bouncing. "Something interesting happen at work to cause this sudden attack of singing?"

"Jonathan Kent came into the store to see me." She grinned from ear to ear. "He asked me to go to the Senior Prom with him."

"Is this the same Jonathan Kent that I've heard you and your friends gushing over?" Her father frowned. "I didn't even know that you knew each other."

She shrugged. "I've seen him around school. We ran into each other at the store where I work Tuesday evening and tonight he came by again and asked me to go to the Prom with him."

Her father nodded, frowning, and mumbled mostly to himself. "Mighty fast worker, this young man."

Kristen didn't hear her father's comment as she hurried up to her room. Paul's frown deepened a bit as he walked into the bedroom where his wife was watching the television. Sharron looked up as her husband entered the room catching sight of the worried look on his face.

Sharron looked more closely up into her husband's face. "What's wrong, honey?"

Paul shook his head, with a sigh. "I just don't like it." He looked over at the television as an advertisement for the 'Daily Planet' featuring a publicity picture of Lois and Clark (The Hottest Reporting Team in Town) was playing. "Jonathan Kent just asked Kristen to the Senior Prom today."

Sharon looked blankly at him a second then blinked. "Are you talking about Jonathan, son of Lois and Clark ...?" She nodded toward the television commercial. "... that Kent?"

Paul nodded still watching the commercial. "That's the one." He looked into his wife's face, making eye contact. "I just don't trust this guy. Why did he suddenly, out of the blue, ask Kristen to the Prom when they have had nothing to do with each other before this. They just don't move in the same circles." He sighed

again deeply, shaking his head as he began pacing at the foot of the bed. "I've seen what these 'Popular Guys' are like. They think just because they're the top of the high school food chain or the 'Big Man on Campus' or their parents are important people that they can do anything they want and get away with it. And when they do get caught doing something wrong, their parents ride in with their money or their influence and bail them out." Paul stopped pacing and stared down at the floor. "It was a guy just like this Kent kid that ruined my sister's Senior Prom and nearly destroyed her life. Out of the blue he invited her to the prom and then proceeded to totally humiliate her in front of everyone at the prom. When she tried to fight back he savaged her reputation and nearly drove her to suicide. The only reason Katy's alive today is because Superman showed up and saved her." He paused a moment and took a deep breath. "Then when my parents tried to have the school do something about that kid, his parents show up to intimidate the school and bail him out of trouble."

Sharron had climbed out of the bed and gently laid her hand on his shoulder from behind. "Hey, don't forget, honey, I was Katy's best friend and I remember very well what happened to her. It still turns my stomach to think about it." She turned him to face her. "Just because Katy ran afoul of a particularly bad apple doesn't mean that they all are bad. I have heard only good things about Jonathan Kent and his parents. Everyone knows the reputation of his parents."

Paul sighed again as he looked into his wife's face. "I just don't want the same thing to happen to Kristen that happened to my sister."

That night as Kristen climbed into bed she looked up at the Superboy poster on her door. She resisted the urge to squeal in delight. Superboy had asked her to the prom! She would be going to the Senior Prom with Superboy!

She was startled back to reality when her mother knocked on her door. "Kristen, may I come in?"

"Sure, Mom."

Sharron came into the room and sat down on the edge of Kristen's bed. "I just heard from your father that the hottest boy in school asked you to the Senior Prom" She tilted her head. "Is everything all right, honey?"

"Everything's great, Mom. Why are you asking?" Kristen gazed curiously back at the slightly worried look on her mother's face.

Her mother shrugged. "It's just that your emotions have been all over the map the last few days and now the most popular boy in school, just out of the blue, asks you to the Senior Prom." She shrugged again. "Your father and I are worried. Sometimes high school boys can be pretty cruel and we just don't want you to get hurt."

Kristen shook her head. "Jonathan isn't like that." She looked down at her hands resting on the covers. She had to fight the urge to blurt out Jonathan's secret just to reassure her mother. "He is the sweetest, nicest boy I have ever met. Anybody at school could tell you the same thing. I've even heard some of the other girls call him a boy scout." She looked back at her mother defiantly.

Her mother looked at her daughter for a second. She knew her daughter well enough to know that though she wasn't lying, she was definitely holding something back. Finally she replied. "OK, honey, if you say so, then I believe you." She patted her daughter's hand. "Good night Kristen." She got up and left her daughter's room, her worry only slightly resolved.

Chapter 4

Saturday was usually family time and, at Sharron's suggestion, they decided to celebrate Kristen's birthday by spending the day in Centennial Park. Lunch was a picnic of hotdogs and soda from a street vendor while watching the various

amateur street entertainers show off their widely divergent talents. After lunch they continued along the pathway that was well known for all the street entertainers that could be found there.

One of the entertainers did a human statue bit. He looked like a marble statue of Superman until he would move, startling the unaware. Kristen and Christopher both cracked up when the Superman statue reached out and touched their mother, making her nearly jump out of her skin.

While they were watching the human statue everything came to a halt as everyone stared up into the sky. High overhead two tiny blue and red figures were flying past the park. One of them broke off and swooped down passing low over the park drawing gasps, oohs and aahs from everyone.

After the low pass Superboy circled back around and landed near the human Superman statue. Kristen could see that the street entertainer was having a very hard time standing still as Superboy slowly walked around him looking him over. Kristen was having a difficult time keeping her runaway emotions under control as well. She knew that she couldn't let on that she knew him but it was hard. When Superboy was again standing in front of the human statue the man finally moved and looked straight at Superboy. Superboy took a step back and laughed.

Superboy reached out and shook the entertainer's hand which apparently left the man just a bit flustered then he glanced around at the gathering crowd. Superboy seemed to notice Kristen's family for the first time and nodded to them and commented. "Enjoy your day in the park." Then his eyes shifted momentarily to Kristen before he lifted off and soon disappeared in the same direction that Superman had gone.

It took a few seconds for everyone to recover from seeing Superboy in person. Kristen noticed that the crowd was definitely a bit more generous in their contributions to the human statue guy after Superboy left. As the small crowd of spectators began to break up Kristen's family continued along the walkway, enjoying their day in the park.

After a short while Kristen noticed that her father and her brother both seemed to be just a little bit distracted and she also caught her brother glancing speculatively at her a couple of times but that soon faded away and they were all talking animatedly about their close brush with Superboy.

Paul glanced at Kristen. "You know, Princess, it looked like Superboy looked right straight at you and smiled."

Christopher jumped in. "I noticed that too. Hey little sister how does it feel to have caught Superboy's eye?"

Kristen blushed. "I'm sure it meant nothing."

Christopher rebuffed. "Nonsense. I saw your face. Superboy noticed you and you noticed that he noticed you."

Kristen shook her head. "You've got too much imagination.

Christopher's eyes flashed with amusement. "Yea ... Right."

Sharron's face showed a hint of surprise then contemplation as she listened to the exchange.

A couple of hours later it was getting close to dinner time and Kristen's father suggested a well-known Italian restaurant that was located just across the street from Centennial Park. Everyone agreed so they headed over toward that establishment.

Five minutes later they entered the restaurant and were quickly seated. Kristen already knew what she wanted so, while everyone else perused their menus, she idly scanned the restaurant. To her surprise, she spotted the entire Kent family at a table on the far side of the room. She remarked quietly. "Wow, that's so wild."

Christopher looked up at her. "What's so wild?"

She replied. "Jonathan Kent and his family are here."

Immediately after she said that, Jonathan, Clark and the oldest girl all turned their heads and looked toward Kristen's family then at a word from Clark they all turned back to their meals.

Christopher and her mother both glanced around. “They are ... where?” Her mother asked.

Kristen nodded in the approximate direction. “Over there on the other side of the room.” Then very softly so no one else could hear her she whispered. “You can hear me, can’t you?”

As the rest of her family spotted the Kents, the older girl glanced over at Kristen in surprise at the same time as Jonathan and Clark both nodded yes without looking at her. It hit Kristen at that moment that if Jonathan inherited his father’s powers then certainly his siblings might also get them.

Kristen’s father only grunted an acknowledgement while her mother remarked. “That’s the boy you’re going to the Prom with, isn’t he?”

“Yea, that’s him, Mom.” Kristen replied.

The waiter returned to take their orders. After that, conversation drifted on to other topics.

About halfway through their meal Christopher commented to Kristen. “I see you’re wearing your new jewelry.”

Kristen smiled as she glanced down at her bracelet. “Yea, I wear it every chance I get.” She looked up at her brother. “Thank you for making it for me. I really love it.”

Christopher’s brows furrowed. “Odd, but something about it looks a little different.”

Kristen shook her head. “No, it looks just the same as when you gave it to me.” She replied, feeling a bit self-conscious.

Christopher looked at her for a moment then shrugged. “Maybe it’s my imagination.”

After that Kristen had a strong urge to hide the wrist that held her bracelet and had to fight it lest she give something away to her too-observant brother.

About ten minutes later the Kent family got up and headed out of the restaurant. As they passed near Kristen’s table, Jonathan smiled and nodded to her. Now that she was aware of it she could clearly see Superboy in the glasses-clad face of Jonathan Kent, yet the Superboy that they had encountered in the park just felt different somehow. Maybe it was something in his overall attitude when being Superboy.

A little over a half-hour later Kristen’s family finished their meal and headed out of the restaurant. As they made their way down the street they passed a popular secondhand book store that they frequented and dropped in, just to see what was new. They split up and each headed toward their favorite section of the store. Paul headed for the science fiction section and Sharron made for the romance novels. Kristen and Christopher, as usual, ended up in the mystery section.

After a few minutes her brother pulled her aside a look of confused concern on his face. “Kristen, that bracelet has been altered. Those are not the stones I put in it ... they aren’t glowing.”

Kristen glanced down at her bracelet then back up at her brother, unsure just what to say to him. “I, ah ... I had to have them replaced.” She couldn’t quite bring herself to look at him. “Ah ... some of them got broken so I, ah, I had them replaced.”

Christopher could tell that she was lying by the way she was refusing to look directly at him. He also thought he caught a hint of panic and fear in her eyes. “This has something to do with that guy that wanted to buy the rest of the crystal doesn’t it?” He frowned at her becoming worried. “Why did he want it? What is really going on here?”

“Chris, I can’t say why. It doesn’t really matter so forget it.” She shook her head trying to end the conversation.

Christopher grabbed her arm as his worried frown got deeper. “Did that guy force you to give them to him? Did he threaten you? You can tell me. Dad and I can protect you?”

She turned away from him. “No, it was my idea. I just had to get rid of those crystals. OK?”

“But why?” He turned her around to face him. “I chose those

especially for you because you liked them so much. Please just tell me. Why did you have to get rid of them?”

Kristen refused to look at him. “**Because** they were **dangerous**, all right?”

“What do you mean dangerous?” He stared back at her shaking his head in disbelief. “I tested them myself for both radiation and toxicity. Those stones were perfectly safe.”

She mutely shook her head then they were surprised when there was a faint swoosh sound and Superboy stepped out from behind the bookshelf next to them.

“Superboy!” Christopher exclaimed. “What ...”

Suprboy looked straight at Christopher and spoke softly. “She means that they were dangerous to me and possibly dangerous to your family if the wrong person found out what she had.”

Christopher gathered his scattered wits. “What do you mean?”

Superboy replied quietly. “Those glowing green crystals that you mounted on the jewelry you made for Kristen?”

Christopher nodded. “Yea, I’d never seen anything quite like it before. It was also the exact same shade as Kristen’s favorite color.”

Superboy cocked his head with a sardonic grin. “They were Kryptonite.”

Christopher shook his head and responded in lowered voice. “But I thought Kryptonite was just a myth.” He glanced at Kristen as though looking for confirmation. She nodded back and he looked back at Superboy.

“That’s what we would like everyone to believe.” Superboy shook his head. “But, unfortunately, it’s very real. However, fortunately, it’s also very rare.”

Christopher looked over at his sister. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Superboy placed his arm across Kristen’s shoulder causing her to look up at him. “She promised to keep it secret.” He gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze.

Christopher looked at the two of them noticing the way Kristen was smiling at Superboy. Then he asked. “Why are you telling me this now if it is such a secret?”

Superboy was looking at Kristen as he responded. “Because your questions were putting your sister in a very uncomfortable position so I stepped in. She was very helpful when she discovered the nature of her jewelry so I owed her one.” He gave her shoulder another gentle squeeze making goose bumps run down her spine and her face to become distinctly pinker. “I couldn’t let her attempts to protect myself and my father come between her and her brother.” He glanced over peering past Christopher’s shoulder for a moment. “I have to go.” He dropped his arm from her shoulder and with a colorful blur and a breezy whoosh was gone.”

After a startled moment Kristen looked up at her brother. “Chris, you can’t tell **anyone** about this, not even Mom and Dad. You can’t even tell anyone that Superboy knows me.”

Christopher’s eyes suddenly lit up with discovery. “That’s why Superboy smiled at you in the park. He already knew who you were.” He turned serious. “All right, little sister, I’ll keep the secret.” He broke into a smile. “But it is kinda cool that Superboy knows you.” He cocked his head. “And you know how much Dad admires Superman. He would be beside himself if he knew that you were on friendly terms with Superboy. It would just about make his year.”

At that moment their father came around the other end of the row of bookshelves. “There you two are. Did you find anything interesting back here?”

Christopher and Kristen looked at each other then back at their father. They simultaneously shook their heads and responded. “No, not a thing.” Then they again looked at each other and smiled.

Paul looked back at his two children wondering what was up with them. After a second he shrugged. “Well your mother and I are done looking. Are you two ready to go?”

“Sure, Dad.” Christopher answered and they all headed out of the store and set their course for home.

Chapter 5

On Monday morning at school Kristen soon noticed that she was getting a lot of furtive looks from many of the other girls in her classes. It wasn’t hard to conclude that Stephanie had apparently spread the word about Kristen and Jonathan. She even overheard a few whispered references linking her name with his.

At lunch she joined her same three closest friends. The first words out of their mouths were questions about the truth of the rumors that had been circulating.

Before Kristen could open her mouth to get a word in edgewise Jonathan walked up to their table. “Hi, Kristen. Mind if I join you?” He asked as he set his tray down next to Kristen’s.

All three girls jaws dropped as their inquiries were very obviously answered by Jonathan’s unexpected appearance at their table. Kristen couldn’t prevent a little bit of a smirk from sneaking across her face at her friend’s reaction. Jonathan could tell by the accelerated heart rates as well as the looks on the faces of Kristen and her friends what type of impression he had just had on all four girls.

Jonathan glanced at Kristen’s bracelet then apparently took in the matching green of her dress and smiled. “Emerald green definitely looks good on you.”

Kristen blushed. “Um ... Thank-you.”

Then Jonathan launched into a discussion of the latest goings-on at the school, while Kristen’s three friends tried hard not to drool or babble too much. Kristen was still feeling a bit overwhelmed in Jonathan’s presence but she still managed to hold up her own end of the conversation.

Finally her friend Molly managed to get out a coherent question. “How did you meet?”

Jonathan glanced over at Kristen and grinned, his eyes twinkling with a hint of mischief. “The first time I encountered Kristen, she came over to where I was standing and I was just totally knocked out by her.” Kristen looked down at the table and Jonathan reached out and took her hand. “After that I just had to get to know her better.”

All three of Kristen’s friends looked like they were on the verge of a swooning over his romantic description. Kristen blushed as she remembered the true interpretation of Jonathan’s description.

After lunch Jonathan offered to walk Kristen to her next class.

As they walked down the hall Kristen glanced up at the bandage across his forehead. “How’s your head?”

Jonathan smiled. “Just fine. The bandage is camouflage. Can’t have anyone noticing how fast I heal. It’ll be gone by prom night.”

On Tuesday Jonathan didn’t have lunch with Kristen and her friends but on Wednesday and Thursday he was back at her table.

Friday afternoon Kristen was on the steps outside the school, digging through her purse and grumbling angrily to herself, when a shadow fell across her. Startled, she looked up to see Jonathan standing over her.

Jonathan cocked his head and smiled down at her. “Anything wrong?”

Kristen set her purse down on the step with a little bit more force than necessary and huffed in exasperation. “Yea, my brother can’t pick me up today and I’ve lost my bus pass.” She huffed again. “And I really don’t want to have to deal with getting past

the Johnson boys on my way home today.” She leaned back on her elbows and closed her eyes. “Damn!”

Jonathan cocked his head the other way. “I would be happy to walk you home.” He smiled. “If you’ll point out which way we will be going?”

She breathed a deep sigh. “That would be nice, thank you.” She pointed off to the left. “My home is that way.”

Jonathan took her hand and helped her to her feet so effortlessly that she easily felt the power of his super strength. It left her in a significant amount of awe over him. At that moment another girl approached and after a moment she recognized her as the older of the two girls that she had seen with his family in the restaurant last Saturday.

Jonathan introduced the girl. “Kristen, this is my sister Martha Ellen. She goes to this school and is one grade behind you.” He addressed Martha. “This is Kristen Mathers; the one I’m taking to the prom.”

“Nice to meet you.” Kristen responded.

“Same here.” Martha replied.

Jonathan took hold of Kristen’s hand and all three of them started out in the direction Kristen had pointed. After a few steps Kristen looked over at Martha, who was walking on the other side of Jonathan from her, and asked. “Why are you walking me home?”

Martha responded. “I’m not. This is the way to our home.”

“Oh.” Kristen responded.

After they had walked on for a few silent moments Jonathan started talking about the latest events going on in school. Soon he and Kristen were carrying on an animated conversation. Though Martha would make the occasional comment or response, she mostly kept quiet. They had been walking about twenty minutes when Kristen became aware that Martha seemed to be studying her, evaluating her. This realization made Kristen a bit nervous and conversation began to falter.

Feeling just a bit self-conscious about the scrutiny, Kristen’s mischievous side came to her rescue and joined forces with her curiosity, getting the better of her. She glanced around to be sure that no one was anywhere nearby to hear then looked over at Martha. She paused a moment then inquired. “Martha, do you have all of the powers like Jonathan does?”

Martha’s eyebrows shot up on her forehead and her eyes opened wide with surprise as her steps faltered. “Wh ... **What?** ... How? ... What? ...” Her voice seemed to fail her at this point.

Jonathan glanced over at Kristen in surprise then laughed. “You don’t beat around the bush, do you?” He glanced over at his sister who was desperately trying to regain her composure. “Yea, pretty much.” He responded. “Though she hasn’t yet mastered flight.” He cocked his head at his stunned sister, a hint of amusement in his expression. “You OK, Sis?”

Finally Martha regained some semblance of control. “How ... How did you know?” Then she stared accusingly at Jonathan. “You didn’t ...”

Kristen shook her head. “Oh no, Jonathan didn’t tell me. I kinda figured it out on my own.”

Jonathan looked over at Kristen. “Yea Kristen did figure it out ...” He grabbed Kristen’s hand and raised it so that the bracelet was clearly visible then looked over at his sister. “Just about the same time that she figured out that the crystals on her bracelet were Kryptonite.” Jonathan looked up. “Ah, here we are.” He turned to Kristen “This is our home. Would you like to come in for a minute for a soda and a snack? Afterwards I’ll walk you the rest of the way home.” He opened the door and directed Kristen inside. Then he turned to Martha, who was standing there sputtering nearly incoherently, and grinned. “You comin’ inside, Sis?”

Once he had closed the door he turned to Kristen. “Since

you're in on the secret I should tell you that we try very hard not to refer to it when in public. But I also noticed that you made sure no one was nearby before you said anything so don't worry about it. Just be very careful what you say around others."

Kristen looked back at Jonathan a bit contritely. "I'm sorry Jonathan. I'll be more careful."

"I know you will." Jonathan responded.

Then the mischief returned to her eyes. "But the look on Martha's face when I asked was priceless."

Jonathan laughed. "That it was."

Martha simply harrumphed with an annoyed frown.

Jonathan looked at his sister. "Oh, come on, Sis. The look on your face was pretty funny." Martha relaxed a bit as Jonathan turned back to Kristen. "Actually she has pretty much all of them but flight is still not fully developed." He looked again at Martha. "Let's go into the living room and Kristen and I can fill you in on the whole story." Then he turned to Kristen. "Do you have to be anywhere anytime soon?"

Kristen shook her head as the three of them went into the family room. "No, I have the day off from work and my parents don't get home for another couple of hours. If I hadn't forgotten my bus pass I probably would have gone to the mall for a few hours before going home."

They all sat down and, after fetching sodas and snacks for the three of them, Jonathan began telling his side of what had happened. When he had finished his rather abbreviated description of events, Kristen filled in with her view of what had happened while showing off the jewelry that had caused all the fuss.

Martha shook her head. "Nobody ever told me what really happened. It must have been terrible for you."

Jonathan shrugged. "It certainly wasn't the most pleasant experience I've ever had ..." He squeezed Kristen's hand as he spoke. "But I think it was worth it since it I got to meet Kristen."

Kristen blushed then responded. "I'm glad we met too." She paused then shook her head. "But sometimes it scares me pea green to know what I know about your family. It's such a terribly big secret for a plain simple person like me."

"I would never call you simple or plain. You are far too special and pretty for that." Jonathan squeezed her hand again as his face developed the faintest bit of a blush then looked toward the back of their home. "Mom and Dad are home."

A couple of minutes later they all heard the back door open and the sound of running feet followed by Clark's voice. "You kids slow down. We have a guest in the house."

The two youngest of the Kent children skidded to a halt in the family room and were looking over the strange girl in their midst with open curiosity. Jonathan introduced the younger of his two sisters, Lucy Lara (she was twelve) and his 'baby' brother James Perry (he was ten). The two children turned and headed for the kitchen, and Kristen commented that it was time for her to head home. Jonathan insisted on walking her the rest of the short way to her house.

As they passed the Johnson home all three of the brothers were outside and they stared sullenly as Jonathan and Kristen walked past. Kristen felt the hairs rise on the back of her neck at their cold gaze. She was very glad that Jonathan was with her. She didn't relax until they turned the corner two blocks down from the Johnson's house.

Jonathan glanced at Kristen and frowned. "Just how much are those Johnson brothers bothering you?"

Kristen shook her head. "They're very troublesome but normally I can just avoid them. It's not important." They walked the next few blocks in silence then Kristen stopped, faced Jonathan and smiled. "Thank you for walking me home, Jonathan. I really appreciated it."

Jonathan smiled back. "I was happy to do it." As she opened

her door Jonathan leaned in hesitantly. She closed the distance and they kissed. When they separated he smiled. "I'll see you at school." He

turned and walked away.

She stood in her open doorway and watched as Jonathan disappeared between two of the townhomes across the street. A minute later a characteristic 'Whoosh' was heard from that direction and she caught a glimpse of a blue streak shooting up so fast that she would have missed it if she hadn't been looking for it. Kristen looked straight up and saw a tiny blue and red figure high in the sky do a perfect double loop then head off in the direction of Jonathan's place. She couldn't help but giggle as she closed her front door.

Chapter 6

The next day Kristen and Stephanie were working together at the music store when the Johnson boys sauntered in. They were again loitering in the same area of the store as last time and Stephanie warned Kristen to keep an eye out for them. Kristen remarked that she was already aware of them.

While Kristen hung near the store phone, Stephanie moved out onto the floor and began straightening the CD racks while steadily working her way over toward where the three boys were standing. Once she reached a position where she could clearly see what they were doing she settled in and busied herself industriously rearranging the CD's while keeping a wary eye on the three boys.

After about ten minutes of this the three brothers began grumbling angrily among themselves while glancing over at Stephanie. Both girls were getting a bit worried as all three of the boys were adopting rather aggressive stances as they began to move away from each other. Soon it became obvious to the two girls that Keith, the oldest, started working his way toward Kristen while Lance and Marty were slowly working their way toward either side of Stephanie.

The two girls were starting to feel really afraid and Kristen was about to grab the phone to call security when Jonathan Kent wandered casually into the shop. He swept the store with a glance then looked over at Kristen, a slight frown on his face. He then strolled over to a spot near where Stephanie was standing, nodded to her and began flipping through the CDs.

The three brothers started looking uncertainly at each other and less than a minute later they decided to leave. All three of them gave both girls the evil eye stare before walking out of the store.

Stephanie and Kristen glanced at each other and breathed a sigh of relief at the departure of the three Johnson brothers. Stephanie headed back to the checkout counter followed closely by Jonathan.

The three looked at each other in silence for a moment then Jonathan spoke. "Are you two girls all right? The tension in here when I walked in was thick enough to suffocate."

Stephanie responded. "We're just fine now. Those Johnson boys looked like they were going to start trouble but they changed their minds when you walked in. Thanks."

"No problem." Jonathan responded with a smile then he turned to Kristen. "I just came by to see you. Can you take a quick break; maybe get a coke or something?"

Kristen glanced at Stephanie who nodded back at her. "Sure, I can take a few minutes," she responded.

As Kristen and Jonathan walked toward the food court he commented. "The way both of your hearts were racing, I would say that things were getting a bit serious back there."

Kristen nodded. "Yea, I think that things were about to turn nasty when you walked in."

Jonathan nodded back then took her hand and stopped, pulling her around to face him. "Just remember, if things ever

turn bad, all you have to do is yell and I'll be there in a flash."

She looked down at the floor. "I know."

Jonathan put one hand under her chin, encouraging her to look at him. "Just, promise me that you will call out for me if you ever get into trouble ... OK?"

She nodded. "OK." There was the faintest shimmer in her eyes as she looked back into his deep brown eyes.

He held her gaze a moment longer then he leaned in and gave a quick peck of a kiss. They smiled at each other then they turned and together headed into the food court.

The evening of the Senior Prom had finally arrived. Jonathan Kent stepped up to the front door to Kristen's home and pressed the doorbell. A minute later the door opened and Jonathan found himself facing a very stern-faced man that just stared hard back at him for several seconds. Finally the man spoke. "Yes?"

Despite being invulnerable Jonathan found that man's stare a bit intimidating and felt a strong urge to step back. He held his ground and put on his best friendly, and hopefully harmless, smile. "Hi, I'm Jonathan Kent. I'm here to pick up Kristen."

The man stared at Jonathan for another couple of seconds then stepped back. "You may come in and wait. My daughter should be down in a minute." The man then led Jonathan into a family room. The coffee table was covered with newspaper, on top of which sat a partially disassembled .45 semi-automatic pistol and gun cleaning supplies. "Have a seat." The man pointed to a chair next to the table then sat down on the sofa.

Over the next couple of minutes of tense silence, the man resumed cleaning and inspecting the gun parts.

After a quick glance at Jonathan out of the corner of his eye Paul finally spoke. "You know, Kristen is really looking forward to tonight." Paul looked down the gun barrel then he wiped at it with a grey cloth as he continued speaking. "She is my only daughter and very special to me." He then looked at Jonathan through the gun barrel. "If anything ever happened to her, I don't think I would be responsible for my actions." He set the barrel down on the coffee table and looked Jonathan straight in the eye. "I'm trusting you to take good care of my little girl tonight."

Jonathan nodded his head. "Don't worry, sir. I know how special Kristen is and I will do my best to be sure that she has a good time tonight and get her home safe and sound."

Kristen's father picked up the handle and trigger assembly and began inspecting it. "I'm counting on it."

As they stared at each other they were interrupted by the sound of Kristen clearing her throat. They both and looked over at the family room doorway to see Kristen standing there looking quite beautiful and staring curiously back at them both. "I'm ready, Jonathan." She announced.

Jonathan stood up. "Great." He stepped around the coffee table and approached Kristen, smiling. "You look fantastic, Kristen."

Kristen dimpled and blushed as she responded. "Thank you, Jonathan. You don't look half bad yourself."

Jonathan reached out and took her hand. "We'd best be going. The prom starts in a few minutes and we don't want to miss anything."

She giggled, still blushing, the touch of his hand sending tingles up her arm. "Then let's go." She glanced over at her father who was scowling back at them. "Good night, Daddy. We'll try not to be out too late." Then she started pulling Jonathan toward the front door.

"See that you don't," her father replied to their backs as they headed out of the room.

Kristen wasn't really listening because she was quietly trying to deal with the way Jonathan's hand in hers was making her heart race. Just as they reached the door her mother appeared from the back of the house followed closely by her brother.

"Wait!" Her mother called out. "Oooo, you two just look soooo cute." She gushed. "I just have to get a picture of you both. I'll be right back." She turned and walked quickly back the way she had come.

Christopher watched their mother walk away then turned toward Jonathan and Kristen. He leaned against the wall and shrugged while chuckling. "Mothers! Sometimes I think embarrassing their children is their main goal in life."

A minute later she returned with a camera and pointed it at them. "Now, move a little closer, you two, and smile."

Jonathan shifted closer to Kristen and reached behind her, placing his arm across her shoulder. Kristen looked over at Jonathan and felt a shiver run up her spine as Jonathan smiled at her, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze. Christopher straightened up from the wall and frowned in deep concentration as he watched the scene before him. He had seen this exact same action and reaction very recently. Then his eyebrows shot up nearly to his hairline in surprise. Kristen and Superboy in the used bookstore!

Oblivious to Christopher's reaction, the little prom date ritual continued to play itself out. "That's perfect!" Their mother exclaimed. "Say Cheese!" She snapped two pictures then stepped forward and kissed Kristen on the cheek. "Now you two go have fun and, for the sake of your father's poor heart, stay out of trouble."

"We will, Mom." Kristen replied.

Jonathan added. "Don't worry Mrs. Mathers. I'll look out for her and get her home safe." Then they turned and passed through the front door.

As the door closed Christopher, still looking a bit shocked, commented to his mother. "Don't worry, Mom ... " He blinked twice and shook himself with a short snort of a laugh. "I don't think Sis could be in safer hands." He turned and headed into the family room mumbling to himself. As he entered the family room he took one look at the disassembled gun then looked over at his father by the window and momentarily cracked up.

As they descended the front steps Kristen noticed the car that they were headed for. It was a Superman-blue Mustang with bright red interior and gold racing stripes. On the fender just in front of the door was a tiny two inch high Superman shield and below it was the words '**Superman Special Limited Edition**' in gold script.

Kristen remembered her brother drooling over that very model when it first came out last year on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Superman's first public appearance during the EPRAD space station incident. She giggled and looked over at Jonathan. "Isn't that color scheme just a bit obvious?"

Jonathan laughed. "It is just a bit over the top for me?"

Kristen shook her head. "It's almost like you're daring someone to make the connection."

He paused beside the passenger door. "This car actually belongs to James Olsen of the Daily Planet, a friend of the family. He let me borrow it for tonight since I don't own a car."

Jonathan opened the passenger door for Kristen and handed her into the seat and closed the door. As he trotted around to the other side Kristen glanced back at the house and saw her father and brother looking out through the family room window.

Jonathan pulled his driver side door closed and Kristen glanced over at him. "What was all that about back there between you and my Dad?"

Jonathan shook his head as he started the car with a roar of glass-pack mufflers. "I think he was trying to scare me." He chuckled. "He was pretty effective. I'm **invulnerable** and I felt intimidated."

Kristen giggled. "That's rich. My dad **actually intimidating** Superboy."

Jonathan pulled out into the street and shrugged. “I don’t think your father likes me very much ... or he just doesn’t trust me with you.”

Again Kristen giggled. “Now that is actually kinda funny cause Dad idolizes both Superman and Superboy.” She shook her head at the irony of it. “I think it’s because Superman once saved Aunt Katy or something.”

Christopher joined his father at the window just in time to see Jonathan closing the passenger door of the very same car that he had dreamed about since it first came out. Once the car pulled away Christopher turned and headed for his room. A minute later both his parents were startled when they heard Christopher break out in a full throated, shake the walls, belly laugh.

Chapter 7

As Jonathan pulled into the school parking lot many of the students milling around outside turned to look at the very unique car Kristen and Jonathan were arriving in. Several of the guys grinned and gave the thumbs up. Jonathan grinned back at them then he commented. “You know, half of my friends have dreamed of owning this particular car.” He looked over at Kristen. “Even I dreamed of having one of these but not even Dad could afford one.” He chuckled. “How’s that for irony. Superman can’t afford to own a Superman Special Edition Mustang.” He shook his head. “Uncle James has done so well off his software company that he can afford a car like this but he still works at the Daily Planet as the staff photographer.” He pulled into an empty spot and cut the engine. “Here we are.” He announced unnecessarily with a grin.

Jonathan jumped out of the car and sprinted around to her side then opened her door with an exaggerated flourish. He held out his hand to her. “May I assist you, my lady?” He asked with a smile and a sparkle in his eye.

Kristen took his hand and allowed him to assist her out of the car. It was like holding onto a steel rail wrapped in soft warm leather. She marveled at the subtle show of Jonathan’s incredible super strength as she stood up.

Jonathan closed the car door and offered her his elbow. “Shall we?”

She took the offered elbow. “We shall.”

The car beeped twice, then Jonathan dropped the keys into his pocket as they started walking toward the main school building. Several others that were headed into the building waved at Jonathan or called out greetings to him in passing. She was sure that she caught many of them looking her over trying to see who he was bringing to the Prom.

As they stepped through the doorway into what was usually the main assembly hall together Kristen gazed around at the great room. Everywhere she looked she saw glittering glass and bright sparkling colors that were made to stand out even more by the generally subdued lighting in the great hall. The place had been decorated to look like a fairytale ball room including hundreds of tiny sparkling fairies in every corner and open wall space in the room. At the far end of the room a live band was currently playing one of Kristen’s favorite romantic ballads. She felt the fantasy atmosphere wash over her as they stepped onto the runway-like ramp that extended from the front door into the room.

They paused a moment at the top of the ramp just inside the doorway and it seemed to Kristen that everyone in the room noticed them. She was sure it was her imagination but she couldn’t help feeling a bit self-conscious. She quietly tried to assure herself that it was Jonathan that drew everyone’s attention. She was just some anonymous high school junior whereas Jonathan was a ‘Senior’ and the most popular boy in the school. She was sure however that she saw expressions of surprise on the

faces of several of the people that she saw looking their way.

Jonathan reached up with his free hand and patted the hand that she had on his elbow. She looked up into his face and he smiled back. She was suddenly very aware of the difference in their sizes. Even with her ridiculously high heels, he was still a head taller than her. She began to feel even more nervous as she wondered just how ridiculous they must look together.

Jonathan cocked his head and his smile seemed to outshine the whole room. “Remember Kristen, you’re here with me because I asked you.” His head cocked the other way and his smile defied logic by getting even brighter. “And I asked you because I wanted to be with you tonight.” Then he patted her hand again and started forward.

Kristen felt a warm glow suffuse her body as she let his words play through her mind. He said he **wanted** to be with her. **Superboy** wanted to be with her!

As they walked down the short ramp into the great hall Kristen caught sight of Beverly, the school’s head cheerleader, staring at them and giving her the once over, looking very puzzled. Then Beverly turned to Steve, the school football team’s quarterback and apparently her date, and dragged him into the crowd.

Kristen heard her name called and looked over to see Stephanie from the music shop approaching with a boy she didn’t recognize in tow. Stephanie walked up to Kristen, smiling. “Hi, Kristen. I see you made it.” She turned to Jonathan. “Hello, Jonathan.” She pulled the boy with her a bit forward. “This is my date, Justin Wyatt.” She leaned in and spoke in a lower conspiratorial voice. “Don’t tell anyone but he goes to that other school that we shall not name.”

Kristen knew that Stephanie was interested in a boy from their school’s principal rival but she had never met him. “I’ll never tell.” Kristen responded with a grin and an equally conspiratorial voice.

Jonathan grinned. “Your secret’s safe with me, Justin.” He took the boy’s hesitantly outstretched hand. “Jonathan Kent.” He gestured toward Kristen. “And this is my girlfriend and date Kristen Mathers.” He turned his smile back on Stephanie. “Won’t you two like to join us?” Kristen felt a warmth rising inside her — *Jonathan said Girlfriend!!*

Stephanie blushed and grinned nodding her head. “Sure,” Justin responded for them both.

Jonathan led them over to the area near the refreshment bar where most of the kids seemed to congregate. The romantic song ended and the band launched into a currently popular Rock’n’Roll tune.

They each picked out their favorite beverage and settled into a convenient open space where they could talk and get acquainted. It soon developed that Jonathan and Justin had very similar interests, including musical tastes. They also both loved the same types of movies. Kristen learned that Jonathan loved science fiction, fantasy, spectacular special effects and action. A movie that included any two or more of those elements was a guaranteed hit in his opinion. Justin apparently felt the same way. Stephanie and Kristen exchanged amused looks as the boys talked excitedly about the latest hot movies.

After several minutes Beverly wandered by dragging Steve with her. She stopped right in front of Kristen and turned to look at Jonathan. “Hello, Jonathan, Who’s your ‘little’ friend?”

Kristen bristled at the way she had subtly emphasized the word ‘little’. Beverly stood a little straighter to drive home how much she towered over her. Kristen responded trying to enhance the confidence in her voice. “My name is Kristen.”

“Kristen is a junior at this school and my date.” Jonathan responded then, turned dismissively away from Beverly to take Kristen’s hand and smiling at her, he inquired. “Would you care to dance?”

At a mute nod from her, Jonathan drew Kristen out toward the center of the room just as the band began to play one of the more popular romantic love ballads. Kristen caught a glance of the surprised and frustrated look on Beverly's face and the amused grin on Stephanie's face before they became surrounded, lost among the other dancing couples.

Jonathan drew her close and wrapped his arms around her then began to sway to the gentle rhythm of the music. Kristen sighed, put her arms around his neck, and laid her head against his chest with his chin barely touching the top of her head. 'This feels so good,' she thought as she reveled in the feel of his arms around her. It was almost a shock when the song ended and Jonathan pulled back from her. She looked up into his eyes to see him smiling back at her.

The band launched into a pop favorite and with a grin Jonathan, still holding on to her, began moving to the faster beat, taking her right along with him swinging her around and spinning her occasionally. It was a heady feeling being guided through the dance by his irresistibly strong arms.

Jonathan was thinking how graceful Kristen looked and felt, as she easily followed his lead, while they were dancing to one of his favorite pop songs. He was still feeling the warm glow he had gotten from holding her close and swaying to the music on the previous song as well.

The song ended and, predictably, the band moved into a driving Rock'n'Roll favorite. They separated, dancing energetically to the driving beat though he kept contact with her hands as much as possible. Jonathan was mesmerized by her movements as she danced. They were so sensual and sexy.

Kristen noticed that Jonathan was trying to maintain contact with her hands, and the way his eyes followed her as she danced to the rock beat made her feel tingly all over. Then the music was over and Jonathan pulled her into a gentle hug. Another slow song began and they were again swaying to the music as the warmth of his body against hers spread through her. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she was thinking that she could easily lose herself in the feel of his arms wrapped around her like this. The song ended and she looked up into Jonathan's smiling face. Then with barely a moment's warning his lips met hers in a warm gentle kiss that sent shivers down her spine and made her toes curl.

The next song had already started as the kiss reluctantly ended. "That was great." Jonathan said softly, then a little louder, "Come on, let's go get something to drink." He let go with one arm, the other remained around her back, and led her toward the refreshments bar.

As they threaded their way through the other couples Kristen found herself wondering if Jonathan had been referring to the dancing or the kiss as being great. She hoped that he had been referring to both.

Just when they reached the bar they were joined by Stephanie and Justin, who were holding hands and smiling. Stephanie's grin widened as she spoke. "I caught a couple of glimpses of you two out there dancing. You look very good together."

"Thank-you." Jonathan responded as he snagged three sodas and handed them to the others before he continued speaking. "Kristen is an excellent dancer and a pleasure to be with." He grabbed a soda for himself.

"Kristen, hi." A voice called out and everyone turned to see Molly Winston and Erica Underwood approaching with their prom dates in tow. It was Molly that had called out. Molly introduced her date, Eddie Coogan, who was a halfback on the Junior Varsity football team. Erica introduced her date, Otto Heitzler, who turned out to be in Jonathan's physics class. Soon they were all acquainted and talking about the Prom and how things were going so far.

Kristen touched Jonathan's arm to draw his attention. "I have

to go powder my nose. I'll be right back." Stephanie jumped in. "Hold up, I'll come too." Erica spoke up. "I'll go with you." Finally Molly chimed in. "I need to go, too." The four girls all headed off together.

The four boys all watched in a bemused state as their dates walked away. Justin was the first to comment. "Why do they always head to the restroom in packs?" Jonathan responded. "I don't know." He shook his head adding. "It's a girl thing." Otto shrugged as he spoke his thought. "Must be genetic." And finally Eddie added his opinion. "I think it's so that they can make fun of us without our knowing about it."

The four boys looked at each other sharing a grin over the peculiarities of the mysterious opposite sex. Soon they were discussing the relative merits of various high school football teams.

In the restroom, minutes later, the girls were in fact discussing their dates. Stephanie was commenting. "Kristen, you sure had a dazed look on your face a little while ago when you came back from dancing." Molly added. "Yea, I noticed that as you walked past Eddie and me out there on the dance floor."

Kristen smiled and the slightly dazed look under discussion returned. "Yea, he kissed me ... right there on the dance floor." She blushed as the other three giggled.

"Good kisser, hu?" Erica commented with a hint of mischief in her eye and a hint of envy in her voice.

Kristen's grin widened. "I could get used to it." With a deeper blush, she said, "I need to get back to Jonathan."

Erica and Stephanie giggled in response but Molly frowned at her image in the mirror. "Damn, where'd that come from?" She wet a paper napkin and tried rubbing at a stain she had just discovered on her top.

Erica jumped in as she grabbed Molly's hand. "No, Molly, you dab at it. If you wipe at it you will only spread the stain." She took the paper towel and fit word to deed. "Kristen, you and Stephanie go ahead. Molly and I will be out in a few minutes."

Kristen and Stephanie had just exited the restroom when Stephanie stopped dead looking up the hall they were in. "What the heck are they doing?"

Kristen looked up the hallway to see three boys at the other end of the hall doing something at the school's trophy case. At that point the three boys turned toward them. It was the three Johnson brothers. Without a word, Stephanie and Kristen made a dash for the door to the great hall. The three boys took out after them.

Just as they passed through the great hall doors the Johnson boys caught up to them and quickly blocked their way. The oldest and the youngest boys had pulled out knives. The third boy was holding a short length of pipe. "You've interfered with us too many times." The oldest boy ground out, apparently addressing his remark at Stephanie. All three waved their weapon threateningly as they moved in on the girls.

Chapter 8

Jonathan Kent and the boys had been talking about Junior Varsity teams and next year's possibilities. Justin had been extolling the virtues of the quarterback from his school. Jonathan reluctantly conceded a point to Justin. "OK, I admit that the quarterback at your school is a strong runner and could be a serious threat next year but you have to admit that he hasn't shown very much of his passing game so far."

Eddie jumped in insistently. "He may be good on the ground but you haven't seen Jackson's abilities yet. I tell you he is the best passer in the state. He can hit a fly at fifty yards while being blitzed, every single time." He puffed up a bit. "And you haven't seen me catch. I promise you that by the end of next season we will hold the state record for completions, yards and points

scored as well as the state championship.”

Jonathan grinned at Eddie and opened his mouth to add his opinion on him and Jackson when he suddenly froze. Something was not right. He was sure he had heard Kristen say his name quietly but in a very strained tone of voice at the same time that he became aware of her accelerated heart rate. For just a moment he hesitated at the realization that he actually recognized Kristen’s heartbeat out of everyone in that large hall. He looked around, scanning the room for Kristen or some sign of trouble and soon spotted what he was looking for over by the main front doors into the entry hall.

He grabbed Justin’s shoulder. “Justin, the girls are in trouble.”

Justin glanced around. “Where?”

Jonathan pointed. “There, over by the doors.” The other three boys looked in that direction he had pointed. Jonathan started moving as rapidly toward the girls as he dared without giving himself away.

Kristen took a step back as the three boys advanced waving their weapons threateningly. “Oh, Jonathan, I could sure use your help right now.” She spoke so low that nobody would have heard her. Part of her wanted him here with her and part of her was afraid that if he showed up now it might give away his secret. She glanced over at Stephanie then the next instant Jonathan was stepping up between her and the three brothers.

Keith Johnson, the oldest, growled at Jonathan. “Not this time.” He took a quick step forward while slashing overhand at Jonathan. Jonathan dodged surprisingly fast to the left and swung his fist up catching Keith in the wrist. Keith yelped as the knife came free of his hand and clattered to the floor. A half instant later Jonathan’s other hand shot straight out. He caught Keith in the chest at the solar plexus with his flat palm, knocking the breath out of him. Keith staggered backwards gasping for air.

At the same time Keith was stumbling back, Lance and Marty came at Jonathan from both sides at once. Jonathan suddenly stepped back at the last possible moment while at the same time grabbing both boys and adding a little extra strength to their momentum causing them to run into each other rather forcefully. Only Kristen saw the knife skitter across Jonathan’s ribs before twisting in Lance’s hand from the force of the contact. An instant before the brothers collided, the pipe in Marty’s hand just missed Jonathan’s head and came down hard on Lance’s shoulder. Lance yelled in pain, dropping the knife a split second before he collided with his brother. The two brothers bounced off each other and went down, stunned by the impact.

Keith came back swinging at Jonathan and would have blindsided him but at that instant Justin came up and blocked the blow. Then, before Keith could recover from the surprise of attack from this unexpected direction, Justin stepped in close and threw Keith to the ground. Eddie arrived at that moment and perched on Keith using his greater weight to hold the boy to the ground. Justin put his knee into Marty’s back pinning him face down to the floor and Kristen perched on a groaning Lance who was too invested in the pain of his broken collar bone to give her any fight.

The whole fight had lasted only a couple of seconds then one of the teachers sprinted up to them. “All right, all right, what’s going on here?” The vice-principal came quickly up behind the teacher, also demanding an explanation.

Stephanie was the first to respond as she pointed to the three brothers being held down on the floor by Justin, Kristen and Eddie. “Those three attacked Kristen and me with knives and that pipe.” She pointed to the pipe section over near Jonathan’s feet. “Jonathan and Justin came to our defense. Eddy arrived just as the fight was ending.”

The teacher nodded in response to her hasty explanation just

as Otto arrived. The referenced weapons were lying on the floor as mute testimony of the nature of the intended attack. The vice-principal replied calmly. “I see.” He had noticed the slice through the front of Jonathan’s dress jacket as further proof of who had been the armed aggressor. Then the vice-principal looked down at the floor and got a puzzled look on his face.

At the same moment Kristen looked up to see Jonathan looking down with his glasses perched at the end of his nose and frowning. She looked down to see the short pipe on the ground. She just had time for her mind to recognize the caps on the ends and the two wires coming out of one of the end caps when Jonathan stooped down, his eyebrows halfway to his hairline. He picked up the short length of pipe. Jonathan looked up at the teacher and the vice-principal. “This is a pipe bomb!”

The eyes of both the teacher and the vice-principal nearly bugged out of their heads as they too recognized the significance of the object in Jonathan’s hand. The teacher turned toward the vice-principal who turned and spotted three other chaperones that were approaching them and barked out orders. “Get everyone out of the building, now!”

They both turned back to see Jonathan already making tracks out the front doors still carrying the pipe bomb. The vice-principal called out to him but he knew that Jonathan was already too far away to hear him above the growing babble around him. He wondered for a moment at how Jonathan had gotten so far so quickly then turned back to the more important job of clearing the students from the building.

Five minutes later, as the teachers were herding the students out into the parking lot, Superboy dropped down out of the sky. He landed beside the vice-principal who was desperately trying to direct the barely controlled chaos. “Is there a problem here?” Superboy asked politely, glancing at the milling crowd.

The vice-principal took a moment to recover from his surprise at meeting Superboy face to face. Before he could open his mouth to speak, Kristen, who had remained near him stepped forward and spoke up first. “Steph and I saw the Johnson brothers fooling around at the trophy case and then they attacked us. Afterwards Jonathan noticed that one of them was holding a pipe bomb.”

At that point the vice-principal got his voice and took over. “Jonathan Kent ran out of here carrying the pipe bomb before I could stop him. I have no idea where he took it. We’re evacuating because we don’t know what else they might have left inside the building.”

Superboy nodded as he responded. “I get the gist of it.” He turned and strode quickly through the door into the building.

As soon as he had cleared the door Jonathan lifted up toward the ceiling and flew over to the trophy case. The glass doors were ajar and there inside he saw three more pipes with their wires connected to a crude mechanical alarm clock and a battery. It was a very primitive arrangement and dangerously unpredictable. He quickly saw that just trying to disconnect the battery and timer might set the bomb off. He glanced around and saw that the nearest doors were crowded with still evacuating students. With so many students still inside he couldn’t risk the bomb going off here inside the building. He carefully picked up the whole device then rushed out the back doors of the building.

Everyone in the parking lot saw Superboy shoot straight up into the air from behind the main building accompanied by the characteristic sonic boom that he and his father made when they were in a big hurry. A half second later everyone in the parking lot saw a colorful silent explosion high up above them. Then a second and a half later they heard the louder deeper boom of the bomb.

Twenty seconds later Superboy floated down to the parking lot near the vice-principal. In his hands were two short pieces of split-open pipes and the charred remains of the clock. His face,

hands, and the front of his suit were covered with smudges of black soot. As he landed he shrugged. "It went off." He handed the surprisingly cool fragments to the vice-principal. "Give these to the police when they arrive. I spotted Jonathan Kent over at the stadium headed back this way. It looks like he left the other piece of pipe in the middle of the field. It should be safe there till the police arrive."

Superboy then looked over at Kristen and Stephanie standing close by. "You two were very helpful. I might not have found the bomb in time if you hadn't told me where to look." He smiled at them both. "Thanks for your help." He cocked his head for a moment then turned to the vice-principal. "I have to go." He rose quickly up to about thirty feet then streaked off, leaving a whoosh and sonic boom in his wake.

Just as sirens could be heard approaching from a distance Jonathan came up to the small knot of teachers and his friends panting as though out of breath. "I put the pipe bomb out in the middle of the football field. I knew I had to get it as far away from everyone as I could in case it went off. The football field was the only place I could think of where it couldn't hurt anyone."

The vice-principal frowned. "That was a very foolish and dangerous thing to do. You could have been killed if it had gone off."

Jonathan shook his head. "I couldn't just leave it here where it could hurt or kill all of my friends. I just had to get it away from them."

The vice-principal sighed for the foolhardy stubbornness of teenagers. "Well, regardless of your reasons, don't ever endanger yourself like that again." He couldn't really bring himself to chastise the boy too harshly. He had, after all, committed a dangerous selfless act to protect the lives of everyone standing nearby.

As the vice-principal turned back to the rest of the students, Kristen reached up and rubbed at a smudge on Jonathan's cheek speaking quietly. "You missed a spot."

At that moment the police came charging into the parking lot and they were soon discussing the situation with the school staff and the students who had been involved. Once the facts were established the three Johnson brothers were loaded into a police car which took them away to jail. Everyone at the prom was kept out in the parking lot while the police bomb squad swept the building for any more bombs that might have been planted. Jonathan, Justin, Eddie, Kristen and Stephanie were questioned by the police and released. Ten minutes into the search they found a gym bag in a locked stall of the boys' restroom that had one more loaded pipe and enough extra components to make two more bombs.

As the gym bag was being brought out Kristen noticed Jonathan's father and mother both over at the other side of the parking lot, talking to the head of the bomb squad. A little while later Lois and Clark came over to where Justin, Kristen and their friends were standing.

Clark nodded to the small group of those that had been involved. "It seems you all had an interesting evening. I just talked to the officer in charge and he gave me the whole story. Now we would like to hear your versions of what happened."

Each of the teenagers gave a short description of what they had seen heard and done. Lois and Clark asked a few questions to get more detail and took down everything that they said.

After they had spoken to each of the teens Clark placed his hand on Jonathan's and Kristen's shoulders. "You both did very well and I'm very proud of you." He then swept the rest of the small group. "You all handled yourselves very well. If not for the clear thinking and quick action of all of you, this could have become a terrible disaster. You should all be proud of yourselves." He smiled at the small group. "Don't forget to check

tomorrow's Daily Planet." He turned to Jonathan. "You have a good remainder of the evening and we'll see you when you get home." Lois and Clark turned and quickly made their way out of the parking lot.

A few seconds later Kristen saw Jonathan look up and followed his gaze. High up in the sky she could barely make out a tiny indistinct figure against the last rays of the setting sun moving rapidly toward downtown Metropolis. She looked down at Jonathan who was grinning back at her. He leaned in and whispered. "They have to hurry if they want to get the story into the morning edition."

About an hour later, once they were sure that the building had been swept clean of any more explosives, everyone was allowed back into the building so that what was left of the prom could continue.

Because of the interruption the rest of the prom was foreshortened. Instead of a ballot, the choice of King and Queen of the prom was made by asking the teens to call out their choices. By nearly unanimous acclamation Jonathan was voted King and Stephanie was voted Queen of the Prom. Everyone cheered them during the 'Royal Dance'. After the royal dance was over Stephanie and Jonathan returned to their own dates.

Jonathan took the crown from his own head and placed it on Kristen's head and smiled at her. "As far as **I'm** concerned **you** are the queen of **my** kingdom." He took her hands and twirled her onto the dance floor.

Chapter 9

Kristen was having a wonderful time at the prom and didn't want to leave but it was already eleven o'clock and her father was expecting her home by midnight. Several of the kids were making plans to go to a nearby all night diner and then they were going to go over to Centennial Park for a little 'romantic' coupling.

With a sly wink Stephanie asked Kristen and Jonathan. "Are you going to be coming with us?"

Kristen shook her head sadly. "Wish we could, but I've been given a strict midnight curfew by my father and we will have to be headed home soon."

A few minutes later Kristen and Jonathan stood out in the parking lot watching their friends head out to the meetomg at the diner. Kristen sighed as she waved to her departing friends. "I wish Daddy hadn't been so unreasonable," she commented softly as she lowered her hand.

Jonathan took her hand and gently brought her around to face him. "Um Kristen, I aah, I was wondering if you would like to go flying with me?"

Kristen's eyes got wide as her heart did a quick flip-flop accompanied by a little flutter in her stomach. "Here, now?" She could barely believe what she had just heard.

"If you would like to ..." He responded his eyes sparkling from the parking lot lights. "I would like to show you how the world looks from my viewpoint."

Kristen felt a tingle of excitement run up her spine and it took a moment for her to calm herself down enough to get out her answer. "**Oh, Yes, I'd love it.**"

Jonathan glanced quickly around then took her hand. "This way." He led her around the corner of the main building to an isolated alcove between the main building and the E-wing of the school. There were no windows in that part of both buildings and the massive air conditioning units hid them from outside observation. Jonathan turned to face her and smiled. "No one can see us here."

With another quick glance around Jonathan became a blurred miniature tornado of shifting colors that a second later resolved itself into Superboy. Kristen gasped in amazement at the display of super speed.

Jonathan grinned at the amazed look on her face. “My dad taught me that little trick. Pretty impressive, hu.”

“Wow!” She replied softly. Then she gave another exclamation of surprise as he scooped her up, one arm behind her back and the other behind her knees. She instinctively threw her arms around his neck as she thrilled to the feeling of being carried in his arms. She looked into his face and blushed.

Jonathan’s grin widened. “Ready?” She felt goose bumps rise as the feel of being carried in his strong arms made her whole body tingle. She nodded mutely, her voice having momentarily deserted her, and tightened her arms around his neck very slightly in anticipation. Jonathan glanced around one more time. “Here we go.”

Kristen felt herself become weightless, then she noticed the walls of the buildings dropping away and realized that they were already rising. In a surprisingly short time she saw the school grounds spread out far below her. She was hundreds of feet in the air, yet she felt safer in his arms than she would have thought possible. She looked into his eyes and he smiled warmly at her, once again making her feel tingly all over.

She looked around and saw the lights of downtown Metropolis. With a tiny gasp she realized that they were already higher than even the top of the Lexcorp Building. As she looked around at the fantastic sight, they continued to rise and soon she could see the entire city of Metropolis spread out far below them in a great pattern of twinkling lights. Then he stopped rising. “This is as high as I can go without becoming an air traffic hazard. It’s well above the tourist and traffic choppers and it’s well below the normal airline corridors.”

Above them the quarter moon rode in a sea of more stars than she could ever remember having seen before. Kristen breathed a deep sigh. Her eyes gleamed with wonder as she gazed at the vista spread out below and above her.

“Beautiful isn’t it.” Jonathan remarked softly. “Sometimes I come up here to just relax and center myself with the rest of the universe.” There was a soft wistful look on his face.

She sighed again. “It’s incredible.” She shifted her gaze to his face. “Especially seeing it like this ... with you.”

Jonathan’s smile brightened and to her it was like the sun coming out. He tilted his head and there was a definite fire in his eyes. “Have you ever danced on air?” He waggled his eyebrows as a hint of mischief crossed his face.

She blinked then shook her head wondering what he had in mind as she slowly answered. “Nooo, can’t say as I have.”

She gasped in surprise as she found herself suddenly standing upright face to face with Jonathan. Despite the change in her position the feeling of weightlessness persisted. Her arms were still around Jonathan’s neck and his arm behind her shoulders had not moved, but his other hand was now riding low on her back very close to dangerous territory and her toes were resting on top of his feet. She became aware of soft romantic music as Jonathan began to sway to its gentle beat. She found herself swaying with him.

After a moment she asked, a hint of wonder in her voice. “Where is that music coming from?”

He grinned shyly. “I have a small player clipped to my belt.”

“You were planning this all along?” She accused as she smiled up into his sparkling eyes.

He blushed. “Yea, But until just now I wasn’t sure I could get up enough nerve to try it.” He ducked his head. “I wanted to do something special but I was a little afraid you would think I was just trying to show off to impress you.”

Her smile widened as she ducked her head to look in his eyes. “You are showing off to impress me ... and I love it.”

His head came up and the sun came out in his eyes. He twirled them around and soon they were spinning and swooping and swaying to the soft romantic music coming from his player.

Her whole body tingled and she felt warm all over as she realized that they really were dancing across the sky. She soon discovered that she could even influence the direction of their movement by shifting her body. Before long she was completely lost in the experience.

The next thing she knew he pulled her body up against his and they were kissing. It was a soft, almost sweetly hesitant kiss, a first love’s kiss. She felt a warm tingling spread through her until she melted against him tightening her arms around his neck as they slowly spun in place. Seconds later their lips parted from each other and they stared into each other’s eyes as they continued to dance through the sky.

A too short eternity later she felt her feet touch ground and gravity returned. Kristen reluctantly pulled her eyes away from Jonathan’s and looked around. They were standing in a deeply shadowed corner between two brownstones. She glanced through the space between the buildings and saw that they were directly across the street from her home.

“It’s nearly midnight.” Jonathan’s smile softened. “And I promised your father that I’d have you home by midnight.” He stepped back then blurred into a miniature blue and red tornado. A second later the tornado turned dark and when it stopped Superboy was gone and Jonathan stood before her adjusting his glasses.

“Wow!” Was all she could get out.

The two of them faced each other for a moment then on impulse she threw her arms around him and kissed him. This kiss had far more passion in it than the others and it sent a powerful shock of lightning through both of them. They both gasped when they separated as their bodies continued to tingle from the effects of that kiss.

This time they both breathed out a soft “Wow!” They gazed at each other for several seconds, lost in their emotions.

After a moment to recover his wits Jonathan reluctantly removed his arms from around Kristen and she reluctantly removed her arms from around his neck with a sigh.

Jonathan bent his elbow toward her. “It’s time for me to get you home.”

Kristen sighed again then took his elbow. “I guess we have to go.”

They stepped out from their hidden location and strolled across the street to her front door. On the front stoop they stopped and again faced each other. Kristen smiled shyly. “I feel a little like Cinderella having to leave her prince behind at the ball at midnight.”

Jonathan leaned in for a gentle, almost chaste kiss. Then he smiled and responded softly. “Only this time the prince already knows where to find his Cinderella and they both know they will be seeing each other again soon.” Jonathan took a step back. “I will see you soon, Kristen.”

Kristen turned unlocked and opened the door and started in. Then, just inside the door she turned back and faced him. “Bye, Jonathan. See you at school, Monday.” She stepped back and gently closed the door.

Jonathan paused a second after the door closed then, after a quick look around, shot straight up into the night air at just a little over half the speed of sound. There was no sonic boom to disturb the neighbors but if anyone had been outside at that moment their eyes would have been drawn upward by a joyous yell from high in the air and they would have seen a dark figure doing loops and barrel rolls a thousand feet above the rooftops. Then the dark figure blurred into the familiar blue and red and shot off toward downtown where a few startled night workers spotted that same blue and red figure doing high speed loops around some of the tallest buildings.

A minute later a second blue and red figure approached and the aerobatics ceased. As Jonathan and Clark approached each

other in the sky above Metropolis the father took in the face of his son that seemed to be having trouble deciding whether to settle on chagrin or joy.

Clark tilted his head barely holding back an amused smile as he spoke. "I take it the prom date was an overall success."

The joy won the battle on Jonathan's face and his eyes lit up as he replied. "Oh, yes! ... It was wonderful."

Clark chuckled then nodded. "That's fine Son." He raised his eyebrows as he continued. "Now ... Why don't you take Jimmy's car back to him, then we can do a quick patrol of the city before returning home."

Jonathan blinked in surprise. "The car. I almost forgot." He streaked off back toward the school.

Twenty minutes later Jonathan rejoined his father and together they flew over Metropolis making sure everything was safe and secure.

Christopher had been in his bed half dozing and occasionally glancing out of his open window when he caught sight of something blue and red and maroon drop out of the sky and disappear into the dark narrow space between the two brownstones across the street. He sat up and stared at the opening for a few minutes to see what would happen next. A short time later he saw Jonathan in his dark dress suit and Kristen in her maroon prom dress step out from between the two buildings and head across the street.

He jumped out of bed and headed down the stairs. There was now no possible doubt in his mind that Jonathan Kent and Superboy were one and the same. His little sister had gone to the prom and gone flying with Superboy. He reached the family room and saw his father half dozing in the recliner as he heard Kristen's key in the front door.

Paul woke-up with a start at the sound of the keys in the door and saw his son standing over him and grinning. Christopher announced. "Kristen is home ... safe and sound."

They both looked toward the door into the front hall as the front door opened and heard Kristen telling Jonathan goodnight. The front door closed and a few seconds later saw Kristen walking past the door to the family room. Christopher called out. "How did your date go, Sis?"

Chapter 10

Kristen gently closed the front door then rested her forehead momentarily against it as she breathed a deep satisfied sigh. After a second she turned and seemed to drift in a warm haze toward the stairway. Halfway to the base of the stairs she was drawn out of her dazed state by the voice of her brother.

"How did your date go, Sis?"

Kristen looked over into the family room to see her father and brother both staring back at her. She took a breath then replied in a sigh. "It was wonderful." Her smile took on soft romantic overtones as she recalled dancing across the skies of Metropolis in Jonathan's arms.

Her father frowned, unsure what to make of the dreamy look on his daughter's face. "What did you do at the prom?"

She focused in on her father and brother, her smile becoming one of deep satisfaction. After a pause of a couple of seconds she replied. "We danced."

Christopher remarked with a hint of a smirk on his face. "I take it, you enjoyed dancing with Jonathan?"

Kristen's smile became even dreamier as she replied. "Like dancing on air."

Father and son, both with raised eyebrows, looked at each other as Kristen turned and drifted up the stairs to her room, still lost in her dreamy fog.

Paul's eyebrows were raised in surprise and uncertainty with a hint of worry mixed in. He had seen that same look before on

his wife's face, usually after a bout of lovemaking. Just how close had Kristen and that boy gotten while they were out on tonight's date? He wasn't sure he liked where this line of thought was taking him.

Christopher's eyebrows were raised in surprise and speculation with a hint of amusement mixed in. When she had said 'dancing on air' was she speaking figuratively or literally? Considering who she had been out with, she could have meant it either way. He silently cheered for his little sister. It looked like she had ended up with a good one.

As the gaze of both males turned toward the top of the stairs they were both thinking the same thing 'tomorrow morning there would be questions.'

High above Superman and Superboy drifted along in silence on a last pass over Metropolis before retiring for the night.

Clark grinned at the dreamy smile he saw plastered on his son's face. After a short while, he broke the silence. "Your mother and I were on our way back from the 'Planet' when I heard music coming from out of midair. We saw you with Kristen dancing on air about a thousand feet away and about a dozen feet above us."

Jonathan looked over at his father in surprise. "You saw us?" He felt the heat rise in his face at the realization that his parents had witnessed that little interlude.

Clark chuckled at his son's reaction. "Yes, we saw you." He paused a moment, watching the expressions passing across his son's face before continuing. "If the two of you had pulled your attention away from each other long enough to look around you, you might have noticed your mother and I doing the same thing not too far away."

Jonathan's eyes opened wide. "You and Mom were dancing on air?" He asked incredulously.

Clark chuckled and responded. "We call it 'Sky Dancing', and we've done it many times." He tilted his head in amusement. "Though it has never occurred to us to bring along our own music like you did."

"But you're old." Jonathan remarked incredulously.

Clark laughed outright at the look on his son's face. "We're not that old."

Jonathan took a few moments to absorb this new aspect of his parents. Apparently the concept of 'Sky Dancing' was not as unique as he had thought. Finally he asked his father a question that had just occurred to him. "When was the first time you and Mom went sky dancing?"

Clark smile at the memory his son's question had conjured up. "About a month after she learned my secret identity."

Jonathan's eyes opened wider. "Wow, just like me and Kristen."

Clark chuckled. "In a way."

Father and son flew for a while in silence, each immersed in their own thoughts, until the sound of a fire alarm drew their attention. They glanced at each other, nodded and dived toward the location of the emergency.

As Paul made his way down to the kitchen, his mind continued to swirl around his worries about his daughter and that boy, Jonathan Kent. As he sat down at the table he cut loose with a huge yawn and picked up the morning paper. When he opened the rolled-up paper the headline practically screamed at him and he was suddenly wide awake.

Senior Prom Interrupted By Pipe Bomb Scare

Paul scanned quickly through the article, getting more agitated as he read. According to the article it had been more than just a scare. There had been a real live pipe bomb that had gone off within seconds after Superboy had removed it from the building. "Sharron!" He called out.

"Yes, honey, what's wrong?" Sharron responded as she

rushed up to the table where Paul sat.

He passed the paper over to her. “Have you seen this?” She glanced at the paper then did a double take as the headline sunk in. “A bomb at Kristen’s prom?” She plopped down into the chair and began reading the article. Her eyes got wider as she got further into the story. How could something like this happen?

Paul’s mind kept revolving around the same questions. Why had she said nothing about this last night? Why had she acted the way she did? It was as though she had been completely unaware of what had happened at the school. For that matter why had he not heard that boy’s loud car drive up last night when she got home? Something was not right here and the possibilities that were running through his mind were really beginning to get to him.

Both parents were distracted by the sound of Kristen bouncing noisily down the stairs. As they looked up they saw Kristen practically skipping into the room with a happy grin on her face and humming one of the currently popular romantic ballads. She seemed totally oblivious to their stares as she opened the refrigerator and stood there humming while she perused the contents.

“**Kristen!**” Paul called out a bit sharply.

Kristen turned around holding a carton of orange juice and looked uncomprehendingly at her father. At the same time Christopher arrived with a screeching halt at the door arrested by the tone in their father’s voice.

“What do you know about this?” Paul spoke severely as he poked a bit forcefully at the newspaper lying on the table.

“Know about what?” She inquired finally noticing her father’s demeanor and wondering what he was so upset about.

Christopher moved forward to see what it was that his father was pointing to. His eyebrows shot halfway up his forehead as he read the bold type upside-down headline.

“What do you mean ‘what?’” Paul ground out. “Were you even at that dance you were supposed to be going to?” A horrible suspicion had begun to form in Paul’s mind.

Stung by her father’s words and annoyed that her father would doubt her, Kristen stepped up to the table and read the headline. She had forgotten that Jonathan’s parents had been there. She certainly hadn’t expected her father to find out about it this quickly. Then as the meaning of her father’s words really sank in she became angry at her father’s accusation and rebellion set in. “How **dare** you say that to me . . . if you’ve read about it then you know that I was there!” She spat out as she glared angrily at her father.

Her angry rebuttal shocked both parents. Paul responded. “What do you mean? What do you know about this?”

Kristen plopped down in a chair and started scanning the article. Christopher had come up behind her and began reading over her shoulder. The article was a fairly accurate description of what had happened with one thing missing. None of the kids involved were named in the article. “Well?” Paul was getting impatient. “What do you have to say? What were you and that boy **doing** last night?”

Stung even more by her father’s renewed and more obvious accusation; Kristen’s rebellious anger flared as she finally responded. “Yea, that’s what happened.” She glared at her father. “The three boys that brought the bomb were the Johnson brothers. The two girls that they assaulted were Stephanie and me, so yea I was there all right. In fact I was right in the **middle** of the whole freakin thing.” She glanced at her mother who was looking back in shock, then glared back at her father. “And it was **Jonathan** and one of his friends that came to our defense so I **resent** your dirty little implications.” She jumped up from her seat and ran out of the room and up the stairs.

Paul looked after his daughter in stunned surprise. He and

Kristen had always been close and she had never yelled at him like that before. He glanced back to see sympathy in his wife’s eyes but was surprised to see frank disapproval in his son’s eyes.

Finally Christopher spoke. “You really blew it this time, dad.” He shook his head. “You jumped right in with the accusations without even giving her a chance to tell you what really happened. Not to mention implying some pretty terrible things about Jonathan who, I happen to know, is a very nice boy that Kristen happens to be very sweet on right now.” He sighed and turned to go up to see if he could calm his sister down before the situation got any worse.

Paul looked at his wife in surprise. “But . . . but I . . . ”

Sharron put her hands over his hands. “They’re right Paul.” She took a deep breath. “Right from the start, you have been on that boy’s case. You have not once given him a fair shake. And the kind of things that you were practically accusing them both of was unforgivable, especially considering what they both apparently went through last night.”

“But she . . . ”

Again Sharron interrupted him. “I know she shouldn’t have yelled at you like that but, considering what you just said about her and the boy that became her hero last night, I can’t really blame her for the way she reacted.”

Christopher hesitated at the door to Kristen’s room trying to figure out just what to say. He wanted her to know that he understood her side of things but he didn’t think he should tell her why he had so much faith in Jonathan. The fewer people that knew Jonathan’s secret the better and he was pretty sure that he was not on the approved list for that knowledge. In fact it was probably best if he just locked that secret away and never mentioned it to anyone.

He softly knocked on her door. “Kristen, it’s Chris. Can I come in?”

He heard a muffled sniffing sound from inside the room then after a long time the door opened about an inch and he saw one slightly bloodshot eye peer out. Oh, boy, she had been crying. Dad’s words had really hurt her, a lot. She quietly stepped back pulling the door open then went over to flop back down on her bed. Christopher stepped into her room and closed the door behind him. He then walked hesitantly over to her bed and sat down beside her. All the while he kept trying to figure out just what he could say to her to make her feel better and maybe smooth things over between her and their father.

Paul looked forlornly at his wife as the size of his blunder came crashing down on his shoulders. “How do I fix this? What do I say to her?”

Chapter 11

Christopher looked down at his very unhappy sister. She was curled up in her bed with her back toward him. The things their father had said to her were so wrong and she was really hurt. What could he say to her to fix things? Right now he was pretty angry at their father over the whole incident but he knew that he had to do something before things got any worse.

Christopher reached out and gently touched her shoulder. She shrugged away his hand. Again he touched her shoulder and this time closed his hand so that she couldn’t just shrug it away. “Kristen, please talk to me.”

After a couple of seconds she looked up over her shoulder at her brother with tear-reddened eyes but said nothing.

Christopher took a deep breath touched by the hurt in his sister’s eyes. Finally he spoke. “Kristen, there are reasons why Dad acted the way he did.” Christopher held up his hand when she opened her mouth. “Just hear me out. I’m not excusing Dad’s actions. I just want you to understand why he responded the way

he did.” He took another breath trying to organize his thoughts. “It’s all tied up with what happened to Aunt Katy when she was your age and a junior in high school. The fact that you look so much like your Aunt Katy just strengthens the connection in Dad’s mind.”

Kristen sat up and turned to face her brother. “What about Aunt Katy?” Like her brother, Kristen had always felt close to their Aunt Katy. To some extent the similarity in their appearance had fostered that closeness.

Christopher felt that now that he had her full attention, maybe he had a chance to smooth things over. He only hoped that Aunt Katy would forgive him for revealing some of the things that she had told him in confidence. He was also about to reveal some things about himself that he was not particularly proud of. “When I was a senior in high school, I got involved with some unsavory characters. There were five of us; one of them was Keith Johnson.”

Kristen sat up a bit straighter looking back at her brother in surprise. She knew that her brother had had a few problems during his senior year and that her brother had known Keith but had not been aware that the two things were related.

“We got this hairbrained idea, I think it was Keith that originally suggested it. We were each going to invite less-than-popular girls to the ‘Fall Dance’ then make fun of them and dump them.” Christopher blushed with shame at what they planned that night. “I don’t really know if I could have gone through with it or not. Anyway, Aunt Katy worked part time in the school library and somehow she got wind of what we were planning. She cornered me one day after school and we had a long talk.” He saw the surprise and disbelief in his sister’s eyes. “She told me what happened to her. It changed my mind. On the night of the dance I treated my intended victim with perfect courtesy and tried my best to see to it that she had a great time. Keith and Joe, however, went way too far. They were caught in the act and expelled. I think Keith believes that I ratted him out but I’m pretty sure that it was Aunt Katy that alerted those in charge about the plot.”

Kristen looked thoughtfully back at her brother as she mulled over what he had told her. “What did Aunt Katy tell you?”

Christopher continued. “When Aunt Katy was a junior, the most popular boy in school invited her to the Senior Prom. They stopped at the park on the way to the dance and she let him go much further than she should have. Later at the dance the boy publicly humiliated her. Things got pretty bad after that and two weeks later she tried to jump off the Hobbs River Bridge. If Superman had not caught her, she would not be alive today.” He stared at her for a while watching her absorb what he had told her. Finally he placed both hands on her shoulders as he continued. “Dad saw all this happen to his little sister and it really got to him. Aunt Katy said that Dad almost went after that boy with a baseball bat but she talked him out of it. I think Dad is scared to death that the same thing could happen to you. That is why he pulled that ‘cleaning the gun’ stunt last night and why he overreacted this morning. What Dad did was wrong but he did have his reasons.”

Christopher dropped his hands and there was a long period of silence as they stared at each other. Thoughts and emotions swirled through Kristen’s mind. She knew that Superman had once saved Aunt Katy’s life but this was the first time she had heard any details about the incident. The few times she had asked about it everyone had avoided the subject.

Finally Christopher stood up. “Please just keep what I told you in mind the next time you speak with Dad.” He turned and left his sister’s room.

Sharron looked into her husband’s forlorn eyes as the scope of his blunder sank in. She squeezed his hand. “You owe her a

very large and sincere apology and an honest attempt to win back her respect.” She squeezed his hands again. “Right now what she needs more than anything else is the assurance that she still has her father’s trust and love.”

“But how? How do I fix this?” He looked into his wife’s eyes looking for an answer.

“The first thing you have to do is go up there and apologize to her.” Sharron told him. She frowned. “And it must be whole hearted. No excuses, no evasions, just a simple straightforward sincere apology.”

“She won’t listen to me, not after the things that I just said to her.” Paul shook his head in despair.

“Maybe not, but she will hear you and, eventually, what you say to her will sink in.” Sharon responded. “The next thing you must do is let go of what happened to your sister. Stop letting it color your outlook on your daughter’s life. Then you must get to really know this boy that she is interested in. Find out what he is really like.”

“How do I do that?” He shrugged.

“Invite him over to dinner tonight ... or better yet, since Kristen has to work this evening, invite him over for lunch and he can go to the park with us this afternoon. Just show Kristen that you really want to get to know him without being hostile.” Sharron placed her hand on her husband’s chest. “But first things first.” She half turned him around toward the doorway into the front hall. “Go up there right now and apologize to her.” She gave him a gentle push to get him moving.

Paul stopped at the foot of the stairs and stared at the ground for a couple of minutes going over in his mind what he should say. As fast as he would come up with something he would reject it. He was basically a proud man and nearly everything he came up with usually boiled down to trying to justify his mistakes. He also found that he was working himself up into a state of righteous indignation over his assumptions that he felt made sense to him at the time.

He finally had to stop and force himself to calm down. This was getting him nowhere. He slowly got himself under control and finally tried again to figure out what to say. When he tried to consciously avoid justification he ended up trying to excuse or, at least, mitigate his error. Again he was working his way into a stubborn ‘it’s not my fault’ mentality.

Again he had to stop and force himself to calm down. ‘This is getting me nowhere. Just go up there and, like Sharron said, give her a straightforward sincere apology,’ he told himself.

Paul heard a door close and looked up the stairs to see his son moving down the hall away from Kristen’s room. He forced himself to take the first step up the stairs. He slowly climbed up the stairs still trying to come up with the right words. Finally he found himself standing before the door to his daughter’s room and he still didn’t know what he should say.

After a couple of minutes he raised his hand to knock but then let it drop silently to his side. He continued to stand there facing her door. This was a lot harder than he had expected. He just couldn’t seem to come up with the right words. Everything came out sounding either lame, insincere or self-serving. Finally he thought ‘To hell with it, just knock on the damn door and hope for the best.’

He again raised his hand, paused two seconds then softly rapped on her door. It was too late to turn back now. He had to say something. “Kristen? Kristen, it’s your father ... I ... I just wanted to apologize to you. I never should have said those things to you. This isn’t the time or the place to get into why I reacted the way that I did and it really has nothing to do with you or that boy. All I can say is, I let my own fears get the better of me and I made assumptions and over reacted without even trying to find out what was really going on and I’m sorry that I hurt you ... ” He took a two deep breaths and released them. “I only hope that

you will eventually be able to forgive me for my foolishness. I just want things to go back to the way they were between us.” He took another deep breath and turned away before he said any more.

It had been very hard to stop speaking when he had. He wanted to keep talking, to explain himself, to excuse himself. With great effort he forced himself to hold his tongue and he slowly made his way downstairs. He had done what he could; now he had to give her time to calm down and think about what he said. He hoped that he had not damaged their relationship beyond repair and that his apology would work.

By the time Paul finally returned to the breakfast room his wife was setting down her phone. She looked up as he entered the room. “Well?”

Paul shrugged. “I don’t know. Her door was closed and she didn’t say anything but I think she heard me.” He hung his head. “I really messed up this time, didn’t I?”

Sharron nodded. “Yes, you did, but ... She really loves you and I think it will work out in the end.” She took a deep breath. “I hope you have got yourself under control because I just got off the phone with Jonathan and his father. I have invited Jonathan to go to the park with us for a picnic lunch. He will be over in two hours and you are going to have to make nice with him and be convincing both to him and to Kristen.” She cocked her head, eyes narrowed and a slight quirk to her mouth. “Can you do that? Can you forget about what happened to Katy and treat that boy like he was a nice kid that you would like Kristen to be with?”

Paul glanced at the floor then looked her in the eye. “I will do my best.”

Sharron looked back at him silently for a couple of seconds then spoke. “Try imagining that he is someone that you would really want to have dating your daughter.” She shrugged then a gleam appeared in her eyes and she grinned. “Try pretending that it is Superboy that wants to go out with her.”

Paul snorted. “Yea right, like that is likely to happen.” Then a sheepish smile crept across his face. “I’m not sure if I could even accept Superboy as being good enough for Kristen.”

Sharron shook her head and rolled her eyes as she reached out and playfully swatted his chest. “Fathers!” She exclaimed then giggled. “You’re all alike. I don’t think any father thinks that any boy is good enough for his daughter.” She shook her head. “Well if we are going to have a guest over and go to the park for lunch then I had better start getting everything ready.”

Paul continued standing there thinking over the idea of Kristen dating Superboy. After a while he shook his head. “Naw. Never gonna happen.” That thought reminded him of the car that boy had been driving and he smiled to himself then turned and headed for the master bedroom. He had better get himself ready and he needed to do a little work on his own mental state.

For a long time Kristen lay on her bed mulling over what her father had just said and what her brother had told her. She really hated being so mad at her father. As a little girl she had practically worshiped him. He had always been there when she needed him. When things went wrong she could count on him to be able to make everything better.

She had always tried her best to make him proud of her. Maybe that was why his words had hurt so much. She looked over at her closed door. He had told her that he was sorry and, no matter how bad his words had made her feel, she didn’t want to lose the special relationship that they had always had. She wanted her ‘daddy’ back.

She sat up in bed and stared uncertainly at her closed door. Maybe she should go out there and talk to him, try to patch things up with him. She glanced over at her clock and realized that over an hour had passed. Pulling her courage and determination

together she stood up and started toward the door. She had only taken two steps when someone knocked at her door followed by her mother’s voice. “Kristen?”

“Yes Mom?” She responded.

“The whole family is going to Centennial Park in about an hour. You need to start getting ready.”

Kristen thought a moment then sighed. She wasn’t really in the mood for an outing in the park but maybe it would be a chance for her and her father to patch things up. She sighed again. “OK Mom. I’ll be ready.”

“We will have a guest with us, so dress nicely.” Her mother threw in before walking away from the door.

‘Great!’ she thought as she stomped over to her closet. “So much for having any time for just Dad and me.” She heaved a sigh of resignation as she began changing into clothes that would be appropriate for the park.

Chapter 12

Kristen came down from her room dressed for an afternoon at the park. The things her brother had told her, and her father’s apology, were whirling around in her mind. She was still a little bit angry and upset over the things her father had said but she was determined to not let it ruin her day. She noticed that her father was in the family room and felt her determination and courage slipping so she went back to the kitchen to help her mother and to avoid her father.

Sharron was busy putting together a picnic lunch and Kristen pitched in to help. Kristen was curious about the guest and was about to ask when the doorbell rang. She heard the door open and her father saying something unintelligible. A minute later her father called out “Let’s get a move on. The cab will be here soon.”

Kristen grabbed up the backpack that her mother had been packing lunch in and called out that they were coming. When they reached the front entry Paul and Christopher were standing there waiting. What really surprised Kristen was that Jonathan was standing in the entry with her father and brother.

“Jonathan?” Kristen stared at him in surprise. She quickly glanced at her father who appeared to be studying Jonathan, who was saying something to Christopher. The first thing that went through her mind was that she needed to get him aside and warn him about her father’s accusations.

Jonathan looked over at her as his face lit up with that fifty megawatt smile of his. “Hi, Kristen.” He replied. “I got a call this morning inviting me to the park with your family.” He stepped toward her and before she could do or say anything he enveloped her in a big hug then released her. “I had a great time last night, Kristen, and I’m looking forward to spending time with your family.”

After a second to get over her surprise, Kristen glanced, a bit apprehensively, over at her father. He was frowning but he didn’t look angry. Then she responded. “I had a wonderful time last night, too.” She glanced again at her father. “I’m glad you can come to the park with us today.”

There was the sound of two short honks from outside. “Taxi’s here.” Paul announced as he glanced at his watch. “Seems to be a bit early.”

Sharron grabbed the backpack containing their lunch from the floor where Kristen had just set it. “Come on everyone, can’t keep the taxi waiting.” She started shooing everyone toward the front door.

As they piled into the minivan taxicab Jonathan was quick to seat himself with Kristen in the back seat. Christopher also took the back seat on the other side of Kristen from Jonathan. Paul and Sharron ended up in the middle seat. Kristen again thought about warning Jonathan about her father but there was no way to do so discreetly.

Paul glanced over his shoulder at the three young people in the back as the taxi pulled out. "I heard things got a little interesting on your date last night."

Jonathan nodded. "That's an understatement. Did you see Mom and Dad's article in the paper this morning?"

"Yes I did." Paul replied.

"The only problem is it didn't mention Kristen and Stephanie's names. They kept their heads when those Johnson kids threatened them and afterward told Superboy where to look for the bomb. He probably wouldn't have found that bomb in time otherwise. Their clear thinking probably saved a lot of kids."

"Kristen said that it was you that came to her rescue." Paul remarked.

"Well me and a couple of other guys to be precise but I think that the girls were doing a pretty good job of holding their own when we arrived." Jonathan responded. "It was her cool head that kept things from getting out of hand."

"Well anyway I want to thank you for coming to her aid none-the-less." Paul remarked.

A few minutes later the taxi stopped just inside the park and everyone climbed out. Paul paid the driver and they headed into the park making for Centennial Lake.

Jonathan placed his arm across Kristen's shoulders as they walked. Kristen was aware that her father was watching them and she still hadn't had an opportunity to warn Jonathan about the problem with her father. She thought that she should do something about his arm around her but she didn't want to hurt Jonathan's feeling by shrugging off his arm without an explanation. She glanced over at her father and saw him frowning back at her and Jonathan.

Kristen gritted her teeth a moment in frustration. The most frustrating aspect of the situation was the knowledge that she could change everything by simply telling her father about Jonathan's secret. But she knew that she could not do that because she would never betray Jonathan's trust like that. Keeping his secret was turning out to be more of a strain than she had ever realized. Finally Kristen decided to relax and take the attitude that she was in-love with Jonathan and if her father didn't like it that was tough. He would just have to learn to deal with it.

A few minutes later, as they were walking along the path that circled Centennial Park Lake, Jonathan had dropped his arm from around her back and took hold of her hand. She glanced over at her father then shifted her hand slightly interlacing her fingers through his. All the while the innocuous conversation continued without so much as a pause.

As Paul had been watching Kristen and Jonathan he noticed that Jonathan was definitely acting like more than just a friend toward Kristen. Though he behaved a bit more familiarly toward Kristen than Paul might have liked, Jonathan never crossed the line. For her part Kristen appeared to really enjoy the attention but seemed to exhibit some nervousness whenever she glanced at her father. It made Paul feel a bit guilty that her enjoyment was dampened by his presence. It made him even more determined to somehow repair his relationship with his daughter.

They were all startled by the sound of a sonic boom and looked up to see a tiny blue and red figure flying northward moving very fast. "He's really hauling ass." Christopher commented.

"It must be something pretty serious if he is moving that fast." Jonathan remarked.

Kristen glanced over at Jonathan wondering if he was going to have to run off but he seemed unconcerned. She raised her eyebrows in a questioning glance. Jonathan leaned in close. "As he passed over the park he called out that he could handle the situation by himself, but you would need super hearing to have heard it." His grin widened. "Of course he could just be in a hurry to meet Mom."

Kristen giggled. Then at the curious looks on the faces of her family she shrugged then explained. "Jonathan suggested that Superman might just be in a hurry to meet the missus." Jonathan shrugged as everyone else laughed.

They had been strolling along the path that circles the lake for about an hour when Paul announced, "Here we are." They had arrived at a popular picnic area located on the shore of the lake near the Centennial Park Band Shell

Sharron set out their lunch on one of the picnic tables that dotted the area. The fact that Jonathan and Kristen were seated just about as close as they could without being in each other's laps did not escape Paul's notice. Soon everyone was digging into their meals as the topics of conversation flowed from the weather to the latest movies. By the time they had finished eating the subject was humorous anecdotes about life in the Kent household.

Jonathan suddenly stopped talking and looked up. A moment later the rest of the family followed his gaze. Then a second after that they all saw the small commuter jet approaching from the east flying way too low over the park and descending. There was thick smoke trailing out of one of the two engines that were located just in front of the plane's tail. Kristen glanced at Jonathan and saw him looking desperately for any form of concealment nearby. There was none.

Then there was a loud boom echoing from overhead and Kristen looked back up to see the body of the plane starting to skitter sideways and roll as a large chunk of the tail section was tumbling toward the ground. The panicked people were running in all directions. Superman appeared, shooting in from the north, and caught the main body of the plane. At this distance they could all see Superman struggling to control the movement of the awkward burden. Three seconds later the tail section hit the lake and exploded causing a series of waves that overturned many of the small boats scattered across the lake.

Paul stared out at the lake in horror as he heard all the cries for help coming from so many of the people that had been dumped into the lake. Superman currently had his hands full trying to bring body of the plane down safely. Who was going to help those people in the water? Then Paul spotted Jonathan running toward the lake and a moment later Paul and Christopher were both running toward the lake as well. Jonathan dove into the water followed closely by Paul and Christopher.

A few seconds later Kristen followed them into the lake. She heard her mother call out to her to stay back but she figured it was about time she made use of those lifesaving lessons that her parents had made her take when she was fifteen.

A few others in the area saw what Kristen's family was doing and also dove into the water to help. Soon there were over a dozen people out there in the lake trying to help others to safety. Paul quickly lost track of Jonathan as he and Christopher became occupied with helping a group of panicked kids. A couple of seconds later Paul and Christopher both saw Superboy shoot up out of the water so fast that very few people caught it, then loop around and pause for a moment. The next second Superboy was shooting back down toward the lake. Paul and Christopher were soon too busy helping those around them get to the relative safety of nearby capsized, but still floating, boats to pay much attention to anything else.

It didn't take long for everyone to become aware that Superboy had shown up and was plucking struggling people out of the water and depositing them on the shore. Christopher and Paul had just finished getting all of the kids to the relative safety of their capsized boat when they both noticed that Superboy nodded appreciatively at them then dived back into the water. The next instant Superboy rose out of the water with another person that had been on the brink of drowning.

As he glanced around for someone else to help Paul spotted Kristen about thirty feet away pulling another teenager toward another capsized boat. The next instant Paul was aware of Christopher who was also pulling a middle-aged woman toward the boat next to him. Paul looked around, his brow furrowed with worry. "Where is Jonathan?"

Christopher assisted the woman as she got a grip on the boat, then pointed into a large group as he replied. "I saw him go over that way, then I lost sight of him."

Paul shook his head. "I just hope he's OK." He thought he heard his wife's voice calling out but he had turned his attention to the next person in need of assistance and had no attention left to pay to her. He would worry about that later.

Paul had only been in the water for about twenty minutes but he felt like he had been at it for hours when he became aware of the sound of approaching sirens. He glanced around and saw Superboy lifting a boat full of the same children he had been helping earlier. Superboy deposited the boat on the shore near where Paul saw his wife standing. She immediately took charge of the scared kids and Superboy returned to the water. Paul then glanced around and spotted Kristen clinging to a righted boat and helping some people get into it. She looked as exhausted as he felt. The next instant Paul felt himself grabbed and lifted out of the water and set on the ground next to his wife and his very tired son. Superboy shot back out over the water and a few seconds later returned carrying another boat full of people which he set on the ground next to them. Then he reached into the boat and helped Kristen step out of it.

At that moment Lois Lane-Kent and a man carrying a camera came running up. "Superboy! Superboy!" Jonathan turned to face his mother and struck the classic stern heroic pose that Superman often used but Christopher and Kristen both caught the hint of a twinkle in both Lois and Jonathan's eyes. "Thank God you were here!" Lois called as she came to a stop next to Jonathan.

"It was no big thing. I was just trying to help out." Jonathan replied then waved toward Kristen, Paul and Christopher. "You should be thanking these brave people. I was never in any danger but they actually risked their lives in order to help those in the water. Without their help I would never have been able to get to everyone in time. They're the real heroes." He looked over at Kristen and smiled. "You did very well out there." He glanced over at the approaching emergency vehicles. "I think the authorities can handle it from here." He gave Kristen another smile then took off and quickly disappeared.

Lois turned to the photographer beside her. "Jimmy, get some shots of these people, then get more background shots of the area." She then turned back to Kristen's family. "Lois Lane, Daily Planet." She smiled. "I have already met Kristen and I would like to meet the rest of your family."

Kristen introduced her family and Lois proceeded to interview them about what they had witnessed and what they had done. A few minutes into the interview a soaking wet Jonathan arrived. He told them that he had ended up helping on the other side of the lake.

Soon they were surrounded by emergency workers who were checking everyone over for injuries. Lois and Jimmy excused themselves and headed over to the large open area where Superman had set down the main body of the plane.

Chapter 13

Paul shrugged under the weight of the blanket that the emergency crews had placed across his wet shoulders. He was savoring the warmth of Sharron's arms around him as he glanced over at his son, sitting across the picnic table from him and also huddled under one of the emergency blankets. Christopher was staring out over the picnic grounds toward the lake as the last of

the injured were loaded into the last of the ambulances. The shoreline was swarming with various government officials that were here to investigate the airplane accident. They were currently examining the tail section of the airplane that Superman had lifted out of the lake and set on the shore a half hour ago.

Superboy hadn't been seen since the last of the people had been rescued from the lake and Superman had left right after giving his report to the authorities. Paul spotted Clark Kent over by the tail section interviewing an FAA official.

Paul's attention shifted over to the right of his son where Kristen and Jonathan sat close together sharing the blanket that covered their wet clothes. His opinion of that young man had completely turned a hundred and eighty degrees around from what it had been this morning. He was thinking that maybe he should say something to them when he caught his daughter looking back at him almost defiantly as she shifted even closer to Jonathan.

Paul smiled back. "Kristen, Christopher." His gaze flicked between his two children. "I just want you to know that I am very proud of both of you." His gaze now shifted to Jonathan. "Jonathan, I want you to know that I am very impressed by you as well. You never hesitated to dive in to help all those people. I'm very glad that Kristen has you as a friend and I hope we will be seeing more of you in the future."

Kristen and Christopher both stared at their father in surprise and he felt Sharron tighten her arm around his shoulder.

Jonathan tightened his arm around Kristen as he responded. "I think meeting your daughter is the best thing that ever happened to me and I also hope to see more of all of you." He turned his smile on Kristen and her face seemed to light up.

Paul nodded and took a deep breath. "Well it's been an eventful afternoon and we're all soaked. I suppose we should all be getting home so we can clean up and change into dry clothes. Jonathan, if you'd like we can drop you off at your place." He noticed the slightly crestfallen look on his daughter's face. "Kristen has to work this evening but the day is still young and after you get changed you're welcome to come back over. I'm sure we can find something to do ..." He grinned at the hopeful look in Kristen's eyes. "... this time without any airplanes falling out of the sky."

Jonathan smiled back. "That sounds great to me." He turned his attention to Kristen. "How about it? Think you can put up with me for a while longer?"

Kristen giggled then shrugged. "I think I can manage."

Jonathan cocked his head, looking back at Paul. "Looks like it's a deal."

Paul stood up. "Then we'd better get going."

The rest of them stood up and collected their things, then headed over to the area where they would be most likely to find a taxi. When they reached the road Jonathan saw a familiar minivan waiting for them. Lois Lane-Kent stuck her head out the open window. "You folks need a ride?"

After a moment's reluctance over their wet condition, followed by assurances from Lois that it didn't matter, they all piled into the minivan. Lois dropped Paul and his family off at their place. Jonathan walked Kristen up to the front door. Paul noticed that Jonathan had placed the blanket they had shared over Kristen's shoulders. Though Jonathan was just as soaked as the rest he didn't seem to be either cold or tired. Paul found himself thinking nostalgically of the resilience of youth.

Jonathan reassured Kristen that he would be back in about an hour or less then strode back out to the minivan.

The doorbell rang and Kristen raced down the stairs, to the shouted admonition to slow down from her father. She yanked open the door and pulled a bemused Jonathan into the house. "Jonathan's here." She called out unnecessarily.

As they joined the others in the family room Paul inquired, “Do you have any plans for the rest of the afternoon?”

Jonathan shook his head. “No, not really.” He glanced at Kristen. “Other than spending as much of it as I can with Kristen.”

“There is that new movie that came out Friday.” Paul continued. “Maybe we can all go to see the matinee show.”

Jonathan knew the movie in question was a romantic comedy and a good date movie. He again glanced at Kristen. “It sounds like a good idea to me.”

Paul scanned his smartphone for a couple of minutes. “We have to leave soon if we want to make the matinee showing.” He frowned. “It may take too long to get a cab.”

Jonathan shrugged. “That’s no problem. Mom prefers driving that silver Jeep of hers so she let me borrow the family minivan.” He smiled thinking about his mother and her precious silver Jeep.

As they headed out the door Christopher was on his cell phone with someone named Anna. They all piled into the minivan and headed for the mall where Kristen worked. While standing in line at the theater for their tickets they were met by Christopher’s current romantic interest, a dark haired pretty girl named Anna. They had arrived with plenty of time to spare and were able to get good seats together despite it being only the second day since the movie had come out.

The movie did not disappoint. It delivered humor and a strong romantic mood. By the time it was over it felt more like a triple date rather than a family outing. After the movie the three couples headed over to the food court for a quick dinner before Kristen had to go to work.

Once they had finished eating they all walked Kristen over to the music store where they took their leave. Christopher split off from the group with Anna. She said that she could give him a ride home. That left just Paul and Sharron with Jonathan. The three of them took their time heading back to the minivan, glancing into some of the stores along the way and talking.

They stopped in at an electronics store where Jonathan and Paul found themselves bonding over high end video displays. Sharron found the whole thing amusing. At one point while they were discussing the relative merits of various types of displays Sharron snickered, shaking her head. “Boys and their toys.” She commented quietly to herself. She was surprised when Jonathan glanced her way and grinned as though in response to her comment that he could not possibly have heard.

About two hours after they had dropped Kristen off at her job, Jonathan dropped Paul and Sharron off at their home. Christopher was not home yet and wasn’t really expected to be back any time soon. Paul and Sharron ended up indulging in the romantic mood that still remained from the movie that they had seen earlier.

Kristen arrived home from work at around ten to find her parents cuddled up on the family room sofa. Fifteen minutes later Christopher arrived home. The family sat together in the family room and talked for a while, clearing the air of the last of the fallout from that morning. By the time they all retired things were back to normal and Paul felt that all was right with the world again.

As he lay in bed Paul thought about everything that had happened that day. Something seemed to keep nagging at the back of Paul’s mind about Superboy and the events at the park, but he just couldn’t put his finger on it. As he went back over everything that had happened in the park it finally hit him. It had seemed to Paul that Superman had appeared to know his children though he couldn’t figure out how. Then he remembered something else that had struck him. After Superboy had retrieved a very tired Kristen from the water, Paul was sure that he had

seen a special look momentarily pass between Superboy and Kristen just before he had left. It had looked to him as though they knew each other and he was sure that he had seen a bit more than simple interest flicker in Superboy’s eyes.

Was there something there? Should he encourage it? What about Jonathan and Kristen? He fell asleep with these thoughts circulating around in his head.

The next morning Paul checked the news reports of the airplane crash. According to the article in the ‘Daily Planet’, based on interviews with those that had been on board the plane, it looked like the cause of the crash was a large bird that had been sucked into the jet engine causing the engine to catch fire and explode. The article also stated that there had been less than a dozen injuries, only one was labeled as serious, and, miraculously, there had been no fatalities.

Paul’s whole family had been mentioned in the article. Paul, Kristen and Christopher were praised for their selfless heroism in going into the water to rescue those that had been in danger of drowning and Sharron was cited for helping to tend to those that were pulled out of the water until emergency crews had arrived. The article concluded that it was thanks to their actions, along with the several others that, inspired by the actions of Paul’s family, had dove in to help, that there had been no loss of life among those that had been out boating on the lake. The fact that the last three rows on the airplane had been empty had resulted in no loss of life there. The actions of both Superman and Superboy were also heavily reported in the same article.

Paul scanned everything about the crash but found no mention of Jonathan’s part in the rescues. It seemed a bit odd but he figured that maybe Jonathan or his parents had wanted to keep his name out of the paper.

For the next few weeks Paul’s family had to endure the attention and congratulations from their relatives, friends, and peers. Jonathan came over several times to see Kristen and the connection between them was pretty obvious. Though Paul had kept his eyes open for any sign of it, there had been no indications that there was any kind of relationship between Kristen and Superboy. Paul soon began to doubt that he had seen what he thought he had seen that day at the park.

Early Saturday morning two weeks after the plane incident Paul was awakened by the sound of the rear door opening and closing. He glanced over at the alarm clock to see that it was five in the morning. He yawned and mumbled to himself. “Who in their right mind would be up at this time of the morning on a Saturday?” He was about to drag himself out of bed to see what was going on when he remembered that it was the first Saturday of the month. That must have been Christopher heading for that flea market that he always visited. Paul stretched and glanced at the bed next to him to see that Sharron was still asleep beside him. As he gazed lovingly down at her he thought that he would let her sleep herself out. Yesterday had been a bit stressful for her at her job — it always was on the first Friday of the month. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. Soon he was dozing off.

Paul was again awakened around eight o’clock by the sound of the back door slamming then the sound of someone running up the stairs. Paul got out of bed and put on a robe while glancing out of the bedroom door. He saw Christopher standing in his daughter’s bedroom sounding very upset and scared as he was urging her to contact Superboy.

Christopher had originally considered going straight to the Kents’ house but he wasn’t sure where it was and he didn’t think he had any time to waste trying to find it much less get them to listen to him. He decided that Kristen was his best chance to get

to Jonathan quickly.

Kristen was sitting up in bed reading when she was disturbed by the precipitous entrance of her brother. She glanced up at Christopher, feeling a bit annoyed as he barged into her room. She did a double take as she noticed his distraught state then, frowning, gave her full attention to him. “Chris, what’s wrong?”

Christopher glanced back out through her door and saw their father coming out of his bedroom door. He paused trying to decide how to say what he needed to say without giving away too much in front of their father. He shook his head then spoke urgently to Kristen. “Look, I believe that you know how to contact Superboy.” Christopher again glanced at their father, who was now standing in Kristen’s doorway, then continued. “I’m sorry for blurting that out and I wouldn’t have said anything if this wasn’t an emergency. You have to tell Superboy that I need to talk to him or Superman immediately. They’re both in great danger and it involves kryptonite.”

Paul blinked twice in confusion then gasped as the meaning of his son’s words sank in.

Chapter 14

Kristen’s eyes initially got wide with surprise and fear as she let the book drop to her lap then glanced back and forth between her brother and her father. Christopher knew she could contact Superboy!/? But as her brother continued speaking, Kristen’s expression became grimly determined. “OK, Chris, but neither of you can ever say anything to anyone about this.” After another quick glance at her father and her brother she reached over and picked up her phone from the nightstand. Kristen was about to select Jonathan’s entry in her phone when she paused a moment thinking very hard. Maybe she shouldn’t let them know that Superboy’s phone number was already programmed into her directory. Instead of just selecting it she quickly punched in Jonathan’s number directly then paused a few of seconds while it rang at the other end.

As soon as Jonathan answered she launched into her explanation. “This is Kristen, I need to see you or Superman right away. My brother and father are right here and I know that I shouldn’t call you like this but my brother says that it is an emergency.” She repeated everything that her brother had just said to her then paused to listen. “OK, I’ll meet you at the back door.” She terminated the call then quickly cleared her phone’s call history. She looked up at Christopher and Paul. “Superboy said that he would be here in a couple of minutes.”

Paul felt like someone had pulled the rug out from under him. Christopher really expected Kristen to have access to Superboy and she had just called him on her phone!/? Kristen knew Superboy’s phone number!/?

Paul felt a hand on his shoulder and nearly jumped out of his skin. He turned to see Sharron standing behind him looking just as shocked as he felt. Their eyes met then she spoke in an awed whisper. “Did Kristen just ...?”

Paul nodded. “So it seems. I guess we had better get dressed quickly cause I think we’re about to have company.”

Paul herded Sharron back to their room while Kristen herded Christopher out of her room then closed the door.

For the next couple of minutes Paul and Sharron quickly got dressed in total stunned silence. They emerged from their room at the same time Kristen emerged from her room and the three of them headed down the stairs. Just as they reached the bottom they heard a knock at the back door. By the time they reached the breakfast nook in the back of the house Christopher was holding the back door open and Superman was stepping into their house followed by Superboy. Despite their suddenly unsteady legs Paul and Sharron managed to make it to the table and sit down. Christopher urged Superman and Superboy to also take a seat.

Superman accepted one of the two remaining seats. Superboy

insisted that Kristen take the last remaining seat then took a cross legged sitting position, floating in midair at the table beside Kristen. Paul and Sharron both looked at him in surprise as Kristen giggled. The action had the effect of both proving that he was the real thing to the parents and breaking the tension. Then everyone focused their attention expectantly on Christopher as he started to pace nervously.

After a few seconds Christopher started to speak. “I went to the ‘First Saturday’ flea market this morning like usual. While I was there I spotted a man examining two glowing green crystals at a rock seller’s booth. As you know I have already encountered Kryptonite once before, when I made Kristen’s birthday present. By the way, this was not the same guy as the one that sold me that other piece of Kryptonite.”

Paul and Sharron glanced at the bracelet on Kristen’s wrist. They both now realized that it didn’t have the self-illuminated sheen that it had when Christopher had first given it to her. Kristen was looking back at them with a hint of resignation in her eyes. She knew that eventually explanations would be required.

Their attention was drawn back to Christopher as he continued talking. “I could see right away that those two crystals had to be kryptonite. The buyer was waving some type of electronic device with a flashing green light next to the crystals. Then he put the device in a brief case that he set on the ground by his feet. I walked up to the booth and tried to get into a conversation with them. I expressed an interest in the crystals and tied to see if I could buy one from either one of them. The seller said that those two were all he had. The buyer was kinda surly and refused to sell either of the kryptonite crystals to me. I tried offering the buyer a good profit for them saying that my sister loved that shade of green and her birthday was coming up. That’s when the buyer got very aggressive and told me, rather rudely, to buzz off.”

Christopher paused and Superman spoke. “Do you have any idea who the buyer was or where he might have gone?”

Christopher responded. “I don’t know who he was but I know where he went.” He paused again glancing at his father. “I let the man think that I had given up on the crystals and left. I doubled back and found a spot where I could see them without being seen then I watched. After a few minutes the buyer took the crystals then started walking around the flea market. All the while he was looked around as if to see if anyone was watching him.” Christopher noticed the worried look on his parents’ faces and rushed to reassure his parents. “I was very careful and I’m sure he didn’t notice me.” Christopher returned his attention to Superman. “About ten minutes later the buyer left the market and I followed him. He met another guy at a warehouse in Suicide Slum and gave him the larger of the two crystals. I recognized the guy the buyer gave it to. I had seen him on one of those “Most Wanted” shows for making bombs. I followed the buyer a few blocks further on where he went into a shabby looking gun shop and gave the other crystal to the guy behind the counter.”

Christopher paused and now they could see a haunted look pass across his face as he continued. “It was about an hour later that I got back to the flea market and talked to the seller. He apparently bought the kryptonite from a roadside stand in Kansas. It sounded like the same place that the other kryptonite came from. I got about halfway back to my car when there was a loud explosion behind me. I rushed back and found a hole in the ground where the rock seller’s booth used to be. I got out of there as fast as I could and came straight home.”

Christopher leaned against the table looking wrung out then his head popped up. “Oh my God! The brief case! The buyer didn’t have his brief case when he left the flea market. That must have been the bomb.”

While Paul and Sharron stared at Christopher in shocked silence, Superman stood up and placed his hand on Christopher’s

shoulder. “That was a real close call. You showed both courage and intelligence and I want to thank you for what you’ve done for us.” He paused to give his shoulder a gentle squeeze. “Also I’m glad that you’re still alive.” Superman began talking more or less to himself. “It looks like the buyer is having kryptonite bullets made as well as a kryptonite bomb. I think it’s a good bet that he is planning to kill one or both of us.” He looked up. “We’re going to need some help on this.”

Paul looked Superman in the eye. “I’ll be happy to help in any way that I can.”

“Thanks, Paul. The best help you could give us right now is to let us use your place to meet some others and plan our next move.”

“You’ve got it.” Paul declared.

Superman produced a cell phone and hit one button. After a few seconds he spoke into it. “Hello, Bill, something very serious has come up and I really need your help.” ... He paused a moment listening then responded. “Great. Can you meet me at a friend’s house.” ... After a few more seconds he relayed Paul’s address then paused again. “Thanks, Bill. We’ll see you in a few.” Superman hung up and put the cell phone away somewhere behind his back then he addressed Paul. “Bill is a very close friend. He should be here in about twenty minutes.”

Sharron was finally getting over her shock at what was happening in her home and the hostess part of her brain took over. She popped up from her chair. “Can I offer you anything ... coffee ... some breakfast? ...”

Superman responded. “I don’t want to put you out or anything.”

“Oh it’s nothing ... I was about to fix breakfast for my family and you are welcome to join us while you wait for your friend.” Sharron insisted. There was the faintest nervous tremor in her voice.

“That would be very ...” Superman stopped speaking and stared off into the distance. Superboy also appeared to be staring at nothing as they both appeared to be listening to something that Paul and his family couldn’t hear.

After a couple of seconds Superboy looked at Superman. “Dad, you go and I’ll stay here to wait for Mister Henderson.”

Superman nodded to Superboy then addressed Sharron. “I appreciate your offer but I’m afraid I will have to take a rain check on that breakfast.” He quickly exited through the back door and a moment later the quiet was broken by a very distinctive sonic boom.

Superboy addressed Paul and his family. “There has been a gas explosion in an apartment building out near Hobbs Bay.” He then smiled at Sharron. “I would love to join you for breakfast while we wait for Mister Henderson to arrive.”

Sharron used the familiar activity of making breakfast to help her recover her equilibrium.

After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence Paul finally spoke. “Superboy, ah, how did you become involved with Kristen’s bracelet and the kryptonite?”

Jonathan (as Superboy) thought for several seconds. He needed to be close enough to the truth to adequately explain what had happened without giving away too much detail. Finally he began spinning his tale. “A short while back Kristen and I happened to cross paths. I came within fifteen feet of where she was standing and started to feel weak, dizzy and achy. She saw my reaction and rushed over to try and help me. I was hit by terrible pain as she approached and passed out. She had no idea what was happening to me but she recognized who I was and took steps to protect me from discovery. She was able to find a way to contact my father to get help. When my father showed up he was also affected by the kryptonite and passed out.”

Superboy paused and Kristen spoke up. “I was never so scared in my life.”

Superboy nodded to her then his eyes returned to Paul. “Once Kristen understood what was really happening she removed her jewelry and got it as far away from us as possible. Dad and I recovered fairly quickly once we were no longer being exposed to the Kryptonite. Dad and Kristen made arrangements to get her jewelry to someone that could safely remove and dispose of the Kryptonite crystals. He replaced them with stones that looked just like the original.” Superboy shrugged. “And that is how we met.”

There was dead silence as Kristen’s family digested what they had just been told. Jonathan thought he had done a good job answering their curiosity without giving anything more away.

Sharron had accepted the story completely and was feeling very proud of her daughter. She realized that Superboy had not said where specifically this encounter had taken place but she figured that it was not really important. One thing that she did realize that pleased her was that Kristen had become good friends with Superboy and Superman. You couldn’t find very many friends better than that.

Christopher was smiling knowingly to himself. He was pretty sure that he could fill in the parts that Jonathan had left out. The encounter must have happened in the music store and Jonathan had entered as himself. That was how Kristen had learned his identity and how she knew how to contact his father. It all made perfect sense. ‘Way to go, Sis.’ He thought to himself.

Paul was very impressed by how well his daughter had apparently handled herself in a serious situation and now she was on friendly terms with Superboy and Superman. Then it hit him. He and Sharron had both made jokes about Kristen going out with Superboy and now it turned out that they already were somewhat close. She knew his phone number and it was obvious that Superboy thought very highly of her. Could a more serious relationship be a real possibility? He glanced at his daughter in amazement. Somehow she had managed to become close to three exceptional people that he admired, Superman, Superboy and Jonathan Kent.

The silence was broken by an exclamation from Sharron as her attention returned to the breakfast she had cooking. A few minutes later she was serving breakfast. She found herself feeling just a bit in awe of the fact that she was serving breakfast to Superboy. She was also trying to deal with the fact that Superboy was still sitting in midair at her breakfast table.

Halfway through their breakfast they were interrupted by the front doorbell. Paul announced that he would get it and strode to the front door. He opened the door and was very surprised to be confronted by, the mayor of Metropolis, William Henderson. After a stunned moment the pieces fell into place. Superman had said ‘Bill’ and Superboy had said Mister Henderson. Paul shook off his momentarily stunned state and invited the Mayor into his home.

Chapter 15

Still trying to come to terms with the fact that Mayor William Henderson was in his house, Paul escorted him back to the breakfast nook. Sharron looked up as they walked in and, recognizing Bill, dropped her spatula. After a stunned moment she retrieved the spatula and dropped it into the sink, then got another one from one of the kitchen drawers. Henderson introduced himself, then Paul introduced his family.

Bill glanced over at Superboy, still floating in a cross-legged sitting position at the table, and couldn’t help the amused snort that escaped him spoiling his characteristic dour expression, at the unusual sight. Then he got serious as his attention centered on Superboy. “OK now, what is this all about?”

Superboy responded. “This is Christopher’s discovery ... I think he should explain it.”

Sharron had begun setting out the food on the table. She seemed a bit uncertain as she took in the important people that

were currently occupying her breakfast nook. “Um, ah, Mister Mayor, would you like to have some breakfast while we talk?” She blushed a bit.

Bill glanced around at the faces of the family then smiled at Sharron. He hadn’t had breakfast yet and the food smelled very good right now. He also knew that these people were a bit nervous in his presence and sitting at the breakfast table with them would put them more at ease. “Yes, thank you. I would like some breakfast. And, please, call me Bill.” He took one of the two empty seats and Paul took the other one. As Sharron continued serving the food he turned his attention on Christopher. “Now, young man, what is this all about?”

As Christopher spun out his tale about what had happened Bill began to frown as the seriousness of the situation became clear to him. He also glanced occasionally at the others, gauging their reactions and coming to some surprising conclusions. This family knew a lot more about Superman and Superboy than most people did and there was definitely something going on between Superboy and the daughter, Kristen. He would bet a year’s salary that Kristen knew that Superboy was really Jonathan Kent and he suspected that Christopher might also know. He wasn’t so sure how much the parents knew. It was obvious, however, that they all knew the truth about Kryptonite.

After Christopher finished telling about the mornings events Bill Henderson thought for several seconds then started talking. “So what we have is kryptonite in the hands of two very unsavory characters and we have a very limited window in which to act before it is turned into even deadlier weapons to be used against you and your father.”

Superboy nodded. “And Dad and I can’t really do anything because we can’t get near the stuff.”

Bill turned to Christopher. “I know a friendly judge that I can trust that will be able to supply us with warrants. But I will need a carefully worded deposition from you about what you saw. There should be no mention of kryptonite. Instead describe it as glowing radioactive crystals. That way we can get fast action and keep the concept of Kryptonite out of the picture.” He took a note pad from his pocket. “If you will write down those addresses I get started on those warrants while you get some paper and write down and sign your statement.”

Christopher wrote down the address for the warehouse and the gun shop then handed it to Bill. Sharron left the room saying that she would get Christopher some paper to write on. Bill studied the addresses a moment then was on his phone.

“Hello, Judge Sanders, Bill Henderson here. Sorry to disturb you but I need really a big favor.” ...

“I need two search warrants.” He repeated the two addresses.

“The objects of the search are illegal radioactive material.”

...

“The material in question appears to be a glowing green crystal.” ...

“That’s right they are suspected of receiving dangerous radioactive material and one of the recipients is believed to be wanted for making bombs used in terrorist type attacks.” ...

“Yes I have a witness.” ...

“I will have an officer stop by in about an hour with the witness’s statement to pick up the warrants.” ...

“OK, and thanks.” He clicked off then dialed another number.

“Hello, Greg, Bill Henderson. I have a critical situation here. I need you to assemble your SWAT team.” ...

“Once your team is assembled I need you to come by my current location to pick-up a witness statement then go to Judge Sanders’ office to pick up two search warrants.” ...

“It’s about nine thirty now. They need to be ready to move by noon.” ...

“No, I can’t be directly involved in this. I’ll explain when you get here.” He repeated Paul’s address.

“Thanks Greg. See you when you get here.” ...

Bill put away his cell phone. “Chief Hughes should be here in a bit.” Bill took a bite of the breakfast in front of him, then he turned his attention to Sharron. “This is very good, Mrs. Mathers.”

Superboy chimed in. “I second that. This is very good.”

Sharron blushed as she smiled back at both of them. “Thank-you.” She turned her attention to Bill. She had noticed that despite his well-known deadpan cynical disposition, Bill Henderson was actually a very pleasant person. “Um, if I’m supposed to call you Bill then you should call me Sharron.” She blushed again at her own words. She was still trying to adjust to the number of very important people that were passing through her home. Now they were expecting the Chief of Police.

Bill turned his attention to Christopher who was intently writing away. “How is it coming there, Christopher?”

Christopher glanced up from his writing. “I’m about halfway through, Sir.”

Bill nodded. “Good, but there’s no need to rush. Take your time and make sure that you’ve got your facts correct.”

A short while later Superman returned. He was invited to partake in breakfast and accepted. Two minutes after that Police Chief Greg Hughes arrived. After introductions were exchanged Bill Henderson immediately got down to business.

Henderson handed Greg the statement. “Greg, this is Christopher’s official statement on what happened early this morning. You’re to take it straight to Judge Sanders and she will sign the warrants as soon as she gets this. I can’t stress to you how important this is.”

Greg nodded as he read through the statement. The further he read the wider his eyes got. Finally Greg looked up at Bill, his face registering a combination of surprise, and grim fear. “Is this really Joey Carson?”

Bill’s expression was now just as grim. “Christopher identified him from that ‘America’s Most Wanted’ segment. He said that he got a good look at him.”

“My God, Bill. Radioactive material in the hands of ‘The Bombmaster’ ... That’s the stuff of every cop’s worst nightmare.”

Bill shook his head. “It’s worse than you know and I can’t explain to you why but it is imperative that the green crystals are recovered as soon as possible and immediately turned over to STAR Labs.” Greg stared at Bill a moment, his brows furrowed in uncertainty, then he glanced over at Superman and Superboy. His expression turned to one of shock as he looked back at Bill. He opened his mouth but Bill cut him off before he could say anything. “Don’t ask and don’t discuss this with anyone else. Just make sure that that stuff makes it to STAR Labs.”

Greg nodded to Bill. “I’ll get it taken care of.” Greg nodded to the rest of them and Paul escorted him out.

When Paul returned to the room Bill exhaled a huge sigh. “Now all we can do is wait and hope.” He noticed the look on Superman’s face and became worried. “Superman, you can’t be involved in this.”

Superman looked back stubbornly determined. “I can’t just stand by and let them risk their lives for me. I have to help.”

“How? You can’t get anywhere near that stuff.” Bill Retorted.

“I can at least fly high cover for them. Warn them of any traps or other dangers.” Superman responded.

“That could cause other problems. If you are present everyone will wonder why you are staying in the background rather than taking direct action.”

Superman paused to think a moment. “You saw the look on Greg’s face when he glanced at me just before he left. He has already figured out that Kryptonite is involved.” He replied. “I will stay out of sight and only communicate with Greg on my cell. Regardless, I have to be there to help any way I can.”

Bill sighed again. “I suppose there’s no way that I can talk

you out of this.”

Superman shook his head. “Nope, not a chance. Chief Hughes should arrive at Judge Sanders’ in about fifteen minutes. I will meet him there and work out the details.” He then looked over at Sharron and smiled. “In the meantime I want to enjoy this marvelous breakfast that you have prepared.

After he had finished breakfast Superman left the Mathers family’s home to a final admonition from Bill Henderson to watch himself and stay well away from any place where the kryptonite might be. Once everyone had their fill of breakfast they all moved to the family room to await news of the raids about to happen.

A few minutes later a cell phone rang. Everyone glanced around curiously looking for the source then Superboy pulled out a cell phone from somewhere behind his back and answered it.

“Hello?” ... He glanced at the others who were looking back curiously at him. “I’m at Kristen’s place.” ... Again he glanced around. “Two pieces of Kryptonite have been located in the hands of some bad guys.” ... “Dad went to meet with some policemen that are going to raid those two places.” ... Superboy’s frown deepened as he listened for a long time. He closed his eyes and nodded his head very slightly. Finally he sighed and responded. “I won’t. I promised Dad that I would stay here until he returns.” ... His frown deepened even more. “Mom, that might not be such a good idea.” He listened a few moments then shook his head and sighed again. “But Dad won’t be able to do much to protect you this time.” ... Another sigh. “I know Mom, just, please, be careful.” He closed his phone with another sigh.

Superboy/Jonathan looked up, his face creased in a worried frown.

Kristen reached out and took Superboy/Jonathan’s hand. “Are you OK?”

Superboy/Jonathan responded. “Just worried about my mother.”

Kristen dropped Jonathan’s hand self-consciously. She needed to be more careful. She knew how worried Jonathan must be about both his parents and she wanted to put her arms around him to comfort him but she wasn’t supposed to know Superboy that well. She knew that she mustn’t do anything that might give Jonathan’s secret away. Keeping Jonathan’s secret was proving to be much more difficult than she had expected, especially under these close and very stressful conditions. Kristen looked around at the various expressions on the faces of the other’s in the room. It was bad enough that they all now knew about Kryptonite, and now she was worried that her actions may have just given too much away.

Paul had been quietly observing everything that was going on. The first thing that struck him was the close physical proximity between Kristen and Superboy. The second thing that struck him was that there seemed to be much more going on between them than he had first thought (The look on her face when she had touched Superboy’s hand in sympathy had been very instructive). The third thing was his realization that, based on the phone conversation, Superboy’s mother was apparently a normal person (something he had not previously considered).

Sharron had noticed indications of a definite connection between Kristen and Superboy (especially when she had touched his hand). Though they were trying not to show it she was certain that they were more than just acquaintances. She began to wonder just how close they really were and where Kristen’s relationship with Jonathan fit in all this.

Henderson watched the interaction between Jonathan and Kristen. He had been in on the Kent family secret for several years now and he had heard about the bomb incident at the high school. He suspected that Kristen also knew the secret and by the looks on her parent’s faces he suspected that they didn’t know.

The older brother however was a bit of a puzzle.

Chapter 16

Superman glided silently just inside the low lying cloud layer directly above a non-descript warehouse. He could see only blurry images through the roof of the building. He had to assume that there was a small amount of lead in the paint that had once been used to paint the interior. However he was able to see well enough and was able to give Chief Greg Hughes a fairly accurate description of the layout. He spoke into his cell phone.

“There is a wall that separates the front two-thirds of the warehouse, which is full of boxes and crates, from the back. There appears to be a large concealed sliding door in the center of that wall. The area beyond is divided up into a crude living area and work area. There are two doors in the back of the building. One opens to the space between this warehouse and the one next to it. The other opens into the alley behind it. It looks like there are alarms and explosive charges on all three of the front loading-dock doors and on the two regular doors on the side and in the back. There are extra thick walls to isolate the booby-trapped back doors from the interior living space.”

Clark paused as he concentrated his attention on the workroom area, trying to get a better view, then continued. “There are several cabinets with explosives and bomb making equipment.” He tried to get a better look at the cabinets before continuing. “There also appear to be booby traps rigged on the explosive cabinets. I suspect that opening a cabinet incorrectly sets off the explosives stored inside them. In the center of the room there is a large work bench and it looks like he is already constructing two unusual looking bombs. There are four armed men inside the occupied part of the building and one armed guard in the front warehouse section.” Clark paused in his narration as he tried to get a closer look at something that didn’t look quite right before he continued. It was so difficult to get any kind of clear view through the old leaded paint.

The Mathers family and their guests had moved into the family room to be more comfortable while they awaited word on the raids on the two locations where the kryptonite had been delivered. Sharron had supplied tea, soda, coffee and snacks for everyone and told them to help themselves to whatever they wished. Jonathan was very nervous and his tight control over his Superboy persona was beginning to slip. He was acutely aware that both of his parents were walking straight into danger and both of them were vulnerable. He seemed to be barely even aware of his surroundings as his mind kept skimming over all the things that could possibly go wrong.

Kristen was sitting on the sofa next to him and her hand slipped into his both seeking and giving comfort without her even being aware of the action. Jonathan became aware of her actions and he looked over into her sympathetic eyes. For just that moment, all of both of their emotions became plainly visible on their faces.

Christopher had noticed what was happening and was worried. He had already concluded that Mayor William Henderson was in on the secret. But if Jonathan and Kristen didn’t get their emotions under better control, they were going to give themselves away. He glanced over at his parents and saw that they were both watching Kristen and Superboy. It was already too late.

Ever since they had moved into the family room Paul had been noticing Superboy’s attitude. He could see the young man’s tight control slipping under the strain of worry for his parents. From the short phone conversation he had overheard he knew that Superman had a wife that was probably a normal human and his mind had been considering all the ramifications since then. He saw Kristen’s hand steal into Superboy’s hand and the look of

deep worry on the young man's face visibly eased. Superboy glanced over at Kristen then looked down in an emotionally open and surprisingly familiar gesture. At that instant enlightenment hit Paul like a bolt of lightning as two faces melded into one in his mind's eye. Superboy is Jonathan Kent! He stared at the young man's face and could now clearly see the resemblance once he looked for it. Then he was startled by the sound of shattering glass.

Clark peered through the obscuring lead-painted roof trying to get a better look at something that didn't look quite right about the floor under the workbench. Finally he continued his description. "It's hard to tell for sure but there may be a trap door in the floor under the workbench. Let me see if I can get a better look." Clark shifted his position to try to get a better angle. After shifting position several times Clark finally reported. "I just can't get a good look at it but I'm fairly sure that there is some type of trap door under the workbench. There is so much lead paint on the subflooring that I can't see what is below the warehouse. There are two utility tunnels, a storm drain and a sewer passing under the building but I have no way of telling which one the trap door might connect to."

The man working on the two bombs reached over and opened what looked vaguely like a cigar box made of lead and Clark saw the beautifully deadly green glow that sent a shiver through him. Clark could feel an unpleasant prickle throughout his body even though he knew that he was too far away for the kryptonite to have any effect on him. The man at the work bench picked up a large spoon and started scooping the glowing green powder into six smaller containers. Clark felt cold shivers go through him at the thought of what a bomb laced with that powdered kryptonite would do.

Clark reported what he was seeing to Greg, referring to the kryptonite as the K-material. His attention was distracted when he detected a familiar heartbeat and looked over to see Lois approaching the police command outpost.

Sharron was watching her daughter and Superboy over the top of the glass of iced tea that she was sipping. Kristen and Superboy seemed to be sitting on the sofa much closer together than necessary. In fact she thought that Kristen was getting much too close to the young superhero. The emotionally charged tension of the situation was causing both young people to let their guard down and they were neither of them thinking straight. Such a relationship could never work out. And what about that other boy, Jonathan? She wondered if maybe she should somehow separate the two of them but she was reluctant to interfere with the obvious comfort that the young worried superhero was deriving from Kristen's presence. Then she saw her daughter's hand slip into Superboy's hand and his unconcealed reaction to it. Sharron caught her breath at the raw emotion both teenagers were unconsciously showing. Then Superboy ran his free hand through his hair in an unconscious nervous gesture and again glanced over at Kristen, a half smile of gratitude began easing across his face. Sharron gasped and the glass of tea she had been holding slipped from her suddenly nerveless hand.

Everyone jumped when the glass hit the floor and shattered. They stared at Sharron seeing surprise and dawning comprehension in her expression. For two endless seconds Sharron sat there with her hand to her mouth and her face frozen in a shocked wide eyed look as several thoughts passed through her mind while she stared back at Jonathan. "Superboy can't take Kristen away from Jonathan because Superboy is Jonathan! Kristen is already going out with Superboy! Superboy's parents are Clark Kent and Lois Lane! Lois Lane has been married to Superman for nineteen years! Kristen is going out with Superboy! My daughter is dating Superboy!"

Just moments before the teams started to move into the building Clark disabled several of the critical alarms and booby traps on the outer doors by cutting the wires with needle-thin beams of heat vision and in the process melting pinpoint holes in the building's roof. Just as Superman finished cutting the last wire Joey Carson looked up from his work and glanced around, sniffing the air. The next second Joey shoved the workbench and it swiveled out of the way and grabbed up the lead box of powdered kryptonite just as the SWAT team smashed through the doors into the Bombmaster's lair. Joey tried to escape through the exposed trap door but when he opened it he found himself faced with more officers down below waiting for him. He slammed the trapdoor shut and shoved home the locking bolt.

Clark continued to watch the operation from his hidden vantage point just within the low cloud layer as the SWAT team moved in on the Bombmaster's hidden lair. He released the breath he had been holding when Lois chose to stay back at the SWAT command truck rather than trying to follow the teams into the warehouse.

The SWAT teams poured onto the hidden lair and Joey reached for a remote detonation switch that sat within easy reach on the workbench. To his great surprise nothing happened. Superman had already disabled all of traps around the entrances. In a matter of minutes the SWAT teams had completely subdued the Bombmaster and the five henchmen that were in there with him.

As Joey and his five henchmen were handcuffed and being led out of the building, Greg recovered the kryptonite powder and returned it all to the lead box. He grabbed the still hot soldering iron sitting on the work bench and sealed the lead box shut. He then personally took the box out of the building and locked it into the SWAT Mobile Command Post van. He glanced back at the warehouse and commented under his breath. "That went a lot smoother than I expected ... Thank God."

Only Lois was close enough to hear him and sighed with relief. That was one less danger to her family.

Greg glanced over at Lois and let out a deep sigh. He was a little surprised that she had managed to stay out of harm's way. "One down ... one to go." He commented to himself then he looked around at his men and called out. "OK gentlemen, we still have one more raid to execute. Let the bomb squad deal with the explosives and the cabinets. The rest of you mount up and head out."

Christopher was the first in the now dead silent family room to recover. He had seen the look on his father's face as Paul had figured it all out and had missed his mother's initial reaction until her glass hit the floor. His mouth quirked into a slightly sardonic grin as he spoke. "Mom you are going to have to learn to control your reactions much better than that now that you're in on the big secret."

Everyone's attention shifted to Christopher. Kristen finally spoke. "How ... When ..."

Christopher shrugged. "I figured it out the night of the Senior Prom. It was a lot of little things but mostly it was something about the way both Jonathan and Superboy seemed to react to you."

After working his mouth soundlessly for a couple of seconds, Paul finally managed to get out a few words. "You're Jonathan ... Jonathan Kent?" Everything that had happened since that first day that Kristen told him that Jonathan was taking her to the prom circulated through his mind.

Sharron was still staring in stunned silence as Kristen pressed close against Jonathan's side and he placed his arm around her shoulders. Kristen half mumbled. "I'm sorry Jonathan, I guess I blew it."

Then Jonathan blushed with a little half grin as he responded. “I think we both gave ourselves away. I guess my secret is out.” He paused then nodded. “Yes, I’m Jonathan.”

Mayor Henderson jumped in at this point. “I hope you all know that you cannot tell anyone what you just learned today. If this secret got out it could destroy Jonathan’s family and cause Superman all kinds of trouble. It could also put your own family in danger.”

As the members of the Mathers family recovered their equilibrium after the shock of discovering Superboy’s true identity they each promised that they would keep the secret to themselves. Then Paul and Sharron were lost in thought as they quietly sat there contemplating the various ramifications of what they had just learned. Christopher and Kristen watched their parent’s faces as the various thoughts and ideas flitted through their minds. From the look of surprise mixed with chagrin that appeared on Paul’s face, Christopher assumed that he was thinking about the events of Prom night and the morning after.

Then the questions came and the next several minutes were spent talking about this new development and what effect it had on the relationship between Kristen, Jonathan and their families. The discussion was cut short when Jonathan’s cell phone rang. It was Clark, informing them that the first raid went off without a hitch and that Lois had, surprisingly, stayed out of the line of fire until the whole thing was over. Clark broke contact and Jonathan relayed the information.

Since the secret was now out Jonathan stood and executed the spin-change maneuver that his father had taught him, much to the amazement of everyone there except Henderson. He had seen it before. Kristen was delighted and amazed by it. Superboy was gone and Jonathan now stood in his place.

A half hour later Superman was hovering over the gunsmith’s shop. In the back the man was dropping nine millimeter slugs into a small pot filled with a green glowing liquid. The slugs dropped into the heated pot quickly melted. On the bench beside the hot pot sat a nine millimeter bullet mold, a bullet press, a container of gunpowder and two dozen nine-millimeter shell casings. There was no one else in the little gun shop. Clark reported his observations to Greg.

Two plain clothes detectives dressed rather sloppily entered the shop posing as less than stellar citizens looking to buy handguns. They arrested the owner without incident while he was in the front public part of the store.

Greg found and unplugged the melting pot containing the liquid kryptonite. Greg and Lois ended up having to stand guard over the pot for several hours while its contents cooled and solidified. Once it had solidified, they took the still too hot to touch pot out to the SWAT van and, a short time later, all the recovered kryptonite was delivered to STAR Labs for analysis.

After reporting on the successful completion of both raids Greg returned to headquarters. Lois and Clark ended up back over at the Mather’s where they were both surprised to see Jonathan in his street clothes. That was when Lois learned that the whole family had figured out the secret. They all sat together in the family room talking late into the evening while Lois typed up a front page story about the raid on the old warehouse and the capture of the ‘Bombmaster’.

EPILOGUE

It was the first Christmas since Kristen and Jonathan had met and their relationship was even stronger than ever. Kristen and her family had been invited over for Christmas dinner at the Kent home and had come bearing gifts that were placed under the Kent’s Christmas tree to be opened after dinner. There were also some gifts already under the tree for Kristen’s family.

Christmas dinner, cooked by Clark, was, as always, a major

success.

After dinner they all gathered in the Kent family room with a cheery fire in the fireplace and Christmas music playing on the stereo while they opened the gifts that the two families had given to each other.

One very large heavy box was labeled for Clark, Jonathan and the kids. Jonathan was delegated to open it and inside they found several yards of Superman blue fabric and behind that was bright red fabric. The blue fabric felt and stretched like spandex but it felt a bit heavier and it had a very unusual, almost metallic, sheen to it. The red fabric felt just like the non-stretch material that Clark’s capes were made of. Clark and Jonathan both looked curiously at Paul as Jonathan remarked. “This is very nice looking fabric. Thank-you.”

Paul looked back at them with a sparkle in his eye and a knowing grin on his face. “It may not look it but that is a very special fabric.” He paused and took a sip from his wine glass then sat there staring at the glass dragging the silence out to the breaking point.

Finally Paul chuckled at the anxious looks on all of the Kent family faces. “I never told you but I work for a major defense contractor. We specialize in high tech materials created for the military. My company has developed a method for producing fabric made from carbon filament reinforced Kevlar thread. The carbon fiber and cotton thread is coated with Kevlar and Teflon then woven into a fabric and made into lightweight vests and coats that are tough enough to stop most small arms fire. The fabric is also nearly fire and chemical proof as well. By coiling the cotton and carbon fibers the finished fabric has the same stretchability as spandex.”

He now had the full attention of his audience. “I was able to have a special run made one weekend last month.” He grinned. “During the process where the carbon-cotton fiber is impregnated with dye, I substituted a heavily leaded superman blue dye. The Kevlar and Teflon coating finished it off rather nicely. The unique sheen of the material is due to the lead and Kevlar content of the thread. That special stretchable thread was woven into the two hundred feet of blue spandex like material you have there. The fibers in the red material are not coiled so it doesn’t stretch like the blue material does. That makes it perfect for capes. The carbon fibers and Kevlar coating makes that material extremely tough and hard to damage. The Teflon coating makes that fabric extremely stain and dirt resistant. The Teflon coating also locks in the leaded dye. After the fabric was finished I took it over to STAR Labs to have it tested. That blue fabric blocks nearly eighty-five percent of kryptonite radiation. When combined with a layer of the red material it blocks out nearly ninety-nine percent of kryptonite radiation.” Paul pointed to the box that still contained the red fabric. “With the special diamond bladed electric cutter you’ll find in the bottom of that package, both fabrics can be easily cut. The fabric can be sewn on any sewing machine just like any other ordinary fabric.”

It was Christopher that summed it all up. “Wearing costumes made of that material would come very close to making kryptonite into little more than a minor annoyance to you. The only part of you that could still be affected would be your exposed head and hands. And that unusual sheen will make the costumes look even more unique than they already are.”

Paul nodded then continued. “With enough advanced notice I can get a few hundred yards of that fabric in any color you want. Just in case any of your younger siblings decide to get into the family business. This first run however is a gift from my family to yours.”

It was Lois that responded. “Thank you, Paul. This gift means more to all of us than you could ever know. It means one less thing that I have to worry about when Jonathan and Clark have to go out on an emergency.”

Clark raised his wine glass and added. “To close family, good friends and Christmas cheer.”

About two-hundred miles south of Smallville, Superman and Superboy swooped into the raging chemical inferno. There were about a hundred workers still alive but trapped in three currently fire-free pockets within the building, completely surrounded by fire. It had already become obvious by the presence of several very dangerous chemicals that there were several illegal things going on in certain areas of the huge plant. Clark tucked that information away in his eidetic memory for further investigation later. Because of the chemicals involved the fire was too big and too hot to be easily put out, even by Superman’s super breath. They had decided to get the people out first, and worry about the fire afterwards.

Each of them could carry two people at a time through the fire to safety. It turned out that the new capes were very effective in protecting their passengers from the extremely hot flames as they carried them through the fire to safety outside. There were forty-seven people in the largest pocket. It took twelve two-minute trips to get them all safely out.

The next pocket had thirty-six people trapped in it. That took an additional nine trips. This was the first time that Clark and Jonathan had worn the suits made from that special material that Paul had given them and the suits were holding up surprisingly well to the extreme heat and chemical conditions they were being exposed to.

The smallest pocket was located at the other end of the building and had nine people trapped in it. As Superman and Superboy arrived in that last small pocket they both were momentarily staggered by sharp pain in their head and hands. The rest of their bodies tingled like limbs that had fallen asleep. Kryptonite! Fortunately despite the pain in head and hands strength, speed and flight were not yet affected and, with the exception of head and hands, invulnerability was still intact. Heat vision, X-ray and super hearing were gone, though, and their heads were no longer invulnerable. The loss was a problem but they were able to work around them and within ten minutes the last nine people were rescued.

If it had not been for the kryptonite-proof qualities of these new suits Clark and Jonathan both might have died in that last pocket. Because of the effects of the short exposure their mouth and throats could not stand up to the pressure necessary to produce the super breath so Clark and Jonathan had to resort to airlifting large containers of flame retardant and dumping it on the fire to finally put it out.

Clark knew that this plant would be the subject of Lois and his next investigation but that was a subject for another day. Now it was time for father and son to return home. Clark had to fill Lois in on what had happened and write up the article for the Daily Planet. Jonathan had to get ready for his big date with Kristen. It was Jonathan’s birthday and she had insisted on taking him out to celebrate.

THE END