

Lori and Clark: The New New Adventures of Superman: Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 6

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Rated: PG13

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Summary: In this story we explore the origins of the baby from the episode “The Family Hour.” We will examine how he came to be with Lois and Clark and why. We will see what happened while they had him and the trials and tribulations of new parenthood. We will also see what happened with his real parents and why they had to give him up.

Warning: This story has adult situations. This story is rated PG-13 for some violence.

Disclaimers: The characters in this story are property of DC, December 3rd productions and Warner Bros. No copyright infringement is intended. I have just borrowed the characters for a short time.

Author’s note:

This is a direct sequel to “Borrowed Time – Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 2”. If you haven’t done so as yet, please read the previous Volume. You can find it here: <http://www.lcfanfic.com/stories/2012/borrowed.txt> You will have a better understanding of the fundamental premises of the set if you do.

I wish to express my thanks to my Beta readers Ray Reynolds and Artemis for their invaluable help. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

Lois and Clark’s children have been introduced in earlier stories and their spouses were introduced in the “First Love” series of stories in the archive here: <http://www.lcfanfic.com/stories/2012/firstlov.txt>

One absolutely critical point: In this entire series I will be dealing with time travel and multi-universe travel. It is therefore critical that you have the concept of alternate universes and be aware of which one the story is currently in at all times. I try to make sure you know where you are by using the “Universal Locator Designation”. Some of the differences in ULDs will be very slight, changing only at the Tau value. If you don’t keep this in mind you will easily become confused as to what is happening and think I am simply changing the story already presented in an earlier volume when it is actually another universe. As far as times, I will attempt to ensure that time markers are always present.

This particular story takes place during and immediately after “Family Hour”.

** denotes emphasis

<> denotes thoughts

(#) footnotes

/ denotes telepathic communication/

[playback of a recording or TV Commentary]

For reference purposes the following will hold true throughout:

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 — Canon Lois and Clark universe also called – Prime

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 — future Lori and Clark universe also called – Alt-Prime

As always comments are welcome. (ken.janney@kjanney.com)

Prologue – 2086

Final chapter of Volume 2 titled Borrowed Time

Alt-Prime should not be confused with the canon Alt universe. Alt-Prime is a continuation of the Prime universe created when Lois Lane’s life was not extended by her exposure to the Kryptonian aura. In Alt-Prime she lived a normal Earth human life span, dying of old age. In this new universe her soul essence moved to a new vessel, Lorelei Lois Lane.

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 – Alt-Prime

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In 2086 Lorelei Lane started working with her husband, Clark Kent at the Daily Planet in Metropolis. Lori, since she technically had not had a large portfolio of major stories, had started as office gofer and then moved to research assistant. Clark had requested that she be detailed to assist him on an investigation into foreign nationals overstaying their visas which had blossomed into quite a story involving Islamic extremist terrorists. Since they had been the ones that had tipped off Homeland Security they had been given an exclusive on the story. When the story had been broken ...

The leaders, who were unarmed, both put their hands up. However, one of them held a small object in his upraised hand and shouted, “I have a detonator and if you don’t throw down your weapons I will trigger the bomb, now! We are willing to become martyrs — are you? I will give you ten seconds and then I will detonate the bomb!”

Clark and Lori were still in hiding. They had been directed to remain concealed until given the all clear by Mr. Jacobs. Clark said, “I need to handle this.”

“Go!”

Clark spun into the suit and took off straight up so that it wouldn’t be obvious where he was coming from and swooped back down from a different direction. He snatched up the bomb and sped away again, straight up until he hit the ionosphere and launched the device out into space as fast and as hard as he could.

He then reversed course so that he could avoid as much of the effects of the detonation as possible. He’d hoped that he could get the device out of range of the detonator so that it wouldn’t go off but, unfortunately that didn’t happen and the weapon detonated. Fortunately, Superman was far enough away that there was actually not much of a compression wave due to the extremely thin atmosphere. He quickly returned to Metropolis and landed at Pier 75.

Mr. Jacobs approached and introduced himself. “Superman, Tom Jacobs, Homeland Security. I don’t know how you happened to be here when you were needed, but you just saved the entire city.”

“Well Mr. Jacobs, I was nearby when I heard gunfire and

decided to investigate. I saw ‘Homeland Security’ on the vests and knew that this was a government operation. I was determined not to interfere. But when I saw what appeared to be a detonator being held up by one of the individuals, I knew that I needed to help out.”

“That was a nuclear device, but I guess I don’t need to tell you that. What did you do with it?”

“I sent it into space. Fortunately I was able to get it high enough that the compression wave was almost non-existent and also high enough that there was no EMP effect, here at ground level. You probably saw the flash a couple of minutes ago. It was probably a couple of hundred miles up when it went off. I don’t think that it will be a rainbow bomb but I think that there are a couple of satellites that might have been affected by the EMP and will need to be replaced. Geosynchronous orbits aren’t all that high but they could have been within the zone of EMP effect. There may be communications or GPS outages until replacements are made. If called upon I am willing to offer my services as a launch vehicle and I’m sure that the other supermen and superwomen would be willing to help as well.”

Mr. Jacobs replied, “Thank you, Superman. I’ll pass that along to the upper echelons.”

Lori had been approaching as Superman had been talking to Mr. Jacobs. Lorelei had come out of concealment when it went down and had been using her Reporter’s Assistant, taking pictures of the action including Superman taking the bomb away. She had been recording the interaction between Superman and Mr. Jacobs. When he had finished she approached Superman and asked, “Superman, would you be willing to allow me to interview you?”

The ‘Reporter’s Assistant’ was a combination still camera, minicam, voice recorder and personal assistant with solid state memory and internet capability. It could be used to edit and file their stories within the device to send directly to the editor or upload the doc to their workstation for final editing.

Superman replied, “I might have time for a question or two. Whom do I have the pleasure of addressing?”

“Lori Lane. I work for the Daily Planet.”

“Well, Ms. Lane, what would you like to know?”

“Are we to assume that you are now back with us permanently or will you be returning to New Krypton?”

“As far as I know I will be here for the foreseeable future.”

“How will we be able to get hold of you when you are needed?”

“Oh, I’ll be around. I’m sorry to have to cut this short, but I need to go now.”

“Thanks for the interview, Superman.”

“Happy to oblige. ‘Bye.’”

Superman took off and disappeared into the darkness.

A few seconds later Clark came out from their previous hiding place. He approached Lori and asked, “What did I miss? I finally got my assistant working.”

“If you hadn’t been trying to repair your assistant you would have been here to interview Superman.”

“Oh, which one?”

“No, not one of the supermen, Superman! The original one.”

“Oh, he’s back?” Clark started looking around as he said, “Where’d he go?”

“He said he had to go and he just flew off.”

Clark turned to Mr. Jacobs. “Did Superman say anything to you? Can we get a quote?”

“Superman said that the device was nuclear and that he launched it out into space where it wouldn’t do any harm when it exploded.”

“Thanks, Mr. Jacobs. Can we do some more interviews?”

“Sure, help yourselves.”

Seeing that the threat of the bomb had been removed the terrorist leaders both surrendered. All those alive were taken into

custody.

Mr. Jacobs used a communicator to call in the police, emergency and Coast Guard personnel who had been on standby at another location. They all arrived, code 3, lights and siren, and took custody of the perpetrators. Emergency personnel treated the wounds of the injured, placed them on stretchers and loaded them into ambulances for transport to the hospitals, each wounded man accompanied by a police officer. A group of police accompanied Coast Guard personnel as they boarded the ship and took the crew into custody. All the unwounded perps and the crew from the ship were loaded into detention vehicles and taken away.

Lori identified her previous ‘acquaintance’ as one of the leaders. In fact, he was the one with the detonator.

Clark was by her side as she approached him. He recognized her and in a threatening tone said, “You are a worthless female who should be confined in your husband’s home and beaten by him until you are more submissive.”

Lori retorted to his rhetoric with a confident, “I work for the Daily Planet. Can I quote you on that? Oh, and by the way, this is my husband and he would never do that to me!”

The terrorist responded with a threat, “May Allah destroy you and your house!” he cursed as he was dragged off.

After things had calmed down they each interviewed some of the people involved. The perps all refused to comment but Lori and Clark did get some good quotes from the HS personnel, the Emergency personnel, the police and the Coast Guardsmen.

When things had all been wrapped up, Mr. Jacobs said, “Well, there you go, Kent. There’s your exclusive.”

“Thank you, Mr. Jacobs. You’ll see it in the morning edition.”

Mr. Jacobs said, “By the way, Kent, how were you so easily able to get a recording of that meeting? We had one heck of a time bugging that apartment.”

Clark laughed and then said, “I guess that will have to remain a trade secret.”

“Okay, but if you ever decide to change vocations, keep HS in mind. We could use people like you and your partner.”

Lori replied with a laugh, “We’ll keep it in mind.”

Lorelei and Clark went straight to the office and finished the write-up of the story. Clark was about to submit it to the night editor when Lorelei stopped him.

There on the screen was a full color photo of Superman taken as he grasped the bomb preparatory to launching into space with it, followed by the headline:

“SUPERMAN RETURNS – SAVES METROPOLIS FROM NUCLEAR DESTRUCTION”

By Clark Kent and Lorelei Lane

“In the early hours of the morning while most of the inhabitants of Metropolis were either in bed or preparing for slumber, Homeland Security was protecting the citizens of Metropolis. A plot to detonate a nuclear device under the city had been uncovered and an operation designed to capture the perpetrators and prevent the disaster was underway when one of the leaders attempted to perform a suicide bomb attack with the nuclear device. The only thing standing between the city and total destruction was Superman. Superman swooped in at the last second and launched the bomb into space. In an exclusive interview your reporters were told that the ‘original’ Superman had returned from his mission and would again be protecting the city.” (Story continued pg A2)

“You’re sharing your byline with me?!?! I’m not back in the reporter ranks yet; I’m your research assistant.”

“I’m sure our editor, Frank, will agree that you deserve it. You did just as much work on this story as I did. Besides you’re the one that got the interview with Superman. Maybe this will move you from researcher to reporter.” He gave her a wink.

“Wow, Okay but, that byline, there’s just something wrong with it. I don’t like it — By Clark Kent and Lorelei Lane. I think I’ll use a ‘professional’ name.” She thought about it for a few

seconds then snapped her fingers and said, “I know, I think I’ll go with my middle name. I didn’t know until I started doing some family research that I *was* named after a famous relative.”

She reached over and deleted the name on the byline and then retyped it as:

By Clark Kent and Lois Lane.

“There, that more accurately reflects who I am now, at least professionally.”

Clark smiled. He hadn’t known what her middle name was. It just hadn’t seemed important. It was almost like old times and he looked forward to the day when she insisted on top billing.

It had been early in the morning when they had arrived at home and since they had been out on the story they had left word with the night editor that they would be in later in the morning the next day.

The next day when they arrived at work, Lori and Clark were talking over what had happened the previous night as the elevator took them from the lobby to the newsroom floor. A ding sound announced their arrival and the doors parted. That ding had alerted everyone in the bullpen that someone was arriving and they had all turned to see just who it was. Knowing the hour everyone in the newsroom expected it to be the Kents since they had worked late the night before. As usual Clark was dressed in a neatly tailored business suit, and today Lori was also dressed in a well tailored women’s business suit in an off white color with matching pumps. When they exited the elevator Clark allowed Lori to precede him and as they did so there was a round of applause. Their front page story of the attempted terrorist strike and the save by Superman was the buzz of all the newsnets. It had been picked up by all of the agencies and their byline had gone worldwide.

Inevitably there was a backlash to the story originating in the Middle East. Lori and Clark weren’t too concerned about it because no one knew what they looked like and they would just keep a low profile until a later news cycle knocked them off the front page.

Clark was not terribly surprised to see that Lori had her own name plate and that it was situated on the desk near Clark’s. He said, “I told you that you wouldn’t have to wait too long before you moved up to reporter again.” He started chuckling as he finished, “All it took was a front page byline.”

Lori walked over and just ran her hands over the top of ‘her’ desk. She sat down in the chair, pulled out a drawer and propped her feet up on it and leaned back. She said, “Feels just like old times.”

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Interlude From Volume 2

As was stated in Volume 2, years ago, in the 2040s after retiring from the Planet the first time, Lois and Clark had written a number of books detailing some of their major investigations and also a book documenting some of Superman’s adventures and major rescues. Between the royalties from those and movie and TV show rights for their Superman stories they had become multi-millionaires. That money had been wisely invested and their fortune had grown even more.

Chapter 1 – Lori

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Smallville, Kansas

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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One evening in September 2087 as Lori and Clark were cuddled up on the couch and looking around, Lori took in the ambiance of the old farmhouse. Memories of her time spent there with Clark, his parents and the children came flooding back.

Thinking about the last year, Lori started voicing her thoughts, “You know, it has been no small chore getting to know all of the family. There have been some other things which were harder to overcome than others. One was the memory of Lois’ aversion to firearms. That was a difficult integration. It was difficult because Lois, Loisetta, Lulu and all the others, they are separate people and yet, they’re still me, just different aspects from different times. It’s hard to explain to someone that hasn’t been through it.”

“As Lulu, I frequently had needed to depend on my sidearm for survival. This was also the case when I went on the trail ride during camp. My accuracy with my revolver was the thing that saved me and Withers in that encounter with the rattler. I feel that it was fortunate that the Lois side of my personality hadn’t been manifesting itself strongly at that time because her aversion to firearms could have caused a delay which could have been serious if not fatal. I have succeeded in submerging that part of Lois and allowed Lulu and my own inclinations to dominate.”

“I know it’s been difficult, Honey. You’ve been a real trouper. I hope I’ve been supportive enough.”

Lori looked up at him and said, “You’ve been my pillar of strength getting me through this and I love you for it.” She moved up and kissed him.

She remembered back to that time, when she had gone to the riding camp before her fifteenth birthday. As far as she had known at the time it had been her first time on horseback; however, with the realization that she had Loisetta’s and Lulu’s memories of riding, it made a lot of sense that she loved to ride.

Looking around the room again she had started thinking about the farm and asked about it. “You know, I have this twenty year gap in my memory and some of Lois’ memories are kinda fuzzy. Why don’t you tell me about the farm? I mean, here we are, but how did we get here?” She giggled as she continued, “I mean aside from the obvious, you flying us. Jon’s son Bernie and his family recently built a new house and moved in. Lara’s son Greg is over in the Irig farm house but the farms are merged?”

With an extra little squeeze, Clark started to tell the tale, “Yes, well, you see, there are things that even Lois didn’t know. In the late 1960s Wayne Irig, Dad’s best friend and neighbor had lost his wife Nellie. At the same time he lost his first born when Nellie had a breech delivery and the midwife didn’t have the skills or equipment to perform an emergency C-section.”

With emotion in her voice and a tear on her cheek at this sad story, Lori said, “That is so sad. Did he ever remarry?”

“I guess that’s the saddest part of all, no he didn’t. He lived the rest of his life missing his wife.”

Clark pulled her in closer as he continued, “It wasn’t all bad though, many years later, in 2010, something happened, which became a comfort in his old age. His brother’s grandson, at the age of ten, started expressing an interest in farming and when Wayne agreed to take him for the summer the two of them really hit it off. The boy became like the son he had never had and he spent every summer and a lot of holidays with his great uncle.”

“That would be Lara’s husband, Mike, right?”

“That is correct, Mike Lee, Lara’s husband is Wayne Irig’s grand nephew. That was another thing that pleased Wayne very much aside from the time that they spent together. Wayne was also happy about the fact that when Michael became engaged it was to Lara Kent, one of Jonathan Kent’s granddaughters. They had met in 2013 and were married nine years later in 2022, uniting the long time friends’ families. Wayne wasn’t around to see it or be at the wedding, but he could see the way things were headed back in the twenty-teens.”

Lori turned in his arms so that she could look more directly at

Clark as he continued.

“It was no wonder that when Wayne passed away, his grand nephew Michael Lee was listed as his sole heir. The problem was that his interests had changed radically. He was no longer interested in farming and became a lawyer. Mike’s father helped with the management and hired a company to rent the farm out while Mike was in school. That continued until Mike and Lara’s son Greg got his degree in Agriculture. Greg spent time with the people that had been renting the Irig farm and observing what they had been doing. When their lease ran out in 2050 he moved in and took over the management of the farm. He paid strict attention to trends and decided to take the farm the organic route.”

“Now, our grandson, Bernie was also interested in AG Business. He was more interested in the business side while Greg was more interested in the techniques side. Desiring to keep the farm in the family it was a no-brainer to let Bernie take over the Kent farm, so in 2055 Bernard Kent assumed management of the Kent farm and Bernie had moved into the old Kent farm house. After twenty-five years, in 2080, the new house was built for his growing family and they moved out of the original farm house, leaving it vacant once more.”

“2058 was when the two farms were officially merged making the Kent/Irig farm the largest in Small County. Between Bernie managing and Greg directing they have turned it into a thriving, very profitable business.”

Lori decided that the time was right to bring up her plans with Clark, “In view of all of that, since we have the farm, why don’t we use it? It doesn’t all need to be put to crops, does it? I want a place where we can ride and I’d like to take the kids riding. They’d love it, I’m sure. Here’s what I’d like to do . . .”

That was when Lori had come up with the idea of remodeling the farm.

The idea for activities at the renovated farm where she would be able to deal with smaller subsets of the family most of the time was very appealing. The idea for fun activities was based on her experiences as Lulu and Loisetette. As a result they had the most fun at the farm, which was most weekends, usually with only a few families at a time. She was determined to share her love of riding with her family.

This project took next to no time to complete. The entire super family joined in. The plans were drawn and construction materials ordered and delivered. It was going to be a boon to the local economy. Even though the super family could have done all of the construction at super speed, how could that have been explained, so local tradesmen were hired and the super family assisted with the non-skilled menial labor. The plan called for a separate building joined to the main house by what could be called a large Florida Room. This was glass enclosed on three sides with tables and chairs as well as lounges. In one corner was a large HV for the kids and along the one wall was a large fireplace for those long cold winter nights..

The final plan was for a three-floor wing with many four-person rooms like a college dorm. They could hold younger families with a few small children in each room or else act as girls or guys dorm rooms. In this way, for large family gatherings they had the accommodations to handle the growing family.

Part of the plan also called for the addition of a new stable. This would adjoin the new corral and would have adequate space for as many as sixteen horses.

When the new stable had been put up a number of horses needed to be purchased. Naturally, when it came time to pick out the horses, Lori had taken the lead. Clark, remembering his time as the Lone Rider, presented no objections. Clark could see how these activities couldn’t help but aid in deepening the family unity. The shared activities and even the competitions that could be introduced could result in fun times.

It seemed like Lois’ competitive nature had been passed

down through the generations and as a result nearly all of the children and grandchildren were highly competitive. Finding ways for them to express that competitiveness in an atmosphere of love was not only important but highly entertaining.

Once the basics were ready and in order to put her plan into effect they went to a horse auction and Lori knew just what she was after.

Fifth on the block was a three year old Appaloosa mare. She looked just like Withers, only younger, and Lori wouldn’t stop until the mare was hers. As soon as the auction was finished Lori looked at the list and saw some quarter horses would be going off, but she had some time before they would go on the block so she moved to the paddock.

She found her purchase and walked up to her holding out a sugar cube in her hand. The horse was wary at first but the gentle approach that Lori made reassured her and when she saw the object in Lori’s hand she touched it with her tongue. Sensing the sweet treat she grabbed it with her lips and pulled it into her mouth, savoring it. She then nuzzled Lori’s hand looking for more. Lori reached out a calming hand and slowly started stroking the horse’s nose. When the horse didn’t shy away she brought her other hand up and started patting her on the neck and talking to her in a crooning, soothing voice which the horse responded to. She said, “I think I’ll call you Withers just like my friend from riding camp. Think you’ll like that, Withers?” She gave her a few more strokes before turning away. As she did the horse nickered. Lori turned back and said, “You like me already, huh? Okay, I’ll only be gone for a while. I’ll be back.” She gave her a few more pats and turned away.

When they had built the stable Lori had asked for sixteen stalls to be built. She now had Withers and wanted at least five or six more horses. She was looking for at least five quarter horses. She also wanted to find one for Clark. That one would have to be strong and sturdy because of Clark’s dense molecular structure. She was determined that he was going to ride with her.

When she got back to the auction there was a Tennessee Walker on the block, a chestnut gelding. She liked his looks as soon as she saw him and didn’t stop until she owned him. She decided to name him Whistler. Next up was a string of quarter horses. Of the ten that went on the block she purchased six.

They had made arrangements for a large transport to move the horses to the farm from the auction in Tennessee. Lori insisted on having a two horse trailer to pull behind her Jeep. Into this went Withers and Whistler. After the auction they loaded the trailer and headed out for the farm. Lori insisted on stopping every so often so that they could take the horses out for exercise.

Clark had grown up on the farm, but aside from a few cattle they hadn’t really had any livestock. The Langs had had a stable though, so he was no stranger to horses. It was a pleasant trip and the horses, because of how they had been treated, were not skittish when they arrived. They went into side by side stalls. When the rest of the mounts were delivered they saw to their disposition. The quarter horses were raw and would need to be broken before their training could begin. That task fell to Clark. Buck as they might, they just couldn’t seem to get rid of their rider and in no time at all they were saddle broken.

A corner of the farm had been landscaped so that there was a twenty foot berm as a backstop for a shooting range. There were benches set up and targets set out at different ranges. There was a partition down the center. One side was for firearms and the other side was for archery. Lori had a selection of firearms, most of which fired sub-caliber ammunition so that the younger members of the family could handle them. For the archery range she had a selection of longbow, semi-recurve, recurve and compound bows to pick from in different weights.

After some months had passed, Lori approached Clark with an idea. “Now that we have everything in place and the kids are working on their riding, archery and shooting, let’s start some

contests. It'll be fun! We can make it a big affair patterned after a medieval tournament! The kids could all dress up in period costume as nobles. The grandkids could dress up also, perhaps as peasants, and we could have archery competitions like the one Robin Hood participated in. I wonder how many of the grandkids could duplicate his feat. We could make it a pot luck picnic."

Clark started to get into the spirit, "That might be fun. We could also offer prizes. You could be the Queen of the Tournament and I could be the King. It's a shame that we are teaching them rodeo riding rather than jousting."

"No, It's not! Jousting is just too dangerous. I know, all but the youngest children are invulnerable, but I just couldn't imagine a couple of guys jousting without armor. Regular people can really get hurt doing that even with full armor. Besides that gives us another activity that we can do that requires skill and not powers; we can hold our own rodeo. We could all dress up as cowboys and cowgirls. Like I said, it'd be fun!"

That had started a couple of annual activities that the entire family participated in.

From then on any particular weekend would find Clark and Lori at the farm. It had literally become their second home. The weekends had become Lori's favorite time. Usually there were at least four or five of the younger grandchildren there with Lori and Clark and Lori was teaching them to ride and shoot. For this purpose a large corral had been fenced in and some of the girls were learning the Rodeo art of barrel racing while some of the boys were learning calf roping. She was even able to get Clark up on Whistler for some pleasure riding.

All of the grand- and great-grandchildren liked going to the range with 'grandma' Lori. A number of them were showing a considerable talent with firearms as well as the bow. Lori had had a hard time convincing Clark. She said, "I know that firearms are somewhat outmoded nowadays, but I think that this would be beneficial training. It helps to develop discipline; it sharpens the senses and develops a keen eye. This along with the karate training will develop the discipline and control they will need when their powers develop."

"Okay, you've demonstrated how handy a bow can be. As long as they will be safe you have my blessing."

Chapter 2 The Emerald Archer

Flashback May 2087

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Lori and Clark were investigating a break in at STAR Labs. Jon, who was now Chief Researcher, had given them a call. It was particularly important that they be notified.

STAR Labs had been robbed. The "most secure" vault had been opened and a very valuable and dangerous piece of mineral had been removed. Accessing the computer security logs, it had been discovered that it had been an inside job. One of the techs who had been with the lab for a period of time and had worked his way up the ladder to a level of responsibility where he had greater access had been the culprit. He had been able to hack the system and elevate his privilege on the system enabling him to access areas that should have been blocked.

Jon and the HR Department at STAR Labs started checking his file and delving into his history and found flaws, indicating that it was a fake. He had been a plant, a sleeper, getting this job and simply being patient until the correct time. He had developed a level of trust and used that trust to access the facility after hours to do his dirty work.

He had stolen a fairly large chunk of crystalline green Kryptonite, the most virulent and dangerous kind. The theft had occurred on a Friday night and it hadn't been discovered until

that following Monday.

The MPD were all over it but really it was going to be up to the supermen and superwomen to find and retrieve the errant mineral. Unfortunately the thief had a sixty hour head start on them which was going to make it very difficult.

Clark called a council of war at the Kent homestead that evening. Once all of the super members of the family groups were there he started, "Well, I guess you all know why we are here. There is a large chunk of Kryptonite that is no longer under our control."

Lara asked, "That brings up a point. Why is that stuff still around? Why wasn't it dispatched into space a long time ago?"

Jon answered, "Sis, you know that I'm trying to find a green Kryptonite antidote. If I don't have samples to work with, how am I going to determine if I'm on the right track?"

"Actually, when I first took over this project from Bernie, it looked like it would be easy. With Sean and Cele's help I thought it would be a piece of cake. That hasn't been the case, though. More and more it looks like there will be none, but I still have a few things to try."

Lara insisted, "I'll repeat my original question, why do we need such large pieces of a dangerous mineral lying around?"

Jon replied, "That's a good question Sis. Aside from the fact that I'd be exposed while trying to acquire a smaller sample ... I guess I could have the staff take the samples, but we've tried to keep their presence low key. The less they are handled the less chance of pieces walking out the door."

Celeste butted in, "Well, guess what Bro, it has! If we got rid of it all we wouldn't have to worry about it walking out the door *or* developing an antidote."

"I know Sis, I know, but we are in the situation now and we have to deal with it. There should be no way that anyone outside of our small group should even know of the existence of the green K. Jimmy, I think I need to get your team in to do a check of our systems. I need your forensics team to examine our access logs to see if you can find where the leak occurred."

Jimmy responded, "I'll have a team in there first thing in the morning. They will need clearance."

"They'll have it. We need to get to the bottom of this. If you can find how the access was accomplished I will need to know the source."

"If they were smart enough to access your systems they were probably smart enough to bounce off of several servers between here India and China to cover their trail. We'll have to use some sophisticated sniffers."

"Use whatever you need to and check our intrusion detection system. They had to be able to get around that somehow."

"It had to be a sophisticated operation. They also had to fake the history of that tech."

Sam, the businessman of the family replied, "Statistically, the odds against being able to dispose of every piece of green Kryptonite that exist are astronomical. There has to be a lot out there that we don't know about. That being the case we need to continue to pursue the antidote, if there is one, or actually, Jon does; therefore there will be a continued need of samples. At least until such time as he has exhausted all avenues of research."

Jessica added, "So, in view of that, we still need to have some available, but, why so much? A very small quantity should be sufficient."

Sean, being practical added, "The amount of green Kryptonite kept in the vault at STAR Labs at this point is irrelevant. What is relevant is the fact that there is a chunk out there that could be a problem for us. Why don't we concentrate on that fact and getting it back under control?"

Clark said, "Sean is right. Everything but getting this piece back under control isn't important. We can debate these side issues later. Since the thief has a long head start the trail is pretty cold. At this point I guess we're just going to have to wait and see

what happens. If the purpose of the theft is for an attack on one or all of us we will have to be cautious about being close together when we are on a job.”

Lucy spoke up for the first time and you could hear the worry in her voice, “What about our spouses? We have never really tested to see if they are affected by Kryptonite.”

Lori answered that question, “When I was Lois, there were a number of times I was exposed to green K, before and after my physiology had been changed and I didn’t feel anything. I guess the fact that I started out as an Earth human kept me safe. In view of that I would hope that it would be the same for each of the Earth human spouses, but until we test that theory we can’t be sure.”

Lucy replied, “That’s a relief. I was worried about Rob. The kids would all be in danger though.”

Jon answered, “I’m afraid so. We still need to keep them safe.”

Clark said, “Okay, I guess it’s business as usual. Just be sure to keep an eye out and shout if you need help.”

The kids all returned to their homes and everything was peaceful for two weeks.

Lori and Clark were at the Planet when their editor, Frank, came busting out of his office, and using the remote he had gripped in his hand, turned on the volume of a HV in a corner of the room. In the holoprojection could be seen a larger than life size robot made in the likeness of a man, but lacking anything resembling skin, breaking into an underground vault which contained atomic weapons. The feed was coming from a news helicopter flying over the repository in a remote section of New Troy.

Lori looked at Clark. He gave the flying hand signal and Lori nodded her head. They both got up from their desks and headed for the stairwell.

Their editor, Frank Edwards, stopped them, “Where do you think you’re going?”

As if stating the obvious, Lori threw her hand in the direction of the HV and spoke up, “Frank, that’s a story just waiting to be written and we’re going to write it!”

“How can you get there before it’s all over?”

Shading the truth, just a little, Lori replied, “Clark can fly. We’re going to the airport.” She didn’t finish the statement and just allowed Frank to fill in the blanks.

Frank said, “All right, go!”

Clark said, “We’re on it, Chief.”

Frank shouted, “Don’t call me Chief!”

They were at the stairwell door as Lori said, “Anything you say, Chief,” and laughed as they disappeared through the doorway.

As the door was closing behind them they could hear him shouting in frustration, “Don’t call me Chief!” Then with his superhearing Clark heard him mutter, “If they weren’t the best damn reporters ...”

As soon as the door was closed Clark picked Lori up and flew her up the stairs. As they exited the roof door, Clark was in uniform. They flew to the scene of the break in.

When they arrived over the area they saw the robot trying to dig through layer after layer of reinforced concrete and steel. Of the military detachment stationed at the site as guards some were scattered around either unconscious or dead while others were using their small arms in an attempt to put the robot out of commission. It had apparently been equipped with a gas of some kind which had knocked some of them out. Since there were still active troops Superman hoped that it was a non-lethal gas and that the breeze had blown the remnants away from the area.

Landing, Clark set Lori on her feet at a safe distance, behind a building, and out of sight and then he started flying toward the robot. When the troops spotted him they stopped shooting and allowed him to handle the robot. He was travelling quickly and it

wasn’t until he was too close to slow and change direction that he started feeling the pain of the green Kryptonite. He was almost unconscious when his momentum carried him into the side of the robot causing it to stagger. Clark fell unconscious at its feet.

The head of the robot turned and tilted down so that the video sensors could see what the disturbance had been. After ascertaining that Superman was there at its feet, the robot appeared to contemplate then it actually moved closer, as if to increase his exposure. For a time, it simply stood there over Superman which increased his exposure even more. Peeking around the corner Lori could see that even in his unconscious state Clark was writhing in pain as the robot stood over him. Finally, as if deciding that it had wasted enough time the robot pulled back one foot and kicked Superman sending him sixty feet through the air, landing almost at Lori’s feet.

Fortunately the robot turned away as Lori was about to step out of her concealment. She glanced up and saw the newscopter and knew there was a risk. They hadn’t seen her as yet but as soon as she went to Clark everyone would know of her presence, but she decided that it was more important to help Clark, they’d just deal with the fallout later. She stepped out of her concealment and quickly knelt at his side, grabbed his arm and started dragging him around the corner of the building, away from the robot. Lori was somewhat concerned as she dragged him that she might be aggravating some injuries. If his vulnerability had been cancelled he could have broken ribs and internal injuries from that kick in the side. As it was, he was as limp as a rag doll as she tried to move him.

As soon as she had Superman out of the way the troops resumed their shooting.

Knowing that she had to do it but not relishing the prospect, Lori grumbled to herself in frustration as she was dragging him away, “I really wish that the three years were up so that I had my superpowers. Then I wouldn’t have to depend on anyone else and I’d be able to get Clark out of here by myself.”

Once it had kicked Superman away the robot had apparently lost interest and returned to its assault on the bunker. Lori finally got Superman behind the building. She felt further frustration that the three years hadn’t elapsed as yet because she had to rely on electronic means to summon help. It would have been so much easier and quicker if she had telepathy.

Lori tapped her earphone which activated her Reporter’s Assistant and she heard, “Say a command.” Lori had coded her speed dial numbers so that it wouldn’t give anything away so she said, “Dial Superman Foundation 2.” Then she heard a series of beeps. She knew that as soon as the phone on the other end started to ring, the ringtone would tell Jon that the call was from first a family member, second that he should respond as Kam-El if possible and most importantly third it meant trouble. When Jon answered she could hear concern in his tone as he said, “Who needs Kam-El?”

Since there was no one close by to overhear, Lori cut him off, “Jon, help. Your father needs you. We’re at the weapons bunker, west of Metropolis. Stay away from the robot!”

Because she was checking Clark for injuries, she hadn’t had a chance to even touch her earphone again to hang up before a black and red blur arrived and picked up Clark. Lori threw her arms around his neck from behind and held on as Kam-El lifted off and headed for the Kent homestead.

Meanwhile back in the newsroom

The newscopter from a news network had been broadcasting all of this action and everyone in the newsroom had seen Superman go down. When that had happened, a gasp of despair could be heard all over the bullpen. Cries of anger and frustration could be heard as they saw him writhing on the ground, obviously in extreme pain. When they saw the robot kick him

there was another gasp. Then when they saw Lori pop out from her concealment behind the building a cheer went up.

Watching the body language of the people in the bullpen it was like everyone was trying to pull with Lori as she tried to get Superman behind the building. Fortunately the newscopter was too far away to pick up sound nor did the watchers see her tap her earphone. They could see her speaking but, she could have been speaking to herself as she exerted her muscles to pull Superman away.

Suddenly while they watched Kam-El entered the frame. As he did another cheer went up from the entire crowd. A mass sigh of relief could be heard when he picked up Superman. They saw Lori throw herself on Kam-El's back and another cheer went up as they all disappeared from view when Kam-El took both of them away from the scene.

In the excitement of the action a fact that obviously had been overlooked by the rest of the staff suddenly hit Frank. Frank thought, <How did she get there so quickly and where is Clark? I guess they'll have a good explanation when they return.>

They did too. Lori said that they had encountered Superman as he was responding and he had offered to take one of them with him. Since Clark was the one that could fly, Lori had gone with Superman while Clark went to the airport so that he could pick Lori up at the scene.

When they landed behind the house on Wisteria Lane, Lori dropped off while Jon carried Clark into the house. Lori said, "Take him into the Sauna." The Sauna was a special room fitted up with banks of high-intensity sun lamps. Jon carried Clark in and placed him on a bed in the middle of the room. After Lori donned protective eyewear, she hit the switch turning on the lights so that she could check on her husband before leaving the room. She noticed that as Jon was placing him on the bed, Clark started to stir.

Before Jon exited with Lori he patted Clark's shoulder and said, "Rest easy, Pop." Then as they were exiting he said to Lori, "That should restore him in less than an hour. I take it he was exposed to Kryptonite. Where was it?"

Lori said, "It must be inside that robot. That's why I warned you to stay clear of it."

Jon said, "Thanks for the warning, Mom. How are we going to stop that thing? We can't get near it."

Lori snapped her fingers and said, "I've got an idea. I'll need your help. By the time your father is recovered I may be ready. We should have time. It'll take a while for that thing to get through those reinforced walls. Let's go."

Lori led the way to a locked room which held all of her firearms. She picked up a compound bow and a quiver of arrows. She said, "Jon, I need your help to modify some of these arrows. Here's what I need ..."

They were busy for the better part of the hour. While Jon was modifying the arrows to her specifications she went upstairs and pulled out a dress and some other clothing which with the help of a pair of scissors she quickly modified to suit her needs before donning the outfit.

When she made her appearance downstairs Clark was just coming out of the sauna. When he saw her he stopped dead in his tracks and asked, "Just what do you think you are going to do in that outfit?"

She answered, "We have a robot to take out and it has to be done at long range. This is where my training will come in handy."

Clark chuckled and said, "What are you going to do, sprinkle pixie dust on it? You look like Peter Pan."

Lori replied, "I was thinking more along the lines of Robin Hood."

Lori was wearing a pair of green tights under an A-line dress she had cut off so that it was a tunic. She had on a wide black belt

that accentuated her narrow waist and black knee high boots. A few seconds later when Jon showed up she added her largest black quiver of arrows on her back. She finished it off with a mask of green cloth, a remnant from the hem of the dress and an old Halloween costume hat that was like what Robin Hood would wear. She picked up her compound bow and said, "Okay boys, let's go corral a robot."

Clark was impressed by the size of the quiver. He thought it could easily hold fifty arrows, yet he only saw something like half that number sticking out. He asked, "How do you plan to stop that robot with some arrows?"

With a smirk she replied, "Just you wait and see. Jon modified some of my arrows for me. Let's go! Time's a wastin'!"

Clark, bowing to the inevitable said, "Okay, I'd like to see just what you have up your sleeve."

They took off from the back yard. Clark and Lori had their arms around one another as he took off. He flew her this way so that it wouldn't look quite so intimate. They landed just as the robot was exiting the bunker for an atomic weapon in its grasp after tearing its way into the underground storage.

Chapter 3 – Emerald Archer Takes Charge

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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They landed far enough away that they were out of range of the Kryptonite. Apparently, when those in control of the robot saw them arrive they wanted to see just what was going to happen and as if daring Superman to attack they stopped the robot. It looked very human just standing there.

After they had all landed, Lori said, "Well, here goes nothing." She reached into her quiver and selected an arrow. When she pulled it out Clark could see that there was a fiber bundled on the side. A quick twist released it. Lori handed the end of the carbon reinforced polymer filament to Kam-El and said, "Hold on to this." She nocked her arrow and took aim. When she let fly the CRP filament played out behind the arrow. Superman thought that she had missed her target because the arrow flew wide of the robot but then as he watched the arrow caromed off of a piece of brick and angled around behind the robot at ankle level. Since it was moving now right to left, when it reached the end of the filament that Kam-El was holding it started curving around in a circle because of its momentum. It made a couple of circles before finally banging into the leg of the robot. While this arrow was still in flight Lori selected another shaft and handed the end of the filament to Superman who held on while she took aim and loosed. This arrow followed a similar trajectory only from the other side.

These arrows had been launched so rapidly that there was hardly time for anyone to respond and by the time the controllers had issued a command for the robot to move the damage had been done.

When both arrows had completed their travel Lori shouted, "Pull!"

In response to her command, Kam-El and Superman pulled on their CRP filaments and the robot's legs were dragged together and it stopped moving again.

Lori reached back and selected another arrow. She nocked and let fly. As this one was in flight she quickly selected another of the same type and let fly.

Both of these arrows had little bags attached to the heads. The targets of these were the shoulder joints, left and right. When they hit, the bags burst and emery dust was deposited in the joints. It only took seconds for the joints to freeze and the arms hung immobile. Unfortunately it didn't lose its grip on the bomb.

While this was happening Lori had still been busy. Selecting

another arrow she let fly. This time at the head was a vial of liquid. While this shaft was in flight she nocked and let fly another of the same. The targets of these two were the optical sensors, the liquid was paint. Now the robot was immobile and blind. After a short struggle however, it broke the graphite filaments binding its legs and it started to move off, at a rapid pace, with the bomb still clutched in its unmoving arms.

Lori said, "So far so good. Now we can follow it back home. It's blind so whoever is controlling it will have to depend on GPS and mapping to direct it back. I think it's time to call in the reserves. Maybe they can get close and capture the one behind this. The robot isn't much of a threat at this point."

What they didn't know was that the crew of the helicopter had captured all of the action just before they had to return to the heliport due to lack of fuel. Their raw feed went to their network which went to all of their video outlets and then the wire services. The Planet picked up the feed and put together a story.

The news copter that had been orbiting the site and broadcasting the action was turning away and lost them when the superheroes took off in pursuit of the robot which ended the video feed.

Clark and Jon had sent out a summons to Mike, Bill, Rich and Rob asking them to join the effort. This was the first time that these particular family members had been called on to help and they were all thrilled at the prospect of getting in on the action. All of the female spouses had the pendants. All of the male spouses had simple medallions similar in appearance to a good luck charm which they carried in their pockets. Mike was unable to get away because he was in a meeting with the senior partners of his firm, but within minutes Bill, Rich and Rob joined Clark, Lori and Jon in the air, far above the robot. They watched it move into a tunnel which was apparently an old abandoned mine.

As a group all six entered the same tunnel and flew down it until they came to a junction. Clark said, "There must be lead ore in these tunnel walls, it's blocking my x-ray vision."

Jon, Bill, Rich and Rob all replied in unison, "Yeah, mine too."

"That means that we are going to have to check all of the drifts and galleries the old fashioned way. They go off in all directions so we'll need to split up."

Jon took the rightmost tunnel. Lori and Clark the next one to the left, while Rich took the next and Rob and Bill took the final one. After a short distance Rob and Bill had to split up at yet another junction. Clark flew Lori down the tunnel and they all were proceeding slowly and cautiously.

Just shy of a large gallery as they were going around a curve in the tunnel Lori spotted light. They landed before they got too close to the gallery. Clark sent, "We found them. They are in a gallery down the second tunnel. We will wait for you here."

When they were all gathered Clark and Jon led the way as they started to move ahead. As they rounded a curve, Jon and Clark stopped abruptly when they started feeling the pain of the Kryptonite and prevented the others from proceeding. As a group they moved back around the last corner they had turned.

As soon as they stopped they had a quick, whispered conference. Clark was inclined to be cautious while Lori wanted to charge ahead.

Clark said, "We don't know how many are in there and we don't know if they're armed. Jon and I definitely can't go past the corner because we'd be exposed to the Kryptonite. We still don't know if Rich, Rob or Bill would be affected. Did you guys feel anything?"

They all shook their heads in the negative.

Jon said, "That really doesn't prove anything. We were farther ahead and we were just starting to feel it. They might not have been close enough, plus there is lead in these tunnel walls."

Lori said, "I guess that leaves it up to me." Clark gave her a look which was meant to discourage her, but it didn't work. She

said, "Look, I'm the only one we can be sure won't be affected by the Kryptonite, so I have to be the one to go in."

Jon objected, "They could be armed!"

Lori held up her bow and said, "News flash, so am I!" She pulled out another arrow and nocked it. This one had a golf ball sized globe on the end in place of a sharp arrowhead.

Clark looked at it and asked, "What can you do with that?"

"Depending on where it hits, whoever is on the receiving end is going to be hurting, but he'll get over it. Wait here, I'm going in."

Suiting her actions to her words, Lori pressed on ahead with her bow at the ready. She peeked around the corner, being careful not to expose more than part of her head. She saw that no one was looking in her direction so she moved forward. When she rounded the corner she saw two men in lab coats working over the robot. She took aim at the guy off to one side and loosed. The blunt arrow hit him in the left deltoid numbing his entire arm. He let out a cry of pain and fell back. This startled his accomplice who was frozen in place.

While the first arrow was still flying she nocked another arrow, this one with a target point and, seeing an opportunity to take a clear shot, let fly. The arrow pierced the sleeve of the other man and lodged in a gap in the robot's body, pinning his arm there. The first man was recovering. He whirled and using his good arm pulled a weapon.

The second man jerked his arm free of her arrow and reached for his gun. Lori quickly faded back around the corner and a shower of rock dust accompanied her as a slug from one of the guns ricocheted off the stone wall behind her. She took off at a dead run.

Not being able to see anything because of the lead, the superheroes had all followed the action with their superhearing. Hearing what was happening and the shouts of her pursuers and the explosions of the guns, they prepared for them. Before they came in sight Bill spun out of his uniform to become Detective Bill Davidson and the rest of the spouses disappeared down the tunnel and around another corner.

As they watched, Lori came around the corner and toward them at a dead run and didn't stop until she was behind Clark. She was starting to breathe heavily but she still pulled another ball arrow out and nocked it. She aimed out from between Clark's right arm and Kam-El's left.

The perps were chasing after Lori and as they rounded the corner they ran into the arms of Superman and Kam-El who disarmed and detained them.

In an angry tone one shouted at the other, "I told you it wouldn't work, but, no, you were convinced that they wouldn't come anywhere near that chunk of rock! I told you it would only make them mad! Now look where it got us! We could get life for this!"

The other perp, apparently the brainy one, said, "It would have worked if it hadn't been for that female William Tell."

Lori started laughing and said, "Don't you know anything? William Tell used a crossbow! Robin Hood used a regular bow."

Sarcastically, the brainy one replied, "Sorry, I didn't mean to insult you."

Lori was laughing as she said, "Apology accepted anyway."

The first perp was irritated, "How does that change anything? My arm is still sore where she shot me."

The second said, "Quit your bellyachin'! Just be glad that arrow didn't have a hunting head instead of that ball. Yeah, you're hurt, but it isn't serious."

"Hurt! I'll say it hurts! Nothing serious!?! I'll be bruised for a week! What was in that anyway?"

Lori replied, "That was just an impact head. Think of a golf ball propelled with the force of the bow."

Bill said, "You both might as well save your breath. You're going to need it for the judge."

While Superman and Kam-El restrained the men Bill read them their rights and put cuffs on them. He took charge of them and started them back down the tunnel. When they reached the mouth of the tunnel Bill used his cell phone to contact a local police department and requested an assist with a pick up.

Once they were out of sight Rob, and Rich came back out of hiding. Clark asked, "Are you feeling the Kryptonite?"

Rob said, "No, nothing."

Rich asked, "What would it feel like?"

Clark replied, "If you were feeling it, you'd know. No one would have to describe it to you."

"I guess the answer is no then."

Clark decided, "Okay, I guess we give it a try. You guys can go in and look for the Kryptonite."

Before he had a chance to object Lori included herself in the party and Lori, Rich and Rob moved ahead into the chamber with the latter two fully expecting to feel pain or at least a diminishing of their powers however, neither of these occurred. Rich recovered the bomb that had been stolen while Rob started to dismantle the robot itself. Finally opening the chest, they found the green Kryptonite. Lori located the original lead lined box it had been in, at STAR Labs, and Rich placed the Kryptonite back inside. As soon as the box was closed, Lori called, "All clear!" After they heard this Clark and Jon moved into the chamber.

Lori pulled out her Reporter's Assistant and documented the equipment making sure that her sons-in-law were not in any of the pictures.

Superman took off with the bomb and turned it over to the military while Jon took the carrier with the Kryptonite and took off for STAR Labs. Rich and Rob waited until Clark returned for Lori. When he returned he gave a report, "The soldiers at the bunker are recovering. Apparently it was a knock-out gas." Hearing this, they were all relieved. Rich and Rob took off to return to work.

Lori threw her arm around Clark's waist and whispered in his ear, "Home James."

Clark put his arm around her and laughing they took to the air.

That evening they were flabbergasted when the evening edition of the Planet was published because front and center, above the fold was a picture of Lori with her bow drawn ready to let fly and the caption:

"New Hero in Town!"

"Even with the supermen and superwomen that protect Metropolis there are cases that they can't handle alone. A new hero joined them to help with just such a problem. An archer all dressed up in Lincoln green like Robin Hood appeared on the scene. This Emerald Archer with some trick arrows enabled the Supermen to get the upper hand on a robot that for some reason they couldn't get near. Story continues 2A"

Clark said, "Well, whaddya know. Lori, you made the front page and this time it wasn't with your byline! This story is *about* you."

She grabbed the paper as she said, "Let me see that!" Quickly reading the article she got a smug look on her face as she did. Laying the paper down she said, "I'm waiting."

Realizing that he had lost the point, Clark said, "Okay, you were right. As old as the technology is, bows and arrows do have their place. You did really well with that. You'll never hear another complaint out of me about your archery."

"And don't you forget it." She couldn't hold it in any longer and she burst out in peals of laughter.

End flashback

The Emerald Archer, as she had been dubbed, made a couple of other appearances to assist the supermen before her powers

began to manifest to the absolute delight of the grandchildren who all knew who she was. Needless to say, they were all disappointed when she stopped using her bow in favor of her superpowers.

Chapter 4 An Engagement

August 2089

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Now it was 2089 and Lori and Clark had been reporting partners all that time and as a team had already won two Kerth awards.

Over the last three years Lori had had to deal with the memories that the Soul Tracker device had installed in her brain while she slept, every night from the time she was six months old. The integration of the various personalities, Lady Loisetto, Lulu Kent, Lois Lane and of course her own predominant among them, had not been the easiest thing she had ever handled but Clark had been very patient and supportive. Knowing the source had enabled them to adapt to the new circumstance.

The largest part of the integration was the memories of Lois and the children that she and Clark had had together. Even though her memories from the Soul Tracker included the birth of each of Lois and Clark's eight children there were problems. One problem was that the memories stopped short of including all of the members of the family. There was a twenty year gap that needed to be overcome. Clark had been doing his best to fill in that empty chapter in her past. Coupled with that there was the physical reality of dealing with eight separate families and that sometimes overwhelmed her. Only the core of the family had been at their wedding which had made it a little easier to handle. When they all got together at the Wisteria Lane home or on the farm, it was indeed a village. Parts of the families rotated in and out of the original homestead as their individual lives could accommodate it. Nonetheless, there were usually batches of small children about.

By this time all of the first generation children were married and they all had children. They were a very close knit clan.

At this point the family consisted of the following.

Head researcher at STAR Labs and eldest son, Jon, had married Jennifer (Jen) Jenkins, an elementary school teacher. Their children were Bernard, Jacob, Maria, Kathryn, Clayton, George, Kirk, Gabrielle and Kristin.

Lawyer, eldest daughter and first wed was Lara. She had married Michael (Mike) Lee who was also a lawyer in the same firm. Their children were Louise, Gregory, Andrew, Sophia, Robert E., Mary and Dean.

ER Physician and eldest twin, Sean, had married Heather MacLeod, an Environmental Engineer. Their children were Maggie, Lauren, Daniel, James, Conner, Leonard, Duncan and Lydia.

Sean's twin sister and Family Practice physician, Celeste, had married William (Wild Bill) Davidson, an MPD Detective. Their children were Jeffrey, Jared, Agnes, Heather, Duncan, Erin and Cassia.

Jessica, the OB/Gyn of the family, had married Richard (Rich) Stuart, an Anthro-Archeologist. Their children were Linda, Joseph, Charles Edward (Charlie), Archibald (Arch), Mary Elizabeth and James E. B. (Jeb)

The computer whiz of the family, James, had married Margaret (Peg) Dennis who was also a computer whiz. Their children were Erin, Josiah, Kenneth, Donna, David, Marie Louise (Marylu) and Tiberius (Ty).

Youngest daughter and Child Psychologist, Lucy had married Robert (Rob) Jackson, a Biochemist. Their children were Thomas

J., Natasha, Andrew, Lance, Teri, Edward, Julia and Reginald (Reggie).

New Director of the Superman Foundation and the youngest of the first generation, Sam had married Alice. Alice was the only other fully Kryptonian member of the family, at least at this time, because she was from New Krypton. Their children were Franklin, Margaret, Jeremy, Karen, Anne, Donald, Loraine and Julie.

Because of their extended life expectancy all of the families were taking a break from having children while they pretended to age. The pendants that all of the spouses wore guaranteed the same long life and superpowers as their Kent family spouses. It was important that they appear to age to keep the family secret. They would all, eventually, assume new identities and start a new generation.

Knowing that it took about three years for the changes to occur in her physiology and that they were nearing that time Lori had taken to wearing the pendant all the time. Gradually, Lori's powers had started to manifest, so slowly that at first she hadn't noticed.

Gradually her hearing became more and more acute. It really didn't hit her until she suddenly realized that the background thump, thump that she was hearing all the time was actually Clark's heartbeat.

The next thing she noticed was that it was taking her less and less time in the morning to get ready for work. One morning while she was in the shower, realizing that she had overslept and had to rush if she was going to be ready on time, she started to hurry and unexpectedly it was like the water from the showerhead stopped in mid air. She was startled and stopped to look at this phenomenon and when she did the water started moving again. She started to hurry again and the water stopped again. She soaped herself quickly stopped to allow the water to flow again and rinse her off. She reached over and turned the water off and then grabbed her towel and started drying off. When the towel started to smoke she stopped and looked at it in amazement.

She let out a whoop and without stopping to put any clothes on, ran out of the bathroom. She spotted Clark in their bedroom and barreled into him, knocking him onto the bed. Using her new found superspeed she took his clothes off of him. Lying on top of him, she started kissing him.

When he realized just what was happening he rolled her over on her back. This started a period of marital intimacy.

He said, "Wow, my little speed demon! What got into you this morning?"

She laughed and with a sly grin said, "Oh, something special."

It wasn't until she responded that he had really realized just what he had said and he started laughing as well. He said, "Well, your powers are obviously coming on. What do you have?"

"Well, let's see, so far I have superhearing, and," she had a broad smile as she said, "superspeed." She chose that second to demonstrate this by spinning into her work clothes and then finished, "I think my strength is coming on but I don't know about the vision things yet."

Clark spun back into his clothes and laughed as he said, "Vision things, huh? Let's try something." He walked over and picked up a safety pin off the dresser. He opened it and said, "Hold out your hand."

She did and he brought the open pin in and gave her finger a little prick. It didn't break the skin so he tried a little harder. Still nothing. He said, "I think that your invulnerability is kicking in as well. It shouldn't be too long until," he started to chuckle, "the vision things kick in and then shortly after that you'll be able to fly. Have you decided on a costume yet?"

"I really haven't given that much thought. I don't think I'll

use the old one. That pink just wasn't my color. Actually, none of the girls have used your color scheme and most of the spouses have decided to use the same colors schemes within families. Jon and Jen both use black, red and yellow. Lucy and Rob both use white. Jessie and Rich both wear hazel and red. Celeste and Bill use red and green. It looks like I should use your red, blue and yellow for mine. I like the length of Angel's cape; it only comes down to her waist. I don't think I want a two piece like she wears though. I'm thinking something like a Speedo with a pleated miniskirt; calf high boots a waist length cape, elbow high gloves and a mask." As she was describing her new uniform they headed downstairs for breakfast.

Once they were in the kitchen and making breakfast, Clark offered, "You could start working on it this weekend, in the evenings. I think Jessie and Rich, Jimmy and Peg are going to be at the farm with the kids. Do you think I should pick up your sister Liz for the weekend?" Clark put the coffee on to drip.

Surprised, Lori asked, "Is it that obvious?" Lori started making some toast.

With a serious expression, Clark replied, "You would have to be blind not to see it. I'm sure it's mutual. To see the two of them together, it's like watching Jon when he first met Jen. I'm glad we brought Liz in on the family secret. At least she knows what she is getting into."

Lori asked, "Remember our first day? When we walked in and Liz got a look at you she asked if you had any brothers. How was I to know that she would be attracted to one of our grandsons? She and Jeb make a cute couple though. I wonder how long it's going to be before he gets up the nerve to propose. Liz is in her early twenties and Jeb is twenty-seven. He started working for the Superman Foundation as Sam's assistant almost as soon as Sam became Director, a few months ago." Lori started buttering the toast that had just popped up.

"I hope they don't make us wait too long. As entertaining as it is to watch them as they court, I'd like to see them together." He took the piece of toast she offered and started drizzling honey on it.

Lori replied, "You and me both. Maybe I need to have a talk with my little sister."

Still smiling, Clark replied, "You do that and Gramps will have a talk with Jeb. After all, Liz is my sister-in-law. Wow, do you realize just how complicated this is going to be? Your sister may marry your grandson so she will be your granddaughter-in-law as well as your sister." He considered this for a second before continuing, "Maybe we should discourage this match. It's going to strain my super memory keeping our relations straight." Clark raised a teasing eyebrow at Lori and then poured two mugs of coffee and handed one to her.

Not realizing that he was kidding while Lori added her sweetener and non-dairy creamer she thought about his statement before saying, "Nah, I don't think we need to interfere. Let them be happy."

Clark said, "I was just kidding about discouraging them! I want them to be happy too. Let's let nature take its course. Okay, why don't you give Liz a call and invite her to the farm for the weekend. Actually, she probably already knows that he's going to be there."

After a few seconds Clark continued, "There is one nice thing about this. You won't have to suffer the loss of your sister the way Lois did with Lucy. You won't be outliving all of your family this time." Because of her association with Clark, Lois had lived longer than her sister even though she was the older sibling.

Lori thought about this and then said, "You know, I hadn't thought about that. It will be nice to have Liz around for a long time." She took a sip of her coffee.

As if on cue the phone rang. Lori looked at the caller ID and said, "Right on schedule." She had her coffee mug in one hand and with her free hand picked up the phone and said, "Hi Liz, we

were just talking about you. Uh huh. Sure he is. Friday? Clark can pick you up. Five thirty Pacific, got it. See ya Friday, Sis.” She hung up the phone and started laughing.

She said, “You have an appointment Friday to pick up your sister-in-law to bring her to the farm.”

“I suppose if I don’t she’ll call Jessie and beg her for a lift.” He thought for a couple of seconds and then said, “Actually, Jeb has had his powers for a little while now and he will soon be joining the rest of the family in the family business. He could pick her up. Hmmmm, you know, that’s not a bad idea.” Setting down his coffee mug, Clark picked up the phone and dialed Jeb’s number. When the phone was answered he said, “Hi Jeb it’s Gramps. Oh we’re doing fine, looking forward to the weekend at the farm. You’re planning on being there aren’t you? That’s what I thought. You know, I’m not as young as I used to be, could you do me a favor? No, nothing serious. I need you to do taxi duty. Yeah, well you see it’s this way, there’s somebody on the west coast that needs a ride to the farm. Yeah, that’s right. Would you mind doing your old Gramps a favor and doing the taxi duty for me? You will earn my undying gratitude. You will? Thanks. I know that I’m really putting you out. I’ll repay you sometime. Oh, this is the repayment? Okay, if you say so. She wants to be picked up at five thirty Pacific time. You’ll be there, good. See you guys at the farm.” He started laughing as he hung the phone up.

Lori was already laughing as she said, “Talk about matchmaking! ‘Do your old Gramps a favor.’ ‘Not as young as I used to be.’ Hah, I might believe that if we didn’t have so much fun in bed.”

“Okay, well we won’t need to worry about Liz getting in the way in the costume making and I don’t think we’ll have to worry about keeping Jeb occupied. I think Peg, Jessie and the girls would all love to help make it. Jimmy, Rich and I can keep the guys busy.”

That weekend, at the farm, the girls and guys split up. The girls spent most of their time on the horses. Raven, daughter of Josiah Kent and the youngest granddaughter of James and Margaret Kent, was showing a lot of talent in the barrel race, consistently beating her older sisters, Leslie and Emerson as well as her cousins, Susan, Angela and Rachel by several seconds.

Raven, like a few of her cousins had become a very enthusiastic and serious rider. Jimmy and Peg had given in to her pleadings and finally bought her a horse of her own. She had a gray quarterhorse that she called Smokey. Smokey was stabled at the farm along with the rest of the mounts. Slowly but surely the stalls were being filled and it wouldn’t be long until another stable would be needed.

On a daily basis the horses were pastured or sent into a corral for exercise. On the weekends the owners of each of the mounts mucked their stalls. They might technically be children of privilege, but that would not keep them from fulfilling their responsibilities. This was one of the fundamental qualities that Lois and Clark and now Lori and Clark and all of the kids tried to instill in all of the children and grandchildren. A fundamental work ethic, a respect for life, loyalty and a desire to help wherever they could were their guiding principles. The good, solid Midwestern principles that Jonathan and Martha had lived out and modeled for young Clark still stayed with him to this day.

Under the supervision of ‘Gramps’ the guys were working on their calf roping and this was where Kenneth Junior really excelled. Kenneth Junior was another one with his own horse, a palomino quarterhorse he called Hunter. Hunter was the best calf roping horse in the stable and Kenneth on Hunter became an unbeatable pair.

The guys were all working diligently to get ready for their rodeo later in the summer.

That night Peg, Jessie and their daughters adjourned to the

hobby room with Lori and got out the sewing machines, fabrics and patterns. The hobby room had now expanded to a very large space with a big worktable and bolts of spandex cloth in a rainbow of colors displayed along one wall. All of the girls contributed to the design and Peg, who was a skilled seamstress, went to work on the big serger. It wasn’t too long before Lori was modeling the results of her work. The girls all agreed that the suit was becoming and that her identity would probably be safe.

While the girls were busy in the hobby room the guys were in the great room playing board games.

While the cousins played, Clark, Jimmy and Rich talked.

Clark asked, “Jimmy, how are things with the business?”

Jimmy replied, “The computer forensics business is booming, but I just got an offer for a position that is going to be hard to turn down. I’m seriously considering it.”

Rich asked, “Oh, what kind of offer could you get that would pull you away from your business?”

Jim started to smile as he replied, “Sam has asked me to bring my entire staff with me and take over the Foundation’s network. There have been a number of attempts to disrupt the Foundation’s business. It should be a seamless move since the Foundation was one of our principal clients anyhow. This way the Foundation will be able to start offering computer network security services. It will broaden the business. It’s a tremendous opportunity and besides, I won’t have the headache of all that paperwork and government forms. For me it’s a win – win.”

Clark was pleased with this comment because Jimmy was just the latest family member to start working for the Foundation. Clark was aware of the way things were going. Slowly Sam had been recruiting family members, moving the foundation in the direction of a family owned and operated business. Clark turned to Rich and asked, “Well, we can see that things are looking up for Jimmy. How are things with you? Has Sam offered you a position yet?”

Rich laughed and replied, “No, not yet, but I wouldn’t be too surprised if he did in the near future. Actually, I don’t see how we could. How could we justify moving Jessie’s practice to The Foundation? I don’t think OB/GYN services would fit too well.”

“I don’t know about that. A free OB clinic sponsored by The Foundation could do some important work. Look at Celeste and her-Foundation sponsored clinic in Metropolis. They are doing a lot of good.”

“You might be right at that. Jessie and I will have to talk about it, if he asks us.”

Clark smiled and said, “I think you can count on it. Sam’s a shrewd businessman. He can see the advantage of having the family all working together and what better place than the Foundation where they can do the most good?”

“Just look at what he did with the old Luthor Tower when he renamed it The Foundation. Remodeling the old underground shelter and turning it into a shopping mall was a stroke of genius. It’s become a tourist attraction. Slowly, as businesses move out, he has been expanding the Foundation’s office space. Eventually the whole building could be exclusively Foundation offices.”

They were talking for a little over an hour when they were called for the unveiling.

When Lori modeled her new uniform for Clark, she did a slow pirouette and his first response was a wolf whistle and then with a glint in his eye he said, “Well, the eyes are certainly drawn away from the face.”

The top of the suit was in Clark’s dark blue spandex material, designed like a tank top with medium wide straps and a deeply scooped neckline which continued down and finished off like a swim suit. Over this was a pleated miniskirt in red which came down barely far enough to cover her derriere. Just below the neckline, centered on her chest was the El family crest, in a size slightly smaller than Clark’s. There was a yellow belt with a hollow buckle within which she placed the pendant. Attached to

the shoulder straps was her cape which fell to her waist just to the level where the skirt started. The cape was a little fuller or wider than Clark's was in relation to their sizes and if she chose to she could bring the sides around and cover her arms and most of her upper body. The mask was little more than a half mask which in effect was a wide band which covered her face from the hairline to a point just below her eyes and allowed her hair to flow freely except for where it circled her head and was made of the same blue material. Boots that came up to mid-calf and gloves which came up almost to her elbows, both in red, finished off the ensemble.

A few minutes later Liz and Jeb came in and Liz didn't recognize her sister.

Jeb said, "Like the new Suit, Grams!"

Aghast, Liz burst out, "*Lori*?!? Why are you wearing that?"

Lori started to laugh, "This is my new uniform. I'm going to be helping out. I thought you knew that all of the spouses have powers too."

Liz was speechless for a minute then she looked at Jeb and said, "I hope you don't expect me to dress up in something like that." As soon as the words were out of her mouth Liz clamped her hands over it and she flushed bright red.

Jeb looked like he had just been thrown to the lions or into a Kryptonite cage. With an embarrassed smile he turned to the family and said, "Mom and Dad, Grams and Gramps, I guess the secret is out now, I asked Liz to marry me while we were out on our walk."

Chagrined, Liz said, "I didn't mean to say that ..." She stopped because all those gathered around burst out in laughter at their discomfiture.

Lori stepped over and put her arm around her sister's shoulder and pulled her into a hug as she said, "Sis, we knew it would happen, sooner or later and frankly we had been *hoping* for sooner." She turned to Jeb and asked, "What took you so long?"

Jeb said to Liz, "I guess you can show them." As Liz reached into her pocket and pulled out an engagement ring and put it on he continued, "I just started at the Foundation and I wanted to make sure Liz would be willing to relocate to Metropolis. As soon as she let me know it would be okay, I went out and got the ring for her before I asked." Liz held her hand up for inspection. All of the girls gathered around as Liz showed off her engagement ring, oohing and aahing as they did so.

Rich walked over and put a fatherly arm around his son's shoulders. Turning to Liz, he said, "Welcome to the family. This guy takes after his grandfather in a lot of ways, so, if this lunkhead gives you any problems, you call me, okay?"

Liz laughed and looking into Jeb's eyes said, "I think I can handle him."

Jessica laughed and said, "If you're anything like your sister, I can believe that."

Lori and Clark both laughed at that and then Lori asked, "When do you plan to tell Mom and Dad?"

Jeb replied, "We were planning to tell them when I flew her home tomorrow."

Clark asked, "I have a suggestion, don't tell them. Ask them. Ask if you can marry their daughter, that's the proper way to do it. Once that's done, when do you plan to have the ceremony?"

Jeb looked at Liz and asked, "How soon?"

Liz replied, "I don't want to wait any longer than necessary. Sis got married the same day as she and Clark met."

Lori jumped in and said, "Whoa, hold on a minute there, Sis. That is a horse of an entirely different color. We had memories of being together for a long time."

Liz retorted, "Jeb and I have known each other for almost three years now. How much longer do we need to wait?"

Clark said to Lori, "She's got you there, Honey. How long do

they have to wait?"

Lori gave in, "Alright, why don't you let Mother and Daddy decide. Go on, get out of here and go tell them. You can let us know what the decision is when you get back."

Chapter 5 – Wanda

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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While everyone was waiting for Liz and Jeb to return from LA, Lori made a decision. She decided that she was going to still use the name Ultra Woman. After all, she was used to it and there wouldn't be any confusion with Lara because of the different uniforms. Lara had made a copy of Lois' original uniform in reversed colors from her original. It was teal blue with a pink cape and other trim. Lori's new uniform was in Clark's color scheme.

When Liz and Jeb returned Lori could tell from the expressions on their faces that it had gone well. Liz said, "Mother and Daddy are happy and think that a short engagement would be okay since we've known each other for so long. Mom wants at least two months to plan the wedding, so three months from today, November 12."

"Congratulations Sis, all of the girls will want to help with the planning, I'm sure. That'll make it easier on Mom."

That following Monday, Lori wore her new uniform under her business attire. The skirt of her uniform was so short that it wouldn't be a problem for her to wear any type of clothes. Today she was wearing a skirt that came to the knee with a slit to mid thigh on the left. The slit ended several inches below the skirt of her uniform.

When Lori and Clark got to the bullpen they settled down at their desks and started their daily routine of checking e-mail and voice-mail. They were waiting to hear back on some feelers they had put out.

Finally, later in the morning one of their snitches contacted them. Initially they had sent out requests for information because they had heard about a dramatic increase in drug usage in the suburbs. But, when he called he told them about Zombie, a new drug on the street. It was a so-called designer drug which was so new that no samples had been obtained as yet for analysis and the DEA had no information on it as a result.

Based on his lead they started searching the recent archives and found some reports of unusual behavior in the most unlikely citizens. The reports that they found said that the people had been ordinary people placed in extraordinary situations. The apparent perpetrators had been apprehended by the police after committing crimes which ranged from muggings to bank robbery. In all cases they were identified by the victims or from videotapes from the facility.

When the police picked up the perps, they all claimed to have no memory of the activity. Blood tests were not able to identify a causative agent but that really had no meaning since there was no clue as yet as to what to look for. Various chemicals had been isolated from the blood samples and analyzed at STAR Labs but it was a set of extremely complex components and there was no way to relate how the various components interacted. Aside from the presence of the same chemicals in the blood stream of all of the subjects, the descriptions of their behavior were consistent. All of the victims of the robberies had described the perpetrators as zombies, the walking dead. No expression, no communication, just a purpose. That was the limit on what Lori and Clark were able to find. Somehow they would need to get a sample of the drug.

It was a rather uneventful morning. They had to do some

interviews and after those they had gone out to lunch. Since they were out in what used to be the Suicide Slum area, they had chosen to visit a club that they suspected of being a front for organized crime. After they were seated Clark nonchalantly pulled his glasses down his nose and scanned for the office. When he found it he sent Lori a thought, /The office is over your left shoulder. Looks like some kind of meeting going on. See if you can hear anything./

They both tried to tune in with their superhearing. It took a few seconds to filter out the ambient noise and pick up on the conversation. What they heard confirmed their suspicions. Clark hadn't said anything about who was in the office, but all Lori heard were male voices.

(Voice 1) "We just heard from Detroit. The operations there are proceeding as planned. So far we have prostitution, drugs, gambling and protection."

(Voice 2) "We need to ramp up our efforts here if we are going to stay on top. If we're not careful they could challenge us for control."

(Voice 1) "They've got it lucky. They don't have any of the supermen or superwomen to contend with. We have to be constantly on the lookout for them. They could shut us down in no time."

(Voice 2) "We do have one thing going for us. We have money coming in and we don't have to risk any of our people. We just slip a pill in someone's drink and ten minutes later we tell them what they have to do. They do it and turn the proceeds over to us. They leave and don't remember anything about what they have done so they can't lead the cops back to us."

(Voice 1) "That coupled with our regular drug trade is keeping us on top. When is the next shipment due in from Mexico?"

(Voice 2) "It should be making its way over the border in a couple of days. That's another sweet deal. The cartel loads it onto a truck coming into the States from Mexico and the driver doesn't even know it. When it arrives we get it as regular goods under a false name and address. We can't be traced and if the driver is stopped he doesn't know squat. We are clear both ways."

Lori sent, /Wow, there's a lot there. We have a couple of days until the drug shipment. Do you want to take a road trip? We'd be less likely to be recognized in Detroit. Besides, I hear Detroit is lovely, this time of the year./

The next day Clark and Lori went to their editor, Frank Edwards, and told him that they had a lead on organized crime and would like to follow up on it. It might involve going undercover for a time. "Frank, what we have could be really big, but in order to do it right we might have to be out of the office for a while. Would you be okay with that?"

Frank asked, "Can you give me an idea of what you've got?"

Lori replied, "Yeah, we have a multi-city organization. They have their fingers in several pies, prostitution, protection, gambling and drugs at the very least. We need to find out just how many things and just who is behind it all. We're convinced they have ties to a group here in Metropolis. It sounds like they are all parts of one larger organization, but there appears to be a competition to see which division is in control. We want to get to the bottom of it. We were planning to start in Detroit."

Frank said, "Okay, sounds interesting. How long do you think it would take?"

Lori replied, "It could take at least a few weeks."

"Try to keep it as short as you can. Keep me posted and I'll expect to see you in here at least occasionally, just so that I know you're still alive. Clark, I expect you to take care of Lori."

Showing a little irritation, Lori replied, "Now just you wait a minute. I *can* take care of *myself*, thank you." Realizing that she might be saying too much she added, "I am a black belt in Tae Kwan Do, you know."

Frank put up his hands in a defensive gesture and said, "Hey, I didn't mean anything by it. Those kind of guys don't play by the rules, you know. They use guns."

With a smirk Lori replied, "So do *I*, occasionally."

Frank said, "I had forgotten about that. Still, be careful out there, okay?"

Clark said, "We will be. Don't worry."

Later, as they were preparing for their undercover assignment, Lori said, "You know, Frank gave me an idea. We might just be able to infiltrate the mob easier if we show some muscle, and no, I don't mean brute strength. I have my concealed carry permit. I could carry one of my guns. It should be easy to convince them that I can shoot. With that on my resume, we might just have an entrée."

"Okay, I can be the strong silent type enforcer. I can use the karate that you've been teaching me. With the moderate use of superspeed I should be able to make it look convincing."

"Sounds like a plan. Where should we start?"

"I think we should let them come to us. If we start our own little protection racket by taking some of their customers away we should be able to get their attention. We can tell the businesses we deal with that we are setting up a sting to get them to cooperate."

"How do we start?"

"Those kind usually collect on a weekly basis and depend on fear to keep the 'clients' in line. I think we start by staking out a couple of businesses and see if they are visited."

Lori said, "I guess I'll need to wear something flashy, at least when we meet the organization. Until then I'll be conservative. I think a business suit, like I normally wear."

"I'll do the same. When we are going to meet them I'll probably wear leathers. Are you ready to start the surveillance?"

With a chuckle, Lori spun into her uniform and said, "Am I ever! It's just a shame that my vision thingies and flight haven't come on yet. At least I'm invulnerable, strong and fast. You'll have to fly me there and I might as well be in uniform."

Clark spun into his uniform and they exited the back door heading for the trees in the back yard. Instead of picking Lori up in his arms he stood next to her and put an arm around her as they took off. They landed in an alley in Detroit and spun into their business clothes. Once they exited the alley they headed for the outskirts so that they could observe some businesses.

They found a café that had a decent view of the street from a table near a window. It was nearing closing time for a lot of the businesses so they settled at a table and ordered. While they waited for their order they watched the street. Clark saw a man dressed casually enter a shop up the street. When he came out his hands were empty, indicating that he hadn't made any purchases. The guy entered another shop two up from that one, was inside a short time and came out. Again he was empty handed. Clark said, "I think I've got one already. Across the street, blue polo shirt and khaki pants. He's gone into a couple of shops but he hasn't purchased anything."

He was just coming out of a third shop and Lori said, "I see him. He doesn't look like a crook, but, who does now days?"

When their order was delivered they quickly ate and Clark paid the check. He sent a thought, /Let's get started. I know the shops he visited. Let's go right down the line./

She thought back, /Lead and I'll follow you anywhere, husband mine./

They exited the café and Clark led them to the first shop. When they entered they saw that it was a florist shop and when they entered the owner was behind a counter. As they entered Clark closed the door and turned over the sign to read 'closed'.

Seeing this, the shop owner started to get worried. He said, "What are you doing? Why are you here? I just paid!" He was starting to sweat and fear was etched into his face the closer they

got to him.

In a soothing tone, Clark said, "Please, relax, we are not here to do you any harm. Can we have a few minutes of your time to talk? We want to help you."

Still not sure just what was going on the shop owner was still worried, after all this could be a trick.

Clark pulled out his Daily Planet ID and showed it to the shop owner. As he was perusing this Clark said, "My partner and I work for the Daily Planet and we would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in a sting so that we can put the people behind this protection racket where they belong."

The shop owner was stunned and still somewhat wary as he asked, "Sting? Put them in jail? You really think you can do that?"

Lori replied, "We sure intend to try."

The shop owner asked, "Okay, how do you plan to do it?"

Clark could see that they had their foot in the door at least. He said, "We plan to take some of their customers away so that they come to us to try to make us stop."

The shop owner said, "Hmmm, that might just work. By the way, my name's Dan, Dan O'Brien."

"Pleased to meet you, Dan. How often do they collect?"

"Once a week."

"Wow, we really caught a break on that one. Was the guy in the polo shirt doing the pickup?"

"Yeah, that was one of the pickup men."

"Okay, here's what we're going to do. Next week, when he comes in you refuse to pay. When he threatens you, you say that you have subscribed with another agency for your protection. If he asks who you tell him Charlie King and Wanda Detroit are the representatives. Got that? Charlie and Wanda."

"Charlie and Wanda, got it."

"Okay, we're going to go visit a few more of his clients. Do you have any names for us?"

"Sure, there are five on this block alone. Jim's Re-upholstery, Frank's Corner Market, Mary's Crafts, Jake's Cakes and my shop."

"Okay, we're going to visit each of them. Thanks. If things go the way we plan, we should have them within a couple of weeks."

"I hope so, because of them I'm barely making a profit."

"We'll do what we can. Just be patient. Do you want your sign turned back over?"

"No, don't bother. I'm closed for the night. I've had enough for one day. Thanks."

They went down the line and the same scene was repeated, with some minor variations, at each shop in the block.

By the time they'd finished they felt that they were ready to muscle in on the protection racket.

Chapter 6 – Drug Interdiction

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Back in Metropolis the next morning they talked over how to go about taking on the drug trade. They also talked about how to get a sample of Zombie.

Clark said, "Okay, from what we overheard they put the drug in someone's drink. I'd speculate that they do it right there in their club. They can cause the victim to forget everything so they would feel safe in doing so."

Lori said, "All of the victims so far have been men."

"I think I'm due for a night on the town. I'll pretend that I've been to several clubs already which should make me a good candidate."

"How are you going to get the sample?"

"As soon as they spike my drink, I'll down it but hold it in my mouth. I'll go to the men's room and spit it into a jar. Star Labs should be able to isolate the drug from the alcohol."

"What about the zombie thing?"

"I'll pretend that I threw up and they'll think that it wasn't in my system long enough to take effect."

"Okay, so much for Zombie, what about the influx of drugs into the area?"

"We know how they are doing it so we can intercept the shipments."

Lori thought about it for a few seconds and then said, "Why don't we cause them some trouble with the cartel? If we could remove the shipment without the driver knowing ..."

"Yeah, that could work. They would contact the cartel and claim that the cartel never sent the goods and the cartel could accuse them of trying to get the goods without paying for them. We could substitute powered sugar for the cocaine and a mixture of parsley and sage for the marijuana."

Lori speculated, "You know, if they are using this ploy to get drugs into Metropolis they could be doing the same thing to other cities. Maybe we should call for some help."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Let's get all of the family in on it. If we can interdict eight to ten shipments a night, we could put a real dent in the drug trade."

"The problem is that this isn't the only way they are bringing in drugs. The real solution to the drug problem is not to remove the supply; it's to remove the demand. If nobody wanted drugs the supply would dry up of its own accord. We would have a harder time of that, but, it may come in time."

"It's still fairly early. Do you want to call a meeting for this evening?"

"Let's do that."

After Happy Hour had started, at about 7 P.M. Clark went to the club and succeeded in acquiring the sample of Zombie. Later he gave it to Jon at the meeting.

That evening all of the super members of the family and their super spouses arrived for the meeting.

Clark and Lori laid out the plan and received overwhelming support. The entire family was anxious to deal with this scourge. Supplies of the replacements were obtained and they all set out.

They hoped that Zombie would be taken care of when the whole story broke and the gangs were rounded up.

The next day Jon put a team on the analysis. The analysis took some time, but, once done the results were be turned over to the FDA. They said it would be classified as a dangerous drug and placed on the prohibited list as a controlled substance. Jon's team also came up with a counter agent.

Rather than their uniforms, the supermen and superwomen wore their snooping clothes. While Lori and Clark concentrated on routes into Detroit, the rest concentrated on routes to major cities on the east coast, the exception being Lara and Mike. They looked for trucks on the Pacific coast.

After examining over fifty trucks, most of them possessing Mexican plates, Lori and Clark found a Mexican truck at a rest stop on the highway to Detroit. Clark used his x-ray vision to check the contents. He saw some suspicious boxes in the mid-section of the truck. Since the back was unlocked they let themselves in and at superspeed swapped the contents of the packages for the fakes that they had with them. When they exited Clark picked up Lori and they zoomed up and out of sight. Clark landed them on a wooded area and built a campfire ring. They placed the drugs in the fire ring and Clark used his heat vision at its highest intensity to vaporize all of it. The heat was so intense that there wasn't even any smoke, it just seemed to cease to exist. The ground below the pile actually fused into a form of glass. It would be a mystery for the fire service if they came across it.

Clark sent out a thought, /We just intercepted a shipment. Anyone else have any luck?/

Jon replied, /Jen and I found a truck headed for New York. We had just about given up. She and I must have checked seventy-five trucks. When we found one it was north of Metropolis.. How should we dispose of this stuff?/

/I used my heat vision to destroy it. Use enough heat so that no smoke is created./

/Got it, Pop./

Sam was next, /Alice and I must have checked close to a hundred trucks before we found one. The one we found wasn't on an interstate. It was on US 40, the Baltimore Turnpike, between DC and Baltimore. We'll get rid of it the same way./

Lara replied, /Mike and I found two. One headed for the bay area and the other headed further north, maybe Seattle. We must have checked two hundred between us. We'll do the same thing./

/Is that everyone?/

Sean replied, /We found one headed for Metropolis./

Jessie replied, /We found one headed for DC. It's taken care of./

Celeste, Jimmy and Lucy all replied in the negative.

Clark sent, /I'd say this was a good night's work. Let's do it again tomorrow night. In the meantime Mom and I will follow up and see what effect we've had. The nice thing is that this should be the last time we do it this way. From now on we can stake out the border crossings to ID the trucks. There are a limited number of border crossings and there are more than enough of us to cover them./

The super family followed this procedure every night for a week, then they started staking out the border crossings. They all agreed that it was much more efficient. Some of the grandkids wanted to help so their parents took them out and trained them. Then they were able to share the burden of the searches.

While this was happening Clark and Lori monitored the club where they had gotten the initial lead and made occasional trips to Detroit.

In order to monitor conversations in the office a wireless mic had been attached to the window frame for recording the conversations. Most of the time there was nothing of any consequence.

Finally after a week they got results on the drug interdiction. When they listened to the recording, they heard.

(Voice 1) "We finally heard back from the cartel."

(Voice 2) "It's about time. Whadda they say?"

(Voice 1) "They claim that they sent the full shipment, five mil worth and they expect their payment."

(Voice 2) "They gotta be kiddin'. What we got was sugar and leaves and those sure don't look like pot. Did you tell them that?"

(Voice 1) "Yeah, I toll them, but, they doan wanna hear it. They claim they sent tha goods and they want their moola."

There was the sound of a door opening and closing and then a third voice was added.

(Voice 3) "Jake, what is our status? Where do we stand on the shipment?"

(Voice 1 Jake) "Hi Naomi. It doan look too good. We got nuthin. We checked the stuff and what we got was sugar and cooking herbs."

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Did you inform the cartel?"

(Voice 2 Rich) "Yeah, we let them know. They claim they sent the real McCoy. According to them we're runnin' a scam, tryin' to get twice the product for the same money."

(Voice 1 Jake) "I think they're the ones runnin' the scam. They're tryin' to get twice the money for the same amount of product."

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Jake, I'll be the one to do the thinking. You just do what I tell you to do."

(Voice 1 Jake) "Okay, whatever you say, Naomi. You're the

boss."

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Just keep that in mind and we'll continue to get along. Personally, I think there is a third alternative. What if the shipment was intercepted en route?"

(Voice 1 Jake) "Who would know about it?"

(Voice 3 Naomi) "One of the other distributors."

(Voice 1 Jake) "Yeah, why didn't I think of that?"

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Because you're not the brains of this outfit, that's why. Just be quiet for a couple of minutes and let me think."

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Okay, I figure it this way. If it isn't the cartel stifling us then one of the other distributors could be trying to get twice the product for the same amount of cash. Jake, you and Rich wait here. I'm going to call some of the other distributors. I may be able to pick up something from the conversation."

There was the sound of the door opening and closing again. There was some small talk between the two, mostly grumbling about dealing with the cartel.

They stopped the tape playback. Lori said, "Okay, so far we have," she read off of a list she had made, "Naomi, who is obviously the boss, Jake, who isn't too bright and Rich the quiet one."

Clark hit play again. There was a bit of silence then suddenly Naomi was back. Since the recorder was voice activated they couldn't tell just how much time had elapsed.

(Voice 3 Naomi) "Okay, here's the story. We aren't the only ones that got stifled. I called ten other distributors. All together there were five or six shipments that were bogus. We won't know until tomorrow about number six. It is still in transit. It seems like it only happened on the east and west coasts. Shipments into Santa Fe, Boise, KC and Chicago made it through. This begins to look like an orchestrated effort by someone or some group to cause problems between us and the cartel."

(Voice 1 Jake) "How could it have been done?"

(Voice 3 Naomi) "It would be ridiculously easy. Those idiot truckers don't take any precautions with their trucks. They aren't even sealed or locked. Anybody could let themselves in at a fuel stop or rest area while they are asleep."

(Voice 2 Rich) "What are we gonna do 'bout it?"

(Voice 3 Naomi) "First I'm going to notify the cartel exactly what has happened. Then I'm going to make arrangements for a new shipment. I am going to specify that each truck, if it isn't going to be sealed and locked, have at least two drivers so that when they are stopped there is a guard on the trailer. I think the cartel will understand since we aren't the only ones this happened to."

(Voice 1 Jake) "How many shipments will they front us?"

(Voice 3 Naomi) "That's going to depend on how many make it through. They don't expect every shipment to make it through, but, if this continues they will have to find another means."

This was the first indication of just how effective they were being. As soon as they had listened to the recording Clark called a meeting. As soon as everyone was gathered he started, "Okay, we've hit them and we've hit them hard. According to our group each shipment was worth about five million dollars. The first night we prevented about thirty million dollars in drugs from hitting the streets and that figure has been growing ever since. The problem is that now they are wise to us. They've figured out how we are doing it so we need to change our tactics. They are going to be guarding the trucks at stops now, so, we will have to hit them while they move. There should be another shipment within the next couple of days. Let's be on the lookout."

The family followed this procedure every few days for several weeks. They intercepted almost a half billion dollars in drugs preventing them from hitting the streets. The problem was that this was requiring a lot of time and effort. They didn't know

just how long they would be able to keep up this level of effort. In addition to this, in between the drug interdiction flights, Lori and Clark worked on the protection racket in Detroit.

Chapter 7 – Infiltrating the Rackets

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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The Monday following the first week's drug interdictions Lori and Clark decided to let the kids handle that task while they took a few days to pursue other phases of the problem.

They discussed what they would do until Wednesday when the protection money pickup would be refused. Clark said, "Okay, we have a start on protection and drugs. I think we can hit gambling tonight. Do you feel lucky?"

Thinking about the times as Lois she had played poker with the guys, she smiled with confidence. No one could out-bluff her. Lori started to laugh as she said, "I was always good at poker. I'm sure you remember those games we had at the Planet with Perry. Well, now, with my superhearing, I can hear the heartbeats of my opponents. I always could tell a bluff a mile off, now I'll be even better."

Clark replied, "Much as I hate to admit it, I've never been really good at poker. Of course, I never used my powers when I played. I was tempted a time or two, but I just couldn't bring myself to use that advantage. This is different. Being able to read their cards and knowing what their hands are should help. Why don't we double team them? You can be there as my good luck charm and you could feed me your impressions of the strength of their hands. Between what I can see and your impression we can't miss."

"We'll need some seed money."

"Since we can't miss let's pull out some savings. Five thousand should be sufficient to get us started. It won't take too long until we are playing with their money."

It was a warm August night, so that evening Lori put on a slinky backless evening gown in silver with sequins all over it so that it sparkled as she moved. The dress was floor length with a slit up the left side to mid thigh. She paired this with diamond earrings and a flashy bracelet, ring and necklace. She grabbed a fur stole to drape across her shoulders. Clark dressed in a black suit with a charcoal gray shirt with a black tie and dark glasses. He spun into the Suit and picking up Lori, they took off from the back yard for Detroit. They landed in an alley; he spun into his disguise and arm in arm they left the alley looking for a club. Clark was planning to use his hearing and vision to find a gambling establishment. They were strolling arm in arm through a well-to-do section of the theater district when Clark found what they were looking for.

They climbed the steps up to the entrance and were accosted by two security guards. The guards were dressed in nice suits and not uniforms because this was a high class establishment. The one asked, "Where's your pass?"

Trying to sound bored, Clark replied, "I'm afraid I don't have one. We just got into town and were looking for some entertainment. Thought I'd try my luck. Vegas can get so ... boring. I heard that this was where the action is. Perhaps I was mistaken." Clark turned to Lori and said, "Come my dear, perhaps we can find some decent action, elsewhere." She threw her stole over one shoulder carelessly and put her arm back around his as they started to turn away.

The guard said, "Wait a minute. Maybe we can arrange a temporary pass. Let's see your green."

Clark reached into his inner jacket pocket and pulled out a billfold which he opened to display a stack of hundred dollar

bills.

The guard reached out and took a 'C' note and said, "Your temporary pass is in effect as of now." Stepping back he opened the door for them. He entered right behind them and stepped around them to lead the way to the back where the gaming was located.

Before they moved away from the door however, he frisked Clark to make sure he wasn't armed. The guard took one look at the formfitting dress that Lori was wearing and decided that there was nowhere for her to hide anything. Her clutch purse was too small to really hold anything, but to his surprise, without his asking she flipped the catch and opened it for his perusal. All he saw was a gold toned compact, a tube of lipstick and a hanky. What he didn't see was the hidden pocket within which, in its form fitted padded compartment, was her .380 automatic. After glancing into her clutch he took another look. To him she simply looked like arm candy. And that one look told him what nice candy she was.

The guard opened the door at the back they entered and strolled around looking at what was offered. Clark was planning on playing Black Jack or poker. Lori sent, /The poker table is over there to the right./

In a leisurely fashion they strolled in that direction and just as they arrived one of the players got up. Clark indicated the empty seat and asked the dealer, "Open?"

The dealer nodded, so Clark sat down with Lori standing behind him. He asked, "What are the stakes?"

"Five hundred ante and a thousand limit on raises."

Clark threw in his ante and the dealer started the deal. Clark pulled a pair of sevens and when it came to him he checked.

The guy two down opened with five hundred. Clark looked and saw a possible straight. When it came around to him he saw his bet. He discarded two and drew a third seven. He checked the guy that had opened and saw a busted straight but he still raised. Lori sent, /He's bluffing./

Clark replied, /I know. He missed his straight./

At this point, since everyone had covered the initial raise the pot was over six thousand dollars. The two to his right dropped. Clark saw the bet and raised five hundred. The next two dropped. The guy with the busted straight decided to drop as well and Clark raked in the pot.

Lori draped herself across Clark's shoulders and kissed the side of his face.

The evening progressed like that for several hours. Once they had a good stake they put their original five thousand away and moved over to Black Jack.

By x-raying the cards he knew when to hit and when to stop and managed to win deal after deal. He thought to Lori, /The deal is rigged. I can 'see' through the rigged deal though. I won't bust when they expect me to./ When a new shoe was brought out he was able to cut the stack to his advantage and immediately won the first five hands. By the time they decided to call it a night they had one hundred and eighty thousand of the house's money as well as their own five thousand. Clark sent, /This will reimburse us for the expense of the sugar and herbs. It will even give us some money to flash around in the other operations if we need it./

Lori sent back, /Seed money. It's a shame that we can't do this for a living. We'd be rolling in dough./

As they were starting to move toward the door a security guard got in their way and said, "The boss would like to speak with you. This way please."

Clark sent, /Looks like we struck a nerve./

Lori returned, /One hundred and eighty thousand dollars worth of nerve. I have my .380 in my purse. Here's where we establish our bona fides./

They were ushered into an office. Lori was carelessly dragging her stole from the hand that was also holding her purse,

her other arm through Clark's. There was a well dressed gentleman sitting behind a desk. As soon as the door was closed he addressed them. "I'm Buzz McCracken and I run this place. You had quite a string of luck this evening. Somehow, I don't think it was luck. I don't know how, but I think you were cheating. In view of this I think you need to return the money and also whatever you came in here with." As he was speaking the toughs on either side of him behind the desk ostentatiously reached inside their jackets to where shoulder holsters would be located.

Clark sent, /Ready?/

Lori responded, /Sure am. Let me at them./ Lori threw her stole over her left shoulder and opened her clutch purse. The toughs both reached deeper into their jackets. Nonchalantly she pulled out her compact and opening it, looked at herself in the mirror and powdered her nose. She took her time doing it making it look like she hadn't a worry in the world. After applying the powder she reexamined herself in the mirror before closing her compact. As she was doing all of this the toughs relaxed.

Clark said, "Well, Buzz, I don't think so. You can't prove that I was cheating any more than I can prove you were."

Buzz said, "I don't need to prove it. I just have to suspect it. Turn over the money ... now. Or do we have to get rough?"

Clark laughed, "Rough? Buzz, are you sure you want to do this? You really don't know who you're up against."

Lori was putting her compact back in her purse as Buzz raised his hand. As he did, both thugs drew their firearms.

Lori had her hand inside her purse and had the butt of her .380 automatic clutched in her hand. There were two muffled reports, BLAM, BLAM. She used just enough superspeed to snap off two shots, each of which impacted the barrels of the guns in the tough's hands, knocking them out of their grips.

After shooting the guns out of their hands she pulled her gun out of her clutch. She held the clutch up and putting her other hand in, stuck her finger out through the hole and said, "Darn, ruined another one." She hadn't been fast enough so that they would tumble to the superspeed but fast enough to accomplish her ends. With the gun now visible in her hand she lined up on Buzz who put his hands up.

Clark said, "Sorry about the purse, Wanda."

She replied, "It's okay, Charlie, replacing it won't even put a dent in the haul we made tonight."

Buzz said, "That's some fancy shooting." He turned to Charlie and asked, "Okay, what do you want?"

Clark replied, "Not much, just your whole operation. I figure this one eighty thou is a good start."

Buzz replied, "That ain't happenin'."

Clark said, "We'll see about that," as he and Lori started backing out of the office. Buzz started to reach for his intercom and BLAM, Lori snapped off another shot which took out his intercom before he had a chance to hit a switch.

They exited the office, Lori tucked away her gun and they were immediately accosted by two more toughs that had been attracted by the gunfire. Clark dealt with them by using Karate, knocking both of them out before he and Lori calmly exited.

As soon as they were outside they rounded the corner of the building and Clark spun into his uniform. Wrapping her up in his cape he picked Lori up and took off, straight up. At five hundred feet he came to a hover. They watched as the toughs came boiling out of the building like fire ants after an animal that had stepped on the mound. A group actually followed the right path into the alley and they were disappointed when they came up empty.

Chuckling, Clark said, "I'd say that this evening was something of a success. Shall we go home?"

Lori turned so that she was facing him and put her arms around his neck as she gave him a kiss. She asked, "Did I tell you how good you look in black?"

Not needing any further incentive, Clark shaped his course

for home and a few minutes later they were landing in their own back yard. Clark spun back into his undercover outfit and they started for the house.

After they moved into the bedroom Lori stepped up to Clark and putting her arms up around his neck, initiated another kiss.

As she did Clark's hands found the zipper at the back of her dress and he lowered it all the way to her waist which was only a few inches as it was a backless dress. As she stepped back she peeled the dress off her shoulders and allowed it to pool on the floor at her feet. Standing there in her thong and hose she reached up and started to undo his tie. Once she had that off she started to unbutton his shirt. Finding only flesh beneath instead of spandex she pushed both hands inside and started tracing his chest with her fingertips with a dreamy expression on her face as she did so. It only took a couple of seconds of this to get her juices flowing and she started moving faster as she divested him of his shirt. Once she had him naked to the waist she moved in and putting her arms around his neck started rubbing her breasts back and forth across his chest. Since she was wearing a thong when he reached down he was able to take her bare cheeks in his hands. He was surprised and she giggled at his response. She said, "In that dress I didn't want to show a panty line." It only took a few more seconds of this before he threw her on the bed and started to peel her thong and hose from her body. When this was done since her feet were the last part of her that he touched he started to massage them and suck on and lick her toes. It wasn't long before her hips were moving of their own accord and she started to moan with desire.

They then had a period of marital intimacy.

Chapter 8 – Taking Over the Rackets

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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On Wednesday they returned to Detroit. This time Clark was dressed in a leather jacket and jeans. Lori was dressed in a short skirt and a bolero top with knee high boots. They returned to the café that they had been in the week before. They saw the pickup guy when he arrived and watched as he entered O'Brien's Flowers. When he came out he had an angry look on his face. They exited the café and headed for Frank's Corner Market which would be the pickup guy's last stop on this block. They went in and reassured Frank that things were going according to schedule and faded into the background. When the pickup guy came in he went up to Frank and said, "Okay Frank, do you have your subscription?"

Frank started to reply, "Sorry, I've ..."

He interrupted, "You've subscribed with another service provider, is that it?"

Frank said, "Well, you see ..."

Just then Clark stepped up to the pickup guy and said, "Yeah, all of the businesses around here have subscribed with another company. We plan to sell our services to a lot more of your customers as well."

The pickup guy stuttered, "Y, you? You're the one selling them protection?"

"What are you, deaf as well as dumb? I said that they were subscribed with my company. They don't need you anymore. You can tell your boss that Charlie and Wanda are taking over."

When the thug heard the names he got a shocked expression and started to sweat. He said, "Charlie and Wanda? Are you the same ones who ..."

"What? Visited Buzz the other night? Yeah, that would be us. You can go back and tell Buzz that his days are numbered. As I told him, we're taking over. Oh, I almost forgot, tell him for me that his girls might as well stay home. We are going to move in

on the prostitution game and my girls will be taking over.”

He was shaken. “You’re going to move in on our prostitution racket as well?”

Clark replied, “Yes we are. My lovely ladies are going to take all of the prime clients and leave just the dregs for his girls.” He thought to Lori, /Looks like we’ve struck pay dirt! Looks to me like Buzz is the local kingpin./

Lori thought back, /Sure sounds like it. I wonder what other rackets they’re into. There could be smuggling, kidnapping and blackmail as well as drugs, protection, prostitution and gambling./

/Let’s follow him and see what other businesses he visits and we can add them to our list for next week. The more we have the sooner they will want to negotiate. I think we need to start a surveillance of his establishment. Maybe we could bug his office, that sure helped on our first case. I’m starting to wonder if this organization might not be more complicated than it appears. There appears to be a loose association, but, what if they all are operating under a larger head the way Intergang did?/

/We’ll have to follow through and see what we come up with./

/I wonder who that woman, Naomi, was./

/She seemed to be someone in charge and she had contacts all over the country. She could be the local boss. She could be the boss in Metropolis the way Buzz’s is here./

/We’ll have to keep an eye out for her to show up again./

The operation continued in this fashion for several weeks, slowly removing customers from the clutches of the protection racket and also interdicting the drugs.

It was becoming harder to get the drugs. They were finding fewer and fewer trucks. It was possible that alternate routes were being used so the super family spread a wider net. Still finding fewer shipments the super family started interdicting those headed into the Midwest.

Because of their efforts drug prices on the street were skyrocketing, making it almost impossible for a lot of users to make their buys. The clinics were being flooded with addicts going through withdrawal symptoms. There was also a spike in petty crime such as muggings and robberies. The family divided up the cities on the east coast and started doing patrols, foiling many of these.

Finally, after several weeks, on a pickup day in Detroit, one of the customers that Lori and Clark had taken away from Buzz’s organization was asked to pass on a message. Buzz wanted a meeting. Arrangements were made to meet out in the country, at an abandoned farm. In order to prepare for the meeting the super family brought in some furniture and cleaned up the area to make it look occupied.

The disguise Lori chose to wear was designed to distract. Lori put on a pair of hip rider ‘Daisy Dukes’ with an Amerindian style metal link belt, western style boots and a midriff baring cut off baggy t-shirt. The shirt only came down far enough to cover the butt of her gun, exposing her abs and belly button. She had a bra holster which clipped to her bra in the center, between her breasts and held her gun, butt down. Its bulk was concealed by the natural swell of her breasts and the likelihood of it being found even if she were being frisked, which wasn’t about to be allowed, was significantly reduced by her attire. They wouldn’t believe her to be carrying a weapon. Clark was wearing jeans a t-shirt and a leather vest.

Buzz drove up with his two enforcers. Clark signaled to them from the barn door that they should join them there.

When they entered the barn, Clark called to them from the loft.

When they climbed the stairs they found a desk and some other furniture. Lori was leaning against the sill of the loft doors, which were open. As Buzz and his cronies arrived at the top step

they all gave Lori an appreciative stare.

As soon as they saw Lori the duo heard the heartbeats of the gunsels accelerate. Clark sent, /I think they like what they see. You are showing a lot of skin./

With a mental chuckle, She sent back, /I think it’s because they are afraid of me./

Buzz tried to get right down to business, “You really think you can take over? Okay, you *are* picking up *some* of my customers. There is still plenty there for both of us.”

Clark said, “I don’t think so. I’ve taken a lot of your protection customers and I happen to know that your drug trade is suffering. You are having a hard time holding on. I have other resources than the cartel you are dealing with and I want them all under one roof.”

Lori and Clark could both hear the heartbeats of the goons pick up even more. Lori stood and put her hands on her hips. She sent, /I think they are getting ready to act./

Clark sent, /I agree, I think they are planning something./

She replied, /I’m ready./ She started to pout, in a sexy way and brought her left hand up and put a finger in her mouth and sucked on it as a distraction. The goons were both looking at her mouth and what she was doing with her finger when Buzz gave the signal. She was sliding her hand across her belly so that it was in position to grab her gun.

The goons distracted by Lori, were slow to react. When they finally started to move, Lori’s hand was already under her cutoff T and she had her gun in hand. As the goons started to pull their firearms she pulled out her gun, getting the drop on them and said, “Uh, un, boys. We could do this the easy way or the hard way. It could be a repeat of the last time or you could just drop them now.”

Standing there dumbfounded, they goggled at the gun in her hand. It was that same deadly looking little automatic she had used the last time. It was unlike most automatics they were familiar with. It was small like a .22 or a .25 caliber but looking down that barrel it looked like a train tunnel by comparison. This was no popgun; it had to be at least .38 caliber or 9mm. They just couldn’t believe what their eyes were telling them. Where had that gun come from? Was this chick a magician or something? She was standing there, practically naked and she was still packin’. Deciding that they didn’t care for a repeat of their last encounter they both dropped their weapons.

With the tone one would use when talking to a three year old, Clark said, “You know, Buzz, I gave you the benefit of the doubt. I thought that nobody could be so stupid as to try the same thing twice. I guess I was wrong. Frankly, you’re too stupid to be left in charge of the rackets here. When word of this gets around, and I can assure you, it will get around; you’ll be laughed out of town. Now, here’s the plan, you’re going to turn over control to me. I want all of your records. Names, dates, amounts. In turn, I’ll let you go. If you’re a good boy, all you’ll do is lose control, if you know what I mean.”

Buzz looked over his shoulder at his goon squad and said, “What good are you guys, letting one little girl take you down.”

One of them said, “What was the use? She had the drop on us. The way she can shoot, we didn’t have no chance. I’d like to know where she had that gun hidden.”

Clark looked at them and said, “Are you guys looking for a new boss?”

They both looked at Buzz and back at him and the leader said, “Not anymore, we ain’t.”

Clark spoke to the two goons, “I want you to escort Buzz back to his office. I’m sure Buzz will cooperate by showing you where all of his records are. I want you to pack them up and bring them here. This is the new office.” He looked directly at Buzz as he continued, “Buzz will give you both sets of books, won’t you Buzz? If you’re a good boy and cooperate, I may even make a place for you in the organization.” Turning to the two goons

Clark said, “Your salary just went up.”

Lori kept her gun in her hand and used it to indicate that the two goons could pick up their weapons. They obediently bent down and picked them up and put them away.

Smiling at this promise of higher pay the lead goon said, “Okay, Buzz, let’s get this over with.”

Clark stopped them and said, “Remember, I don’t want Buzz harmed. He could be useful.”

The lead goon said, “Gotcha boss, let’s go Buzz.”

After Buzz and the goons left Clark and Lori changed into their normal clothes. Knowing that they were going into the local FBI office, Lori left her gun hidden in the loft. They both spun into their uniforms and Clark flew them to the local FBI field office. They chose the FBI because there was less chance of agents being on the gang’s payroll and since they were dealing with a multi-state organization, some of the crimes crossed state lines, so they fell under FBI purview anyhow.

Spinning back into their working clothes, Clark and Lori appeared at the local FBI office and identified themselves. At their request they were taken immediately to the field director’s office and were introduced.

“Mr. Dickson, we are Lane and Kent, reporters with the Daily Planet. We have been working undercover investigating the rackets here in Detroit and we’ve managed to infiltrate their organization. In a couple of hours the documents detailing all of their activities are to be delivered to us. We’d like some agents to be there to accept the documents when they are delivered. The agents should look like they are members of another gang to allay any suspicion in case they are spotted. Once the documents have been turned over you will be free to make the arrest, all we ask is the exclusive for our paper.”

Mr. Dickson hit a switch on his intercom and said, “Davis, come to my office. You’ve got to hear this.” He turned back to Lori and Clark and asked, “Whose gang is this?”

“The head of the gang is Buzz McCracken.”

Mr. Dickson slapped his desk and said, “You’ve got the goods on McCracken! We’ve wanted to nail him for a while now.”

Just then Special Agent Davis entered the office. Mr. Dickson said, “Hold on to your hat, Bob. These two,” he indicated Lori and Clark, “are about to hand McCracken to us on a silver platter. I don’t know how they did it, but, they’ve done something we haven’t been able to do.” He turned back to Lori and Clark and asked, “How did you do it?”

Lori spoke up, “We pretended to be representatives of a rival gang that wanted to take over their action. The final concession happened a little while ago. We won over some of his stooges and they are bringing all of the documents and books to us.” She picked up a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote down an address. Handing it to him she said, “The books and documents are being delivered to this address in a little over an hour. Do you think you can have some men there before they arrive?”

Mr. Dickson looked at the address and handed it to Agent Davis. He said, “Bob, grab three or four agents and head out.”

Clark said, “We’re going to head back and get back into costume. We’ll meet you when you get there. There’s space behind the barn to park your cars. Once you are parked we will position everyone in the barn.”

Davis said, “Okay. We’ll get there as quickly as we can.” He turned and exited the office to marshal his resources.

Clark and Lori left right behind him and finding an alley spun into their uniforms and flew back to the farm.

Half an hour later the FBI agents arrived and Clark positioned them in advantageous spots in the barn.

An hour later a car drove up and the two goons and Buzz exited. They opened the trunk and removed the ledgers and other books as well as a couple of computers and they carried it all into the barn and up to the loft. While their arms were still occupied

Lori pulled her gun and Clark relieved them of their weapons. As soon as Lori had the drop on them they started swearing and complaining of a double cross.

Once they were relieved of their weapons, Clark called Agent Davis. “Agent Davis, you can come out now. They have been disarmed. You may take custody of them as well as all of the evidence.”

The FBI agents swarmed out of their hiding places and took custody of the gang members.

McCracken addressed Clark, “What’s with this double cross? You just want us completely out of the way? Who are you really? What syndicate are you with?” He turned to Agent Davis and said, “These two came in and shot up my office. They run their own rackets.”

Agent Davis laughed and said, “Really? McCracken, you’ve been had. These are a couple of reporters. They work for the Daily Planet.”

McCracken sputtered, “But, but, she’s packin’!”

Lori reached into her back pocket and pulled out her concealed carry permit and displayed it to Davis. He glanced over it and said, “She’s legal, which is probably more than I can say for you and your cronies. Let’s go. I can’t wait to get you into a cell. I’m sure all of these books and documents are going to make interesting reading. The nice thing is I didn’t even have to get a warrant.” He started chortling, “You handed the stuff over of your own free will and there are ample witnesses to that fact.” He said to the other agents, “Get ‘em outta here.”

Lori and Clark did do some interviews of the field agents before they left. Lori suggested that Davis look for a connection to the group in Metropolis and they made arrangements for follow-up interviews and story details and headed home.

When they got back to Metropolis they wrote up the story and gave it to Frank with the stipulation that it be held until the FBI completed the investigation and followed any links back to Metropolis from Detroit.

Three days later there was a call from the local FBI office. “Daily Planet, Clark Kent.”

“Hello Kent, this is Special Agent John Gilly. I’m director of the Metropolis Field Office. We just got a pile of information on the local rackets which I was told you had a hand in delivering. All you asked for was the exclusive. Well, we are going to do the bust in about an hour. Do you want to be there?”

As the conversation had been going on Lori had drifted over and perched on the corner of his desk. Clark winked at her and replied, “We sure would! What time and where?”

Agent Gilly named the club that had given them their initial lead. Clark said, “We’ll meet you there.” He hung up the phone and smiled. He said, “Let’s go wrap this story up.”

Lori said, “It’ll make Frank happy. Now we can publish.”

They were there for the roundup which included the mysterious Naomi who in fact was the boss here in Metropolis.

While the bust was going down Special Agent Gilly had been in communication with the office. After it all went down, Gilly pulled Lori and Clark aside and gave them some more information. “Based on the information collected in Detroit we didn’t just bust this group. This was a synchronized operation. We’ve had teams hitting all of the local headquarters at the same time. Apparently three of them were warned. They cleared out before our people got there. There was information in the files collected from Buzz which compromised the operations in twelve cities besides Detroit and Metropolis. We missed in Chicago, Atlanta and Santa Fe.”

After adding the new details to the initial story they filed it.

The news of the capture of the gangs was front page news for over a week as more and more details were revealed and the Planet’s top reporting team was on top of it the entire time.

As a sidebar there was a note that the prices for illicit drugs

on the street had spiked. In some places they were ten times normal.

When things were finally settling down, Clark flew Lori to Rome for dinner to celebrate. When they arrived back home they settled in the living room.

They settled on the couch and snuggled up together. Lori said, “Well, another story, maybe another Kerth nomination. Will it ever end?” She started to giggle.

Chuckling, Clark said, “I sincerely hope not!”

Looking up at him she asked, “Well, what do we do to top this one?”

He replied, “I don’t know. We might have to save the world.”

“Well, I don’t know about saving the world, but, right now I want us to go upstairs and go to bed.”

“Yeah, a good night’s sleep will do wonders.”

With an arched eyebrow and a wicked little grin she asked, “Who said anything about sleep?”

The next thing she knew they were upstairs.

Chapter 9 – A Romantic Dinner

March 2090

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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In November Elizabeth Lane and James E. B. Stuart were married in the church that the Lanes attended in LA. It was a lovely wedding. Lori was Liz’s matron of honor and Clark was Jeb’s best man.

After the honeymoon, Liz moved to Metropolis and joined Jeb in working for the Superman Foundation.

In January, after they had wrapped up the Detroit syndicate story, Lori and Clark had gone in to see Jon for her check up as she had been doing every six months since their wedding. This time there was no question. Slowly her aura had been changing color and this time it showed up as a rich wine purple.

Jon said, “Okay, Mom. Let’s pull up the results from Lois’ tests and compare them.” He hit a few keys and brought up the stored data. Doing a side by side comparison it was evident that the color of Lori’s aura matched that of Lois when she was first pregnant with Jon. Jon pointed to the screen and said, “I don’t know, but to my eye, the colors look identical. I’d say that at this point the physiological changes have progressed to the point that you can have children.”

Lori looked at Clark and said, “That confirms what we already discovered. The changes have reached the point where the pendant now has given me all of your powers.” She turned to Jon and said, “Thanks, Sweetie.” She moved over and gave him a hug and a kiss.

Jon said, “You’re welcome, Mom.” All of the kids had gotten into the habit of calling Lori Mom when it was only family around. If they were in public since they all looked like contemporaries, age-wise because of their Kryptonian physiology, they called her Lori like she was a sister-in-law.

One month later

Lori was pregnant, she was sure of it. Wearing the pendant kept her from feeling the nausea and all of the other early signs, but, she had been tracking her cycle and she knew that she had missed. It had to have happened after they finished working on the Detroit rackets story.

Clark was out on a rescue and Lori was scheduled to meet with a source so she left a little early and stopped at a drug store to pick up a home test kit. These kits had been improving over the years and there was very little question, if it indicated a pregnancy, you could be sure you were pregnant. Before she was

scheduled to meet her source she stopped in a ladies room and used the tester. Sure enough, that test confirmed what she already knew. She couldn’t wait to tell Clark, but she wanted to do it the right way. In the past, her first pregnancy had come as a total surprise. Sam, their youngest, had been conceived on her birthday many years ago. This was going to be the first of the next generation. She was determined that this time, if it was a boy, his name would be Clark Junior.

After meeting her source and getting the low down on the latest city government corruption story she headed back to the Planet. Clark was there when she returned and he was typing up the story on the latest Superman rescue. She walked over and perched on the corner of his desk. Today she had dressed in a rather long skirt. It reached all the way to her ankles but it was a wrap skirt and when she sat on the corner of his desk and crossed her legs, which she did slowly and sensuously, the skirt fell open at the slit revealing her leg almost all the way to the hip.

So engrossed was he in what he was doing, Clark hadn’t noticed Lori’s approach. When he didn’t immediately react, Lori felt a flash of disappointment. She had gone to all of this effort to be sexy and seductive and he hadn’t even noticed. It wasn’t until she addressed him that Clark stopped typing and looked at her. She decided to forgive him when he did, because his reaction was all that she had hoped for. His mouth opened in a gasp and all he could do was sit there looking at this very shapely leg display and enjoy the view. Lori leaned in and stroked the side of his face in that special way that they shared and then, cupping his chin, lifted his head and face to look at her. She asked, “How did it go? What was the emergency?”

He swallowed and replied, “It was a capsized sailboat about ten miles out.” He pulled back slightly so that he had a nice view of her legs again before continuing, “After I righted the craft and made sure it was seaworthy I picked up the crew, which turned out to be a family, and put them back aboard. I pushed them in and helped them to a mooring in a slip at the marina in Hobbs Bay.” His eyes traveled from her legs, taking in her whole form before finally reaching her face again as he concluded, “They got wet, but, no one was harmed.”

Lori said, “I’m glad to hear that.” She looked around to make sure that there wasn’t anyone within earshot and then leaned in and said with a conspiratorial tone, “I want to give my flight power a real tryout. What say we go to Paris for dinner?”

He whispered back, “Are you sure you’re ready for that long a flight?”

She replied, “No, but, you’ll be there to catch me if there’s a problem. Come on, be a sport. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

He chuckled and said, “When could I refuse you anything? Okay,” he switched to a whisper, “dinner in Paris it is.”

As she slid down off of his desk she had a Mona Lisa smile. So far so good. Her plan was to tell about the pregnancy while they were finishing a romantic dinner. She moved over to her own desk and typed up her notes from the meeting she had had with her source in city government. It was already late in the day when this exchange had occurred so it wasn’t too long till they were ready to quit and head to dinner.

When it was time to leave they both locked their work stations and Lori picking up her bag, they headed for the elevator. They took the elevator to the basement garage and moved over to Lori’s Jeep. Lori unlocked the car and they got in and drove home. On the drive she asked, “Do you have any favorite places in Paris?”

“There’s this little sidewalk café on the left bank of the Seine. They serve a Boeuf à la Bourguignonne that is to die for.”

Lori said, “My mouth is watering already. I can’t wait.”

When they got home they both dressed for the occasion and then spun into their uniforms. They took off from the back yard where the trees gave them some privacy. First they went straight

up until they were out of sight from the ground and then they headed east. It didn't take all that long to reach Paris and Lori's powers didn't falter in the slightest. She was smiling in triumph as they landed in a park behind a screen of bushes. They spun back into their dinner clothes and strolled to the café that Clark had mentioned. It was a balmy evening in Paris and the atmosphere was perfectly romantic with La Tour Eiffel in the distance and the Seine nearby. The candle flickered in the light breeze as they had their Boeuf à la Bourguignonne. For dessert Clark suggested a Chocolate Soufflé and was surprised when Lori opted for a raspberry crepe instead.

As they were eating their dessert Lori asked, "Do you know why I'm having the crepe instead of the Soufflé?"

With his tongue obviously planted firmly in cheek Clark replied, "You're getting tired of chocolate."

She gave him a look of disbelief before saying, "As if that would ever happen. Guess again and this time, be serious."

Clark replied, "Was the rest of the meal too rich for you?"

She tried again, "I had something to tell you and I decided to just give you a clue so that you could figure it out on your own. I want you to think back. What is the only reason that I would willingly give up chocolate?"

With a look of dawning comprehension which turned to pure joy, he asked, "Are you ..."

With a grin so big it threatened to split her face she said, "Yes!"

A herd of elephants couldn't have kept him in his seat. He sprang up and knelt by her side taking her hand in his. He pulled her hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he stood and pulled her up into an embrace and kissed her soundly.

When he broke from the kiss he looked around and the other patrons were all looking at them. Still holding her he said to them, "We're having a baby!"

The other patrons started to clap.

Clark called over the waiter and said, "A glass of wine for everyone." When the wine had been distributed he said, "To babies," and lifted his glass in toast. Lori lifted her glass of Perrier as her toast.

After he was seated again Lori softly said, "I need to set up an appointment with Jessie when we get back."

Clark said, "Wow, yeah, she's going to be your OB of course. She'll have the privilege of delivering her baby brother or sister."

She said, "If this is a boy, I want to name him Clark Junior."

Leaning back in his chair and giving her an ornery look Clark said, "Okay, but, if it's a girl, I want her named Lois."

Lori laughed, "Tit for tat. Okay, if that's what you want. Lois it will be."

Clark paid the check and they exited and took a stroll along the Seine, occasionally stopping to watch the barge traffic.

Finding a rather secluded area under a bridge they spun into their uniforms and took off for home with Lori flying under her own power.

The next day Clark called a family council for 7:30 that evening. When everyone had arrived they all gathered in the spacious living room, which was becoming increasingly crowded as the family grew.

Clark started things off. "We have a number of things to discuss. Jon, why don't you fill us in on your progress on the antidote?"

Jon stood up and said, "Sean, Jessie and I have been working on that ever since they got their MDs. I still don't see any possibilities along the line of an antidote. If it were like an infection there might just be a possibility, but, this problem is one of radiation. It increasingly looks like the only antidote is avoidance, either by disposal of any sample we come across or just steering clear. At least we have empirical evidence that the spouses, presumably because they were originally Earth human,

are not affected and continue to be immune even when their physiology has been modified by exposure to the Kryptonian aura. They continue, through the use of the Star Sapphire Kryptonite/red Kryptonite pendants, to have their powers and their powers are unaffected even during exposure. At this point I would suggest that if any of us come into contact with green Kryptonite – call in the 'reserves' and let your spouse handle the Kryptonite. The use of the sauna room is effective in facilitating the recovery process. We used it with Pop after he had that encounter with the robot."

Clark said, "Thanks Jon. What are we going to do with those samples currently in storage?"

Jon replied, "Already taken care of. Jen came in and helped me remove them all from storage. First we sealed all of the containers with our heat vision so that there wouldn't be any leakage then we took them up and launched them all out of the system. My suggestion would be that if any of us encounter any Kryptonite and have to call in the reserves that they don't even bother to wait until they have a lead enclosure, just throw it up high and fast in a direction perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic so that it goes out of the system and not into the sun."

Clark said, "Well, so far we have been able to keep the powers of our spouses our secret, but, it may be time for them to come out into the open. Lara has been covering LA. Mike, do you want to come out in the open and start helping? By the way, I liked your uniform. Teal blue suits you."

Mike started to laugh, "Yeah, we had all talked it over and decided that we would keep the same color schemes within family groups, but, I couldn't feature a pink cape like Lara's so I stuck with teal for everything."

Clark, with a chuckle, said, "No arguments out of me on that. I'm just glad that my Suit came first. If it had been Lois I would have died of embarrassment if my Mom had tried to set me up with a pink outfit to match hers. Who would have taken me seriously? Have you chosen a name?"

Mike replied, "No, not as yet. I'll have to wait and see what strikes me."

Taking the floor again, Clark said, "Lori has something for us, Lori."

Standing up Lori said, "Well, I guess the simplest way to do this is to ask. Jessie, when can I come in for an office visit?"

Pandemonium broke out. All of the girls mobbed Lori and took her off to another room.

The guys all stood there mystified, looking at each other with questioning expressions. After a couple of minutes Clark took pity on them and said, "Guys, Jessie's the Obstetrician in the family." He gave that a few seconds and then added, "Guys, this isn't a routine office visit, we're expecting!"

Now that he had told them plainly, they all understood and all gathered around to congratulate Clark.

When Lori went in to visit Jessie it was determined that there were no problems and that on the next visit they would do an ultrasound to check on progress.

Jessie said, "Well, Mom, you remember the drill. Go easy on the alcohol and caffeine. Even though there is a lot of caffeine in chocolate, just go easy on it. Next month we should be able to tell if it's going to be a boy or a girl. What are you hoping for?"

"Well at this point it's evenly split between boys and girls. Neither of us cares what it is as long as it's healthy. We did decide that if it's a boy he'll be named Clark Junior and if it's a girl she'll be named Lois."

Clark went with Lori when she went for her next appointment.

Jessie's assistant, who just happened to be Maria, Jon Kent's eldest daughter and therefore Lori's granddaughter, prepared her Grams for the ultrasound. A minute later Jessie came in and said,

“Okay, let’s just see what we can see.” She took the emitter and applied the gel and started running it over Lori’s lower abdomen. The picture was displayed on a monitor as she did this. When she found the baby she moved the emitter around to get different angles. She was speaking as she was doing this, “Okay, it looks like we are right on track. I’d say we are at about ten weeks. Let’s see ... ahh ... there ... there we are ... yep ... I guess you’re going to be using the name ... Clark Junior. Congratulations Mom, it’s a boy.”

Lori had been holding Clark’s hand the entire time the procedure had been underway and she squeezed his hand when Jessie gave her determination. She looked at Clark and said, “I just knew it would be a boy.”

Clark looked at Jessie and Maria and said, “Let’s keep this a secret, okay? We want to tell everybody ourselves.”

Chuckling, Jessie said, “Don’t wait too long. I don’t know how long I’ll be able to keep this a secret.” She leaned down and gave Lori a hug.

Maria started cleaning Lori up and a few minutes later they left the office.

That Friday Clark called a family conference. When everyone had been gathered he said, “You’re all probably wondering why we called you all together. We have an announcement to make.”

Lori took over and said, “The next generation is on the way and will be started with a boy. We’ve decided to name him Clark Junior.

A cheer went up and all gathered around to congratulate Lori and Clark.

Chapter 10 — CJ

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Lori was into her fifth month and her baby bump had made her retire her Ultra Woman outfit. Ultra Woman being pregnant at the same time as Lori Kent could potentially compromise their secret. They could foresee a time when there would no longer be a need of their secret identities, but, that time had not come as yet.

She just couldn’t get over Clark. She could remember when as Lois, she was pregnant he had been so careful of her, seeing to her every need and making sure that she didn’t place herself into any unnecessarily risky positions. She looked over at him at his desk and started to smile. He was still the same way. <He’s such a dear. I guess old habits are hard to break. He needs to realize that I may be pregnant, but, I’m still super and nobody, but, nobody is going to harm me or this child. Especially now, not only am I super, but, I have the whole clan looking out for me. If for some reason Clark isn’t around, there’s always one of the kids or one of their spouses around and they’re always looking out for me. I *think* it’s a *conspiracy*! Clark *must* have put them up to it! I really don’t know why. What does he think I’m going to do anyhow? I’m not about to take on any super robots like we did some time ago and even if I did, the Kryptonite wouldn’t affect me! Oh, *wait* a minute, the *baby*! The Kryptonite *could* harm the *baby*. Yeah, I’d better not do something stupid like that. I *really* don’t want to hurt the baby. Maybe it is a good thing they are looking out for me. They could just keep me from doing something I really shouldn’t do. But, why am *I* so special? It has to be related to my being Lois and *our* offspring are *more* Kryptonian than our *grandkids* with the exception of Sam and Alice’s since Alice is the only other fully Kryptonian spouse. Since I’m now more than half Kryptonian our children are more than three quarters Kryptonian. Sometimes it feels a little smothering. Sometimes I just want to put on the Suit and take off for a while, but, how much good would that do. I might

be able to go somewhere that they can’t see me, but, they can still ‘talk’ to me, I can’t get away from the telepathy.>

She got up from her desk and moved over to beside Clark’s and said, “I’m going to cover the Mayor’s Press Conference. I understand His Honor is going to be making an announcement about some award for Superman and he’s supposed to be there to accept it. I’ll see you back here afterwards.”

Clark looked up at her and said, “Be careful out there. I won’t be there with you. Although, if you get into trouble all you’ll need to do is yell for Superman and he should be there, within seconds.”

Lori gave him a loving pat on the cheek and said, “I’ll keep that in mind. See you later.” She turned to her desk and picked up her bag which had her reporter’s assistant as well as other necessities as she headed for the elevator.

Once outside she hailed a cab. She was amazed at the rapidity with which a cab pulled up. It didn’t occur to her until the cabbie jumped out of the driver’s seat and ran around to open the door and assist her to enter the cab that the reason for the solicitous attitude was her expectant condition. It registered in the back of her mind that this could become useful, especially as her condition advanced. It wasn’t that she thought that she needed special treatment, after all she was an extremely competent reporter and business woman, but, her condition could just give her an extra edge when she needed it.

When she arrived at the press conference she was early and as she was being greeted by reporters from other papers who recognized her, she used her condition to have the others make way for her so that she could move to the front of the pack. Of course they had good reason to recognize her, as Lois Lane she routinely beat them out of big stories. She and her partner actually didn’t leave much of any consequence for them and that kept the Daily Planet the premier paper on the planet.

Shortly after Lori reached the front of the pack where the reporters were queued up for the press conference, Superman landed and the mayor moved to the microphone, beginning his statement.

Suddenly, Lori grabbed her abdomen because she started to feel the baby within her womb writhing in pain and then she felt a knife in her back.

She heard someone hiss in her ear, “The famous Lois Lane. We have been looking for you and that pig of a partner of yours for years. Praise Allah it has been my good fortune to be the one to at last find you. Ever since the fatwa was issued against you we have been searching. You brought dishonor on the name of the prophet and now it is time for you to pay. I see that you are expecting, even better, now your devil spawn will never see the light of day. I may cut it out of your belly before I kill you so that you can see it die. You will come with me. You will make no sound or I will kill you immediately. Move toward the back of this crowd, slowly.” He prodded her in the back with the point of the knife.

Lori was worried. The baby was still moving, causing her pain and she didn’t know why. She wasn’t worried for her own safety because she had her pendant securely hidden on her person so there was no fear of losing her powers. Just to be on the safe side she sent a thought to Clark, /”Clark, I’m being abducted by a radical Muslim that says there is a fatwa out against us because of that plot we busted up and there is a problem with the baby. I can feel him moving. The Muslim has a knife in my back.”/ She sent all of this before she turned away to follow his directions and saw Superman look up and scan the crowd.

Clark had been following her progress with his eyes and retained a neutral expression. As he continued to watch, he sent to her, /”When he has you away from the crowd I’ll deal with him.”/

The mayor was droning on and on about how much good Superman had done for the city and how the city wished to honor

its favorite superhero. Watching the progress of Lori and her abductor, Superman saw when they reached the outskirts of the crowd and started moving toward an alley. He reached out and touched the mayor's arm and said, "Excuse me for a minute Mr. Mayor. I have something to deal with." Not waiting for His Honor to acknowledge, he took off straight up and then arced down, interposing himself between Lori and her abductor. Grabbing both of his hands, Superman squeezed the wrist of his knife hand until he dropped the knife. Even as he accomplished this he could feel himself weakening. He sent a thought, "Kryptonite! That must be why there is a problem with the baby. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to hold out. You need to help."/

The Muslim started spouting curses in Arabic and almost literally foaming at the mouth he was so angry and frustrated that he had been foiled.

When Lori had stepped away the baby had settled down. Immediately after receiving his thought Lori x-rayed the Arab and found an explosive vest under his jacket. Lori sent, "He's wearing a bomb."/ There were overtones of fear and worry in the rest of her communication, "You've got to keep him from triggering that bomb! That Kryptonite would be sent right into you. I have to disarm that bomb!"/

The Arab could see that Superman was weakening and started struggling that much more. He was trying to reach his detonator switch.

Clark sent, "What about the baby?"/

"I'll just have to be quick."/

Aloud she said, "I need to open his coat so that I can de-vest him. Apparently he was going to try to kill a number of people at the Press Conference, possibly even the Mayor himself, but I think you were the primary target."

Moving as quickly as she could without giving away the fact that she was super powered now and also wanting to minimize the baby's exposure, Lori used her x-ray vision and ripped the bomber's coat open. Quickly she pulled the blasting caps out of the explosives and severed the wires from the trigger.

She sent, "Okay, we're over that hurdle. At least now he can't trigger the explosives. We still need to deal with that Kryptonite though."/ After disarming the explosives she reached into her bag and came up with a Swiss Army Knife which she used to carefully cut the shoulders and front of the bomb vest so that she could remove it. Once it was removed, as quickly as she could she moved the vest away from Clark. The further she got the less Clark was affected by the Kryptonite.

The baby within Lori was still writhing as she examined the vest and found pellets of Kryptonite strapped to one of the explosive charges. The design was such that they would have been propelled like shrapnel by the detonation of the explosive. If the bomber had been close to Superman at the time, it might have killed him.

She ripped the offending mineral out of the vest and since she was around a corner and out of sight she hurled it as hard as she could up and out of the atmosphere. Immediately, the baby settled down and stopped moving any more than normal.

Once this had been done she walked back around the corner and checked on Clark. He appeared to be back to full strength so she touched her earphone and heard, "Say a command."

She said, "Call Homeland Security." This was another number she had pre-programmed when she had gotten the Reporter's Assistant, just in case. When the call was answered she heard, "Homeland Security. How may I direct your call?"

She said, "Mr. Jacobs please."

She heard, "Hold, please."

A few seconds later she heard, "Homeland Security, Tom Jacobs, how may I help you?"

Lori said, "Hello Mr. Jacobs, this is Lori Lane. My partner and I helped you a few years ago on that Muslim terrorist nuclear

bombing."

"Ah, yes, Ms. Lane. What can I do for you?"

"I hate to say it, but, I've got another one for you. I was at the Mayor's Press Conference and he tried to abduct me at knife point."

"Well, Ms. Lane that would seem to me to fall into MPD's bailiwick, not Homeland Security."

Smugly, Lori replied, "That might have been the case if that was all there was to it, you see, he had a bomb vest strapped to his body. He was apparently going to martyr himself at the press conference."

She heard him gasp and ask, "Where are you?"

"Corner of Tenth and Shuster. Superman has him in custody waiting for you to take charge."

"I'll be right there with a squad. Give me five minutes."

Lori replied, "We're not going anywhere." She touched her earphone to hang up and touched it again and heard, "Say a command." She said, "Call Twelfth Precinct."

When it was answered he heard, "Twelfth Precinct, Sergeant Vincent."

Lori said, "Sgt. Vincent, this is Lois Lane. Could you put me through to Inspector Cardona?"

She heard back, "Hold on." There were a series of clicks and then she heard, "Cardona here."

"Inspector Cardona, this is Lois Lane. You may want to check on your security at the Mayor's Press Conference. Superman just apprehended a radical Muslim terrorist bomber. He caught him before he had a chance to martyr himself, but there may be others."

She heard back, "I'm on it," followed by a click as the connection was severed.

A few seconds later they could see the police officers at the press conference forcing everyone back away from the podium and stand, and another group moving all of the dignitaries into the building. Additional police seemed to be coming out of the woodwork, so to speak, and they started checking all of the attendees. Fortunately it appeared as though the terrorist that Superman had in custody was the only one.

It was actually less than five minutes after her call that Mr. Jacobs and his squad drove up. They saw Superman and hurried over to him. Lori asked, "Mind if I document this for the paper?"

All he could do was shake his head and say, "Sure, go ahead. Who am I to stop you? It's your story, this time even more than the last. How do you do it?"

Laughing, Lori said, "This time the story came to me. He must have heard someone say my name. It appears as though there is a fatwa out against me and my husband because of our involvement in that other plot. He was trying to abduct me when Superman intervened."

Mr. Jacobs said, "I'm glad that Superman was here again. That's twice that I know of that he has saved you from something like this."

Lori said, "Yes, Superman does always seem to be there whenever I need him."

Mr. Jacobs noted her baby bump and said, "When you see Mr. Kent tell him that I pass on my congratulations. Your first?"

Proudly, Lori said, "Yes, the first of many we hope. We want a large family."

Clark, as Superman, had a hard time suppressing a proud smile at her comment.

Mr. Jacobs' men had relieved Superman of his captive and had taken the vest as evidence for the trial. Mr. Jacobs turned to Superman and said, "Thanks again, Superman. If not for you, there would have been a lot of people injured or killed here today."

Now Clark could let the smile blossom. "It was my pleasure, Mr. Jacobs. I definitely don't want anything to happen to Mrs. Kent and especially her baby."

Lori giggled and said, "I got that. Can I quote you?" She took a breath and smiled back at Superman, "Both of you?"

Superman smiled wider and said, "Sure, why not. Let the world know I'm watching out for you and every innocent person that others want to harm."

For his part, Mr. Jacobs chuckled and said, "Sure, why not? It's the truth."

As his people hauled the terrorist away Mr. Jacobs said, "Well, I guess we're done here. Are you sure you and your husband don't want to change careers? After what you did for us before, we could use you in Homeland Security."

Lori smiled and said, "Like I said last time, we'll keep your offer in mind."

The next edition of the Planet carried the complete story of what had occurred at the press conference, scooping the other papers. The other papers carried what they knew, which wasn't much, and what they could speculate about, which was a lot, as the reasons for what had happened.

A few months later

Frank Edwards was amazed at how well Lori was handling her pregnancy. Her condition didn't seem to slow her down at all.

As she was nearing her term he asked to see her and Clark in his office. Her belly was so large that he was surprised that she didn't practically waddle into his office. She seemed to be light on her feet even at this advanced state.

When Frank called them into his office she had a good idea why. She was getting near her term and he was probably worried. Conversely, she could remember when she had been pregnant as Lois and how it had been, without the powers. She silently thanked Herb, almost every day, for the pendant. Being superpowered had distinct advantages.

When they had entered the office and settled into chairs, Frank asked, "Just how long do you plan to work? Don't you think that you should, you know, take some time to rest and prepare?"

Lori looked at Clark and at his nod she answered. Knowing that she needed to seem like any other woman, Lori replied, "I'm not due for another month so I'll probably work a couple more weeks. We have that story we're working on about the city manager but I can work on that here in the office. If there is any field work, Clark can handle it."

Frank said, "As long as you're comfortable with it, it's okay with me. I'm glad to have you here as long as you feel up to it."

Lori worked until Friday, October 13, 2090 which was two weeks before her due date. On Tuesday, October 24 Lori had an urge to give the whole house a thorough cleaning. Then she decided that she didn't like the color of the nursery. Going to a paint store she purchased three gallons of a periwinkle blue. She moved the furniture to the center of the room, taped the ceiling corners and molding and laid down a drop cloth. By Thursday, October 26th she had the room done and the furniture back where it belonged.

That night Clark made dinner and after they ate they relaxed and watched a movie. It was a holographic recreation of "Lethal Weapon 3".

About 11 PM they went up to bed. At 1:30 Lori felt a flood of warm water as her water broke and a heavy pressure on her hips as her back began to expand. Fortunately, having been through this eight times before, they had prepared the bed with a waterproof sheet. She was gasping for breath as another contraction came.

She nudged Clark and said, "Wake up, Papa, it's time to head to the hospital."

Clark was instantly awake and sent a thought, "Jessie!?"

The groggy reply came back, "What?"

He sent, "Jessie, it's time."/

Jessie sent back, "It's 1:30 A.M.. Take two aspirin and call me in the morning."/

Frantic now, Clark sent, "Jessie!"/

Jessie replied, "Just a little doctor humor there, Pop. I'll be at the hospital when you get there. Don't worry, there won't be any problems. Remember, Mom's super now."/

They did the trip to the hospital the 'old fashioned' way, in Lori's Jeep and shortly after they arrived, Lori was taken to Labor and Delivery. Clark gowned and joined her as her labor coach.

At 8 AM on October 27, 2090, Clark Jerome Kent Junior announced his arrival by emitting some lusty cries when his sister gave him a light swat on the bottom.

When the newest member of the Kent clan had been cleaned up, weighed and measured, he had been swaddled and placed in Lori's welcoming arms.

Lori immediately put him to her breast and he started to suckle. Lori felt the first rush as her colostrum started to flow.

After a short time they were transferred to a room and the next morning Clark took mother and son home.

Chapter 11 – The Request

February 26, 2090

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Lori had been on maternity leave from the Planet for six weeks. When she had returned to work she had placed CJ in the child care facility on the second floor. She felt very comfortable with this. After all, she had done his with each of his eight siblings. With him being so close she could go down whenever she needed to nurse him. The security was exceptional and she had made sure that all of the children were on the access list. Rarely a day passed that one or another of his siblings didn't visit at some time of the day. The staff was very impressed with all of the attention that this one child received, but, they were happy to see the involvement of this large family knowing that this child had a wonderful support system. As the Day Care workers had come to know the family members they had found out that there were quite a few doctors in the mix and occasionally when one of them stopped in the staff would have questions about their charges and the Kent family members were always happy to give appropriate advice.

One evening about two months after Lori had returned to work they were relaxing in the living room. Lori had just finished nursing CJ and Clark was burping him when suddenly a thought intruded, "Kal-El, we need your help."/

Clark was startled and looked over at Lori. He asked, "Did you hear that?"

Lori replied, "Yeah, I heard it. Who could have sent that thought?"

"It obviously wasn't one of the kids. It has to be someone from New Krypton. Let's see who." "Who needs Kal-El?"/

The return thought carried along with the message a feeling of relief, "Kal, is that you? Thank Rao. This is Ching! I have Zara here with me."/

Clark sent back, "Ching, my old friend. How are you?"/

His reply was disturbing, "I'm fine but we are in desperate need of your help. New Krypton is under attack. We need your leadership if we are to survive. Can you help us?"/

Clark sent, "Where are you now?"/

Ching replied, "We are in low Earth orbit, In a Lagrangian point (1) over North America. You should be able to reach us without any trouble. We would appreciate it if you would join us for a council of war."/

Clark asked Lori, “Feel up to a flight up to low Earth orbit?”
Lori with some apprehension replied, “I’ve never flown that high before.” Then the excitement of the adventure took over and she had a smile as she said, “Should be fun! We will need a sitter. Let me call Lucy.” She sent, /”Lucy?”/

She got back, /”Hi Mom! What’s up?”/
She sent back, /”Is Teri free to babysit for CJ for a little while?”/
/”Let me check.”/ ... /”She just finished her homework so she’s free. How soon do you need her?”/
/”ASAP. We just got a call from Ching.”/
/”I know. I think we all heard that call.”/
/”Okay, so you know where we are going, up into orbit. I’m looking forward to the trip.”/
/”I’ll bring Teri over right away. See you in a few minutes.”/
/”Thanks Luce. Tell her grandma really appreciates it.”/
/”She said she knows and she’s looking forward to having some one-on-one time with CJ.”/

Now that the arrangements had been made Clark sent, /”We will be there shortly.”/
Zara replied, /”Will Lois be with you?”/
Clark replied, /”Yes and No. Her name is Lori now. It’s a long story. We’ll explain it to you when we get there.”/
/”Should we send a pod down for you?”/
/”No, that won’t be necessary. We’ll come up under our own power.”/

The reply carried overtones of confusion, /”You’ll both come up under your own power? Will you be carrying Lois, uh, Lori?”/
/”No, she will fly herself. Again, we’ll explain when we are aboard. We will be departing shortly. Have an airlock open for us.”/

Lori got an amused smile on her face as this exchange went on.

/”Depressurizing now. The outer port will be open for you when you arrive. Once inside hit the green button to close the outer port and pressurize the airlock.”/

/”Green button, got it. See you shortly.”/
Clark finished burping CJ and laid him down in his crib.
A few minutes later Lucy and Teri arrived. After Lucy had spent a few minutes with Clark, Lori and CJ, Lucy said her goodbyes and returned home leaving Teri playing with CJ.

Lori told Teri, “I just fed CJ and papa burped him so he should be good for quite a while. This shouldn’t take too long but, if we are gone longer than I expect, there’s some breast milk in the refrigerator already in bottles. Just warm it a bit. You know where everything else is already.”

Teri leaned in and picked up CJ and held him in her arms.
“No prob, Grams. CJ and me’ll get along just fine, won’t we CJ? Wave, CJ.” She picked up his arm and caused him to wave his pudgy little hand.

Lori leaned in and kissed him, and then it was Clark’s turn.
Teri said, “Don’t worry about a thing Gramps. We got it covered. Piece of cake. Go have some fun.”

Clark couldn’t help but laugh. His fifteen year old granddaughter would soon be a supergirl and was so nonchalant about her status as a member of the Kent clan that she was refreshing. So many members of the family were overly serious at the prospect. It was probably due to her mother’s influence. As a child psychologist, Lucy’s kids were among the best adjusted, self-confident and comfortable with just who they were of all the Kent kids.

He turned to Lori and said, “Well, you heard her, let’s go have some fun.”

They both spun into their uniforms and as they did Teri held CJ so that he could watch. She provided a running commentary, “See that CJ? See them spin! Ohhh look at the bright colors! Aren’t they pretty! Red and blue and yellow. That’s Mommy and Daddy! There they go!” She said this as Clark and Lori headed

for the door. “Say, Bye, Mommy and Daddy! Wave!”

Once Lori and Clark were out of the house they moved to the back of the property where it was wooded and took off from there.

Clark sent to Lori, /”Okay. While we are still below 10,000 feet, take a deep breath and hold it.”/ Then he projected to Ching, /”We’re airborne. We should be there in a matter of minutes.”/

They used their supervision to scan the heavens. As they gained altitude Clark sent, /”Ching, can you flash some lights so that we can get a fix on your position?”/

He got back, /”Starting rainbow flash.”/
Suddenly, about thirty degrees to the left and twenty degrees below they saw lights start to flash. They started as red and moved through the rainbow spectrum through orange to yellow to green and blue before returning back in reverse order before starting over again.

They altered course and headed for the lights. As they got nearer the actual size of the craft became apparent. It was huge. It was larger than the ship that had been used when they had come to Earth back in the 1990s. It took a minute to find the open airlock but, find it they did and as soon as they were inside Clark hit the green button. The outer hatch closed quickly and they could feel the pressure build which was a comforting feeling after the vacuum of space. It took a couple of minutes to bring the pressure up to normal and they simply floated there until the inner hatch opened. Ching was standing there with Zara to welcome them aboard.

As soon as they floated through the port they were taken by surprise as they entered the zone of artificial gravity and they ceased to float and staggered as they dropped suddenly to the floor. Embarrassed at being caught off guard like that, they each had a chagrined expression as they caught themselves. Ching and Clark gripped their right arms together in a forearm shake. Lori took off her uniform mask and Zara said, “Lois, you’re as lovely as ever.”

Lori laughed and said, “The name’s Lori now. We’ll explain later.”

Ching said, “Let’s go to the salon. There are some people that wish to welcome you. After that we can be comfortable there while we discuss what brought us here.”

Ching led the way through a labyrinth of corridors and a lift, finally arriving near the center of the ship in a large lounge area. Trey and several other members of the Council of Elders were there to greet them. They all gave the closed fist striking the chest salute as Kal-El entered. Even though he had chosen to abdicate in favor of Zara and her chosen mate Lt. Ching, many of the Elders still considered him the rightful ruler because he had saved them from Nor’s rule.

Clark returned the salute and then walked over and grasped Trey’s arm, asking, “How are you, my old friend?”

Trey relaxed and said, “I am fine, for an old man. It is good to see you again, Lord Kal-El.”

Clark performed the introduction, “Lord Trey, I’d like to introduce Lori-El, my bond mate.”

Trey had a quizzical expression as he asked, “Is this not the same woman we met previously?”

Clark replied, “No, well, yes and no. Physically she is not the same woman, however, memory wise she is. It’s kind of hard to explain.”

Trey replied, “There is no need to explain. It is enough that she is your bond mate.” He turned to address Lori, “Lady Lori-El, I am pleased to meet you, I just wish it were a happier occasion.” At Clark’s quizzical look Trey turned to address him and concluded, “I am confident that Lord Ching and the Lady Zara will fill you in.”

Trey turned to the other members of the Council and said, “We have welcomed Lord Kal-El. Let us now leave so that Lady Zara and Lord Ching can brief him on our difficulty.” The

members of the council filed out and Ching, Zara, Lori and Clark settled on a couple of couches facing each other.

Zara, her curiosity getting the best of her asked, “You said that your name is Lori now. What did you mean by that?”

Lori replied, “I am not the woman that you met the last time. That woman, Lois Lane, was the previous vessel of this soul. When she passed away her soul took up residence in this body, but, rest assured, I have all of her memories. To all intents and purposes I am Lois Lane, but actually, I am more than Lois, I am Lori. It’s complicated.”

Zara continued, “Obviously you are more than Lois Lane, you now have Kal-El’s powers. How is that possible?” Turning to Clark she asked, “Have you found a way to duplicate your powers in the Earth humans?”

Clark replied, “The answer to that question is no, we have not. A very special form of Kryptonite was found by accident which endows the Earth human mates of Kryptonians with the powers once their bodies have been transformed by exposure to the Kryptonian aura.”

Lori pulled out her pendant for Zara to see as she said, “Contained within this pendant is a fragment of a blue Star Sapphire Kryptonite meteor and a fragment of a red Kryptonite meteor. The red Kryptonite energizes the Star Sapphire Kryptonite and that gives me the powers.”

Turning to Clark, Zara asked, “Would that work for us under a red sun?”

Clark replied, “We have no way to know. It would have to be tried. We don’t even know if Lori would have the powers under those conditions. It has never been tested. I must admit to being very curious. It isn’t every day that you visit Earth. What is the purpose of your visit?”

Ching spoke up, “Kal-El, we need your help. There is a great probability that New Krypton is going to come under attack. We were approached by a new space-faring race. They call themselves ‘The People’ as if they are the only ones that are people. They consider all other races as inferior. So far we have encountered only a scout ship but our long range detectors have detected a fleet of ships in route. Even with our Kryptonian technology we had a hard time defeating a single scout ship. After the encounter we found that same scout ship severely damaged by a collision with a small asteroid. The crew was all dead. We don’t know if they were able to notify their home base of how little we were able to do to them. We have been a peaceful culture for so many years that we have neglected the military. We were hoping that you could come and give us the benefit of your knowledge of Earth weapons and tactics. If we are incapable of defeating this threat it is only a matter of time before they will be a threat to Earth as well.” After this introduction to the problem, Ching went into greater detail, finally finishing up with, “There you have it. We are unsure of exactly what we are facing, but, if our worst fears are realized we are facing possible extinction.”

Lori and Clark both had shocked expressions as they listened to Ching. Clark was the first to speak, “How long do we have until they are in close enough proximity of New Krypton to be a threat?”

“If we were able to leave immediately we could be back at New Krypton in time to have a New Krypton month, roughly equivalent to forty-five Earth days, to prepare.”

“That’s not very much time. We have to talk it over.” He looked at Lori and said, “We have a big decision ahead. Let’s head home.” To Ching he said, “We’ll let you know by tomorrow, will that be okay?”

Zara spoke up, “Kal, Lori please keep in mind that the continued existence of New Krypton rests on your decision. If we cannot defend ourselves we will have to evacuate and abandon what we have created. It will be the same as when Krypton exploded. We will be homeless vagabonds in space.”

Clark said, “We could hardly forget. We will inform you of

our decision shortly.” Ching exited with them to guide them back to the air lock.

Before they entered the air lock, Ching held out his arm and Clark grasped it. Ching said, “I know that you will make the right decision. Watch the pressure indicator. The outer hatch will open automatically when the pressure is at zero.” Knowing that they would be leaving the zone of artificial gravity they started to float and as Ching stepped back they floated into the air lock and Ching sealed the door. They each took a deep breath and held it while they watched the pressure gauge drop. When it reached zero the outer hatch opened automatically and they flew out and shaped their course for Metropolis. They managed to control their reentry so that they didn’t appear as a couple of streaks across the sky and landed in the Kent residence back yard. They spun into their casual attire and walked to the house.

As they walked Clark said, “I think we need to call a family council. What do you think?”

She replied, “I don’t think we have the time for that. I think we have to go, but, what about CJ?”

Clark said, “CJ could be a problem. He isn’t fully Kryptonian and might not survive under the red sun and higher gravitation of New Krypton. Can we leave him with one of the kids? We actually need to make this time away look like we are away on vacation. How would it look if we left him with one of the kids?”

“More importantly, how are we going to explain the time away from the Planet?”

“We could say that since NK is a trading partner we were invited to come and report on the conflict since it could affect that trade.”

A few seconds later they entered the back door of the house and Lori called, “Teri, we’re home!”

Hearing concern in the voice of their granddaughter they heard Teri call from the living room, “Grams, you better come in here, NOW! There’s someone here to see you.”

Chapter 12 – Guess Who

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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As they hastened toward the living room Lori called out, “Teri, you know you’re not supposed to let strangers in while we are away!”

As they rounded the doorway into the living room they saw Teri, holding CJ in one arm and a lamp like a club in the other while standing in a far corner facing a gentleman in a suit that was somewhat out of step with the times. He had his hands up in a defensive posture.

As soon as they saw the bowler hat they stopped dead in their tracks and in unison shouted, “Herb!”

The nattily dressed, somewhat short gentleman in the wire rimmed spectacles and bowler hat turned when he heard his name.

Teri in her own defense said, “I didn’t let him in, he just ... appeared ... out of thin air ... here in the living room ... a couple of minutes ago.”

Relieved, Lori said, “Oh, Honey, it’s okay. This is an old friend of ours.”

With a relieved smile, Herb said, “I was starting to explain when you came in. I was hoping that she wouldn’t *bash* me with that *lamp*.”

Clark had started chuckling at the scene. Their granddaughter was threatening Herb with the lamp defending her little uncle. He walked over and relieved Teri of her weapon as she slowly relaxed.

CJ appeared to be none the worse for wear, in fact he was cooing and gurgling happily at all of the excitement.

Lori walked over and reclaimed her son. Seeing that he was fine, she gave him a kiss and handed him back to Teri and asked, “Teri, could you please take CJ up and get him ready for bed?”

Teri was still giving Herb a wary eye as she took CJ back and said, “Sure Grams, happy to.” She exited with her little charge.

After Teri exited the room, Lori and Clark turned to Herb. Clark asked, “Okay, Herb, what brings you here this time?” As they turned to him they could see that this was the 1917 or maybe 1918 version as opposed to the 1912 version.

Herb took off his bowler hat and started shuffling his hands around the rim, spinning the hat in his hands. He asked, “Can we sit down? This could take some time.”

Clark nodded and with a relieved sigh, Herb sank into a chair while Clark and Lori took seats on the sofa.

Herb started, “Well, it’s this way, you are about to travel to New Krypton on a mission at the request of the New Krypton ruling council. You need to find a place for CJ, where he will be safe and well cared for and loved.”

Clark said, “If I didn’t know you so well I’d ask how you know. To you, it’s history, right?”

“Quite so my boy, quite so. CJ will need to be there for the same period of time that you will be away so that he ages appropriately. I have a solution for you.”

Lori asked, “Okay, let’s hear it, what’s your solution?”

“My dear, I’m going to ask both of you to search your memory. Back to before Jon was born, when you thought that you couldn’t have children.”

Clark and Lori were both obviously concentrating on dredging up the memories of that time when a look of dawning comprehension came over both of their faces. With awe in their voices, almost simultaneously they both said, “CJ!”

Heb said, “Right you are, CJ, the child you found in your house at the time when you were so despondent over having been told that you couldn’t have children. I propose to take CJ back and give him to you as guardians while you are away.”

In a resigned way, Clark said, “Well, I guess that it really is inevitable. It happened so it has to happen.” He turned to Lori and said, “There’s our answer. CJ will be taken care of by his own parents and we already know that he will be loved and cared for very well, because we remember taking care of him.”

Lori had a terrified expression as she said, “We had him for over eight months. Is this mission going to take that long?”

“Yes, my dear. This mission will take quite some time.”

Clark asked, “Will we succeed?”

With an unreadable expression on his face Herb replied, “My boy, you should know better than to even ask that. If I were to tell you the outcome it could perhaps prejudice your thinking and change the outcome, creating yet another universe. Remember my motto, ‘Too much information, too soon, is not good’. It does not carry any indication as to the outcome of the mission for New Krypton, but, if you think about it, I did come to retrieve CJ and return him to you.”

Lori said, “I guess we’ll have to be satisfied with that consolation. We make it back and we get back a happy, healthy, little boy. It’s going to be hard leaving him behind.”

At this point Teri came walking in carrying CJ who was now in his sleeper. Lori took the bull by the horns and as she reached for her son said, “Teri, Honey, I need you to do something else for me. I need you to pack the diaper bag for me. Enough supplies for a couple of days.” She put CJ on her lap and looked very intently at his face as if committing every nuance to memory as she finished up, “CJ’s taking a little trip.”

Teri asked, “Where ya goin’ Grams?”

Somewhat distractedly, as she was looking intently in her son’s face, Lori said, “He’s not going with us. He’s going with Herb. Herb has to take him to us, in the past.”

Teri was confused, “He’s taking CJ to you in the past?”

Lori finally gave her granddaughter her full attention, “I’m

sorry, you don’t know. Herb is a time traveler. Gramps and I are going away on a mission. Herb is taking CJ into the past so that we can take care of him and love him and protect him from what is going to happen.”

Teri, finally understanding somewhat asked, “Do you want me to go with him? I could go to help take care of him.”

Lori said, “No, not this time, Sweetie. I appreciate the offer, but, it didn’t happen, so it can’t happen.”

Teri was mystified and said, “Huh? It didn’t happen so it can’t happen?”

Understanding just how confusing the situation could be Lori said, “That’s right, Sweetie. You being there didn’t happen. You see we, Gramps and I, we took care of CJ, back before your Uncle Jon was born. It is our history. It happened. It’s happening now.”

Lori gave this a couple of minutes to sink in and then said, “I need you to pack that diaper bag for me, please. Can you do that for me? Here, I’ll let you take CJ with you. He’s going to be gone for over eight months.”

Being practical, Teri replied, “I can’t pack that much supplies in the diaper bag.”

“No Sweetie, you don’t need to. We will be buying what we need, in the past. I know, I’m mixing my tenses, but, that’s what happens with time travel. It’s confusing.”

“I’ll say. We will buy the things we need in the past. Why not say, ‘we bought the things we needed in the past?’”

“Because, CJ isn’t in the past yet. Wait a minute, he was in the past he just hasn’t left yet. My head is starting to hurt. Herb! What’s the right way to say it?”

“I don’t know, my dear. I’m just as confused as you are. The English language is too limited to express the situation properly. Yes, quite. Too limited. I say, jolly good.”

“Okay, Grams, I’ll stuff as much as I can into the diaper bag. Come on CJ, let’s go get you packed for your trip.” She put CJ on her hip and headed for the nursery.

Lori stopped her, “Teri, please include his blanket with the shield on it. He’ll need that to keep him warm.”

“You got it, Grams, I’ll grab it.”

Once Teri had walked out of the room Lori turned to Herb and said, “I think that Clark should write the note. Clark, do you remember what was in it?”

“Like it was yesterday. Herb, if I recall correctly, you came by the next day with a fake birth certificate and a letter from my ‘cousin’. You’re going to take care of those, right?”

“That is correct, my boy, I have them right here,” he said patting his breast pocket, “There will be no questions. I’ll take CJ directly to 1997 and see that he is safely delivered to 348 Hyperion Ave. Since it is near his bedtime I will drop him off at night and then I will simply skip ahead to the following morning and deliver the papers. This is really the best way. You already know that he is loved and cared for because you are the ones doing it and you can relax in that knowledge. That is one less thing that you will have to worry about.”

“We can see that Herb. Still, we are going to be away from him for eight long months.”

“Ah, but the beauty of this solution is that you do not miss those eight months. You already have the memory of him during that period so you will not miss out on that period of his development. I’m sure you have all the memories of his milestones, his first word, crawling, first step and all of that. You see, by doing this you are able to have him safely protected, he will age appropriately and you get to have all of the memories associated with his development. It is almost like you are not separated at all.”

“I just wish that we had been able to include more information in the note that we send with him.” Clark stepped into another room and prepared the note, returning in just a short time.

A few minutes later Teri came back into the living room with CJ on her hip and the diaper bag over her shoulder. She said, “Grams, I packed as much as the bag would hold but it’s only going to be enough for a couple of days at best. The way he’s going through diapers they might not even last that long. I also packed all of the breast milk; it would just go bad if he didn’t take it with him.”

Lori said, “That’s very thoughtful of you, Sweetie. I had forgotten all about that. It was critical and that way we had enough to get started.”

Still confused by all of this and the concepts involved with the time travel, Teri said, “Huh? You sound like you know.”

“I do, Honey. Remember, it’s our history. Herb is taking CJ into the past and giving him to Gramps and me and we are going to be taking care of him ourselves. You see, we can remember taking care of him because it already happened, uh, is happening, well, will happen, uh, did happen. It’s really confusing. It’s about to happen, but it already happened.”

Lori reached out for CJ and pulled him into a close embrace. She wasn’t crying, at least not outwardly. She held her son and looked intently at him for a couple of minutes as she said, “Well, little guy, Mommy is going to miss you. You need to be good for Mommy and be a good boy for Mommy, your other Mommy, the one in the past.”

Clark came over and folded both Lori and CJ up in his strong arms. They both gave CJ kisses on the forehead as Clark stepped back.

As Lori was about to hand CJ to Herb, Herb started as if he had suddenly remembered something. He said, “Oh my, I nearly forgot.” Herb reached into his pocket and pulled out a pendant.

He handed it to Lori as she handed him CJ. He said, “My dear, this pendant is for you to wear when on New Krypton. According to our calculations on New Krypton with your current pendant you would be able to survive the higher gravitation, but, that would be all. This pendant has a double sized piece of the Star Sapphire Kryptonite and a correspondingly larger piece of the red K. If our calculations are correct you should, with this, retain your powers even on New Krypton. It is our belief that you may have need of them.”

As soon as the pendant hit her hand Lori felt her powers surge. She was careful, when she closed her hand on the pendant that she didn’t crush it in the process. She said, “Thanks, Herb, this is greatly appreciated.” She turned to Clark and said, “Well, it sure looks like role reversal. On New Krypton, I’ll be the superhero. At least I won’t have to worry about maintaining a secret identity.”

Herb said, “I will return CJ to you as soon as you return from your mission.” Herb pulled his TaDT from his pocket and entered the space and time coordinates. A portal opened in front of him and he stepped through, carrying CJ with the diaper bag over his shoulder. The portal closed itself as soon as they had passed through.

As the portal was closing behind Herb another memory from that time suddenly hit Lori and she started laughing hysterically.

Clark and Teri looked at her like they thought that she had lost her mind.

Noting their expressions, Lori started laughing that much harder. After a couple of minutes she started to settle down and she said, “Clark, think back to when we had CJ! Do you remember the prescription?”

For a moment Clark stood there thinking back and suddenly he started to laugh and Lori joined in with him. By the time they settled down they both had tears running down their cheeks.

Observing this behavior Teri started to have some doubts about the sanity of her grandparents. She asked, “What prescription?”

Walking over and putting her arms around her granddaughter Lori said, “It’s a prescription that Herb has to deliver to us in the

past when he drops CJ off with us.”

Mystified, Teri asked, “What prescription? CJ doesn’t take any medicine! He’s very healthy.”

“Honey, the prescription isn’t for CJ, it’s for me.”

“Are you sick, uh, were you sick, back in the past, I mean?”

Lori started laughing again, “No, Sweetie, I wasn’t sick and the prescription wasn’t for medicine, at least, not exactly and Gramps and I had to work on it together. It was just ... a surprise, that’s all.” She gave Clark a sidelong glance and a wicked little grin as she finished, “A very pleasant surprise.”

Lori had an inscrutable smile which totally mystified Teri, but, as she watched her grandmother and grandfather put their arms around each other and kissed. This put all of her fears at rest. Her grandparents loved each other and all was right with her world as a result.

Chapter 13 – Into the Past

June 13, 1997 – 11 PM

348 Hyperion Ave., Metropolis

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

Prime

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It had been a very eventful day in which Lois and Clark defeated Mensa. Even though Ellen Lane had been made aware of Clark’s secret identity as a result of Mensa’s machinations, the malfunctioning ‘Bummer-Be-Gone’ had wiped that knowledge from her mind.

Now, it was later at night and Lois and Clark were in bed. Lois was lying on her side with her head on Clark’s chest as they discussed the day’s events.

With a relieved sigh Lois said, “Well, my parents are back to normal, clueless that their son-in-law moonlights in tights.”

Clark smiled at that vision and then he said, “I guess knowing that I’m Superman brought them nothing but unpleasantness. So now that memory is gone.”

Lois nodded her agreement before she added, “I don’t think mother remembers being mad at Daddy either.”

Clark had felt her nod against his chest and kissed the top of her head before replying. “Apparently not, because I caught them kissing on the terrace.”

Lois smiled, lifted her head and kissed his bare chest. This was such good news. For years she had had to deal with the bickering and animosity between her parents and now it looked like that might just be coming to an end.

Even with this good news Lois was still bothered about other things, namely the meeting they had had that afternoon with the social worker about the possibility of adoption. Clark had been given a score of 97 while Lois had been scored, lower, 17 actually and that included 5 points for being an American citizen. The social worker had called her a thrill addict who dangled over the jaws of death on nearly a daily basis, most of the time needing to be rescued by Superman.

With a deep sigh Lois said, “I’m sorry,” as she played with the hairs on his arm.

Clark was bewildered by this statement coming apparently out of the blue, not related to the current topic of discussion. He raised his head from his pillow, looked down at her and asked, “For what?”

Lois repeated, “I’m sorry that Daddy can’t find anything wrong with STAR Labs’ data. He doesn’t think we’ll be able to have kids.”

Clark, always ready to comfort her, looked at her and assured her, “Honey, I have not, for one second,” as he was speaking Lois raised her head from where it was lying on his chest so that she could look him in the face as he spoke, “doubted in us. We live

the impossible. A child is something brought about by love, isn't it?"

Lois gave a small, hesitant nod of assent as he continued, "Then that, above all else has got to be possible for us."

Lois started to shift her position, moving up so that they could share a kiss, but just then Clark's superhearing kicked in and he got a startled look on his face.

Lois saw the look and asked worriedly, fearing that he was going to be called away from her for an emergency, "What, what are you hearing?"

With a mystified expression on his face he said, "I'm not sure."

Lois anxious now asked, "What, what does it sound like?"

With a look of uncertainty he said, "I can't actually believe what it sounds like," as he started to get up out of bed.

They both got up and put on robes and moved downstairs. Clark flipped a switch at the head of the stairs which turned on the lights. Clark had a look of concentration on his face as he followed the sounds he had been hearing. He led Lois through the living room and into the dining room where they had placed Clark's old bassinet.

As they opened the sliding door a look of wonder came over their features and Lois put her hand up to her heart as Clark reached into the bassinet and picked up a note.

Lois just stood there staring as Clark read the note, "Lois and Clark, this child belongs to you."

Lois was stunned and simply stood there gawking as she looked down and saw a three or four month old infant under a blue blanket with the El family crest on it.

Lois, without realizing it, had been holding her breath. She suddenly took a gasping breath. As the baby started to cry she moved over, leaned and pulled back the blanket. As she did she started to smile. Then she reached in with both hands and picked the baby up.

Just then they heard Jonathan call, "Son?" as he and Martha, Sam and Ellen all came trooping downstairs because they had all heard Lois and Clark move downstairs. They were all tying on their robes as they descended the stairs. Jonathan continued, "Is everything all right?"

Sam asked, "Is everything okay?"

Ellen said, "We saw the light. Lois???"

Clark came around the sliding door and let out a sigh and then said, "Yeah, yeah, everyone, everything is absolutely fine. Uh, Mom and Dad and ah, Mom and Dad, ah, we have something to tell you."

As he had been speaking Lois had been moving out of the dining room and had been coming out behind Clark so that she couldn't immediately be seen. When she stepped around Clark they could all see that she was cradling the baby in her arms. There was wonder and joy on all of their faces when they all saw the baby.

Martha was the first to come out of her stupor and ask, "Where did he come from?"

Clark answered, "We don't know, he just appeared in the bassinet with this note."

He handed the note to Martha and she gave it a close examination before saying, "If I had to guess, I'd say that this was your handwriting."

Startled, Clark said, "Let me see that," as he reached for the note again.

As he looked at it more closely a look of wonder came over his features and all he could do was stand there, transfixed, staring at the note. Lois, seeing his reaction moved into a position where she could look at the note herself. Now that they were in better light and Lois could make out the note clearly she said, "Yeah, that sure looks like your handwriting, but, how could that be?"

Clark snapped out of his stupor and used his microscopic

vision on the note. When he did he could make out additional writing but not really writing, just the impressions of letters, like someone had written on the top sheet of a pad and the impression of what had been written was impressed on the sheet underneath. His look of wonder turned to one of surprise as he said in a whisper to Lois, "There's more. We'll look at it later."

Not content to wait, Lois carried the baby over and handed him to Martha and asked, "Can you watch him for a few minutes?"

Martha, with a look of pure joy on her face said, "I'd be happy to." She turned to Ellen and said, "How about it Ellen? Let's go over and sit a spell." Martha and Ellen moved over to the couch with Jonathan and Sam following to stand behind them and watch.

Clark moved over to a secretary in the corner and picked up a pencil and then he and Lois moved back into the dining room. Using the side of the pencil point he ran the lead over the sheet to bring out the impression. After he did this he showed the results to Lois.

It read, "**PLEASE TAKE CARE OF 'OUR' SON. HIS NAME IS CLARK JUNIOR. WE CALL HIM CJ. HERB WILL EXPLAIN.**"

In a hushed tone so that their parents wouldn't hear Lois said, "That figures! We should have known that Herb would be mixed up in this somehow. Wow, Clark junior? What could that mean? It has to mean that we can have children. Bernie's data must be wrong somehow. Oh, Clark, could it be possible?" She clutched his arm in hope and expectation.

Clark said, "I don't know, Sweetheart. Look closely, there are quote marks around the word, our. That has to mean something. There are a couple of possibilities. First he could be adopted or second it could be almost like a sharing, his and mine. The 'him' in this case obviously being me in the future. Like I said, children are a product of love and we have enough for a large family. I guess we just won't give up hope, but, still, he could have been adopted."

"The note said that Herb would explain, but, it was written that way probably so that Herb wouldn't know that we had that extra information. If he shows up we can't let on how much we know. Let's get back in there with the rest of them."

Clark put the note in the pocket of his robe and Lois removed the blanket and stuffed it in a drawer before they both moved back into the living room.

Clark spoke to Jonathan and asked, "Dad, would you mind helping me move the bassinet upstairs to our bedroom?"

Jonathan, realizing that this was simply an excuse to get him alone, probably to talk said, "Sure thing, son," and he moved over with Clark to the dining room.

Clark pulled the blanket out of the drawer and showed it to Jonathan before putting it in the bassinet with the shield down so that it wouldn't be visible. Upon seeing this Jonathan gave a start and gave Clark a questioning look. Clark shook his head and reached to pick up the bassinet as Jonathan did the same. They carried it upstairs and once in the bedroom Clark took the blanket and placed it on a shelf in the linen closet. Then he showed Jonathan the note.

Jonathan asked, "Just what does this mean?"

"It was obviously written by me in the future and sent with the baby which means that he is *my* child, either with Lois or by adoption. That might mean that Lois and I can have children. All we can surmise at this point is that he comes from the future and for some reason had to be sent into the past for protection. There's no way to tell just how far in the future though. I just wonder what we were going into that made it necessary to place him in the past for safety."

"Well, son, it sure looks like one way or the other he is yours. I'm sure that you will take good care of your son." Jonathan had a little catch in his voice as he finished, "My grandson."

Clark said, “I guess we need to get back downstairs with the rest.” Clark walked over to the closet and stuffed the note into the folds of the blanket and then turned and followed Jonathan downstairs.

Lois had gone back into the dining room while the grandmothers were watching their charge, had found the diaper bag and started going through it to see just what it contained. She found enough supplies for a couple of day’s worth of diaper changes. Not recognizing the brand name or even the design, she realized that it wasn’t too different from what was available to her. After all, how radically would something like that change over time? She even found some bottles of breast milk that were still cold because of the packing around them. Feeling how cold they were she knew that virtually no time had elapsed in transit. She took the bottles into the kitchen and placed them in her refrigerator until they would be needed. She silently thanked whoever had packed that bag for thinking about that little item. It would be hours yet until they would be able to pick up any formula.

Lois walked back into the living room and simply stood in the doorway watching the two grandmothers doting over their grandchild. She had to believe that he was her and Clark’s child, that note said so in almost so many words.

She saw CJ yawn and realized that he must be tired and so she walked over and addressed Martha, “I think I need to put him to bed. We can spend some time getting to know him tomorrow.”

Martha, somewhat reluctantly, nodded and passed him over to Lois.

Lois led the procession as they all ascended the stairs with Clark bringing up the rear and closing up. At the top they all separated with the grandparents returning to their separate rooms and she and Clark entering their bedroom. Lois walked over to the bassinet and laid CJ down. She turned to Clark and asked, “What’d you do with his blanket?”

“It’s in the closet.”

She walked over and pulled out the blanket and when she did the note fell to the floor. After she tucked CJ in she retrieved the note and took another look at it. She asked, “What do you think the actual story is?”

“We really won’t know until Herb shows up, but, it sure looks like he is our child, so he’s obviously from the future. I just wonder what we were getting into that made it necessary to send him into the past for safety.”

Lois was standing at the side of the bassinet and Clark was behind her with his arms wrapped around her as they both stared down at the sleeping child with awe in their eyes. Lois said, “Well, I guess when the time comes we’ll recognize it. Obviously Herb knows all about it so we aren’t going to have to send out an SOS. Clark Junior, I just can’t get over it. Our son. He’s a little miracle. Are we going to be able to handle it? I mean, are we ready? This is so sudden! We didn’t have nine months to get ready for this. What kind of a mother am I going to be?”

With a light chuckle at her babble, Clark replied, “A totally amazing one. You know, we could stand here all night and stare at him, but, if we did we wouldn’t be any good to him tomorrow. We need to get some sleep.”

“You’re right, but I just can’t get over it. Here he is! Proof that we can have children or at least that you can have children. What if he’s your son, but not mine? The way that note was written, it could be that way too.”

“Let’s not worry too much about that just yet. Let’s wait until we hear from Herb. Maybe he’ll give us more information when he gets here.” Clark released his arms from where they had been wrapped around her waist and started to untie the belt of his robe.

With a sigh, Lois started doing the same thing as they headed for the bed. Lois threw her robe over the foot of the bed and lifting the covers on her side, slid in and snuggled up to Clark with her head on his chest. For a few minutes she lay there just

enjoying cuddling and she started drawing little figures on his bare chest. Slowly after a few minutes her fingers stopped moving and Clark heard her mutter, “A little miracle,” just before she fell asleep. Hearing this Clark started to smile as he pulled her in closer. A few minutes later he was also asleep.

Chapter 14 – Lois’ Prescription

June 14, 1997

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

Prime

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At 6:30 Lois was awakened by CJ crying. She snapped awake instantly and reached for Clark only to find his side of the bed empty, but still warm. She frowned, thinking that he had been called away on an emergency. But then her countenance brightened and she started to smile when, looking over where the bassinet was she saw Clark as he was reaching in to pick up CJ.

Her smile broadened even more as she watched him holding CJ. Slowly she got out from under the covers and asked, “Well, Papa, how is Junior? Does he need a change or is he hungry?”

Clark took a sniff and said, “I think a change is in order.” Lois cleared the top of the chest of drawers and laid out a towel. Clark laid CJ down and said, “Okay Sport, let’s see just what we have here.” He opened the diaper to find quite a mess. He said, “Oh boy, look at what we have here. Uh, Lois, you want to take over?”

Lois laughed and said, “Not on your life. You started, you finish. I’ll get the diaper bag and see what’s in it.” She started rooting around and pulled out a container of baby wipes. She laid them down next to CJ and said, “Here’s some tushie wipes. Do a good job on him.” Clark leaned over CJ as he reached for the wipes and CJ chose that second to pee straight up. Fortunately, Clark was able to use his superspeed to cover him with the diaper. Lois started laughing as she said, “You are soooo lucky. If you didn’t have superspeed he would have gotten you. With little boys you have to keep them covered until you have everything ready. You’ll learn. I didn’t have your advantages. I learned the hard way while I was babysitting.” She placed the clean diaper next to CJ and said, “As soon as he is changed he’s going to be hungry. I’ll go downstairs and warm his bottle.”

Clark said, “You go ahead and do that, we’ll be down in a jiff.”

Lois went downstairs and took the bottle out of the refrigerator and put on a pot to heat some water. In her babysitting years she had learned from some parents that they had a good reason that they preferred warming the bottle this way. It was better as compared to the microwave because it didn’t cause hot spots and by gently warming the milk the enzymes present were not denatured, destroying their efficacy. While the bottle was still warming, Clark came into the kitchen with CJ. A few minutes later the bottle was ready and he handed CJ over to Lois to feed.

Taking CJ from Clark she said, “Here you go, CJ.” When he heard his name in Lois’ voice he started to smile and coo. As soon as the nipple of the bottle was presented he reached up and put his hands on the bottle, latched on and nursed hungrily. Observing this Lois said, “Did you see that? He recognized his name when I said it. Wow, he’s a good eater. He’s going to grow quickly.”

Martha, who Lois didn’t even realize was downstairs, responded, “I don’t know about that. Clark was a big eater too, but he didn’t grow at an unusual rate. It must have something to do with his metabolism.”

Smiling, Lois responded, “Thanks, Martha, that’s the kind of information we need.” Lois looked up at Clark who was

‘hovering’ around them and said, “He must take after his father. There’s one point in favor of him not being adopted. How old would you guess he is?”

Watching CJ nurse, Martha said, “I would say somewhere between three and five months. What are you guys going to do about work?”

Without even looking up Lois said, “We don’t have to worry about that till Monday. Today we need to pick up some supplies, a changing table, formula, baby bath, more diapers, and those kinds of things. Plus we have to wait and see when Herb shows up.”

Martha replied, “I was actually thinking about Monday and the rest of next week. I think you guys are going to need a sitter.”

Just then Ellen Lane walked into the kitchen and said, “I heard that.” She turned to Lois and said, “You have two sitters available.” She turned to Martha and said, “He’s my grandson too, you know.”

Flustered, Martha replied, “Oh, Ellen, I wasn’t trying to shut you out. I just hadn’t had the opportunity to talk it over with you as yet. How are you this morning?”

Ellen replied, “I’m just fine, loving life and looking forward to spending some time with *my grandson*, just like you.”

Just then, Jonathan and Sam joined the others in the kitchen.

CJ had just finished his bottle so Lois set it aside, put a pacifier in his mouth and said, “It’s getting a little crowded in here. Why don’t we go into the living room?” As she was saying this she handed CJ to Ellen.

When they were all in the living room Ellen and Martha sat next to one another on the sofa and played with CJ while Jonathan and Sam looked on.

It was just about 7:30 by this time and there was a knock on the door. Clark pulled his glasses down and scanned with his x-ray vision. He nodded to Lois and said, “I wonder who’s at the door? Honey, why don’t we check?”

Lois got up and joined him as he headed for the door. When they opened it, Herb was standing on the threshold. Clark said, “Well, Herb, we were kinda expecting you. Won’t you come in?”

They moved into the living room and Lois performed the introductions, “Mother and Daddy, Martha and Jonathan, this is our friend Herb, Herb, our parents.”

Tipping his hat, Herb said, “Pleased to make your acquaintance,” then he turned to Lois and Clark and said, “Can we speak, privately?”

Clark said, “Of course, Herb. Let’s go into the office.”

Once they were in the office, Lois turned to Herb and said, “Okay Herb, what’s the story?”

Herb began his explanation, “That child is the son of a super couple from another universe. They are going on a dangerous mission and needed a safe, loving home for their child. Naturally, I thought of you. When they return, their child needs to have aged appropriately for the period of their absence so that it at least appears as though they have been together all of that time, so the period of time that you will have him will correspond to the duration of their mission.”

Lois challenged, “This, super couple, are they related to us?”

Herb, somewhat chagrined, replied, “My dear, I really cannot answer that question. I have begun living by a motto of sorts, ‘too much information too soon is not good’ and answering that question would be giving you too much information.” Reaching into an inner pocket Herb pulled out some papers. He continued, “Here are the documents you will need. Here is a birth certificate stating that this child is the son of Lorelei and Jerome King. The birth date has been adjusted to reflect his actual age which is four months old, stating he was born on February 10, 1997. The indicated name is Charles Jerome King, not his real name, of course.”

Clark blurted out, “Charles *King*!! That’s the name I usually use when I go undercover.”

Lois added, “Jerome is your middle name. I smell something fishy. Why did you give him *that* name?”

Herb didn’t answer. He just stood there, wearing a look of inscrutability.

After a few seconds he continued, “The request is that you use the nickname of CJ. Here is a letter asking you to become his temporary guardians while his parents are away on the field as medical missionaries. These are the guardianship papers approved by the court. Lastly, here is a prescription.”

Interrupting, Lois asked, “Is CJ sick? He looks healthy.”

With a look of extreme embarrassment on his face, Herb replied, “Actually, my dear, the, uh, the prescription, uh, the prescription, well, it is not for CJ, it, uh, actually, uh, it, it’s for ... you.”

Stunned, Lois asked, “Me?!?!?! What do I need a prescription for?” She started to open the document. As she did so she looked over at Herb and noticed that he was very flushed. She stopped opening the document and continued to address Herb, “What is this, some kind of joke?”

Herb stammered, “No, uh, no, no, this is not a joke. Tha that, that uh that prescription is uh, we uh, it is serious. Actually,” Herb cleared his throat, “Actually, that is one of the reasons that you were chosen to be his guardians. You see,” Now that he was getting into the more clinical aspects, Herb was a little less uncomfortable, “there are certain proteins, enzymes and other nutrients and also immunizing agents which CJ needs and which because of your unique body chemistry only you can provide.”

Lois was stunned as she asked, “Me? Unique body chemistry?!?!? Why am I so special?”

Herb replied, “My dear, the situation is this, you are in very fact married to Superman and that makes you very unique indeed. Through your close association with Clark, how shall I say this, you have picked up certain, elements which are absolutely crucial to CJ’s development. Without them he would die. The diagnosis would be ‘Failure to Thrive’. These elements cannot be obtained through the use of baby formula, soy based or otherwise. He will survive for a certain period of time on those, however, not for as long as you will have him. It is all explained in the prescription and the accompanying documentation. To go along with the prescription,” Herb reached into his pocket and brought out a vial of pills, “Here are some pills which will facilitate the process. I had one of the doctors at TTEMPO prepare this medication and the explanation.”

Starting to get an inkling of what he was saying and not liking the implications, Lois was almost in panic mode by this point as she asked, “If he will die on formula, what can we do?”

Herb replied, “Perhaps you should read the prescription.”

Lois finally opened the prescription and read silently to herself, “Proper nutrition of a super child consists exclusively of breast milk from the mother or host mother.” Her worst fears had been realized! Lois let out a gasp and blurted out, “Herb, do you know what this says?” Lois could see the color in his face go to a bright red. Lois said, “Yes, you do. How can I do that? I didn’t just give birth. Isn’t that a prerequisite?”

Embarrassed, Herb replied, “Uh, no my dear, it isn’t. It is all explained in the documents.”

Clark was mystified at the conversation that was going on in front of him and he had no clue as to just what it was about.

Lois put her hands on her hips and challenged, “Why don’t you give me the Reader’s Digest version?”

Herb’s flush became an even darker red, even though it hadn’t seemed to be in any way possible. He replied, “Uh, I’d rather not. Please just read the directions. I really must be going.”

Taking one hand off her hip and pointing a finger at Herb in an almost threatening manner, Lois said, “Now, you wait, just a doggone minute. You’re not going anywhere. You need to explain this!” She started shaking the documents he had given her in the air between them.

Worried about Lois' reaction to this information, the apparent threat to CJ, and with his curiosity finally getting the best of him, Clark asked, "Lois, what does it say?"

Exasperated, Lois barely managed to keep her voice just low enough so that the neighbors wouldn't hear her as she almost shouted, "I have to breastfeed him!"

Startled by this turn of events, Clark burst out with, "What? Let me see that." Lois handed him the prescription and the accompanying documentation while she put her hand back on her hip and pinned Herb with her eyes like a bug under a biologist's dissecting microscope.

Clark speed read the document and as he did he started to laugh. Lois turned a withering stare on her husband. Her anger and exasperation barely contained, she challenged, "What's so funny? I don't see anything to laugh about!"

Clark handed her the documentation and indicated the particular paragraph that she should read. "The bullet points and the two paragraphs after them."

She read. Occasionally she would glance over the top of the papers to make sure Herb stayed put.

Mothering through breastfeeding is the most natural and effective way of understanding and satisfying the needs of the [baby](#).

Mother and baby need to be together early and often to establish a satisfying [relationship](#) and an adequate milk supply.

In the early years the baby has an intense need to be with his mother which is as basic as his need for food.

[Breast milk](#) is the superior infant food.

For the healthy, full-term baby, breast milk is the only food necessary until the baby shows signs of needing [solids](#), about the middle of the first year after birth.

Ideally the breastfeeding relationship will continue until the baby outgrows the need.

Alert and active participation by the mother in [childbirth](#) is a help in getting breastfeeding off to a good start.

Breastfeeding is enhanced and the nursing couple sustained by the loving support, help, and companionship of the baby's [father](#). A father's unique relationship with his baby is an important element in the child's development from early infancy.

Good [nutrition](#) means eating a well-balanced and varied diet of foods in as close to their natural state as possible.

From infancy on, children need loving guidance which reflects acceptance of their capabilities and sensitivity to their feelings.(2)

Even a woman who has not recently given birth can bring on her milk supply. A slight elevation of certain hormones such as Prolactin along with the stimulation of other hormones which result from the active participation in sexual intercourse and the stimulation of the mammary glands by the active suckling of the infant can stimulate the production of breast milk even in a woman that has not recently given birth and ensure an adequate supply of milk.

By taking the included medication, participating in intercourse at least three times a day and having the child suckle at least an hour a day within a two week period you should begin to lactate. Once you start as long as the child suckles your milk supply should continue. Keep in mind that the more the child eats the more milk your body will produce."

Lois lowered the booklet and with a stricken look stared at Clark. She challenged, "Do you think they are serious? Do you think this would work?"

Still chuckling, Clark replied, "I don't know, but it should be fun trying."

During this exchange they had almost forgotten about Herb. Lois looked up at Clark and asked, "Did Martha breast feed you?"

Clark thought for a second before saying, "I don't think so. I think that's one of the reasons we had cows."

Lois turned on Herb again and challenged, "Okay, Clark wasn't breast fed, what's the difference? Why do *I* have to breastfeed *him*?"

Herb stood a little straighter and assumed the attitude he used when in front of a class, "My dear, I have already given you the answer to that question. If you think back I said that as a result of being married to Superman your body chemistry is unique.

Because of that association you have certain proteins, hormones and enzymes which have been changed and are no longer exactly what you would call Earth human normal. You see CJ is not fully Earth human or fully Kryptonian human, he is a hybrid child, approximately three quarters Kryptonian. Clark, since he was fully Kryptonian was able to assimilate the proteins, enzymes and hormones contained in cow's milk without harm and thrive. Such would not be the case with CJ because of his hybrid status. Because of your unique body chemistry your body will produce milk that he will thrive on."

One statement that Herb had made stuck in Lois' mind and she blurted out, "He's three quarters Kryptonian? How did that happen?"

Herb replied, "I guess I'm not saying too much by saying that his mother is a little more than half Kryptonian and his father is fully Kryptonian."

Lois looked at Clark and said, "There you go, he's not adopted. This super couple, are they related to us?"

Herb replied, "Now I must fall back on my motto, 'too much information too soon is not a good thing'."

Lois asked, "Okay mister time traveler, tell me, did it work?"

Herb, back on a firm footing now said, "Well, I will go so far as to say I took a happy, healthy little boy back to his parents who were very happy to get him back."

Resigned to accept this answer Lois opened the vial and popped a pill in her mouth and swallowed. She turned to Herb and asked, "Is there anything else?"

Herb replied, "No, I don't think so. I should be back for him in approximately eight months."

Lois had a pained expression as she said, "Oh, I can't help feeling sorry for them. They're going to miss so much, his first word, his first step and all."

Herb had a strange expression on his face as he said, "Oh, I don't know about that. Uh, not to worry, there are 'ways' around those problems."

"What do you mean by that Herb?"

Herb replied, "Too much information ..."

With a pained expression, Lois interrupted and finished for him, "Too soon is not good. I know. That's just a convenient excuse for hiding information."

Herb said, "I really must be going. Please express my regrets to your parents for me." Herb pulled a TaDT out of his pocket and after entering the time and space coordinates he said, "Ta, ta," and stepped through.

Lois turned to Clark and said, "Well, if we're really going to do this thing, I suggest we take a two week vacation, just the three of us. Where shall we go?"

Clark thought for a second and then said, "There's this little island in the Pacific, off the travel lanes, uninhabited. Give me an hour or two and I could fix up some accommodations for us."

With a dreamy expression Lois said, "That sounds perfect. We'll need enough supplies for a couple of weeks, diapers and such. Oh my God, I just thought of something. Wait here."

Lois went into the kitchen and retrieved two bottles of breast milk before returning to the office. After closing the door she turned to Clark and held a bottle up next to each breast as she said, "I'm going to need a nursing bra. Just imagine, I'm going to be carrying this around in here," she indicated her breasts.

With an exaggerated leer Clark said, "I can't wait."

Lois wailed, "I'll look like a cow!"

Clark put his arms around her and pulled her into a hug as he

said, “No you won’t, you’ll look lovely. A woman that is breastfeeding her child is among the most beautiful women in the world. I love you and your willingness to do this for ‘our’ child.”

“Oh, Clark, am I going to be able to do this?”

“I’m sure you can. Just keep in mind that you’re doing it for CJ, *your* baby.”

“I can make sure we have everything we need before I pick you and CJ up. What are we going to tell our folks?”

Lois said, “What else, we’re going to take some time off to get to know our child.”

They rejoined their parents in the living room. Martha asked, “What happened to your friend?”

Clark said, “Uh, well, uh, he uh, he had somewhere else he had to be. He left, uh, ...”

Lois finished for him, “He left through the back door. While you guys are watching CJ we’re going to go get dressed, okay?”

Ellen replied, “That’s fine dear. You go ahead. We’ll take care of him. You called him CJ?”

Lois replied, “Yeah, that’s why Herb stopped by. He dropped off the guardianship papers. His name is Charles Jerome, CJ for short.”

Lois and Clark turned and ascended the stairs to the master bedroom. As soon as the door was closed, Lois turned to Clark and put her arms around his neck, pulling him down into a kiss. She whispered into his ear, “I think we need to start working on that prescription, don’t you? Let’s go take a shower ... together.” She kissed his ear and then the side of his neck as she reached in and untied the belt of his robe. Two seconds later she found herself naked and in the shower with Clark. He stood between her and the shower as he turned on the water. Once the water was hot he moved so that she was in the stream. When the water started cascading over her skin she felt his hands as he used the body scrub gel to wash her body. As she was rinsing that off he started washing her hair for her and she almost melted into a puddle of goo it felt so good. After rinsing her hair she grabbed the gel and after squirting some in her hands she started washing him. He quickly washed his own hair and after rinsing off picked her up. Her arms were around his neck holding herself in close so that her breasts were in contact with his chest. They had a period of intimacy and then Clark reached over and turned off the water. He still held her close as he reached for towels to dry them off.

With a dreamy, languid tone she said, “That was wonderful! Just think, we’re under doctor’s order to do that at least three times a day. Ohhhhhhhhhhh, I can’t wait. I’m really going to enjoy this vacation. It’ll be like a second honeymoon. Let’s get packed. Let’s see, uninhabited tropical island, about all I’ll need is sun tan lotion, right? How much else would I need? We are going to be spending a lot of time doing what we just did and I’m going to be spending time with CJ nursing, or trying to nurse which also means, no clothes. I understand that babies like that skin to skin contact so aside from his diaper he probably won’t be wearing anything else either.”

As he was dressing, Clark suggested, “We will be near Hawaii. We may go out to dinner or a movie so you may want to pack a dress or two.”

While Lois started the packing Clark went downstairs. He sent Perry an e-mail telling him that something had come up and that he and Lois were taking the next two weeks as vacation. He added that they would be out of cell phone range so Perry wouldn’t be able to contact them.

After doing this, Clark went into the living room. Addressing their parents he said, “Lois and I have decided to take the next two weeks as vacation. We decided that we need to get to know our new son, so, the three of us are going to go away, together, alone.”

He could see that Ellen was about to object so he cut her off by repeating, “We are the ones that really need to get to know him quickly and this is how we have decided to do it.”

Martha, knowing her son the way she did, didn’t offer any objections. Actually she was happy to see how seriously he was taking this new situation. She knew that he always had a soft spot for children so this was not really anything new. She simply nodded her acceptance of the situation and then asked, “What arrangements are you going to make for when you return?”

Clark replied, “We have really lucked out on that. There have been enough workers at the Planet that have children for them to add an in-house daycare center on the second floor. When we get back we will enroll him there. We may need sitters if we go on an assignment or if we just want to go out, so, if you don’t mind, you guys will be our first choices as far as sitters go.”

The faces of Ellen and Martha both lit up with that. They would each be able to have time with this new grandchild.

About this time Lois came down the stairs and asked, “Martha, could I impose on you to make breakfast? We have a lot to do to get ready for our vacation.”

Martha handed CJ off to Ellen as she stood up and headed for the kitchen. Sam and Jonathan both moved from where they had been standing behind the couch and sat down, one on each side of Ellen.

Lois pulled Clark aside and said, “I packed some casual clothes, swim suits and a couple of dresses as well as toiletries. What do you want me to pack for you?”

“I’ll take care of it when we finish breakfast. Right now I need to plan our accommodations. I think I’ll talk it over with Dad and see what we can come up with.”

Chapter 15 – Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All About You

June 14, 1997

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

Prime

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After breakfast Clark took off and headed for the island. While he was gone all of the grandparents took turns holding CJ while one or another went to get ready for the day. Ellen had the pleasure of giving him a bottle which left them with three.

While Martha and Jonathan were watching CJ, Sam and Ellen went upstairs to get dressed. When they came downstairs they pulled Lois aside and Sam said, “Princess, your mother and I have decided that we are going to move back in together so, if you don’t mind, we’re going to take off so that she can pack up. My place is bigger so she’s moving there. You’ll probably be gone to start your vacation by the time we are through, so, we’ll see you when you get back.”

“Daddy, Mother, that’s wonderful news. You guys go ahead. As soon as we’re back we’ll call and you can come over.”

Ellen said, “That’s fine, dear. We’ll look for your call.”

Sam went upstairs and grabbed their overnight bags, brought them downstairs and joined Ellen at the door. They said their goodbyes and exited, Sam giving Lois a wink as he was going out the door. Lois closed the door behind them and heaved a relieved sigh.

She walked over and plopped down on the couch next to Martha and said, “You have no idea how much of a strain it is keeping the secret with them around. It’s so much easier with you and Jonathan.”

Continuing, she said, “Okay, here’s the story. This child,” she looked lovingly at CJ, “is from another universe and he is the child of a super couple. We suspect that he’s from the future as well. Herb wouldn’t give us a whole lot of information but we got that much.”

Hearing her voice, CJ’s head and eyes swung her way and he started to smile around his pacifier. His smile got so big that the

pacifier fell out of his mouth and Martha had to grab it before it hit the floor. Martha picked him up and held him in a standing position with his little feet in her lap as he reached for Lois. Martha said, “He recognizes you. From what you guys have told us about this Mr. Wells and alternate universes and such his mommy has to be a Lois or else he wouldn’t take to you so.”

Martha held CJ out to Lois along with the pacifier and Lois reached for CJ as she said, “You’re probably right, but, we couldn’t get any kind of confirmation out of Herb on that.” She sat CJ in her lap and gave him his pacifier and a close perusal. Then she lifted him up and nuzzled his belly and gave him a raspberry and as she did he squealed in delight and started laughing, losing his pacifier again in the process, obviously enjoying this. Lois lowered him back down to her lap reinserted the pacifier again and asked, “Just whose little boy are you? I wish you could talk and answer that question. Your grandma is probably right though and I’m just like your mommy.” As she had been speaking she had unconsciously been rubbing her hand in little circles over his tummy which had him giggling and smiling around his pacifier as he brought his pudgy little hands in and placed them over hers.

Lois continued, “Oh, and, something else, I have to breast feed him.”

Martha gasped and asked, “Oh, Honey, is that really necessary? I looked into that when we found Clark and it looked rather daunting. Fortunately we had a couple of cows and we were able to give him raw cow’s milk.”

Lois reached into her pocket and pulled out the pills Herb had given her, the prescription and the accompanying document and handed them to Martha.

Martha glanced at the prescription and started reading the pamphlet. After she got into it she started chuckling. The further she got the louder she got until she was outright laughing. She said, “I wish it had been explained to me this way when we looked into it.” She gave Jonathan a look and continued, “It would have been fun!”

Jonathan had a quizzical expression as she was saying all of this. Martha took pity on him and said, “The prescription is for Lois to take these hormone pills then she has to have CJ suckle at least an hour a day.” She lost her control and started laughing again as she finished, “Then she and Clark have to have sex at least three times a day!”

Jonathan smiled and said, “Yeah, you’re right. If we’d been given those same directions, we might have tried it ourselves.” Martha jabbed him in the ribs and they both started laughing while Lois blushed.

Jonathan continued, “So, that’s why Clark and I were discussing a bungalow. He’s going to build you a place to stay while you work on this prescription. When you guys get back, maybe you and Clark would let us use your getaway for a while.”

Martha gave him a look, and he said, “Or, maybe not.”

It was Lois’ turn to burst out laughing. She said, “I can’t wait to see what he came up with. He found an uninhabited island in the South Pacific. That’s where we’re going. I hope we don’t have any hurricanes while we are there.”

Martha gently corrected her, “Honey, in the Pacific they are called typhoons.”

Laughing, Lois said, “Martha, that *must* be where Clark gets that from. His fund of trivia never ceases to amaze me.”

Martha started to laugh as she said, “Guilty as charged!”

Lois looked at CJ and in a teasing tone asked, “Are you going to do that to your wife? Drive her crazy with trivia?” As she started nuzzling his tummy again he started chortling happily and holding the sides of her face and then started squealing in delight.

Lois keeping her face in his tummy looked up with her eyes and asked, “What are you guys going to do? We’ll be gone for two weeks.”

Martha looked at Jonathan and then at his nod turned back

and said, “Oh, I think we’ll head back to the farm. That’ll save us some money on an apartment here in Metropolis ...”

Lois interrupted, “Now Martha, you guys know that you can always stay with us. You don’t need to rent ...”

Martha interrupted her in turn, “We know, but we also know that you guys need your privacy and if we were just down the hall, you’d be self conscious and not consider doing what you guys did a little while ago.”

Lois blushed bright red and gasped out, “How, what, did, were we, how did, did we make some noise or something? How?”

Martha started chortling as she said, “No, nothing like that. When Clark came down, I could just tell. He had the *satisfied* look. A mother knows.”

Lois looked back at CJ and asked, “Is Mommy going to know things like that about you little guy? Huh?” Then she blew another raspberry on his tummy. He started flailing his arms and squealing in delight.

When she pulled back she could see a look take form on his face and Lois said, “Ah *ha*, I think I recognize that look. Is that what you’re talking about Martha?”

Martha looked and said, “Yeah, something like that, but not quite the same.”

Lois said, “I *know* what this one is. It means it’s time for a change.” Lois stuck a finger in the leg hole of his diaper and felt the lining. She said, “Yep, I’ve got that one pegged.”

Martha started to laugh. She asked, “Want me to do the honors? You’ll be changing plenty of diapers over the next two weeks.”

Lois picked CJ up and handed him to Martha as she said, “Thanks, Martha. I do have some things to do to get ready for our trip. The supplies are in our bedroom. He might want a bottle when you’re finished. They’re in the fridge. The pot’s already on the stove.”

Martha stood and placed CJ on her hip and headed for the stairs. Jonathan asked, “What can I do to help you guys get ready? Is there some shopping I could do for you?”

“Oh, Jonathan, you’re a life saver! Yes, there is. We’re going to need formula to carry us until my milk comes in. Probably a two week supply, diapers; that should probably be a large economy size box and a baby bathtub. We can get the rest of the furniture when we get back.”

Jonathan walked over to the secretary and picked up a pad and pencil and started writing. He looked at Lois and asked, “What about baby wipes, talc and things like that?”

With a pained expression Lois replied, “Oh, Jonathan, what kind of mother am I going to be, forgetting things like that?”

Jonathan reassured her, “You’re gonna do just fine. I have the advantage of experience. I’ve changed a few diapers in my time and,” he started chuckling as he finished, “powdered the tush of that big lug you’re married to.”

Lois picked up his laughter and said, “I just might have to remind him of that.”

Jonathan made some additional notations on the pad. He moved over and shouted upstairs to Martha, “Martha, I’m going out shopping. Do you need anything?”

Martha appeared at the head of the stairs with a freshly changed baby and said, “Yes, get one of those harness thingies for Lois to carry CJ in. You know the kind that has a seat and a bunch of straps to secure him in front. That way he can see her face and know she’s there for him. I don’t like that papoose kind where they are on the back. It could be the back of anybody’s head. I think that the baby will be reassured by seeing her face.”

Jonathan wrote that down and said, “Baby carrier, check. Got it. Anything else?”

“No, unless you can think of anything else.”

Jonathan said, “I already have quite a list. Okay, I’m off.” He headed out the door.

While Jonathan was away getting the supplies Martha came back downstairs with CJ. She took Lois by the hand and led her over to the couch and when she was seated handed CJ to her and asked, “How do you plan to encourage him to suckle?”

Lois was intently looking at CJ as she held him. From the tone of Lois’ voice, Martha could tell that her daughter-in-law was on the verge of despair. This whole thing was threatening to overwhelm her. She looked at Martha as she said, “Oh, Martha, I hadn’t even given that a single thought. What should I do?”

Martha placed a calming hand on Lois’ arm as she suggested, “You still have three bottles of breast milk in the refrigerator. Here’s what I would do if I were you. Save those to use as treats. As soon as Jonathan gets back, you’ll have formula to feed him. What you do is when you want him to suckle, once you’re ready, you know, bare breasted, place a few drops of the breast milk on your nipple so that he will taste it. That should encourage him to suck. Every few minutes apply a little more. If you’re careful, those three bottles should last for as long as you need them.”

A look of relief spread over Lois’ face as she took in what Martha was suggesting. She said, “Yeah, thanks Martha! That should work.” She turned back to CJ and lifting him up so that she was looking directly into his face she said, “Did you hear that CJ? Momma’s going to trick you into suckling, but, it’s for your own good. The more you suck, the sooner my milk will come in and the sooner you get the real thing. How about that? Are you going to help Mommy?” She pulled him up into a hug and kissed the side of his face. “Well, there’s no time like the present. Let’s go give this a try.” Lois stood up and put CJ on her hip, went into the kitchen and pulled out one of the bottles and headed upstairs.

As she was passing through the living room Martha asked, “Will you need any help? I might not have done it myself, but, I have been active with La Leche and helped other young women with breast feeding problems.”

Lois responded, “Thanks for the offer Martha, but, we’re going to be away for two weeks and I need to be able to do this on my own.” She looked at CJ and said, “CJ’s going to be a good boy and help Momma, aren’t you CJ?” CJ responded to her saying his name by gurgling and smiling around his pacifier. Lois proceeded upstairs and into her bedroom.

Once she was in her room she closed the door and went over to her vanity and sat in her chair. She laid CJ on her lap while she removed her shirt and then her bra. She took the bottle and by pinching the nipple on it managed to get a few drops out and on her nipple. The cold liquid hitting that tender area had the effect of causing her nipple to harden which she figured was probably a good thing. Lifting CJ up she put him to her breast and immediately he latched onto her nipple and started to suckle.

There had been occasions when Clark, as part of their foreplay had sucked and nibbled on her, but this was different. CJ didn’t have any teeth and she could feel his toothless gums as he squeezed down on her nipple. She had half way expected that once the effect of the cold liquid hitting her nipple had left that it would soften and he would have a hard time but just the opposite happened. As he latched on and started to suck she could feel her nipple become somewhat longer and larger in diameter. She found that she enjoyed the feel of him suckling and thought, <If this is what it means to mother this child, I can’t wait until my milk actually comes in and I can do this for real.> She said, “CJ, It won’t be too long until your efforts will be rewarded. I am looking forward to the day that I’m really feeding you. Keep it up, little guy. Momma needs your help in this.” After a while she applied a few drops of milk to the other nipple and moved him over to that other one to suckle a while. He wasn’t nursing yet, that wouldn’t happen until her milk came in. As it was she spent a pleasant hour with CJ at her breasts. He had recently eaten and he wasn’t really hungry so this was more like her nipple was simply replacing his pacifier for a time. She crooned some little songs to him as he suckled and occasionally he would stop and almost fall

asleep, but even those times he continued to suckle, just not as forcefully. It was a lazy pleasant hour for both of them.

A little while later Clark arrived. He needed some help so Jonathan flew off with him and they were gone for several hours.

When they returned they both had smiles on their faces. Clark said, “All set. You’re gonna love this place. Almost all of the comforts of home. Dad let us have the bed from the spare room to use while we are there. We managed to pipe in running water and we overcame the sanitation issue. We put in a septic system so you’ll have a flush toilet and running water in the kitchen and bathroom. I’ll use my heat vision to cook and my supercold breath for the refrigeration. I picked up a sofa, a table and chairs and miscellaneous bedroom furniture at a used furniture store in San Francisco. I even got a crib and changing table for CJ.”

As he had been going on Lois had been getting more and more excited. She said, “While you were away the first time your dad did our shopping for us and this time I got it packaged up. You’ll need to make a couple of trips. When you’re ready for us, we’ll be ready to go.”

While Clark was ferrying their supplies and luggage to the island, Jonathan and Martha got packed up to return to Smallville. When he was ready to take Lois and CJ his parents were ready to go, so they all said their goodbyes and Clark lifted off with Lois having CJ in the baby carrier on her chest. She was able to stroke CJ’s hair, what there was of it, and talk to him the whole way.

Lois was amazed at the sight that greeted her when they landed. Here was what looked like a log cabin, but this wasn’t something out in the Maine woods, this was bamboo in place of pine and there were palm and bamboo trees all around. Clark had built the cabin in a clearing up from the beach and near to a small lake under a waterfall.

Clark pointed out what he had done. Under the falls he had constructed a railing for use when using the falls to shower. He had run a framework of hollowed out bamboo which acted like pipe to take water from the falls to the cabin where it fed a tank on stilts. This tank supplied water to the sinks in the cabin. If hot water was needed he would use his heat vision.

Lois took CJ out of his carrier and handed him to Clark, “Here ya go, Papa. Take junior so that I can get comfortable. As soon as Clark had CJ Lois removed the baby carrier and then started to unbutton her blouse. Once the blouse was off she reached back to unhook her bra.

Clark looked at her and asked, “Should you do that in front of CJ?”

She gave him a look and said, “CJ and I have had a very pleasant hour with him suckling so it’s not like I’m showing him anything he hasn’t seen before.” She finished taking off her bra and then started on her pants as she said, “Besides, we have a doctor’s order that says you owe me two more romps before the day is over.” She pushed her pants off, wiggling her hips in order to do so, leaving only a thong.

She said, “Okay, while you hold him, I’m going to take that onesie off of him. All he needs is his diaper.” Once she had that off of him she took CJ in her arms and held him close to her chest. She said, “Your turn.”

Clark spun and when he stopped he was standing there in his red briefs. Lois licked her lips and asked, “Where’s the crib?”

He replied, “In the bedroom, through that arch.”

“I need to put him down for a nap. We could try out the bed.”

She led the way to the bedroom, Clark just couldn’t resist and since he was behind her he put his hands on her cheeks and squeezed. She jumped and looking back over her shoulder said, “Ooooooo, you want to play, huh? Well it looks like we’ve come to the right place. After we play some I’m going to want to try your shower.”

She put CJ down in his crib and turned to her husband and

asked, “Do you like my choice of attire? Or should I say, lack there of?”

With a distinct leer he said, “I love your choice. Brown is your color.”

Surprised she said, “This thong is red.”

With an arched eyebrow he asked, “Who said anything about your thong?”

With a chuckle she said, “Oh, so you want me to change?”

Kneeling in front of her he grasped the waist band of the thong and started sliding it down her long legs kissing her belly as he did. As his hands reached the floor she lifted a leg out of the thong and this was what he had been waiting for. After a period of marital intimacy Lois rolled off of Clark and they lay in each other’s arms for a while, cuddling.

After a time Lois said, “Now, I want to try that shower of yours.” Lois went over and picked up the sleeping baby and carried him with her as they exited the cabin.

They took the path up to the side of the falls and Lois handed CJ to Clark while she moved out under the falls. The water was cool, but not cold and very refreshing and she enjoyed every minute. When she came out from under the water she took CJ back and Clark got under the water. While Clark was under the falls CJ woke up and Lois was cuddling him to her breast while they waited.

They took the path down and came to a small beach of sorts. Clark used his hands to dig out a small pool to use as a baby bath. Clark used his heat vision to warm the water slightly and then Lois took CJ’s diaper off and gave him a bath. He was cooing and gurgling happily the entire time.

When they got back to the cabin Lois put a fresh diaper on CJ and decided to have another suckling session. Lois pulled a bottle of breast milk from the cooler and Clark sat down to talk with Lois while CJ suckled. She would occasionally apply some of the breast milk to encourage CJ and afterward she gave him a bottle of formula. When he finished this he went down for another nap.

After they were back in the living room they snuggled together on the sofa. Lois asked, “Do you really think this is going to work?”

“I think all we have to do is think back on what Herb said. He said he picked up a happy and healthy little boy to take back to his parents, so, I’d say, yeah, it’s going to work.”

“So far this hasn’t been anything like a chore. I’m really enjoying this time alone with you ... and CJ.”

“I’m enjoying the time with you too, Honey. Just think, we have two weeks alone, together, just the three of us.”

“Once I’m nursing, I’ll be doing all of the feeding, but, until then, buster, we’re sharing the duties. Last night he was a good boy and slept through the night. That was probably because we interrupted his sleep cycle. I would guess that he’s going to be hungry in the middle of the night. I expect you to take care of him for that mid-night feeding. I’ll be doing it all soon enough.”

Clark was chuckling as he said, “No problem. I look forward to the one-on-one time with him, without his mother’s interference.

“*Interference*!!! What do you mean, interference?”

“Oh, nothing, it’s just, if you’re asleep, I’ll be able to start teaching him how to throw a ball.” He was no longer able to keep a straight face as he finished up and started laughing.

Lois joined in and asked, “Don’t you think that is a little premature?”

“You never can tell with these super babies. They could be capable of just about anything.”

“Did Jonathan teach you to throw a ball at his age?”

“I honestly don’t remember. I’ll have to ask him the next time I see him.”

She started making little figures on his chest as she thought and finally voiced her wonder, “Super baby, a *super* baby, *three quarters* super, three quarters *Kryptonian*. How can

that happen?”

“Remember what Herb said, ‘Too much information too soon is not good.’ We’re just going to have to accept that as fact.”

“I can accept it. I don’t have to like it, but, I can accept it.”

Chapter 16 – Success

June 14, 1997

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation — Prime

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After a while Lois said, “Okay, here’s the thing, I’ve been giving this some thought and I think that, just so Lois and Clark being away doesn’t correspond to Superman being away, you need to go back and do some patrols. Now would be a good time. I can relax a while and when CJ wakes up we can have another suckling session. Why don’t we plan on you doing a couple of patrols a day like that?”

“If you won’t mind, okay, but, what if I get tied up with something. Will you be okay?”

Lois moved over and picked up her purse. She opened it and reached inside. When she pulled her hand out she was holding an oversized watch. As soon as Clark saw it he nodded in understanding. She said, “You obviously remember this.”

Clark replied, “Of course, Jimmy’s signal watch. I haven’t seen that in years.”

“Jimmy stopped wearing it when it didn’t appear to be effective. You never explained what happened when he used it. A long time ago I got him to loan it to me, just in case. I don’t know if the hypersonic signal will carry all the way to Metropolis or not, but I have it, just in case.”

Clark spun into his Suit and said, “Okay, this shouldn’t take too long.”

“Hurry back. We’ll miss you while you’re gone.”

Clark started to smile at the use of the plural. He said, “I’ll hurry back to my family.” He stepped out the door and with a whoosh he was gone.

When Clark arrived in Metropolis he did a loop over Suicide Slum and then did a loop around Hobbs Bay before moving over center city. All seemed quiet, perhaps too quiet.

He was flying past the Planet when he heard an alarm suddenly go off. Turning his head he located the source. Changing course he increased speed and swooped down just as a robber was exiting a jewelry store. He had his gun pointed into the store. Clark could hear him saying, “Think you’re smart, setting off the alarm? Take this.” He pulled the trigger.

With a burst of speed Superman crashed through the display window and intercepted the bullet in flight. He reversed course and exited the building. When he did he spotted the robber only a few paces away and running. Superman arced over him and landed in front of him. Spotting him, the crook stopped and not knowing what else to do he aimed and fired, repeatedly, until he exhausted all of his ammo.

When Superman saw him aim his gun he stopped and stood still, deciding that as long as he allowed himself to be the target he could control the situation. As the crook fired Superman’s hands became a blur as he intercepted each slug, snatching it out of mid-air. When the crook had expended his last round Superman opened his hands and allowed the slugs to fall to the sidewalk. With a look of disbelief on his face the crook dropped his gun and put his hands up. The patrolman on the beat came running up. Superman looked around and saw the jewelry store owner running up and said, “I think that jewelry store owner will press charges.” To the owner Superman said, “Are you all right, sir?”

“Yes, I am, thanks to you! If you hadn’t stopped that bullet I’d have been hurt, if not killed. He had aimed right at me.”

Superman said, “I’m sorry about the window.”

“Don’t worry about that! It’s a small price to pay for my life, besides, I’m insured.”

The patrolman put the cuffs on the perpetrator and read him his rights. As soon as he had done this he keyed the mic to his radio and requested a black-n-white to come pick up the prisoner. He left the gun lay where it was until the car would arrive with an evidence kit.

The patrolman said, “Thanks, Superman. He might have gotten away if not for you.”

“You’re welcome. That’s what I’m here for. I do what I can to help.”

“That you do and we appreciate it.”

“I can see that you have everything under control now, so I’ll be on my way.”

As Superman was lifting off the shop owner shouted again, “Thanks, Superman!”

Superman looked back and waved to hi. Then he put on a burst of speed. The people on the west side of town heard a sonic boom as Superman left the vicinity of Metropolis.

When he reached the area of Smallville, Clark checked and saw that his parents had arrived back home safely from Metropolis so he decided to stop. Landing, he spun into his jeans and top and jogged onto the porch. Entering the house he closed the door and walked to the kitchen.

When he entered the kitchen, Martha was surprised and said, “Oh no, what’s happened? Is there a problem?”

“No, no problem. We decided that I should do some patrols of Metropolis so that Superman isn’t away at the same time as Clark Kent. I just broke up a robbery and was on my way back. When did you guys get back?”

Jonathan answered, “Just a little while ago. We got lucky. There was a flight out almost as soon as we got to the airport.”

Clark replied, “I’m glad it went okay. If you guys hadn’t had to pack up and all of that I would have given you a ride back. As I was passing I had an idea, Dad, don’t you have an old generator that the motor quit on?”

“That old rust bucket? Yeah, I still have it. I’ve been thinking about replacing the motor so that it would be available in case a tornado took out the power lines. It’s out in the barn. I’ll show it to you,” Jonathan said as they exited the kitchen door.

“Could I borrow it for a while?”

“Sure, what are you going to do with it? That motor won’t run.”

“I don’t need the motor. I thought that it might be nice to have a power source to recharge our battery operated appliances. I can take a laptop to the island and we can use it to play movies and also type up a diary of our time with CJ so that we could send it back with him when he goes home.”

Jonathan said, “That sounds like a good idea. Let’s go out to the barn and get it out.”

They went out to the barn and after uncovering the generator Clark removed the motor leaving only the generator portion and the armature free. He would be using his hand to spin the armature to generate power.

Spinning back into his Suit he took off and flew back to Metropolis. Landing in the back yard he let himself back into the house. He picked up their camera and a laptop which along with a CD player and a selection of CDs which he placed into a backpack. Closing up the house again, he took off for Smallville. Arriving there he thanked his dad. Picking up the stripped-down generator, he headed for the island again.

Lois was sitting outside the cabin in a lounge chair with CJ at her breast when he landed. Clark set the generator down and just stood there looking at her for several minutes, marveling. It just looked so natural and wonderful. He could feel an outpouring of

love for her because of what she was doing.

His emotions must have been visible because she said, “Yeah, me too. I never would have thought that I’d enjoy this, but I do. It just feels so . . . natural. What’s all that?”

“That’s an afterthought. I thought I’d bring us some entertainment.” He shrugged the backpack off and revealed the camera, laptop, CD player and CDs. “I also thought it would be good to keep a diary of our time with CJ, for us and also so that we’d have something to send back, along with him. We can include pictures as well as notes. I know I’d want something like that if I were in this position.” He picked up the camera and threatened to take her picture, naked with CJ at her breast.

She glared at him and said, “You do that and we might just have to depend on the pills and him sucking to get my milk started. If you were doing all of the processing and printing that might be one thing, but, I don’t want anyone else seeing me like this.”

Clark immediately didn’t care for her veiled threat of “No sex.” So he hastily he put the camera down and said, “I don’t want anyone else seeing you like this either. The camera is strictly for pictures of CJ. Now, if you had your bikini on and were holding him, then maybe. That way we can send pictures along with a diary to his parents.”

“Okay, but only if I get a chance to take pictures of you in your Speedos with him. Tit for tat!”

“Are you sure his parents would want to see pictures of me?”

At the mention of the parents Lois got a look of compassion on her face, “You know, I’m glad you thought of that. I’m sure a diary and pictures would be appreciated.”

That night CJ woke up at about 3:30 AM. Lois woke up and felt Clark’s side of the bed which was empty. She looked over and saw Clark picking up CJ. He said, “I’ll take care of him. Soon enough you’ll have to be the one to feed him in the middle of the night. You go back to sleep.”

“I’ve got news for you, buster, once my milk comes in I will be expressing extra so that you can take care of at least some of the mid-night feedings.”

Giving her a leer Clark replied, “I look forward to it, especially watching as you collect it.”

The look on her face was one of pure love as she rolled over and pulled the sheet over herself. She said, “Thanks.” A couple of minutes later her even breathing told him she was asleep again. He carried CJ into the other room and prepared his bottle. When the baby had finished eating and had been burped, Clark rocked him to sleep and then carried him back and placed him in his crib. Returning to bed, Clark pulled Lois over into an embrace. She mumbled something unintelligible but, didn’t awaken. CJ slept through the rest of the night.

They enjoyed playing with and taking care of CJ, sharing the duties. There were few distractions so they were able to devote a majority of their time to getting to know CJ’s little quirks.

Clark did his daily patrols, not all of which wound up in his having to intercede in problems,

A lot of time was spent on the beach. Lois would lather CJ up with sun screen and Clark would lather up Lois and they would, all three, lay out for a time. Occasionally they would take CJ into the gentle surf to play. They put him on his belly where his hands could just touch the waves as they came in.

Several times Lois put on a dress and Clark flew them to Hawaii for a movie and dinner.

Through the course of the next ten days they maintained an aggressive schedule with CJ suckling more than an hour a day and she and Clark coming together, in more ways than one, many times more than three times a day.

Lois could literally feel the changes as they were occurring in her body. Her breasts were becoming more and more sensitive and both she and Clark could tell that they were enlarging.

Suddenly on the tenth day when she put CJ to her breast for a suckling session she could feel a flow of liquid through her nipples and a look of intense pleasure swept over her features. Excitedly she said, “Clark, he’s feeding! I’m feeding him! It worked, I’m nursing! It feels wonderful. I don’t know if I’ll be able to fill him yet, but, it’s a start. Now, I’m really his mother. Go ahead CJ, take as much as you can.”

Both Clark and Lois were surprised that Lois had an increased appetite for sexual encounters with the successful nursing. It just seemed like nursing and sex went together. Fortunately, Superman was happy to oblige her.

By the time they went home, Lois was able to provide all that CJ needed and Lois was feeling very fulfilled in her role of a nursing mother, something she would never have considered possible, previously.

They returned to Metropolis on Saturday. They evaluated the rooms in the house and decided that the room next to theirs was best suited to be used as a nursery. Lois had CJ in his carrier the entire time they were discussing colors and decorations, deciding on a theme as they looked over the room. Clark wanted a football theme while Lois wanted teddy bears. They came up with a compromise. The lamps and such would be teddy bears, but, the wall would bear a mural of a football team made up of teddy bears with teddy bear fans in the stands.

The first purchase was paint for the walls. Clark taped, spackled and prepped the walls and then painted. He used his heat vision to hasten the drying process and then they went out to purchase the rest of the furniture they would need. By the end of the day the room was all put together. Lois was able to use her new rocking chair to feed CJ and then she changed him and put him down in his own crib for his nap.

Lois just stood in the doorway of *his* room and marveled at his very presence. She looked around and had to chuckle when her eyes fell upon the mural that Clark had come up with. There was an amused look on her face as she contemplated it. The teddy bear quarterback, who was wearing a white Metros jersey, was back with his arm cocked to make a pass while he was being rushed by two teddy bears wearing the green of the Philadelphia Eagles. She flicked the light switch and the night light came on providing a gentle glow. The baby monitor was turned on and she could hear CJ’s gentle breathing on the base station.

Clark stole up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. She leaned her head back against his chest and released a happy sigh. She placed her hands over his and moved them up until they cupped her breasts and then she said, “I’m actually feeding him with these. I’m actually able to be his mother. Do you know how good that feels?”

He gave her breasts a gentle squeeze and said, “I think I have an idea, but, it is impossible for me to really know. I am happy for you. What you have with him is a very special relationship, unlike anything I could ever have. I can change him, burp him and play with him, but, I could never feed him. That is something only you can do. I’m happy for you, that you can do this for him.”

“It really is special. It makes me feel so ... fulfilled ... as a woman. I really hope that he is ours, that we can have children. I know he’s ours, but only for a little while. I have to look forward to the day ... the day that we can have our own, if that day ever actually happens.”

“Honey, he has to be proof that we can. Look at him. He looks just like my baby pictures with one exception. He has your smile.”

Lois giggled and said, “Yeah, he kinda does, doesn’t he?”

“Come on; let’s let him get some sleep.” Clark took her hand and led her to the living room. They settled on the couch and Lois snuggled up to him as he played with her hair.

Lois asked, “What are we going to do when it’s time to give him up?”

“Well, when Herb comes to pick him up we just hand him over so that he can go home. We aren’t going to have to worry about that for a while. We’ve only had him a couple of weeks. We have plenty of time for that.”

“But, what if we really get attached to him? I mean, I can feel this connection, this bond that is forming. Every time I put him to my breast it gets stronger. It’s going to get to the point that I’m not going to want to give him up.”

“Honey, we can’t afford to get that attached. Sooner or later, he has to go back to his parents. We have to maintain some distance.”

“I don’t see how I’m going to be able to do that. Every time I feed him ... that’s me that he’s drinking ... me he’s feeding on ... my body that is sustaining his life.”

“Yeah, I can see that, but, we still need to keep a distance.”

“I can’t. I just won’t be able to. It’s just too much to ask.”

Suddenly they both became aware of tiny baby snores coming out of the monitor. Lois pointed at the monitor and said, “Listen to that. That’s our son. I don’t care what Herb says, that has to be our baby.” She saw the look on his face and she said, “I know, we can’t be sure. He might not be. It might just kill me if he isn’t. Now that I’m feeding him, he just has to be mine.”

“Lois, Honey, you know that isn’t possible. He belongs to someone else. When the time comes he will have to go back to them.”

Resignedly Lois said, “I know, I just hope I can do it. What are you making for dinner?”

“How about spaghetti with meatballs?”

With a wicked little grin Lois asked, “Sounds good to me, but, are you sure you want to make pasta? You know what that does to you.”

He gave her a leer as he said, “Yeah, well, we are back to work on Monday so we need to taper off but we don’t need to stop cold turkey.”

Chapter 17 – Back to Work

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation — Prime

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It was a typical Monday morning at the Daily Planet, controlled chaos. Perry White was out of his office, in the bullpen shouting orders when everyone heard the ding of the arriving elevator.

Perry was expecting Lois and Clark to be back from their unscheduled vacation and he was ready to tear into them for taking off so abruptly, no warning, no explanation. He knew that there must be a good reason and he was hoping that they had been doing an off the cuff investigation. If they hadn’t been, they were sure going to get a piece of his mind.

At the sound of the arrival of the elevator everyone turned to see who the occupants were. Secretly, or maybe not so secretly, everyone was hoping that it would be Lois and Clark because ever since they had disappeared Perry had been really out of sorts with everyone. He had been demanding big stories from everyone and unfortunately, the Star had been scooping the Planet routinely in their absence. So it was with breathless anticipation that everyone turned to face the elevator.

When the doors opened the first one out of the elevator was Lois looking tanned, fit, relaxed and very happy.

There was an audible sigh of relief from the staff.

Then Clark stepped through the doors and the sigh turned into a gasp as they saw the baby car seat and diaper bag that he carried.

Perry was the first one to vocalize his surprise, “What ... in ... Elvis’ ... name? Clark, what do you have there?!?”

Clark looked down and said, “What, what do I have? Oh, this? It’s just our baby.”

Perry was dumbfounded. He dropped the papers that he was holding and in a strangled tone asked, “Baby???” He turned to Lois and gasped out, “Lois, Honey, how did you keep this a secret? Usually, something like that, well, it’s kinda hard to hide, if you know what I mean, and you guys have only been gone two weeks. The last time I checked it took a lot longer than that.”

Lois, with a look of contrition said, “Yeah, really it does, we took a shortcut.”

Perry was still reeling as he asked, “Shortcut, how can you shortcut something that takes nine months?”

Lois asked, “Can we go into your office? Have we got a story for you.”

They moved into Perry’s office and Clark put the car seat on the corner of Perry’s desk.

CJ and awakened now that the motion had ceased and he was starting to look around at these new surroundings. When Perry bent over him he started to smile and his pacifier fell out. Before Lois or Clark started the story Perry just stood over the car seat and peered at the child it contained. He gave him a very close appraisal. He looked back and forth between the child, Lois and Clark. Eventually he stood back and said, “I don’t know how you did it, but, there’s no question, this is your child. I can see both of you in his features. Clark, he has your eyes, definitely. Lois, he has your mouth and your smile. Some of the weirdest things have happened to the two of you but this tops them all. How in Elvis’ name did you shortcut the nine month term of a normal pregnancy. Now, don’t tell me that this child is a clone.” Perry snapped his fingers, “Did your friend Herb take you away and then bring you back after you delivered?”

CJ started to fuss. Lois said, “I think he’s getting hungry. I need to feed him.” Clark moved over and started to unbuckle his safety straps while Lois delved into the diaper bag and pulled out a drape. While Clark was lifting CJ out of his seat, Lois snapped the drape around her neck. Then she started opening her blouse and nursing bra. Clark handed CJ to Lois and she took him under the drape and put him to her breast.

Perry was dumbfounded by all of this. He said, “That does it! As far as I know you need to deliver a baby in order to breastfeed one. Come on, ‘fess up. How did you do it?”

Lois replied, “That’s what we thought, too. It turns out that with the proper supplements and, um, activity, any woman can bring on her milk and nurse a child. That was why we needed the two weeks. We had to work on, uh, things, so that I could nurse him.” They could all hear the slurping sounds CJ was making while he nursed. “As you can see, it worked.”

Clark jumped in and said, “To answer your question, no, he’s not a clone. That’s for sure. Actually, he belongs to my cousin and his wife.”

Lois picked up the narrative, “You see, they’re medical missionaries and they are on a mission trip. They decided that it would be too dangerous to take CJ with them so they asked us to take care of him.”

Perry was still marveling at the fact of Lois nursing and asked, “Why do you have to nurse him? Why not feed him formula?”

Lois had prepared for this question and had come up with an easily accepted and almost completely true answer, “He’s allergic to formula. Besides, I like to feed him. It makes me feel, I don’t know, fulfilled, as a woman. If we ever have children of our own, I’m definitely breastfeeding them.”

“How is this going to affect your time on the job? What if you have to go on a stake out? What if you have to go out of town?”

Lois replied, “We plan to put him in the daycare on the second floor. Whenever I need to feed him, I’ll just go down. If we have to go on a stake out, we take him with us in his car seat,

if we have to go out of town, same thing. It’s not like I’m home bound just because we have a baby. There are other women working here that have babies. Come on, Perry, we can handle this.”

Perry double pointed at her and said, “Okay, but, you just remember, you’ve got somebody there depending on you. Don’t go jumping in without checking the water level. You hear me?”

Lois was moving CJ over to the other breast as she rolled her eyes and said, “Chief, I haven’t done anything dangerous recently.”

“No?!?!?! What about Mensa or did you forget about him? Well, actually, you *are* right, of course you haven’t gotten yourself in over your head for a *while*, since you’ve been on vacation for the last two weeks and that reminds me I need you two working! I’ve got page space to fill. Get outta here and get me a story.”

Clark asked, “Who handled the follow-up on Mensa?”

“Nobody. That’s why I need you guys back. We’ve been running wire service leads to fill space.”

“What about Ralph or, or, or, Jimmy?”

“Ralph? Really? Come on, I’d give it to Jimmy before I’d give that to Ralph. I’ve got him on the dog show. He just finished the car and boat shows. He’s even screwing those up.” Perry started shaking his head. “I wish there was some way to get rid of him, but, with his uncle on the board, there’s just no way.”

Clark said, “Okay Chief, we’ll get on it.”

Lois pulled CJ out from under the drape and readjusted her clothing. Lois was wishing that they had taken some time to pick her up some new blouses. Since she was nursing, she really needed to wear button up tops and with her breasts enlarged, she was straining the buttons on what she was wearing. Clark placed CJ back in his car seat and he promptly fell asleep. After buckling him in Clark picked him up and headed out to their desks. Lois finished buttoning up and removed the drape and put it back in the diaper bag. Picking that up, she also headed out after Clark. She turned to Perry as she was about to exit the office. She said, “I’ll contact my snitches and see if they have heard about anything.”

Perry said, “I hope they have something for you.”

When Lois got out into the bullpen she couldn’t even get near her desk because of the crowd of people around it. Diane and Denise from research, Jimmy and Eduardo, and even Steve from Sports were all around oohing and aahing over CJ.

Ralph was an exception. He was on the outskirts and was leering at *her* rather than looking at the baby. Noting how he was looking at her, Lois started intensely regretting not having gotten the larger blouses.

Ralph said, “Hi Lois, lookin’ good there. I like the new look. Motherhood fits you better than your blouse. Don’t inhale too deeply until I’m out of the line of fire when those buttons go flying. Are you feeding Clarkie boy as well as the baby? You look like you could.”

Lois was doing a not-so-slow boil at his crude comments but before she had a chance to disembowel him, Clark stepped in between them. He said, “Ralph, I think you’ve said just about enough. If I hear any more out of you there will be a sexual harassment charge leveled against you. Your rude and crude comments are not wanted.”

Just then Perry shouted, “Ralph, where’s that dog show report? It was supposed to be on my desk ten minutes ago.”

Ralph ducked away from Clark and headed for his desk.

Clark moved over to Lois and took her in his arms. Lois said, “Thanks, you just saved me from another murder charge, the only difference would be that this one would actually be real.”

Clark kissed her forehead before he started chuckling and said, “He was right about one thing. We do need to get you some new blouses.”

Lois buried her head in his chest and asked, “Can we stop on the way home? I don’t want to wait another day and possibly have to put up with more of that.”

CJ had woken up from his brief nap and was cooing and gurgling and smiling at all the attention and everyone around him was touching his nose or offering their finger for him to grab.

“Definitely. What do you want to do with CJ?”

Just then Denise from research turned to Lois and asked, “Can I take him to my cube and watch him for a while? He’s so cute I just want to love him.”

Hearing this Diane asked if she could have a turn. Lois said, “Okay, you can each have a turn. We need to go down and register him in the day care center. We’ll be back in a few minutes.”

As Denise picked up his car seat she said, “Take your time. CJ and I are going to get to know each other.” She turned away and headed for her desk.

Lois watched her go and turning to Clark said, “I hope I can do this.”

“Do what?”

There was just a touch of hysteria in her voice as she started to babble, “Put him in day care. I mean I know that I need to, but wouldn’t it be just as good if I kept him here in his car seat, here by my desk? I could watch him myself and if I need to feed him, I could just take him into the conference room, no, too many people go in and out of there, I know I could take him into the ladies room and feed him there. I wouldn’t even need the drape; I could take him into one of the stalls, and, and then that way he’d get the attention that he needs from his mother and not some stranger who doesn’t care if he lives or dies. I mean, he could be pushed off in a corner somewhere and nobody would check on him. He’d be crying his little eyes out wanting his mama and nobody would even think to come and get me and when we got there to pick him up he would be dead.” Lois grabbed the lapels of his jacket and almost wailed, “We can’t let that happen! What kind of mother would do that to her baby, let someone kill her child like that? Only one that doesn’t have a motherly bone in her body and couldn’t care less if her child lives or dies. Well, I care and I’m not about to let those people down there kill my baby. Clark, we have to do something, we can’t let that happen to our baby! We have to save him!”

Clark pulled her into an embrace as he said, “Lois, calm down. Nothing like that is going to happen to CJ.” He lowered his voice to just above a whisper and said, “I would never allow anything like that to happen. Remember, I can keep an eye and an ear on him all the time.”

Lois had been sobbing after her rant and slowly she started to settle down and she asked, “You promise?”

He held up his hand in the Boy Scout salute and said, “Super scout’s honor. I’d never let anything happen to CJ.”

Lois sniffled a couple of times and said, “Okay, but, I’m going to hold you to that buster,” as she poked him in the chest to emphasize her point. “Let’s go downstairs and get him signed up.” She looked over at Denise’s area only to see Denise bending over the car seat, unbuckling CJ’s restraints so that she could lift him out and actually hold him. Lois didn’t budge until she had assured herself that Denise was holding him properly. When Lois heard him cooing and gurgling happily she finally turned. Grabbing Clark’s tie, she started dragging him toward the elevator as she said, “Okay, let’s get this done, before I change my mind.” Clark had to almost run to keep up with her. As they neared the elevator she released his tie and he smoothed it back down, tucking it in under his jacket.

Lois hit the button to summon the elevator and while they waited her eyes were glued to CJ.

When the elevator arrived they got in and as the doors closed Clark hit the button for the second floor. When he turned back around to her he could see tears in her eyes. He put his arms

around her and asked, “What is it, Honey? Why are you crying?”

“Oh, Clark, This is the farthest I’ve been away from our baby since we got him. My arms ache to hold him.” She reached up and brushed away a tear as she said, “I can do this. Really, I can. I have to.” She straightened up and put on a brave mask.

When they arrived on the second floor, Lois exited the elevator with a purposeful stride and headed directly for the day care center. Clark held the door for her and ushered her in. She moved over to the counter and addressed the receptionist, “We need to enroll our baby.”

The receptionist recognized Lois and asked, “I’m Georgiana, aren’t you Lane and Kent?”

Lois smiled at this recognition and said, “Yes, we are.”

Georgiana said, “I’ve read everything you’ve written. That recent story about Mensa was something.”

Thinking back on it Lois said, “Yeah, that story sort of came to us instead of us finding it. That was just before the baby arrived.”

Georgiana had a surprised expression as she asked, “I remember seeing you in the lobby and I don’t remember you being pregnant. You recently had a baby?”

Lois hesitated, “Well, yes and no. I mean, no, I wasn’t pregnant and yes, we have a baby.”

Georgiana brightened and said, “Oh, I get it, you adopted. How wonderful for you.”

Lois had a funny expression as she replied, “Well, not exactly. We didn’t adopt, we are acting as guardians for Clark’s cousin while his parents are away. We need to enroll him in the day care. If you don’t have any openings, we’ll understand. We’ll just wait for an opening.”

Lois’ hopes were dashed when Georgiana said, “Oh, no, we have openings. How old is he? What’s his name?”

“His name’s CJ and he’s about four months old.”

Georgiana’s face lit up, “Ooooo a real little one. I bet he’s a cute as a button. How soon do you want to bring him down?”

“Uh, well, you see, it’s this way. We brought him in with us today and this is the first time and everyone in the newsroom is taking turns with him. I guess we could bring him down tomorrow. I’ll need to come down and feed him.”

Georgiana was taken aback with this statement. She said, “That will be okay, we can feed him. What formula are you using?”

“Well, you see, that’s the thing, I’m breastfeeding him.”

“You did say that you didn’t just give birth, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then ... how? I didn’t think that was possible.”

As she replied Lois looked at Clark and shared a secret smile, “Neither did I, but, I found out differently. I’ll bring a supply of breast milk for him if we will be gone on a story.”

Georgiana was surprised by the breast feeding, but, accepted it as fact. The evidence was very obvious. She could see the buttons on Lois’s blouse straining to keep it closed.

Lois noted her staring at her enlarged bust and turning to Clark said in an exasperated tone, “We definitely are stopping on the way home for me to get some new tops.” Turning back to Georgiana she asked, “Okay, where are the forms we need to fill out?”

Georgiana handed her a clipboard with the forms on it. Lois took a form off the top and handed the clipboard back. She said, “I’ll take this with me and fill it out. Clark can bring it back down later. I want to get back upstairs to CJ.” She turned to Clark and said, “Let’s go, partner.”

They both exited and headed for the elevator. He said, “Let’s take the stairs.”

She responded, “Huh, why?”

He pointed to his ear and she nodded her head. They changed direction and as soon as the door had closed behind them he picked her up and super sped them up to the bullpen floor.

As they were approaching the door Lois started to hear CJ crying. She rushed through the doors and almost dashed down the ramp as she headed for Denise's desk. Denise was holding CJ and bouncing him trying to get him to stop crying. As Lois approached she said in a tone calmer than she felt, "CJ, CJ, mama's here darling." She reached for him. As soon as CJ heard her voice he stopped crying and looked toward the sound of her voice. When he saw her he started to smile and coo again.

Seeing how he was responding to Lois' voice, Denise shifted him so that Lois could take him easily and she relinquished her temporary charge. As Lois took him she gave him a kiss on the cheek and pulled him into a tight embrace. She was saying, "I know baby, I know. Mama's here now. How is mama's boy?" She turned to Clark and asked, "How am I going to be able to do this? He wants to be with his mama. He's not going to be happy down there in the day care. Isn't there some other alternative?"

Concerned about just how this was all going to play out he said, "I don't see any alternative. We're going to have to at least give it a try. Tell you what, why don't we take him down there after lunch? That way he'll only have to be there a few hours. In the mean time, why don't you let Denise try again? You'll be right here."

With a hurt expression bordering on panic Lois looked up at him.

Clark looked at her, trying to encourage her and nodded his head in Denise's direction. Reluctantly, Lois pulled CJ up and gave him another kiss and as she was handing him back to Denise she said to him, "Mama's going to be right over there, okay? You be a good boy for mama and let Denise take care of you for a while, okay?" Reluctantly, she handed him back to Denise.

Denise smiled and said, "I think he'll be okay. Give it some time."

Lois nodded her head and turned away, at least her body turned away. Her head stayed turned so that she was watching CJ. When she bumped into a desk she realized that she needed to pay attention to where she was going.

Clark took her hand and said, "Come with me." He started to lead her to the conference room.

She started to object so that she could move to her desk, but, Clark kept a firm hand in the small of her back directing her to the conference room. When they entered the room he closed the door. Lois stood there staring out the window until, with a snap, Clark closed the blinds then she looked at him with a hurt expression. She started to complain, but he stopped her by gently placing a finger up in front of her lips. He said, "I think I have an idea what the problem is."

She retorted, "Oh, great, now you're also a child psychologist. Okay, I'll bite. What do you think the problem is?"

Clark pulled her over and indicated that she should sit in a chair. Once she was seated he said, "I think that the problem is separation anxiety."

She spluttered, "Separation anxiety?!?!?! Then we can't put him in the daycare! I need to keep him with me." She started to stand up.

Clark gently put a hand on her shoulder to keep her in the chair as he started to chuckle.

"What are you laughing about? It's not funny. Why should he be forced to go through that?"

"I wasn't speaking about CJ, Honey. I was talking about ... you."

She spluttered again and said, "*ME*? What do you mean?"

"I think that you're afraid to let anyone else take care of him and he picked up on that and reacted to your unease."

She gave that some thought and then said, "Okay, maybe, but, I just thought of something else. What if somebody notices something? He is a superbaby, after all. What if somebody notices something ... different about him?"

"Lo - is, you've seen my baby pictures. You've talked to my

mom. Mom and Dad didn't know that I was anything other than a normal child until my powers started to come on and that wasn't until I was about ten years old. Nobody is going to notice anything. You have to let go and you can't let CJ know how upset you are leaving him. He's a smart little guy. He'll sense that there is a problem. He won't know what it is, but, he'll know you're upset about something and he'll react, just like he did earlier."

Clark moved over and peeked through the blinds to see Denise holding CJ and nuzzling his belly and he could see him laughing as a result. He called Lois over and said, "See? He's just fine. Let's let Denise have him for an hour or so. I don't want to strain Perry's patience too far, after all she does have a job to do and it isn't being a baby sitter. Then we can let Diane have him for a while. Let's let him get used to some other people while we are here to watch over it."

"Oh, I guess we have to, don't we."

"Yes, we have to. It's the only way we will be able to do our jobs, unless you want to become a stay at home mom." He smiled as he watched her reaction. She was actually seriously considering his suggestion. Finally, the tug of war ended and she nodded.

She said, "Let's let him get used to other people. That is the only way I'll still be able to work." She peeked out through the blinds. She saw Denise apparently singing to CJ. She turned back to Clark and said, "Do you think he'll remember me?"

He put his arms around her from behind and soothingly he said, "I'm sure he could never forget you. Just wait, you'll see." They stood there for several minutes watching Denise with CJ. Finally Clark asked, "Ready to get back to work?"

She turned in his arms so that she was looking up at him. She nodded and said, "I guess so. How do you always know just what to say?"

He kissed her and said, "Just lucky I guess. It also helps that I know you so well."

She nodded and stepped back slightly. She said, "Let's go, partner. We've got work to do." She turned to the door and opening it led the way back to their desks.

Chapter 18 – The Werewolf Robber

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

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As she was about to sit down she saw Denise holding CJ and moving his little hand in a waving motion and she heard her say, "Look CJ, there's mommy! Wave to mommy!"

Seeing that Lois got a pleased smile on her face which almost morphed into disgust as she reached to turn on her computer, muttering, "Ugh, two weeks of e-mails and voice-mails to catch up on."

After a while Clark came over to her desk and asked, "Anything earth-shattering in your e-mail?"

"A couple of notes from Bobby and one voice-mail from Henderson. You?"

"About the same. What do you want to do?"

She asked, "Could you start the follow-up on Mensa? I'll call Henderson and Bobby and see what they have for us."

"You got it." Clark returned to his desk and started making some calls to MetGen, Metropolis prison and the police, following up on Mensa.

Lois called Bobby first. "Hi Bobby, Lois, whatcha got for me?"

"Lois, I thought you'd dropped off the face o' the Earth. Where've you and that husband of yours been?"

"We just needed some time off."

"How's the baby?"

Lois was flabbergasted! “Whaa?? How, how did you know about him?”

“Oh, it’s a boy? I didn’t know that. I have my sources. You should know that by now.”

“Well, Bobby, you have succeeded in surprising me.”

“Anytime, Lois, anytime. I guess you’re calling because of my messages. Shortly after you guys disappeared, a series of strange robberies started happening. This guy has attacked and robbed a number of women but only a couple have even gotten a look at him. They have a partial description from them. Based on that description they’ve started calling the guy the Werewolf Robber. I really don’t have anything concrete on him, just that I think he’s from LA. The cops out there were closing in on him so he took it on the lam. Like I say, he showed up here just under two weeks ago. You may want to talk to Metropolis’ finest for more detail.”

“Thanks Bobby, Check Burger Palace later. There’ll be a gift certificate waiting for you.”

“Thanks Lois! Say hi to that husband of yours and take care of that baby. Bye.”

“Bye, Bobby. Thanks.”

Before calling Henderson she checked with Clark. “How’s the follow-up going?”

“Not really anything there. Mensa is still practically catatonic. He apparently lost most of his memory when the Bummer-Be-Gone malfunctioned. He’s been in the hospital ward of Metropolis Prison ever since. What’d Bobby have for us?”

“He said that there’s someone called the Werewolf Robber who came here from LA.”

“Mensa’s going to be a dead-end. We might as well work on that.”

She lowered her voice and asked, “Why didn’t you know anything about him? You were doing patrols.”

He replied in the same hushed tones, “I was only here for short periods a couple of times a day.”

“Okay, I’m going to call Henderson. You want to listen in?”

With a chuckle he said, “Are you kidding? I wouldn’t miss it. You and Henderson get along so well.”

She arched an eyebrow as she said, “I just like to keep him honest.”

“Lo-is, he’s the most honest cop we know.”

“Yeah, and I want to keep him that way.”

While he laughed out loud, she picked up her phone and dialed a number that through frequent use she had long ago memorized. When the phone was answered she heard, “12th Precinct.”

“Lt. Henderson, please.”

“Hold on.”

There was a series of clicks, then, “Homicide, Henderson.”

Lois said, “Bill, Lois.”

She could hear the surprise in his voice as he said, “Lois as in the famous Lois Lane?”

“Yeah Bill, Lois Lane. What do you have for me?”

“You’re finally returning my call? I left that message almost two weeks ago. Where did you go?”

“We took a couple of weeks off so that we could get to know our baby.”

It was a good thing that Bill was just reaching for his cup of coffee to take a sip when she dropped this bomb because if he had just taken a sip it would have been all over his computer monitor. He spluttered, “Baby??? Did you say, baby?”

“Yes, Bill, I said baby.”

Bill’s surprise was in his voice, but it became evident that her was teasing her as he continued; “Let me get this straight. Lois Lane, *the* Lois Lane that works at the Daily Planet, the one married to Clark Kent, that Lois Lane said that she has a baby. This isn’t someone impersonating her voice and pretending to be her just to give me a hard time?”

“Yeah Bill, it’s really me and yes, I said baby.”

“The Lois Lane that I know would never speak a sentence having her name and baby both in it.”

“Bill, people can change, you know.”

“I’m just having a hard time believing that the Lois Lane I know could change that much. How did it happen? Well, besides the obvious.”

“It’s a long story Bill. Clark’s cousin’s family was going on a medical mission and they asked us to take care of their baby for them while they were away. Soooo, instant motherhood.”

Lois couldn’t see it, but she could just imagine Bill shaking his head as she heard him sigh, “Leave it to Lois Lane to figure out a short cut to motherhood. I’ll bet you’re obsessing over the child, not wanting to let it out of your sight.”

Lois started to flush and sputtered out, “No, no, no I’m not! Not, not really, no. Well, maybe a little.” She could hear Bill laughing on the other end as she tried to defend herself. It didn’t help any that Clark, who had heard every word, was grinning from ear to ear at the banter. She elbowed her husband as she glared at him. Returning to the conversation, she asked, “Well, what do you have for us?”

Henderson’s teasing tone changed to one of seriousness as he replied, “Okay, I guess you can take only so much truth. Shortly after the two of you disappeared a crook showed up. He has an unusual MO. Only picks on young women, mostly waitresses. It hasn’t crossed over to homicide as yet, but, the way he’s going, it might not be long. You need to talk to Inspector Backstran. Ed Backstran over at Broadway Division. He’s Chief of the Robbery detail. Ben Romero, Sergeant Ben Romero has been working the case. He can fill you in on the details.”

Lois had been writing as Bill had been speaking. She said, “Thanks, Bill. We owe you one. Ever since we got back, Perry’s been on our case to get him a big story.”

The easy banter stopped as Bill’s tone became serious, “You want to know how to repay me? Keep your distance on this one. You have a baby to worry about now. It’d also be nice if you’d bring him by some time so that I can get a look at him.”

“We’ll do that. Thanks Bill. Bye.” She hung the phone up.

Clark could almost literally see the wheels turning in her head as she placed the phone in its cradle. He said, “No. Now Lois, Bill had a point. We have a baby to consider now. What if you got hurt?”

She lowered her voice to a whisper only he could hear, “How could I be hurt with Superman watching over me?”

He also lowered his voice as he responded, “What if I’m called away for an emergency?”

“Then I get to practice my Tae Kwan Do.” She put her hands on her desk and pushed herself back in her chair and stood. She headed for Denise’s desk and checked on CJ. He wasn’t making a fuss but when he saw her his smile got a lot bigger. She looked at him and asked, “How’s my baby? Are you being good for Auntie Denise?”

Denise smiled and said, “He’s a good baby. I remember when Ben was this age. He fussed a lot.”

Lois asked, “Do you want to give Diane a turn?”

Denise looked at CJ as if to say that she didn’t but then thought better of it and said, “Yeah, I guess I need to. I’ve got work piling up. Here you go.” She shifted him around so that Lois could take him.

As soon as CJ was in Lois’ arms she could feel him relax as if he had been tense the entire time Denise had held him. She rubbed his back in a soothing motion, in a way that she had learned he liked, and decided that she would need to talk this over with Clark later. She carried him over to Diane’s work area and asked if she still wanted to hold CJ for a while.

Diane readily agreed and took CJ from Lois’ arms and started getting to know him.

Lois walked away and CJ started to fuss. She turned back

around and talked to CJ, “It’s okay little guy. It’ll only be for a little while. I’m not going anywhere. I’ll be right over there.” She patted his tummy which elicited a smile and said, “Now, you be good for Auntie Diane, okay?” She turned away again and this time when she walked away, CJ was okay.

When Lois got back to her desk she looked up the number for the Broadway division and called.

“Broadway Division. How may I direct your call?”

“This is Lois Lane with the Daily Planet. Inspector Bill Henderson suggested that I call Ed Backstran. It’s about the Werewolf Robber.”

“Hold please.” There were a series of clicks and then finally, “Backstran.”

“Inspector Backstran, Lois Lane, Daily Planet. Bill Henderson said I should call you about the Werewolf Robber.”

“Lois Lane, huh? Look, I know all about you and how you get in the middle of our investigations.”

“Yeah, well, I’ve helped Bill more times than I can count.”

“To listen to him you’ve been more problem than help.”

“Bill and I have a complicated relationship.”

“I’ll say. Okay, whaddya want to know?”

“Can we come see you? We’d like to get as much detail as possible about this case.”

“How about 10 AM tomorrow?”

“Ten will be fine. We’ll see you then, inspector.”

After Diane had had CJ for a time Lois reclaimed her son and took him into the ladies room to breastfeed him. When she came out she said to Clark, “That’s a relief. It’s a good thing he was hungry. I was starting to feel uncomfortable. How are we going to do this? I need to feed him every three to four hours or I start to hurt.” As Lois was carrying him back to the bullpen CJ had fallen asleep so Lois put him back into his car seat and buckled him in.

“That’ll be one of the nice things about having him in the daycare center. All you need to do is hop into the elevator and in a few minutes he’s being fed and you are getting relief.”

Perry opened the door to his office and saw Lois and Clark at her desk talking so he called them. He watched as Clark picked up the car seat and carried it with him as they moved to the office.

Once they were inside and the door closed Perry asked, “Okay, what do you have to work on?”

Clark said, “I started the follow-up on Mensa, but that looks like a dead end. He’s in the hospital and it looks like he will be there for the foreseeable future. We thought we’d work on the Werewolf Robber. We have a meeting scheduled with the police for ten tomorrow.”

“Yeah, the Star has done a couple of hit pieces against the police about that. You guys weren’t here and I didn’t have anyone I could assign it to. Eduardo has been on assignment and Jimmy went along to get pictures. I couldn’t trust it to Ralph. That boy could screw up a . . . well, you know what I mean. Okay, keep me posted.” He had been eyeing CJ asleep in his car seat and said, “Alice and I are going to have to have you guys over for dinner so that Alice can meet CJ. What are you doing Friday?”

Lois laughed and asked, “Don’t you think you ought to check with Alice first?”

Perry looked like a wily fox as he replied, “I’ll have you know that I already have. Can you make it?”

Lois looked at Clark and smiled as she said, “Sure Perry, we’d love to.”

Perry hadn’t taken his eyes off of CJ the entire time they had been talking. He said, “How much more do you need to do to get ready for your meeting tomorrow?”

“We should make a few more calls and plan our questions.”

“Why don’t you just leave him in here with ol’ Uncle Perry for a while? You can go make your calls and I’ll watch him for you.”

Lois said, “Why, Perry, you old softie! I never knew you

were into babies.”

“It’s been an awfully long time since either one of my boys was this age.”

“Okay, we’ll leave him with you. Let’s go partner and let Perry have some one-on-one time with his honorary nephew.” They were both chuckling as they left his office.

After they had finished their preparations they went back to Perry’s office to retrieve CJ. Through the door Lois could see Perry playing peek-a-boo with CJ. CJ was squealing with delight. Perry had his back to the door so Lois opened it quietly. She pulled out her mini-camera and when the flash went off Perry realized that Lois had caught him at an unguarded moment. Lois chuckled and said, “I’ll have Jimmy print this up so that we can post an 8x10 on the bulletin board.

Perry huffed at her and then asked, “Everything ready for tomorrow?”

“As far as we can be. We’ll have to just wing some of it.”

“Okay, that’s settled. Why don’t you two get out of here? I’m sure there are still some things you need to do because of him that can’t be done while you’re around here. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

Chapter 19 – The Werewolf Strikes

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

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The next day they went by the Planet and dropped CJ off in the daycare. Lois spent a few minutes with him, comforting him and reassuring him as she handed him over to Brenda, one of the workers. The night before she had expressed some milk and gave that bottle to Brenda who put it in the refrigerator. Lois said, “We expect to be back shortly. We’re just going over to Broadway Division to see Inspector Backstran. I’m probably going to want to feed him as soon as we are back.”

When they presented themselves at Broadway Division the desk sergeant sent them back to Inspector Backstran’s office.

After introducing themselves, Lois pulled out her notebook and a sharp pencil while Clark started the interview. “We just got back from a vacation and we would like everything you have on the Werewolf Robber.”

“Okay, well, it appears as though he came here from LA. He gave the LAPD fits for over a month. They felt they were getting close to him when he relocated. Now he’s our headache.”

Interrupting her note taking briefly, Lois prompted, “What’s his MO?”

“First off he steals a car. Then he parks in the street. He waits for a young woman to come along. It’s usually between 2 and 5 AM, when the clubs are closing. Most of the girls are still in their wait staff uniform. He grabs them and puts his hand over their mouths so that they can’t call for help. He must be exceptionally strong or else he’s just skilled at picking defenseless women. Anyhow, he drags them to the stolen car and renders them unconscious by beating them severely. He doesn’t just knock them out; he beats them to a bloody pulp. Almost all of them are still in the hospital recovering. Some of them will require reconstructive surgery. He robs them of their cash and jewelry then he dumps them. Most of the time he doesn’t even stop the car when he pushes them out. Invariably in addition to injuries already sustained the girls are injured more when they are dumped. The last one hit her head on the curb. She’s still unconscious. She may not make it. This guy works fast. She was number 18 in just under two weeks.”

Clark was having some difficulty controlling his anger, mostly at himself for not being here when the perp had been doing his damage. He asked, “Have any of the victims been able

to give a description?”

“Yeah, that’s how he got the moniker — Werewolf Robber. A couple of the girls have recovered enough to give a description. There was also an independent witness to the last assault. One of your Daily Planet newsboys was out on his corner waiting for his delivery of the morning edition. He saw a blue Ford drive by and dump the girl. He saw her being pushed from the car, hitting the street and bouncing and rolling until her head hit the curb. As he started to run to her aid the car did a ‘U’ turn and came back at him. The kid jumped up on the sidewalk behind a light standard. Because of the light he got a good look at the perp. Here, here’s an artist’s sketch.”

The picture he handed her looked like a cross between the Lon Chaney Wolfman and Michael Jackson’s Thriller character. Long hair, lots of facial hair, slightly pointed ears, hairy hands on the steering wheel and an almost animal snarl at being unable to run down the witness.

Lois shuddered involuntarily and handed the drawing to Clark. She asked, “Is it a makeup job or is that his natural look?”

“That’s something we need to find out. It could be a disguise. For all we know he could be your partner here in make-up. No offense.”

Lois said, “Trust me, it’s not Clark.”

“Honestly, I didn’t think it was. I was just trying to make the point. This description is consistent between what we got out of a couple of the victims, those that got a look at him before they were knocked out and what we got from the newsboy.”

“No leads other than this drawing?”

“Nothing. Either he turns into the Werewolf when the sun goes down and he holes up during the day or he puts on the disguise, if it’s a disguise, just before he starts his activities.”

Clark asked, “What about fingerprints from the cars?”

“Nothing. Clean as a whistle.”

Clark followed up with, “Wouldn’t that lend credence to the supposition that he could be wearing gloves that look like hairy hands?”

“Yeah, we thought of that too.”

Clark said, “That would lend some weight to the disguise theory, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, but we can’t make that assumption. He could simply be very good at wiping the surfaces to eliminate fingerprints.”

Lois chimed in with, “Bottom line ... you don’t know.”

Backstran agreed, “We don’t know.”

“What have you done so far to catch him?”

“This will have to be off the record. We don’t want to let him know what we are doing.”

They both nodded their agreement.

“We started with increased patrols, extra cars, calling in off duty personnel. Nothing. Now we have police women out pretending to be waitresses on their way home. Each one is followed by plainclothes officers in shifts. We’ve been doing this for a week. He must have a sixth sense about our decoys because he’s passed every one of them up in favor of the real thing.”

Just then his phone rang. Picking it up he said, “Backstran. Ah, Romero. What d’ya have? Uh huh. Another one? But, it’s broad daylight! That doesn’t fit the MO. Oh, I see. Where?” He scribbled and address which Lois read upside down and copied. It was a street address near Centennial Park. “Who found her? Uh huh. ID? Uh huh. Have you followed up? Uh huh. Condition? That’s a shame. Okay, make a full report when you get back.”

Lois asked, “What was that inspector?”

“That was Sergeant Romero. It was apparently another victim of what is now the Werewolf Murderer. Some kids found a woman’s body near the jogging track through Centennial Park. Very badly beaten. Dead. She must have been there since last night, or rather early this morning. She was dressed as a waitress. Ben found her ID and followed up. She was a young woman, just over thirty. She has, uh, had ... had ... three small children. She

was so badly beaten she was hardly recognizable.”

Lois and Clark were both badly shaken by this revelation. Lois looked at Clark and said, “We need to do whatever we can to catch this guy.”

Clark only nodded.

Turning back to Backstran, Lois said, “Okay, thanks, inspector. Please keep us posted on any new developments and anything we can print.”

“The department is coming under tremendous pressure. Everyone from the Commissioner and the Mayor on down through city councilmen are demanding that we get this guy. I just got authorization from the Chief to request assistance from the State Police and the Sheriff’s office. We plan to spread a dragnet across the city. By the way, I was just giving you a hard time earlier. After your call yesterday, I talked to Bill. He reassured me that you are the most fair in your reporting of any reporters in the city. The people at the Star have been raking us over the coals over this. Whatever we get I’ll make sure you have it.”

Clark reached for his hand and said, “Thank you, Inspector. We always try to be fair and impartial, reporting the news as factually as possible.”

As the Inspector was shaking his hand he said, “I trust Bill’s judgment. He said you guys were okay and that’s good enough for me.”

Lois also shook his hand and said, “We’ll try to live up to your trust.”

The first thing Lois did when they got back to the Planet was to feed CJ then she joined Clark upstairs.

She plopped down in her chair and said, “Well, I guess it’s going to work out. He was fine. He was happy to see me but he didn’t make a big fuss when I left.”

“See, I knew it would work out. Now you don’t have to worry so much.”

“I guess.” She looked over at the conference room. Seeing it was empty she said, “Let’s go into the conference room.” She picked up her notes and headed in that direction.

Once in the conference room with the door closed Lois asked, “Well, what do you think we should do?”

“I could fly extra patrols. He strikes usually between 2 and 5 AM. That’s why I missed him while we were on vacation. My patrols were almost exclusively during daylight hours.”

Lois said, “I think I need to go undercover.”

Clark had more than half expecting her to suggest that. Thinking about the danger and also about the added responsibility that CJ represented he shook his head no as he pointed out, “Lo-is, what about CJ?”

“We can make arrangements for my folks or yours to watch him while we’re out. You could fly your parents in for a few days until we wrap this thing up.”

Knowing Clark as she did, she could see that this didn’t satisfy him. His body language told the story. He was frowning and then he forgot himself and did something he usually reserved for when he was in the Suit. He crossed his arms and in an exasperated tone asked, “A few days? How can you be so sure it will only take a few days? The MPD has been working on this for two weeks and they’ve had their decoys out for a week.”

“Ah, but, there’s the difference. They had a plainclothes detective trailing their decoys. He probably saw them and shied away. You, my dear husband, will be out of sight, overhead, keeping an eye on me.”

“Like I said before, the flaw in that plan is what if I get called away on an emergency?”

With an air of confidence Lois rebutted, “I could simply defend myself with my karate.”

Shaking his head, Clark said, “No. I don’t think so. He strikes without warning and knocks his victim out before they even know something is happening.”

“Okay, how about this, you can swoop in and pick me up and take me to the emergency so that I can report on it.”

“Then if he is watching and he sees me he’ll know it’s a trap.”

“Ooooo, how many emergencies occur between 2 and 5 AM anyhow?”

“A lot, mostly at other parts of the globe. There’s no way I’d be able to be there for you. I don’t want you putting yourself in that kind of danger.”

“Look, how about we try it for two nights. We’ll see how it goes. If you wind up with an emergency, maybe, depending on what it is you could ignore it.” Lois could sense that Clark was weakening. Just a little more and she would win.

“Look, Lois, let’s start by my doing extra patrols. If that doesn’t work within a couple of days, we’ll try your suggestion.”

“Clark, we’re taking chances with more women’s lives. He’s already killed once. We can’t afford to put this off.”

“Lois, I want to do this my way, at least for a couple of days. I don’t want to take a chance on you being hurt. Remember, we have CJ to think about. I couldn’t take care of him alone.”

“Here’s a case where we have some significant information that helps us. Remember what Herb said? He said that he picked up a happy and healthy little boy to take back to his parents. That means that I am going to be around to feed him.”

“Lois, I don’t think we can make that assumption. You could be badly beaten or even paralyzed in a wheel chair and still feed him. I don’t want that to happen.”

Properly chastened, Lois said, “I hadn’t thought about that, but, we **have** to catch this guy. He’s killed once now and may kill again. We can’t let that happen. Besides, think of the **story** we’ll have.”

“What good is the story if I have to write it because you’re in the hospital?”

“Alright, alright, we’ll try it your way for two days. After that we try it my way.”

His reluctance was evident in his voice as he replied, “Okay. I just hope I can catch him within that time.”

Unfortunately Superman was only a single individual and a single individual, even a super individual, cannot be in more places than one at a time.

The first night into early morning he patrolled during times he would normally have been in bed with Lois. All to no avail. He kept a mental schedule and after the first night they checked with Inspector Backstran and found that while he had been patrolling the downtown area the Werewolf had struck again in the Suicide Slum area. The problem was that the first thing he did was silence his victim. They didn’t have a chance to call for Superman and this only served to increase Clark’s frustration.

The next day the Inspector had some new information for them. “We’ve narrowed down the list of cars that he might be driving. Statistically, 95% of stolen cars, if they are going to be recovered, are found within 24 hours. Two days ago the list was six vehicles long. This morning’s report has three of those vehicles having been recovered. We are looking for a dark blue Ford sedan, a yellow import convertible or a late model gray Ford Mustang convertible. We have alerted all of our prowling cars and all beat cops to be in the lookout for any of those cars. As soon as one is spotted they will call in with its location. This gives us a better chance of nabbing this guy.”

The second night Clark made an error in judgment and concentrated his time in the Suicide Slum area. The Werewolf struck again, this time downtown.

The next day Clark flew Martha in to sit for CJ. Lois had been expressing extra milk so that there would be a supply, just in case.

That night as Lois was donning her disguise as a waitress she said, “Two nights ago, Suicide Slum. Last night, downtown. I

have a hunch that he will hit Hobbs Bay soon. What say? Shall we stake out the Hobbs Bay area?”

Clark replied, “I guess that will be as good as any area. We really have no idea where he will strike next.”

When Lois finished putting on her costume they went into the living room where Martha and CJ were. Lois picked up CJ and said, “Okay little guy, you be good for Grandma, you hear me.” She pulled him into a tight embrace and kissed him several times.

When Lois took CJ, Martha got up and pulled Clark aside. In a very intense voice only he could hear she said, “Can’t you talk her out of this?”

“I’ve tried, Mom. She insists on doing this.”

“Mind if I try?”

“It’s your funeral. Go ahead.”

Involved in holding CJ and loving him, Lois wasn’t paying much attention to what Clark and Martha were doing. She was actually worried about this mission. She was more worried about this than any other assignment she had ever gone on. The reason was CJ. What Clark had said had really hit home. How would she be able to take care of CJ from a wheel chair? She tried to hide her apprehension behind a cheerful façade. Just as Martha returned from her talk with Clark, Lois gave CJ another kiss and handed him to Martha.

When she did, Martha spoke up, “Lois, Honey, are you sure you want to do this?” Seeing Lois’ look of determination she continued, “I mean, I guess you feel you need to, but what about CJ. If anything happened to you ... what would happen to him?”

Lois replied, “Martha, I appreciate it that you are concerned about me, but really, I **can** take care of myself, and besides, Clark will be watching over me. What can happen?”

“Then I guess there’s no talking you out of this?”

“No, Martha, we need to do this. Too many girls have been hurt for us to give up now.”

Turning to Clark and putting on a brave front she said, “Let’s go catch us a murderer,” and with purposeful stride she headed for the back door.

As soon as they were outside they moved to the sheltered spot in the back yard and they took off and headed for Hobbs Bay.

Lois knew one of the cafes in that area and she went in to talk with the proprietor. After she had explained why she was there he was very cooperative. She actually worked a shift as a waitress. At 3 AM after clean-up had been done she, along with the rest of the wait staff, left. Most of the girls walked together to a nearby parking lot where they all entered a couple of vehicles in which they had car pooled and drove off. Lois started walking the other way down the street.

Knowing the man’s MO she knew that he would either be in a car, try to snatch her and force her into the car, or else the car would be parked and he would be lurking nearby ready to grab her and drag her to the car. Her self-defense training told her to walk on the side of the sidewalk near the street. That way, if he was lurking in an alley or doorway he would have to cross some open space to get to her, giving her a chance to prepare to defend herself.

She walked a circuitous route which took her into some sparsely lit areas. She was constantly on the lookout for the three suspect vehicles.

It was about 4:30 AM when she heard footsteps behind her. She was instantly on alert but she maintained her pace, trusting her husband to intercept any trouble. She could hear the footsteps getting closer and closer and then suddenly they stopped. Startled by this outcome she stopped and turned to see if it had been her husband that had intercepted the man. What she saw however, was a rather large individual who had stopped at a shop a short way behind her and he was opening the door. She looked at the sign and saw that it was a bakery. She breathed a sigh of relief as she realized it was just the baker there to start the day’s baking to

prepare for the early crowd.

She turned on her heel and resumed her journey. She had been walking for over an hour and was very thankful for the foresight she had used in selecting her footwear. She was wearing comfortable walking shoes as part of her waitress role and not a pair of heels. She continued walking. She walked until 5:30 AM when she whispered, "I'm going to duck into this alley. Come pick me up. I need to go home. It's past time for me to feed CJ."

She walked into the alley and Clark was already there, waiting for her. She threw herself into his arms and said, "I don't think he's going to show. Let's go home."

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than he picked her up and took off. A couple of minutes later they landed in the back yard and moved to the house.

Martha had already given CJ a 3 AM bottle so Lois expressed some milk to take the pressure off and they all went to bed.

CJ awoke at 7:30 and a bleary eyed Lois got up to feed him. As soon as he was done she put him down for a nap and she went back to bed. A little later in the morning Clark called Perry and explained what they had done the night before and Perry told him to take the day to recover.

When Lois got up they called Inspector Backstran and were told that the Werewolf Murder had struck again, this time in the Suicide Slum section. The girl was seriously injured but she would be okay.

Disappointed at her perceived failure, Lois said, "Well, I guessed wrong. I think we need to repeat in the same area. If we move he could go into Hobbs Bay when we move away from there."

Clark replied, "Okay, after all, you're the top banana."

She smiled and poked him in the chest and said, "Just you remember that and we'll do just fine." Then she broke down laughing at the old joke. He always knew how to lighten her mood.

A little later in the morning they had a call from Inspector Backstran. "Clark, a report finally made it to my desk. Last night a woman walked to a local post office box to mail a letter. As she was turning to return to her apartment our subject pulled up and tried to grab her. She got lucky. The pavement was uneven and he tripped on the broken sidewalk and she was able to run into her building. There's one good reason to thank the city for being derelict in their duty of repairing the infrastructure. Anyhow she called in to report the incident. It was our man all right. The nice thing we got out of it was a description of the vehicle. He's driving the gray Ford Mustang convertible. Now we know what to look for. We are putting out a description to all officers, uniform and plain clothes, to be on the lookout."

Clark said, "Thanks, Inspector. We will withhold that information until you have him so that he doesn't know that you have a description of his vehicle. None of our snitches had any information. If we hear anything, we'll let you know."

Chapter 20 – Winner and Still Champ

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

Prime

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That night Lois went back to the café and worked a shift. At 3:00 a.m., when the clean-up was finished, they all left and again the rest of the staff stayed together to the parking lot while Lois headed off on her own.

About 4:30 Lois saw a gray Ford Mustang convertible parked down the street in front of her. She was instantly on the alert and started scanning the area. She saw an alley adjacent to where the car was parked. She continued walking hoping that the Mustang driver hadn't noticed her hesitant step.

Her nerves were at fever pitch. She knew that she was only seconds from the confrontation. She thought about CJ. When she did she almost turned around and ran. Almost, but, not quite. She stole her nerves. She had to do this; after all, she was Lois Lane. She had to put this scum behind bars before he hurt or killed any more women. <Besides,> she thought, <I've got the best backup possible.> Nodding to herself her steps firmed up and with deliberation she moved ahead.

Afraid that if she turned her head to look into the alley she would give herself away, she started to cross the alley opening. She concentrated on her hearing and was rewarded for her effort. She heard a heavy shuffling tread which rapidly turned into a run. She turned her head when she knew he was nearing and seeing him barreling towards her, she spun to her left which initially took her into the same direction of travel as her assailant.

Seeing this, her assailant tried to put on a burst of speed thinking this was going to be a simple foot race. He saw her veer to the left as she continued her spin and he tried to change his direction but his bulk was such that quick movements were not possible. His rush carried him beyond her. As he was passing her she completed her spin which took her to his left side, beyond the stretch of his arms and performed a snap kick taking him in the side of the near leg, at the knee. His leg collapsed and he fell forward on his face. Unnoticed by Lois, just as she unleashed her kick, Superman landed behind her. Lois danced around the man like a prizefighter in the ring. Her hands were clenched into fists and were up in guard position. As he started to get up she kicked him again, this time knocking his arm out from under him causing him to fall on his face again.

Superman crossed his arms over his chest and simply watched.

Her assailant was still on his belly, but he reached with his right hand and pulled a sheath knife out and rolling over, attempted to threaten Lois with it.

Lois closed with him and used her feet again. The kick impacted his arm between elbow and wrist sending the knife flying. It impacted a telephone pole about ten feet away with a solid thwack and embedded itself in the wood.

After kicking the knife away she danced away again and flipped her head so that her hair swished around and fell back out of her face. He snarled an invective and this time reached for a gun.

Before it cleared its holster Lois closed with him again. This time her kick took him under the chin. His head snapped back and he lost all interest in the conflict as his gun went flying from his nerveless fingers.

Lois danced over and kicked the gun out of reach. Once she had done this she suddenly realized that Superman was there acting for all the world like this was a spectator sport. She stopped and put her hands on her hips and asked, "Well, are you just going to stand there?"

He gave her that megawatt smile and said, "You're doing just fine all by yourself. I just like to watch you work."

She gave him a hard stare and reaching into her pocket pulled out her cell phone and dialed 911. "911. What is the nature of your emergency?"

"This is Lois Lane. I just caught the Werewolf Murderer."

She instantly had the dispatcher's attention. She asked, "Location? Are you hurt? Do you need an ambulance?"

"Bay Street half way down the block from Windsor. I'm not hurt, but he's a little the worse for wear. I don't think he needs an ambulance, just a police car." Before she was even finished, she heard the dispatcher on the radio sending the police. Lois added, "You might want to send Bill Henderson and Ed Backstran." Lois could hear sirens in the distance and approaching.

The Werewolf came to and started to stir and Lois moved over and kicked him again, this time in the stomach. He let out a grunt of pain and said, "Superman, don't just stand there, do

something! Save me from her.”

Superman could hardly keep a straight face as he replied, “You brought this on yourself. I think she has made a Citizen’s Arrest and who am I to interfere in the course of justice?”

The Werewolf collapsed back to the sidewalk.

Less than a minute later a black-n-white screeched to a stop. The patrolman jumped out of his car, with his gun drawn. He shouted, “Freeze!” Then he looked around and took in the complete scene. He saw Superman standing off to one side. He saw a petite brunette dressed as a waitress in a fighting stance and a large man sprawled out on the sidewalk. As he started to move over closer he could see the woman relax, dropping her arms to her sides. He addressed Superman, “What’s going on here, Superman?”

Superman inclined his head in Lois’ direction and said, “I think you need to talk to her. She just caught your Werewolf Murderer for you. That’s him on the sidewalk.”

The cop did a double take and asked, “Are you serious? She took him out?”

Superman said, “The she to whom you are referring happens to be Lois Lane of the Daily Planet and yes, I’m serious. She made a Citizen’s Arrest.”

The man held his hands up for the cop to put the cuffs on and said, “Please, take me into custody. Get me away from this b*tch.”

Superman said, “If you have no further need of me I need to finish my patrol.”

The cop said, “That’s fine, thanks, Superman. I think we can handle it from here.”

Superman flew off. A minute later Clark came running up apparently breathless, from running. He gasped out, “Sorry Lois. I had car trouble. What happened?”

“You missed all the action, Clark. Fortunately Superman was here,” her tone began to hold a scolding tone as she continued, “But all he did was stand there watching while I did all the work.”

In a somewhat defensive tone he said, “I’m sure that if there had been any problem he would have intervened. He wouldn’t have let you be hurt. I’m sure he felt that you were competent to handle the situation so he chose not to interfere.”

Just then two more cars pulled up. Out of one stepped Bill Henderson. Ed Backstran exited the other. They both approached slowly, taking in the scene. Bill was shaking his head and chuckling. He said, “Lois Lane, I should have known.”

Ed turned toward Bill and said, “I should have taken your warning more seriously. Now I see what you were talking about.”

Bill said, “I’m curious, but, I’m going to wait until we have some pictures before I satisfy my curiosity.” He turned to the officer and asked, “Did you read him his rights?”

“Not yet. I was told that she’d performed a Citizen’s Arrest. What’s the procedure?”

Bill turned to Lois and asked, “Lois will you turn your prisoner over to MPD?”

Lois got a mischievous look as she asked, “Do I get credit for the collar?”

Bill chuckled and said, “I should have known. Yeah, we’ll give you credit for the collar.”

Lois jumped up and down and clapped her hands. After a few seconds she stopped and said, “Yes, I turn my prisoner over to the MPD.” Then she got an ornery look and said to the officer, “Read him his rights and book him!”

Bill, Ed and Clark all started laughing. Lois said, “I’ve always wanted to say that!”

Bill nodded to the patrolman and said, “You heard the lady, uh, arresting officer. Read him his rights and book him.”

More black-n-whites and a few plain cars had been arriving all the time this had been going on. The officers had all exited their cars to see what was happening.

The patrolman told the man to roll over on his stomach and put his arms behind him. He cuffed him and then helped him to stand. While Lois, Clark, Bill and Ed stood there as witnesses the patrolman read him his rights and then assisted him in getting into the black-n-white.

Lois called him over and said, “Over there, in that telephone pole you will find the knife he pulled on me and over by the wall you’ll find his gun.”

As she was saying all of this Bill and Ed had startled expressions. Bill was the first to speak, “He pulled a knife and a gun on you? Why didn’t Superman do something?”

Her expression was one of self-satisfaction as she said, “He didn’t want to spoil my fun.”

Bill nodded to the patrolman and said, “Evidence kit. Collect everything.”

As the patrolman was going into his trunk for the evidence kit he was looking at Lois with even more respect.

Bill turned to Lois and asked, “When can you come in and give us a statement and the whole story? I can’t wait to hear the details.”

Lois said, “Clark and I will stop on our way in to work. Considering the time, that won’t be until afternoon. We’ll bring CJ with us. The story might be in the afternoon edition before we get there. I’m going to file it as soon as we get home, but, it’s after the morning edition deadline.”

Bill chuckled and said, “I can’t wait to read it. Okay, I’ll look for you tomorrow afternoon.”

Clark put an arm around Lois and they started to walk away. Bill stopped them and asked, “Can I give you a lift home?”

Clark said, “Thanks Bill, yes you may. I’m sure Lois has walked enough for one night.”

Lois and Clark amused Bill by discussing the write-up of the article that they would be submitting to the paper while he drove them home.

After he dropped them off, they thanked him and went on in. Lois headed for the computer while Clark went to check on CJ. He was fussing so Clark picked him up and carried him downstairs. When CJ saw Lois he settled down.

Holding out her hands, Lois said, “There’s my boy. Come to Momma.” Clark handed him over and Lois prepared to feed him. While she did that Clark typed up the article. When she was finished she handed CJ to Clark so that he could burp him and she proofed the article. After making some minor additions she sent it off to the Perry’s e-mail account.

Finally, at 6 AM they put CJ back in his crib and they went to bed for a few hours sleep.

The next afternoon the headline of the Daily Planet read: “Werewolf Killer Nabbed”

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

“The so-called Werewolf Killer was arrested in the early hours of the morning. The individual was captured while attempting to assault and rob what would have been his twenty-first victim. He was subdued and a Citizen’s Arrest was performed. The individual was held until the police arrived and assumed custody. ...”

Early that afternoon Lois, Clark and CJ entered the Twelfth Precinct and were immediately sent back to Bill Henderson’s office.

It took some time to get down to the business of the arrest because Bill was becoming acquainted with CJ.

Finally Lois asked, “Okay Bill, what do you have for us?”

Bill reached into his top drawer and pulled out a manila folder. He handed it to Lois who opened it and started flipping through the pictures it contained. Clark was looking over her shoulder and he let a whistle escape from between his teeth.

The first few pictures were of the man at his initial entry. In the light of day he looked even weirder than he had when he had

accosted Lois. He had black hair which was rather long. He had bushy eyebrows and a full beard which was long and scraggly. His hands were also covered with hair.

The next pictures were of a clean shaven individual with close cropped blond hair. Lois blurted out, “What’s this?”

Tapping the picture with his forefinger Bill said, “That’s your capture. After we took the first series of pictures we discovered that all that hair was false. The guy had been an actor and was down on his luck. He used his skills at makeup to change his appearance when he went out to assault the women. He had been thrown over by a girlfriend who happened to be an aspiring actress working as a waitress until she would be discovered. He was attacking waitresses to get back at her and robbing them because he didn’t have a job. Problem is, he may try to cop an insanity plea.”

Lois looked over at Clark with a look of pure fury then looked back at Bill, “Don’t let him get away with that Bill. There’s no excuse for what he did to those women.”

“We may need you to testify when this goes to trial, if it ever does. His public defender has already been to see him. I know this guy. My guess would be that he’ll dissuade the perp from the insanity plea because if he tries that the state will go for capital murder, first degree. In previous cases that this guy has handled he has plea bargained to a lesser charge. The state could realistically go for murder one because the death occurred in the course of a felony. That would make the killer eligible for the death penalty. I don’t think his lawyer will want to chance that. He could plead down to second degree and go for life in prison. Okay, so much about him. I need to hear the story. Let me start the tape.”

When Lois finished Bill sat back in his chair and applauded. “Wow, that’s some story. I’ll get it typed up and you can stop by and sign it, oh, how about tomorrow?”

Lois said, “Sure, tomorrow will work.”

Clark started to reach for CJ’s car seat. Bill stopped him and said, “You know Lois, believe it or not, this is the first really important Citizen’s Arrest we’ve had in this city. I’ve heard rumors of a citation and certificate from the mayor’s office. Don’t let on that I told you. Act like it’s a surprise.” Bill held out his hand and said, “Put ‘er there, champ.”

Lois giggled and shook his hand.

Chapter 21 – New Krypton

Lori and Clark, 2090

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Lori knew that sending CJ into the past was the right thing to do. It had to be, since it had been what they had done and she remembered it being done. She wondered why her memories of that time were so fuzzy, but attributed it to all of the memories that had been crammed into her brain as a child by the soul tracker. That didn’t lessen the impact of the loss of her baby. Herb had just stepped through the portal and already her arms ached to hold her baby. She tried to hide her disappointment from Clark, but, he knew her too well and took her in his arms to comfort her. He didn’t need the telepathy to know how she was feeling because he was feeling the same thing. She appreciated Herb’s thoughtfulness in providing the medication to assist in stopping her milk, but, she knew that if not for her invulnerability she would have been in agony stopping so abruptly.

Clark used his Reporter’s Assistant to place a video call to Frank. “Hi Frank, Clark and Lori here.”

They could see a look of surprise on his face as Frank answered, “Well, Clark, I certainly wasn’t expecting a call on

Friday night. This is your weekend off, isn’t it?” They could see a more eager expression come over his face as he continued, “There is only one possible reason that my top reporting team would be bothering me on their time off, you’ve got something big that can’t wait until Monday, don’t you? Come on, don’t keep me in suspense. What is it?”

Clark continued, “Yeah Frank, this is big. We’ve been contacted by representatives of the New Krypton government and they request that we travel there to document the encounter with a new space-faring race.”

Frank was skeptical and Clark could see it in his expression, “Just what does that have to do with Earth?”

“Look at it this way, this could be the exclusive of the century! We will be the only journalists there.”

“Just why are we being given this privilege?”

Warming to the topic now Clark continued, “Back when the New Kryptonians first arrived the Daily Planet was very involved, even going so far as to be the headquarters for the resistance effort here in Metropolis. This is a tremendous advantage! We will not only be able to document this encounter, we can also do some stories of life on New Krypton. It could give our readers a new perspective on them.”

Frank looked thoughtful as he asked, “How can we do this? You say that you’ll be gone for an extended period. How long?”

Stepping into the frame so that Frank could see her, Lori tried to minimize the problem. Putting the best face on it so that hopefully Frank would agree, she replied, “We don’t know just yet, but it shouldn’t be too long.”

Frank kept bringing it back to the practicalities of the situation so he asked, “What about your pay?”

Clark offered, “We can take this as a leave of absence. When we return you can adjust our salary based upon the stories we turn in.”

Frank, still concerned about losing both of his best reporters at the same time, asked, “What am I going to do with the city desk while you’re away?”

Trying to offer an acceptable solution and yet protect their positions, Clark suggested, “You could hire a couple of temps or do a lateral move of a couple of other reporters, with the understanding that those seats are ours when we return.”

They could see Frank’s face as he thought this through before he replied, “I guess I could move Sullivan and Schultz over temporarily. I’m sure they won’t have your style, but maybe they could learn to work together.”

Utilizing the video link to its fullest Lori added hand and arm motions to emphasize her points as she said, “Frank, if this turns out the way we expect it to, it could be Pulitzer material. Just think of it ... a world fighting for its survival and we’ll have a ringside seat. This could be bigger than WW I and WW II and all the other smaller wars we’ve seen put together.”

They could see from his expression that Lori had scored some points. Finally Frank replied, “All right, all right, we’ll make this work somehow. Get back as soon as you can.”

With a sincere look, Clark promised, “We won’t stay away a minute longer than is necessary, count on it.”

With a look of concern on his face, Frank said, “Do me one more favor. Stay safe and by that I mean stay alive. This newsroom wouldn’t be the same without you.”

Lori put her arm around Clark’s and moved in close to him so that they were both in the frame as she replied, “We’ll be back, Frank. Count on it,” before closing the link.

They each packed a few necessities and after saying goodbye to the kids and grandkids they took off for the ship.

The trip to New Krypton was taking longer than Clark had anticipated. The FTL technology that had been developed and implemented for the colony ship was not as advanced as the drive that Jor-El had developed for the small ship he had used to send

Kal-El to Earth.

On the tenth day Ching and Clark were together in a room near the command deck and the topic of the FTL drive came up. Clark said, “I wasn’t aware that the trip between New Krypton and Earth would take so long. What are the distances involved?”

Ching replied, “Why don’t I call in the chief astrogator and our chief engineer? They can probably explain it better than I can.” He placed the call and outlined the request.

When they arrived Clark posed his question, “Is there a way to increase our speed when in FTL drive?”

The engineer explained, “Lord Kal-El, the speed we move when in FTL drive is constant and is determined by the design of the engines. The technology we use warps the space around us at a constant rate allowing us to move between the folds rather than along them. The size of the fold is determined by the design of the engines.”

“What is the distance from the location of Krypton’s star to New Krypton?”

This question was fielded by the astrogator who had come prepared for just such a discussion. He placed a small device on the desk. When activated a small holographic projection of a volume of space appeared above it. As he spoke he hit some keys on a controller in his hand. When he made a final keystroke a pair of pinpoints of light glowed brighter. As they watched the pattern shifted. When they finally stopped he hit another key and a line connecting the two points appeared. After reading the display on his device, he said, “New Krypton orbits the star you call Arcturus. That distance from Krypton is, was 225.8 light years, based on Earth years. In the display I started with a current starmap and moved back in time to Earth date January 1963, which was our launch date.”

“What is the distance from the location of Krypton’s star to Earth?”

He hit a few keys and one of the points of light faded and another lit up. Then the lights shifted briefly. Again a line of light joined the two and after reading his display he said, “That distance would be 227.9 light years, again based on Earth years. I moved ahead to February, 1966 Earth date. Astronomically, the difference in the distances is only approximately 2.1 LY.”

“What is the distance from Earth to New Krypton?”

Making more entries, the astrogator caused the map to shift again. Once the display firmed the first pinpoint had faded and the other two flared brighter and were connected by the line. After consulting his read out he said, “These are New Krypton and Earth at the current time. That distance would be 36.7 light years, based upon Earth years.”

“What will be the duration of this trip?”

“This trip will last 30.88 days.”

“Wow, that long to cover that short a distance? My Earth parents found a flight chronometer in my ship and they told me that it showed a flight duration of 30.25. Presumably this was days and not hours. How does that compare to your drive?”

The astrogator used the device in his hand to do a computation before saying in an awed tone, “That would be 7.53 times faster than our drive.”

“What would be the duration for a trip between New Krypton and Earth with the Jor-El drive?”

After a quick calculation the astrogator looked up in amazement and announced, “Only 4.87 days, twenty-six days less.”

The engineer said, “If that is indeed the case then the FTL drive developed by Jor-El after we left represents a quantum leap in FTL drive technology. The state of the art at that time had power sources adequate to the task of a size to be installed in your ship. The drive unit would have had to be smaller than that which we developed. Our FTL drive occupies a space comparable to a small dwelling and is distributed in compartments throughout the outer areas of the ship so that the warp field is uniformly

distributed. The size of your ship would only require a single field generator. Even so the field generator itself must be very small in order to accommodate your person and the life support systems that would be necessary within so small a craft.”

Ching said, “I’m sure our scientists and engineers would like to get a look at your ship and Jor-El’s drive.”

“Perhaps that can be arranged. We’ll talk more about that later.”

It was apparent that Jor-El, as Krypton’s leading scientist, had made a breakthrough with the new star drive. It was just a shame that he hadn’t had time to build a ship larger than the experimental craft he and Lara had sent off with Kal-El aboard. The fact that their FTL drive was not as efficient and the unknown destination of Kal-El’s ship accounted for the fact that Clark was in his twenties before Zara and Ching had found him. All things considered this trip actually took longer than necessary had they been using Jor-El’s drive.

During the trip Zara, Ching, Lori and Kal spent almost all of their waking hours together. Zara and Ching were bringing Lori and Kal up to speed on the level of preparedness of New Krypton for dealing with the impending threat. Lori had taken the family name of El and was therefore given all of the respect that name afforded as the bond mate of Kal-El.

During one session Ching said, “We have their scout ship. After it fled it was damaged by a collision with a space rock, a large granite meteor. Since the hull integrity was broken the internal atmosphere was released in an explosive decompression. There were no survivors. By salvaging their ship and bringing it to New Krypton we have been able to do some analysis of their systems.”

“They have a FTL drive; however, it is not nearly as efficient as ours which is why we were able to make the trip to pick you up and return before they arrive in our space. We have also determined that at sub-light speeds their vessels are not nearly as maneuverable as ours. From our time on Earth I believe that I can give you a comparison. It would be like a speedboat compared to a tug boat. Their ships are designed for power rather than speed and maneuverability. Their thrust to mass ratio is significantly lower than ours. Their ships tend to be larger than ours overall. They seem to depend more on the FTL drive even in system than using maneuvering thrusters.”

“As for their weapons, they rely on energy weapons which really pack a punch. For defense they have energy shields which are effective against all but our most potent energy weapons.”

Clark asked, “What about projectile weapons? Have you tried them against that shield?”

“Yes, Kal, we have. They are also ineffective. Projectiles do not penetrate the barrier.”

Lori asked, “Do you have an idea as to just how many ships are on the way?”

“Our long range sensors are able to detect a large, a very large mass headed this way. At this distance, however, we cannot determine if it is a single, moonlet size vessel or a cluster of smaller craft.”

Clark asked, “Do you have any way to communicate with them?”

“We have a limited sub-set of their language upon which to base a rudimentary translation. We found some technical manuals and, of course, the markings on the controls on the consoles. Some of those we were able to determine the meaning of by observing the result of activating the control.”

His concern over the situation was evident as Clark asked, “Is there any way to check on the progress made in translation while you have been away? If we could communicate with them we may be able to avoid a conflict.”

Ching replied, “We have two teams of linguists working on the translation. One team is on board and I receive daily updates.

The other team is on New Krypton. They are working on different sub-sets of the language. They will compare notes when we return. The hope is that we will be able to develop a sufficient understanding of their language by the time they are within communications range that we will be able to negotiate with them.”

When they arrived the first thing they did was to check with the linguists still on New Krypton and compare notes to see how far they had gotten on developing a working vocabulary of the alien language and combining their findings. They were disappointed at the limited extent of what had been accomplished. Clark said, “At this rate we might be able to say, ‘We surrender’ when they get here, but then it might also mean, ‘I take mine with sugar’. This is very frustrating.”

While Clark had gone with Ching to see the linguists, Lori had gone with Zara to the residence they would be sharing with them. Zara had given Lori a tour and showed her the rooms that she and Kal-El would be using. It was a suite of rooms consisting of a bed chamber, bath with shower, sitting room and kitchenette. The main meals would be shared by both couples in the main dining room and would be prepared by the wait staff.

After the tour Zara and Lori had moved into a common lounge area which had large windows giving a view of the landscape and part of the city. The city had lofty spires with delicate, or at least what from this distance appeared to be delicate, bridges at upper levels to be used for crossing from one building to another without the necessity of descending to ground level first. There was a total absence of smog so there was a crystal clear view. In the distance, several degrees above the horizon, two moons could be seen. One moon was larger than the other and was about to pass between New Krypton and the farther moon.

Turning to Zara, Lori asked, “I can see two moons. How many does New Krypton have?”

Zara’s reply surprised her, “We have ten moons and moonlets altogether. Some of the moonlets are little more than large asteroids. There are, actually, only six true moons.”

Lori was amazed at how different things looked. She could see the sun riding high in the sky. Its apparent diameter nearly five times that of Sol as seen from the Earth yet it wasn’t any hotter than Metropolis in the summertime. Zara had told Lori that they were currently in what would correspond to late summer, approaching fall although the differences between the seasons were not as marked as those on Earth. It was more like the environment experienced in Central America with the highs and lows only being separated by the equivalent of forty degrees Fahrenheit, the highs being around ninety degrees and the lows being around the fifty degree mark.

Lori was surprised that what she was seeing looked just about the colors she expected even though the sun was a red giant. She had expected reds to dominate. Zara explained, “The human brain, Earth or Kryptonian, is a marvelous device. It takes in the input from the optic nerve and interprets that input based upon the expectations from years of experience. For instance look at your cape. You expect it to be red so you see red. When you look at your uniform you expect to see blue, so blue it is. Compared to Earth as you can see our sun is huge. It is approximately five times Sol’s diameter. That’s why it looks so big, it actually is. Because it is a red sun it isn’t as hot as Earth’s star so even though we are only slightly farther away in our orbit we are still in the habitable zone where we have liquid water which is necessary to the existence of life. Because of the size of New Krypton’s sun we do have some rather spectacular sunsets.”

Lori saw what appeared to be a bird fly by and even though she got a pretty good look at it she thought it looked familiar but, failed to recognize the species. She asked, “What kind of bird was that?”

Zara replied, “That was a Grocker. It is a native species from Krypton similar to your mocking bird even to the extent that it mimics other bird calls. From almost all of the native Kryptonian species we brought with us we have hatched at least a few birds. Even though they are technically wild species, since they were hatched and raised in captivity they are really tame. They depend on us to feed them since there are still insufficient Kryptonian foodstuffs available. We will be negotiating for some compatible female mammalian Earth animal specimens to act as host mothers for our animals. Once we have sufficient numbers of breeders of our own in sufficient quantity the Earth animals will be sterilized and become pets.”

Lori asked, “Why sterilization?”

Zara replied, “Our environment will be difficult enough on adult Earth animals. New born would not survive. We are a humane people and would prefer to have them as pets to euthanization.”

She gave Lori a few seconds to absorb all of this information before she continued, “You see, ours was a colony ship. It was our intent to colonize a new world.”

This was new information for Lori. She asked, “Before your arrival on Earth we had thought that Kal-El was the last survivor of Krypton. How is it that there even was a colony ship?”

Zara decided to give Lori the whole story, “Not all of Krypton ignored Jor-El’s warnings of a core instability. Some of us took him seriously. We had developed a star drive, not one as advanced as the one Jor-El invented, so we built our colony ship.”

Lori interrupted her, “How do you know that the drive Jor-El developed is more advanced?”

“Ching told me about a conversation he and Kal-El had early in our voyage here. They talked with our chief astrogator and made that determination. Our colony ship used cryogenic units, freezing us for the duration of the trip. This reduced the supplies that would be needed to sustain the colonists during the trip. Kal-El’s and my marriage was arranged even before either of us was born. I was actually born three years before Kal-El and due to my rank was selected as one of the colonists. It was deemed that Kal-El was, as a newly born infant, in fact too young to survive the rigors of the trip and so was left behind.

During the trip only a maintenance crew remained awake to watch over the sleepers and the ship’s functions. Those of us that slept did so for three years. In that time the maintenance crew examined and rejected a number of planets as unsuitable for colonization, finally finding New Krypton. They calculated that if we had been able to go directly there the trip would have taken about one hundred-ninety days.”

Zara continued her explanation, “During our earlier visit to Earth we examined Kal-El’s ship and we discovered that it did not have a cryo unit installed. This called for further examination. When we did we found that since Jor-El had also determined that baby Kal-El would not survive the rigors of the cryo process, he had used an alternate method for putting baby Kal-El to sleep. There was an herb found only high in a mountain range in a remote part of Krypton which when crushed produced a vapor like essence reminiscent of Earth’s pine forest odor. This vapor had a unique property. In sufficient concentrations it produced a state of suspended animation similar to hibernation which your Earth bears experience. This vapor had been stored in a small tank and mixed with the air in Kal-El’s ship. The effects of the gas mixture would have been counteracted immediately when his capsule was opened. The fresh, untainted air would have awakened him immediately without the prolonged process we had to go through. Since I was in cryo-sleep for three years Kal-El and I are now the same physiological age.”

“Kal told Ching that his Earth parents found a trip chronometer and from that timer they determined that his flight had lasted only a month whereas ours would have been closer to

a year. That tells us that the drive Jor-El developed is at least ten times as efficient, read that as fast, as ours.”

Zara gave a few seconds so that Lori could digest that information.

Zara continued her narrative, “The team behind the construction of the colony ship knew that the trip could consume a lot of time and that when we arrived at our new planet we would need to Kryptoform it so when they built it they stocked it with the eggs of as many species of native Kryptonian avian, aquatic and reptilian species as we were able to carry. One thing we did not bring were insectoids. They could have become pest species if their predator species were not available, the exception being pollinators. Since we took eggs rather than juvenile or adults of the various species we were able to accommodate almost the entire genome of the planet. The scientists have estimated that it will take some time yet to complete the Kryptoforming of the planet. Modifying the eco-structure of an entire planet is a slow process. We carried considerable quantities of condensed and dehydrated foodstuffs to carry us; however, the trade with Earth has been critical to our survival.”

Thoughtfully Lori commented, “Just about like the biblical story of Noah and the Ark.”

Zara agreed, “Ah, yes. I remember. While we were on Earth that was one of the books I read. I noted that there were numerous similarities between it and the Book of Rao.”

Lori asked, “The Book of Rao. Just how similar is it to the Bible? Is it a guidebook for living a good and spiritual life pleasing to God?”

Zara replied reverently, “Yes, the Book of Rao contains stories which tell us how to live good lives. It also contains a pre-history of our world and a full description of Rao’s time on Krypton.”

Lori was astounded, “Rao lived among the people of Krypton?”

Zara replied, “Yes, he did. The parallels between Rao and the Hebrew Christ are striking.”

Deciding that the discussion of religion could be put off for a later time, Zara returned to the subject of the colony ship. “We also brought with us female ova and male sperm from donors from across Krypton. We will use in vitro fertilization techniques. Once we have a thriving ecology we will be asking our women to act as host mothers so that we can increase the population more rapidly. We have complete records as to the source of the zygotes and the names would maintain the family lineage.”

Zara continued her explanation, “We didn’t limit what we brought to animals; we also brought seeds of plant species. We hope that eventually we will have a completely Kryptonian environment. We have planted many experimental plots of Kryptonian shrubs and trees, both fruit bearing and ornamental and the results are promising. We have also set up sod farms where we are attempting to grow Kryptonian grasses. We have examined the local species and although they are similar there are differences in the native proteins which make them slightly incompatible with our physiology. Don’t get me wrong, they are not poisonous, it’s just that some of the proteins that we require are missing.”

With pride, Zara indicated the shelves that lined one of the walls, indicating the books held there. “These are all classical and scientific tomes which have been reprinted from the archives stored in the ship’s data banks. All of the classical heritage of Krypton survives.”

They returned their attention to the scene outside, looking out of the windows. They stood there for some minutes, in silent contemplation. Before Zara turned to look at Lori, “Fortunately, Earth commodities are sufficiently compatible. Our trade with Earth has been life saving. Once our Kryptonian species are growing in sufficient quantities we will be able to reduce our imports. The problem causing us to rely on trade with Earth this

long is the reduced growth rate we have experienced. Our Kryptonian foodstuffs grow, but not as quickly as they did on Krypton itself. It has taken many years to get to where we are able to start harvesting some foodstuffs and those are being tested to see if the native soil is acceptable.”

“It has taken over seventy years to get this far, but converting a planet, modifying the plants and the animals establishing the new species is a very slow process, especially with a planet as large as New Krypton and will take many more years yet.”

Lori asked, “Why did you choose this planet to colonize? Why not a planet more like Earth?”

Zara replied, “If you had a choice of, oh, perhaps your own neighbor planet, Mars or a more earthlike planet circling Alpha Eridani, which would you chose?”

Lori countered, “That probably isn’t a fair question. Comparing Mars to Earth isn’t like comparing Krypton to Earth. For one thing Mars doesn’t have a breathable atmosphere. It’s too thin.”

Zara pressed her point, “In essence it is. Mars is smaller than Earth so even a non-superpowered individual would have enhanced strength and agility. They might not be able to leap tall buildings at a single bound or be faster than a speeding bullet, but you get the idea.”

Zara continued, “We are used to the environment of Krypton. Our plants and animals were adapted to that same environment. That is why we found a planet that simulates the Kryptonian environment as closely as possible. I’m sure you would do the same, perhaps Epsilon Eridani 4.”

Lori laughed and said, “I think I’ll stay on good old Earth. Epsilon Eridani 4 might be a nice place to visit, but I’m not sure I’d want to live there.”

Chapter 22 – The Defense of New Krypton

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Stepping away from the window and with a gesture, Zara invited Lori to take a seat. She asked, “How many of Lois’ memories do you have?”

Lori replied, “All of them.”

Zara had a worried look on her face as she asked, “Do you remember everything about me and Kal-El?”

Lori tried to put her fears at rest, “I remember that you were forced into a marriage that neither of you wanted because it had been arranged when you were infants. I remember that I got a message that said, ‘In the absence of a member of the house of Ra, you are acceptable’ which was basically, Jor-El’s permission for me to marry Clark, oh I mean, Kal-El. I really need to get used to that, calling him Kal-El I mean. Then you showed up and all bets were off. Ching almost killed himself and Clar, uh, Kal-El, Kal-El, Kal-El, Kal-El. Isn’t that what they say? Say something a few times, over and over. Ching almost killed Kal-El, hah, I got it that time, in his attempt to prove that he wasn’t worthy. I remember Ching smuggling me on board as one of Cla ... Kal-El’s concubines. I remember Kal-El fighting Nor and almost dying along with him when the Earth military used Kryptonite gas on them. I remember Kal-El abdicating in favor of you and Ching. I also remember you being happy that Kal-El released you from your vows. That all happened a long time ago and now you are happy with Ching and I am happy with Clar ... oooohhh, Kal-El. It’s going to take some time for me to get used to that. How have you and Ching been?”

“As you probably know, at the time of our last meeting, as a military officer, Ching, used his military rank rather than his family name. Now he has retired from the military and has taken his family name which is Ka. When we were wed I became Zara

Ching-Ka or simply Zara-Ka. Genealogy is very important to our people. My name means Za of the family Ra married to Ching of the family Ka. We have three sons and a daughter. The boys are named, Ram-Ka, Tel-Ka and Su-Ka while the girl's name is Loka. We wanted to honor Kal-El with one of our children and you with another one."

"Where are your children?"

"They each have families of their own, but, we plan to have a feast once this situation is resolved and you will meet them at that time, if not before. How many children do you have?"

"Kal-El and I only have one, but, as Lois we had eight. I'll give you the Kryptonian names. They are Kam-El, Myel, Dan-El, Noel, Hazel, Zar-El, Angel and Ben-El. They are all married and we have over sixty grandchildren. My sister just married one of our grandsons. We haven't decided on the Kryptonian name for CJ yet. CJ is the nickname for Clark Junior."

Zara said, "Wow, such a large family. Do they all have your powers?"

"All of the children do, yes. Through the use of the pendant, all of the spouses have the powers as well, which reminds me, I have something for you to try." Lori pulled out her 'old' pendant, the one with the single strength Star Sapphire Kryptonite and handed it to Zara.

Zara held it in her hand and Lori asked, "Do you feel anything?"

"What should I feel?"

"Oh, I don't know, a sudden feeling of well being, strength, better hearing, x-ray vision. The same way you felt on Earth under the yellow sun and lower gravitation."

Zara thought and searched herself for several seconds before saying, "No, I don't feel any different."

With something of a frown, Lori said, "That's such a shame. We were hoping that you would get your powers back with that. It looks like it will only work with Earth humans that have been changed by exposure to the Kryptonian aura." Lori took the pendant back and secured it.

Just then Ching and Clark walked in. Each of the men walked over and greeted their respective wives with a kiss.

Zara was shocked, "Ching, in front of our guests?"

Ching replied, "That was a small celebration."

Zara looked at him and said, "Celebrating what exactly?"

Clark spoke up, "We just broke the language barrier. We should be able to communicate with them. We plan to record a message and send a drone vessel to meet them. We just need to decide on the content of the message"

Lori spoke up, "I think that we need to determine if we have a chance against them before we try to communicate with them." She turned to Ching and asked, "What kinds of weapons do you possess?"

Ching started going down a list, "We have some energy weapons. We also have some rather primitive projectile weapons, very similar to what exists on Earth."

Clark asked, "What about missiles, explosives, or atomic weapons?"

"We gave up on reaction drive missiles a long time ago. They are mostly ineffective against FTL drive ships, the same with atomic weapons. They are dependent on a delivery system which would be defeated by a FTL drive."

Lori suggested, "What about placing a nuclear weapon inside a FTL driven ship?"

Ching replied, "The problem of control enters the picture. It would in essence be an unguided missile since any control system would rely on electromagnetic radiation in the form of radio waves of some frequency to deliver the commands. The second the ship went into FTL drive, it would outrun the control signals. Besides, their shield technology would render such a weapon useless."

Lori said, "So much for 'smart' weapons."

Clark asked, "Have you tested their defensive shields?"

Zara answered this one, "Yes, we have had our best scientists studying their defensive shields. They have determined that their shield is proof against any energy weapon currently in our inventory."

Clark asked, "Is it proof against their own weapons?"

The wait staff called them to a meal and they moved into the dining area and continued the discussion over their meal.

Ching answered Clark's earlier question, "Yes, it is. We have been working on some of our ships, installing copies of their shield device. The hope is that if we can field a number of ships that they cannot destroy they may call it a draw and pull back."

Clark asked, "How far have you gotten on the ships?"

"We have one prototype just about ready to test. We determined that they concentrated their shields at the front of their craft. What we decided to do was build a spherical craft and place shield generating units at equidistant points around the craft. The decision to go with spherical craft was actually made in order to maximize our maneuverability. By placing thrusters in all quadrants, at sub-light speeds, we can apply thrust in any direction. With our artificial gravity technology the differing thrust vectors will not affect the occupants. This enhanced maneuverability can be used either in defense or offence."

Lori asked, "What weapons are you planning to mount?"

"We are mounting our most potent energy weapons as well as some projectile weapons. If we can disable their shield the projectile weapons could be effective."

Clark asked, "What kind of projectiles have you tested against their shields?"

"We tried a number of different alloys as well as spent radioactives, such as depleted uranium, since they are the densest, heaviest materials available. All attempts have been futile. The projectiles simply bounce off."

Lori asked, "Didn't you say that the scout ship had been almost destroyed? What did it?"

Ching said, "They had crashed into a granite meteor. Why?"

"Aren't most meteors made of nickel/iron?"

Ching said, "Yes. May I ask why that is of importance?"

Clark could see where Lori was going with this line of questioning and spoke up, "What if their shields are only proof against refined metals? That granite meteor was unusual and apparently it pierced their shields."

It was like a light bulb suddenly went on in Ching's head. He said, "Say, you're right! What if raw materials like granite can pierce their shields?"

Lori spoke up again, "It would be like the biblical story of David and Goliath. We could throw stones at them!"

Zara spoke up for the first time, "How would any stone we could throw pierce their shields and do any damage? It would be far too small."

Clark asked, "Have either of you ever heard of a rail gun?"

Both of the Kryptonians shook their heads while Lori nodded in understanding. Clark proceeded, "A rail gun is a device that uses magnetic fields to accelerate an object to high velocity far in excess of the velocities produced by explosive charges and in space there wouldn't be an atmosphere to slow it once it left the device."

Ching thought he had found a weakness and spoke up, "But, if it is dependent on magnetic fields to cause the acceleration, the projectile would have to be made of iron or steel which would be deflected, wouldn't it?"

"On Earth, there is a French word, sabot, which came into common usage in the twentieth century. It is the root of the word sabotage which came into common usage during World War 2 when the Dutch would use their wooden shoes, sabot, to gum up the works and delay or prevent the production of war materials by the Germans. Later it came into use to describe a shoe which surrounded a projectile. The military took a spent radioactive

projectile of considerably smaller diameter than the gun that would be firing it and created a sabot to go around it which built it out to the size of the cannon. As soon as it left the barrel the sabot fell away and all that was left was the dense core projectile moving with all of the speed and power of the larger round. It would punch through the thickest armor. What I propose is that we create granite projectiles and a sabot of iron or steel. Once the projectile leaves the end of the rail gun the sabot will fall away and the granite projectile will do the work.”

Excited, Ching said, “I’ll put a team on building one right away. Can you give me a rough drawing and a description as to how it works? That would help our engineers get started.”

Clark replied, “Why don’t we finish this meal, then you and I can get together with the engineers and I can go over it with them. Then they can take their own notes.”

Ching raised his glass of Kryptonian wine and said, “An excellent suggestion. To the rail gun and our defense.”

They all lifted their glasses in toast and drank.

After the meal Ching and Clark left to meet with the engineers. As they were leaving Ching said, “We’ll be back later. Zara, why don’t you girls go out and you can show Lori some of the sights?”

Zara looked at Lori and smiled mysteriously as she said, “We may, but then again we may just stay here and have some girl talk. Maybe we’ll compare our husbands.”

Both men were startled by this comment and somewhat apprehensive.

Chapter 23 – A Surprising Discovery

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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When Kal and Ching returned the girls were both curled up on a couple of couches facing one another and chatting amiably.

As they entered Ching addressed Zara and asked, “Okay, so, how did I fare when compared to Kal?”

With a wicked little grin Zara said, “You’re the best husband ever.”

A little downcast from hearing this Kal asked Lori, “I suffered by comparison?”

With a grin that matched Zara’s, Lori replied, “No, we decided that you’re the best husband ever, too.”

Kal and Ching both gaped and asked, “How can that be?”

The girls laughed and Zara said to Ching, “You’re the best husband ever on New Krypton.”

Lori said to Kal, “And you’re the best husband ever on Earth. Now, of course, we might just be a little bit prejudiced on our evaluations, but, then, what wife doesn’t think her husband is the best ever?”

Kal looked at Ching and said, “Well as one best husband ever to another I think we have a couple of terrific wives. What do you think?”

Ching replied, “I would have to agree with that evaluation, but then, we might be a little prejudiced in our evaluations.” They both ducked as Zara and Lori each launched pillows at their respective husbands. Ching was able to dodge his easily but, Kal, since Lori was super powered wasn’t fast enough to get out of the way of the one she launched at him at super speed. He shouted, “Hey, no fair, you’re still super powered!”

Lori started laughing and said, “Serves you right, for making that comment.”

They picked up the pillows and joined their wives on the couches. Zara asked, “Well, how did it go?”

Ching answered, “Kal was very thorough. The engineers have an excellent idea of what they need to do and they think they should have a good drawing tomorrow and a working model

within ten days.”

Lori said, “Isn’t that going to be cutting it kinda close? That’ll only leave about thirty days before they are here.”

Kal said, “We will be working on other items at the same time.”

Ching added, “Tomorrow we’re supposed to test the shield technology. The first spherical ship is just about ready for its test flight. We are hoping that the maneuverability of the spherical design will give us a big edge in the upcoming conflict.”

Kal added, “Also, the linguists are going to be preparing a message for them which will be recorded and placed on a robot craft. We plan to launch that and have it on station in their path broadcasting. We still have to decide on the content. Any ideas?”

Zara suggested, “How about a warning that if they enter our space they invite their destruction?”

Kal replied, “They could perceive that as either a threat or a challenge. That may not be the way to go.”

Lori offered, “How about an offer to simply negotiate?”

Ching replied, “That might be best. Offer to start a dialogue rather than a war.”

Zara asked “Ching, did you show Kal the battle suits that we recovered from that scout ship?”

Ching replied, “No, not yet. We’ve had other things to do. I was planning to show those to him tomorrow.”

Lori asked, “Why don’t you tell us a little about them?”

Ching responded, “Okay, well, these are powered environmental suits. They have an exoskeleton which imparts great strength. There is a small, personal, shield unit located on the chest and weapons mounted on the arms. The whole thing is powered by a power pack carried on the back.”

Kal asked, “How effective is the shield device?”

Ching replied, “Don’t let the size and portability deceive you. It is every bit as effective as a ship based device; it just covers a smaller area.”

Lori suggested, “But does it have the same vulnerability?”

Ching replied, “It should, but, it would be difficult to use the rail gun against an individual.”

Smiling, Lori said, “I have something else in mind. I’ll need to talk to an engineer, a metallurgist, an ornithologist and a geologist.”

Kal looked at his wife with a mystified expression before he said, “That’s an odd mix of disciplines. What do you have in mind?”

Lori replied, “Think back, I think the Emerald Archer is due to make a comeback. I need an engineer to design a new more powerful compound bow and the metallurgist to come up with a metal alloy that will stand up to my super strength. I need the ornithologist to get me some feathers for fletching and the geologist to locate some obsidian, flint and quartz for arrowheads. I’ll also need a lot of wooden dowel rods. Since all refined materials are deflected by the shield I will need arrows made of all natural, unrefined materials.”

Continuing she asked, “The crew of the destroyed scout ship, was there enough left of them to determine their anatomy and physiology?”

Zara replied, “I led that team. We found a couple of individuals that managed to partially don environmental suits before the catastrophe. We have a pretty good idea of their anatomy. It is essentially the same as ours. There is some minor rearrangement of the organs, but, still essentially the same.”

Lori said, “I’ll need a drawing indicating non-lethal, disabling targets on their bodies that I can aim for.”

Zara replied, “I’ll have a med-tech prepare a drawing for you. It should be ready tomorrow.”

Standing, Lori reached for Clark’s hand as she said, “Thanks. If that’s all for tonight I think we’ll head off to bed.”

Following Lori’s lead, Zara also stood as she said, “That sounds like a very practical suggestion.” As she stood up she

reached for Ching's hand.

Each couple went to their own suite.

The next day Ching arranged the meetings that Lori had requested. She explained what she needed to the engineer. The design that came out of the discussion was a compound bow with pulleys for power and other features that gave it more capabilities than any bow heretofore created. At the push of a button, locking pins were released and the bow folded in upon itself into a very compact shape which would fit in a compartment of the quiver. The metallurgist knew of a Kryptonian alloy that he felt would hold up to the strain and when formed into fine wires and braided and twisted into a cord should make an adequate string. The estimated pull would be such that only an individual with super strength would be able to pull it. The speed, the arrows launched from this bow were travelling at close to Mach 1, and the force generated as a result of that speed would be such that it should pierce the heaviest armor.

The geologist knew where outcroppings of various minerals were, quartz, mica schist, obsidian, and flint among others, each of which could be given a fine edge and would make formidable projectiles.

Lori would be depending on her skill with the bow to enable her to hit her target so precisely that she would not inflict mortal wounds.

On the day of the test flight of the spherical ship they were to be on hand. They accompanied the prize crew. They had the best astrogator on New Krypton; his normal assignment was on the palace ship. Ching took command and directed the trip out of the atmosphere with Kal-El as his Executive Officer. The rest of the crew was the cream of the crop as far as the Kryptonian forces were concerned. The senior astrogator, navigator and helmsman from the palace ship were at their stations. Engineering was also the pick of the crews from the fleet.

Ching took his place in the center seat and looked around. Once assured that all stations were properly manned he addressed the helmsman, "Helm – status?"

The helmsman replied, "All systems show as ready, Commander."

The question was understood when he said, "Navigation?"

The Navigator answered, "Course plotted to take us out of atmosphere and to a position five hundred thousand units north of the ecliptic, beyond the orbits of all of New Krypton's moons using conventional power, time to station — seven point five hours."

"Acknowledged." Ching pressed a button on his console activating a communicator. "New Krypton control, NK-SSX (New Krypton Sphere Ship Experimental) ready to commence testing."

"New Krypton control to NK-SSX, you are cleared for departure."

"Helm, initiate. Take us up."

"Aye Sir." The helmsman operated a control.

Kal was a little surprised that there was no sensation of motion. The only way he knew that they had left their berth was the fact that the view screen went to a star speckled black, thanks to the artificial gravity technology.

During the trip to the designated test site they performed system checks and rotated crews so that the primary crew would be fresh when it came time to start the testing.

Once they reached an area away from all planetary bodies they brought the ship to a stop. They checked all power systems to ensure that they were all operating properly.

Ching said, "We are not sure what effect the force fields will have so we have created a relay which will turn the fields on for only one tenth of a second. It was felt that so brief an activation shouldn't result in any possible damage."

Clark said, "I would make the additional recommendation of donning environmental suits, just to be on the safe side."

After these precautions had all been taken the switch was thrown. Apparently nothing happened. Ching checked around and all departments reported that no problems had been encountered. He said, "That would appear to be a successful test. Let's go for a longer period this time." He pushed a button on his command console and said, "Reset the relay for a ten second engagement."

A few seconds later he saw a green light appear indicating that all was ready. He pushed a button on his command console again. This time it was a ship wide call, "Prepare for shield engagement." He released the button and said, "Execute."

There was a moment of disorientation and then it was over. The astrogator shouted, "Lords Ching and Kal-El, we have moved."

Clark and Ching both spoke up at once, "What do you mean?"

The astrogator was busily pushing buttons and reading displays. After several seconds he said, "We have moved approximately one tenth of an orbit away from New Krypton."

"How could that be? We didn't apply any thrust!"

"I don't know sir, but, there's New Krypton, over there when it should be here." He was indicating positions on a 3D holoprojection of a space chart.

Ching said, "Let's return to our starting point."

The crew moved to comply. The ship slowly moved back into position. Once the ship was where it was supposed to be Ching ordered a repeat of the test.

When the test was over the astrogator reported, "The results are identical to the last test."

Ching muttered, "Curious," then louder, "Return to start point." He hit the button on the command console again and said, "Increase duration to twenty seconds."

When he saw the green light he ordered, "Execute."

The feeling of disorientation lasted longer. When the shield effect was turned off again the astrogator reported, "Sir, we have moved exactly twice as far as the two previous tests."

Ching challenged, "Does anyone have an explanation for this movement?"

After a few minutes Ching observed as the assistant astrogator started running some computations. When he finished he had a broad smile on his face as he called the senior astrogator over to show him what he had come up with. The senior astrogator checked what his junior had discovered. Once he had satisfied himself of the validity of his supposition he turned to report.

With a motion of his hand, Ching silenced him. He pointed to the junior and said, "He came up with the answer, let him explain it."

The senior bowed aside and the junior started to speak, "Sir, it was the vector information that was inconsistent. If we had stopped in space relative to the orbit of New Krypton we would be here." He used a glow stylus to indicate a position in the holo-display. "However, we are here." He indicated a position south of the plane of the ecliptic as well as behind the orbit of New Krypton and then continued, "I started to wonder why we would have moved down as it were. Then it occurred to me that not only is New Krypton moving in its orbit, but, our sun is also moving in an orbit around the galactic center. By taking that into consideration the new position makes sense."

Ching put out a general question, "What could have caused us to stop in space while the planets and stars continued to move?"

The chief physicist who was on board offered, "The only thing that could cause us to stop dead in space would be the cancellation of inertia. A body in motion tends to remain in motion, but, that is only when the body has inertia. The corollary is that a body at rest stays at rest until an outside force is applied

to it. I would speculate that somehow the activation of the defensive shields, configured as they are in a spherical pattern somehow negate the property of inertia for all of the mass enclosed in the field. If we were to initiate the field and apply some thrust a minimal thrust should result in tremendous speed because it is being applied to an inertialess mass.”

Ching came to a decision, “We are going to initiate the field and start applying thrust starting at minimum and slowly ramping up the thrust until we are accelerating enough to maintain position relative to New Krypton.”

The crew jumped to their stations. When the panel was all green Ching gave the command to execute.

Ching and Clark followed the chatter between astrogation and helm as they worked together to adjust the thrust. Finally when they were satisfied they gave a report.

“Astrogation reports stationary position, relative to New Krypton. Thrust at twenty-three percent. Velocity approximately 300,000 miles per hour. That equates to approximately 22 percent of light speed. We must be cautious due to time dilation we could be in essence moving forward in time as we accelerate. It would be proportional to the speed/duration interval.”

Ching ordered, “Cut the field.” Abruptly the display on the screens changed slightly. Ching realized that they were still applying thrust so he ordered, “Cut thrusters.” All motion ceased.

He came to a decision, “Navigation, plot a course to take us home.”

After running some computations the navigator replied, “Using conventional power – time to New Krypton – one day seven hours. Using FTL drive – sixty-five minutes.”

Ching ordered, “Helm, initiate FTL, best speed back to New Krypton. Kal, as soon as we get back we need to talk.”

A few seconds later there was the familiar feeling of the FTL drive kicking in. After a relatively short time they felt the return to normal space with the shutdown of the FTL drive. The helmsman reported, “Landing in 25 minutes.”

Chapter 24 — First Contact

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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Forty-five minutes later they were in the office where Zara and Lori met them.

Ching and Clark explained what had happened.

Ching asked, “How can we turn this to our advantage?”

Lori asked, “What would happen if an energy beam or a projectile were sent against an inertialess ship?”

Clark answered, “Projectiles, at least, depend on inertia to cause their damage. I would speculate than an inertialess body would simply react by being moved by the projectile and the projectile wouldn’t penetrate.”

Zara said, “Well, that being the case we can tell that they know nothing of this possibility. If they did then that scout ship wouldn’t have been destroyed by that granite meteor.”

Ching said, “We could use the normal thrusters to propel the ship at tremendous sub-light speed to zoom in on their fleet, fire a few projectiles from the rail gun and flee before they knew what was happening.”

Clark suggested, “That would only work if they were sub-light. If they were using a FTL drive we wouldn’t be able to get near them. You have sensors that detect energy usage such as the thrust of a drive. There is yet another possibility. We could do the same thing we did in the tests. If we know what direction the system is moving and at what speed, we could position ourselves so that if we turn on the shields and stop, the natural motion of the universe will go on around us, and at the appropriate time we cut the shields and we are in front of them. There would be no

use of thrust to give away the ship’s approach. We fire a few projectiles from the rail gun and then cut in the screens again. To them it would look like we zoomed in at tremendous sub-light velocity and then zoomed out again without a telltale drive signature.”

Lori said, “Then we need to decoy them into dropping out of FTL drive while they are far enough away that we can engage them before they are a threat to New Krypton.”

Zara said, “I’ve got an idea. We have the scout ship. Our engineers have been studying their systems. The engineers have already duplicated the stranger’s FTL drive, weapons, communications system and shields. Why don’t we tow it out and turn on its distress signal. That should bring them to a stop to investigate, if nothing else.”

Ching said, “That is a marvelous plan, Zara. By the time they are near the position where we want them we should be able to have the rail guns installed on at least ten of the sphere ships. We should be able to give them a bloody nose at least.”

Clark spoke up, “I’d still like to negotiate with them.”

Lori asked Zara, “Are there any habitable planets in their path that we could put the scout ship on and we could be there waiting for them?”

Zara replied, “There is at least one and it has several moons.”

Lori said, “Perfect. The sphere ships could be concealed on the moons or held on station ready to cut in the shields and go inertialess at a signal if negotiations fail. I can be on the planet with the wreck as a welcoming committee. Can the linguists throw together a translator?”

Clark spoke up, “Now, wait a minute. I don’t want my wife putting herself in danger like that.”

Lori said, “How much danger will I be in? I’m super, remember?”

Clark replied, “Yeah, you’re super, but, I’m going to be there with you.” Clark turned to Ching, “I’ll need one of those battle suits, but, *no* weapons. Just a defensive shield.”

Ching asked, “Kal, are you sure you want to do that?”

“Perfectly. I need to be there with her.”

Ching said, “I mean are you sure you want to go without weapons or a guard detachment?”

“I’m sure. I’m not going there to start a war; I’m going there to prevent one. If I’m armed or if I have a large guard detachment it could be misconstrued.”

“I can see your point. I don’t know that I agree with you, but I can see your point.”

Clark said, “It has to be that way, Ching. It’s the *only* way.”

Preparations were pushed forward. A planet was selected fifteen days travel from New Krypton which lay directly in the path that the approaching fleet would take. The selection was both good and bad. Unfortunately it had an almost white sun so Clark would not have all of his powers; however, it wasn’t a giant world so he would have some of his super strength. This was due to the fact that an individual’s strength is directly proportional to the gravity of the planet of origin. This was demonstrated adequately when Earthmen landed on Luna. The muscles of an Earthman were able to propel him great distances and lift great weights under the conditions of one-sixth gravity.

The atmosphere of the chosen planet was slightly higher in oxygen content and correspondingly lower in carbon dioxide, resulting in a higher barometric pressure at sea level than either Krypton or Earth. This meant a denser atmosphere. The lower CO2 content was probably due to a lack of industry since the planet was uninhabited. This meant that Lori would not need an environmental suit and Clark could forgo the need of a breathing air supply.

Lori received her bow and arrows. She had a variety of arrowheads, all natural minerals. The shafts were of a very hard

New Kryptonian wood similar to oak, but it had a golden hue rather than a whitish color, and they were fletched with yellow/gold feathers from a fowl which was the NK equivalent of a turkey. The shafts were fully a meter in length, similar to the so called cloth-yard shafts used with the English longbow in medieval times and used to such effect by the English bowmen.

While all of the other preparations were in process Lori practiced with her bow. She quickly honed her skill with the new equipment so that she had pinpoint accuracy. Her object was to at most disable without killing. It was important that she not kill any of the enemy. Using this new bow she practiced at long distances. After she loosed a shaft, while it was in flight a distortion wave was evident just behind the arrowhead indicating that the shaft was actually moving at super-sonic speed. Anyone standing to the side, between Lori and the target, would have heard a sonic boom caused by the arrow's passage.

The linguists worked with the computer programmers to produce a translator that would pick up sounds or radio frequency transmissions and convert them to the Lingua Franca used on NK. This was based on English with some of the original Kryptonian product names modified to suit an English speaker since they had become trading partners with Earth. It would also accept input in English and translate it and either vocalize or transmit as the case might be, automatically determining the correct frequency. They prepared two of these devices and made them small so that they could be handheld, one for Lori and one for Kal-El. They also built one into the ship's communications system.

A fleet of ten spherical ships was ready and more were being manufactured. Each was equipped with two rail guns. One unarmed ship, the original NK-SSX was re-designated and prepared to transport Lori and Kal on their mission and to tow the scout ship.

The trap was laid. Five of the spherical ships were secreted on the satellites of the chosen system and five more were stationed at intervals so that they could activate their shields and drop in unexpectedly on the enemy fleet.

Under Kal's direction and orders, the ships practiced their jumps until the crews were operating at peak efficiency. They could activate their shields and cut them, dropping into position within meters of their target, loose several projectiles from each rail gun and jump again with minimum exposure. Kal insisted they practice targeting with the rail guns so that they could adjust their aim to hit a small object at a distance of hundreds of kilometers. The gunners were strongly cautioned to target propulsion and shield units which would disable the enemy craft with minimal loss of personnel. It was fortunate that several of the manuals they had found contained the specs for various types of craft within their inventory. These all indicated external features and locations of beam emitters, shield units and drive pod descriptions and locations.

The world chosen was orbiting a sun which was approaching its final stages of existence. It had already started to collapse in on itself and before many more millennia would become a white dwarf. When that happened, the planets which still encircled it would become uninhabitable. The planet selected was rather earthlike in configuration as far as size and atmosphere. It was warmer than Earth because of its hotter sun which had dried up almost all of the water turning it to vapor in the atmosphere. The air was so thick with moisture that it was almost akin to trying to breathe while underwater; however the higher oxygen content compensated for that fact.

The day finally came. Lori and Kal were on the planet's surface standing near the damaged scout craft. They had triggered the emergency signal when the enemy fleet was soon to be in range.

Kal was an impressive figure clad in his battle suit, his size

and bulk being enhanced by it.

On the other hand Lori was a vision of loveliness, wearing a more traditional Kryptonian gown of white with gold brocade trim. As in the Greek tradition the bow arm was bare and the top had a single shoulder strap. The skirts were long, almost dragging the ground, but layered and with a slit on the left which as she moved revealed a shapely leg. She had on golden sandals, a golden cord held her hair back in a pony tail and she was carrying her bow and arrows. The alloy used by the NK Engineers to manufacture her bow was polished to a bright sheen and was of a golden color. In this gown and carrying the bow and arrows Lori looked like the Greek Goddess – Artemis!

The ruse worked. When the distress signal was picked up the entire fleet dropped out of FTL drive. One craft was dispatched to the surface to investigate. Before it had gone very far the emergency signal was turned off and a message from Kal-El was broadcast, "We of New Krypton greet you. We are a peaceful people and would be desirous of establishing a trading relationship with 'The People'. We are a peaceful people, however, if attacked we are quite capable of and will defend ourselves. My life partner and I are on the surface and we would speak with one of your leaders. We await your response."

The ship that had been on a trajectory which would have taken it to the surface of the planet reversed course and returned to the formation. A little later another ship, this one somewhat smaller, separated itself from the fleet and shaped course for planetfall in the vicinity of the downed craft.

The first individual out of the craft was a warrior in full battle gear. He easily topped Kal's six foot plus height reaching a full seven feet three inches to the top of his helmet. His battle suit would have been intimidating if Kal's hadn't been similar. Unlike Kal, the warrior wore the helmet and the tinted visor prevented Lori or Kal from actually seeing his visage. The visitors had obviously scanned the area and knew that Lori and Kal were alone. The first thing the warrior did was raise his arm, target Kal and trigger his forearm mounted weapon. A bright amber beam of energy burst forth, blinding in its intensity. There was a coruscation of light as the force beam from the weapon impacted the force shield of the battle suit that Kal wore.

Although Kal was confident in the shield device and the fact that he had a significant portion of his normal super strength he braced for the impact as best he could. Even so, when the beam hit him, despite being prepared for it, the force was still sufficient for it to throw him back against the damaged scout craft.

Seeing that the warrior was targeting her husband, super-swiftly Lori nocked an arrow and loosed it, targeting the weapon and striking it after only a brief burst. The arrow went right through the shield as if it wasn't even there and pierced the casing of the weapon, disabling it. The power behind that arrow carried it completely through the weapon and out the other side.

Wishing to eliminate this new threat, the warrior raised his other arm. Lori allowed him to aim at her and braced herself for the impact. He triggered his weapon and again that amber force beam came from the weapon. Lori stood firm holding up her right palm to intercept the beam. Because of her invulnerability and super strength the beam had virtually no effect on her.

Seeing that his weapon was ineffective, the warrior activated a control by flexing a muscle in his forearm. The intensity of the beam increased and it became brighter, rivaling the sun for its brightness. Seeing that it was still ineffective, he twitched another muscle and the character of the beam changed moving through the spectrum of color as the frequency changed.

The beam was being deflected from Lori's invulnerable hand and it was reflected striking a nearby hillside. As it did it created a tunnel and a small landslide. After several seconds when his weapon started to overheat because he had pushed the intensity of the beam to its maximum, he stopped shooting.

As soon as the beam was off, with a look of satisfaction Lori

said, “Okay, now it’s my turn.” Calmly she nocked another arrow and loosed. This arrow took out his other beam weapon.

Lori’s superhearing picked up a high pitched whine emanating from the weapon. She saw the warrior act startled, and then try desperately to remove the weapon, however, the mechanism attaching it to his forearm was stuck and he couldn’t detach it. Lori seeing his desperation used her super speed and flew to him and ripped the device from his arm. Nonchalantly she flipped the device up. She retreated again and took a position between the warrior and Kal. As the weapon was leaving the atmosphere it detonated.

The warrior had volunteered for a suicide mission, but he hadn’t expected his own weapon to be the cause of his demise. When his weapon overloaded he had desperately attempted to remove it. If he could at least get it outside of his shield he should be okay, but his attempt was doomed to failure. He realized that he was running out of time and was preparing himself for his death when this being moved faster than he could follow and removed the weapon that was threatening to explode and remove it from the immediate vicinity. That, almost negligent, toss of the weapon which resulted in it leaving the atmosphere was startling with the power it displayed. He was relieved that this being had saved him but, he still had a mission to complete and he would do so. Even the gratitude he felt would not prevent him from completing it. Seeing both of his primary weapons disabled and seeing also that Kal was back on his feet, he pulled out a wicked looking bladed weapon similar to a two handed broadsword having serrations along one side and sharp projections along the flat sides. The sharp edges would cause a lot of damage when used for striking while the side projections would cause additional damage when the weapon was used in a thrusting motion.

Lori pushed a switch on her bow and it folded itself into a compact form which slid into her quiver. She advanced on the warrior.

Kal shouted, “Lori, no!”

Back over her shoulder Lori said, “I’m finishing this the only way he’ll understand.”

She was bare handed and apparently defenseless, yet, as she approached, the warrior raised his weapon and started to swing an overhead blow at her head. Lori reached up with one hand and caught the warrior’s arm, stopping it in mid descent. The warrior was startled. His exoskeleton powered suit gave him the strength of twenty men and this slight female with no suit or any other means of boosting her strength had stopped his blow as if it was nothing. She then calmly reached up with her other hand and ripped the blade from his grip even though he put all of his power boosted strength into his grip to prevent it from happening. He felt like a child in her grasp. He had flashes of a small animal and a very large predator; he was the prey helpless in the jaws simply awaiting death.

To his utter surprise, now that she was in possession of his blade she stepped back, releasing his arm. He was relieved that she hadn’t used his own weapon to thrust him through and he was amazed to see what she was doing. Apparently she could do things he had never conceived of. As he watched somehow the metal of his sword started to glow red and then using her bare hands on this obviously hot metal with impunity, she started to stretch it like taffy. This warrior had his shield unit mounted on the back. Knowing that while his shield unit was active she wouldn’t be able to do what she wanted to do, she swiftly floated up and over her opponent. When she came down she reached out and grabbed the shield generator crushing it with her hand. Then she used the metal band she had created from his weapon to bind his arms to his sides.

Once he was secure she pulled out her translator and said, “You are now my prisoner. You could just as easily have been dead, but, that is not our way. We value life, all life. We would

welcome friends, but, if you chose to be enemies we will deal with you as such. You have seen my power. You are powerless against me. If you chose the right path I can be your friend, but, you would find me an implacable enemy. Who among you can make the choice? What will it be, peace, or war?” The translator was synthesizing her message into their speech so that the warrior could hear and was also broadcasting on a range of frequencies, their emergency frequency among them. The entire fleet was listening.

Kal moved over and stood by Lori as they waited.

A minute later they saw the port in the ship open again. Lori reached back and grabbed her bow. As she hit the button, the bow automatically unfolded itself into its ready position. She reached back and pulled an arrow out and nocked it without drawing, allowing the bow to hang down in her left hand, her right hand on the string, fingers spread with the arrow nestled between them. She could raise, aim and loose in less than a second if needed.

As they watched a smaller individual emerged. He was smaller only in comparison to the warrior; his suit was not a battle suit but one like Kal’s, defensive only. The exoskeleton would only be adequate to support him under a higher gravitational pull than what he had grown up with. He, like Kal, was without a helmet.

When the scout ship had been found some of the crew had managed to at least partially don environmental suits, giving the NK medicos a chance to examine at least that much of the stranger’s physiology. This was the first time that they had seen an intact head. This individual’s head was somewhat larger than theirs with a high forehead with a ridged bony plate which would afford additional protection to the brain when in conflicts and projected out over his eye sockets giving his eyes a sunken look. His hair was somewhat long and unkempt. His moustache and beard were full, but trimmed neatly.

As he approached the defeated warrior moved to kneel and bow in reverence. Lori handed her bow to Clark and assisted the warrior by removing the metal band she had bound him with. Finishing this she recovered her bow. The smaller individual reached out and touched his helmeted head and the translator picked up and translated what he said, “Arise, Goroeth. You have done well.”

Goroeth stood to his feet and moved to stand behind the other, like a servant or bodyguard.

The leader spoke again, “Please excuse Goroeth for attacking you, but, we had to test you and your resolve. We have never met such a formidable race. How and why did you destroy our scout craft?”

Kal spoke up, “We did not. We found the ship floating in space and recovered it. We discovered that the crew had all died in an accidental collision with an asteroid.”

“Ah, I see. My name is Golosselei and I am High Minister of ‘The People’. We heard your words about being peaceful, but, we saw you with one of our craft which had been destroyed and was emitting a distress call. We needed to know what your intentions *really* were.”

“The same way that we needed to discover your real intentions,” said, Kal. “We had deciphered some of the documents carried on this craft and thought that we had discovered you to be a hostile, conquering race.”

“We conquer only those races that are themselves hostile. We are explorers. If we find a race that is extremely backward we will establish a relationship with them and assist them to move toward a more modern, civilized society. If they are exceptionally aggressive we will take steps to quarantine them and contain their influence. In many cases they eliminate themselves as a threat by wiping themselves out with global warfare. We then colonize the planet, if it is still habitable.”

Clark said, “We represent the remnant of an advanced society. Our planet destroyed itself. There was instability in the

planet's core which caused it to explode. A small colony ship survived and the passengers settled in a nearby system." Kal informed. Indicating Lori he continued, "As my bond mate said, we are a peaceful society. We already have peaceful relations and trading relationships with other cultures. We would welcome a new trading partner, but not a conqueror. It would be necessary to conduct those negotiations with our Council of Elders."

"The fact that your bond mate would have been just as capable of killing Gorothe as she was of subduing him has shown me the truth of your statements. The act of preserving his life by removing the weapon when it went on overload, thus sparing his life, also told us much. I will order our fleet to immediately return to our space. I will return with it and bring a proposal to our governing council for establishing a trade relationship with your planet. How can we contact your Council of Elders to set up the meetings for negotiations?" As the translator finished converting his words into English he stopped and looked at Lori's bow. He said, "Please, I am an old man and not much of a threat; could your bond mate please put away her most formidable weapon?"

Clark and Lori had both forgotten that Lori had her bow prepared. She put her arrow back in the quiver and hit the button to cause the bow to fold into its compact form, which she stowed away.

Answering his question, Clark said, "We know the frequencies that you use and are now able to translate your messages. When you are ready you can send a signal. I would suggest that this planet be used as a meeting site. We will arrange for shelter and meeting space. We would request only a small delegation."

Suddenly Kal's com link chirped an alert tone. Ching's voice came over it, "Kal, one of their ships has broken formation and is headed your way."

Kal looked at Golosselei and asked, "What's going on?"

The translator had converted the message and spoken it aloud to Golosselei. He replied, "I'm not certain. Perhaps they think I've been down here too long. It could be a ship from the Hangaresi. That is the war party within our government. At times they are difficult to restrain."

"Why would they be approaching the planet?"

"I could be the target. I am with the Caregeigh or peace party."

Kal pushed a button on his com link and said, "Deploy ship one. I want that ship disabled. Target shield generators, weapons and propulsion systems."

"Acknowledged."

A minute later, Golosselei's communicator started to sound. Golosselei listened intently for a minute and then turned to Kal and with a tone of awe said, "A ship appeared from nowhere and launched projectiles against our ship and then disappeared again. How did you penetrate our shields?"

Clark replied, "I'm afraid that will have to be our secret. Be assured that we will keep the knowledge confidential, unless and until you demonstrate an aggressive nature. If that were to occur we would be forced to reveal our secret to any sentient race that you would attack. Keep in mind that we value life; however, we will not stand by and see other races attacked without provocation. We will act in our own defense and the defense of others. Our respect for life called for restraint in this encounter; however, I'm sure you are aware that we were quite capable of utterly destroying that craft and any others that you might chose to send against us. We are a peaceful people, but, do not mistake our desire for peace to be weakness. Others have made that mistake and lived to regret it."

"I acknowledge the correctness of your statements. Our ship is disabled. There were some minor injuries but no fatalities. You would indeed be a formidable foe."

"As I said, we value life and we could just as easily have destroyed that craft."

"I can see that. There will be no further tests."

Lori burst out with, "That was another test!?!?"

Golosselei asked, "You didn't expect me to accept your word that you would be capable of defending yourselves, did you? Seeing an individual, even one such as yourself, displaying powers far above that of normal people, how could we trust that your race would be able to defeat us?"

"You took a big chance."

"Not as big a chance as you would suppose. That was a robot craft with life synthesizing dummies. In this way we were able to determine the level of injury that would have been inflicted. If you had simply destroyed that craft, with little or no concern for the life on board, we would have known you to be an aggressive species in need of watching. The fact that you do indeed value life has now been amply displayed. We now believe you. Your actions have spoken and shown the truth behind your words. I will now return to my fleet. We will be returning to our space and begin preparing for the negotiations to establish a trading relationship with your people. I, as a representative of 'The People', I bid you adieu."

A second before the translator said 'the people', they heard Hangaresi and Lori and Clark realized that this was their name for themselves. With a small formal bow Golosselei turned and re-entered his ship. Gorothe followed him and closed the hatch. A few minutes later they lifted off.

Kal-El's com link chirped and he heard Ching's voice, "Kal, as soon as the ship that was on the surface with you lifted off, one of their other ships broke formation and moved over to take that ship we attacked in tow. Once the docking was completed and the disabled ship was secure, the combined vessels returned to their formation. Now the entire fleet is starting to move away."

Kal touched his com link and in a weary tone said, "That was expected. You can come and pick us up. Tell the other ships that they can stand down. This entire encounter was an elaborate series of tests to determine whether or not we were a hostile race. I'm happy to say, we passed the test. The decision to respect their lives and avoid killing was the key. If we had given in to our baser instincts and simply destroyed that ship we would have initiated a very costly war. It would have been costly in both lives and resources. As it is we now have the foundation laid to establish a trading relationship with them." Warily he said, "Come get us, we're ready to go home."

Clark and Lori could hear cheering behind him as Ching replied, "We'll be there shortly."

Lori turned to Clark and said, "Wow, this really didn't take all that long. I wonder why Herb told us that we would be gone for eight months. By the time we get home it will have only been about three and a half months."

Clark thought for a few seconds before answering, "Maybe we will have to stay until the negotiations are complete."

Lori's reply was immediate, "I don't see why, unless we might need another show of force." Before she continued a look of deep concentration took over her features, "You know, this has gotten me to thinking. Why don't we propose to the kids that they take turns taking vacations here on New Krypton? It would give them the opportunity to learn about the culture and each spouse could be the local superhero while they are here."

Clark started to smile as he replied, "You know, that's not a bad idea. Let's bring it up to Ching and Zara when we get back to NK."

Lori brought it back to the original topic, "If we don't have to stay here for the negotiations then why did we stay? We might need to stay for a little while to prepare some things, but that still doesn't explain how we were gone for eight months. Herb did say eight months. He should know since he has to bring CJ back to us. I've got a really bad feeling about this, like something's going to happen."

Chapter 25 – Memories

Lori's bad feeling persisted for some time. While they waited to be picked up she said to Clark, "What could have happened to keep us here for the full eight months? It sure looks like we are finished and I want to get back to CJ. Maybe Herb made a mistake. Maybe he picked him up from us after eight months but he brought him to us only a month or two from when we left because he was held up or something. Oh, what am I saying? Herb is a time traveler for heaven's sake. There's no such thing as him being late or making that kind of mistake."

"I don't know, but there had to be something or we wouldn't have stayed."

Lori said, "You know as time has progressed on this trip it's like a movie has been playing in my mind. Memories of the time we had CJ with us back in the past have little by little come to mind. It's like I'm living that time in my memory as the time goes by. At least they were some very pleasant memories."

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation –

Prime

1997

%%%

Lois had just finished feeding CJ and he was down for his nap. They had been compiling their diary and preparing it for when CJ was to be picked up. Sitting in her rocking chair in his bedroom she was looking at the pictures and reading the text entries written in Clark's precise script. Some of the pages were filled with computer printouts which gave details of incidents or activities, records of milestones and just general comments not related to the pictures.

As she looked at the pages, frequently her fingers would brush over the picture's surface as the scene depicted brought the memory of the occasion back to her.

She thought to herself, <We're going to need to make another copy and keep this for ourselves. I just can't send this one.> The reason that she was thinking this was that on virtually every page the paper was crinkled from getting wet. It was still in the process of getting wet every time she pulled it out to look at it. She knew that it wouldn't be too long before Herb would show up. When he did, she knew that he would be taking CJ, her baby, away from her. Yeah, she knew the reason. He would be returning him to his rightful parents, but, that didn't make it any easier.

There were a lot of pictures, sometimes several on a page since they had started making notes and taking pictures, virtually from the beginning. She decided to turn back to the front and start over.

Most of the entries were at least a paragraph in length, many were much longer.

It was a regular journal. The first entry dealt with how CJ had arrived, surprising them in the middle of the night.

She couldn't help but laugh as she read through the next entry. It dealt with Herb's visit the next morning and what a surprise he had dealt them with the prescription. She still wasn't sure if she should thank Herb for that or hate him. In one way she had hated the fact that she had been forced into breastfeeding CJ. Ruefully she had to admit that once she had gotten into it she had decided that there was no way she would ever consider *not* breastfeeding any children she and Clark might conceive in the future, if that ever did happen. It really made her feel fulfilled as a woman in that role. She was amazed about that. Until she had married Clark she had never really considered having children. All she had thought of was her career and being the award winning journalist that she had become.

This time with CJ had shown her that motherhood and her job were not mutually exclusive. She could really be a mother and still do her job.

The turning of the page revealed some pictures that were taken on their island get away and also in Hawaii during the 'getting to know you' phase of their relationship with CJ.

The text told all about the efforts to bring her milk on, skipping the details about her and Clark's activity and centering on her and CJ.

Looking at a picture of CJ as she held him in her arms with her in a bikini, she giggled to herself because she had put the bikini on just for the picture and as soon as it had been taken she had returned to her regular mode of dress which was complete undress.

Next there was a picture of Perry White playing peek-a-boo with CJ in his car seat on the corner of Perry's desk. She couldn't help but chuckle over this one. She hadn't followed through on her threat to post it on the bulletin board but she had really worried Perry when she had threatened to do just that.

There were a couple of pictures of other bullpen staff holding CJ and of course of CJ in the DP day care center, mostly with Brenda. Brenda had become almost as attached to CJ as Lois had.

As Lois flipped through the pages the tears flowed freely.

She came to a page where it had been four months since CJ had joined the family. In that time he had been growing by leaps and bounds. He was developing a personality and was really attached to both Lois and Clark, especially Lois, just as she was to him. He was the love of Lois' life, second only to her husband, and she relished every minute that she spent with him.

Flipping more pages she came to an entry that she had forgotten that Clark had put in. As CJ had grown, everyone that saw him for the first time and hadn't been told the story, complimented Lois and Clark on their beautiful little boy and commented on how much he combined their features. Everyone especially remarked that he had Clark's eyes and Lois' smile. Looking at the pictures it was very evident that these people were sincere in their comments. As he had grown it had become even more evident. CJ was a very happy baby and he smiled almost all of the time and the smile he possessed was definitely a copy of Lois'. It was unmistakable and undeniable. The eyes were just as easy to identify as to the parentage. Their slightly almond shape was distinctive.

Turning some more pages she came to a picture of CJ in his playpen. She guessed that he would have been about six months old in this picture. He had been sitting up and grabbing items that were scattered around him. He would pull the item to him and examine it thoroughly, feeling it, rubbing it on his face feeling the soft fleece or fake fur and gurgling happily. His favorite was a stuffed bunny rabbit, a rather large milk chocolate colored bunny with big floppy ears and white markings. He would hold that bunny when he lay down and if his pacifier wasn't in his mouth the ear of the bunny was.

Next she came to a picture that she wished she had an audio recording to go with. This one had been taken only a week or so after the previous picture. Lois was doing most of her work, when at home, in the living room with CJ in his playpen nearby. One day Lois had him in the playpen in the living room as she went about doing some research on her laptop nearby. She was focused on what she was doing, but, she could still hear him cooing and gurgling happily as he played with some stuffies scattered around him. His bunny was in his lap. Suddenly she stopped what she was doing and gave him her undivided attention. She thought she had heard something and she wanted to make sure before she made a fuss about it. After about thirty seconds, during which time Lois had actually been holding her breath in anticipation she heard it again. CJ said, clear as daylight, "Momma ... Momma ... Momma."

Lois looked at him. He actually had his back to her so she knew that he really wasn't associating the words with the person as yet, but, he had said his first words. Lois was ecstatic! She called Clark who had been in the kitchen preparing dinner,

“Clark, can you come here a second?”

His response was immediate, “I think I heard the same thing you did.” He came through the doors and leaned over the back of the couch to kiss her on the top of the head. Just as he did so, CJ gave a repeat performance, “Momma ... Momma ... Momma.”

Lois couldn’t contain herself any longer. She got up and stepped over to the playpen and picked CJ up. She said, “Momma’s right here Darling. Momma’s here.”

In reply CJ cooed and then said again, “Momma ... Momma ... Momma.”

Lois whirled him around in an impromptu dance. Clark came over and put his arms around both of them and joined in while CJ squealed in delight.

The next page held a picture which had been taken a week later. The angle was somewhat different from the previous one. In this one, CJ was in his playpen and Lois was kneeling in front of him.

It had been a week since CJ had spoken his first words. Again he was in his playpen while Lois was working on her laptop nearby. Occasionally, she would say something to herself, out loud and CJ would babble in reply. Frequently Lois would hear a word spoken but suddenly it occurred to her that there was a difference. She looked up at CJ and saw that he had spun himself around and was looking directly at her, his stuffies forgotten, and he was talking to her. He was saying, “Momma,” over and over. Lois was frozen in place. She couldn’t believe it, but, sure enough, there it was, he was looking at her and calling her Momma. Clark had heard and grabbed the camera. Just as Lois moved over closer to the playpen he had snapped the picture.

She remembered that almost as one in a trance she had gotten up. When she did, CJ had tracked her with his eyes and repeated, “Momma.”

She hastened to him and picking him up hugged him and said, “Yes, CJ, Momma. I’m Momma. Momma loves CJ.”

On some level CJ must have known that he had done something right. He reached up and put his hands on her face as he continued to say, “Momma.”

Lois was showering him with kisses and interrupted only long enough to call Clark. She hadn’t realized that he was already there. Her attention had been centered on CJ. Lois was beside herself. She looked back and forth between CJ and Clark and said, “He called me Momma. He wasn’t just babbling! He was looking right at me and said, Momma. He’s associating me with that name!”

Suddenly CJ shifted his focus and looked at Clark. He very distinctly said, “Dadda?”

Lois was astonished. She looked at Clark who was also stunned. She held CJ out for Clark to take him. As soon as he was in Clark’s arms he started chanting, “Dadda ... Dadda,” over and over.

Clark said, “Well, I guess we know who he takes after! He has to take after you. Here’s an overachiever if I ever saw one!”

Lois laughed and punched his bicep.

Still smiling at that particular memory, Lois turned over another page.

This page contained a picture of CJ sitting in his highchair. His face was an absolute mess. Lois started thinking about it.

CJ was about eight months old and his metabolism was causing him to be hungry with less and less time between feedings. In order to satisfy him and extend the time between feedings Lois had started him on some solid foods. She had gotten some rice cereal for him. She would express milk in the evenings and store it in the refrigerator so that in the morning she could use the breast milk in the cereal. She would use enough to make a loose paste and start feeding him with a spoon. Initially he had some little difficulty adapting to eating from a spoon and

he wound up getting more on him than in him. This particular picture had been taken early on and he had cereal smeared all over his cheeks and chin.

The picture right next to it was of CJ, again in his highchair. This time Lois’ hand with the spoon was near his mouth. Now he was more comfortable with eating from a spoon and he looked like a little bird with its mouth open for the momma bird to drop a worm in.

Lois was smiling even as the tears fell at the memory. These were very special memories, ones she would treasure for all of her life.

Turning the page again Lois saw a picture that represented the only time that they had any real problem.

It had all started when CJ began crying for no apparent reason. Lois had been beside herself. Up to this point he had been such a happy baby and to have him start crying almost constantly she was worried that she was doing something wrong. She finally decided that she needed some outside help so after making a phone call Clark flew to Smallville and picked up his mom and brought her to Metropolis.

When she came in Lois was carrying CJ and bouncing him and talking to him and he was crying and crying. Martha calmly walked over and looked at CJ. Then she asked, “Has he been sticking things in his mouth?”

Lois replied, “He always has something in his mouth. Is that a problem?”

Martha then used her finger to explore CJ’s mouth. As soon as she had her finger in his mouth he started to try to chew on it and he quieted down. Martha said, “I know what the problem is. He’s teething. You need to get one of those things that are filled with gel that you put in the freezer. Once it’s cold you give it to him to chew on. The cold helps reduce the pain and the chewing helps the teeth to come through the gums.”

Lois let out a relieved sigh, “Thank you Martha. You don’t know what a relief it is to know what the problem is. I was getting frantic not knowing what the problem was or how to deal with it.”

The next picture was of CJ lying in his playpen with his bunny on his tummy and his teething ring in his mouth.

Turning the page Lois came to another shot from around that time. CJ was up on his hands and knees crawling, the teething ring dangling from his mouth. He started crawling around in his playpen and eventually started getting bored doing that. After going around a few times he would stop, sit and looking at Lois start to wail. At first Lois had no idea as to why he was doing this. Then she made it a point to watch the process. Seeing what was happening, Lois tried to put herself in his place and decided that it was time to baby proof the home. Clark went out and purchased the necessary materials and installed everything in less than an hour.

Once this was done, Lois was able to take CJ out of the playpen and placing him on his tummy he could get up and explore. Crawling was still somewhat new to him so he didn’t move too fast. In fact, he would crawl a few paces and then spin around and sit on his butt. After looking around, apparently deciding which way he wanted to go next and what he wanted to see, he would flip over on hands and knees and crawl to this new and interesting location to check out what was different about it from where he had just been.

The next picture brought another smile to Lois’ face. CJ had crawled over to the sofa and using it for support had managed to pull himself up on his feet and was standing there looking over his shoulder staring right into the camera with the largest smile on his face. He knew that he had accomplished something and was very pleased with himself. As soon as he let go though, he landed on his butt. Undeterred he had repeated the process and

was standing once more. Eventually, there wasn't a piece of furniture that he didn't use to pull himself up. It was like he was testing all of the furniture to see which piece was easiest to use and which gave him the best view once he was on his feet.

The next picture brought another smile to her lips. CJ in his highchair with a bunch of lifesaver shaped cereal pieces on the tray in front of him. He was picking them up, one at a time, and putting them into his mouth. He had some more teeth coming in and the hard cereal felt good to him as he crunched down on it, but, very quickly it softened from his saliva and he was able to swallow it without any problems. The caption read simply, "CJ feeding himself."

Not believing that there would be any possible problem in doing so, there were occasions when Clark would spin into the Suit in front of CJ when he had to respond to an emergency. Apparently CJ began to associate this act with Clark leaving for a period of time. One day, as Clark was leaving, he turned to CJ and waved. To his surprise, CJ waved back. Lois said, "He's waving goodbye to you."

Clark walked over and picked him up. He gave CJ a hug and a kiss and said, "Bye Sport, I'll be back before you know it." He placed him back down on his tummy.

Lois watched and decided that she had to act. She got up and chased after her son who was following his father as fast as he could crawl in his footsteps.

That was the last page. She knew that there would be more entries because they had a few months yet before Herb was due to show up.

She was determined that she would build some more memories before that happened, because she knew that once he came, there would be no more memories to build, only the one which would tear her heart out. The memory of losing her baby.

Chapter 26 – The Accident

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

2091

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Once it had been confirmed that the Hangaesi fleet was indeed on its way back the way it had come, the order had been given for all of the ships to make best speed back to New Krypton.

Before lifting off Ching, Clark and Lori met in the Captain's ready room.

"Tell me about the meeting. I'm very curious. What happened down there?"

Ching started a recording and Clark dictated the story, minus that part where he had taken the energy burst. He had been somewhat disoriented by it so Lori filled in that part.

When he was finished Ching asked, "What are your impressions?"

Lori spoke up first, "They passed all of this off as tests. They were testing *us* to see if we held life as sacred. Supposedly, since we disabled that ship without destroying it we passed the test. I'm still not too sure about this. We really didn't test them at all. We just took their word for everything."

Clark added, "That was the reason I suggested that we meet for the discussions on this world. In that way we don't have to disclose the true location of New Krypton. Invisibility can add to the safety of New Krypton. I would recommend exercising caution in the negotiations. They are still an unknown quantity. I'm still not too sure about them. Their warrior apparently would have had no problem killing Lori or me at all. The first thing he did when he exited that ship was take a shot at me and then as

soon as Lori took out that weapon he turned his other weapon on Lori who was obviously unprotected. There was no way for him to know that she was super powered. In that gown, and holding an apparently ancient weapon which could very well have been ceremonial, she didn't appear to present much of a threat and yet she was attacked."

Ching replied, "I don't know just how well we'd fare against them. They apparently have a mastery over energy that we do not possess. We have laser based energy weapons as Earth does, however, they apparently have the means of multiplexing electromagnetism or some other attractive force with the beam to form a tether because they did not use a cable or some such other physical item to attach to the disabled ship. Apparently it can also be used to draw items to it like an attractor, or tractor beam. We took some sensor readings and the power being transmitted through that beam was almost immeasurable. Once they had initiated the beam that disabled ship was pulled along the beam until it actually docked with the tow vessel."

Chuckling, Lori added, "I wonder what was going through his mind when his energy blast had no effect on me. I could feel it as he ramped up the power output. Then when his weapon overloaded and I sent it out of the atmosphere before it exploded, he should have been grateful but instead he pulled a sword. He had to be surprised when I stopped and disarmed him so easily. That suit of his gave him the strength of many men. It's because I have a double strength pendant that I had the strength I needed to overcome him so easily. I think my regular pendant would have been adequate, this one just made it that much easier."

Ching replied, "I wonder if we'll need to put on a demonstration of force the next time we meet. We took them by surprise with our inertialess ship. It may not work again. We also have not thoroughly tested the spherical design. We need to run more maneuverability tests so that we know just what we can do before they return."

Clark replied, "I think we will have some time. Our FTL drive is superior to theirs." He paused for a second in thought before continuing, "You know the FTL drive that my father, Jor-El, used in my ship was superior even to the one you currently use. When we return to Earth why don't I give my ship to you so that the New Kryptonian scientists can duplicate the drive? You already have an advantage over them in that your FTL drive is faster. This will increase that advantage."

"I wish we had thought of that, years ago. Our scientists have tried to improve our FTL drive but they have never made any significant breakthrough on the technology. They are good, but sometimes it takes the ability to think outside the box to make any advances. They have a hard time doing that. Plus, there hasn't been any great incentive to improve on what we have. Having the technology that Jor-El developed would give us that leap that we need and now that we have had this encounter we have all the incentive we have needed. It would be greatly appreciated. Any advantage we can have will help."

"At this point I think we have a couple of tactical advantages. They know we can penetrate their shields, but they don't know how. Our use of the inertialess condition, which can bring our ships into position without emitting a thrust signature, is another advantage. If we were to have an even faster FTL drive we could use it to intercept them at even greater distances than previously."

Once they had finished recording the report and after the other ships had departed Ching gave the order to lift off of the planet's surface.

Ching was anxious to do some further testing of the maneuverability of the spherical design when in an inertialess state so, once they cleared the atmosphere he ordered the shield controls to be activated. When he did, suddenly it was like the planet accelerated past them, narrowly missing their ship. Ching said, "Wow, that was a close one. I should have had astrogation double check their figures. I'm just glad that the physicist's

theory wasn't tested." He depressed a com button and said, "Minimal thrust, one percent. Astrogation, chart a course for return to New Krypton."

The course was plotted and laid in and the journey began.

That started a series of trials wherein they tested the maneuverability of the ship, changing thruster direction and observing the effects. They had been alternating between several banks of thrusters, performing a zig-zag pattern of movement when suddenly what was currently the aft thruster ran wild.

Ching hit the button on the comm. panel and said, "Engineering! Status?"

"Engineering, we have a bank of thrusters that is locked. It is ramping up to full. We haven't been able to control it or shut it down."

"Does it pose a threat of explosion?"

"Not at this time."

Can we counter the thrust by applying thrust from the opposite vector?"

"Initiating."

On the view screens they could observe the flare of the thrusters. As they built up to a level equal to the aft thrusters suddenly they cut out.

Ching hit the comm. Button, "Engineering, why did you shut down thrust?"

"The thrusters in that quadrant weren't designed for that level of effort for any extended period of time. They were building to an overload. We had to shut them down before they exploded."

"Understood. Keep working on those aft thrusters." He hit the button to shut off the intercom. Turning to the crew in front of him he asked, "Navigation, status?"

The reply he got didn't relieve his anxiety. "Velocity climbing. We are at point 5 of light speed and accelerating." Not very many seconds later he said, "Point 6."

"Engineering, we need to get a handle on that thruster. You need to shut it down."

You could hear the fear entering the helmsman's voice as he said, "Point 7."

"Engineering, how about shutting down the fuel supply?"

"Working on it."

The helmsman's voice had an edge to it as he in clipped tones, "Point 8."

"Engineering, status?"

"No effect."

The edge was still there and the tone of the helmsman's voice was being affected. It was half an octave higher as he said, "Point 9."

Ching, with an obvious effort to control his voice said, "Engineering, you need to get a handle on this problem!"

The helmsman had managed to gain some control, perhaps it was the quiet desperation of one facing a firing squad as he reported, "Point 95."

Clark had been listening and suddenly had a solution. He stepped over to Ching's comm. panel and hit a button and shouted, "Kill the shields!"

A few seconds later the star field stabilized and they heard back, "Shields off."

Ching heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Thanks, I don't know why I didn't think of that." He hit the button and said, "Engineering, Status?"

"Thruster still running wild. We are transferring the fuel that supplies it to another tank. Once the tank is empty it should shut down."

After a while they could actually feel the thruster as it started to sputter and eventually shut down. Ching hit the comm. button and said, "Engineering, status?"

"Engineering aye. The thruster is shut down. It will hamper our maneuvering ability at sub-light but we can compensate by reversing and using the forward thrusters in their place."

"Thank you for that report. We'll want a complete evaluation once we are on the ground."

"Acknowledged."

Ching addressed the crew in front of him, "Navigation, how far off course has this sent us?"

"Calculating."

A minute later Navigation replied, "Since we were not on a direct course for New Krypton when the thruster malfunctioned we have some distance to make up. Recommend that we use the FTL drive to return. Course already plotted and laid in."

Ching nodded his head and then issued the command, "Execute."

Seventeen ship days later the ship arrived in New Krypton's space and radioed in requesting landing clearance. Ching hit a com. button, "New Krypton control, this is Ching on NK1701 requesting clearance to land."

They could hear some confused chatter in the background as the link came alive. "This is New Krypton control, please repeat identification."

"This is Ching aboard NK1701. Is there a problem? We have just returned from the meeting with Golosselei of the Hangaresi."

Suddenly over the speakers was heard another voice, the voice of Zara, "Ching, where have you been? Did you follow them back to their space or something?"

"No, we came straight back, well, maybe not exactly, we did some tests of the ship and we had a malfunctioning thruster. Why do you ask?"

"You were supposed to be back four months ago."

Startled, Ching blurted out, "Four months ago?"

"Yes, the rest of our ships returned fully four months ago."

Ching looked at Clark and they said, simultaneously, "Time dilation!"

When they landed Zara was there waiting for the hatch to open. Seeing Ching in the port Zara threw herself into his arms. When they broke from a kiss she said, "Thank Rao you've returned. I've been worried sick." She firmed up and stepping back said, "Don't you ever do that to me again."

Ching pulled her into an embrace and said, "I promise. Never again. From now on we stay together. Where I go, you go too."

"What happened? Why are you so late getting back?"

Clark asked, "Why don't we go back to the residence where we can relax and talk?"

Zara wound her arm around Ching's and started walking to the transport.

Ching stopped and turned around. Spotting the executive officer he said, "Give the crew a two day pass to be with their families. When they report back have engineering tear that thruster apart and find out what caused the malfunction. We can't afford to have that happen to any other ships."

"Aye, Captain. I'll see to it."

"Thank you. If I'm needed I'll either be at the residence or meeting with the council. I need to report on the contact." He chuckled as he finished up, "My report is four months overdue."

"Aye, Captain. Don't worry. We can handle it."

Ching nodded and turned away, allowing Zara to pull him to the ground transport.

Ching was speaking, "As you can see, my Lord Trey, there are still a lot of questions that will need to be answered. We do know from our sensor readings the direction they approached from and the vector they took when they departed correspond. It would be logical to assume that if we were to follow that vector eventually we would enter their space."

Clark spoke up, "Lord Trey."

Trey responded, deference obvious in his voice, "My Lord, Kal-El. Please, whatever you have to say, we are prepared to

hear.”

“Council and Lord Trey, It is my considered opinion that until these questions have been answered to our satisfaction that the true location of New Krypton be kept a secret. That was why I suggested that the meetings be held on that world where we made first contact. It is fifteen days away using the current FTL drive and considerably longer for them.”

“At this point we only have their word that they are a peaceful race. I am still disturbed by the fact that the warrior attacked Lady Lori-El without provocation when she was perceived to be defenseless. There was no way for him to have known that she was invulnerable. Anyone else would have been killed by that energy discharge. When his energy weapon failed he then proceeded to attack her with a sword.”

“I would urge this council to consider them to be hostile until proven otherwise.”

“I would recommend the following. When Lady Lori and I return to Earth, I will be giving the captain the ship that Jor-El used to send me to Earth. Its FTL drive is more efficient than the one you currently use and will be far superior to that used by the Hangaesi. Once some ships have been fitted with the advanced FTL drive, send out scouts along the vector that they followed. Contact any sentient species found along that route. Find out from them if they have interacted with the Hangaesi and what the nature of the contact has been.”

“Send a small flight of several ships to actually locate their home world. A single ship would be too vulnerable. Two or three, but preferably four ships could defend one another. On Earth a basic tactical formation is four aircraft. There is a flight leader and his second in command then each has a wingman whose job it is to protect his leader. With the extra speed afforded by the advanced FTL drive they would be able to escape if need be.”

“If they do need to flee they should do so in a vector away from New Krypton until they are far enough away that the Hangaesi can no longer detect them and then still take a round-about course in returning home.”

“I would also recommend that the NK scientists work on developing a means of communicating over long distances, perhaps basing it on the field generated by the FTL drive itself. That also would give a tremendous tactical advantage. As it is we have to be in close proximity to communicate effectively.”

“When we return home we plan to propose to our family that they take turns spending time here on New Krypton. In this way each of their spouses could be your local superhero and assist with natural disasters and also be available in case of attack from invaders. I believe that our family will jump at the opportunity that this will present. They will have the opportunity to become acquainted with the customs and traditions of New Krypton and you would have an opportunity to get to know our family better. I would simply ask that they be provided with housing.”

Trey, speaking for the council said, “That will be easily arranged. We look forward to getting to know the El family.”

Chapter 27 — Birthdays

Febuasry 1, 1998

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation —

Prime

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It was going to be CJ’s first birthday and plans had been made for a big celebration. Both sets of grandparents were going to be there as well as Uncle Perry, Auntie Alice, Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Lucy.

Since Lucy had completed her college degree in Computer Science and returned to Metropolis, she had snagged a position with STAR Labs. She had become a frequent visitor at the Kent

household. Oddly enough, many times her visits just happened to correspond to those times that Jimmy was also supposed to ‘drop by’. Recently, Jimmy had also jumped at any opportunity that presented itself to spearhead any research that involved working with STAR Labs.

Lois had been slowly adding solid foods to CJ’s diet, still relying primarily on breast milk as the principal component of his diet, and to her great pleasure he was thriving. He was a very happy and healthy little boy that was the joy of her life, second only to her husband.

Since they had been adding solids they had purchased a high chair for him and it was prominently placed at the table in close proximity to Lois’ chair.

Lois was really surprised with herself. She had actually taken to motherhood very well. A very great portion of the credit for that, she had to ruefully agree, was a result of her prescription. Being forced into breastfeeding was the best thing that could have happened to her. The mother-child bond that she had formed with CJ as a result of that activity was stronger than she could ever imagine was possible.

Today was going to be a happy occasion but, it was tinged with regret. Today it was almost eight months since CJ had come into their lives. Lois knew that Herb would be coming in less than a month to take CJ, who she thought of as her baby, back to his real parents. She dreaded Herb’s appearance. She still didn’t know how she would be able to give CJ up. All she knew was that it would break her heart. Then she thought about CJ’s real mother and she thought about how she must have felt, giving up her baby for eight long months, mission or no mission. Her heart must have been broken just as hers was breaking at the thought of losing CJ.

Lois had submerged all of these feelings by throwing herself into planning this event. She had gone out and purchased decorations, with CJ in an umbrella stroller the entire time. She had shown him everything that she was purchasing and talked everything over with him. She would frequently interrupt what she was doing and just look at him and marvel. Then she would bend down and plant a gentle kiss on his head. Frequently, when she did that, he would reach up and put his hands on either side of her face and say, “Momma, Momma,” and she would respond, “Momma loves CJ.”

The day had finally arrived. As soon as Lois and Clark got home they started decorating. CJ was an interested observer on the floor in his walker. He was scooting around on the tile floor with ease following his parent’s movements. Before too long there were colorful streamers crisscrossing the kitchen. After a while the guests were gathered and the guest of honor was now in his high chair with a party hat on his head.

When it came time for the cake, Lois had picked up some cup cakes for the occasion. She selected a white cupcake with chocolate icing. She took the paper off and placed it on the tray in front of CJ. For several minutes CJ just sat there looking at this foreign object. Lois had been feeding him solid foods as a supplement to her breast milk but that had always been given him on a spoon. He had been feeding himself those little circles of cereal, but, this was very different. CJ didn’t know just what to make of this object, but, in his inquisitiveness he reached out and touched it. When he did he happened to contact the icing, some of which wound up sticking to his finger. He pulled his hand back and looked at his finger. Not knowing what else to do he stuck the finger in his mouth and licked this foreign substance off. When he did suddenly his face lit up and a great smile came into existence. He pulled his finger out of his mouth and with great deliberation he reached out and ‘plop’ his whole hand came down on the top of the cup cake. His little fingers closed on the icing and so quickly he rivaled Clark for his superspeed he brought his hand up and tried to stuff his whole hand, icing and all, into his

mouth, winding up with icing smeared all over his face from nose to chin.

Everyone was watching and Clark was recording with a videocam. When CJ tried to stuff all of that into his mouth it took everyone by surprise and they all started laughing.

CJ was enjoying every morsel of the cup cake and icing and kept reaching down and grabbing more and putting it into his mouth. Eventually all that was left was a scattering of crumbs and chocolate smears on the tray and CJ's face. Smiling he shouted, "Momma, Momma?"

Lois grabbed a washcloth and wet it with warm water. As she approached she was smiling as she said, "Momma's right here CJ. Momma's right here." She started cleaning his face. He started babbling, "Momma, Dada, Momma, Dada." Lois released his safety belt and lifting him out of the high chair handed him to Clark. As she did he squealed, "Dada, Dada, Dada," and Clark responded, "Okay Sport, let's go visit everyone." They started playing 'pass the baby' as everyone took a turn holding him while Lois finished cleaning up his high chair.

After the high chair had been cleaned up and everyone had had a chance to hold the guest of honor, he was placed back in his chair and buckled in. Lois placed a brightly wrapped package in front of him. CJ looked at it for a few seconds and then reached out and started patting it looking around for approval as he did so. When neither Lois nor Clark said, 'No,' he realized that it was okay so he started hitting it harder. Lois leaned in and picked up a loose piece of the paper and pointed it out to him. He grabbed it with a couple of fingers and pulled. When the paper ripped he was startled and again looked to Lois to see what her reaction would be. Seeing her smile encouraged him and he pulled some more, ripping the paper further. Lois was getting anxious so she leaned in again and helped him and he was laughing and saying, "Momma, Momma," while she did.

When the paper was finally off she helped him open the box and inside was a toy. Lois opened it and dumped the pieces on his tray. It was a ball with large plastic shapes that fit through similarly shaped holes in a sphere. He picked up a triangle shaped piece and tried to push it through a square shaped hole. Clark helped him find the right shaped hole and when the piece dropped through, he squealed in delight and shouted, "Dada, Dada," while Clark beamed his pleasure. CJ picked up another piece and Clark helped again. This became a game that CJ just couldn't get enough of. It was similar to another toy he had had for a while. It hadn't been hard plastic; it had been plush. After a while he was given another present and another until all the presents had been delivered.

About this time CJ was yawning but fighting sleep. Lois took him out of his highchair and put him on the floor and he crawled over to Clark and grabbed onto his leg. He used this to pull himself upright until he was standing with just one hand on Clark's leg. Lois knelt down at a little distance. CJ let go of Clark's pants and took a hesitant step. As soon as he completed the movement he plopped down on his butt. Undaunted, he crawled back to Clark and using his leg got back up on his feet. He fixed his eyes on Lois and took a step. He wobbled some but stayed upright. Lois held out her hands to him and he took another step. Lois was smiling widely as she watched him. He took another step. Lois encouraged him, "Come to Momma CJ, come to Momma." He took another step. Everyone was holding their breath. One more and he would be able to touch Lois' outstretched hands. He took that final step and everyone released the breath they had been holding as Lois scooped him up in her arms and showered him with kisses while saying, "What a big boy! CJ, you can walk! Momma is so proud of you! Such a big boy!" Clark moved over and wrapped up both of them in his arms. Everyone crowded around and made a fuss until Lois said, "It is really past time for his nap. I'm going to go put him down in the crib. I'll be right back."

Everyone stayed for a while chatting and having a good time over coffee and tea with left over cake. The party finally broke up and after cleaning up Lois and Clark moved into the living room. Perry and Alice had been among the first to leave because Perry needed to be in the office early. Lucy and Jimmy had followed. Jimmy was driving Lucy back to her apartment. Sam and Ellen had stayed a little longer. Last to leave had been Jonathan and Martha Kent who were staying in a hotel nearby.

After the Kents left, Lois and Clark cuddled up together on the couch with Lois leaning back against Clark's side with his arm across her shoulder and his arm crossing her chest and his hand on her waist. They sat that way silently for a time, both of them lost in their own thoughts. Suddenly Lois started weeping, something she had been doing more and more frequently as time went on. Clark knew the cause, because he was feeling the same way, although he was concealing it from Lois, presenting a strong presence to give her something she could draw strength from.

She turned around in his arms and put her arms around his neck as she gave vent to her grief and pain, her tears soaking his shirt. He moved his arms so that he held her within their circle. After a few minutes she asked, "How am I going to do this Clark? How can I give up our baby? Herb will be here before too much longer and he's going to take our baby away. Do we have to let him? Can't we go somewhere and hide?"

He started running his hands over her back in a soothing manner and spoke in a voice which was also husky with emotion, "Remember what Herb said, he was able to return a happy healthy little boy to his parents when they returned from their mission. He'd find us, no matter where we went, remember, to him it's history."

As her tears flowed freely she said bitterly, "Yeah, history. I wish we could change this particular piece of history. We've had him for the majority of his life. We're his parents in every way that counts. I might not have bore him, but, I'm still his mother. Why did Herb have to do this to us?"

Clark was feeling every bit of the pain she was expressing but he had to put up a front for her. He said, "I know, I feel the same way. It is bitter disappointment to me to have to give him up, but, look at it from their perspective; they gave him to us in good faith. How would you feel if he were actually ours and you know, he could very well be, and we had to send him off for his safety and then they, we, refused to return him to us when we returned home? We would fight to get him back and you know it. How can we do that to them or possibly ourselves? At this time, since Herb has not given us any information to the contrary, there is just as much chance that he is ours as that he isn't. We have no way to know. On that basis, if for no other reason, we must return him when Herb comes to pick him up."

With tears still in her eyes she gazed up at Clark and said, "I know you're right," she pointed at her head, "up here, but," she pointed at her heart, "down here, it hurts. We're going to be losing our baby."

"Perhaps it is only temporary. Herb could be returning him to us in our future. We just don't know. Until Herb shows up, we have to continue to be CJ's parents and we can't let him know how upset we are that he's going to be leaving. He'll know that there's a problem. He won't know what it is, but, he'll know and it will upset him."

"I know and I try, but, he's picking up on it anyhow. He's such a smart little guy, just like you."

"He's inquisitive, just like you."

A wintery smile took over her face as she said, "Yeah, he's just like what my mom said I was at his age. Must be a chip off the old block."

On February 28th Lois, Clark and CJ went out for a quiet dinner to celebrate Clark's birthday. Lois had CJ in his carrier and Clark flew them to Hawaii. Since it was a Saturday they left early

and took the diaper bag and a small bag with them. They landed in a secluded area and strolled around Waikiki for a while. They went into a fast food joint and ordered burgers, fries, drinks and milkshakes. They used the rest room to change clothes and emerged ready for the beach.

They strolled down to the beach and put out some towels. Lois lathered CJ up with sun screen and put him down to play. Clark took his turn and lathered Lois up with the sunscreen. He was on a towel on one side in his Speedos and Lois was on the other side in her brown bikini. After a time Lois picked up CJ and took him down to where the waves made it up the beach. She sat him down where the wave would wash up to him and knelt down next to him while Clark stood by. When the first wave hit him he was startled and watched it retreat. When the next one hit him he tried to pat it and succeeded in splashing some of the water on his legs. When the next wave came in he hit it harder. This time he managed to splash Lois. When she giggled he knew that what he was doing was okay so he decided that he wasn't just going to sit there. He got onto his hands and knees and started to crawl out toward the water. Lois allowed him to get just so far before she said, "CJ, no."

He stopped and looked back at her. He contemplated what she had said for a few seconds and then crept one step further. Lois said, "CJ, no!"

CJ stopped again and looked back at Lois and then very deliberately took another step forward while continuing to watch her. She stood and stepped up to him and picking him up gave him a little swat on his wet diaper and said, "CJ, Momma said, no!"

Seeing her anger CJ was repentant and put his hands out to her and said, "Momma, Momma?"

Lois pulled him into a hug and said, "Momma loves CJ, but if Momma says no, CJ must obey."

Lois sat him down in the light surf again. He looked up at her and then turned over on his hands and knees and started to crawl into deeper water again. Lois said, "CJ, no."

This time he stopped and turning plopped down on his bottom and repeated what she had said, "CJ, no."

Lois was startled. She looked at Clark and said, "Did you hear that? He said something other than Momma or Dada and it's like he really knew what I meant. He stopped!" She stooped down and picked CJ up and gave him a big hug and kiss and twirled him around almost dancing with him in her arms. Clark came over and wrapped his arms around both of them.

CJ started babbling, "Momma, Dada, CJ, no. Momma, Dada, CJ, no."

Lois said, "That's right, Darling CJ. Momma loves CJ."

CJ repeated, "Momma lubs CJ."

With tears of joy streaming down her face Lois said, "Yes, Momma loves CJ. Momma loves her baby boy, CJ."

Lois continued crying, but, Clark could tell from the look on her face that they were no longer tears of joy, but sorrow. Sorrow that it wouldn't be too much longer until Herb showed up to take CJ away from them and back to his parents. He enclosed both her and CJ in his arms standing there in the surf and comforted his wife even though his own heart was also breaking.

Chapter 28 – March Madness

Sunday, March 1, 1998

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation — Prime

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Spending a lazy Sunday afternoon at home, Lois was on the couch next to Clark nursing CJ while Clark was going over his picks for the brackets for the College Basketball Playoffs which

were affectionately called March Madness. As CJ was finishing up Clark made one final entry on his bracket and gave it a final perusal. Satisfied he put it down and accepted CJ when Lois handed him over to his father to burp.

Lois had just finished readjusting her clothing when there was a knock on the door. She looked at Clark with fear on her face. Clark slipped his glasses down a bit and checked. He said, "Jimmy," and got up to answer the door. When he opened the door he said, "Hi Jimmy, what brings you over today?"

Holding out his hands to CJ to see if he wanted to come to him, Jimmy said, "I just finished my brackets and thought I'd see if you were done and how we matched up." CJ held out his hands to Jimmy and Clark handed him over. Jimmy said, "How are you today, CJ? Boy, you're getting big. What's your Momma feedin' you, huh?"

Laughing, Lois chimed in from the couch, "You know what I'm feeding him. It's a good thing I started supplementing with solid foods, I don't think my body could produce enough milk to keep up with his appetite."

Jimmy bounced CJ a few times which elicited squeals of delight from CJ before turning him over to his Momma. Jimmy turned to Clark and said, "Okay, let's see whatcha got."

Clark and Jimmy headed into the dining room so that they could lay out their brackets to compare them.

Lois got up off the couch and was about to head into the kitchen when there was another knock on the door. She shouted, "I'll get it," and proceeded to open the door. Lucy was on the threshold. Lois said, "Hi, Sis! What brings you over today?"

"Oh, I just had a feeling that I should come over today. Hi, CJ! Want to come to Auntie Lucy?" She asked as she held out her hands to him. CJ reached for her and Lois handed him off.

Lucy started nuzzling him and picking up his shirt started giving him raspberries while he squealed in delight.

Lois asked Lucy, "Do you want to feed him his carrots while I express some more milk?"

Looking up from CJ's belly, Lucy said, "Sure, glad to help."

Lois said, "Let's go into the kitchen." As they were passing by she said to the guys, "Lucy and I are going into the kitchen and I'm going to be expressing some milk so the kitchen is off limits. If you want a snack or a drink, you'd better get it now."

Clark looked at Jimmy and Jimmy said, "Nah, I'm good."

Clark said, "Maybe when you're done."

Lois arched an eyebrow and said, "Okay, don't say I didn't warn you."

They moved into the kitchen and Lucy put CJ into his highchair and buckled him in. He knew what was coming and started banging on the tray anxious to have his carrots.

Lois got out her pump and started using it while Lucy started feeding CJ. They both finished up about the same time and Lois got herself decent again. Lois put the milk in the refrigerator while Lucy used a cloth to clean CJ up. Lois unbuckled him and put him down on the floor. He crawled over to Aunt Lucy and held onto her leg to help himself vertical and then he started to toddle around. He would manage a few steps and then plop down on his butt, get up and try again. Lucy said, "He's getting better all the time. Before you know it he will be walking all over the house. Good thing you baby-proofed."

Chuckling, Lois said, "Yeah, it's an entirely different mindset. He's really becoming the little man," as she leaned down and scooped him up. She put him over her shoulder to burp him, rubbing his back in small circles. After he burped he started yawning so Lois said, "Looks like I've got a sleepy boy here. Lucy, let's go put him down for his nap."

"Okay sis."

As they passed through the dining room Lois said, "Kitchen's free now."

Clark was pointing at an entry in a bracket and looking up said, "Thanks Honey." He turned to Jimmy and asked, "Thirsty?"

Jimmy thought for a second and then said, “Sure, whatcha got?”

“Coke, Mountain Dew or cream soda.”

“I’ll have a Dew, thanks.”

Lois and Lucy went upstairs to the nursery and Lois put CJ down for his nap. After she covered him up he fell asleep almost immediately, holding his bunny. She just stood there looking at him. After a couple of minutes Lucy saw that she was crying. Lucy moved over next to her and put an arm around her sister. She asked, “What’s the problem, Sis?”

Lois turned to her and tried to control her emotions as she said, “Nothing. Nothing at all.”

Lucy wasn’t buying it and said, “Let’s go sit down.” She led Lois out of the nursery and into the master bedroom where they sat down on the bed, before she said, “Sis, you may try to lie to yourself, but you can’t lie to me. I know you too well. Give, what’s the problem? Are you and Clark fighting?”

With a shocked expression Lois looked at Lucy and asked, “No, Clark and I are NOT fighting. How could you think such a thing?”

“Okay, if that’s not it, what’s got you so upset?”

“Oh, Lucy, it’s CJ,” and she started to cry.

Worried now, Lucy asked, “Why, what’s the matter with CJ? He looks happy and healthy.”

“That’s not it, I mean, yes, he is happy and healthy. It’s something else.”

“What is it then that has you so upset?”

“Oh, Lucy, it won’t be too much longer until he will be going back to his parents.”

“What? Why? I thought you were keeping him.”

“No, we were only keeping him while his parents were on a mission trip.”

Suddenly remembering the story, Lucy said, “Oh, that’s right. They’re medical missionaries. They’ll be coming home soon?” Trying to mitigate the problem somewhat Lucy asked, “Won’t you be able to visit him? I mean, it isn’t like he’ll be going to the space station or something.”

Lois started crying harder. When she had regained some control she said, “No, Luce, we won’t be able to visit him. He’s going too far away and we won’t have any means of getting there.”

Lucy was dumbfounded, “What do you mean, ‘too far away’ and ‘no means of getting there’? With what Clark can do, how can that be?”

Lois was happy that her sister had been brought in on the family secret so she was able to discuss problems like this with her. “Luce, that was just the cover story. CJ is really from the future ... he is the child of a super couple from the future. Any day, Herb is going to come and pick him up to take him home. He’s going to take my baby away.” A fresh flood of tears left her eyes.

“Why didn’t you tell me this story earlier, Sis?”

“It was for his safety. That’s why I had to breast feed. He needed the special nutrients only my body could provide.”

“Shouldn’t you have some say in the matter? You’re more of a mother to him than the woman that gave him birth!”

“That’s the problem, Luce. You see, first, she didn’t give him up willingly. They were going on a dangerous mission and they sent him to us to care for and protect him until they returned. It’s complicated. He couldn’t go with them but, Herb couldn’t just move him forward in time because he had to age appropriately for the amount of time they would be gone and second, I could very well be the woman that gave him birth. He could really *be* my child. How could I keep him away from myself?”

“Sis, since that is a possibility, you will have to give him up when Herb comes for him. If he is yours then you know that you can have children.”

“That’s the problem Luce, Herb wouldn’t confirm that he was

mine and Clark’s child. All he would say was that he was the child of a super couple. I really don’t know what he meant by that either. Did he mean that both of them were super? If that was the case, why is he only three quarters Kryptonian and not fully? We have so many questions and very few answers.”

“Well, Sis, all I can say is, enjoy what time you have with him and hope that Herb takes his time about getting here.”

Lois let out an unladylike snort and as she almost literally spat out her next statement the bitterness and pain were clearly evident, “Time! Time?? Takes his *time* getting here! Herb has all of the time in the world! All the time in time! Herb is a time traveler! He moves through time the way we move through the house! Whenever or wherever he wants to be he just pulls out his little box, hits a few keys, a doorway opens in front of him and zap, he steps through and he’s there, whenever and wherever he pleases. His doorway could open up right here in this room a minute from now and we’d have no warning and no recourse. He could be in CJ’s room right now picking him up to take him home and I wouldn’t know it until I went in there to feed him.”

Lucy had been shaken by the emotion Lois had been revealing and also by concern for the situations she had described. She asked, “Lo, would he really do something like that to you?”

Lois was overwrought and replied hastily, “Yes, no, I don’t know, I really don’t think he would, but he could, that’s the worst part. He could take him and I wouldn’t know it. I wouldn’t even be given the chance to say goodbye to my baby.”

Lucy threw her arms around Lois and pulled her into a hug as she started crying like her heart was being ripped out.

In a matter of seconds Clark was there by her side. Sensing his presence Lois pulled away from Lucy and threw her arms around Clark’s neck and the floodgates opened.

Lucy could see that this needed to be a personal time for the two of them so she quietly got up and went downstairs.

She found Jimmy in the dining room. He looked at her and asked, “What’s going on? Suddenly, Clark got this concerned look on his face and he left without saying a word.”

Lucy said, “It’s a long story, Jimmy. Why don’t you take me out for lunch and we can talk about it?”

Not being one to look a gift horse in the mouth and loathe to turn down such an invitation Jimmy grabbed his brackets sheet and stuffed it into his pocket. “Do you have any place special in mind?”

Lucy replied, “Yeah, Travaglini’s, they have the best pasta in town.”

Jimmy led the way to the door and escorted Lucy to his car.

Lois cried for a time drawing a measure of comfort from Clark’s solid presence. Eventually she pulled back and asked, “Oh, Clark, what are we going to do? The longer we have him the more I love him and the harder it’s going to be to give him up and the longer we have him the closer we get to the time when we have to do just that.”

Clark was very somber as he replied, “All we can do is love him while we have him and miss him when he leaves and hope that someday, some way we’ll see him again.”

Chapter 29 – Herb Returns

Thursday, October 27, 2108

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

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It was a pleasant mid afternoon in Metropolis. They were experiencing an Indian Summer day when a portal opened in the back yard of the Kent residence on Wisteria Lane. Herb stepped

through and as soon as he did the portal closed after him.

He checked his TaDT to confirm the time, 2 pm and date, October 27, 2108, and assuring himself that everything was correct, he walked up to the back door and knocked.

A few seconds later Lori Kent answered it. When she saw Herb she said, “Herb! This is an unexpected visit. Is there a problem somewhere?” Suddenly she realized that they were still standing at the door and hastily said, “Won’t you come in?”

Herb chuckling at her apparent discomfiture entered and said, “Actually, my dear, I’m here to see CJ. I’d like to ask him to take a short trip with me.”

Lori had a quizzical look on her face as he said this. She asked, “What is the problem? Are you sure that Clark wouldn’t be better suited to the trip?”

Herb said, “No, CJ is the one best suited to this mission. Please allow me to assist you in recovering a memory.”

Lori was wary, “What memory?”

Herb replied, “A memory that I had to block some time ago but which it is now time to unblock.” Herb pulled out a small device and punched a button. It hummed for a second and then he saw Lori’s visage change as the memory returned.

As a memory reconstituted itself a look of understanding took its place. She asked, “Why did you block that memory?”

“For the same reason that your memories of most of the time CJ was with you as Lois were blocked until the appropriate time. Most of those memories were time triggered so that you would remember them a little at a time. That made it a little less overwhelming.”

She nodded in understanding and said, “That’s why I didn’t remember everything at once. I understand and I guess I thank you. I’m not too happy about you messing with my memory, but you’ve been doing just that most of my life. He’s in his office, right this way.” She led him into the office where CJ was studying. He was in the process of completing his college degree requirements by taking on-line classes. He was going to complete his masters in Electrical Engineering in about two more months. There were just a couple of required courses and a thesis to go.

Lori knocked on the door and said, “CJ, you have a visitor.”

He said, “Come on in, Mom.”

Lori opened the door and said, “CJ, I’d like you to meet Herb Wells. Herb is an old friend of mine and your Dad’s.”

CJ reached out his hand and said, “Pleased to meet you.”

Herb shook his hand and said, “Oh, my boy, you don’t know it yet, but, we’ve met before.”

CJ looked at Lori with a questioning expression. She nodded her head and said, “He’s right. It was shortly after you were born. He’s the one that took you back into the past to protect you when your father and I went to New Krypton. I’d like you to hear him out and ... it’s important that you do what he says and that you go with him.”

CJ asked, “Go with him? Where?”

Lori said, “Into the past.”

CJ was incredulous and asked, “The past?”

“Yes, you see he has a mission and you’re an important part of that mission.”

Herb said, “My boy, it is necessary that I cause you to recall some memories, memories of your early life. Please sit down and relax.”

CJ sat back down in his chair as Herb pulled a device from his pocket. Herb reassured him, “Now, this won’t hurt at all. All I’m going to do is to help you remember. As soon as we are finished I’ll be asking you to accompany me.” Herb pushed a few buttons and the device in his hand hummed a gentle tune for a few seconds. As it did a smile took over CJ’s features.

CJ opened his eyes and said, “Momma. I remember!” He looked at Lori and said, “She was so much like you that I never realized the difference.”

Lori replied, “I know CJ, you see, I was her or she was me,

we were the same person, I have her memories. Ohhhhh, it’s so frustrating! Herb, what’s the best way to say it??”

Herb was chuckling as he said, “You have all of her memories so to all intents and purposes you are her.” Turning to CJ he said, “Now, my boy, it is time for me to go back and pick you up and bring you back home. I would like you to go with me. I’d like you to meet the woman that will become your mother and who was your mother for that period of your life.”

CJ looked at Lori and she said, “Yes, please go with Herb. It’s important.” She moved over and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

CJ turned back to Herb and said, “Okay, I’m ready.”

Herb nodded and pulled his TaDT from his pocket and entered the desired coordinates. The portal opened and he and CJ stepped through.

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Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 local designation — Prime

1998

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A portal opened in an alley down the street from of 348 Hyperion Avenue and Herb and CJ stepped through. They walked down the street. As they did they witnessed a young couple exit the house they were headed for, get into a car and drive off. Once the car was out of sight, they approached the door and Herb prepared to knock.

CJ stopped him and said, “I can hear them, they’re upstairs. She’s crying. We might want to wait a few minutes.”

They waited at the door and CJ monitored the conversation and activity upstairs. When he determined that Lois had gotten her emotions under control he said to Herb, “Okay, you can knock now.”

Herb knocked on the door and they heard Clark’s voice say, “Just a minute.”

A few seconds later Clark opened the door. He had checked with his vision beforehand and knew who was there. In a resigned tone he said, “Herb, I guess it’s that time.” He looked at Herb’s companion with a questioning look.

Herb noted this and said, “Let’s go inside. We have some things to discuss.”

Clark nodded in resignation and said, “Okay,” and led the way into the living room. He called upstairs to Lois, “Honey, Herb is here. Is CJ still asleep?”

CJ and Clark could both hear Lois gasp and heard her breathe, “Not now, not yet. We’re not ready.” She came to the head of the stairs and they could see the tears in her eyes. She started to descend the stairs, slowly, like a condemned prisoner headed for the gallows, holding onto the banister with both hands as she moved almost sideways down the steps. When she was half way down she saw that Herb was not alone. The young man with him was tall and looked a *lot* like Clark, right down to the glasses. His appearance shook her. There was a pang of recognition. Finishing her trip like one in a dream, she moved over and completely ignored Clark and Herb, her entire focus was on this stranger.

Clark started to say something, but, before he could utter a word, Herb put his hand on Clark’s arm and stopped him.

Lois walked up to the stranger and just stood there for almost a full minute intently staring at his face. She said, “I ... I feel like I know you. It’s so strange. I’ve never met you before, but, I feel like I know you.” Hesitantly, with shaking hands she reached up and took off his glasses. As soon as she did so they fell from her nerveless fingers. A look of total recognition overcame her features as she put her hands on either side of his face and in a voice full of wonder and in a hushed questioning tone asked, “CJ?”

He put his arms around her and said, “Momma.”

At that instant Lois’ knees went weak and her legs seemed to turn to jelly as she almost collapsed but he held her up as she started crying uncontrollably. He gently pulled her into a tight hug and said, “Yes, Momma. It’s me, it’s CJ.”

Clark moved over and took both of them in his arms.

After several minutes Lois was finally able to stand on her own, but Clark and CJ led her over to the couch. Once she was seated Clark sat on one side and CJ on the other. She was still looking at CJ’s face and her hand was on his cheek.

Clark asked, “Lois, how did you know? Herb hadn’t introduced him to me yet and I didn’t know.”

Lois, without turning and still looking at CJ answered, “A mother knows. I just knew he was my baby. My baby’s all grown up.”

CJ said, “Today’s my eighteenth birthday. Herb brought me with him as a birthday present so that I could see you again. Also so that you could see how I had grown up, thanks to you, Momma and also my Mom.”

Lois asked, “How is she? Did they save New Krypton?”

With a sad look he said, “Herb told me that I can’t say anything about that except, New Krypton is still there. Something along the lines of too much information ...”

Lois interrupted him, “Yeah, I know that line; ‘too much information too soon’ is not good’. Okay. So you can’t talk about it. What are you going to be doing?”

“I’m just finishing up on my degree and I plan to work at STAR Labs.”

Clark said, “Good for you. I’m sure they are still doing very important work.”

Lois asked, “Do you have a girl friend?”

“Actually, I’ve been to New Krypton a few times since my powers started to come on and I’ve met someone. I think she’ll be joining me on Earth soon. Her name is Elka and she’s the daughter of Tel-Ka and granddaughter of Zara and Ching. Uncle Ching, when he gave up his military title, took his family name of Ka. She was named Elka to honor the family of El. Mom and Dad decided to name me Ka-El. Ka as a dominative of Kal and also the family name of Uncle Ching and Aunt Zara. When we pair bond she will be Elka Ka-El. She decided to take the Earth name Laura.”

Lois asked, “Do you have any pictures?”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small device. When he pushed a button a holographic picture of a very lovely girl with dark hair flowing loosely around her shoulders with dark eyes and a beautiful smile dressed in flowing robes sprang into existence. She bore a striking resemblance to Lois.

Lois said, “She’s lovely. She looks a lot like me.”

“Mom said the same thing. I think, subconsciously, I was looking for you. Don’t get me wrong, I love my mom, but you and she are a little different, if you know what I mean. I was concerned when Herb first showed up and suggested this trip. Mom encouraged me to come. I didn’t know how seeing you again would work out. I just want to say, thank you. I love you, Momma.” He looked past Lois and said to Clark, “I love you too; you have got to be the best Dad a boy ever had.”

Herb and CJ spent a good part of the afternoon with Lois and Clark. Eventually it came time for them to return to the future.

While Lois went upstairs to get CJ and his things Clark got the diary. As he handed it to CJ he said, “These are our memories of your time with us. We kept a copy for ourselves, so that ... so that we can remember you. Now we will also remember the man you have become.”

Lois came down the stairs with CJ in her arms. She handed the baby to his older self and said, as she handed the diaper bag to Herb, “Take care of him. I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you. You know, that sounds so weird. He’s you. You’re who he

will become.”

Clark put his arm around Lois and said, “What she’s trying to say is, we’re proud of you. The man you’ve become. We just hope that at least part of that is a result of the time you spent with us.”

Looking over at Herb who nodded his head, CJ said, “Before I came on this trip, Herb used a device to restore my memory of the time I spent with you.” He started to tear up as he continued, “I remember that it was a period of intense happiness and joy. Your care, your tenderness; I hope I never forget that. I love you, both of you more than I can express.”

Lois looked at Herb and said, “Thank you Herb. This is a tremendous gift you have given us. It makes it a lot easier to give him up now that I see the young man he has become.”

Herb replied, “You should take comfort in the fact that what he has become is a direct result of his time with you. A large part of the most formative period of his life was spent with you and it was your influence that formed so much of his character. He is a reflection of you. You should be proud of that.”

Lois put out her hand and cupped CJ’s cheek and while looking into his eyes said, “We are Herb. We couldn’t be prouder of him if he were actually ours.”

Herb chuckled and said, “In many respects, he is. Yours, I mean. In every way that counts you are, were, his parents. He is the living proof of how any child you would parent and nurture would turn out. You have every reason to be proud.”

Clark nudged Lois and said, “See, I told you you’d do a good job as a mother.”

She replied, “Yeah, I guess I did do okay.”

Chapter 30 – Back Home

Monday, November 13, 2090

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124

%%%

Lori and Clark were about to take their leave of New Krypton. Ching and Zara were not going to accompany them on their return. Zara, after Ching being absent for four months, was reluctant to allow him out of her sight even though she would have been with him on board.

Zara asked, “How are you guys going to handle this absence? It’s been longer than you anticipated, hasn’t it?”

Lori replied, “No, actually, we knew that we were going to be gone for eight months before we left.”

Zara asked Lori, “Didn’t you just have a child?”

Lori said, “Yes, we did. He’s about a year old now. I can’t wait to get back to him.”

With a sympathetic tone Zara said, “I don’t know how I would handle this much time away from my new born child. You’ve missed so much of his development.”

Lori replied, “Subjectively, we’ve only been gone a couple of months, but I still miss him terribly. As far as missing his milestones, well, we haven’t exactly missed them, you see, we have this ‘friend’ ... Herb Wells, he’s a ... time ... traveler. Anyhow, he visited us the night you arrived. He took CJ, back into the past and gave him to us so that we could take care of him. That was at a time after your previous visit. Since we were the ones that cared for him, we have all of the memories of that time with him. I’m still looking forward to getting him back though.”

Zara said, “I can believe that. Remembering how he grew up is not the same as being there with him, being able to hold him and play with him ...”

Lori started to chuckle as she interrupted, “You’re right. It isn’t the same. It has been a sacrifice, but it was a sacrifice we had to make. The survival of New Krypton depended on it. If

there had been any other way ... but there wasn't. I just hope he remembers me." There were unshed tears in her eyes as she said this.

Zara reached out and gave Lori a hug. She said, "You have sacrificed so much for us and that after all that happened in the past. All of New Krypton will know of your sacrifice. Your name will be revered as much as Kal-El's is."

Lori looked at Zara and said, "That's really not necessary."

Zara replied firmly, "New Krypton must know what you sacrificed for them and I am going to see to it that they do. You have sacrificed so much for us, it's the least we can do."

While Zara and Lori had been talking, Clark had been packing their things. He came into the room just as Zara was finishing up and walked over to Lori and putting his arms around her said, "We appreciate it."

Zara asked, "Is that everything?"

Clark looked at the bags and said, "Yep, all set to go."

Zara said, "Then I will wish you a pleasant and safe trip home. Ching and I will be needed here to complete the preparations for the negotiations and also rebuilding our military preparedness."

Ching walked in and asked, "Are you ready to go?"

Clark replied, "We are very ready. We can't wait to get back."

Ching clasped Clark's forearm in that forearm shake and said, "Thanks. Thanks to you and Lori we have a chance. We hope you can come back soon."

"Depending on how our suggestion is accepted, you may be seeing some other members of our family pretty soon. We will come back as needed."

The new throne ship had been retrofitted to have the new shields installed for protection and had also been armed with a pair of rail guns. On their return trip they were going to be taking Kal-El's ship back with them so that the FTL drive that Jor-El had developed could be analyzed and duplicated. It was estimated that it would shorten the transit time between Earth and New Krypton by as much as eighty percent.

They would be able to establish a regular shipment schedule that would improve trade and also enable the Kent clan to follow through on the plan of families 'vacationing' on New Krypton. The New Krypton year was broken down into ten months of forty-five days each, one orbit taking 450.25 days. Each family would take at least a portion of one of the months.

The trip back took the same amount of time as the trip to New Krypton since the speed when in FTL drive was a constant. A portion of each day, Clark spent in a sauna which used 5400 degree Kelvin lights which simulated a yellow sun spectrum which started rebuilding his power reserves, preparing him for their return to Earth.

Eventually they arrived in Earth's space and assumed an orbit in a LaGrange point as they had done previously. Lori and Clark, thanks to the sauna treatments, both floated into the air lock and waited for it to de-pressurize. When the hatch opened they shaped their course for Metropolis. As they entered atmosphere Clark sent a broadcast thought, /Kids, we're home!/
 A chorus of replies came back, most with side channel emotions of relief. Finally one cut through. Jon sent, /Welcome back! Shall we have a gathering?/
 Clark replied, /I'll get back to you on that. We have some things to do first./
 Once they had landed they entered the house to check on things. After a few minutes Clark went out back to the secure storage he had constructed and pulled out his space craft. He sent, /Commander?/
 /This is commander Zar./
 /Commander, this is Kal-El. I will be there with my ship in just a few minutes. Please see to it that the landing bay hatch is open./
 A few seconds later he received, /Pod bay outer hatch

cycling. Rainbow flash, initiated./

/Thank you commander. I'll be there in minutes./ He picked up his ship and took off.

When he was dropping the ship off he asked, "How soon must you leave Commander?"

"We are not on a schedule. Did you have a request?"

"Yes, Commander, I'd like to propose to my family the idea that we have had for them taking turns visiting New Krypton. I may have some passengers for you on your return trip."

The commander started to smile as he said, "I will have some accommodations prepared. We will delay our departure as long as is needed."

"Thank you Commander. We should know within a day or so. We'll let you know."

When he returned he found Lori in the bedroom, crying. He moved over and sitting down next to her put an arm around her shoulders. He asked, "What's wrong Honey? We prevented a war, saved a world and made it back in one piece. Why all the tears?"

She turned and buried her face in his chest as her sobs increased. He wrapped her up in his arms to try and comfort her. After a few minutes she was calmed down somewhat. She pulled back and said, "I was just sitting here thinking, trying to remember CJ and how he had been when we had him in the past and suddenly this wave of grief just swept over me. All the time we were away, little by little things from that time would come to my memory. You know what it's like. I'd remember what it was like to put him to my breast and how eager he was to feed. I'd remember that time, before I knew about the problems with chocolate how I'd had a couple of Double Fudge Crunch bars and afterward he was colicky because of the stomach problem it caused and then the absolute mess he made in his diaper. Actually, believe it or not, they were happy memories. Now I remember the soul shattering grief of having *my* baby taken away. How could I have allowed Herb to do that to me? Why didn't we come up with another solution?"

"Honey, you know it had to happen this way. I guess that memory was blocked until now so that we would do what needed to be done. It was the only way."

"I know that, but, it doesn't make it any easier. Herb should be here soon with CJ. I need to clean the house. We've been away for over eight months." Walking over to a table she swiped her finger across the top and said, "Look at the dust. I'm just glad I have super speed now. It won't take too long to clean up, especially if you help." She gave him a hopeful smile.

"How can I resist when you ask so sweetly? Let's get started. I'd like to call a family conference for this evening. I'd like to propose the family vacation plan we came up with."

Lori brightened and said, "Yes, let's do that. Right now I feel that it could be imperative that there be a superhero on planet. Sam's is the only family that wouldn't provide a hero since Alice is from New Krypton. All of our older grandchildren and their spouses, including Liz and Teri, in just a few years, can take turns as well. Let's get the cleaning done so that we can have the family over."

"So, there it is. How many families would consider taking their vacations on New Krypton?"

All of the families raised their hands in assent.

Clark said, "I thought as much. Who would be able to leave within forty-eight hours?"

There was some discussion within families and finally Lara and Michael, Celeste and Bill raised their hands.

Clark addressed Lara, "How can you justify the absence?"

Lara replied, "You've been gone for eight months. In that time we have left the LA firm and accepted Sam's offer to work for The Foundation. We started two months ago. We head The Foundation office in LA now and we still handle the New Kryptonian trade contracts. Since contracts with New Krypton is

our specialty, I'm sure Sam can see the advantage of us spending some time on New Krypton. In fact, Mike and I will have to talk this over; we might be open to a permanent move." There ensued a conversation at the speed of thought between them.

This was totally unexpected and shocked Clark and Lori as well as the rest of the family. There was an excited babble. Finally Clark asked, "Permanent? Are you sure you would want to move there, permanently?"

Lara replied, "Well, yeah, why not? We just discussed all of the ramifications of a move of this sort and we are satisfied that as long as some details can be overcome, it should be doable. Since the rest of the family is going to be setting up rotating visits, it won't be like we won't be seeing everybody. With us there permanently, they will have at least one full time superhero and when a second family visits there will be at least two. Occasionally, when another family comes out, we can come back for a vacation here. It's a win, win situation."

"For a permanent move, won't you need more than forty-eight hours?"

Looking over at Sam, Lara said, "As long as we can get some help settling our house and all, we should be ready."

This had all been happening too fast and Clark and Lori were perplexed. Something said earlier finally hit them and said in unison, "The Foundation office in LA?"

There was some general laughter. Finally Sam spoke up, "While you were away some changes have occurred. The Foundation has opened some new offices. We now have subsidiary offices in twenty cities. Some of the offices are primarily medical clinics, provide security consulting services or perform other necessary services at reduced prices or free services. Each office is run by a family member. I let the family members chose what city they wanted. Each city that has a branch office of the Foundation now has a resident superhero or team."

"We realized as a result of the drug interdiction that clustering almost all of us here in Metropolis wasn't efficient. Now we are spread out for greater coverage. As more of the kids develop their powers eventually we will go international."

Sam said, "With respect to the move, we can take care of that detail. Let's see, you have the house in LA. Louise hasn't chosen a city yet. Louise, why don't you take the LA office and you can continue to live at home. As long as we know when to expect you back for a visit, it will be ready for you when you arrive."

Louise said, "That would be great! All my friends are there anyhow."

Lara said, "That would be just fine. In the morning we will start packing what we will need. Sophie, Rob and Mary are all over ten so their powers are coming on which means that they will be able to handle the environment on New Krypton. Okay, now that that is settled, we can be ready in forty-eight hours."

Mike added, "Torque will become the resident superhero of New Krypton."

Lori snapped her fingers and then said, "When you get there, make sure you pick up my spare bow and arrows from Ching." She zipped into the office and back. She held up the bow to display it. "They made a backup in case this one broke when I was practicing. It came in very handy when we had that meeting. You're almost as good as me with a bow and I think that this one will help you be even better. There will be little need of compensating for drop. The arrows you loose from this bow will be moving at supersonic speed. They will have a pretty flat trajectory as a result."

"Thanks, Lori. I will," said Mike.

Clark looked at Celeste and Bill and asked, "How could you guys do it?"

Celeste said, "We now head the Detroit office where we have set up a free clinic. I have an assistant and staff who could handle the practice for a few months. I've covered for him for a like

period when he's gone on a medical mission to Africa. I'll tell him I'm going on a medical mission to New Krypton. Agnes, could you head the office while I'm away?"

Agnes replied, "Happy to, Mom."

Bill said, "I could turn the security consulting function over to my assistant. The office is so new we don't have that large a clientele yet."

"Could you guys be ready in forty-eight hours?"

"Easily."

"Okay, why don't we do this, both families will depart with the transport now in orbit. Cele, Bill and their family will return in three months. When that transport arrives there will be another family ready to take their turn. All I can say is thank you. This means a lot to us and also to New Krypton. With the threat posed by the Hangaresi the presence of a super hero or two could mean the difference between survival and extinction. When Herb returns with CJ we will request additional pendants for each of the spouses."

Lori spoke up, "Will your unmarried children be going with you?"

Lara and Mike looked around at their children and receiving nods from each said, "Yes, they will," Lara laughed and continued, "Who knows, they might find their soul mates there the way Sam did."

Celeste had already surveyed her family and said, "Ours will go too."

Clark said, "I'll notify the commander." He sent, /Commander./

/Yes, Lord Kal-El./

/You will be having two family groups consisting of thirteen individuals riding back with you. They should be ready to go in forty-eight hours./

/We will prepare accommodations. Thank you./

/Thank you commander./ He said, "All set. Lara and Celeste, if your families could stay so that we can brief them, the rest can go on home."

There was a chorus of farewells and some hugs exchanged as the families were leaving.

Clark and Lori briefed both families on what had occurred before they headed out to prepare for their departure.

Mid-afternoon the next day, Herb showed up with CJ.

As he handed CJ to Lori she marveled at how much he had grown and she started fussing over him. CJ had a somewhat quizzical look on his face. He asked, "Momma?"

Lori said "Yes, CJ, it's Momma."

CJ looked around and in an agitated tone said, "Momma?"

Lori frantically looked at Clark and said, "He doesn't remember me."

Clark said, "Here, let me." Clark reached for CJ. CJ readily went to Clark and CJ said, "Dadda!"

Clark said, "That's right Sport. Clark pulled Lori in and said, "Momma."

CJ said, "Momma?"

Clark said, "Yes, CJ, Momma."

Lori reached for CJ and he shied away.

Lori started to cry. "Oh, Clark, my baby's forgotten me."

Clark replied, "You're younger than Lois was and you wear your hair differently. Just give it a little time. Think back. Remember some of the things you did as Lois."

After a minute's thought she said, "Let me have him. I have an idea."

Clark handed him over and Lori lifted his shirt and gave him a raspberry on his tummy. He squealed in delight and put his hands on the sides of her face and said, "Momma!"

Lori pulled him into an embrace and showered him with kisses, and said, "Momma loves CJ."

CJ repeated, "Momma lubs CJ."

That's right, "Momma loves CJ."

While this was going on Herb pulled Clark aside. Herb reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of pendants. Herb said, "Each of these pendants is a double strength. On the reverse you will see a numeral two. That way you can tell them apart. Your family will need them when on New Krypton."

Clark chuckled and said, "Right, history. Thanks Herb. New Krypton appreciates it."

With an enigmatic look Herb said, "They may come in handy."

"Oh, are we correct about the threat?"

Herb retreated behind his motto, "Too much information too soon ..."

Clark interrupted and finished with, "Is not good. I know, but you can't blame me for trying."

Shortly after that Herb left.

After Herb's departure, Lori picked up the diaper bag so that she could put away the supplies. When she opened the zipper she was confronted by a brown and white stuffed bunny. When she lifted it out, CJ saw it and smiled as he reached for it. Lori handed it to him and he hugged it with both arms. When she put him down for his nap he wouldn't settle until he had his rabbit but once in his possession he was content. That rabbit was his constant companion for several years.

When it was time for the families to depart, the ship sent down some pods to carry what was to be moved to New Krypton.

Clark had a small capsule made of Plexiglas which was airtight and had an attached air supply and a small heater unit. They put CJ into this and carried him with them when they went up to the ship before it departed. When they arrived, Lori took CJ out of the capsule so that his siblings could all say their goodbyes.

Clark handed the extra pendants to Lara to take to New Krypton and then hugs, handshakes and kisses were exchanged before Clark and Lori left to return home with CJ.

After exiting the lock, Clark and Lori hung suspended in space as the ship broke orbit and they were able to watch it disappear into the void before heading back home.

Epilogue

TTEMPO Headquarters 2042

Herb stepped through the portal into the receiving area of the lobby of TTEMPO HQ. He looked around and saw the motto that he had insisted be posted over the reception desk. It was emblazoned in gold letters "Only Time Will Tell". As he was stepping away from the receiving pad he observed agents arriving and departing and nodded to himself.

Herb took a tube to his floor and as he approached it his office door automatically opened for him since it was keyed to his bioelectromagnetic signature. When he entered he hung his bowler hat on the coat rack standing just inside the door. He said "Lights!" and several lamps designed to look like the gas lamps of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century lit up. He walked over to an old fashioned roll top desk and sat down. As he did so the chair actually creaked as it took his weight. He pushed a button on his desk and speaking into the air said "New document."

A very human sounding voice replied "Working. Will this be a letter, or a journal entry?"

"Journal entry, Title ... Universal Locator Designation — Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 CJ's visit"

"Observations:"

"I have just returned from delivering CJ to Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime. The time spent with Lois and Clark of Prime, as anticipated was basically uneventful. I was able to deliver a happy and healthy one year old to Lori and

Clark. Taking the eighteen year old CJ with me when I went to pick younger CJ up softened the blow of losing the child as I had anticipated. Prior to our departure I was able to use the memory blocker on Lois and Clark. It should have sufficiently confused their memories of the time that they will not remember the emotional overtones of the time other than being happy having him. They should have little recollection of the time spent with the teen-age CJ. I was able to unblock those memories for Lori.

"I returned the teen-age CJ to 2108 before returning the young child to 2091.

"The mission was successful and everyone back where they belong.

"End entry."

"Recorded."

Thursday, October 27, 2108

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -124 Alt-Prime

%%%

CJ was surprised. Herb had just dropped him off at home before moving back into the past to return his younger self to his mother and father. It was still his birthday. In fact it was just a few minutes since he had left with Herb for his visit to the past, to the woman he could only think of as Momma. The trip had taken most of a day. It had been a day spent with one of the most important people in his entire life. Now, he was back in the office, but he had not returned to his studies.

His siblings hadn't returned from school as yet. Usually he liked this time because he knew he wouldn't be disturbed by his brothers and sisters for some uninterrupted study time, but not today. Today was different.

He was sitting in his chair holding the book he had been given by his dad, running his hands over the cover. He hadn't opened it as yet, but, deep down he knew that it was going to be one of his most prized possessions.

The visit with her and his dad had struck a deeply emotional chord and his whole being was still vibrating like a tuning fork. To a certain extent he was torn. He deeply loved his Mom and he knew that she was also Momma and he deeply loved her as well. It was so confusing, they were the same person and yet they were different people. As it had been explained to him, Momma was part of Mom, but not all of her. There was more to Mom than just Momma. It was quite confusing.

Composing himself he finally opened the diary of his time with her, with them he corrected himself.

Thanks to Herb and the memory enhancement treatment he had given CJ prior to the trip, the pictures actually brought back crystal clear memories of the incidents portrayed. Some brought a chuckle; in fact most brought at least a smile to his lips. There were so many pleasant memories to savor. He knew that, thanks to their thoughtfulness in preparing this diary, he would never forget the time he had spent with them.

CJ went through the entire book, slowly, savoring every recalled memory. He laughed at some of his antics and cried along with Momma as he could see the pain mirrored in her visage. He could see that she was trying to hide it behind a façade of cheerfulness, but he could see right through that to the pain she was feeling. He knew just what that pain was. She loved him and she knew that she would be losing him, forever. He could feel that love poured out through the pictures. If there had been any doubts as to its existence they would have been instantly dispelled. He could never doubt her love for him.

Eventually he came to the last page. Attached to the page was an envelope. On all of the other pages, notations had been made with the pictures or narratives typed up and attached. This was separate. On the outside was a simple inscription in a feminine

hand, “CJ”. He opened the envelope and extracted a letter. This was not written in the same hand as the captions. This was the same as the inscription, a woman’s handwriting. He started reading.

“My dearest CJ,

I am writing this while sitting in my rocking chair in your room. I’ve just finished feeding you and you are asleep in your crib.

I hope that when you are older you will read this and think kindly of me.

Herb never told us just who your real parents were. We suspect that it could be us, but we have no way to know for sure. What we do know is that for now you are our baby and we love you with all of our heart. I couldn’t love you more if I had borne you. I hope you have felt that love while you were with us.

We really had no preparation for you. We didn’t have the normal nine months to get ready that most couples have.

To us, you were a gift from heaven. The day you arrived we had been told that we could not have children and also we were turned down for adoption. That news was the death and double death of a dream. Then you appeared and you were the fulfillment of that dream, a dream come true in flesh and blood.

As soon as I picked you up I just knew I was in love. This little miracle child had been delivered as an answer to prayer. It was love at first sight.

We had some hurdles to overcome, but, we worked on them and suddenly the hurdles were behind us.

Your presence in our family made it complete.

I had dreaded being a mother because of the example my own mother had set, but, then when I became a member of the Kent family and got to know Martha, the example she set encouraged me. It was her example that really convinced me that having children wasn’t the catastrophe I had always feared. That was when I decided that I wanted a child.

Martha was a wonderful role model and I really tried to follow her example. I think I was at least moderately successful because you seemed to be a happy baby and so easy to love.

I still don’t know if I will ever have children, but, if that miracle does happen and I do, please remember that I will always love you as my first baby. No one will ever take your place in my heart. You may at some point have to share it but you will never lose it.

I love you more than words can express and I always will.

Momma”

CJ carefully folded the letter and put it back in the envelope. He closed the flap and simply sat there with his fingers on the closed envelope as he thought about what he had just read.

Softly he closed the diary and standing, placed it prominently on his bookshelf between a treasured copy of “The Time Machine” and a brown and white stuffed rabbit that showed a lot of love which he patted before turning away.

He said, “I’ll never forget you, Momma.”

THE END

Footnotes:

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lagrangian_point
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Leche_League