

Lois and Castle

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Summary: A crossover story where Lois Lane steps in to give Castle and Beckett a helping hand.

Late 2010

New York City homicide detective Kate Beckett leaned back in her chair and studied her ‘murder board’. The large, white, porcelain marker board displayed several photographs with colored marker lines connecting them in a crisscross pattern that looked like a road map from hell. Each photograph was labeled with notes, questions, and answers pertaining to each individual and their relationships to each other.

The FBI had their fancy computers with all the touch screens and virtual displays, but there was something about doing it old school that seemed so much more satisfying to her.

Her latest case had been one of the most challenging yet. There had been so many twists and turns, blind leads, red-herrings, and just plain old confusion that it was just short of a miracle that she and her team had been able to solve the murder and prevent a second.

She shook her head slowly as her gaze drifted across the colorful scribbles on the nicked and scratched whiteboard. Against all odds, they’d busted the case and once again, Castle’s contributions and assistance had proved essential to their being able to catch the killer and close the case.

Her Captain had just finished giving her a pat on the back for a job well done and was now talking to Castle. If she knew Captain Montgomery and Castle, it probably had nothing to do with the case and most likely about tickets to the Knicks game tomorrow night.

One would think that the life of a homicide detective, though never dull or mundane, would generally be more stable and routine. Every murder was different, but each was approached in the same way. There were procedures to follow and legwork that needed to be done that were essentially the same for every case.

Yet, when Castle had entered her world, even the routine seemed to take on a life of its own and she was consistently finding herself needing to re-evaluate her expectations. In her line of work results were what counted and she grudgingly had to admit that he helped her get results.

Richard Castle was a best selling crime novelist who’d first crossed her path almost two years ago when she had brought him in for questioning about a couple of murders that had mimicked murders from his books. He was friends with the mayor, as well as her captain, so he had little trouble getting permission to accompany her and her team on that case. He then convinced the powers that be that he should be allowed to ‘shadow’ her for a time. It was all in the name of research for his next book. The higher ups thought it would be good public relations. She thought it would be a pain in the neck.

Of course, that didn’t really prepare her for what came next. As it turned out, he was looking to create a new character for his next book; a character that unfortunately was supposedly based on her.

The heroine of his novel was a sexed-up, super model with a badge who went by the name of Nicki Heat. It had caused her no little amount of grief and embarrassment when the first book ‘Heat Wave’ hit the stands and became an immediate best seller.

Kate sighed as she remembered those awkward days after the book came out. At least he got most of the police work part of it right.

The public reaction was such that those powers that be were more than receptive to the idea of a second book. Castle was back in the fold, and even though ‘Naked Heat’ had been released a few months ago, it didn’t seem that he would be leaving her team anytime soon. Apparently Nicki Heat was here to stay, and so was Richard Castle.

She glanced up when she heard the laughter coming from her captain’s office. They were probably swapping dirty jokes now.

Her relationship with Castle was... complicated. Early on, his constant hovering and unsolicited input had been annoying, but over time he sort of ‘grew’ on her. There was no doubt that he was a good looking guy, and could be very charming when he wanted to be.

He seemed to know everybody who was anybody in the city of New York, and on more than one occasion his contacts had been very helpful on cases.

They’d had their ups and downs in the past. Every time it seemed like one of them was ready to make a move toward something a little more daring in their relationship the other would do something to put distance between them again. It was an age old problem and truthfully she didn’t have any idea where she and Castle would end up, but she did know that he would always have her back, and she would always have his. They were friends.

She watched as Castle shook her captain’s hand and left his office. He approached her desk, a big smile on his face. “Well, I hear you’ve got some vacation time coming up.” He sat on the corner of her desk.

Kate frowned. “It wasn’t my idea. Captain is forcing me to take some time off. It seems that HR pointed out that I’ve got eight weeks of vacation time built up and if I don’t take some time off the union is going to file a grievance.”

“Can they do that if it’s your choice?”

Kate shook her head. “It’s a union, what do you think?”

Castle laughed. “I see what you mean. So, any big plans?”

Beckett emitted a very unladylike snort. “Oh yeah, big plans. First I’m going to take a luxurious bath, then I’m going to paint my toenails. After all that, I think I’ll fall asleep on my couch reading a book.”

Castle perked up. “Oh, going to check out ‘Naked Heat’?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of actual literature.”

Castle placed his hand over his heart. “You wound me.” Kate laughed. “Tell you what,” he continued. “It sounds like you don’t really have any definite plans. Let me offer you an alternative.”

Kate eyed the cocky novelist warily. “What, prey tell, has that dirty little mind of yours concocted?”

“Have you ever been to Metropolis?”

“The Big Apricot?”

Castle smiled at that city’s sobriquet. “One in the same. My agent has me scheduled to do some book signings and press junkets there this weekend. Why don’t you come with me? We could do some sight seeing.” Castle cocked his brow. “Who knows, we might even get to meet Superman.”

Beckett shook her head in amused denial. “I know you seem to know everyone who is anyone in New York, but I hope you aren’t trying to tell me that you actually know Superman.”

Castle shrugged. “Well, no I don’t know Superman, but I do know someone who does know Superman. She knows him quite well, in fact.”

Beckett couldn’t hold back her laughter. “Of course she does. What is she, his secret girlfriend? Or perhaps they’re just buddies who hang out and watch old videos at her place.” Beckett’s tone turned more accusatory. “And why is it that your ‘friend’ in Metropolis just happens to be a woman? Not another ex-wife?”

It was Castle's turn to laugh. "Hardly; perhaps you've even heard of her. She and her husband are pretty well known." He paused, knowing that it bugged her when he played at the dramatic.

"Enough with the games just tell me who this mystery woman is."

Castle smiled. "None other than... Lois Lane."

Beckett rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Now I know you're either lying or bragging. No way do you know Lois Lane."

"So you have heard of her?"

"Seriously? There are cases she was involved in that are now used at the academy to teach undercover and infiltration techniques." A smile found its way onto Beckett's face. "I've always wanted to meet her. She's kind of a hero of mine."

Castle frowned. "A hero?"

"A strong independent thinking woman who has excelled in a profession that was normally considered a man's world. What's not to admire?"

Castle grinned at her. "Sounds like someone else I know."

Beckett snorted. "As tough as it still is now, it was much tougher back when she started." Kate spun her chair to face Castle. "So tell me, how would a crime novelist from New York meet Metropolis' top investigative journalist?"

"What, you don't think that my natural charm and good looks are enough to interest a woman like Lois Lane?"

Beckett patted Castle's arm with her hand. "You're talking about a woman who hangs out with Superman... and I've seen pictures of her husband."

Castle raised his brow. "Be that as it may, I met the ubiquitous Ms. Lane at a writer's conference where she was a guest speaker. She told the crowd of mystery writers of several of her adventures as a reporter for the Daily Planet."

Kate laughed. "I'll bet what that woman has gone through in her career could really inspire a book series by one of your cohorts."

Castle gave her a thoughtful look. "I thought about it... briefly, but I rejected the idea. Truthfully, her life would be too unbelievable for mainstream crime and mystery fiction. But, I found her to be a charming and interesting woman."

Beckett grinned. "And it didn't hurt that she was also attractive?"

Castle winked. "That too. Anyway, she said that if I was ever in Metropolis I should look her up." Castle stood up. "So, what do you say? You want to see Metropolis?"

Beckett pursed her lips as she got up from her chair. "What the heck. It's not like I have anything better to do."

"Great, I'll call you with the travel details in the morning."

Castle turned and began to walk toward the lobby.

"Oh, and Castle." He stopped and turned. "I want my own room."

His smile was just a bit coy. "Of course."

Lois Lane eased her way into the Barnes and Noble. It was the largest bookstore in Metropolis and it needed all that square footage today. The crowd was large and animated as they stood in the long winding line, waiting patiently for a chance to garner an autograph and a few moments with one of their favorite authors.

Lois knew that Rick Castle was a popular writer, had been for several years, but she hadn't been prepared for the size of the crowd. With a small sigh she put her copy of "Naked Heat" back into her bag. She had hoped to get her book signed here at the 'official' signing just like any of his fans, but she knew that she'd be seeing him later and could get the autograph then.

She quickly suppressed her disappointment and shifted to the 'other' reason why she wanted to come to the signing. Ever since Rick had mentioned that he was bringing Detective Beckett along

on the trip Lois had been excited at the prospect of meeting the NYPD homicide detective.

Lois was under no delusion that the hyperbolized pin-up policewoman that served as the lead in Castle's latest two novels bore any resemblance to a real life detective. She was curious to meet the woman whom Castle publicly credited as being his inspiration for the character Nicki Heat.

She'd initially expected to see Beckett sitting at the table next to Rick; maybe even adding her own autograph to a book jacket. But she wasn't there. Lois let her gaze sweep the store. She hoped that Beckett had come and hadn't opted to stay back at the hotel, or take in some sights on her own while Castle did his diligence for his publisher.

A slow smile spread onto Lois' lips as she caught sight of a striking young woman standing toward the back of the store conversing with a man who had to be the manager. If this woman was the one, then Castle hadn't been exaggerating when it came to his physical description of his lead character.

The woman was very attractive. She was taller than Lois and her simple outfit of a plain red blouse and tan slacks wasn't able to hide the fact that she had a great figure and a toned body. Of course, that figured, considered the kind of work the woman did.

Her hair was worn long and loose; over the shoulders down to her shoulder blades, and she had an air of competence that radiated from her in waves. Lois' smile grew wider. That woman had to be Kate Beckett.

Lois strode purposely over to where the woman and the man were conversing. As her approached was noticed the two turned toward her. She extended her hand.

"Hi, you must be Detective Kate Beckett. I've heard so much about you. I'm Lo..."

Recognition flashed onto Beckett's face. "Lois Lane!" Kate grabbed her hand and shook it vigorously. "Castle said he knew you, but I just chalked it up to his typical name dropping tactics. I'm such a big fan of yours."

A smile of confusion found its way onto Lois face. "You've heard of me?"

Beckett laughed. "Seriously, what independent woman trying to make her way in a male dominated profession hasn't heard of the crusading reporter Lois Lane? You are something of an idol to all of us."

Lois smiled as she shook her head. "I'm not sure that's a compliment. It makes me sound like some old maid icon."

Beckett cocked her head and gave Lois a once over. "One look at you and I doubt anyone would consider you an old maid, but you are an icon to working women everywhere."

"Well thanks for that." Lois glanced back over her shoulder. "It looks like Rick is going to be busy for a while." She grabbed Beckett by the hand. "There's a great coffee shop just around the corner. It's quiet, and they have the best chocolate brownies this side of Switzerland." Lois grinned. "I think we need to talk."

Kate returned the smile and indicated that Lois should lead the way.

It only took them a few minutes to get to the coffee shop and be comfortably seated at a booth near the back of the place. Both ordered coffee and a brownie and settled in. It was Beckett who broke the silence first.

"So, Ms. Lane, do you mind if I ask you some questions?"

Lois smiled at the eager young woman. Beckett couldn't have been much more than thirty, yet she was one of New York's finest detectives. "What is this, an interrogation?"

Beckett blushed. "No, Ms. Lane, I... I just would like to know what it's like to be someone like you. Someone who has done so many amazing things in her life."

Lois laughed softly and patted Beckett's hand. "First off, my name is Lois, and I wish you would use it because I plan to call you Kate. Also, it's my understanding that you are someone who

has done quite a few amazing things herself.”

Kate blushed again. “Fair enough, but please don’t confuse Nicki Heat with me. Castle’s imagination is mostly responsible for that character.” She lowered her head and leaned closer to Lois. Her voice was pitched low and soft. “So... is it true that you named Superman?”

Lois smiled as the young detective fired questions at her with a fan girl’s enthusiasm. It became clear that Beckett had followed the media coverage of many of her more high profile investigations. It was also obvious that Beckett was used to working with a partner because she seemed especially interested in how Lois and Clark worked with each other and how their partnership progressed over the years.

Lois chuckled as she put her hand on the young woman’s arm to stop her barrage of questions. “Kate, take a breath. Save some of these for later; till after I’ve taken you and Rick back to our place for dinner.” Lois sighed dreamily. “You haven’t really eaten until you had some of Clark’s cooking.”

Beckett grinned. “So is your husband the cook in the house, or does he just cook for special occasions?”

Lois waved her hand about in a gesture of dismissal. “My skills in the kitchen are severely lacking. I only know how to make three things and two of them require a lot of chocolate.”

Beckett laughed. “Well, I’m not a great cook, but I know my way around the kitchen. I just don’t have the time, so I order in, or eat out, frequently. Castle always gives me grief about my empty refrigerator and the lack of any food in my pantry.”

Lois nodded. “So, how long have you and Rick been together?”

Lois almost laughed at the panicked look on Beckett’s face.

Kate swallowed as she hesitated answering Lois’ question. In the short time they’d been talking she was really starting to like the beautiful reporter. Even in her early forties Lois Lane was stunning. Her short dark hair framed a face that still hadn’t yet seen the onset of wrinkles that came with aging. She could easily pass for a contemporary of Kate’s.

Her hesitation was based on the question. What exactly did she mean by ‘together’? What had Castle told her? Kate knew that he exchanged friendly emails with Lois several times a month, and supposed that since he’d been partnering up with her, he’d probably increased the frequency just to brag about his own investigative exploits.

“What do you mean, ‘together’?” She tried to keep her voice emotionless. “Castle has shadowed me for about two years now and I consider him a good friend... and my partner; but there is nothing romantic going on.”

Lois’ brow rose. “Really? That’s not quite the way Rick explained it.”

Beckett just shook her head, her hair falling in front of her face. She quickly tucked an errant strand behind her ear. “Sometimes Castle confuses his books with reality. I am fond of him and we do work well together, but I’m with someone. His name is Josh, and he’s a cardiac surgeon. Our schedules don’t let us have a lot of time together, but I really like him.” Kate rolled her eyes and frowned. “I just wish Castle would stop calling him ‘Doctor Motorcycle Boy’.”

Lois laughed softly. “Funny, I don’t remember Rick mentioning him in any of his emails.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“Am I interrupting anything?”

Kate turned a watched as a gorgeous hunk of manhood approached their table. Except for a pair of stylish glasses, he was the poster boy for ‘tall, dark, and handsome; and the glasses didn’t get in the way in the least. Kate knew immediately who it was and suddenly she was very jealous of Lois.

A big smile spread across Lois’ face as jumped up to greet the

man. “Oh, Clark, I didn’t expect you yet.” She literally threw herself into his arms and soundly kissed him. Apparently Lois had no problems with public displays of affection. With a husband like Clark Kent, she didn’t blame her.

Lois sat back down and Clark slid into the chair next to her. “I went over to the bookstore but the manager said the two of you had left. He’d overheard you mentioning this place so I came here.”

“I’m glad you did.” Lois gave him another quick kiss. “Clark, this is Detective Kate Beckett.”

Clark smiled and reached out his hand to her. His smile was amazing and she was so lost in it that she almost forgot to shake his hand. “So this is the extraordinary KB; the inspiration for Nicki Heat.”

Kate rolled her eyes again. “Castle might claim I’m the inspiration but the only resemblance I bear to Nicki Heat is gender.”

Lois grinned. “We’ll see.”

Kate was confused by her comment but before she could ask Lois what she meant they were interrupted by a shout from across the room. Kate saw that Castle had entered the little coffee shop.

Clark waved him over. “I told Rick where I was going and told him to join us when he finished up.”

Lois jumped up and ran over to give Castle a hug. Kate had to admit that when beautiful woman threw themselves into Castle’s arms she often felt a slight twinge of jealousy, but knowing who Lois worked with every day, and went home to every night. There was none of those feelings here.

She was a bit surprised by how familiar Lois was with Castle though; considering they’d only met in person a few times and carried on an occasional email friendship. Maybe Lois was just one of those types of people who made friends easily. Kate couldn’t help thinking that it might be nice to get to know Clark a bit better.

Lois grabbed Castle’s arm and waved for Clark to follow as she dragged him out the door. “Let’s get home... I’m starved.”

Clark laughed and offered his hand to Beckett. She took it and marveled at the strength of the man as she helped her to her feet. “We better hurry. The one thing you don’t want to do is keep Lois waiting.”

Kate returned his smile. “Well, we wouldn’t want to do that, would we?”

Lois was having a great time. The dinner had gone splendidly and the two couples had been entertaining each other by trading ‘war stories’. Lois was amazed at how much Detective Beckett had gone through in such a short time and was saddened by the obvious pain the woman carried due to her mother’s horrific murder. It was clear that the young woman had built walls to protect herself; a practice that Lois was only too familiar with. She just hoped that with Beckett it wouldn’t take as long for someone to tear those walls down as it had been for Lois. She liked Kate and saw her as someone who deserved to be happy.

Lois glanced over at Rick. He was currently holding court; expounding on one of their more recent cases. Judging by Kate’s frequent eye rolling she guessed that he was exaggerating things... just a bit.

She knew, based on their correspondences over that past several months that Rick was quite taken with Kate Beckett. It was unfortunate that the young detective didn’t seem to feel quite the same. Though, if Lois was any judge, it was obvious that Beckett was quite fond of Castle. After all, she called him her friend... and partner. Lois was only too aware of where those feelings could lead. She only hoped they didn’t wait too long to admit it to each other. You always regret the time lost.

It was fairly late when Castle and Beckett got back to their

hotel. Against her stated wishes he hadn't gotten each of them a separate room. Instead he had booked the penthouse suite. She had been angry, at first, when she saw that he'd booked only the one suite, but relented when she saw exactly how spacious the place was. I had a huge living room which opened out to a balcony which offered a spectacular view of Metropolis at night. She had to admit that she enjoyed sitting on the lush sofa, drinking expensive wine, and having pleasant conversation with Castle. But what really assuaged her initial annoyance was the inclusion of two bedrooms... with doors that locked from the inside.

Beckett took a sip of her wine and shook her head in wonder. "I still can't get over that you know someone like Lois Lane."

He gave her a faux frown. "I think I've been insulted."

Kate grinned. "You have."

He smirked. "My dear Detective Beckett, you know that I have a very public part to my life and as such have met and know a lot of people; some even more famous than Lois Lane."

"I'm not talking about the plastic people who have all the depth of character as a page from one of your books. People whose only concern is their next close up, or write up in one of those scandal rags." Kate waved her hand through the air. "Lois Lane is real. You don't normally associate with real."

Castle chuckled softly. "Now I know I've been insulted. I'll have you know that I have many friends whom you'd consider 'real'." He used his fingers to make quote signs.

Kate laughed. "Name one."

He grinned. "NYPD Detective Kate Beckett. I have it on very good authority that they don't get much more real than her, and I feel confident in saying that she's a good friend of mine."

Her smile was warm and genuine. "Yeah, I guess you could say that, but don't spread it around, I wouldn't want to undermine my reputation."

"Your secret is safe with me."

He leaned back into the soft cushions of the sofa. "They make a cute couple. It's almost like they were meant to be." He grinned. "She loves him very much."

Kate smiled in return. "He loves her even more, and I agree, I think those two were fated to be together."

Rick gave Beckett one of his patented smirks. "You know they started out as friends and partners just like we are." He wagged his brow. "Maybe there's hope for us yet?"

Kate rolled her eyes and shook her head. She eased her way up from the sofa and stretched; a yawn cracked her jaw. "Well this 'friend' is tired and is going to go to bed." She moved toward the bedroom she had selected earlier.

He raised his glass to her. "Goodnight Kate."

She stopped at the door and turned back toward him. "Night Castle."

Lois stifled a yawn as she pattered around the kitchen making herself some toast and coffee. She hadn't slept well. She couldn't remember any specific dreams but she had tossed and turned all night. Clark had to wake her a couple of times to calm her down. She had woken with an overpowering sense of dread. It was like she was waiting for some impending doom to strike.

Clark had to leave early to handle a bank robbery and told her he'd meet her at the Planet later with the story for the afternoon edition. She tried to put her black mood out of her mind. After all, she had to get to work. As the editor of the greatest newspaper in the world she had a responsibility to her staff and the readers. Her mentor, the late Perry White, had instilled that ethic in her and she never wanted to let his memory down.

To move her attention away from her troubled feelings she shifted her focus onto a more pleasant subject. She'd just gotten a new email from Rick Castle yesterday and she couldn't help but smile at the happy ramblings he'd shared with her. She was so happy for him and Beckett.

It had been some hard times for them the last couple of years. Beckett had lost her captain to a nasty shooting incident that had left Lois feeling like there was a lot more to the story than Rick had mentioned in his missives. Then had come the near tragic shooting of Detective Beckett at Captain Montgomery's funeral. It had been a near thing but the young woman was a fighter and had pulled through the surgery. Her recovery had been long and difficult but after a year of ups and downs for the quixotic pair they'd finally come to realize what they meant to each other and had acknowledged their feelings for each other.

Lois knew that Castle had been in relationships before. She knew that he'd been married, and divorced, twice. But just the tenor of his emails and the tone of his voice on those rare occasions when they spoke on the phone told her that this was different. This time Rick was really in love. Unless she was totally mistaken in her read of this, Lois knew that Rick had finally found his soul mate. She just hoped that it was true for Kate Beckett also. The woman truly deserved this chance at happiness.

With a promise to herself to contact Rick soon and arrange to get together again, she exited her home on Hyperion and headed for work.

Maybe this time she and Clark would go to New York.

Detective Kate Beckett strode out of the elevator onto the 4th floor of the 12th precinct. This was her world. She'd been a cop for over 13 years now and she couldn't imagine doing anything else. Her mother's murder had been the catalyst that had put her on this career path, but she couldn't help but think that she would have wound up here eventually anyway. She was born for this.

"Yo, Beckett, where's Castle? You two have a lover's spat?"

Kate gave a quick glance toward Captain Gate's office, then glared at Detective Javier Esposito. "Where's Ryan?" She gave her head a nod toward the Captain's office. "Don't you two have something to do?"

He gave her a bright smile. "Ryan's in the break room and... nope, we don't have anything to do at the moment."

She walked over to her desk and grabbed a couple of files. She walked back and dropped them on his desk. "Now you do."

Kate glanced over at Captain Victoria "Iron" Gates office as she sat down. Gates had assumed command after Roy Montgomery's murder a couple of years ago.

Her years as a cop had been tumultuous, to say the least. At first, her mother's murder had been her driving focus. It occupied her entire being for years. It nearly tore her apart. She went down that rabbit hole and almost didn't come back. It took all her strength and a fair amount of therapy to let it go. At least enough to be able to function back in the real world.

She shifted her focus to becoming the best police officer she could. She became the youngest women to make detective. Her case closure rate was the best in the precinct, and Captain Montgomery had called her the best he'd ever trained. Still, all work and no play made Kate a dull girl.

Then Richard Castle came into her life. She had known his work and was a fan of his books. She'd even stood in line for over an hour waiting to get an autograph. Of course, that was something she would never tell him.

At first he was an annoyance. Then gradually, she came to enjoy his antics; his wild theories and out of the box thought processes. Castle went from an annoyance to an asset. He became her friend and her partner; and now so much more.

His feelings toward her were much more transparent much earlier. It had taken her four long years and a couple near death experiences to finally allow herself to return his love. She had denied it for a long time, but she'd never been happier with anyone else. She was cautious, but she no longer could imagine her life without him.

Which lead to their current dilemma. Gates didn't like Castle. She didn't want any 'dilettante writer' playing cop in her precinct. Only the mayor's insistence had allowed Castle to remain a part of her team. Only, if Gates knew that she and Castle were a dating couple, she could use NYPD regulations to send Rick packing.

They had to be circumspect when at the station, especially around Gates. And that was getting harder by the day. Espo and Ryan had found out fairly early on, and she had confided in her friend Lanie. The woman had been badgering Kate forever to tell Castle how she felt about him: even before she knew herself. She and Rick might be a couple now, but at work they had to play it platonic.

Detective Kevin Ryan was the junior member of the team, but his previous work as an undercover narcotics agent in the Irish mob had led to numerous arrests and a deep respect for his dedication. He passed Beckett's desk, a cup of espresso in his hand.

"Hey, Beckett, where's Castle? It's a little late, even for him."

Kate frowned. Yeah, where was Castle? They'd had quite the 'good time' last night but he couldn't be that worn out... could he? A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. She thought he had more stamina than that.

Suddenly her computer beeped; alerting her to a new email. She clicked on the icon and watched as the attached video file streamed.

In the few moments it took for the video to play Kate Beckett's world came crashing down.

Lois sat behind her desk as she fought the good fight again. It pained her to have to watch the decline of newsprint. It was a profession she was born for. Being an investigative reporter had always been her dream, but time has a cruel way of changing the world around you. Now, as Editor-in-Chief, it was her task to make a newspaper competitive in the age of instant information. Even the greatest paper in the free world had trouble competing against television and the internet. There was no way a newspaper, even a daily, could be the first with the big headline. No way could they break a story before it was already hours old.

No, Lois realized that she could no longer be first with the story so she had to settle for being the best. Television and the internet were unsurpassed at the breaking headline, but that was all they did. It was up to her and institutions like the Daily Planet to give the public the complete, in-depth look behind the headline. That's where newspapers could still excel, and as long as there were people to buy it, she was going to do her damndest to give them her best.

Just then a darkly handsome gentleman poked his head through her open door. "You wanted to see me, Lois?"

Her eyes darken with passion. "I always want to see you; c'mere."

He grinned as he moved gracefully over to her desk. She grabbed his tie and pulled his head level to hers. She crushed her lips onto his as if it had been years since they'd last seen each other rather than hours. Only the need to actually breathe caused them to separate.

"While I'm always in favor of these short, impromptu meetings..." His grin grew wider, as he planted another quick kiss on her inviting lips. "Did you actually have something you wanted to say to me?"

Lois returned her husband's grin. "Actually, Clark, I did. I've had this uncomfortable feeling all day. I can't explain it, but I can't shake it either. It's like I know something bad is going to happen." She leaned closer to Clark. "Could you see your way clear to stick close today? No running off to be 'super' unless it's really necessary?"

A look of confusion crossed his face. "Sure, I suppose so, but

Lois, do you really..."

The loud ring of her phone interrupted the conversation. Almost hesitantly, Lois reached for the receiver. "Lois Lane."

Both Detective's Esposito and Ryan were standing behind Beckett's desk as the emailed video ran again. If Kate hadn't been sitting down she would have fallen down. Her hands were shaking when she hit the replay. She was holding back any tears but her eyes burned with the need for release and a cold fist had a tight grip on her heart.

She was forced to watch the short, deadly message again. The scene was one of sparsely wooded grassland obviously some distance outside the city. It showed two heavy set men manhandling someone from a late model dark sedan. A third fellow came out from behind the wheel. He held a gun in his right hand. The trio and their captive approached a large hole that clearly had been freshly dug. The captive was thrown into the hole.

Whoever was doing the camera work shifted perspective to the inside of the hole. The captive was sprawled across something that resided at the bottom of the hole. When he stood up next to it they could clearly see that it was a coffin. The camera shifted to the man with the gun. There was no sound but it was evident that words were being exchanged. He gestured aggressively with the gun and the point of view shifted back to the victim in the hole. When he looked up at his captors the camera got a good, full view of his face. It was Richard Castle.

Kate bit on her lip as she saw the slump of Castle's shoulders as he lifted the lid on the coffin. It wasn't any cheap casket; it was very well appointed and she could see that Castle couldn't resist making some smart ass remark. Even in the silence Kate could see the effects of the gun being fired. Castle flinched as a piece of the coffin splintered from the impact of a bullet.

He heaved a big sigh and looked up into the camera. He mouthed the words 'I'm sorry' and bent over to get into the coffin. Beckett knew those words had been meant for her. Seeing it again almost made her lose it, but she held on.

Once lying prone in the plush setting, he allowed the lid to close over him. The two heavy set men began to shovel dirt into the impromptu grave. The video time lapsed till the hole had been completely covered over. Then the crew got back into the car and left.

There had been no sound, but a short message scrolled at the end of the email. It read 'An eye for an eye — His air with run out by noon today'. Then the message went black.

Beckett glanced at her watch. It was 10:17. In less than two hours the man she'd finally come to realize was her 'one and done' would suffocate. A most horrible way to die. She glanced back at her two brothers in blue.

"What are we going to do?"

Both were badly shaken by what they had seen, but finally Esposito spoke. "Were you with him this morning?"

Kate nodded. "Yeah, I left about 7:00. He was just getting up." She grimaced. "I didn't realize I wore him out so much," she muttered under her breath. "He told me not to wait; that he'd catch up. He had a few errands to run anyway."

Esposito nodded. "So, say he was taken as early as 7:30, 8 o'clock. With the time stamp on the email the burial took place around 9:45. So, at best, they had two hours to get to their destination. Assuming the hole had been pre-dug, that means they could have gotten as far as 80 to 90 miles."

Ryan ran over to a cabinet and pulled an area map out and brought it over to Beckett's desk. They laid it out and looked it over. Using the maps' mileage scale and a compass, they drew a 90 mile circle using Castle's loft as the center.

Ryan pointed to an area north and west of the city. "This seems the most likely spot they would have gone, it's open

country and only a few smaller communities around.”

“Yeah, but it’s still hundreds of square miles to cover and we have no leads on where to begin looking, or even who we might be looking for.” Beckett’s voice was full of pain and despair. She didn’t want to give up on Castle but she felt lost as to what to do. She hadn’t felt this helpless since her mother’s murder all those years ago.

“Plates?” she asked.

Both of her partners shook their heads. “Nope, never saw them in the field of vision. Couldn’t really tell the make of the vehicle either. All the shots were too close to get a good picture of the car.”

“So what do we do?” There was a definite note of desperation in the lovely detective’s voice.

“Whatever we can.” Esposito laid a comforting hand on Kate’s shoulder.

Beckett took a deep breath and glared down at the map on her desk. “Okay, we start by calling every small town municipal police station or county sheriff and ask them to send out everyone they have to search for possible sites where someone could have done some fresh digging. Maybe someone saw something. It had to have taken them some time to dig a hole that big and transport that coffin there.”

Ryan shook his head. “You know this is beyond a needle in a haystack. It will take hours to make all those phone calls and we’re not even sure we’re looking in the right area.”

Beckett bit her lip as she nodded. “I know, but what else can we do?”

Beckett, Esposito, and Ryan had been making phone calls for over an hour and had nothing to show for it. The frustration level was only topped by her fear. Castle had only about a half an hour of air left. There was no way they were going to be able to find him in time. She was going to lose the only man she had ever really loved. It just wasn’t fair. It had taken them so long to finally come together after years of missteps and misunderstandings. Why did she have to suffer this kind of loss again?

Ryan threw his pencil against the far wall. “This is pointless. We’d have to be a Superman to have any chance of finding Castle in time.”

Kate’s head snapped up. For the first time since she’d seen the video a small beacon of hope crept into her voice. “Exactly!”

Her fingers flew over her keyboard and she typed in the contact information request for the Daily Planet. It only took a moment for her to find the right number. She quickly dialed and after the third ring she got an answer.

“Daily Planet, how may I direct your call?”

“This is Kate Beckett from the New York Police Department. I need to speak to Lois Lane. It’s urgent.”

Clark stepped back when Lois picked up the receiver.

“Lois Lane.” He watched as a smile came across her face.

“Kate, it’s good to hear from you. What’s up?” When Clark saw Lois’ expression change he kicked in his hearing so he could get both sides of the conversation. Lois was talking to Rick Castle’s friend and partner, Detective Kate Beckett and she sounded distraught.

“I’m sorry to bother you Lois but I’m desperate. Castle has been kidnapped and I received a video of him being put in a coffin and buried.”

Lois shot Clark a look of horror. “Oh my god, Kate, what can I do to help?”

There was a shuddering of a breath on the other end of the line. The young detective was near her breaking point. “I know it’s a lot to ask but I’m at the end of my rope. Castle only has about a half an hour of air left. If I can’t find him he’ll suffocate.

Is it possible that you could contact Superman for me?”

“Certainly, Kate, we’ll be there as soon as possible. What’s the address of your precinct?”

Kate rattled off the address and thanked Lois profusely. “Don’t think another thing about it, Kate. See you soon.”

Lois hung up and looked over at her husband. He could tell she knew he’d been listening. “I’m going to tell Jimmy we’re going out to lunch.”

He watched as she hurried out the door and grabbed Jimmy to relay her message. She turned back and frowned at him. He shook himself out of his reverie and followed her out.

Once out of the building they detoured into the nearest alley and after a quick spin change into the suit, they were off.

Beckett was in the Captain’s office filling in Gates as to their lack of progress when suddenly a commotion broke out in the precinct. Gates glanced out her window to see what all the hubbub was about. Her mouth dropped open as an attractive, petite brunette strode through the bullpen followed by... Superman!

She turned quickly to her best detective. “You knew about this?”

Kate tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. “I was just about to tell you about that.”

The two women exited the Captain’s office. Upon seeing her, the slight brunette ran over and gave Beckett a hug.

“Oh, Kate, we came as fast as we could. How are you holding up? Is there any new news?”

Kate shook her head. “No, there isn’t.” She glanced around the room seeing the astonished looks on her fellow officers. There was an undertow of murmurs. Kate held up her hands for attention. “Everyone, this is Lois Lane, and I’m sure her friend needs no introduction. They’ve offered to help us find Castle.” Kate turned back to her Captain. “Captain Gates, this is Lois Lane and ... Superman.”

Victoria Gates shook Lois’ hand then Superman’s. “I’m very pleased to meet you both, but am somewhat surprised to see you here. I didn’t know you knew Detective Beckett.”

Lois spoke. “I only met Kate the one time she visited Metropolis, but I’ve been a friend of Rick Castle’s for years.”

Gates raised her brow. “Of course you are.” Lois snuck Kate a look, but Beckett looked away. “Well, I’ll leave you folks to it. I hope your involvement will lead us to a more desirable outcome.” Lois just nodded as Gates turned and went back into her office.

“A more desirable outcome?” Lois directed her words at Beckett.

Kate shrugged. “You have to understand. Captain Gates doesn’t like Castle. She was forced into accepting him through the insistence of the mayor, who does like Castle. Over the years she has grudgingly come to accept that Castle is actually an integral part of my team. The fact we have the best case closure rate in the city allows her to let things continue the way they have. She’s loosened up some, seeing firsthand how valuable Castle has been, but she still doesn’t like him.”

Lois shook her head. “Who doesn’t like Rick?”

“Yeah, well, we won’t get into that right now.”

Kate ushered the pair from Metropolis over to her desk and made the introductions with Esposito and Ryan. Ryan had a tendency to stare up at Superman. It was obviously making him uncomfortable.

She quickly replayed the emailed video for them. Lois gasped when the thugs began throwing dirt back into the grave. Superman asked Kate to replay the video several times. She watched as he noted everything about the surrounding landscape that was visible from the message.

He turned back to Kate. “Is there an access to the roof? I

think it will be easier and quicker if I can take off from there.”

She nodded. “Yeah, we have roof access. I’ll take you up there.”

Kate saw Lois glance at the clock. She laid her hand on his arm. “He only has about 10 minutes of air left.”

Superman nodded at the worried look on Lois’ face, then turned and followed Beckett to the elevator.

They took the elevator to the top floor and from there down a hall to a back stair that led to the door to the roof. The wind blew Kate’s hair into her face. She impatiently grabbed at it and tucked it behind her ear.

Superman placed a hand on her shoulder. “I know you care very much about him and I promise I’ll do my best to find him and bring him back to you.”

She gave the super hero a tremulous smile and nodded. “Thank you.” She took a breath. “We believe that his abductors couldn’t have gotten more than ninety miles from the city and the most likely direction to search, given the landscape, would be north and west.”

He gave her a smile of encouragement then took off in a gust of wind that had her hair in her face once again. Moments after he was gone from view the access door opened and Lois, along with Ryan and Esposito came out. When they made it to the spot she was standing, Lois put her arm around Kate’s waist and gave her a hug.

“He’ll find Rick for you Kate; he’s a hero, it’s what he does.”

They all stood of the roof for several minutes; nobody said anything. Lois watched the young detective staring in the direction that Clark had recently flown off to. She saw a lone tear slide down Kate’s cheek. The woman was hurting and Lois could feel the pain coming off her like something physical, something solid.

Lois took Kate’s hand and caused Beckett to look at her. “So, I hear you and Rick are finally together?”

Kate chewed on her lower lip and nodded.

Lois allowed herself a short chuckle. “Only took you guys five years; and I thought Clark and I took a long time to realize the obvious.”

Lois smiled when she saw the slight upturn of Kate’s lips. “Yeah, well, Castle and I never did things the easy way.” Beckett raised her brow. “So where is your husband?”

Lois shrugged. “He’s holding down the home front. Someone has to keep the Daily Planet running in my absence.”

Kate looked at her watch. Her shoulders sagged. “By my count, Castle ran out of air about 5 minutes ago.” She turned to Lois; a few more tears slipped from the corners of her eyes. “I can’t lose him now, Lois; not after all we went through. It’s not fair.”

Lois shook her head. “Life’s not always fair, Kate.” She glanced up, noticing an ever growing speck in the sky coming toward them. She smiled. “But I wouldn’t worry about losing Rick just yet; look.” She pointed.

The three detectives and Lois watched as the speck grew larger. In moments they could make out the bright primary colors of Superman’s costume. He was holding someone next to him. In another few moments they could make out that Superman was indeed holding Richard Castle.

Esposito and Ryan high-fived each other; Kate put her hands to her mouth and let tears of relief flow while Lois just smiled as a couple of tears of her own slipped, unnoticed, onto her cheek.

Once he’d landed on the rooftop, Superman released Castle from his grip. Castle seemed beside himself with excitement. “Beckett... Kate, did you see that! I flew with Superman... Superman!”

Kate stood motionless for several heartbeats. Lois could see the fear and the tension the poor woman had been holding at bay

all morning finally leech from her body. Suddenly she was hurtling toward her partner, and lover.

Beckett threw herself into Castle’s arms, nearly knocking him over as she crushed her lips onto his. It was a kiss of desperation and affirmation all at once. Lois moved quickly over to The Man of Steel and placed her hand on his arm. “Thank you.”

“I’m just glad I could help.”

Lois turned toward the now breathless partners. They stood in each other’s arms staring into each other’s eyes. She could see the little boy in Castle begin to gain supremacy once again.

“I flew with Superman!” He whispered fiercely. “It was so awesome!”

Kate laughed. “Oh course it was, Castle; how could it be anything but awesome?” She grabbed his hand and led him toward the door back into the precinct. “Let’s go catch some bad guys.”

Lois surreptitiously reached back and interlocked her fingers with Clark’s. She gave him a squeeze which he promptly returned. She was happy. Seeing Rick and Kate together, she knew they were going to work out just fine.

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