

Clark and Lois – Two Universes — Matchmaker Chronicle Volume 7

By Ken Janney <ken.janney@kjanney.com>

Rated: PG-13

Submitted November 2013

Summary: This is part 4 of the Clark and Lois arc. Alt-Clark and his new Lois are dealing with Luckabee in one universe and Luthor in the other and use what they learn in each universe to help solve the problem in the other. Along the way they save a little girl's life and rescue Jack and Denny from the mean streets.

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 the fourth part of the Clark and Lois arc, the explanation of which follows. If you haven't done so as yet, please read the previous volumes. 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. I also wish to especially thank Corrina for help with the Aussie dialogue. A special thanks goes to Artemis for help assist with the wedding party and wedding. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

* * 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 025 x Tau 036 – Canon Alt Clark universe also called – Alt 1

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt 2

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

Clark and Lois – Two Universes — The Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 7

How we got to this point:

This story, which is number 7 in the Matchmaker Chronicles

series, is the fourth story in the Clark and Lois arc.

The Clark and Lois arc started in Volume 3 of the Matchmaker series. The title is “Clark and Lois – The Lost Years”:

At the close of “Lois and Clarks”, as Herb Wells was taking Alt Clark back to his universe, Herb offered to assist Alt Clark in his quest to find the Lois Lane of his universe. Clark accepted the offer and Herb transported him back in time and to Brazzaville, Congo so that he could pick up her trail when Lois arrived to start her investigation of the illegal gun running. Clark managed to meet her and form an acquaintanceship. Through a series of circumstances she found out that he was investigating the same story; however, he led her to believe that he was a government agent. After a rough start they cooperated on the investigation and their relationship became more than a partnership. They were on the trail of the guns when the incident which had prevented her return occurred. Lois and Clark were captured by a rebel band and Clark was unable to prevent Lois from being shot. Clark is able to subdue her assailant without revealing his powers and got her to a hospital. At this point a new universe is created and the Lois in this new universe survived her injuries.

Clark discovered that some things had changed and he was of the belief that they had simply changed history. After Lois recovered from her injury they were wed and returned to Metropolis to continue the investigation, with Clark being hired by Perry White on Lois' recommendation. The investigation resulted in the ultimate downfall of Lex Luthor and his death at the hands of Bill Henderson in a gunfight.

Volume 4 of the Matchmaker series – “Clark and Lois – Despair to Hope” is part 2 of the Clark and Lois arc.

When Lois had been shot by the rebel, there had been two possible outcomes, 1) she lives, 2) she dies. When the new universe had been created it had been because she had lived as opposed to the recorded course of history of Alt 1 where she had died. In this story we return to the Alt canon universe where Lois had died. Due to the death of his soul mate Alt Clark had been plunged into the depths of despair which almost claimed his life. Some friends he had made in Brazzaville had nursed him back to health and a chance comment by one of them reminded him that there were many Lois Lanes in the multi-verse. Clinging to this hope, Clark patiently awaited the return of Herb.

Clark told Herb the story of how Lois had died while Herb returned Clark to his proper time in Herb's time sled. When they arrived back in Clark's apartment, an older version of Herb showed up, appearing through a time window, with an offer. After sending his younger self on another mission the older Herb proposed to Alt Clark a series of missions. While he and the resources of TTEMPO searched for a Lois without a Clark, he needed Alt Clark to visit a number of other universes where the presence of a second Superman was crucial to the survival of the Lois or Clark of the subject universe. This would be similar to the time that Alt-Clark had helped canon Lois (the Lois that had helped him create Superman) and her Clark against Tempus. Thus Alt Clark began his own version of the twelve labors of Hercules.

Volume 5 of the Matchmaker series, Clark and Lois – Hope Realized is part 3 of the Clark and Lois arc.

Herb picked up Alt Clark after successfully completing his twelfth mission with a promise of one final mission. That mission was to unite him with a Lois whose Clark had been killed.

In that universe (called Alt 2), just prior to the White Orchid Ball, Miranda had sprayed Lex with Revenge; however, it had a delayed effect. It kicked in when Lex saw Lois at the ball and he became obsessed with having her. Finding out that Lois and Clark were engaged, Lex was determined to eliminate his competition and contracted a hit on Clark.

One day shortly after that there was a call about a baby in the Wishing Well in Centennial Park to which Superman responded. The Newtrich sisters were there with their laser to attack Superman; however their laser didn't use red Kryptonite. It was a hybrid form of red and green. When Superman was hit with that beam it not only transferred his powers to Lois it modified both of their physiologies making him Earth human and Lois Kryptonian human and this change was irreversible.

Lex's hit on Clark was successful but the arrival of Alt Clark was timed to coincide with it. His presence prevented Lois from falling into the same depths of depression he had suffered by the loss of his soul mate in his own universe. After some time and grieving on Lois' and the senior Kent's part, Alt Clark was able to assume local Clark's identity and form a bond with this Lois.

When Herb returned at their scheduled meeting time he found them together and married. This left a problem. Now there were two universes that needed superheroes and one pair that didn't want to separate. This problem was solved by Herb giving them a TaDT (Time and Dimensional Transport) device which was locked on to their two universes so that they could cross back and forth at will.

In Lois' universe (Alt 2) they proceeded with their investigation of Luthor. At this point there are two fully Kryptonian superheroes in this universe.

All Kryptonians are able to communicate telepathically and those communications are denoted by /" dialogue"/. That is where we will pick up with this story.

What is Past is Prologue:
From Hope Realized — Volume 5
Chapter 00— Capturing Luthor

%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 — Common name —
Alt2

%%%

Lois had completely forgotten that she was still in her disguise until she heard the wolf whistles and cat calls that she started receiving when she entered the room. She looked down at herself and blushed. The hooker costume she was wearing was a little more revealing than her normal attire. She looked around. She saw Jimmy standing at his desk with his eyes almost bugging out of his head. She looked around with a withering look at all of the males in the office and said, "You've never seen an undercover costume before? Get a life!"

Clark chuckled and took off his suit jacket and put it over her shoulders. "I can't blame them. You look amazing, in a cheap sort of way!"

With a smug look she pulled his jacket around herself and, sat down at her desk and pulled out the sheet they had gotten from Henderson so that she could check the last name and address.

She asked, "How do you want to handle this last one?"

"The messenger outfit worked out well the first time. We could try that again," Clark replied.

"Let's make sure that he's home." Lois picked up the phone and dialed the number. A switchboard operator answered. Using a sultry tone she asked, "Is Frank Baxter at home?"

The switchboard operator said, "At this time of the day, you can usually find Frank at the Metro Club."

Lois said, "Thanks, I'll look for him there."

Clark had heard the entire conversation. Lois said, "Looks like I don't need to change. I'll see if I can pick him up at the Metro Club. Do you think he'll like what he sees?"

"How can he help it? I'll be right outside."

Lois stood up and removed Clark's jacket and as she handed it back to Clark she scanned the bullpen and could see that all

eyes were on her. She did a slow pirouette displaying herself. This elicited a new round of whistles and cat calls.

Clark started to snicker and said, "I didn't know you were such an exhibitionist."

She giggled and said, "Just giving my adoring public one last look." She used an exaggerated sway to her hips as they exited the newsroom, receiving even more wolf whistles and cat calls as she did. She turned and did a little bow as they were about to enter the stairwell. As she stood up again and started to move into the stairwell she was laughing.

When they exited through the roof door she was still laughing. They took to the air and headed for the Metro Club. They landed in an alley down the street and Lois changed back into her hooker costume. As she exited the alley to head for the club she stuck a stick of gum in her mouth and started chewing.

When she entered she looked around and spotted Frank Baxter at a table. She moved to the bar and took a seat on a stool. When she did she made sure that her left side was toward him so that he couldn't help but see her leg through the slit. She ordered a drink. While she waited to be served she crossed her left leg over the right which only displayed her legs that much more.

Spying her from where he was sitting at a table, Frank thought, <Wow, what a hot babe! What's a dame with those kind of looks doin' in this place?> It only took Frank a few minutes to get up from his table and walk over to her. He said, "You're new around here, ain't you?"

Popping her gum she replied, "Yeah, I just got into town. Thought I'd try to find out where the action is." She popped her gum again as she looked him up and down pretending to be interested.

Noting her appraisal, Frank tried to put on an air of importance as he said, "If you want action, babe, I'm your man. You want I should show you some action?" Frank thought of himself as quite the ladies man and as he leered at her, thoughts of the kind of action he would like to show her flitted through his head. He tried to make his ugly scarred face look sexy, though the effort was doomed to failure before he even started.

Lois thought, <Ugh, ladies man he isn't. Well, I need to play along, no matter how much it leaves a bad taste in my mouth.> Popping her gum once more she replied, "Sure, let's get outta here. You can show me some of the action and maybe I could show you a good time."

Hopping down off the stool, she took his arm as they started walking out. As they walked out the door Superman appeared behind Frank and grabbed both arms. Lois spun into her uniform and checked Frank's pockets. She said, "This is getting monotonous, they are all carrying Kryptonite." She relieved him of his box and launched it into space.

Realizing, belatedly, that he had been duped, Frank's countenance fell, realizing that he had tried to pick up Superwoman. He thought, <No wonder she looked so hot!>

Superman said, "Lieutenant Henderson would like to have a talk with you."

Frank blustered, "Whadda ya mean. I got rights! You can't do this to me. You gotta have a warrant."

Superman said, "It's at Headquarters. They just want to have a friendly talk." They lifted off side by side with Superman carrying Frank. A few minutes later Frank was in interrogation 7.

Superman and Superwoman exited and headed home. Lois changed into a regular work outfit and they returned to the Planet.

When they walked into the newsroom everyone turned, and seeing Lois in her regular clothes, started booing.

She laughed and said, "Sorry, boys. That was a special occasion. Usually Clark is the only one that sees me dressed like that."

Chuckling, Clark said, "Eat your hearts out, guys. She's mine."

Heading over to Perry's office, they knocked on his door and entered even before he could say 'come in'.

As they sat on his couch he said, "What do you have for me? What was that stir in the bullpen a while ago?"

"Sorry about that Perry. We were helping Superman and Superwoman and I was undercover. It was a little ... revealing."

"As long as it doesn't happen too often. What'cha got for me?"

"The case against Luthor is moving ahead. That's what we were doing. Bill Henderson got some material witness warrants and we were helping Superman and Superwoman execute them. Four of Luthor's underlings are now in custody and being questioned. It's only a matter of time now."

Luthor dialed a number. In interrogation 3 Nigel's cell phone began to ring. Nigel looked at Henderson. Nigel could see from the caller ID that it was Luthor. Henderson saw the caller's name also and said "Put it on speakerphone so we can record it."

Nigel answered and put it on speaker. "Nigel here."

"Nigel, where are you? You've been gone for hours."

"I'm trying to arrange that little job for you, sir."

"Have you found a sniper to take out Kent yet?"

"No sir, but, I'm working on it. That is a very specialized skill. I'm sure you understand."

"I'm growing impatient. I have to have Lane and Kent in my way. I want him eliminated. Don't you have any contacts from your time in MI6 that you could use?"

"No sir, none that are still around. You'll have to be patient."

"What about Frank Baxter? He's done a number of jobs for us. He's good with firearms."

"His specialty is close work with a hand gun. I don't know if he can handle a scoped rifle."

"Talk to him. I want this done and I'm getting impatient. I have to have her."

"I'll see to it sir."

"See that you do." The connection came to an end.

Bill started rubbing his hands together. "I'm glad we got that on tape. That is incriminating. Nigel, I'll talk to the DA and see about moving forward on your guarantees." Bill turned to Sergeant Adams and said, "Keep at it. Get as much as you can. I'll check back later. Get him some coffee or tea if he wants it."

Bill moved down the hall and entered the room that held Izzie Banks. He had already informed Izzie what they had on him and offered a deal. Izzie had been anxious to cut the deal because what they had on him based on Nigel's testimony was enough to send him to prison for a very long time. He was spilling the beans on everything he knew about Luthor's operations. The same thing pertained to Mitzie Daphne and Frank Baxter. In Frank's case the deal had been a reduction to life in prison rather than the DA going for the death penalty.

Bill returned to his office and placed a call to the Daily Planet.

When it was answered he heard, "Daily Planet, Clark Kent."

"Clark, Bill Henderson. It looks like it's all over but the shouting. With the testimony of Nigel, Izzie, Mitzie and Frank we have enough on Luthor to throw the book at him. His secret books would be the icing on the cake. I'm getting ready to go to a judge for a search warrant for his offices and a warrant for his arrest. According to what Nigel said we will need Superman to get the evidence out of the safe before it can be destroyed. But, Superman can't get near that office while that Kryptonite is there. Any suggestions?"

"Yeah, from what Nigel said it's a little chrome plated statue. If you take some lead sheeting or a lead lined box to put it into, it can be rendered harmless."

"Assuming I get the search warrant we can be ready for a raid in three hours. Do you want to get in on it? It's your story."

"I really need to be here so that you can call me when the Kryptonite has been dealt with. Then I can contact Superman and let him know the coast is clear. By the way, don't forget the statue in Nigel's office too. They will both need to be dealt with."

"You're right, Clark. I had forgotten that. I'll get the warrant. When we have the Kryptonite neutralized I'll call you. Should be about 3 1/2 hours from now. Talk to you later."

A few minutes later Clark's phone rang again and he answered, "Daily Planet, Clark Kent. How can I help you?"

"Mr. Kent, this is Ed Jackson, the realtor. We just got word that the seller has accepted your offer on 348 Hyperion Ave. We can go to closing on Wednesday, next week. You can take possession then. What time are you available? It will take about an hour."

Clark answered, "We should be available by about ten a.m. Will that be okay?"

"Ten a.m. Wednesday it is. I'll send the details to your e-mail address. See you then."

"Thanks Ed. We'll see you then." Clark hung up and looking over at Lois said, "They accepted our offer. We go to settlement next week!"

Lois jumped up and almost flew into his arms. She kissed him and said, "We need to start looking at paint and fabric and upholstery and furniture and ..."

He interrupted, "Whoa, one thing at a time. Let's get past settlement, then we can think about all those other things."

She had a little pout on her face and in her voice as she said, "Spoil sport. This is going to be my, our, first house. No more being an apartment dweller!" She added, "At least in this universe. We have the farm on the other side."

He said, placatingly, "I'm not saying we aren't going to do that. All I'm saying is that we need to wait a few days. We have a lot on our plate right now."

Lois relented, "Oh, okay. I guess you're right. Let's take care of Luthor first."

Switching over to telepathic communication again, Clark looked over at Lois and thought, "You could go and wait in the lobby until I get the call. I'll let you know when it's clear and then you can go up to the office and be there when I arrive." /"Sounds like a plan." / Out loud she said, "Let's go tell Perry what's going down and then get a bite to eat."

They both got up and moved to Perry's office. After closing the door they stood in front of Perry's desk. Clark said, "I just had a call from Bill Henderson. They are going to be raiding Luthor's office in about three hours. They expect to be arresting Luthor and we'll be covering it. It's our exclusive, so save page one."

Perry was so excited he jumped up and started pacing. "How soon will I have your copy? How much do you have at this point? Are we looking at a full page spread or just above the fold?"

Lois said, "I'd say, full page with a banner headline!"

Perry grabbed his phone and punched in a number.

"Composing, put a hold on page one. You'll get the copy in ... " He looked at Clark who looked at Lois who shrugged and looked over to Clark.

Clark said, "Five hours."

Perry completed, "Five hours, that'll be too late to make the evening edition. We'll have to hold it and put it out as a special." He hung up the phone, "Go get me the story."

Lois said, "You got it Chief." They exited his office.

Three hours later Lois was in the lobby of LexTower when a squad of police entered. Plain clothes came in first and took the security guard by surprise as they took him into custody. They kept him away from his panel so that he couldn't alert Luthor. The squad piled into an elevator car and Lois watched as it went up and stopped on 98. She thought, "So far so good. They are

neutralizing the Kryptonite in Nigel's office.>

A minute later she saw the elevator resume its course to 100. She wished she could be there for a ringside seat but she had to content herself with waiting where it was safe.

A minute later she saw Luthor exit another elevator. She sent a thought to Clark, /"Clark, it looks like Luthor was warned somehow. He must have had someone at the precinct on his payroll that Nigel didn't know about. He just exited an elevator while the police were going up to apprehend him. I'm going after him."/

/"Lois, no! He's dangerous."/

/"He won't do anything to me! He wants me, remember?"/

/"I'm on my way."/

Lois maneuvered so that Lex would almost literally run into her. She stopped him and said, "Mr. Luthor, I'd like to reschedule that interview. When would you be available?"

Nervously he looked back over his shoulder. He looked back at her and said, "How about right now?"

Lois said, "I don't have everything I need to do an interview. I *would* like to schedule it though."

Luthor said, "I'm sorry, but I must insist on right now." He reached out and grabbed her elbow and started dragging her toward the exit. Just then Clark Kent came in through the doors they were headed for. He pretended to just see them and said, "Lois, oh I see you found Mr. Luthor. Did you schedule the interview?"

Luthor said, "We're going to do it right now! Get out of the way."

Clark said, "Wait a minute. That's my wife. I think I have something to say about when she does an interview."

Luthor growled, "Not any more, you don't," as he pulled a wicked looking automatic from a shoulder holster.

Lois was wearing heels and before he had a chance to take aim Lois tramped down with her spike heel on his foot and knocked his arm up just as he pulled the trigger. The pain of her heel being jabbed into his instep caused Luthor to scream and pull the trigger in reflex.

This gave Clark the opening he needed and he rushed him using just a smidgen of superspeed. He closed with Lex, grabbed his gun hand with his left hand and then delivered an uppercut just off the point of Luthor's jaw. There was a sickening crunching sound and Clark did a quick x-ray exam. Sure enough, he had broken Luthor's jaw. He was satisfied that he hadn't killed him. Luthor was unconscious before he hit the floor. Secretly Clark hoped that his jaw would be wired shut for a long time.

The report of the firearm caused some of the people to duck, but, human nature being what it is; there was an even greater number that wanted to see what was happening. What they saw was a woman, apparently being abducted by an armed man and another man taking him on with nothing but his fists. A cheer went up when Luthor was felled by a strong uppercut. There were also numerous flashes as people pulled out their cell phones and activated their cameras to document the action. One individual seeing the confrontation between Luthor and Lois early on had grabbed his phone and made a video of all of the action. Later Lois downloaded the video from the internet where it had been posted on a video sharing site as a memento.

Chapter 0– Wrapping Up The Case

%%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Common name ALT2

%%%%

Clark pulled out his cell phone and called Henderson. As he was dialing he sent a thought to Lois, /See if he has any Kryptonite on him./

"Henderson here."

"Bill, Clark."

Lois sent, /Sure enough. Just like all of his henchmen./ She pulled a little lead box out of his pocket and stuck it in her purse.

Henderson said, "Clark, Luthor must have gotten a warning. He's not here. We've neutralized the Kryptonite so you can call Superman anytime."

"Well, Bill. I don't know how to tell you this, but, Lois and I are in the lobby and Luthor just attacked us. I had to deck him. He's here and he isn't going anywhere any time soon if you want to come collect him."

Clark could hear Bill laughing as he replied, "The Hero of 9th and Siegel strikes again, huh? I guess I need to come down and place him in protective custody! I'll be right down."

Five minutes later Bill stepped out of the elevator with two uniformed patrolmen. He said over his shoulder to the uniforms, "One of you, cuff him and when he wakes up, read him his rights." Bill pulled out his cell phone and call headquarters. "This is Henderson. I need a black-n-white at LexTower immediately. East entrance. Pick up."

He turned back to Lois and Clark and said, "You guys want to come up and witness the opening of his safe?"

Clark said, "Lois can. I have to get back and write this up for the evening edition."

Bill said, "Okay, Lois, are you ready?"

"I'd rather stay here and make sure he gets picked up and doesn't get away."

"Okay, I guess we can wait."

After Luthor was picked up Lois went with Henderson to Luthor's office. When they walked in Superman was already there talking with Detective Muggervin. Henderson said, "Okay, according to St. John, the walk-in vault we are after is behind this bookcase. Once the bookcase is out of the way, you need to open the vault and immediately remove the documents before his security system has a chance to destroy everything. Think you're fast enough?"

Noting some valuable first edition manuscripts in the bookcase Clark knew that Luthor wouldn't go to the extent of removing all the books before moving the bookcase itself so he looked for another means of moving it. Using his x-ray vision he saw a hidden mechanism and a release switch. He stepped over and activated the switch. The bookcase swung out on arms which moved it out and to the side automatically. He was correct in his belief that Luthor wouldn't want to exert himself unnecessarily.

Once it was open, Henderson turned to Superman and repeated, "Think you'll be fast enough to get everything out of the vault?"

Clark responded with Superman's deep voice. "I guess we'll find out, won't we? Everybody, stand back."

Superman stood before the vault door and grasped both sides. He dug his fingers in through the crack between the door and frame, enlarging them with his invulnerable fingers. Once he had a good grip he said, "Here we go." He flexed his arms and yanked the door off its hinges. Less than a second later the door was leaning against the wall. As soon as Clark stepped into the opening he could feel the effects of Kryptonite and thought, <Not again. Too late now, I've got to get those books no matter what,> and he sped inside.

Fortunately Lois was standing off to one side but even so she was on the fringes and could feel the effects. With a pained expression she took a pace back to put more shielding between herself and the Kryptonite. Also fortunately Superman was traveling as fast as he could because there was more than paperwork in the vault. Aside from the paperwork there was a Kryptonite trap and other evidence of crimes, weapons etc. He was able to scoop up a double armload and start to leave the vault. He could feel his powers fading the whole time. He was

just about clear when the flame weapons started to fire. As soon as he cleared the portal of the vault with the books and other artifacts in his arms his powers finally gave out and he collapsed. As he did intense flames shot out from all sides and anything in the vault would have been incinerated in seconds and that included him, if he had still been in there. Even that brief exposure would have made him vulnerable just as it caused him to pass out as soon as he was out of the vault. This was the same technology being used by the Toasters. Lois wanted to go to him and pull him to safety, but, she knew that if she tried, she would simply collapse next to him. Frantically, she shouted, "Bill, drag him over here, quickly! There's Kryptonite in there!"

Bill and one of the uniforms standing by each grabbed one of Superman's arms and dragged him away from the open vault. As they were doing this Bill directed the other uniform, "Gather up all of that material and find a box to put it all in."

Bill had dragged Clark away from the immediate vicinity of the Kryptonite but she could see that it wasn't quite far enough. She realized that she needed to act. Lois said, "I'm going to go contact Superwoman. Don't move him until she gets here."

Lois left at a run. She took the elevator down to the lobby and exited the building. She ducked into an alley and spun into her Suit. She took off and flew up to the balcony of Luthor's office. When she landed she could see that the flames inside the vault had stopped. Even at this distance she could still feel the Kryptonite. She asked, "Lieutenant, do you have any of that lead left?"

Henderson said, "Sure."

"As soon as it is cool enough for you to enter, I need you to go into the vault and wrap up the Kryptonite that's in there."

Henderson, not being one to go by half measures, said, "It's kinda hot in there still, but I'm going in, now." He disappeared into the vault.

A few seconds later Lois could feel the pain disappear. She entered as Henderson exited the vault with sweat streaming off his face. She said, "Thanks Lieutenant. You're a life saver."

As he was mopping his brow Henderson said, "Amazing, this little chunk of rock did all of that? It must be awfully powerful stuff."

In reply she said, "You have no conception. It really isn't the size so much as the type. Some forms are more potent than others. That must be a crystalline form if it's small."

Henderson replied, "Yeah, it looked like green glowing quartz."

She picked up Superman as she said, "That's the worst kind," and flew out the French doors that led to the balcony. She took him to the apartment and put him in bed. As soon as she did this she returned to LexTower and reentered as Lois Lane.

When she exited the elevator on the top floor, Bill Henderson and the police squad were waiting for the elevator with the books and other evidence in hand and Mrs. Cox, in handcuffs, in tow.

Lois asked, "How much did I miss?"

"Well, you apparently got through to Superwoman because she came and picked up Superman and took him away, probably so he can recover from the Kryptonite exposure." Henderson indicated that the squad should precede them into the elevator. He said, "Send the car back up for us."

When the doors closed and they were alone, Bill said, in a conspiratorial tone, "I think I have a good idea as to just how close 'friends' you and Clark are to Superman and Superwoman." He handed the ball which was the lead wrapped Kryptonite over to Lois as, with a wink, he continued, "Here, why don't you dispose of this for them."

Seeing his wink, Lois gave him a questioning look and said, "Thanks Bill, I'll see to it that they get it."

He smiled and said, "You do that and take care of Clark." Again, he winked at her.

She was stunned. She said, "How?"

He smiled and said, "Detectives are trained observers. Don't worry. My lips are sealed."

She said, "Thanks, Bill."

He said, "If you didn't want to ride down in the elevator with me, I would understand."

With that, Lois did her spin change as Bill looked on. He watched in fascination and tried to hide his amazement, but couldn't. She heard him mutter, "So that's how you two do it. Handy."

Superwoman said with Lois' demeanor, "Thanks, Bill. You'll have to tell us later what gave us away."

Bill nodded his agreement. He said, "We can talk later. Clark needs you now."

She nodded her appreciation and taking off, flew through the office and out the windows again. She headed for the apartment, flinging the lead coated Kryptonite out into space as she did. Once there she grabbed the laptop and stuffed it into a backpack. She put the backpack on under her cape, picked up Clark and flew to Kansas. When she landed she pulled a lounge chair off the porch and moved it into the sun.

The Kent truck wasn't in the drive so she figured that the Kents were in town. Pulling the shirt of his Suit off of him she put jeans on him over the rest of his Suit. She laid the bare-chested Clark in the lounge chair and spun out of her Suit into her business suit. She pulled another chair over beside his and sitting down opened the laptop.

She typed up the story at superspeed and after making sure of her wireless connection, she e-mailed the story to Perry. As soon as this was done she went upstairs, changed into a midriff-baring tank top and shorts, packed the backpack and spun into her Superwoman uniform.

She put a polo shirt on Clark and picked up the backpack. Again she put it on under her cape, and picking him up they took off for Hawaii.

He came to while they were over the Pacific Ocean en route. He was still groggy as he asked, "Where are we going?"

She smiled at him and said, "One of your favorite places. Only this time we're going to a place with a little more privacy for full healing." Her eyes had mischief in them.

He raised a single eyebrow in inquiry and said, "Ohhh," then asked, "Did you pack the brown bikini?"

She laughed and said, "I guess I should have waited to ask you your preference. I'll have to keep that in mind for the future. I packed the pink one."

He leered at her and said, "Just as good, maybe better."

When they landed they were at the base of a cliff that seemed to stretch up forever. Since there was absolutely no one around to see them Lois spun out of her uniform and into her shorts set. Because of his condition Lois helped Clark out of his clothes and into jogging shorts. She put Clark's suit into the backpack because he wouldn't be doing a normal change for quite a while.

After spreading out their towels they lay down in the sun and almost immediately Clark fell back asleep. Lois rolled on her side and just drank in the view of her husband, thinking, <We made it through this. We should have some time now. Time to be with my, Super, husband, my, forever, husband. Time, actually we have all the time in the world ... no, all the time in *two* worlds ... no, two *universes*.>

They had finished this story. There was another one still waiting for them to finish in the other universe but there was time, as much time as they wanted to take because whenever they decided to go work on that story they'd arrive back there five minutes after they left and Lucy would be asleep upstairs, blissfully unaware of their absence. They would pick up right where they left off. Right now all she could think about was finishing up on this story. There would be a lot of follow-ups to

be done. Then she thought that maybe then they should take some time off to fully recharge and recover. Maybe they'd return here for a few days.

She thought, <I need to tell Clark about Bill. Maybe we could invite him to dinner some night and he can tell us what gave us away. We are going to need to be more careful in the future. It may be good to have someone like Bill know our secret. I'm sure we can trust him.>

Based on past experience Lois had a good idea as to how long Clark would be out, so she grabbed some money and spun back into her Suit and took off. She headed over to Kihei and after landing and, spinning back into her shorts and top, found a pizza shop. She was in a quandary as to what to order. Suddenly it hit her, they were in Hawaii, after all, so she ordered a Hawaiian pizza; cheese, tomato sauce, ham and pineapple with a double order of each topping.

After about an hour Clark woke up and he just lay there. He realized that Lois had just gotten back from somewhere because he had heard her change. He could hear Lois' heartbeat and the steady rhythm of her breathing. Both were comforting sounds to him. For a time he simply lay there thinking, <When the other Lois died I was in the depths of despair. When Herb proposed the missions and offered the possibility of finding another Lois my despair turned to hope. Now that hope has been realized, not only for me but for Lois as well. We're together now and we have a lifetime ahead of us to be together. Thanks, Herb, for helping me find her, my true Lois.> Then he realized that he was smelling a delicious aroma.

Clark opened his eyes, looked over at Lois and when he did he was looking directly into her coffee colored eyes.

She asked, "Hungry?"

He spotted the pizza box and said, "That's a wonderful surprise. What kind did you get?"

She was chuckling as she held up the box as she replied, "I figured that since we were in Hawaii, I'd better get a Hawaiian pizza." She opened the box to display the contents. She set it down and picked up some other items. She offered, "Coke for you, cream soda for me and ... a half pint apiece of chocolate ice cream." Setting these down, she reached in and pulled out a slice and presented it to him so that he could take a bite. As he was chewing this she took a bite of the same slice. They alternated feeding each other and themselves until the whole thing had been consumed.

Curious, Clark asked, "We seem to be on a rather deserted stretch of beach. Where are we?"

"We're on the south shore of Maui right across from the 'Big Island' and below the Haleakalā volcano. The cliffs are kinda steep here so unless you come in by canoe or 'air' the way we did it's hard to get here. We have the beach all to ourselves."

When they had finished Lois said, "I feel like a swim. You said you wanted to see me dive. Watch this."

He sat up as she took off down the beach. Just as she hit the shallows she took off in what looked like a flat dive. He knew that she was flying, but that didn't matter. She was headed straight out and she 'dove' straight into a wall of water that was just starting to break as it hit the shallower water. He lost sight of her for a few seconds but then he saw her again as the next wave was approaching. She was body surfing the wave in. When the wave broke over her it obscured her from sight again, but, then she stood up, like Venus rising from the oyster shell and every bit as beautiful. Her tank top was sticking to her body like a second skin and, since it had been white when it got wet it had turned transparent as had her white short shorts.

She approached him slowly and she could feel his eyes on her the entire time.

Breathless at this vision of his beautiful wife, all he could do was to stare at her.

She walked over and straddling his hips, she knelt down and sat in his lap and as she did she could feel his excitement. As she settled down her arms circled his neck and she moved in for a kiss. The kiss started soft and tender and rapidly escalated as her breasts were pleasantly being mashed into his chest.

His hands came up and grasping her tank top, he slowly peeled it from her upper body. She removed her arms from his neck and stretched them over her head to allow him to remove her top. Immediately she moved in and started another kiss. Their tongues began that ancient dance as the kiss deepened and their desire flared. There followed a period of marital intimacy.

Lois heaved a very contented sigh and said, "That was wonderful. I'm glad I have my super husband back. I couldn't imagine doing that with anyone else."

Clark said, "I don't want you to even think about doing something like that with anyone else. You're my wife, now and forever. He asked, "How about a swim before we head home?"

With a wicked little grin she answered, "As long as when we leave we stop in Smallville again. I want another roll in the hay."

He laughed and said, "Anything my beautiful wife wants."

They were both still naked as they stood up and hand in hand headed for the surf.

Chapter 01— We could use some help

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

A portal opened in the middle of the living room of the farm house in Smallville, KS. Through it stepped Clark and Lois Lane-Kent. As soon as they stepped through the portal closed in upon itself as if it had never existed.

Both of them just stood there for a few seconds and listened, using their super hearing. All either of them heard was the heartbeat of the other and one more. The extra one was upstairs and that steady rhythm and the slow even breathing that accompanied it told them that Lucy was sound asleep in her room.

They moved together and sat on the sofa. Lois let out a sigh before she said, "Wow, what a five minutes that was. It seemed to take weeks." No longer able to keep a straight face she started to laugh, quietly.

Clark was smiling and ticking off the items on his fingers as he said, "Well, let's see, in the last five minutes we have managed to get the goods on Luthor and see to it that he was arrested. We have both been exposed to green Kryptonite at least once. We've spent some time on the beach. We closed on our new house at 348 Hyperion Ave. Repainted, re-decorated and re-furnished it. We even managed to christen our new bed ... a few times."

Lois moved in closer and curled up against him as he wrapped his arms around her. She looked up at him and said, "Thank you."

Surprised he asked, "What'd I do this time?"

"You found me and came into my life. I love you."

He pulled her into a kiss before he replied, "Actually, I think we found each other. I love you."

They spent a little time cuddling on the couch before deciding to head off to bed. Tomorrow was going to be a busy day. They had to pack dinner clothes because their boss, James Olsen, had asked them to dinner again so that he could spend the time with Lois's sister Lucy.

Before they could move upstairs, Lois said, "You know, I never in my wildest imaginings could have thought that Lucy and Mr. Olsen knew each other, let alone be in love with one another. Hey, I just had a thought. Let's have another Bar-B-Q! We could

invite Daddy and Mr. Olsen. That way Mr. Olsen will know the entire family.”

Clark gave her a smile as he replied, “This wouldn’t have as much to do with you spending time with the father you never knew as it does with introducing him to Mr. Olsen, would it?”

“Well, maybe, just a little.” She had a wistful expression as she continued, “In a way, I’d like to introduce him to my Mom.”

“I don’t know how that would work out. Ellen Lane didn’t get along with her husband. They fought constantly. He wandered. She drank.”

“That’s exactly why I need to get to know him better. I need to know if he would get along with Mom. He knows that you’re Superman and that there are things you can do that others can’t. Crossing the dimensional barriers is just another one. The next time we cross over we can talk to my Mom.”

“Let’s take one thing at a time. Get to know him first and then, once you’re satisfied, we can talk to your Mom. You have to keep in mind; he’s not the same person that she lost. He has a different history. This Sam Lane wasn’t in the military. He’s been involved in some really hair

brained get-rich-quick schemes. Recently, he’s turned himself around. He’s been working on new designs for prosthetics. His work has been revolutionary. He has come up with a replacement hand that responds to the movements of the muscles of the upper arm just as a normal hand would. It needs some refinements though. The last I heard, in a test, one of the recipients crushed a beer can as he was bringing it to his mouth for a drink. There was beer all over.”

Lois started to laugh. She said, “Oh, that’s funny. I mean, I’m sorry it worked out that way, but all it will take is a little more work. I know he’s not the same man, but I just need to find out more and the only way to do that is to spend time with him before I decide if we should introduce them.”

“There is one good thing. Your mom isn’t like the Ellen Lane of this universe. She isn’t a drinker and she has a position of no little responsibility. Have you told her that you are Superwoman?”

“No, I haven’t. The transfer just happened a few months ago and with what all has been happening, Clark’s death and all; I just never got around to it. It has always been so much easier with the Kents. Oh, I forgot to tell you! Bill Henderson knows.”

“Knows? Knows, what?”

“About us, who we are. Our other selves.”

“What?!?! Did you tell him?”

She gave him a look of disbelief before she said, “No, silly, of course I didn’t tell him. Why would you even think that? He figured it out for himself. I asked him what gave us away and he said he would tell us later. I think we should invite him over for dinner when we get back so he can tell us how he figured it out.”

With a relieved sigh he replied, “Well, I guess it’s one thing for Bill to know, we can trust him, but if we gave ourselves away to him, we might to someone else. We need him to tell us so that we can be more careful in the future.”

“Actually it could be a good thing for him to know. He could feed us more inside information because of it.”

Looking at her with a small smile, he said, “Leave it to you to think of that angle.”

“That’s one of the reasons you married me. I think of all the good angles, besides we work closely with the police anyway, why not have someone on the inside? It could help us in our investigations and this way we will be able to feed information to them. You see, it works both ways.”

“Well, I’ll tell you this ... right now I’m not thinking about angles,” he gave her a look and a lifted eyebrow before he continued, “I’m thinking about curves. A special set of curves.”

Standing up Lois ran her hands down her sides, smoothing down her dress, emphasizing the curves he was thinking about. In

a sultry tone she said, “You want to explore some curves?”

With an exaggerated leer he replied, “Always!”

“Then I suggest we head out to the barn. I don’t think I will be able to avoid waking Lucy up if we’re in our bedroom. Hers is just down the hall.”

At superspeed they left the house and crossed to the barn. When they got out there they both floated up to the loft. Unlike the farm in the other universe, this one had no livestock so there was no need of fodder in the form of feed hay. The loft in this barn had been furnished with a desk, some chairs and a sofa bed.

Pulling the bed out they settled on it and cuddled.

In between kisses Lois said, “I love you so much, I don’t know what I would do without you.”

He replied, “We were meant to be together like this.”

His hand which had been cupping the side of her face drifted down and cupped her breast. She placed one of hers over it and encouraged him to squeeze, which he did. As he did she released a contented sigh and said, “Oooooo you really know how to treat a girl. Uh, go a little easy on them. They seem to be a little tender tonight. Don’t stop, I still love when you do that, just not so hard.”

While she was talking her hands were just as busy as his because she was unbuttoning his shirt. Once it was open she started sliding her hands around on his naked chest. Finding one of his nipples, she tweaked it, sending a jolt through his body.

Releasing her breast, he reached under her polo shirt and unhooked her bra. Quickly he removed her shirt and her lacy bra. Once that was done his hand returned to her breast, this time with no clothing in the way. He was squeezing her breast and pinching and tweaking her nipple.

Her hands parted his shirt as they moved down his body. When she reached his jeans, with a twist she undid the button and then she unzipped his fly.

He broke the kiss and started leaving a trail of kisses along her jawline, down her neck and across her collarbone. From there he moved down to the outer verge of her breast. His tongue flicked out and he started licking his way around her breast in ever diminishing circles. Her head drifted back and her eyes closed in joy as he ministered to her breast.

While his mouth was attached to her breast his hands started removing her pants, sliding them off her hips.

It wasn’t too long until neither of them could wait any longer and they broke apart and undressed each other. This started a period of marital intimacy.

She threw her arms and legs around him to keep him just where he was. She said, “Wow, you know, you are something else. That was ... fantastic!”

Smiling he moved in for a kiss and then said, with feeling, “Yeahhhhh. It was and you are. You’re incredible. I love you.”

With a sly grin she gave a little wiggle of her hips and said, “You are just too much.”

“Really, I thought I was just right.”

She smiled and said, “Yyeeeeeaaahhhh, you are that. Just right.” She unwrapped her arms and legs so that he could move. When he did she said, “You know, this way I just feel ... I don’t know ... incomplete. Yeah, incomplete. I only feel complete when we are joined that way.”

He replied, “I know what you mean. I feel the same way.”

They cuddled together on the bed for a while and then finally went into the house and to bed.

The next day they each packed a small bag with a change of clothes and Clark ferried them to Metropolis before picking up Lucy to take her. Lois waited until they had departed before closing up the house and following under her own power. She waited on the roof of the Daily Planet and a few minutes after Clark joined her, they went downstairs to the bullpen.

As soon as they exited the stairwell door, Mr. Olsen saw them and called them to his office. When they entered he indicated that they should take seats in his visitor's chairs which they did.

He asked, "Okay, a few days ago you had something to tell me about Leslie Luckabee. What do you have?"

Clark spoke up, "Well, Mr. Olsen, it isn't anything definite at this point. We just got the name Leslie when we went undercover in the bordello."

"So it might not be Luckabee."

"No sir, it might not, but can we really take the chance that it isn't? We just need some time to dig into his background."

"Okay, I'll give you some time, but his offer is on the table. I stand to make a lot of money on this deal."

Clark replied, "If our information is accurate then he is tied up in criminal enterprises."

"But, all you have is the name Leslie. You can't even be sure that it's Luckabee."

Lois blurted out, "But, even if it isn't, what would be best for the paper? How do you know that he will maintain the Planet's standards?"

"How do you know so much about the Planet's standards? You've had amnesia. You don't remember much."

"I definitely remember why I initially wanted to work for the Planet. It was because of the high ethical standards that the Daily Planet stood for. I don't want to see the Planet turned into another Star or Whisperer for that matter. We have no idea what this guy's standards are or what direction he would take the Planet."

"Okay, you make some good points. Go ahead and do your research. Just make it quick. He's going to want an answer soon."

"We'll get right on it. I think we'll need some research support. Can we have someone handy with the computer?"

"Sure, just let me know who you want and I'll clear the way for them to move up here."

Lois said, "Thanks. We'll get you a name shortly." They got up and left his office.

As they moved to their desks they had a discussion. Lois sent "I wish we had the other Jimmy here. We need someone with his computer skills to get the lowdown on Leslie Luckabee."/>

Clark thought back, "Yeah, you can say that again. Who do we know that's good with the computer?"

Lois reached her desk and dropped into her chair as the elevator dinged. She looked that way as the doors slid open and got a smile on her face as she sent, "Just what the doctor ordered."/>

Clark looked at her and saw the direction that she was looking and was startled. He sent, "Why didn't I think of that? I think we need to go to the conference room and discuss this."/>

As she was standing up Lois called out, "Lucy, would you mind joining us in the conference room? We need your help on a project."

"Sure Sis. Just let me drop off this report to James, uh, Mr. Olsen. Be right with you."

Lois smiled at her sister's little slip. The way things were proceeding it wouldn't be long before Mr. Olsen popped the question and then there would be another wedding. Lois picked up her notepad and pencil and headed for the conference room with Clark trailing along in her wake.

A few minutes later Lucy joined them. Lois asked, "Luce, just how good are you with the computer?"

"Well, not as good as James, but pretty good."

"Okay, here's the story. We need information, lots of information, most of it not easy to obtain and we need it ... yesterday. Can you get it for us?"

"That would depend on what kind of information it would be."

"We need background and history, financial records, records

that indicate sources and amounts of income and distributions of payments to include receivers and amounts. The background has to include family history back at least a couple of generations. Think you can do it?"

Lucy gave it some thought before she replied, "That may require accessing some secure databases, some of them government owned. Those should be easier than any bank. The level of encryption is higher with a bank, believe it or not. I'd have to be very careful not to leave any footprints. That could make it take longer." She thought some more before asking, "Do you think that there will be off shore accounts involved?"

"I think you can count on it. Is that a problem?"

"That would depend on where they're located. Switzerland has become somewhat complacent about their security. Now, the Cayman Islands, they're newer at this so their systems are more up to date. Makes it a little tougher. Okay, who's the target?"

Clark answered, "Leslie Luckabee."

Lucy gasped, "The guy that has offered to buy the Planet?"

Lois answered, "One and the same. We have reason to believe that he is tied up with the rackets here in Metropolis and you're going to help us prove it."

Clark continued, "Lois and I were on an undercover assignment a few weeks ago and I heard his name mentioned in connection with the prostitution racket. If we're right and he is, then we need to expose him before he has a chance to buy the Planet. We had a bit of luck on that front. The evidence we collected enabled the DA's office to get a warrant to raid the local house of prostitution. They went in and collected a lot of evidence. It will take them some time to sort it all out. Since we were involved, we have an inside track on the fallout from the bust."

Lois joined in, "Yeah, you can expect to see some major heads rolling. They collected hundreds of tapes of public figures in compromising positions, pun intended. Anyway, we will be getting a list of names any day. The problem is that they have a lot of stuff to go through to get to the one behind it and Mitzie and Constance are being tight lipped. Either they are being very well paid to take the fall or they are too afraid of the consequences of telling what they know."

"If they have a couple of the principals in custody, why do we need to look into Luckabee's background?"

Lois replied, "Because they aren't talking. Also, we only got one name, Leslie. We aren't sure that it's Luckabee, so we need to find out. That's where you come in, Sis."

"Well, I'll do what I can for you, Sis. I'll go back downstairs and get started on this. I'll work down there until I get set up here in the bullpen." With that Lucy picked up her notes and left the conference room.

First stop for Lois was Mr. Olsen's office. She stuck her head in the door and said, "I've got a name for you. Lucy Lane."

He smiled and said, "Why am I not surprised? Okay, I'll notify IT that she's moving up here to research."

"Thanks. She's already starting on the assignment. Having her up here will help."

"Fine, let me know when you have something."

"Will do." She ducked back out of his office and laughed as she returned to her desk. When she got there she sat down and pulled up a search page on her computer and typed in Leslie Luckabee. The search returned a few possibilities. She clicked on them as she went down the line. She called Clark over when she found one that looked interesting.

"Look at this, Clark. There is an entry for a Leslie Luckabee with an address in Sydney, Australia. Let's check that address." A few more clicks brought up a satellite map of the city and they zoomed in on the address in question. It was an apartment complex on the outskirts of the city.

With a disgusted snort and a sour expression she said, "That

has to be a dead end. This can't be his address. Those aren't the digs of a multi-millionaire." She typed a few more keystrokes. "Here, look at this." She pointed at her screen, "His current residence is listed as the penthouse of the Plaza here in Metropolis."

"See if you can get a picture."

Lois typed some more. She found a possibility and clicked on it. A number of pictures were displayed. They were of a good looking fairly young guy swimming, playing polo and other sporting activities.

Clark picked out a couple and said, "Let's print these out."

Lois hit a few keys and the printer spit out a couple of sheets of paper.

Looking at them Clark said, "You know, these are all pretty recent. How far back can we go? We need to find out where he came from."

"I think we need to give this job to Lucy. He's supposed to be from Australia. Maybe she can get a copy of his driver's license picture. She'd have to access a government database to get that. From what she said, I don't think she'll have any problems."

"That could take some time."

Picking up one of the pictures and looking at it Lois mused, "Maybe some on-site investigation could speed things up. We could take this with us and start showing it around. Maybe someone would recognize him."

Clark replied, "Let's not go off half-cocked. Let's see just what Lucy can come up with first."

"Okay, let me go down and give her what we have and tell her what we need." Lois got up and went to the elevator. While she was waiting she was thinking, <A little on-site snooping could move this ahead a lot quicker.> She climbed aboard the elevator and took it down to the first floor, where IT had their offices.

She found Lucy in a cubicle. Lucy had two monitors with open data windows spread across both of them. It was a bewildering display and Lois wondered how Lucy could keep it all straight. As she watched Lucy grabbed a bunch of data from one window and dragged it over to another one and merged the two. It was an impressive display of legerdemain.

When Lucy was finished with that Lois said, "Luce?"

"Oh, hi, Lois. What brings you down to the puzzle palace?"

"We managed to get some current pictures of Leslie Luckabee. We thought that we should try to get an older one, like maybe a driver's license or passport picture from Australia."

Lucy turned back to her monitors and grabbed her mouse. Clicking on an icon in her taskbar brought up a folder of pictures. A few clicks later she had the computer in filmstrip mode. She turned to Lois and asked, "Like this?" On the monitor was a typical driver's license photo. He had been having a bad hair day and it wasn't exactly a smile that was on his face. Another click and Lucy brought up another photo, or actually a set of photos, mug shots. "Or like this?"

Lois was impressed. She said, "Wow! You got all of that already? I'm impressed, little sis. How did you get to be so good with computers?"

Blushing as she replied, Lucy said, "By trying to outdo James."

"Could you print those out for me?"

Lucy turned back around and clicked a couple of times and pages started to come out of her attached printer. When they stopped Lucy picked them up and handed them to Lois.

Lois asked, "How soon will all of this," she waved her hand to indicate Lucy's computer setup, "be moved upstairs?"

"The hardware techs will move it and set it up after work this evening. That way they don't disrupt my work. James called down and talked to Ken, my boss, and explained to him my new assignment. He wasn't too happy about it. I've only been here a

few weeks and I'm already being promoted. Now he's going to have to back fill my position."

"Promoted? I thought this would be a lateral move."

"I was surprised about that too. It seems that moving up to the news floor is a promotion, at least that's what James told Ken."

Lois got a knowing look as she said, "Well, I'm glad we were able to get you a promotion. I'll get out of here and let you work. See you later, Sis." She took her printouts and went back upstairs.

Chapter 02— Emergency in Australia

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

In the penthouse of the Plaza Hotel in downtown Metropolis, a handsome young man in a sport coat and slacks was behind the bar in a corner of the room consuming a drink he had just poured. The music of a Verdi opera was playing in the background. He was watching the other individual in the room as he, in turn, was pacing back and forth.

The pacing individual was supposedly the valet of the person behind the bar; however, his manner belied that position. He was shorter and had long, straggly, unkempt hair and a disfigured face. The left side was somewhat distorted and the upper ridge of his left eye socket protruded. His appearance was the stuff of nightmares for young children.

Finishing that drink, the man behind the bar started to pour another, but was interrupted by his companion, "Don't you think you've had enough? That was your fourth." His voice was rough and gravelly but thin, which went along with his stature, yet it was fraught with authority

"Whatcha stressin' about? We don't have anything on t'day."

The pacing individual stopped and stared at the man behind the bar. He said, "Stop that!"

"Stop what, mate?"

"Stop with the Strine! You're supposed to be educated. If anyone hears you talking like that the game will be up. Everyone will know just what you are."

"Oh, and just what might that be?"

"A minimum wage bogan from a cheap dodgey in Sydney where I found you."

"Ah, but now I'm Leslie Luckabee, multi-millionaire and I don't need to wait tables any more."

"You'll continue to be Leslie Luckabee, multi-millionaire as long as I need you to be Leslie Luckabee, multi-millionaire and if you aren't careful your usefulness will end and I'll have to come up with an alternate plan and if you're lucky you'll return to being Leslie Luckabee, bogan. You don't want to inconvenience me that way. I've spent a lot of dough to get this far and if it is wasted I may have to take it out of your hide." He resumed his pacing.

The man behind the bar, the one known as Leslie Luckabee, set down his glass and asked, "Whatcha planning now?"

"We suffered a setback a few weeks ago. The DA's office got enough evidence to raid the brothel and shut it down. They got the blackmail tapes and now we don't have either as a source of income and more importantly — influence. That is a severe blow. We need to come up with another operation to make up some of that lost revenue." He stopped and turned again to face Leslie, as he continued, "There isn't much we can do about the lost tapes and the hold they gave us over some rather prominent politicians, but I've been in contact with a Libyan businessman. He is in the market for young white women to staff a house he is setting up in Tripoli. I have some teams out looking for likely candidates to

recruit.”

“What are you going to do? Run an ad in the paper?”

“What kind of a whacker are you? What chick would willingly place herself in that position? Once she is there, she’s not leaving. If she doesn’t perform she will be punished until she will. When she fails to attract clients, she will be done away with. She will only remain alive as long as she brings in money. It is an ideal business for us. He will constantly need replacements. I already have five. I rented a house out of town and they are there. They are being kept drugged so that they are docile and if Superman were to find them, he would regret his interference. If he gets too close he will fall into a green trap. I was here when he was exposed and I managed to acquire that chunk of green stone that Tempus used to control him. I’ve kept it all these years for just this eventuality. With that he will not be able to interfere with my plans.”

Sitting his glass back on the bar after quickly draining it, Luckabee asked, “What exactly are your plans?”

Smythe stepped over so that he was directly in front of Luckabee with the bar between them and while tapping the bar with his fingers, decided how much to tell his puppet. After coming to his decision he started, “In order for you to understand I need to fill you in on some history. Some years ago, there was a single individual, here in Metropolis, who ran most of the rackets. No one knew it. They all thought he was a ridgey-didge businessman. He was smart about most things, but he finally made a fatal mistake. He was behind the house, which is why we took it over. His mistake was the way he went about staffing it. He identified young women within the corporation, sacked them for no reason and then blacklisted them so that they couldn’t find work. He selected women that had loans or other financial obligations which he took over and then used the threat of foreclosure to pressure them. Then he sent Constance to them with an offer of work in the house. His mistake was in choosing one particular individual. She was a scientist, an expert in energy weapons. When she and her sister were fired, they were mad as a cut snake and decided to get even. The brainy one built a laser and used it to kill ... Lex Luthor, my father. You’ve only known me as Smythe. My true name is Lex Luthor Junior.”

“But, Luthor was a Yank; I thought you was from Oz.”

“Lex Luthor was briefly married to an Aussie woman, just long enough for her to get pregnant and have a child. When he saw the child he was disgusted and left. He couldn’t stand the fact that I was less than perfect. He paid the bills, but that was all. He never wanted to see me again and he never did. He died before I came to the States. Now, I plan to rebuild his empire, but Superman could be a problem. He wasn’t around when my father was building his empire so my task will be more difficult, but I look forward to the challenge.” As he was saying all of this he was watching Luckabee, looking for signs of weakness.

The young man called Luckabee, couldn’t stand the scrutiny and looked back down at the bar. After clearing his throat he said, “So, what was in this empire?”

Smythe smirked as he replied, “For one thing, ANN, the All News Network, used to be LNN, the Luthor News Network, but that is not why I’m buying it or the Daily Planet. No, he who controls the news controls the people. People are so gullible, they will believe anything they read or see on TV. If you control the media, you control the people.”

“Okay, so once you control the media, what will you do with it?”

“I will use it to turn the people against Superman.”

It was a good thing that Leslie wasn’t drinking something when Smythe said this because he would have spit it out and it would have been all over Smythe if he had. He blurted out, “But, Clark Kent, Superman, works for the bloody Daily Planet!!! How will you use the Planet to turn people against him with him

working there?”

Waving the hand that had been resting on the bar dismissively, Smythe said, “You mean that currently he works at the Planet. Once we own the Planet I think his services will no longer be needed.”

“What about his partner? They seem to go together like pies and sauce. How will you be able to get rid of him and not have her defend him in print?”

“Anything she writes has to be approved by the editor and failing that, you are forgetting our new enterprise. I think the redoubtable Lois Lane will be making a one way trip to Libya.”

“Wait a minute! That could be dangerous. How are you going to get her without him getting involved in locating her?”

“Idiot! Weren’t you listening or is your brain addled from too much grog? I am prepared for that eventuality. I was in Metropolis when Superman made his ‘debut’ if you want to call it that. He was just starting to help the police when Tempus exposed him for what he is. That confrontation took place on TV, but you might not have seen it Down Under. Tempus lured him to the studio and then proceeded to capture him by using a chunk of a glowing green rock. That fiasco ended in Tempus’ plans being revealed and then somehow he disappeared. No one knows just what happened to him. I had my minions scour that studio after the emergency was past and they found that rock in a far corner behind a piece of scene dressing where Lois Lane had thrown it. I now have that green rock that Tempus used. It could be interesting to actually let him know just where he can find her and then spring the trap. Kill two birds with one stone as it were.”

Just then, the phone rang. Smythe answered it and recognized the voice on the other end. Peremptorily he said, “Report.” He listened to the reply and then said, “Proceed with special target number one,” and hung up the phone.

Turning to Luckabee, he said, “We now have seven.”

With some concern in his voice Luckabee asked, “Just who is Special Target Number One?”

“Why, that would be Lois Lane, of course.”

“What other lurks do you have planned?”

“Another thing we are going to do is to build a new, upscale marina area in Hobbs Bay. There will be a modern conference center as well as residences.”

“How are you going to do that? The blokes that live over there aren’t about to sell out to you.”

“Ah, perhaps before they wouldn’t, but I think that shortly they will be begging you to buy their properties.”

At the Daily Planet, Lois was just leaving the elevator after having visited Lucy.

Clark was on the phone as she descended the ramp so she sat down at her desk with the pictures. When Clark finished his call he came over and sat next to her.

He said, “I called the Plaza. It looks like Leslie Luckabee is single and has one servant, a Mr. Smythe. That was all I was able to get out of the desk clerk.”

“I went to see Lucy. Good news, Lucy should be up here tomorrow and, get this,” she switched to a conspiratorial tone, “this is a promotion for her.”

With a surprised expression he said, “Promotion? Research assistant is the bottom of the ladder, just above gofer. If that’s a promotion, I’d hate to know what she was being paid in IT.”

Continuing in her conspiratorial tone, she said, “Just between you and me, I think she’s going to be paid a lot more than any other research assistant we have ever known.” Changing tracks she said, “Here, look at what Lucy got for us.” She handed him the pictures.

After perusing the pictures for a few seconds, he said, “Wow! Okay, he did time for something. I wonder how he made his money,” with a smile he finished with, “or if he earned it

honestly.”

“We need to find out how recent that picture is. If he was in jail, how did he get his millions?”

“Maybe he inherited them.”

With an unladylike snort she said, “Not likely.”

With a smile Clark replied, “I don’t know, stranger things have happened, like . . . us finding each other.”

“We had more than a little bit of help with that.” The Mad Dog was starting to show itself. “I suspect that he did too. We need to find the source of his funds.”

“Lucy is going to be finding his money and tracking its movements. Won’t that be enough?”

Lois was vehement, “NO! We have to trace it back to the source. Seeing where it’s going now isn’t enough.”

Clark replied, “Okay, we’ll work on that. Maybe Lucy can get that info for us.”

“What if she can’t?”

“Then we’ll try something else. Maybe Superman could fly to Australia and make some inquiries.”

Lois switched to telepathy, /”Or Superwoman could.”/

He replied in kind, /”Ahhh, but, there’s the problem.

Superwoman doesn’t exist in this universe.”/

/”Well, maybe she should! All it would take is a little flight, maybe a rescue.”/

/”What about saving your presence as a surprise?”/

/”You know, I think I hate surprises, especially when I’m the surprise.”/

/”But, think how much fun springing the surprise is going to be when you do make your debut.”/

With a mental pout she replied, /”But, you get to work out in the open.”/

Out of the corner of his eye, Clark saw what was being broadcast over ANN. Their tag line was ‘All News Network, All News, All the Time’. It was a scene from cameras located on the upper floor of the Sunbird Beach Resort Hotel on Main Beach Parade on the Australian Gold Coast looking out on the Tasmanian Sea. A cruise liner was in trouble and they were requesting Superman’s aid.

Lois jumped up out of her chair and grabbed Clark. She whispered in his ear “This is our chance, Australia! I can go with you.”

“Lo-is, what about Lucy?”

“Oh, drat! How do we get her to Smallville? Why don’t we drop her off on the way by?”

“It’s too early in the day. We can’t take her home this early.”

Lois snapped her fingers, “James! Maybe she could go home with him.”

“I don’t know how that would work out. We don’t know how long this will take. Look, I need to go. This happens a lot and James is okay with it because I can write it up as an exclusive. If I’m not back in time, go out to dinner.” He gave her a kiss and said, “Wish me luck.”

She said, “Good luck.” And then switched over to telepathy, /”What if you are gone too long? If Lucy knew about me I could fly her home. This way we’re stuck here.”/

/”This is just one of the glitches in our living arrangements that we have to look at. We can discuss it when I get back.”/

/”You bet we will, buster. I think we need a local apartment, that’s what I think.”/

Clark leaned in and gave her a kiss. He said, “Keep the home fires burning.”

Lois patted his cheek and asked, “Should we save a seat for you at dinner?”

Back over his shoulder he said, “I’ll have to let you know,” as he headed for the stairwell. A few seconds later there was a sonic boom heard in the western suburbs.

Lois continued to watch the coverage on the TV. The scene

had switched from the camera on the Sunbird to a news helicopter. The cruise ship was obviously in distress although it wasn’t apparent as to what had happened. Suddenly she caught the term rogue wave and nodded in understanding. The ship was listing at a severe angle and seemed to be leaning more and more. If this kept up it would turn turtle within a very few minutes. A couple of minutes later, as the starboard side rail was dipping under the surface, Superman came into the frame. As they watched he dove underwater. A few seconds later the ship was being righted and then started to lift clear of the water.

Just then the police/fire scanner chirruped and announced a robbery and the address was just around the block from the Planet.

Lois felt the need to help out so she grabbed her bag and throwing the strap over her shoulder she headed for the stairwell. As soon as the door was closed behind her she supersped down to the lobby. She almost literally ran through the lobby and out the doors headed for the scene.

As she was running down the block to get to the scene she saw a car coming up the street toward her at a high rate of speed. She assumed that this was a getaway car because it was being pursued closely by a police car. Suddenly, Clark’s parting remark came to mind. He had said, “Keep the home fires burning.” That gave her an idea so; she used her heat vision in a wide beam on the radiator to instantly overheat the water causing it to boil so furiously that the cap popped off like a cork out of a champagne bottle. Water with coolant treatment started bubbling out of the neck and steam immediately started billowing out from under the hood so thickly that the driver’s vision was obscured and it was complicated by the oily coolant which smeared the windshield so he had to hit the brake before his plowed into another car or light pole.

The crooks bailed out of their car, guns in hand. One of them shouted, “Come and get it coppers!” He leveled his gun in the direction of the car that had been chasing them. He was going to shoot the driver right through the windshield.

Lois used her heat vision again and heated up the guns. This time she moderated the heat so that the rounds in the magazines didn’t explode, but hot enough that the thugs had to drop the guns.

The driver, who was the one aiming at the cop, screamed in pain, “Owwwww! It’s burning my hand!” as he dropped his gun.

The driver of the pursuing police car had seen the distress that the crooks were in and stopped behind them. Seeing the perp aiming at him, the officer jumped out of his car and crouched behind the door. He started to shout for them to drop their guns, but before he could get it out they in fact dropped their guns and put their hands up. Staying behind the door of his cruiser car, the officer stood up and shouted for them to put their hands on the roof of their car and lean in to them.

As they complied, another car pulled up and another officer jumped out, gun in hand. Seeing the perps moving to put their hands on the roof of their car he reached back and pulled out his cuffs as he moved in to place them in custody.

The cop figured out what must have happened and he started scanning the sky looking for Superman, but he didn’t see him.

As he was cuffing the prisoner Lois walked up, and looking at his name tag, said, “Officer Powers, Lois Lane, Daily Planet. What happened here?”

“Ah, Ms. Lane, I’ve read your stuff in the Planet. Well, these guys just robbed Hotchkiss Jewelers up the block.” He reached into the car and removed a bag. Opening it he displayed the contents. A pile of sparkling jewelry greeted her perusal.

She asked, “How did you stop them?”

He replied, “It had to have been Superman. The car overheating could have been a mechanical failure, but the guns heating up, that had to be Superman. He must have had

somewhere else to go, because he didn't stick around. I wished that he had, I woulda liked to thank him."

Lois smiled in the secret knowledge that she had been able to help and still keep her secret. She said, "I'm sure he knows that you are grateful. Thank you, officer, I need to get back and get this written up for the evening edition," as she turned and headed to Hotchkiss Jewelers. When she got there she interviewed a clerk. They were still doing an inventory, but a preliminary estimate on the value of the jewelry stolen was \$25,000. After making the appropriate notes she thanked the clerk and returned to the Planet.

She wrote up her "Superman Foils Jewelry Store Heist Getaway" story and sent it to Mr. Olsen. She thought to herself, <I need to tell Clark that he heated up those guns on his way to Australia.>

Glossary of Aussie terms:

Strine — Aussie slang. Stine is the word for Aussie slang.

Bogan — busboy/waiter

Dodgey — eating establishment

Whacker — idiot

Chick — young girl

ridgey-didge — very rich

sacked — fired

Yank — American

Oz — Australia

Grog — Liquor

Chapter 03— Women are missing

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

When she had gotten back to the newsroom Lois had turned her attention back to the TV and watched the news coverage. The newscopter had followed Superman with his burden all the way to a port facility. He was just lowering the ship into the water next to a wharf. Knowing that this rescue was in the bag Lois returned to her desk. Lois turned her attention to writing up her story. Just as she was finishing up she was interrupted by Clark's phone. Since they were in a call pick-up group she answered for him, "Daily Planet, Lois Lane."

A voice she didn't recognize answered, "I was looking for Superman."

"I'm his partner, can I help you?"

"Can you pass a message to him?"

"Sure I can. How can I help you?"

"My name is Jeffrey Faulk. I need Superman's help. You see, my fiancé is missing. She went missing just under two weeks ago. She was out with her girlfriends from work. They had a few drinks, maybe a few too many. One of the girls told me that when they left the bar Doris wasn't feeling well, maybe more than a little drunk. She claims that they all had the same number of drinks but they hit Doris harder than any of the other girls. Anyway, she never made it home. I filed a missing person report, but the police haven't been able to find her. I've been calling the police regularly to follow up on her and they have told me that they are really stretched thin right now. There are about seven girls missing including Doris. I'm really worried."

"What is Doris' last name?"

"Sanders, Doris Sanders."

"Well, to me this sounds like it could be more than a coincidence. I'll pass the word on to Clark when he returns and in the mean time I'll start investigating this myself."

"Thank you. I figured that if I could get Superman to help she might be found."

"We'll do what we can. Give me your number and we'll get back to you." She wrote down his contact information and ended the call.

Returning to her computer she finished her story and sent the e-mail. That done, she picked up her phone and called the twelfth precinct.

"Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Cooper."

"Sgt. Cooper, Lois Lane. Is Lt. Henderson in?"

"Just a moment. I'll transfer you." There were a few clicks and then Lois heard, "Henderson."

Lois said, "Bill, Lois Lane."

"Hi Lois, what is it this time?"

Laughing, Lois said, "You think you know me so well, don't you?"

"It didn't take me long. You know, your partner is easier to get along with even knowing just who he is."

"How much difference does that make?"

"Well, you know, before Superman came on the scene, back when Tempus was running against Perry White for mayor, we went through a rough time. Tempus was riling everybody up about 'The Enemy' when he tried to make Clark out to be a threat. Fortunately that got cleared up really quickly once Tempus was exposed. I wonder just what happened to him. We were going to go after him for fraud and a few other things, but he up and disappeared. We never saw him again. I guess it's good riddance. People aren't so concerned now. They have stopped carrying firearms and are letting the police handle problems with Superman's assistance. It's much better this way. I could wax eloquent on that topic for hours on end, but that's not what you called about, I'm sure."

"You're right, Bill. We just had a call from," she referred to her notes and continued, "Jeffrey Faulk. He's worried about his fiancé, Doris Sanders. She's been missing for almost two weeks. Do you have anything for me?"

"Yeah, well, we've been trying to keep a lid on it because we don't want to start a panic. She's just one of a number of young women that have been reported missing by friends, relatives or co-workers over the last few weeks. Altogether there are seven young women that have gone missing."

"Can I get copies of the missing person reports and the interview notes on the case?"

"I really shouldn't, but this way Superman is getting the information and he can help us. I was planning on contacting him within the next couple of days anyhow."

"How soon can I pick up the copies? He's in Australia right now but I'm anxious to get a start on this."

"Okay, you can come over at any time. I already have copies made since I was going to be asking for an assist anyhow."

"Thanks Bill, I'll be there shortly." As she hung up the phone she was thinking, <I need to be especially careful around Bill. He's one smart cookie, no matter what universe he's in. I don't want to give myself away to this one the way I did the one in the other universe. Clark and I really need to go back for a few days so that we can have him over for dinner. I'm dying to know just what it was that gave us away.>

She locked her workstation, jotted a quick note to Clark explaining her errand in case he returned before she did, grabbed her bag and, throwing the strap over her shoulder, headed for the elevator.

Lois didn't know it but, when she exited the Daily Planet building and hailed a taxi she was being observed from across the street. Her watcher lost her when she entered the taxi but his purpose had been achieved. He had been able to identify her after only having seen a picture. Now when the order came he felt confident that he would be able to pick her up. He nodded to himself and turning, strolled down the walk away from the Planet building.

When Lois arrived at the Twelfth Precinct she made her way to the desk. She said, “Hi Sgt. Cooper, Henderson is expecting me.”

When Lois addressed him, Sgt. Cooper looked up from the ‘True Detective’ magazine he was perusing. Seeing who it was he smiled and in a friendly tone said, “Sure thing Ms. Lane. You can go on back.”

Bill’s door was open so Lois walked in and in a cheery tone said, “Hi Bill. What do you have for me?”

Bill looked at her and said in a serious tone, “A piece of advice. I know how involved you were in that other investigation, going into the brothel as one of the girls. That took guts and I know, I know, you have Superman as backup, but my advice is to stay out of this one. I have a bad feeling about it. Let Clark handle it, okay?”

She replied with a bantering tone, “Aw, come on, Bill. Give me a little credit.”

He had a concerned tone in his voice as he said, “I mean it Lois. I’ve got a really bad feeling about this one. You fit the profile of the missing girls to a ‘T’. If you weren’t standing right here in front of me, I could pick out your description in that stack. It’s scary.”

Her interest was piqued and it was in the tone of her voice as she made one of her intuitive leaps and replied, “So, you think this has been orchestrated. There’s someone behind it and they’re after a particular type of girl, like they are filling orders or something.”

He started leafing through the papers in his hand as he continued, “Yeah, all the girls are around thirty, pretty, and with a good figure. The one item in the profile that doesn’t fit you is that most of them are unattached. You are most definitely attached. You are the most attached woman I know. Being married to Superman makes you the most attached woman in the world.”

Lois started to laugh, “I don’t know about that. Clark might argue that he’s the most attached guy in the world, but I guess it works out to the same thing.” She was still laughing as she finished up. “Thanks Bill, I’ll take these back and go over them with Clark. We’ll see what we can do to help.” She placed the sheets in her briefcase and, throwing the strap over her shoulder, turned to leave.

Before she was able to get out the door, Bill stopped her when he said, “Lois, I’m really serious about this one. I have a really, really bad feeling about it. Do yourself a favor and stay away from this.”

Lois turned and put on a confident pose as she said, “Bill, if I did that I’d cease being an investigative reporter. I *have* to investigate this. It’s what I do. Don’t worry! I’ve got the absolute best backup in the world.”

“Yeah, I guess you do at that.”

“Thanks, Bill. We’ll get right on this and let you know what we come up with. Clark’s in Australia right now, but as soon as he’s back, I’ll go over this with him.” She left the office and headed out.

Deciding to follow up on the discussion they had had just before Clark left on the rescue Lois hailed a cab so that she could have some extra time at the office.

Another watcher spotted her as she exited the Twelfth Precinct. This watcher also lost her when she entered a cab.

As soon as she was at her desk she called Murray at the Superman Foundation. “Murray, Lois Lane.”

“Hi, how is that husband of yours?”

“He’s fine. He’s on a rescue in Australia right now. Listen, Murray, we are in a situation where we are going to need some cash. Can the Superman Foundation loan us enough for a down payment on a house and a car? Now, we expect to pay it back.”

Murray replied, “I don’t think there will be any problem, in fact we can underwrite both loans at no interest. The Superman Foundation derives all of its revenue thanks to Superman, it’s the least we can do.”

“Thanks, Murray. We’ll get back to you with the amount.”

“Just let me know how much and we’ll cut a check.”

“Thanks, Murray. That’s a load off of my mind.”

She pushed down in the cradle to break the connection and then looked for a realtor. She found the number for Ed Jackson. They had used the same realtor in the other universe when they had purchased 348 Hyperion Ave. “Metro-Real Estate, Ed Jackson. How can I help you?”

“Mr. Jackson, my name is Lois Lane. You were recommended to me by a friend. I’m looking for a house to buy.”

“What is your friend’s name? I like to thank clients for referrals.”

“That would be difficult. It is a sad story.”

“Oh, I understand. How may I help you? Is there a particular type of house you are interested in? Do you want to move out to the suburbs or stay in town?”

“Actually, I have a particular house in mind. Could you check and see if it is currently available?”

“Of course. What is the address?”

“348 Hyperion Ave. It is a multi-story brownstone.”

“Give me just a few seconds to check the MLS, that is, the Multiple Listing Service. That will tell me if it is available and if it is who the seller’s realtor is. Just a moment.” She could hear him typing on his keyboard and clicking his mouse. A few seconds later he was back on the line, “Yes, it is available. The realtor is Pam Henry. Would you like to schedule a tour?”

“That won’t be necessary. What is the asking price?”

He quoted a price very similar to what they had paid in the other universe. Lois gave him a sum to put up as an offer. He said, “I will need you to come in and sign some papers. What would be a convenient time to do that?”

Lois looked at the TV and saw that Clark was finishing up with the emergency and said, “We should be able to come by in about three hours. Will that do?”

“I’ll have all of the paperwork prepared. See you then.”

After hanging up the phone, she turned her attention to the file she had gotten from Bill. She started leafing through the reports. She found the one for Doris Sanders and read the complete report. The report on what the police had found didn’t quite match up with what Jeffrey had told her over the phone. The police had been a bit more thorough than the distraught boyfriend had thought. They had interviewed a number of people that had seen Doris exit the café after her friends. Despite what Jeffrey had said, the other witnesses didn’t say anything about her being even a little drunk, but that is always a matter of perception. The police had traced Doris’s movements for almost a block before they lost her.

Just then her phone rang. “Daily Planet, Lois Lane.”

“Lois, Bill Henderson. I just got some new information on that case.”

“Oh, what is it?”

Lois could hear Bill moving papers around looking for what he wanted before he spoke again, “We have been following the movements of . . . Doris Sanders. I just got a report back on a security camera on an ATM across the street from where she was last seen. It’s definite now, she’s been abducted. The camera captured what happened. It is a shame that the period between pictures is as great as it is. We could have had more. Well, anyway, what we got is conclusive. There were two perps. They came out of a side alley. It looks like they grabbed her and one of them put something over her face. It could have been chloroform or ether. Either way, she was knocked out and they took her away. That makes this a case of serial kidnappings and not runaways.”

Approach it from that angle.”

“Thanks, Bill. I’ll pass it along.”

“You do that and remember what I said. You stay out of this one. That bad feeling I had on this just got worse.”

She was very thoughtful as she said, “I’ll keep it in mind,” and then hung up the phone.

Lois took the file and moved into the conference room so that she could spread the reports and the accompanying photos out on the table. Once she had them spread out she started moving them around, changing the order.

She arranged them first chronologically. There was no apparent pattern. Then she grouped them by age. That was a waste of time because they were all within about a year of the same age. Marital status came next. There were two that were married. One was engaged and four were simply dating. All of the husbands, boyfriends and fiancé had been interviewed. There were no problem relationships. Next she arranged them by hair color.

< They are all about thirty and about five three to five six. What is the common thread here? Ahhh, what do we have here? We have blonds and redheads, but no brunettes. I wonder.>

Lois picked up the conference room phone and made a call. Eventually she heard, “MPD, Henderson.”

“Bill, Lois Lane. How closely have you looked at these missing person files?”

“I’ve looked them over. Have you found something?”

“Well, maybe, just maybe. I’ve been looking for a common thread that would tie them all up together and I haven’t found one, but it’s what is missing that’s important. Take a minute to look at the pictures.” She allowed him some time to look at the pictures.

“Okay, I’ve looked at them, now what? I don’t see any common thread either.”

With confidence she said, “Bill, it isn’t what’s there that’s important, it’s what isn’t there. There are blonds and redheads.”

“Yeah, I see that.”

“What’s missing?”

“I don’t ... kn-ow ... wait a minute ... there aren’t any brunettes! Is that what you’re driving at?”

“Yes, now if they are kidnapping girls to fill an order, my guess would be that they would be on the lookout to pick up some brunettes.”

“Okay, you could be right. Now I’m tempted to put you into protective custody. Please promise me that you won’t use yourself as bait.”

Bill didn’t like the tone in her voice as she replied, “Now Bill, would I do that?”

“Do you want an honest answer to that question? I wouldn’t put it past you. Look, Lois, everything about this case stinks. At least don’t do anything until Clark gets back. Can you at least promise me that much?”

With an exasperated tone in her voice she gave in, “All right Bill, just for you. I won’t even leave the Planet building until Clark returns.”

With a rather sarcastic tone, Bill replied, “That makes me feel so much better. If we get anything else I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks, Bill, I, we appreciate it.”

Lois actually kept her promise and didn’t even leave the Planet building until Clark had returned. Of course it wasn’t because of her promise; it was because she was busy making phone calls checking with her snitches.

Lois was so elated with her little adventure in helping from the shadows that as soon as Clark returned from Australia she pulled him into the conference room and told him all about it.

He was smiling as he said, “That’s the kind of thing I was doing before I actually became Superman. When I first started working for the Daily Planet I was engaged to Lana. She didn’t

want me using my powers because she was afraid that the government would grab me to study me. I would duck into an alley, behind a light standard or some such and do whatever I could. I remember once I ducked into an alley and used my heat vision to flatten the tires on a getaway car so that the police could capture the bad guys.”

Lois replied, “It felt good to be able to do *something*! I don’t like to sit back and allow bad things to happen just because I’m a surprise package.”

Clark had a serious expression as he said, “I know how you feel. I felt the same way back then, but I’m sure we’ve made the correct decision. We really need to hold you in reserve for the right time.”

Grudgingly she replied, “Yeah, I know it was the right decision. As long as I can do things like this without getting caught though ...”

“All right, just don’t take any chances.”

“I’ll be careful. I wouldn’t want to spoil the surprise. Okay, here’s the story, while you were in Australia, I called a realtor and made an offer on 348 Hyperion Ave.”

With amazement in his voice he asked, “It was available?”

“Yep and they are asking just about the same as over on the other side of the doorway. If we get it though, I suggest that we paint it different colors so that we have a visual clue as to just where we are.

He laughed and said, “You are amazing! How do you think of things like that?”

“That’s one of the things you married me for. Remember, I think of all the angles.”

Laughing he replied, “Actually, I’m still thinking of curves.”

Chapter 04 – Lucy Disappears

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

The next day Clark was dressed in his navy pinstripe suit while Lois wore a camel color pantsuit, with a brown shell under a light jacket. Shortly after they arrived in the bullpen, they had a call from the realtor that their offer had been accepted and that he had some more papers for them to sign. They told Mr. Olsen where they were headed, and he asked them, on their way back, to cover a press conference that Mayor White was holding. Lois and Clark were both happy with this assignment since neither had had any time to visit with Perry since they had returned to this universe.

When they went to the realtor’s they signed the papers which firmed the offer and they were told that they could go to settlement the following week.

When they arrived at City Hall they were sent to the council chambers where the briefing was being held. When they entered the room a number of newshounds recognized both Lois Lane and Clark Kent as one of the premiere journalists in the city and Superman respectively and deferred to them, allowing them to move down front.

When Mayor White entered the first thing he did was scan the crowd. As soon as his eyes lit on Lois and Clark he started to smile and he nodded to them as he stepped up to the podium.

He held up his hands and the hubbub died down. He started his briefing. “Ladies and gentlemen of the press, we have a situation developing here in the city that the public needs to be made aware of and with your assistance that will be accomplished.”

“There have been a series of kidnappings here in the city. So far seven young women have been abducted. We now are able to

state that these are definitely kidnappings. Until yesterday there was some question as to whether or not these could be runaways. We now know for sure that these women have been snatched right off of our city streets.”

A gasp went up from the gathered reporters and a couple started to shout questions. Mayor White held up his hands for silence again.

“The MPD with the assistance of Superman,” he nodded in Clark’s direction, “is investigating. There are precious few leads at this point although I am assured that there has been some progress made. We now know how it is being done.”

“Now, this is where you folks come in. We need you to warn the public about what is happenin’. These people are grabbin’ young women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-three. They seize targets of opportunity, mainly young women walking unescorted through the city. I need you to tell young women that they need to make sure they are always with other people. Walkin’ alone is only askin’ for trouble.”

“I’ve asked the Police Chief, Ed Backstran, to be here to answer any questions. Chief?”

Chief Backstran moved to the podium as Perry stepped back. That was when the free for all started. Question after question was fired at the chief a lot of which he answered with “No comment.”

While this was going on Lois and Clark managed to slip away from the pack and moved to the side where they caught Perry’s eye. As they stepped into the corridor he joined them.

As soon as the door closed behind them Perry threw his arms around Lois and said, “Darlin’, it’s been a month-o-Sundays since I saw you. You disappeared right after I was elected. What happened?”

“It’s a long story, Perry. I had a relapse. Clark found me again and helped me recover my memory and, well, here I am! Clark brought me back a few weeks ago. Remember the bust of Mitzie’s brothel? Clark and I worked on that along with Mayson Drake and Dan Scardino. We are still waiting for the names of the political figures that they had tapes of in compromising positions.” She was laughing at her own pun as she finished up. Then she sobered immediately and asked, “We’re not going to see your name on the list, are we?”

Looking at her with a shocked expression Perry replied, “Alice would have my hide, get it tanned, stretched and mounted on the wall if I did anything like that.” He turned to Clark and said, “Clark, you can back me up on that.”

Laughing at the word picture Perry had put forth, Clark replied, “Yes, I could see Alice doing just that. No, I don’t suppose we will be seeing Perry’s name on the list.”

With a relieved sigh, Lois said, “That’s a relief and, oh, by the way.” She smiled broadly as she removed her glove and held up her left hand to display her wedding ring.

With a look of shocked disbelief on his face Perry looked from the ring to her smiling face and said, “Nah, I don’t believe it. Married? Lois, Mad Dog, Lane, married? I never would have thought that there was anyone that could ever tie you down. Who’s the lucky guy?”

In silent answer, Lois looked at Clark. Perry followed her eyes and sputtered, “Kent? Why you ol’ dog you! How’d you convince her to marry you?”

“She saw how well we could work together. We can be an unstoppable team.”

“Well, I can believe that. Between her drive and skills, which is not to say you don’t have drive and skills of your own, and well, the other things you can do, the sky’s the limit, well, maybe not even the sky.” Perry chuckled at this unintentional pun. After pausing thoughtfully, Perry continued, “You know, Clark, I’ve watched you develop as a reporter and I like your writing style, it’s homey and comforting. Lois’ style is more hard hitting. I can

see where she can sharpen you up a little and you can smooth off some of her sharp edges. The combination of your styles has been absolute dynamite. I know because I have read everything you’ve written. Frankly, I feel sorry for anyone you two go after. They just aren’t going to know what hit ‘em.”

Joining in on the laughter, Lois said, “You’re right, chief. Not even the sky is the limit.”

“So, when are the two of you goin’ to come to dinner? I know Alice would love to see you again.”

Clark replied, “Let’s wait until we are at least past this crisis.”

Sobering, Perry asked, “Right. Has Bill Henderson contacted you yet?”

Clark replied, “Yes, he has and we’re on it.”

“Good, I feel better knowing that y’all are on the case.” He turned to Lois and said, “Now you, Missy, I want you to stay out of this. Let Clark handle it. You got that? You haven’t been back that long. You probably still need to take it a little easy. Take your time getting back up to speed.”

With an exasperated tone she blurted out, “Why is everybody telling me to stay out of this investigation? What is this ‘Protect the Little Woman Week’? First Bill Henderson and now you!”

Perry put up his hands in a defensive gesture at her outburst and said, in a placating tone, “We’re just worried about you, Darlin’. You know that.”

“Well, don’t. I can take care of myself and besides,” she said as she moved over and snuggled up to Clark. Then putting an arm around his back and tilting her face up to look at Clark’s face, she switched to a silly sweet, little miss innocent tone of voice as she finished, “Clark won’t let anything happen to me, will you Clarkie?” As she finished she batted her eyelashes.

All Perry could do was laugh at this behavior.

Looking down at her, with a smile on his face, Clark replied, “I won’t let them harm a single hair on your head.”

Instantly returning to her normal tone, turning to Perry she said, “There, you see. Clark will be there for me.”

Perry put his hands up this time in surrender, “I should have known better than to take on Mad Dog Lane when she has her teeth in a story.” He started to laugh again, “It’s just like old times. Welcome home, Darlin’.”

Lois put her arms around Perry and gave him a hug as she said, “It’s good to be back and don’t you worry. We’ll get these guys.”

Looking back and forth between Lois and Clark, Perry shook his head and said, “I actually feel sorry for whoever is doin’ this. They don’t know who they are up against.”

With a secret smile Lois said, “You can say that again.” She turned to Clark and said, “We need to get back and get this written up if we are going to make the evening edition. Let’s go, partner.”

Clark turned to Perry, shrugged and said, “You heard the boss. We gotta go. See ya Perry.”

As they started to walk away, Perry was shaking his head and laughing. The idea of Superman being bossed around by a woman was somehow incongruous. But actually, if any woman could do it, Lois Lane could.

Suddenly he felt a *lot* better about their chances for clearing up this problem; Lane and Kent were on the case. If *anyone* could crack it, they could.

Clark and Lois exited the stairwell back into the newsroom, descended the ramp to their desks and Lois started typing up the story. When she had it finished she sent it to Clark for him to check over. Looking up she noticed that Lucy was not at her desk. She called over to Denise who had the desk nearest to her and asked, “Denise, have you seen Lucy?”

Denise replied, “Yeah, a little bit ago she said something about needing some caffeine. I think she went out for some

coffee. Frankly, I don't blame her for not drinking that swill." She inclined her head in the direction of the coffee station as she was speaking.

"I know what you mean. Thanks, Denise. I guess I'll talk to her when she gets back." Lois pulled out what they had so far on Leslie Luckabee and started going over it again.

Lois got the article back from James with some change requests and she worked on it. She thought to herself, <For a computer geek he's turning into some editor.> She sent the revised article to Clark again. After he checked it over she sent it to Mr. Olsen again.

Lois noted the time and realized that it had been some time since Lucy went for her coffee. She sent to Clark, /"Clark, Lucy has been gone for some time. Denise said she was going for coffee. She could have gone all the way across town and back by now. Could you see if you could find her? I'm starting to worry."/ "I'm on it."/ He jumped up and headed for the stairwell.

Ten minutes later he returned, "I couldn't find her in any of the coffee shops near the Planet or anywhere in the immediate vicinity. How long has she been gone?"

"She left while we were at City Hall. That's almost an hour that she's been gone. I'm worried. Should we call Bill Henderson?"

"Bill's not normally Missing Persons although he is helping out on that case, so I guess it couldn't hurt." So saying he picked up his phone and dialed the number.

"Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Cooper."

"Sgt. Cooper, this is Clark Kent."

Clark could almost see Sgt. Cooper sitting up straighter in his chair when he heard who was on the phone. "How can I help you, Superman?"

"I'd like to speak with Bill Henderson, please."

"Right away, Superman."

There were a few clicks and then, "Henderson."

"Bill, Clark Kent."

"Hi Clark, what can I do for you?"

"I need to report a missing person."

Through the phone Clark could hear Bill's hand hit the top of his desk as he said, "I told Lois I had a bad feeling about this case. I'll put out an APB immediately."

Clark started chuckling at his response. The assumption that it was Lois was so normal. "No, Bill, it isn't Lois. It's her sister, Lucy."

Bill instantly calmed somewhat and started asking for more detail, "What? I didn't even know she had a sister. Lucy you say? What's the story? Is she just like Lois, putting herself in harm's way?"

"Well, they are sisters, but Lucy isn't like that. She's the quiet type. Look, Bill, right now, I don't know if it's anything, it's only been a little over an hour, but, she is missing. She said she was going for coffee, but she hasn't returned yet."

"I take it she works with you at the Planet. Do you know just where she would have gone? Could she have decided to do some shopping on the way back to work?"

"That would be highly unlikely. She's very conscientious about being on the job."

Bill replied, "Officially we can't take a missing person report until at least twenty-four hours has elapsed, but since it's you I'll start the ball rolling, unofficially, especially with what has been happening recently. Let me start some inquiries. Do you have a picture?"

Clark picked up a framed photo of Lucy that Lois had on her desk and looked at it. It was a cute picture of the two of them, sitting next to one another, leaning into each other with the sides of their heads touching smiling at the camera. "Yes, Lois has one here on her desk. I'll bring it right over. Thanks, Bill. I owe you one."

In his normal phlegmatic tone, Bill said, "Owe me one! I owe you more than I can count. Just yesterday you kept a couple of my officers from getting shot. Let's just say this is a small down payment on what the department owes you. I'll be in touch."

Thoughtfully Clark hung up the phone. He turned to Lois and asked, "Do you think there's any possibility that this is related to the missing women?"

In a voice filled with desperation she said, "Oh, Clark, I hope not, but I'm terrified that it is. From what I was able to figure out it looks like they are after brunettes and that's exactly what Lucy is. We have to find her!" She switched to telepathy, /"Maybe it's time for Superwoman to show herself. If I join you in the search we can cover twice as much territory."/

/"No, Superwoman is our secret weapon. We need to keep her hidden, at least for a little while longer."/

/"I'd feel a lot better if I could be out there looking for Lucy too."/

"I know. I'm going back out. Why don't you go ask around? Maybe someone saw something."/

She sent, /"Oh, okay. If I have to,"/ as she picked up her bag and threw the strap over her head so that she wouldn't have to keep pulling the strap up to keep it from slipping off of her shoulder, freeing up both of her hands. She headed for the elevator as he headed for the stairwell.

She took the elevator to the lobby and started asking around. Lucy had been there long enough that the lobby workers had started to recognize her as part of the staff. She started at the coffee stand since Lucy's stated objective was coffee. Sid the coffee vendor was an older, semi-retired, married man who had a more or less regular clientele and he knew just how everyone liked their regular orders. When she asked about Lucy he said that he hadn't seen her all day.

Next Lois went to the newspaper and magazine stand. She asked Joe the vendor about Lucy. Now, Joe was a twenty-something, single and looking. He had an eye for the girls; which is precisely why he liked his job. Located in the lobby of the building he had a lot of eye candy passing by all of the time. He especially liked it when a woman would be wearing a scooped neck blouse and she'd have to bend over slightly to get her money out of her purse. This worked to Lois' advantage since Lucy was one of the attractive females that he watched for.

"Joe, have you seen my sister within the last hour or so?"

He had a smile as he thought about Lucy and what she had been wearing today, a burgundy outfit. She had been wearing a silky sleeveless blouse with a scoop neck and a short skirt with a modest slit on the left which allowed a little leg to peek out. He said, "Yeah, about an hour ago she popped out of the elevator and headed outside. I saw her go to the right. I think she was headed for the CoffeeHause because she looked over at Sid's stand and kinda shook her head as if making up her mind about something. At the CoffeeHause she could get a shot of espresso added to her coffee. Sid doesn't do that. Come to think about it, I noticed a disturbance shortly after she walked out. I couldn't see much because of the angle, but yeah, there was a disturbance."

A few minutes later Clark received a thought, /"I didn't have to look very far. Joe at the magazine stand in the lobby said there was a small disturbance outside a while ago. It wasn't much and it happened quickly so he didn't think much of it. I'll check around some more and then meet you at Bill's office."/

Clark's first stop had been the Twelfth Precinct. Before entering he spun out of the Suit and into his work clothes. As he handed over a picture of Lucy he said, "Here you go, Bill. She still hasn't showed up. Lois is checking the vicinity of the Planet. She says that there was a commotion outside the Planet this morning, just about the time Lucy would have been leaving. That might be when she was snatched."

“Lois said?”

Clark pulled out his cell phone and held it up.

“Oh, okay. Well, I’m afraid it could be. It fits the profile. I’m afraid she’s another victim of this kidnapping ring. The thing is there have not been any ransom demands. The girls have just vanished. She’s the eighth one so far.”

After talking to Joe, Lois headed out of the building. She was on her way to the Twelfth Precinct and as she exited the Daily Planet she went to the right, following Lucy’s path. There were no taxis in sight so she headed for the corner. As she passed an alley, suddenly there were hands on her arms and a cloth with a cloying odor was held over her face.

She had never before experienced chloroform, but she assumed that this was what they were using and in that split second she decided to play along. She struggled briefly and then went limp. She felt herself being lifted and carried into a vehicle. She sent, /”Clark!”/

Bill noted a change in Clark’s features as he received this communication and filed it away for future reference. Clark replied, /”Yes, Lois?”/

/”I’m being abducted. They used chloroform to knock me out. Now I’m in the back of a car.”/

Bill noted yet another change. This time a look of anxiety came over Clark’s features.

Bill asked, “Is there a problem, Superman? Do you hear something?”

Chagrined that he wasn’t being careful enough Clark replied, “Well, yes, sort of.”

“What is it, a fire?”

“No, not exactly. Excuse me Bill, I have to go.” He spun into the Suit and exiting at superspeed, took to the air. He sent, /”I’m on my way.”/

He flew to the vicinity of the Daily Planet and started listening for Lois’ heartbeat. He started flying in concentric circles moving outward using the Planet building as a center until he heard what he was listening for.

Using his x-ray vision he finally spotted Lois in the back seat of a car and was thinking about intercepting the vehicle. If he did that then the kidnappers could be grilled by the police until they revealed the location of the other girls.

He sent, /”Okay, I found you. I’m going to stop them and take them to the police.”/

Chapter 05 – Rescued?

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

She sent to him, /”No! Don’t do that! This is fun! What can they do to me? Really! Let’s let them take me wherever they want to. Maybe they will take me to the rest of the girls that have been kidnapped. Lucy could be there.”/

/”But, why? The police can get the location of the other girls out of them. How did they get you?”/

/”Look, go with me on this. Think about it, it’ll be quicker this way! They must be taking me where the other girls are. Just follow us. I was on my way to the corner to get a cab when they jumped me. I think we are traveling down Schuster which could take us out of town if they stay on it. Oh, I hear your heartbeat. You must be close.”/

/”Yeah, I found you a minute ago. You’re in the back of a blue Chevy. Okay, you’re probably right. It will be quicker this way. I’m going to follow, from a distance.”/

/”Okay, but don’t get too close. We don’t want to scare them

off.”/

They were both listening as the driver said, “That went easy. The more of these dames we grab, the easier it gets.”

His partner replied, “Yeah. Dat one dat Frank and Bud picked up dis morning really put up a fight. I’m glad dis one wasn’t a hellcat like her.”

“Are you sure this is the one we were supposed to grab?”

“Yeah, I spotted her earlier so dat I could be sure. Dis one is Superman’s partner. Now dat we got her, we can call all de shots. If he don’t play along, we got his dame and we can make him sorry.”

“Why did Frank and Bud grab that other one this mornin’?”

“Dey tout it was dis dame. Dey look so much alike dey could be sisters. We needed some brown haired dames for de order anyhow. Dis one may be kept ‘ere or sent wid de rest. I don’t know.”

“I hope Frank and Bud get that blonde. She completes the order and we can ship these dames out.”

Lois sent /”They have Lucy. Just wait till we get where we are going, I’ll soon teach these guys what’s what.”/

/”Now, Lois, remember you are our surprise package.”/

Her mental grumble came through even though she didn’t think she was broadcasting, /”I really hate surprises.”/

The car proceeded to the outskirts of the city and as it pulled into the attached garage of a secluded house Lois started feeling the pain associated with Kryptonite exposure. She sent, /”Oh no! Pain! Clark, Kryptonite! You need to stay away.”/

She could sense the worry in the side channels of the mental communication as he sent, /”What about you?”/

/”I’m going to have to let them carry me into the house or else I’ll blow my cover. At least the telepathy isn’t affected by the Kryptonite. Look, I still have my bag. For some reason they didn’t take it away. I still have some lead foil in it from the other universe. If I can find the Kryptonite I’ll neutralize it. It might be a good idea to call Bill Henderson. A police raid at this point would be a good thing.”/

/”I’m going to call it in now! Be right back.”/

After the car was parked Lois felt herself being lifted and carried out of the car and through a door. At that moment the pain increased dramatically and then as they continued to move it lessened again. With each step the pain from the Kryptonite now decreased. Once they had mounted the stairs the pain came again and it was becoming harder for her to control herself and she was beginning to wince from the pain.

One of her captors said, “Let’s get her settled. I can feel her starting to move. She must be coming out from under the chloroform,” just before they unceremoniously dumped her on a cot in a room on the second floor. Her bag had not just been slung over her shoulder in her normal way. This time she had actually put the strap over her head so that it was over the opposite shoulder and thereby harder for her captors to remove so she still had it when they exited, closing and locking the door behind them.

Lois was in a fair amount of pain as she lay there for several minutes making sure her captors were not going to return immediately. She sent, /”I’m inside the house. I am in pain, but it’s nothing like what I felt coming from Nigel’s office. This is either a smaller piece, it is from a different substrate or I’m farther away from it, but it still hurts and I don’t think I have my powers right now.”/

She could feel the concern coming to her through the side channels of the link as he sent, /”I need to get you out of there. I can see you. It should be easy.”/

She tried to project confidence with her thoughts as she sent, /”No! We don’t know just where this piece of Kryptonite is or what kind it is. We can’t afford to both be caught. Keep your distance. I’ll handle this! See if you can spot it and let me know

just where it is.”/

A few seconds later he sent, /”Well, what do you know. That’s the piece Tempus used on me. I had wondered where it had gotten to. It’s on the first floor in the kitchen sitting out on the table. They brought you through a door down that hall from it when they carried you in from the garage. Wait a minute, there’s another car pulling up into the garage. They have another woman. Oh no, you’re not going to believe this.”/

/”Believe what? Who is it?”/

/”They are removing her from the car. I think she will be the other occupant of your room. Just wait until you see who your roommate is.”/ She heard a mental chuckle as he finished up. Lois made sure that she was lying still as she heard the door being opened.

“Okay Bud. They got the other dame. Let’s put this one on the other cot and go have a beer.”

“Sounds good to me. Let’s get up a card game. I’m feeling lucky.”

As the thugs were exiting Lois sent, /”How many of ‘them’ are there?”/

After a few seconds he sent, /”There are seven other girls besides you, Lucy and your roommate. All of the rooms have two girls each. You’re all on the second floor. There are five hoods, all on the first floor. They are in the living room sitting around a table drinking beer and starting a card game. If you are quiet you might be able to get downstairs and into the kitchen without them seeing you. I’ll guide you from here. Before you leave, check out your roommate.”/

She replied, /”Thank God they didn’t take my bag. I still have my lock-picks.”/ Finally opening her eyes she let out a groan as she shifted her position.

Clark heard that groan and sent, /”I need to get you out of there!”/

Lois could feel the anxiety in his communication. Trying to reassure him she sent, /”It was just changing my position suddenly. It’s not so bad now. Just a dull ache.”/

/”Don’t even try to lie to me. I can sense the truth through our link,”/ Clark sent indignantly.

/”All right, have it your own way. It hurts, but I can handle it. You stay clear and let me do this.”/

She felt quite weak as she swung her legs around and put her feet on the floor. She took just a second to kick off her heels when she thought, <These heels could make noise. Better to be barefoot.> Her body was aching all over as a result of the Kryptonite exposure and she was thinking, <How did Clark do it? He was being exposed to crystalline Kryptonite all of the time he was fighting those muggers. He even walked up to it and wrapped it up in lead foil so that I wouldn’t be exposed. I know how I’m feeling at this distance. I just hope I don’t collapse before I can get it wrapped up in lead.>

Forcing herself to her feet she found her legs to be somewhat unsteady. She reached down inside herself and sought that connection that she had with Clark and tried to draw on his strength. Her legs stopped trembling and she made the few steps that would take her to the door. As she passed the other cot she looked at her roommate and received quite a shock.

Her roommate was Mayson Drake! She sent, /”This is too much to be a coincidence. It had to have been planned.”/

/”I agree. Coincidence only goes so far.”/

Reaching into her bag she pulled out her lock pick set from its partial concealment and went to work on the lock. It was the work of only seconds for her to release the lock and quietly open the door and peek out.

Suddenly she received a message from Clark, /”One of the guards is getting up. I’ll let you know where he is headed.”/

A minute later she received, /”Okay, the coast is clear. He went to relieve himself. He’s headed back to the game. I hope

none of them need a refill soon.”/

She opened the door and passed through closing, but not locking it, after herself as she headed for the stairs. Barefoot she made no sounds as she descended the staircase.

Surprised by the fact that the pain of the Kryptonite didn’t increase as she descended the stairs she sent, /”Am I getting used to this exposure or what? I was expecting the pain and weakness to increase as I came downstairs.”/

He replied, /”You’ve been getting closer vertically, but you’ve been increasing the horizontal distance. You’re moving away from the kitchen. It balances out.”/

/”Oh, okay, I understand. Once I’m on the ground floor and start to move toward the kitchen, that is when it will get worse?”/

/”Yes, I wish I was doing this and not you.”/

/”But, you can’t. I’ve got to be the one to do this. Just keep talking to me. It helps. What’s taking the police so long?”/

/”Bill said he would get a squad together and get here as quickly as he could. It shouldn’t be too much longer.”/

By this time she was approaching the first floor landing and was tempted to peek around the corner to see what the guards were doing.

As she started to move in that direction she received, /”Don’t do that! One of the guards is sitting facing that direction. If you look around that corner he could see you.”/

/”Okay, thanks for keeping me from making that mistake.”/

She stood there listening as the guards talked while playing cards.

She recognized the driver’s voice as he asked, “How many more do we need to fill the order?”

One of the others replied, “That all depends. If we count these two, then we’re done. If the boss is going to keep them here as leverage against Superman then we need two more.”

“How does he figure dat dese dames can be used against Supes?”

“One is his partner at the Daily Planet. They work together which means that they are close. If they are close then threatening her will cause him to do what we want. The other one was his main squeeze until recently. The Boss figures that they might have had a falling out, but that he might still have feelings for her.”

“But won’t dat just get him to come atter us dat much sooner and make him meaner?”

“I hope he does show up. That’s what that green rock in the kitchen is for. It’s a trap for Superman. If he gets too close ... whammo ... the trap closes and he is caught. We might even be able to kill him.”

“Kill Superman? I taut he was invulnerable.”

“Invulnerable, you idiot. He is, but not against that rock. Les ... The Boss says so.”

“Yeah, but what does he know? He ain’t even from around here.”

“Well, he’s The Boss and what he says goes. We have to trust him.”

/”Did you hear that slip? Les ... could be Leslie and he’s not from around here, Leslie is from Australia,”/ the excitement she felt flowing through the link.

/”We can’t jump to that conclusion. It could be a setup,”/ Clark sent and his skeptical tone carried through the link.

/”Yeah, right.”/ Even using telepathy her sarcastic tone came through.

“This last one was a special order, like the other one. This last one, the blonde, was in the DA’s office. Word is that she caused The Boss a lot of trouble some time ago. She got a warrant to raid the brothel. That messed up his plans something fierce. She was to be the last one we picked up so that as soon as we had her they would all get shipped out.”

/”Mayson and I were singled out because we helped to break

up the prostitution racket!”/

“Hah, I woulda thought dat de dame we just lugged in here woulda been de last, what wid her bein’ Superman’s partner and all. How are we goin’ to get dese dames out o’ da country?”

“The Boss will have an exec jet waiting at a little private airstrip outside of town. It has the company logo on it and no one will question it since it makes frequent trips out of the country.”

“I wish we knew what airport and could get a look at that jet to see what company it is.”/

“You really need to move. Go to your left, down the hallway. At the end of the hall you will be in the kitchen.”/

Stepping down off of the bottom step, Lois started to tip toe down the hallway. As she moved the voices faded. She was already past the door to the garage, more than half way down the hall, when suddenly, behind her, she could hear voices rising in anger coming from the living room. There was apparently a dispute about the outcome of a hand.

The pain she was experiencing was rising exponentially as she moved down the hallway. She felt like she was moving through a flowing stream of molasses, against the current. The further she moved toward the kitchen the stronger the current against her seemed to become.

At that point Clark sent, “The one that was complaining just threw down his hand in disgust. He said he was going to go check on the prisoners. He said that he was going to shoot up the two new captures with the sedative. If he catches you out in the open it will be a problem.”/

It was amazing how telepathically you could even project sarcasm, Lois replied, “You’re just chock full of good news aren’t you.”/

She was already worried that something would happen and one of the guards would see her and now that fear seemed to be coming true. What she received next confirmed her fears, “He’s standing up from the table. He’s headed for the staircase. If he looks down the hall he’ll see you.”/

She still had a distance of five feet, two long paces, to travel until she would be obscured from view and she didn’t know if she would make it.

The pain was excruciating and her movement had been slowed to a crawl. The way she felt it would be half a dozen paces instead of two. It had almost come to the point that she would be on the floor, literally crawling, on all fours. In utter desperation she drew again on that inner bond, drawing strength from Clark and put on a burst of speed, only in the metaphorical sense, and made it the two paces needed to get around the corner into the kitchen before the guard was in a position to see her, but just barely.

Once around the corner she did collapse to her knees and let out a muffled groan. She had to rest and recover some strength before she could move another inch. She knelt there on all fours quietly panting from the exertion which had sapped almost all of her remaining strength and will.

Since those last two paces almost did her in, she was having some serious doubts as to her ability to complete this mission. The pain was almost unendurable and all she wanted to do was get **away** from that evil rock, not get closer to it, but her resolve to do this, to neutralize that rock so that it wouldn’t hurt her or Clark again enabled her to force her body to start moving again.

As much as it hurt she had to get closer. She had to get close enough to touch it even if it killed her. She hoped that it wouldn’t, but right now it **felt** like it **was** killing her and not exactly slowly. She could feel her body failing rapidly. If she didn’t finish this quickly **it** would finish **her**.

With her vision starting to blur and seeing multiple images of what she was looking at swirling around in a circle, she saw the Kryptonite on the table. Hoping that when the time came, she

could pick out the real from a false image she started crawling toward it. It seemed like she was moving only an inch at a time and that each inch was taking an eternity, an eternity of torture.

After creeping a foot she had to stop to rest and was still panting with the exertion but realizing her danger doing so as silently as possible. On one of her stops she pulled the lead foil out of her bag and clutched it in her hand. She crept forward another pace. Suddenly she received an urgent thought, “Lois, the guard is on the second floor. When he finds you missing he’ll raise an alarm!”/

She looked and saw the distance remaining and wasn’t sure she could make it. She clamped down on the telepathic link so that Clark wouldn’t know just how close she was to failing. She wasn’t sure just how long she could block him out, but to keep him from doing something rash she had to.

She felt like she should be rolling on the floor writhing in pain. She was already sweating profusely. She could feel her hair sticking to the sides of her face. It was only her strength of will and her connection to Clark coupled with her determination to protect him from the Kryptonite that kept her going.

She crept forward another pace. She was close to one of the legs of the table now. She knew that only because with her head down and her eyes mostly closed to reduce the dizziness the top of her head bumped into something. She **needed** to rest again, but she knew that she dare not. If she gave in to that need, she would never rise again and she knew it. She looked up to see what she had hit and found herself looking at the table leg, bleary eyed she looked at it for a few seconds before she realized just what it was.

As she grasped the table leg to pull herself up she heard a shout from upstairs followed by curses and the noise of more feet rushing up the stairs.

It was now or never. With her last ounce of strength she pulled herself up and reaching out with the hand grasping the lead foil, slapped it down on top of the rock, and then with a convulsive movement clenched her hand, enclosing the rock completely in the lead. Immediately she collapsed, falling with a thud, supine on the floor, legs bent at an angle, arms outstretched and eyes closed. Her last conscious thought was, <I did it.>

Clark had been watching her and saw her cover the Kryptonite and collapse. A second later Superman burst in through the kitchen window and, scooping up the now lead-wrapped Kryptonite, put it in her bag, where it would be out of sight. Picking Lois up, he flew her out the same window setting her in the sun on a chair he had taken from the porch. As he reentered the house he heard sirens approaching from the direction of town. He flew up the stairs, arriving just as the guards were finishing their search of the second floor for Lois.

Seeing Superman the guards all pulled weapons and started shooting, all but one who made a dash for the nearest room.

Superman caught all of the bullets launched in his direction and seeing this, the thugs dropped their useless weapons and, putting their hands up, surrendered. Superman called to the one in the room, “You might as well come out. You can’t get away. The police will be here in a minute.”

The thug replied, “I have two hostages, Superman. Give me safe passage out of here or they get it.”

At superspeed Superman used the thugs’ own belts and shoe laces to secure them and then he sped out of the house. He used his x-ray vision to see just where the remaining thug was. He saw him half supporting Lucy and holding a gun to her head. The thug was facing the door, expecting him to come at him from that direction.

As he hovered outside of the window he could just see the gun the thug was holding and focused his heat vision to melt the point of the firing pin on his revolver’s hammer so that it would never contact the primer. When he did this he also melted two

pinpoint holes in the glass of the window. Now that the danger was eliminated he crashed in through the window. As Superman grabbed him, in reflex, the thug pulled the trigger, but instead of the expected explosion there was a simple metallic click. Superman reached for and relieved him of his weapon. Five seconds later he had joined his fellow thugs on the floor of the upstairs hallway.

Once this had been accomplished Superman picked up Lucy from where she had fallen when the thug released her and took her with him as he flew back to Lois. He placed Lucy in another chair and picked Lois up and cradled her in his lap, her head on his left shoulder, as they waited for the police to arrive, which was only a few short minutes later.

Bill Henderson was the first one out of a cruiser car. He spotted Superman with Lois in his lap and Lucy next to them. Lois appeared to be passed out. Bill looked at her and then at him and lifted an eyebrow in enquiry.

Superman replied to the unasked question, "They chloroformed her. She hasn't completely recovered yet." Superman indicated the other girl and said, "This is Lucy Lane, Lois' sister. The rest of the missing girls are all upstairs. They look like they've been drugged. I'd suggest that you call for some ambulances."

Bill turned to his driver, Sgt. Tartaglia, and said, "Gino, get on the radio and call that request in." He turned back to Superman as Gino sketched a salute and turned to make the call. Bill indicated Lois and asked, "How is she? Should she go in an ambulance?"

Shaking his head in the negative, Clark replied, "No, Bill, that won't be necessary, I'll take care of her. I will leave Lucy here so that she can go to the hospital with the other girls. I don't want to give her special treatment. If I did then whoever is behind this could realize that she is a valuable hostage. There were five guards and they are all secured up on the second floor." Superman stood up and, cradling Lois in his arms, said, "We'll stop by and give you our statements later. By the way, you'll find Mayson Drake in one of the rooms upstairs. I overheard a statement by one of the guards that she was kidnapped because of the work we did on the prostitution rackets a while ago. It was a revenge move by someone they called The Boss."

"There's no rush about the statements, so take your time. The Boss, huh? Sounds like what happened a few years ago. After Lex Luthor died in that attack during the White Orchid Ball we found that he had been behind the rackets here in Metropolis and he was called The Boss. I wonder ..." After a few seconds contemplation Henderson nodded in Lois' direction as he added, "Take care of her. I told her a couple of days ago that I had a bad feeling about this case and I warned her to stay out of it. She just didn't listen to me."

As they had been talking the patrolmen had been entering the house.

Smiling, Clark replied, "Don't feel too bad about that, Bill. She doesn't always listen to me either, besides, they had her sister. She has a mind of her own, but she didn't do this deliberately. She couldn't avoid this. She was targeted because we are partners. They were going to use her as leverage against me. If you don't mind, I'm going to take Lois home."

"No, I don't mind. Thanks for your help." Bill was distracted and turned away as the uniforms started bringing the hoods out in handcuffs. He turned back, but Superman was already gone. He nodded to himself and said, under his breath, "Really need to put a bell on him so that he can't sneak away like that. Right, married man. Needs to take care of the little woman." Out loud, addressing the patrolmen, "Did they have their rights read to them?"

The corporal looked at each private and receiving a nod from each replied to the Lieutenant, "Yes, Sir."

Bill nodded and said, "Get 'em outta here." He called over another patrolman and said, "Stay with this one until she's in an ambulance. I'll wait with the rest for the ambulances." He turned and entered the house to wait.

Chapter 06 – Jack

%%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –
Alt 1

%%%%

Clark flew Lois to the farm and put her on a lounge chair in the sun. He grabbed the phone and called Mr. Olsen at the Planet. "Daily Planet, James Olsen."

"Mr. Olsen, it's Clark. I have Lois here with me. The police just broke up the ring that has been kidnapping girls."

"They did?!?!? What about Lucy? Was she one of the kidnapped girls? Did they find her?"

"Yes, she's safe. She needed to go to the hospital because she had been drugged."

The relief in Mr. Olsen's voice was very apparent as he said, "That's tremendous news!" Then like any true editor he asked, "How soon can I expect to see your copy?"

Clark looked over at Lois and said, "I'll try to get you the main story shortly. The real inside story will have to wait. You see that part is Lois' to tell, and she isn't quite up to telling it right now."

Worry back in his voice, Mr. Olsen asked, "What do you mean by that? Where is she? Is she okay?"

Reassuringly Clark replied, "She's right here and she'll be okay. We'll be out of touch for a few hours. Could I ask you check on Lucy in the hospital?"

"Sure, I'd be happy to. Are you sure she is okay?"

"Positive. She just needs some rest, to recover from the sedatives they administered."

"What about Lois?"

"They chloroformed her. She just needs some rest."

"Okay, get the main story to me and then we'll see you later."

Clark said, "Thanks," before he hung up. He grabbed the laptop from their office in the house, typed up the story and e-mailed it to Mr. Olsen.

After returning the laptop to the office he went upstairs and grabbed one of Lois' bikinis and after stuffing it, some towels and casual clothes for himself in a backpack, picked Lois up and flew to Hawaii. Landing on 'their' beach he spread the towels and at superspeed, stripped her, put her bikini on her and lay her down on her towel in the sun. She hadn't stirred since she had collapsed in the kitchen. He spun out of his Suit and into a pair of swim trunks before he lay down on his towel next to her.

Several hours later Lois roused and did a lazy stretch as if she were just waking up from a good night's sleep. She looked up and saw some very familiar cliffs stretching up into the blue sky. Memory came flooding back. The memory of the pain, the pain she was no longer feeling. She looked around and saw the sand and then her eyes locked on Clark's brown orbs which were staring at her. She said, "I guess I succeeded. Thanks."

With a look of pure adoration in his eyes he replied, "Thanks?"

"I couldn't have done it without you. When I thought I couldn't go on I reached down and found a connection to you and I drew on your strength. It's what got me through."

"I wish it had been me and not you. I hated to see you go through that. Please don't put me through that again."

Rolling up on her side and propping her head on her hand she said, "It isn't like I planned it that way. If I had my druthers, I'd

never go through that again. I have to say I have a greater appreciation for what you went through in that mugging.” She leaned over and gave him a kiss. “My husband.”

After leaning in and capturing her lips in another kiss he said, “My wife. I didn’t want you in that situation. What am I going to do with you?”

With an arched eyebrow and a little grin she replied, “Do I really have to give you a suggestion?”

Just then a canoe rounded the point and approached their section of beach. Seeing this, Lois stood up and started packing their things. Before they came close enough to get a good look Lois grabbed the bag, Clark spun into his Suit and picking up Lois they soared into the air.

She sent, /”Well, so much for ‘our’ beach. Thanks for putting a bikini on me, at least I wasn’t nude. Now the word will get out that Superman uses it and it won’t be private any longer.”/

/”We’ll just have to find somewhere a little more private. Next stop, Smallville.”/

/”What about Lucy?!”/

/”She’s going to be in the hospital overnight so we don’t have to worry about her.”/

Early the next morning they went by the hospital. Lucy and all of the girls that had been kidnapped had been kept overnight for observation because they had all been drugged. When they arrived each of the girls was being interviewed by a detective.

Needless to say, Lucy was happy to see them. She had just finished giving her statement to Detective Danny Clover. As Lois walked up she said, “Detective Clover, nice to see you again.”

“Oh, hi Ms. Lane. I take it that this is your sister.”

With a smile Lois asked, “Yes, she is. Has she been giving you a hard time?”

Detective Clover laughed and replied, “I may have to take her in for obstruction of justice.”

With a shocked expression Lois asked, “Really, why?”

“Even though I have her name she keeps giving me a false address. I need her local address in case I need to follow-up and also so that I can pick her up if she consents to a date.”

With a sheepish look Lucy said, “Really? Actually, I’m already seeing someone.”

“What does he have that I haven’t got?”

“Well, let’s see, he’s a multi-millionaire, he owns the Daily Planet, need I go on?”

“I guess not. You lost me at multi-millionaire. Oh well, you can’t blame a guy for trying.”

Clark said, “She really wasn’t giving you a bogus address. She *is* living in Kansas, with her sister and me.”

Detective Clover finally looked at Clark and realized just who he was. His jaw dropped and he said, “She lives with you and ... and ...”

“Yes, and her sister, Lois Lane so you see, she really isn’t obstructing justice.”

Detective Clover stuttered, “I didn’t really ... I mean it was just, uh, yes, uh, okay. Anything you say.” He closed his notepad and put it away. “Thank you for your time, Ms. Lane.”

Lois and Lucy both answered at the same time, “Don’t mention it,” and then they both broke out in laughter.

Lois said, “Oh, right, you meant Lucy, sorry.” She thought to Clark, /”Let’s get out of here before it gets any more awkward.”/

Clark said, “Uh, right, well, we have to go, uh, to the Planet, we ah, we need to get to work.” Turning to Lois and Lucy he said, “Shall we?”

Both girls nodded their heads and arm in arm, started for the door with Clark bringing up the rear.

As they started to walk, Lucy said, “James was here until Detective Clover arrived then he had to get to the Planet.”

Just as they got into the hallway and turned left toward the

elevators, behind them they heard a female voice call, “Clark!”

All three turned at that hail and saw Mayson Drake and Daniel Scardino coming toward them.

Lois sent, /”Let me handle this.”/

He sent back, /”Please do.”/

Lois said, “Mayson, fancy meeting you here and Agent Scardino. I see that you are still together.”

Mayson glanced at Daniel and smiled, “Yeah, we are.” Turning to Clark she said, “I understand that I have you to thank for saving us.”

Daniel spoke up, “Yeah, I need to add my thanks. As soon as Mayson recovered from the chloroform she called me. They wanted to keep her overnight, just in case. I appreciate you rescuing her.” He held out his hand.

Clark took the offered hand and said, “Don’t mention it. It was my pleasure. Besides, they had Lois and her sister too.”

Mayson looked back and forth between the Lane sisters and said, “I can see the resemblance.” She offered her hand to Lucy and said, “Hi, my name is Mayson Drake. Your sister and I are old friends.”

Lucy took the offered hand and said, “Lucy Lane, pleased to meet a friend of Lois’.”

Seeing and hearing this exchange spoke volumes to both Lois and Clark. Mayson had forgiven Clark and Lois for what had happened. The supposition was that the blossoming relationship with Scardino was the answer.

Mayson turned to Lois and Clark and said, “Daniel and I are going to Travaglino’s for lunch. Can you guys join us?”

Clark answered, “Thanks for the invitation, but we have to get in to the office so that Lois can write up the stories of her and Lucy’s capture. If you wouldn’t mind, if you have some time later we’d like to interview you as well. By the way, when you do we will fill you in on what we overheard.”

Her interest piqued, Mayson looked at Dan and asked, “Want to come with me to the Planet? You’d probably like to hear the details as well.”

Dan nodded his head and said, “Wild horses couldn’t keep me away.”

Turning back to Clark, Daniel said, “Okay, we’ll see you after lunch.” He took Mayson’s hand in his they started down the hall along with Lois, Clark and Lucy. When they all exited the elevator they headed their separate ways.

On their return, as they were exiting the elevator, a police scanner in the newsroom announced a robbery in progress at Tenth and Bayview. Lois looked at Clark and he gave a nod. Seeing this, Lucy headed for her desk while Lois threw the strap of her bag over her head and headed back up the ramp. Carrying it that way had enabled her to have the lead foil she needed to neutralize the Kryptonite after all so she was thinking she just might start carrying it that way all the time. Together they headed for the stairwell.

Less than a minute later, Superman and Lois landed next to Detective Clover, Superman addressed him, “My, Detective Clover, you do seem to get around. Is there anything I can do to assist?”

Turning to him he said, “Oh, hi Superman. Nah, not now. It was a petty theft. I’m not even sure that the victim will press charges. It was just a kid. The kid really looks like he’s had a rough life.”

This story sounded familiar to Clark and he asked, “Would it be possible for me to see the kid?”

Detective Clover said, “He’s over there in the middle of that group.”

Superman and Lois headed over toward the small crowd that had gathered around. The spectators made way for them. When they did the couple recognized the kid involved. It was Jack in

the custody of a uniformed policeman. Superman addressed the victim, “Sir, could you tell me just what happened?”

“Certainly Superman, this lad tried to pick my pocket. Fortunately for me and unfortunately for him, he’s not very good at it. I caught him in the act.”

Superman turned to Jack and asked, “Son, why did you do this?”

His sullen reply was, “I was hungry. Needed some money to buy food.”

The victim indignantly said, “There are organizations that are set up to feed the homeless. Why not go there instead of trying to pick pockets?”

The sullen reply was simply, “Can’t.”

Superman turned to the victim and asked, “Sir, if this young man apologized and promised to mend his ways, could you see your way clear to not press charges?”

The older man looked on Jack with pity in his eyes, “I would hate to see a kid start on a life of crime and if he is sent to a juvenile facility that is just what could happen. If I could have some assurance that he will not do this again, I won’t press charges.”

Superman replied, “I will take it upon myself to assure you that he will not do anything like this again. I think I can help him turn his life around and make him a productive member of society.”

“Well, Superman, if you can do that, you have my blessing. He’s all yours.”

“Thank you, sir. Lois and I will take it from here.” He turned to Jack and said, “We have a date at the Daily Planet. I want you to go with Lois and I’ll meet you back there.” Turning to Lois he said, “I’m going to do a quick patrol and meet you back at the office.” Mentally he sent, “He’s just like Jack in the other universe. We need to help him. I bet his brother Denny is around here somewhere. I’m going to find him. Once I do I’ll bring him with me.”

Lois nodded her head and turning to Jack said, “Okay, you heard the man. Let’s go. We just might be able to put you to work so that you earn an honest living. What’d ya say?”

Jack replied, “That would be nice. I never liked stealing anyhow. It’s just ...”

As Lois hailed a passing cab she said, “I know, probably more than you want me to. You don’t need to say any more about that. Don’t worry you’ll be back if you need to be. Here’s a cab. Let’s get in.”

They climbed in and Lois gave the Planet as their destination and the cab pulled away with a screech of its wheels.

Lois tried in vain to engage Jack in conversation while they were on the way to the Planet. She knew about Denny and figured that Jack was probably worried about his little brother. She hoped that Clark could find Denny and find him quickly so that at least that anxiety would be removed from Jack. He was in a bad enough situation already without that worry hanging over him.

Jack sat, sullenly on the far side of the seat against the door. He considered opening the door and bolting when the cab came to a stop at a light. There were a couple of things that kept him from doing just that. He thought to himself, “How could I outrun Superman? If he came after me I don’t see how I could get away. This lady, I think he called her Lois, she’s sure pretty and she seems really nice, but what’s going to happen to Denny? He’s expecting me back before long. I hope he doesn’t start to worry and break cover. If he gets picked up they could separate us. I guess the best plan is to cooperate and get this over as quickly as possible so that I can get back to him. He’s just a kid and he might do something stupid.”

<I am going to need to shoplift some food or check some

dumpsters on the way back. Wow, how far are we going? On foot it’s going to take me a long time to get back to Denny.>

<Why would Superman be offering a kid like me a job anyhow? What can he get out of it? What does he have up that blue sleeve of his? He doesn’t know me. How does he know he can trust me? If this is legit it could be okay. I have heard that he does a lot for kids. Maybe this could work out after all. I’ll have to wait and see what he says.>

Finally the cab pulled up in front of the Daily Planet and they got out. After Lois paid the fare they headed inside.

After they got to the news floor she led him down the ramp and said, “This is my desk. Have a seat. I’d like to get to know you better.” She started using her well-honed interview techniques to draw information from him without him really suspecting how much he was divulging. She used her knowledge of the Jack in her universe to guide her questions. The parallels were amazing. She knew that there had to be similarities, but the amount of duplication was surprising.

Lois kept Jack talking until she heard Clark’s heartbeat and the elevator ascending. There was another heartbeat with him. From the speed and tone she could tell it was a child and she smiled to herself as she realized that Clark had succeeded in locating Denny.

Jack noted her smile, but didn’t have the faintest notion as to its meaning until she said, “I think you will be having a visitor in a minute.”

Her statement confused him. How would anyone know where he was to come and visit? Who would want to visit him anyhow?

Chapter 07 – And Denny

%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –
Alt 1

%%%

Superman, after seeing Lois and Jack off, flew up and started searching. From the other universe he knew Jack’s history and had met Denny a few times. He knew that they were orphans trying to make it on their own. Jack was doing whatever he could to keep them together and out of the system.

Clark knew, from personal experience, just how rough that could be. He had been lucky with some of the foster homes he had been put in but that was only because it had been in and around Smallville. He actually had pleasant memories from some of the homes he had been in. Bob Clifton had been a Viet Nam vet who had taught him many things including some self-defense moves that had come in handy. Not all of the homes had been as nice, but even so, they had all been better than it would have been trying to fend for himself, especially with a younger brother depending on him.

He scanned all of the abandoned or empty buildings in the area. Finally he found a rundown tenement that had a mattress and some threadbare blankets with some boxes as furniture in the basement. In the doorway stood Denny as if he were expecting Jack’s return. Superman landed out of sight and spun into his working clothes. As he walked up Denny ducked down the stairs and disappeared into the basement of the building.

If he had used his superspeed he could have intercepted Denny before the boy had gotten more than a few steps, but he chose to be Clark Kent and not Superman right then. He descended the steps slowly and when he reached the bottom he listened. He heard Denny’s breathing so he spoke up, “You don’t need to be afraid of me. I’m here to help you.” Clark chuckled as he said, “Your brother doesn’t know it just yet, but I’m the best friend the two of you have. Come on out Denny, don’t be afraid.”

He heard a tremulous voice from the shadows, “How do you know my name? Did Jack tell you?”

“Not exactly. Let’s just say that I know more about you than you or he realize. Come on out. I need to take you to Jack.”

Worried now, Denny asked, “What happened? Where’s Jack?”

Reassuringly Clark said, “Jack is just fine. He’s with my partner on his way to the Daily Planet. We’re going to see if we can’t get him a job.”

“Why are you doing this for us?”

“Let’s just say that I could have been in your position. You see, I’m an orphan too.”

Denny finally stepped out of the shadows and started to approach. He said, “You were? What happened to your folks?”

Before beginning his reply, Clark knelt down so that he was more at Denny’s level and less intimidating. “My biological parents were killed a long time ago, when I was a baby, then when I was ten my adoptive parents were killed in a traffic accident.”

“Wow, you mean you were orphaned two times?”

“Yeah, Denny, twice. So you see, I really know how it is. Do you want to come with me to see your brother?”

“I guess so. I just hope he doesn’t get mad because I left our place here.”

“I’ll square it with him. Don’t you worry. He’ll be okay with it.”

“Who are you anyway?”

“Me? I’m just a guy that works at the Daily Planet. Maybe you’ve heard about the paper.”

With childish enthusiasm Denny replied, “Sure, who hasn’t? You’d have to be living under a rock not to know about the Daily Planet!”

Chuckling Clark said, “Okay, well, let’s go see Jack.” They climbed the stairs out into the sunshine.

When they hit the light, Denny got a good look at his new acquaintance. He thought the man looked familiar somehow. He followed him as they headed for the street. When a cab pulled to the curb at his signal they both got in and he heard him tell the driver to take them to the Planet. He had been ready to jerk the door open and bolt if he had heard anything else. So far this guy seemed to be legit, so he sat back and enjoyed the ride.

When they arrived at the Planet they exited, the guy paid the fare and they headed for the doors. Denny looked up in awe at the big Daily Planet globe as they passed.

When they exited the elevator on the newsroom floor the first thing Denny did was to look for Jack. He saw him sitting in a chair next to a desk with a pretty lady and saw that they were talking. Before he had a chance to say anything Jack looked up and with a fearful expression he shouted, “Denny! What are you doing here?” Just then Jack saw Clark exit the elevator behind Denny.

Denny replied, “This guy came for me. He said he would take me to you. I figured you had to have told him about me.”

“Well, I didn’t!” He turned to Clark and asked, “How did you know about Denny?”

“You’d be surprised at how much I know about you.”

Jack questioned, “Is that another one of your powers?”

Clark laughed and said, “No, Jack, it isn’t. I just have some inside knowledge, that’s all.”

Denny asked Jack, “Powers?? What powers?”

Jack looked at Denny and pointing at Clark asked, “Don’t you know who he is?”

Denny, searching his memory said, “No, should I?”

Jack replied, “That’s Superman!”

Denny looked at his brother as if he had lost his mind and then skeptically at Clark and said, “Really? Then where’s his blue suit?”

Clark smiled, loosened his tie and unbuttoned a few buttons of his shirt revealing the familiar blue suit and the top of the red and yellow ‘S’ crest.

Seeing this Denny was stunned. All he could say was, “Wow,” in a hushed tone. Regaining his composure he asked, “Were you telling me a story or was that the truth?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you Denny. It was all the truth. I am an orphan just like you.”

Denny said, “I believe you. Thanks.”

As Clark started to button his shirt Lois said, “Let’s go into the conference room, guys,” and gathering up both Jack and Denny she headed them in the right direction with Clark following along in the rear.

After they were all seated, Clark asked, “Jack, how would you like to work here? It wouldn’t be anything big, like reporting on stories, at least not for a long time, but you’d be working, earning an honest wage.”

Jack was surprised and replied, “A job? Why are you doing this? What would I have to do?”

Lois replied, “Well, you see, it’s this way. My sister was going for a cup of coffee at a local beanery and she was kidnapped. Normally that wouldn’t happen, but, well, with me being married to Superman and her being my sister we need to take extra precautions. That’s where you come in. You would be what’s called a ‘copyboy’, running errands, getting coffee and donuts, supplies, making copies, that kind of thing. I think you will be demonstrating an aptitude for computers and we could then move you over to research. That would be during the day. At night you would be going to school.”

With a skeptical expression, he asked, “What about Denny?”

Lois calmly replied, “Denny would be going to school during the day just like every other kid.”

“How could we do that? Somebody is bound to question it and they’d take Denny away and put him in foster care.”

Clark replied, “Nobody is going to split you up. I’ll see to that.”

Skeptically, Jack asked, “What do you get out of it?”

Good naturedly Clark replied, “First, a good employee, second, the pleasure of seeing that you two stay together and finally the satisfaction that you aren’t going into a life of crime, getting arrested and leaving Denny to fend for himself. If you’re willing to give it a try, I’ll go talk to Mr. Olsen to see about that job.”

Denny looked at Jack with imploring eyes and said, “I’d rather have you around and not in jail.”

Relenting, Jack said, “Okay Mr. Superman, you’ve got a deal.”

Laughing, Clark said, “The name is Clark Kent. I’m just Superman when I’m wearing the Suit.”

“Oh, I didn’t know. Sorry. Can I call you Mr. K?”

Thinking about just how parallel things between the universes were and how the Jack in the other universe called him the same thing he smiled and said, “Yeah, Jack. That will be just fine.” Clark turned and went to Mr. Olsen’s office to plead the case for hiring Jack as a copyboy. Citing what had happened to Lucy and why, it was an easy sell.

Returning to the conference room he addressed them, “Welcome to the Daily Planet, Jack. Now we need to see about a place for you and Denny to stay.”

Lois interrupted, “Clark, can I talk to you a minute, in the other conference room?”

He nodded and she led him out. When they were in the room with the door closed she said, “We are about to own 348 Hyperion.” Looking into the other room they could see the happy expressions on both of the boys’ faces as they talked animatedly. Lois continued, “Why don’t we let them stay with us, at least for a while? That way we could keep an eye on them. I think they

need some caring adult role models really badly.”

“You’re probably right. Okay.”

They returned to the room where Jack and Denny waited. Lois said, “We are going to be closing on a house here in town. It’s kinda big with lots of extra bedrooms. If you would be willing to live with us, at least until you have some money saved, we will have a couple of rooms you could use.”

Denny looked at Jack and said, “It’d sure be better than that basement.”

Jack looked skeptically at Lois and asked, “You aren’t going to try to take the place of our parents, are you?”

Clark spoke up and said, “No, Jack, we aren’t.” He placed one hand on Jack’s shoulder to make sure Jack was looking directly at him. “We know that no one could ever replace your parents. We *would* like to be your friends though. We think you could use some.”

Jack thought about it briefly before saying, “Okay, but if we don’t like the arrangement, we can leave, can’t we?”

Lois said, “Of course you can, although we would be disappointed we won’t try to stop you. We just want to see you in a decent living situation. Keep in mind, it’s just until you have some money saved and you and Denny can afford to live on your own.”

Clark, placed his other hand on Jack’s other shoulder to show just how serious he was and looked him straight in the face before he said, softly, with empathy, “We know that you don’t want to wind up in the system. We don’t want that either. I’ve been there. I know how it is and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Most of the time, I got lucky and had a good situation.” Clark looked over at Denny, significantly and said, “I don’t want to see the two of you separated. I’ll pull whatever strings I can with DCF to keep you together and out of the system. I have to admit, it would be a lot easier if you were living with us. We could show DCF that you are in a stable, family environment.”

Denny spoke up, “Come on Jack. I like them. I wouldn’t mind living with them, besides, he’s Superman. Just think we’ll have a ringside seat to watch him being super.”

Clark had started laughing while Denny had been saying this. Finally he said, “Well, I don’t know just how super I’ll be around the house. That’s usually only when I’m on a rescue.”

Looking at Jack, Denny implored, “Common Jack, whadda we got to lose? At least we’ll be outta that drafty basement and won’t have to worry about rats no more.”

Jack with a look of resignation said, “Any more, not no more.” Then he turned to Lois and said, “I guess we can give it a try.”

Clark asked, “What do you have to collect from where you were staying?”

“Nothin’ really, about all we had was these clothes.”

Lois said, “Well, we can’t have the newest member of the Daily Planet staff wearing the same clothes every day and Denny will need some clothes for school,” turning to Clark she asked, “How about we take the two of them shopping after while? We need to interview Lucy and write up her kidnapping as well as mine, and then Mayson should be in. As soon as we have the story filed we’ll be free.”

“Why don’t you get Lucy’s story and start writing everything up while I call the realtor and see if we can’t speed up the process?”

“Sounds like a good idea. We are going to need that house sooner than we expected.” Turning to the boys, Lois asked, “You guys want to watch a reporter interview the victim of a crime first hand?”

Denny was eager and grabbed Jack’s hand and started dragging him in Lois’ wake over to Lucy’s desk. Half way there Jack saw who they were going to see and immediately his attitude changed. When he saw Lucy who was only a ‘little’ older

that himself he was attracted to her and Denny was no longer dragging him.

When they got nearer Lucy’s desk she introduced them, “Guys this is my sister Lucy, Lucy, Jack and Denny.” She indicated which was which with her hand. “Jack is going to be working here as a copyboy.”

Lucy stood and offered Denny and Jack her hand which they in their turns shook. Lucy noticed the way Jack was looking at her and said, “Nice to meet you both. I’ll have to introduce you to my boyfriend.”

Immediately Jack lost the look of adoration that was on his face and he choked out, “B ... b ... boy ... boyfriend?”

“Yeah, Mr. Olsen.”

That was a name he had just heard and he choked out, “The owner? The owner is your boyfriend?”

“Sorry, yeah, he’s my boyfriend. Tell you what, do a good job and I’ll put in a good word for you. Deal?”

Trying to make the best of a bad situation Jack said, “Deal.”

Lois said, “Okay, Lucy, I need you to tell me everything you remember about your kidnapping.”

Lucy turned away from Jack and faced Lois as she said, “Okay, well, I had been working on that research project for you and, well, you know how it is, a computer geek’s brain runs on caffeine. I decided to go get a large coffee with a shot of espresso. Well, as I left the building and rounded the corner I felt hands on my arms and a rag over my face. I held my breath and started to struggle. I tried to use some of those Tae Kwan Do moves you’ve been teaching me. The problem was that they surprised me and they had a secure hold before I knew what was happening. I heard one of them complain that I was fighting more than any other girl they had taken. The other one said that I was the wrong one, whatever he meant by that, then I couldn’t hold my breath any longer. A few seconds later I was out. The next thing I knew I was in a room somewhere and somebody was jabbing a needle in my arm. Everything is kinda fuzzy after that until I woke up in the hospital.”

With a thoughtful look, Lois said, “I think I can explain one of their statements. I was the target that they were after.”

“Oh, Lois! Why were they after you?”

“Because I’m with Superman and also some time ago we, along with Mayson and Daniel, that couple you met a little while ago, got the evidence needed to bust up a prostitution and extortion racket here in town.”

“Was she a target as well?”

“We believe so.”

Clark joined them and said, “I just spoke to the realtor. We got lucky. The current owner is available and we can sign the rest of the papers and close in an hour.” He turned to the boys and said, “That means that the house will be ours today. The house has been vacant for some time because the previous owner had already moved to a larger house and because of their growing family they wanted to move to the suburbs. That means that this afternoon we have a lot of shopping to do. We need four beds, dressers, curtains, living room furniture and kitchen equipment. Let’s see, we also need to get Denny some school clothes and work clothes for Jack.”

Jack spoke up, “I can’t let you do that. I’ll get us what we need when I have some money.”

Clark said, “Look at it as a loan. You can pay us back a little at a time, but you need these things now.”

Chapter 08 – Doctor Klein Helps Out

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –

Alt 1

%%%

A short time later Mayson and Daniel showed up. When they did Lois, Clark and Lucy led them into the conference room.

Lois asked, “Mayson, what can you tell me about your abduction?”

“I was supposed to be meeting Daniel for lunch. Since I didn’t want to move my car from a choice parking spot, I decided to take a cab. As I was walking to a cab stand I was grabbed from behind and a cloth was held over my face. I took a deep breath so that I could yell and that’s the last thing I remember until I woke up in that hospital.”

“That pretty much checks with what happened to me.” Lois looked at her sister and with a touch of pride in her voice she continued, “Lucy on the other hand didn’t make it so easy for them. She held her breath and tried to fight them off. She almost succeeded. If they hadn’t been able to surprise her she might have done it too.”

Mayson said, “I wish I’d thought of that. Oh well, live and learn. All right, you said there was more to the story.”

“Clark was following the car that had me and overheard the thugs talking. He stayed far enough away that they didn’t know he was following. I was a particular target, and they had grabbed Lucy thinking she was me. You were also a particular target. It seems as though the person behind the brothel was mad at us for breaking up their operation and they wanted revenge.”

Daniel asked, “So the same people were behind both. Why weren’t any ransom notes sent?”

“We weren’t grabbed for ransom. After I recovered from the chloroform I snuck downstairs and overheard a conversation. We were scheduled to be shipped out of the country. I’m afraid that we were being sold into sex slavery, probably in the Middle East.”

Daniel got a very concerned look as he turned to Mayson and said, “We need to talk.” He turned to Lois and Clark and asked, “Is there somewhere we can talk and can you excuse us for a few minutes?”

Lois looked over at the other conference room. Seeing several people leaving she nodded her head in that direction and said, “The other conference room is open. You can use that.”

As Daniel reached for Mayson’s hand, Mayson looked at Lois and lifted her shoulders in an I-don’t-know shrug.

Daniel and Mayson were in the other conference room for a few minutes. Lois and Clark studiously avoided eavesdropping but they did notice some movement. They couldn’t help but notice that there were no raised voices. They did hear one gasp from Mayson.

A few minutes later Daniel had her hand as he led Mayson back into the still occupied conference room. When they rejoined Lois, Lucy and Clark, Mayson was smiling.

Lois said, “I guess he wasn’t mad at you.”

Mayson started smiling even broader and said in a dreamy tone, “No, no he wasn’t. Not mad at all.” She held out her left hand to display a new addition to her jewelry. A one-carat solitaire adorned her ring finger.

Lois and Lucy both squealed and Lois threw her arms around Mayson. Clark stepped over and shook Daniel’s hand saying, “Congratulations. I’m happy for you.”

Daniel said, “I decided that if this kind of thing was going to be happening I didn’t want to waste any more time or let her out of my sight any more than necessary.”

Shaking his head, Clark replied in a commiserating tone, “I know how it is. Believe me, I know how it is.”

Looking at Clark, Daniel asked, “I know it’s short notice, but would you be my best man? After all, if you hadn’t introduced us this never would have happened.”

Mayson extricated herself from Lois’ arms and said, “Yeah, we don’t want to wait. Lois, I could use a matron of honor. Lucy,

could you be a bridesmaid?”

Lois and Clark were flustered with the rapidity of all of this. They both nodded their assent. Lois asked, “When?”

“Three days. Nothing fancy, just a civil ceremony at the city hall. We’re going to get the license today.”

Lois suggested, “Since you asked Lucy to be a bridesmaid, Dan needs a groomsman. Might I suggest your cousin, Tony?”

Mayson only took a second to consider this before saying, “Perfect! Thank you, Lois. That would be perfect and afterward we can go to Travaglini’s for a very private reception. I love it. Thanks for that suggestion!”

Since they were in the conference room Lois moved over and dialed the Twelfth Precinct.

The voice she heard sounded almost terminally bored. “Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Cooper. How can I help you?”

“Sgt. Cooper, this is Lois Lane.”

“Oh, hi, Ms. Lane. You want to talk to Lt. Henderson, don’t you?”

“You know me pretty well. Yeah, Henderson, please.”

“Just a sec.”

There was a series of clicks and then they heard, “Henderson.”

“Bill, it’s Lois and Clark.”

“Lois, I see you’ve recovered. Look, the next time I tell you to stay out of something, listen to me, okay?”

“I tried, Bill, I really tried. The problem was that Mayson and I were targeted, specifically. Clark overheard something that we thought would interest you.”

“Oh, what is it?”

Clark replied, “Bill, do you remember the brothel case?”

“How could I forget?”

“Okay, well, this kidnapping was retaliation for that. The same person was behind both situations. While we were in the brothel I overheard a name, just one name ... Leslie. Now, we don’t know if it is a first name or a last name, but recently an individual arrived in town and we’ve been investigating him. His name is Leslie Luckabee. We found out that he has a criminal record in Australia. Now, that’s no proof that he is involved in criminal activities, here in the states, but it’s kinda hard for a leopard to change its spots.”

“Well, so far that’s not enough for me to even start an investigation. What else do you have?”

Lois answered, “That’s just it, that’s all we have, at this point.”

“Well, all I can say is, get back to me when you have more. That’s not enough for me to work with.”

Clark replied, “We understand that. We just wanted to give you a heads-up. As soon as we have more, we’ll let you know. Thanks, Bill.”

Later that day Lois and Clark signed the papers and took possession of 348 Hyperion Avenue, furnished it and moved in with Lucy, Jack and Denny.

While Lois decided about the furniture Clark went out and purchased a car. Since they now had three non-super members in the ‘family’ they had decided that a car was needed. Lois had had a Jeep in the other universe so that was what he found for her.

The next day Denny started school with Lois driving him and making the arrangements so that he wouldn’t have the notoriety of being sponsored by Superman.

After taking care of Denny she returned and picked up the rest of the ‘family’ and headed out for the Planet.

Clark personally took Jack around and introduced him to his new co-workers and, showing him where the FAX machines, copiers and the supply closet were, he explained what his duties were to be.

Jack seemed to be eager to get started so Clark, with the offer that if he needed any help to come to him, left him on his own.

Two days later Mayson Drake became Mayson Scardino.

Tony was thrilled that his cousin, Mayson, wanted him in the wedding party along with Superman. He thought that Lucy was very cute and he was very satisfied to be paired up with her.

It was a very small ceremony and afterward the party went to Travaglini's for a reception meal.

After the meal Tony approached Lucy and asked her out. He was disappointed when she turned him down, but when she explained about her millionaire boyfriend, he understood.

After the meal and before Mayson and Daniel could leave for their honeymoon, Clark and Lois asked that they and Lucy accompany them to their new house so that they could have a talk.

Once they were all settled in the living room Clark started the conversation. "I think that it is only safe to assume that whoever tried to hold Lois and Mayson in order to have leverage against me will try again. We need to be on extra alert against that eventuality. Mayson, once it becomes known that you are now married and that it isn't to me, they, whoever they are, may drop you from the list; however, there still exists the fact that you were part of the team that took the bordello down and that may be sufficient reason for whoever it is to keep you on the list."

Daniel replied, "Well, you're just full of good news, aren't you? How are we going to prevent that, added security?"

Mayson answered, "That isn't going to happen. I think that when Daniel and I move out of our separate apartments and into a larger place they might lose track of me."

"You can't count on that. They can pick you up at the court, when you're coming out of your office, any number of places. We need to come up with a means of you alerting us if there is a problem and also a method for us to track you."

"Don't even think about implanting a chip under my skin."

"I wouldn't think of it. Maybe we could arrange a regular check in or something like that."

Mayson looked over at Daniel and said, "Let's worry about that when Daniel and I get back from our honeymoon. I don't know about him, but I'm anxious to get started."

Daniel reached for her hand and pulled her to him as he said, "You and me both," he turned to Lois and Clark and said, "I think we are going to leave. We'll call you when we get back."

In the penthouse of the Plaza, Leslie Luckabee was again behind the bar pouring a drink while Smythe paced back and forth. In the background, the "Ride of the Valkyries" by Richard Wagner was playing. The wild martial music seemed to fit the mood of Smythe.

Luckabee asked, "What went wrong? We had the Sheilas. All we had to do was ship 'em out."

Smythe spit his reply out as if it were an expletive, "Superman! Superman, that's what happened."

"But, I thought you were ready for him. I guess you weren't as ready as you thought, were you?"

"Watch it, Luckabee, I could dispense with you very easily."

"Now, don't get hasty, mate. I didn't mean nothing by it. It's just with him you can't be so cock sure as you can with others."

"That goes without saying. Somehow the green rock disappeared. He must have managed to get someone in the clink. Perhaps it was one of the guards. We won't know for sure until I can either get them out of jail or at least get someone in there to talk to them."

"How sure are you that the blokes won't turn dog and talk to the cops?"

"They know better than to talk. They are being paid very well

not to talk. They also know that if they do talk their lives aren't worth fleas on a Dingo."

Luckabee asked, "What about the house you rented? Can't the cops trace that back to you?"

"No, I used an intermediary, and if they look for him they will come up empty. He is no longer ... available. I learned a lot from the secret records I found that my father left behind. Some of the people that he had on his payroll were still available. Some have even moved into jobs of higher responsibility. Most of them were more than happy to deal with Lex Luthor's son."

"Fine, so you have some blokes in high places willing to help. How does that keep Superman from interfering in our plans?"

"Our plans? *Our* plans? What do you mean *our* plans? You don't have a plan in your head! These are *my* plans!"

"Alright mate, don't get narky. What new plan have *you* come up with?"

"First, you are going to start pressing James Olsen for an answer about the sale of the Daily Planet. We just got a response from ANN that they have accepted our offer. The papers will be signed later this week, and we can change the name back to LNN. We won't explain that it is Luthor News Network. Let them speculate. They'll think it is Luckabee News Network. As soon as the papers are signed, we can start working on turning the people against Superman."

"That's going to be hard to do if you haven't got the paper as well. Without the paper you've got Buckley's."

"That is only one avenue that we are pursuing. I am also negotiating the purchase of MiraLabs. MiraLabs used to be LexLabs. As soon as we have MiraLabs, I will have a research project for them. I want them to build the most powerful, yet portable laser that has ever existed and if I can get my hands on some more of that green rock I'll use that to power it."

"But, if that green rock didn't keep him from rescuing the Sheilas, how is it going to hurt him?"

"Again, you haven't been listening. I said that he must have had inside help because that green rock was missing. Where it went, I don't know, but it had to have been one of our hirelings. When I find out which one, he will be dealt with summarily, I assure you."

"I also have teams out fossicking for more of that mysterious green rock. There has to be more of it around, somewhere. If Tempus hadn't disappeared, I'd be asking him, but this way I can't."

"Where are these teams looking for this here green rock?"

"Anywhere and everywhere. I recently heard a report that a mysterious green rock was sent to the state labs in Kansas for analysis. Once I have MiraLabs, an offer will be made to do an analysis of that rock using equipment that the state lab doesn't have available. Once we find out what part of the state the sample came from our teams will converge there and do a thorough search."

"What are you going to do about an office?" Luckabee asked as he poured another drink. After he downed it he continued, "Not that I'm whining about the amenities, but we aren't gonna work outa this suite all the time, are we?"

"Another thing I found in my father's documents was plans to use the old abandoned subway tunnels. There are side tunnels with what were supposed to be control stations that could be fitted out. They are so far underground that no one above ground, even someone with super hearing will be able to hear anything said. The first one is almost ready."

"What about the blokes that are working on setting it up? Won't they be able to dob on you to the cops?"

"Dead men don't, what was that, oh yes, dob. Dead men don't dob to the cops or anyone else."

"The most galling thing about this failure was the fact that we

lost both Lois Lane and Mayson Drake. We could have used them for some serious leverage against our foe even if we didn't have them here as long as he didn't know that. We will have to do better the next time we grab them. They must not be allowed to escape us the next time. Part of the problem could have been that we had them above ground. It made it too easy for them to be found. The next time will be different and yes there will definitely be a next time. You can count on it."

"All right mate, If you say so. Just how are you going to do that little thing? We don't want to come a gustser like that one again. The next time it could lead him back to us and I'd feel a like a fruit loop if that happened. I for one don't want to cark it."

"I'm not sure, just yet, but I'll do it some way and next time I will not be foiled by Superman."

On Monday Clark and Lois paid a visit to STAR Labs and Dr. Klein.

When they arrived in Dr. Klein's office he asked, "Well, Superman and Lois, what can I do for you?"

"Dr. Klein, we have a problem that we could use some help with. We find ourselves in a difficult situation. Because of just who I am, there are certain individuals that are subject to kidnap so that they can be used in an extortion plot against me. Recently Lois, Lois' sister and Mayson Drake were all kidnapped. It was just a fluke that I was able to locate them. They need to be able to alert me to a problem and it needs to be done in such a way that it is done secretly, but I will be able to trace whatever signal is used to their location."

Dr. Klein leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers as he started thinking out loud, "Hmmmmm, an interesting problem. A signal that only you can perceive. It would, of necessity, have to carry for some distance, perhaps penetrating solid objects." He tilted back forward and said, "Several companies have started marketing devices that when triggered will send a signal to a central monitoring station where they alert police, fire or ambulance as needed. It has an audio link for the victim."

"That might be fine for someone homebound, but we are dealing with healthy, young active individuals. They won't alert me near a base station like that."

Dr. Klein leaned back and steepled his fingers again as was his wont when thinking. After almost a minute he asked, "It needs to be totally mobile?"

Clark said, "I'd say so, yes."

"I need to know the extent of some of your powers. Can you sense radiation?"

"No, radiation, at least radiation from sources other than Kryptonite, does not affect me in any way."

"You can't see, smell or hear radiation?"

"I can't perceive it in any way."

"Actually, radiation wouldn't be a good answer because then the user would be slowly poisoned. How about vision? What can you see?"

"I can see at great distances, through solid objects, except lead, and I can see very small things. Oh, I can also see into the infra-red."

"See into the infra-red, very interesting. How about smell?"

"I can detect very faint odors."

"We could make a device that emitted a faint odor. The problem with that is the vagaries of air currents could disrupt that kind of trail and following it could take time and be uncertain. I think we can rule out touch and taste as being too limited. How about hearing?"

"I can hear faint sounds at great distances."

"How about the range of sound frequencies?"

"I'm not certain. I do know that I can hear beyond the range of normal human hearing, for instance, I can hear a dog whistle."

"Now we're getting somewhere. Normal human hearing is from about 80 to 20,000 Hertz. A dog hears in the range of about 70 to 60,000 Hertz. Let's do an experiment to see just what your limitations are. I have a tone generator that was used in some animal experiments some time ago. It has a variable oscillator so that I can control the frequency." Dr. Klein got up and went to a cabinet where he pulled out an electronic device. He returned to his desk and said, "Okay, now when I turn it on I'll start in the normal human range and then move up. Let me know when you don't hear the tone anymore."

"Okay, Doctor. This could be interesting."

Dr. Klein turned on the device and all three of them heard the tone. It was in a lower register about in the baritone range. Dr. Klein started turning a knob and as he did the tone got higher.

When he could no longer hear the tone Dr. Klein asked, "Can you still hear the tone?"

"Why, yes Doctor. Can't you?"

Lois had been looking for clues as to when Doctor Klein couldn't hear the tone anymore because she couldn't let on that her hearing was every bit as acute as Clark's.

"No, it went beyond the range of human hearing. We are at about 30,000 Hertz. Here we go, higher. Don't forget; let me know when you can't hear it any longer."

Dr. Klein turned the knob some more and stopped. He asked, "You still hear that?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Amazing! We have passed 60,000 Hertz. That is normally the top of the range for dogs. Let's proceed with the test."

He turned the knob some more and then stopped. He asked, "You're sure you still hear the tone?"

"Yes, Doctor. Is that a problem?"

Doctor Klein was almost clapping his hands in glee. This test was working out better than he had expected. He replied to Clark's question, "No! No, not at all. We have exceeded the range of the dog and are into the range of the mouse. Now the mouse tops out at around 70,000 Hertz." He turned the knob again. "Do you still hear the tone?"

"Loud and clear."

"Incredible. We are now at 85,000 Hertz. Well into the range of the bat. My equipment isn't built to go any higher." Doctor Klein turned off his machine before he said, "Well, I think we know what we have to do. We need to create a device which will emit a sound in the range something above 60,000 Hertz so that dogs are not affected by the tone. That would alert whoever was near that there was a signal being generated. Mice and bats won't matter. Now, does size matter?"

"It would need to be small enough that it can be carried and concealed easily."

"How many would you need?"

"I think six would be a good start. I think that three could be for men. The other three should be something a woman would wear."

"Let me see what I can come up with. Call me in a couple of days."

They all stood up and shook hands. Lois and Clark exited and headed back to the Planet.

As they did, Lois sent, "That went well, but, who is the third device for?"

"You, my dear."/

"But ... I don't need one! I'm not about to carry around some clunky electronic gadget!"

"No matter what it looks like you do need one, if only for appearance's sake. We can't treat you any differently from Lucy and Mayson."/

"Oh, right. Secret weapon."/ As she thought this to him she had a sour expression on her face.

Chapter 09 – Mr. Olsen Sells Out

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation —

Alt 1

%%%

Jack had been working at the Planet for a little over a week and apparently he liked the work because he was eager for every assignment and was quick to accomplish whatever he was given to do.

Clark and Lois were going over some of the data that Lucy had gathered for them on Leslie Luckabee when Jack approached. “Mr. K, want a cup of java?”

“Sure Jack, thanks. Are there any cake donuts left?”

“I’ll see, how about you, Ms. Lane? Coffee and a donut maybe?”

“Thanks, Jack. Are there any chocolate covered left? That’d sure be nice.”

Jack walked off whistling a tune, returning a minute later with the coffees fixed just the way they liked them, along with a chocolate frosted donut for Lois and a cake donut for Clark. He smiled in return to Lois’ smile of appreciation at seeing the donut. He was depositing Clark’s on his desk and as Clark was thanking him he heard Denise in research calling him. He smiled and said, “Duty calls,” and headed in her direction.

Lois smiled as she watched him go. She sent, “He’s just like our Jack, isn’t he?”

Clark replied in kind, “I’m glad we were able to help them. Denny’s settling in to school and seems to be doing okay. He has some catching up to do, but I think he can handle it and Jack has enrolled in night school. He could be ready to go for his GED within the year. I think I’ll talk to Murray and see about a Superman Foundation scholarship to college for him.”

“I know that Jack would appreciate it. Let’s talk after he has his GED.”

A minute later Jack was back with a stack of printouts that he had picked up from Lucy.

Lois looked through the file and let out a rather unladylike snort which Clark heard. He moved over and perched on the corner of her desk. He asked, “Okay, what’s the problem?”

“Here, look for yourself. There’s nothing! We have some money moving around and changing hands, but no source and no history of Luckabee except for just before he came to the states. We *need* to go to Australia to check on him.”

“Okay, but before we do that we need to make sure that Lucy can handle Jack and Denny.”

Lois said, “I think all we need to do is give Lucy the keys to the car. I’m sure the guys will behave. She can oversee Denny’s homework while Jack is at school. She isn’t as good a cook as me, but I believe she could make them a meal, no problem.”

“Okay, you’ve convinced me. Let’s go talk to Lucy and Jack.”

Now that the decision had been made, Lois made the hotel reservations while Clark called STAR Labs. After the call was transferred he spoke to Dr. Klein. “Dr. Klein, Clark Kent.”

“Hi Clark, I’ve been waiting for you to call. I think I have something for you. Do you want to stop by?”

“Sure, Doctor. Lois and I will be right over.”

Clark called over to Lois, “Doctor Klein has something. Want to go see what it is?”

In a somewhat irritated tone she said, “Okay, I guess so. What would something put together by that mad scientist look like? It’ll probably be a small box jammed with wires and electronic ... stuff. I hope you don’t mind if I don’t wear it all the time. I might stick it in my bag and just forget about it.”

In a placating tone he replied, “It’s just for show, nothing more.”

She grumbled, “Okay, let’s go see what he has.”

They headed for the elevator, took it down to the lobby and exiting the building, hailed a cab.

They didn’t know it but there was a watcher across the street.

When they arrived at STAR Labs they were sent on back. When they entered his lab Dr. Klein was beaming with pride. He said, “Welcome, welcome. I think you’re going to be pleased with what we have come up with. First, I need to take your picture, yours too Lois, if you don’t mind.”

Clark said, “Okay, Doctor, snap away.”

Dr. Klein had them each stand in front of a neutral background as he snapped several pictures. In one he even had them kissing.

Since he was using an instant camera the pictures were developed after just a few minutes. He took a pair of scissors, trimmed the pictures and disappeared for a minute. When he returned he had a jewelry tray and on it were several lockets and watches.

The watches were oversized sports watches and each had metal bands. The lockets were silver and gold tone. While his staff had been working on them, Doctor Klein had gotten a list of recipients. Two of the lockets had the initials ‘LL’ and one had ‘MS’ emblazoned on the face.

Dr. Klein picked up one of the ‘LL’ lockets and handed it to Lois. He said, “This one is for you. Go ahead and open it.”

At first sight Lois expressed her feelings by going “Oooooo.” Lois just held it and admired the workmanship. It was a beautiful piece of jewelry. She caressed the surface with her fingers, feeling the engraving. When Lois opened it, on one side was a picture of Clark and on the other was the picture of them kissing. She said, “Dr. Klein, I love it. You’re special. How did you know I’d like this?”

“Just an educated guess. The watch design was my idea. The idea for the locket design came from Isabella, one of the lab techs. That accounts for the outer surface and the picture area; the rest of it is a marvel of micro miniaturization.” Indicating the ring that the chain passed through, Bernie said, “Turn this one quarter turn and it will emit a signal at 80,000 Hertz. The battery will power the transmitter for ten hours before needing to be replaced.” He picked up one of the watches and handed it to Clark. “This looks like any other sports watch. It is shock proof, anti-magnetic and waterproof to 150 meters. It has a number of buttons for different functions.” He pointed to the button on the upper right. “Push this button in and it will emit a sound at 85,000 Hertz. Can you discriminate between those frequencies?”

“I was able to when we ran the tests.” Clark replied.

“I debated using the same frequency for all of the devices but decided to differentiate between the male and female signals. The battery in the watch will last longer because it is bigger.”

Lois looked at Clark and said, “Forget what I said before. I’m going to wear this all the time,” and so saying she immediately put on the necklace and the locket came to rest deep in her cleavage. Clark watched Lois do so with interest. It was then that he realized that her breasts seemed to be ever so slightly larger.

Lois said, “Doctor Klein, how can I thank you? Oh, I know!” She gave him a kiss on the cheek and said, “Thank you.”

Blushing, Dr. Klein said, “I made the chain extra long so that if you decide to keep the locket hidden, it can be worn under a top. If you want it seen you could wear something like what you have on or you could use a shorter chain.” Turning to Clark he said, “If you need any more, just let me know.”

When they got back to the office Clark used an instant camera to take Lucy’s picture and after trimming them and

placing them in the locket he gave it to her and explained how it worked. Lucy also loved its appearance and promised to wear it all the time.

When Mayson and Daniel returned from their honeymoon she would get her locket, but hers would have a picture of Dan instead of Superman.

After presenting the locket to Lucy, Clark called Jack over and said, “Jack, I have something here for you,” as he handed him a watch.

Jack’s eyes bugged out at the sight of this very fancy and obviously expensive watch. “I can’t accept that! That’s too much! I owe you a month’s salary already for these and Denny’s clothes. I could never afford a watch like that,” he said as he handed the watch back.

Clark was smiling as Jack went through this. When he stopped, Clark said, “Don’t think of this as a present, think of it as a piece of equipment that is being assigned to you. You see, since you and Denny are now associated with me, you are now in some danger. Crooks might try to kidnap you in order to force me to work for them.”

Jack got a look of some disbelief as he said, “Just let ‘em try. They won’t be able to catch me.”

Clark chuckled at his bravado and said, “I don’t expect that they could, under normal circumstances, but let’s say that the circumstances aren’t exactly normal. That’s where this watch comes in.” He pointed to the upper right button and said, “When you push in on this button it will send out a sound that I will be able to hear and I can follow it to where you are. Look at it this way, if you are kidnapped and you trigger the signal, I’ll be able to catch the kidnapers and they can be put where they belong. You would like to have a hand in capturing the bad guys, wouldn’t you?”

Jack reached out for the watch and said, “Well, since you put it that way, sure, I’d be happy to wear that watch. What about Denny?”

Clark replied, “There’s a watch for Denny too.”

Jack started to grin, “That’s great. I guess we’re all part of the team now, huh?”

Clark smiled and said, “I guess you are.”

Just then Mr. Olsen called Lois and Clark to his office.

When they were in there with the door closed he said, “I’ve had a call from the people representing Luckabee. They are asking for my answer to the sale of the Planet.”

Lois asked, “Is there any way you could stall? We haven’t gotten nearly as far as we need to on the investigation. We do know that he has a criminal record. We aren’t sure yet what the beef was, but we hope to find out soon.”

“If his wasn’t the only offer I might be able to say that I need to consider all of the offers that are on the table.”

Lois got a shrewd look as she said, “Can you excuse us for a few minutes?”

“Sure, just let me know what you come up with.”

Lois led Clark into the conference room and after closing the door said, “We need to make an offer to buy the Planet.”

Clark was incredulous as he blurted out, “What?!?!?! How can we do that??? That would take millions!”

Lois was calm as she replied, “Between the two of us we can mine enough rare earths, gold, silver, platinum and gemstones to make it possible.”

Seeing where she was going with this he started thinking out loud, “I guess we could do that, but I don’t want to own the Planet.”

Lois replied, “We won’t have to. We could do it through a blind trust using the Superman Foundation as the trustee. Look at it this way; it will kill two birds with one stone. Mr. Olsen doesn’t want to be Lucy’s boss, or ours for that matter, when they are married and we can keep the Planet out of Luckabee’s hands. We

can make sure that the Planet stays true to its founding principles.”

As Lois had been outlining the plan, Clark had started seeing the viability of her solution. He said, “That sounds like a good plan. Why don’t I go start doing that while you proceed with the investigation, but first I think we need to talk with Mr. Olsen.”

She nodded her agreement and they went back to his office. After they were seated Lois asked, “How many millions is his offer?”

Mr. Olsen looked at Lois and said, “I really shouldn’t be telling you this but, \$45 million. What do you have up your sleeve?”

“How would an offer of \$50 million sound?”

“What?? How could you do that?”

“Leave that up to us. You’ll have an offer of \$50 million coming in shortly. Now, if you’ll excuse us, Clark has an errand to run and I’ve got an investigation to pursue.”

Still amazed at what he had heard, Mr. Olsen said, “Okay, if you say so. Who will the offer come from?”

“It will come from a blind trust which will hide the names of the principals. That way Luckabee will not know who his competition is.”

“What if he tries to outbid the offer?”

With a smile, Lois replied, “The resources of the trust are virtually unlimited. Don’t worry, he can’t bid high enough to outbid the trust.”

Looking at Lois with awe on his face, Mr. Olsen said, “If you guys can do that, why do you work here?”

Clark started to laugh as he replied, “Because we like to. We like the challenge of bringing the bad guys to justice. It’s what we live for.”

Shaking his head in disbelief Mr. Olsen said, “Okay, well, I guess I’ll just wait to hear from this trust.”

Later that afternoon, Murray, director of the Superman Foundation, called Mr. Olsen with an offer of \$50 million as the administrator of a blind trust for the Daily Planet. He promised that the Foundation’s lawyers were preparing the paperwork and that the official hard copy would be forthcoming.

Mr. Olsen thanked him and looking out through his office window he saw Lois and Clark talking. He just shook his head and muttered, “I guess if they are working here because they like to and they could do this, who am I to say nay.” He picked up the phone and called the representatives of Leslie Luckabee to give them the bad news about their offer.

A little while later in the penthouse of the Plaza a very angry Smythe was again pacing the room while Leslie was behind the bar pouring himself another drink. And because of Smythe’s mood it was a stiff drink.

Luckabee asked, “Do you want a drink, mate? I think you need some amber fluid.” His head tracked left and right as he followed his boss’s movements.

Smythe stopped and with anger evident on his face as he glared at Luckabee he spat out, “Oh, what gave you a clue?”

“You’re pacing like a caged lion and you don’t have your bloody opera playing.”

Smythe strode up to the bar and struck it with his closed fist, emphasizing his frustration, needing to strike something. “We were just notified that we have been outbid for the Daily Planet. I told our representatives to up the offer to \$47.5 million. I can’t afford to go any higher and that would be pushing it as it is. He couldn’t even tell me who it was that made the offer. He said it came from a blind trust. I suspect I know just who it is though. The trust administrator is the Superman Foundation.”

Luckabee slammed down his glass and choked out, “He’s on to us, is that it? Let’s get out while the going’s good. I don’t know

about you, but I learnt from that other go that I really don't want to tangle with him."

Even though he wasn't that calm himself, Smythe held up his hand in a calming gesture as he said, "Don't panic! Keep your shirt on. We don't know that he's on to us. All we know is that he doesn't want us to own the Daily Planet. We still have LNN, and we can start our campaign. There's always the Metropolis Star, it doesn't have the distribution or the reputation of the Daily Planet but we could still buy it. I'll have to think about that."

Clark was at Lois' desk and they were looking at the latest from Lucy when Mr. Olsen called to them. They moved to his office and saw the amused look on his face.

Noting his look, Clark started to smile also as he said, "Apparently you got some good news."

Olsen's smile grew wider as he said, "Oh, you could say that. Apparently the fact that they were outbid didn't set very well. I just had a call upping their offer to \$47.5 million. When I told them that the other offer was higher their rep was fit to be tied. The fact that they only upped the ante by a \$2.5 mil tells me that they were being stretched and I don't think they will make any further offers. How soon do you want to sign the papers and take ownership?"

Lois replied, "Whoa, hold on. Not so fast! We're not in any hurry — are you?"

"Well, no."

"Then, why don't we leave things as they are. Just because the offer is there and the money is guaranteed doesn't mean we have to complete the deal immediately. Let's just carry on with things as they are."

Olsen's countenance lit up as understanding dawned, "It isn't that you are unhappy with me having the Planet, you just didn't want Luckabee to have it. Okay, how about we handle it this way. From now on we work together, I mean, you don't work for me, we work together — partners. You are the de facto owners anytime I sign the papers."

Clark said, "Before you sign the papers, we'd like to have another Editor-in-Chief waiting in the wings to take the reins."

"Do you have someone in mind?"

Lois looked at Clark and asked, "How much longer is Perry's term as mayor?"

Clark replied, "I think he has another year and a half until the next election. It would depend on if he decides to run for another term."

"I think that if we offer him his old job back he'd jump at it. We can talk to him."

"Does that mean I have to put off my plans?" Mr. Olsen asked

Lois asked, "You mean you and Lucy?"

With some concern in his voice he said, "Yeah."

Lois said, "Well, now, let's see, we are no longer in an employer/employee relationship since we are now partners, so it isn't like I'd be working for my brother-in-law. That makes it a lot less awkward. Actually, I think we just removed a major roadblock."

Mr. Olsen started to smile again, very broadly this time as he said, "Yeah, I guess we did. Well, in that case, Lois, as Lucy's sister and closest relative can I ask her to marry me?"

Lois started to laugh. When she did his countenance fell, until she answered, "Odd that you should put it that way. Just the other day we were talking about a Bar-B-Q with you and our dad. It'll give you a chance to meet him. He's really the one you should ask."

Hearing this Mr. Olsen's expression brightened considerably. In a tone of relief he said, "Whew, you had me worried there. Sure, I'd love to meet him. And, since we are now partners and could be relatives soon, why don't you both call me James."

Clark said, "In private we will," looking over his shoulder and nodding toward the bullpen he finished, "out there it'll be Mr. Olsen. We don't want it to look like there's any favoritism being shown."

Assuming an air of authority Mr. Olsen said, "Okay, if that's all you've got, get back to work." He winked at them.

They both nodded and said, loudly enough to be heard outside, "Anything you say, Mr. Olsen," and turned to exit.

Clark picked up his phone and called Murray. "Murray, Clark Kent... Yeah, the offer came in just fine... Well, that's the thing, the deal is there, but the transaction will not be completed for at least a year and a half... Yeah, that's right, you will have access to that money... Yes, you can invest it at interest... What??? ... I don't know about that. That wasn't the purpose of that money... Well, it would be nice to not live paycheck to paycheck. Okay, as long as Legal agrees, that will be fine... Okay, Thanks, Murray. We really appreciate it... You'll get back to us with the details? ... That's fine. Thanks again." He hung up the phone and turned to Lois. "Murray just gave me a surprise. When I told him that the 50 mil would be in his care for a couple of years he proposed investing it at interest."

"That sounds like good fiscal responsibility. He's turned out to be a good manager."

"That's only part of it. He said that since the interest accrued isn't coming in as royalties on memorabilia that he can't mix it in with that income. According to him, the easiest way to handle it is to keep it totally separate."

"That sounds reasonable. What does he propose to do with that money? The deal is for 50 mil. What will happen with that extra?"

"Murray is setting up a draw account for us. All of the interest generated from the investments will be ours to use to defray our expenses. He just cancelled the loan on the car and the mortgage. We are no longer in debt. The interest on the investments could amount to several million a year. With careful reinvestment of that interest by the end of the two years we could have a nice nest-egg, especially if we can live on our salaries otherwise."

"Wow, that's too much! You mean that we don't have to worry about money any more?" She started to smile as she suggested, "Maybe we should do the same thing in the other universe."

"In the other universe no one knows that Clark Kent is Superman. How could Clark Kent explain the influx of funds or access to Superman Foundation money?"

Disappointment in her tone, Lois said, "Yeah, well it was a thought."

Chapter 10 – Planning a Wedding

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

The following weekend there was a Bar-B-Q at the Kent farm in Smallville. This was the first time that Jack and Denny had been in the country.

Lois made sure that both of them brought their school books so that they could study for some upcoming exams. Both of the guys were doing well in school. Most of the monitoring of the homework was being done by Lucy and there were no objections from either of the boys because they both liked the attractive brunette. The plan was to spend the entire weekend at the farm so they all packed some clothes.

An alarm system was installed at the 348 Hyperion address which incorporated an ultrasonic signal at 90,000 Hertz and

enough power to be heard all over the city and beyond. They hadn't tested the range but the amount of power being fed to the emitter guaranteed its effectiveness over a wide area.

Clark had called Doctor Klein and requested a few more watches and lockets so that he would have them to distribute as needed. In the mean time he gave one of the watches to James, explaining its necessity since James was going to be marrying into the family.

Once all of this had been accomplished, Clark ferried the bags and then people to the farm. Jack and Denny were particularly excited about flying with Superman and the excitement lasted a long time after they were on the ground. It was all they could talk about and forget about any studying being done that night.

Saturday after breakfast, Clark picked up Sam Lane and dropped him off at the farm before going after James Olsen.

The day went well. Sam appeared to like James and vice versa and by the end of the morning James had permission to ask Lucy for her hand.

That afternoon James asked Lucy if she wanted to go for a walk and when they returned Lucy was simply gushing with joy.

Lois said, "Okay, let's see it."

Obligingly, Lucy held out her hand to show off a two-carat emerald-cut diamond flanked by a pair of emeralds in a yellow gold setting. As she did she said, "You'll be my Matron of Honor, won't you, sis?"

Lois replied, "Don't even think about asking anyone else."

James pulled Clark aside and asked, "Would you consider being my best man?"

"I would be honored."

Lois spoke up, "Hey, wait a minute. Clark, why don't we make this a double wedding? We were married in the Congo, but this way we could have a church wedding. Daddy, would you mind walking both of us down the aisle? Lucy, would you be my Maid of Honor?"

Clark looked at James and asked, "Are you okay with this?"

James was surprised at what was happening, but said, "I guess so. I really don't have much family. My dad is with the NIA and I don't see him much. I really don't know where my mom is either so I was thinking of a small ceremony. I guess it would be fun for the girls, sure, let's do it that way."

With a chuckle, Clark asked, "Oh, I think it will be a small ceremony. My folks passed some time ago. Sam and Lucy are the extent of Lois' family. Unless some of the people from the Planet want to attend, it will be a small wedding. In that case, since the girls are being each other's bridal party, would you be my best man?"

With a grin James said, "It would be my honor. Where should we have the ceremony?"

"If you really want to keep it small, we could hold it here in Smallville. The other option would be Metropolis."

Just then the phone rang and Clark went to answer it. "Kent residence."

"Clark! I heard a rumor that you were at the farm. How are you and Lois doing?"

"Lana! This is a surprise! How are you and how is Pete?"

"That's why I'm calling. Is Lois there?"

"Sure, she's right here. You want to talk to her?"

"Actually, why don't we come over?"

"We? Who is we?"

"Me and Pete, silly. Who else would we be?"

"Oh, right, you and Pete. Sure come on over. We'll see you shortly."

He turned to the group and said, "I need to zip to the store. I need to get more supplies for the grill. We have more guests coming."

Lois said, "Oh, who?"

"Lana and Pete."

"Oh, well, good! We haven't seen them in months. Okay, more franks, burgers, chicken and ribs. Pick up some more coleslaw and potato salad while you are at it. I think we have enough drinks in the fridge. I guess you need to hurry. I'll get the grill ready." She turned away to do just that while Clark spun into the Suit and took off for the store.

Sam stopped her and said, "Princess, I guess that's one of the gaps in your memory. Let me take care of the grill. I used to do a lot of grilling while you were growing up."

Lois added this to her store of information that she was gathering about this father that she had never known. She gave him a peck on the cheek and smiling said, "Go right ahead, Daddy. The grill is yours."

"Thank you, Princess," he replied as he turned away.

Clark just barely managed to return before Lana and Pete arrived. He saw Sam at the grill. The coals were hot and with an apron on, Sam had started cooking. Clark placed the additional meats in the cooler and said, "Thanks, Sam, for taking over."

Smiling, Sam replied, "Think nothing of it! You just go relax and let the 'ol Grillmeister handle this chore. It's been a while since I've had a reason to grill. I've really missed it."

Lana and Pete drove up and gallantly Pete opened the car door for Lana and helped her to exit.

Lois and Clark both noticed this and smiled as they walked over, hand in hand.

As soon as Lana was in range Lois gave her a hug. Then after Lois made the introductions she said to Lana, "Well, we haven't seen you guys for a while. How have things been going?" She looked back and forth between the two of them significantly.

Lana started to smile as she looked at Pete and said, "Well, he finally did it."

Knowing just what was coming, but deciding to play dumb, Lois asked, "Who finally did what?"

Lana, with just a hint of exasperation in her voice said, "Pete of course!"

Lois asked, "Oh, Pete! What did Pete finally do? Did he hear back on that job application?"

"Well, yes, he did, but that's not what is so special." Lana reached into her pocket as she turned away for a second. When she turned back around she held out her left hand and said, "He popped the question."

Lois dropped the act and looking at Pete asked, "What took you so long?"

Pete, defensively said, "I needed to hear back on that application and make sure she was willing to make the move."

Clark asked, "Was there really ever a question?"

Pete replied, "I guess not, I just had to get up the nerve."

Lois asked, "How soon?"

Lana replied, "We haven't decided yet."

With an ornery look Lois asked, "Would you like to join us?"

Lana, with a mystified tone asked, "Join you in what?"

"Would you like to join us in our weddings?"

Lana was totally in left field at this point and asked, "Weddings? What weddings?"

Lois was almost laughing as she replied, "Lucy's and mine! Lucy just got engaged and since Clark and I had a civil ceremony in the Congo we are going to make it a double ceremony church wedding. Now we could make it a triple!"

Lana replied, "Oh, I'll have to think it over. While I do, Pete, why don't you get that thing you wanted to show Clark?"

"Right, it's in the trunk. Be right back."

As Pete was returning from the car he was carrying an old tackle box. He started to open it as he was walking, saying, "Wayne Irig found this on his property when a storm blew over

an old tree.”

As he was passing Lois she suddenly screamed in pain, “Arrrrggggg!” All she had time to send was, “Kryptonite!” before she passed out, falling limply to the ground.

Clark supersped to Pete and slammed shut the tackle box. He kept his hands on the box, keeping it closed. He turned his head to look at Lois.

The girls all gathered around Lois trying to revive her. As Sam dropped to the ground at her side checking her pulse and breathing he asked, “Is she pregnant?”

With conviction, Clark replied, “That’s not the problem.”

Pete was shocked. He looked at Lois lying on the ground, unconscious and at Clark’s hands keeping the box closed with a question in his eyes. Finally he asked, “What happened?”

Still making sure that the box was kept closed, Clark asked, “Pete, what’s in this box?”

“I don’t know! It looks like a geode that has been broken open. It is filled with these crystals. They are green and shine like light sticks.”

Clark said, “That’s what I thought, it’s Kryptonite. Pete, you need to keep this box closed!”

Pete asked, “I thought Kryptonite only affected you. What happened to Lois?”

Clark didn’t answer immediately. Letting go of the box finally, he picked up Lois and cradling her in his arms looked around. He could see Jack and Denny at a distance, tossing a ball back and forth in a field. He asked, “James, could you grab that lounge chair on the porch and bring it out here into the sun, please?”

Grateful for something constructive to do James jumped to comply.

While standing there waiting he had been thinking, furiously. Once James had the lounge in the sun, Clark placed Lois on it. Fortunately, that morning Lois had opted for comfort and fun in the sun apparel and was dressed in a shorts set consisting of short shorts, a tank top and sandals so, thankfully she would get a lot of sunlight on her bare skin without Clark having to change her into one of her bikinis. He turned to those gathered around and said, “There’s something we haven’t told anyone, but I guess it’s time you all heard. Lois is Kryptonian, like me.”

This hit everyone like a bomb going off and there was a general gasp.

The first to recover was Sam Lane. He said, “She wasn’t Kryptonian when she was born. I should know, I was there, if you know what I mean.”

They hadn’t planned on how to proceed with this. Clark had decided that he would have to wing it. “You are correct, Sam. It is something that happened later. We had decided to keep it a secret, sort of a surprise to spring at the proper time. This wasn’t supposed to happen.” Turning to Pete he said, “That box, how old is it?”

“That tackle box? It’s ancient. It belongs to Wayne Irig.”

“It must be painted with lead based paint. That’s why it didn’t affect me. The lid was between me and the Kryptonite. Lois was in direct line of exposure. That’s what knocked her out. She is fully Kryptonian which means she has all of my powers, but she also has my weakness. Kryptonite can kill us, both of us.”

In the silence which followed this statement, everyone heard the click as Pete finally threw the latch on the tackle box. Feeling remorse at his unintentional injury of Lois, Pete stammered, “I didn’t know.” It suddenly hit him, “If I had shown that rock to you . . . that could have been you there! This is just great! What a mess. What can we do?”

“In the barn you’ll find some baling wire. Use some of it to wind around the tackle box so that it won’t open accidentally and then bring the box back.”

Pete went off on his errand, returning shortly with the box

wrapped like a mummy in the baling wire. Pete was not one to go by half measures. He said, “Here you go. What do you plan to do with it?”

Putting out his hand, Clark said, “If I may?”

After Pete handed the wrapped box to him, Clark took two paces away and hurled the box up and out of the atmosphere into space, never to return.

A few minutes later Lois stirred on the lounge. As she opened her eyes she said, “I’m sorry. It must have been too much sun.”

Clark was kneeling at her side with her hand in his. He said, “It’s okay, Honey, they know.”

With a questioning look she asked, “They know? What do they know?”

“They know that I’ve made you a Kryptonian so that we could be together.”

Realizing that this was the story that he had invented to cover what had happened and still conceal the truth she went along with it. “Oh darn. You mean that we’ve spoiled the surprise?”

He said, “I think we can trust them to keep the secret. After all, this is all family.”

Everyone expressed their agreement with this so Lois nodded and said, “Yeah, I guess you’re right. If we can’t trust them, who can we trust?”

“How are you feeling?”

“Still a little rocky. It never gets any easier, does it?”

“No, and from what Pete said it was a large piece of crystalline green Kryptonite, the worst kind. Why don’t you stay here on the lounge, we can bring over some more chairs and we can all sit around and talk.”

With a look of appreciation she said, “That would be nice. We need to decide if Lana is going to make it a triple wedding.”

Jack and Denny had been far enough away that they were entirely unaware of what had happened to Lois and the decision to keep them in the dark was a natural one.

The rest of the day was spent in the sun so that Lois could recover, eating Bar-B-Q and talking. Jack and Denny joined in the eating, but headed out on their own when the grown-ups started talking. No one was surprised when Clark waited on Lois, bringing her whatever she asked for. Since her exposure had been brief, Lois recovered quickly, but Clark was still worried about her reaction to the rock. Somehow it just didn’t seem right. She shouldn’t have reacted that severely to that brief an exposure. He decided that they would have to talk it over later. This was a mystery and a concern which had him worried.

Clark pulled Pete aside and asked, “Pete, I’ve been thinking. If this piece of Kryptonite has shown up there is probably more around. I’m going to need some help in finding and disposing of any more that might be lying around. Growing up I was only on the farm for the first ten years. After I went into the foster care system I was on the other side of town most of the time. If there is more around, on this side of town I might not have known about it. Now that you know what it looks like, maybe you could get some of the other guys, like Billy Eck and Rachel’s brother, Charlie, to help look for more and dispose of it. By the way, how are Rachel and Billy? I haven’t seen Rachel since I took her to the prom.”

“Well, you do know that Rachel was elected sheriff when her dad retired. She got her degree in criminology about the same time you graduated from Journalism school. She married Billy a couple of years ago. They seem to be happy together. He runs the feed store in town now, took over the management when his father retired. I’ll contact them on Monday and see what we can do.”

The possibility existed that with each exposure Lois was becoming more sensitive, though that had not been the case with him. If anything, he had been able to handle that exposure to crystalline Kryptonite during that fake mugging better than he

had that time when Tempus had exposed him to that large piece of non-crystalline Kryptonite. As he was thinking about it, Clark started getting even more concerned. Even when he was exposed to that large chunk by Tempus, it hadn't knocked him out the way it had Lois. Maybe there was something to the old saying, 'The Weaker Sex', but no, Lois was every bit as fast as he was and short of pressing neutronium barbells there was no way to determine if there was a significant difference in their strength. This was going to require more thought. In the mean time he was going to take as good care of her as was possible.

Chapter 11 – The Kryptonite Detector

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –
Alt 1

%%%

After a while they decided to split up, so while the girls talked about the plans for the triple wedding, Pete, Sam, James and Clark all piled into Pete's car and headed over to the Irig farm. When they drove up Wayne came out to greet them. Recognizing Pete and Clark as they stepped out of the car Wayne started to smile. "Hi Pete, hey Clark. I haven't seen you since you first got back with your new wife. How is she?"

"Hi, Wayne, she's fine. We left her with her sister and Lana discussing wedding plans."

"Wedding plans. Who's getting married?"

Clark, James and Pete all started to laugh. Seeing Wayne's puzzled expression, Clark finally said, "That's a long story. Let me introduce Sam Lane, my father-in-law and James Olsen, my future brother-in-law. James just got engaged to Lois' sister Lucy." Turning to Pete he asked, "Do you want to do the honors?"

Pete was still laughing so he said, "Nah, you go ahead. You're doing a good job."

"Okay, well, Wayne, Pete and Lana Lang are now engaged."

Wayne started to smile and turning to Pete said, "Well, congratulations. I always thought that you and Lana made a better couple than Lana and Clark, but I never woulda said anything."

Pete said, "Thanks Wayne."

Clark continued, "Lois decided that she wanted a church wedding so we were planning a double wedding, but now it's going to be a triple. I think we are going to have it here in Smallville and you're invited, but that's not why we came over."

"Oh, what brings you over this way?"

"That rock you gave Pete. Where did you find it and is there any more?"

"Oh, that thing!" Wayne pointed to a side yard and a tree that was lying on its side, partially cut up, with a ball of dirt still attached to the roots. "You see that tree? That tree was planted in 1966. After all these years it suddenly decided that it was tired of standing up. I found that rock in the hole that tree left when it fell over. I sent a chunk to Wichita to see if they could tell me what it was and if it is valuable. I haven't heard back from them yet."

"Wayne, it is very important for you to tell me if there is any more."

"Nah, except for the chunk I sent off to the lab, what I gave Pete was the whole thing." Wayne got a hopeful look as he asked, "Why, is it valuable?"

Clark thought, <I got rid of this sample, but there was the piece that Wayne had sent to the lab in Wichita? I'll have to see about recovering that.> Clark in a very serious tone replied, "No, Wayne, it isn't valuable, to anyone other than criminal elements, but it *is* dangerous ... dangerous to me. It is a remnant of my home planet and it can kill me."

Wayne had a stricken look as he said, "I ... I didn't know. How could I?"

"No, Wayne, I'm not accusing you of anything. Please, don't get upset. I just needed to know if you found any more."

"No, I didn't, but now I'll be on the lookout for it. What should I do with it if I find any more?"

"Do you have a lead lined box or any lead based paint?"

"Sure, I've got buckets of lead based paint. I use it on all of my metal equipment, even that old tackle box I had the rock in. Keeps it from rusting."

"Good, if you find any more, give it a couple of coats of lead based paint and bring it over and put it in my barn. I'll have a box with a lid on it that you can put it in. Thanks Wayne, I really appreciate it."

They took their leave of Wayne. As they headed for the car and before they got in, Clark said, "Pete, let's swing by Shuster's field."

"Why do you want to go over there, Buddy?"

"Before my folks died in that accident, Dad told me that they found me in Shuster's field. It's pretty close to Wayne's place. If he found that meteor rock on his property and Mom and Dad found me at Shuster's it would be logical to think there might be more in that area. I'd like to do a quick check."

"Are you sure you want to do that, Clark? After what happened to Lois, wouldn't that be a risky move?"

"I just want to walk around a bit. I can feel the pain it causes before it becomes dangerous."

"Okay, if you say so, but I don't want to have to explain it if we have to carry you back to the farm, unconscious."

Laughing, Clark replied, "Don't worry Pete. I'll take full responsibility."

Sam asked, "Why don't we see if we can borrow a can of lead based paint from Mr. Irig before we go?"

Pete said, "Now, why didn't I think of that?"

Clark said, "Thanks Sam! That's a good idea." Raising his voice he called, "Wayne, can we borrow a can of your lead based paint? I have a hunch that it may come in handy."

With a laugh Wayne asked, "Do you have a color preference?"

Clark replied "No, whatever you have the most of will be fine."

"I can spare some red. Hold on, I'll get it for you."

Wayne retrieved a can of paint and handed it to Pete who put it into the trunk. "Thanks, Wayne. We'll return what we don't use when we're done."

"Nah, don't bother. I've got plenty. Keep a hold of it."

Clark said, "Thanks Wayne, we'll put it to good use, count on it."

They all climbed into the car and Pete drove off. In short order they were at Shuster's field. Pete parked and they climbed the fence to get into the field.

Clark pointed toward a stand of trees and said, "Dad said that they found my ship over in that copse. Let's start the search over there." Clark started off in that direction and the others followed.

Pete said, "Wait a minute. Let me get the paint." Pete returned to the car and got the paint out of the trunk and looked around for a screwdriver. Since he couldn't find one he finally used his lug wrench to remove the lid. Once this was done he rejoined the party.

Clark said, "This is really the first time I've been here. When I was growing up, old man Shuster kept his stud bull in this field. You remember, Pete! We were all afraid of that bull."

Pete was nodding his head, "Yeah, he was a mean one, wasn't he?"

As they were entering the copse Clark noticed a scar, like a gouge in the turf. It was over a dozen feet long and about four feet wide. He said, "This must be where the ship landed. I'm

surprised that the marks are still here.”

Pete answered, “At that time of the year there wasn’t much rain. The grass probably grew and kept the dirt from being washed into the cleft before any heavy rains happened.”

“You could be right.” Clark started to wander around. He followed the trench to its end and then climbed out of it and started to circle. He was about fifteen feet away and to the right when he started to feel a tingle. He said, “I thought so.”

Pete picked up on that and asked, “Where?”

“Not sure yet. Let me see ...” Clark lifted off and hovered at about fifty feet. He used his x-ray vision to scan the area. Spotting a chunk of meteor he switched to heat vision and applied just enough to wilt the foliage around the spot.

Pete was first on the scene and he scuffed around with the toe of his boot until he uncovered the rock. He dropped it into the lead paint and Clark landed again.

Pete said, “That worked out pretty well. I think all we would need would be some hand towels or small shovels. I have some small tools back at the house. Why don’t we do it this way; you do your spotting from overhead and mark the spots the same way. I don’t think that we should devote too much time to this today. If you mark the spots, I can get the gang together and we can come out and collect them, later.”

Clark started flying around again. Following this same procedure they found five more pieces of various sizes. The paint bucket which had been half full was now threatening to spill over so they decided to call it a day.

On the way back to the car, Pete said, “All in all, I’d say this was a good day’s work. That’s six less pieces of poison to bother you in the world.”

“Yeah, but just how many more are there out there that we didn’t find?”

Sam said, “We covered the area around your landing site pretty thoroughly. How much more could there be?”

Clark ran his fingers through his hair as he replied, “We really don’t know. This is just one area. That other piece came from Wayne’s side yard. There could be pieces of that rock scattered all over between here and there.”

Pete put his hand on Clark’s shoulder and said, “Don’t worry. You have a lot of friends here in Smallville. I’ll get everyone I can to help look for this stuff. Now that I know what to look for, we’ll gather up as much as we can. We’ll start on Monday.”

“You guys head on back. I’ll mark as many as I can and meet you back at the farm.”

They climbed back into the car and returned to the Kent Farm where the girls had the wedding all planned. They had even called the pastor of the local church and scheduled his services for the following month.

The day was spent and evening was coming on. The boys were called in and encouraged to spend some time studying. This time James took a part with Lucy overseeing their homework.

One of the subjects that Jack was taking was a basic computer science class. While Lucy worked with Denny, James and Jack moved into another room so that they wouldn’t disturb them. James started asking questions to find out just how much Jack was learning. Once he was sure Jack had a handle on it, James started giving Jack the benefit of his knowledge and experience, taking him beyond what the boy had been taught. James borrowed Lois’ laptop to teach Jack some things which the student picked up rapidly, demonstrating an aptitude for working on computers. After a couple of hours Jack had grasped a number of advanced concepts.

As they were finishing up James asked, “Jack, how would you like to spend an hour or so each day with me going over computer technology? I think that within a short time I could have you ready to pass any computer test your school could put

in front of you. You do that and I will move you up from gofer to research assistant. Would you like a promotion?”

Jack was stunned, “Gee, would I! You mean it? Sure, I mean yes, I’d really appreciate it.”

“We can start right away. Tell you what, bring a lunch and join me in my office each day at noon. We’ll go from noon to 1 P.M.”

Jack said, “I don’t know how to thank you.”

Smiling, James said, “You can thank me by learning and doing a good job for me.”

“You can count on me, Mr. Olsen.”

“I know I can Jack. I like your attitude. You’re a good kid. I’m glad Clark brought you in.”

Later that evening alone in their bedroom Clark and Lois were cuddling on their bed. Clark said, “I’m surprised that that brief exposure, even to crystalline green Kryptonite, hit you so hard. There has to have been something else. We both know it wasn’t the sun.”

Lois snuggled deeper into his arms and said, “I think it happened in Hawaii that time after the safe incident.”

“What, what happened? I don’t remember anything. Did something happen while I was asleep?”

“No, remember what we did after you woke up?”

“Yeah, we had pizza.”

“And?”

“And ... we made ... love.” Suddenly he pulled back so that he could look her straight in the face as he asked, “You mean?”

She nodded in mute agreement as a smile slowly formed on her face.

“I’m speechless! How long have you known?”

“I couldn’t be sure. I tried one of those home test kits, but they are based on Earth human hormones. Every time I tried one it came back negative. All I know is that I’ve just missed my second period.”

“So, you think you are what, ten or twelve weeks?”

Lois nodded, “Yes, between ten and twelve weeks now. That’s why I asked you to go a little easy on my breasts the last time. They’re kinda tender.”

“What are you going to do about an OB/GYN?”

“How can I go to a regular doctor? She would find out I’m super.”

“But, what if there are problems?”

“I’m going to trust you, my husband, to study up on how to deliver a baby.”

“I’ve been meaning to take an Emergency Medicine course. Because of all the injuries I have to deal with, I’d feel better if I knew how to handle injured people without aggravating their injuries. I think delivering babies is included in those courses.”

“I’d feel better if you could help in some real deliveries.”

“Pick an OB/GYN and I’ll approach them and make arrangements to do just that. I’ll just be honest. I want to learn so that if I’m on a rescue and need to do a delivery, I’ll know how to do it right.”

Lois smiled and cuddled back into his arms with one hand on his chest before she asked, “Did you ever think that one day you’d be a Papa?”

He replied with a question, “Remember the canoli? You told me then that you were willing, I just didn’t know it would happen this soon, if ever.”

Lois couldn’t see his face because she had snuggled into his chest, but if she had been able to see his face she would have seen the biggest grin ever.

He said, “This is incredible! I’m going to be a father. I’m going to have a family, not just a wife that I love.” Clark pushed her upright so that he could look into her eyes as he said, “You are incredible; stupendous ... there aren’t enough superlatives. I

can't tell you how much I love you." He had started weeping.

Lois cuddled back against him as she said, "You're not so bad yourself, handsome. I love you."

"You're going to be one terrific mom, a super mom, in more ways than one."

Lois murmured, "I hope so. I've never done this before, but, I have two good role models, my mom and yours. I couldn't ask for better. I just hope I can be half as good."

"Any idea how soon?"

"No, we're in uncharted territory. We don't know how long a Kryptonian woman carries a baby. It could be shorter or longer than an Earth mother. At this point I'd guess longer. I mean, look at me. I'm possibly twelve weeks and I'm not starting to show yet. We'll just have to wait and see."

"So, you think it was because of your condition that the Kryptonite is hitting you this way? Obviously the baby is drawing on your body's resources as it grows. That must be why. This green K today was the crystalline form and it knocked you out immediately. How were you able to handle the Kryptonite at the house?"

"I don't know. Somehow it didn't affect me the way that crystalline form did. What is the difference?"

"Well, that piece started out as a different substrate. I remember that when Tempus used it on me, I was in a lot of pain, but it didn't knock me out the way the crystalline form does. I guess it did hit you harder than it did me. When you were finished with it you were out. It *must* be related to your condition. It must make you more susceptible. We're going to have to be more careful. Besides, we don't know how it would affect the baby."

"I don't think we should tell anyone. There's no need in worrying them unnecessarily."

"Yeah, Pete feels bad enough as it is. We need to make a trip back to see my folks. We need to let them know. Mom is going to be thrilled."

"I think Jonathan will be happy too." As soon as she finished this statement she yawned.

Clark cradled Lois in his arms until she finally fell asleep. He continued to lie awake with thoughts of Lois and their future child. Since he had lost the Kents at age ten he had almost given up on the thought of family. Then he had started dating Lana. That was unsatisfying, but it still represented family and the fulfillment of his desires. Then Lois had entered his life. Her drive and energy and especially her acceptance of him and what he was, taught him what he really wanted and needed, but then she had left. He had searched for, and finally with Herb's help, found his Lois only to have her die, almost literally, in his arms. Then Herb had proposed this mission, to find this Lois and he had finally found true fulfillment in her arms. When they had wed he was the happiest he had ever been and didn't think it would be possible to be any happier, but now ... now they were going to have a child! Not an adopted child, but flesh of his and Lois' flesh and blood of his and Lois' own blood. Now he knew the ultimate joy. He drifted off to sleep with that thought.

The next day Clark ferried Sam home before picking up the luggage and taking it to the brownstone. He took Lucy first, then Jack and Denny. Before they had locked up the house Clark took James back. When he returned Lois flew under her own power. They flew high enough to be out of sight from the ground until they were near Metropolis and then Lois smoothly flew into his arms and he carried her, the rest of the way to a landing.

Chapter 12 – Killing Some Time

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

Everything returned to normal on Monday except for the interruptions Lucy experienced as word got around that she had become engaged over the weekend to Mr. Olsen. Word even made it down to the IT department. Everyone wanted to see her ring and she was happy to oblige.

Meanwhile across town, in the penthouse of the Plaza hotel, Smythe entered to find Luckabee watching LNN. He picked up the remote and muted the sound. Luckabee looked at him with a question in his eyes.

In answer to his unasked question, Smythe said, "The purchase of MiraLabs has gone through. Your first act as the new owner has been to direct the lab to acquire that sample of the green rock from the lab in Wichita. You just got word that they are shipping the sample immediately. They are very interested in seeing the results of our analysis. It is such a shame that the sample is going to be lost in shipment."

The next order created a division dedicated to research and development of energy weapons. "We caught a break on that one. The person I, uh, you have chosen to lead that division is one Nell Newtrich. Do you have any idea just who that is?"

"No, should I?"

"She is the one who built the laser that killed my father. She had been working on the Quantum Disruptor project before my father fired her in his misguided attempt to staff the brothel. It is fortunate indeed that she is there."

"Why is that such a good thing?"

"She is going to head up the project to recreate the Quantum Disruptor."

"What is so special about this weapon?"

"It could conceivably be the one weapon that could kill Superman."

Luckabee voiced his unease, "When you first approached me about this lurk, nothing was said about murder. I done some things, but nothin' like murder. You go away for a long time for murder."

"Only if they catch you and can prove it. With this weapon, there will be complete destruction. All of the evidence will disappear."

"So, if she creates this weapon, you will forgive her for killing your dad?"

With a look of sheer evil Smythe replied, "Oh, quite the contrary. She and her sister will be the first test subjects to prove the weapon works."

Clark had already decided, after some persuasion by Lois, that it was time to do some on site investigation on Leslie Luckabee, so after giving the keys to the car to Lucy and letting James know what they would be doing, they headed for the roof. With Lois in his arms they took off for Smallville.

The trip to Australia was going to be delayed slightly because they were making a side trip. When they arrived in Smallville, the first thing that they did was pull out the TaDT and open a window to the other universe.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt 2

%%%

Lois and Clark stepped from the living room of the farm house in one universe into the living room of the farm house in the other universe. They stepped through the window, hand in hand, and found the Kents in the living room, right where they had left them on their previous visit.

Martha was on the couch knitting and Jonathan was in his favorite easy chair looking at the Farmer's Almanac. They both looked up at the sound of footsteps and both started to smile. Martha started to put her knitting away and Jonathan set aside his book. Clark said, "No, no, it's just us. We just thought we'd stop in for a quick visit. We have some news."

Martha, with a look of understanding asked, "Can I make a guess?"

Lois looked surprised and said, "Sure."

Martha picked up her knitting project and displayed a yellow, red and blue baby bootie.

Lois broke up in laughter. When she was finally able to say something coherent she asked, "How did you guess?"

With a sly look Martha replied, "Right from the start we knew that the two of you couldn't keep your hands off one another. I don't know about Jonathan, but I had my doubts about the efficacy of condoms on super powered individuals and I didn't think that hormone pills as contraceptives designed for Earth human women would work on Kryptonian physiology, so ... how soon?"

Doing a quick calculation before responding, Lois said, "The way this works, anytime between now and about five hours from now, depending on how many trips we make back here between now and when I deliver."

Martha was startled and asked, "Did you say five *hours*? You didn't mean five years did you?"

"No, you heard right. Five hours, of course it depends on just how much time we spend in this universe."

A new thought occurred to Lois and looking directly at Clark she asked, "That brings up the question, how are we going to handle this? If we go back and forth too often and spend too much time in one universe or the other, it will look like I have had a very short pregnancy and people will start to ask questions. Plus people in both universes will be expecting to see a child."

Clark thought for a moment before he replied, "I think we are going to have to decide which universe we want to have this child in and only make short visits to the other until after the baby is born." Looking at the Kents he said, "We are in the middle of a crucial investigation right now in the other universe and we are between investigations here. What do you think, Lois?"

Lois thought about it for a few seconds before replying, then she said, "I think that since there is no Superwoman in the other universe then Lois Lane can be pregnant without Superwoman having to excuse her absence in some way. I'm sorry, Martha. But we can come for short visits while it remains quiet here."

Martha smiled and said, "That will be just fine. This way I won't have to wait for nine months to see my grandchild. It could be as soon as ... tomorrow!?!?!!!!" Picking up her knitting needles she started furiously clicking away as she said, "If I'm going to have these and a baby blanket finished in time I need to get busy. Jonathan, could you make me some coffee? I think I have a long night ahead of me."

Jonathan couldn't resist chiming in with a smile. "Well, fortunately babies are small. Less to knit."

Martha looked over at his teasing and just said, "Oh, you!"

Then Lois sat down next to Martha and drew her into her arms and hugged her as she laughed lightly. She said, "Martha, I really love you."

Martha smiled and said, "No more than I love you. You are a very special woman and I'm glad my son found you ... both of them. I couldn't have hoped for a better daughter-in-law."

With tears in her eyes Lois said, "Martha, I just hope I can be half as good a mother as you. You are my inspiration and role model."

Martha hugged her even tighter as she said, "Lois, honey, you'll do just fine on your own. There are three basic rules that you need to follow if you want to be a good wife and mother.

Rule number one is: be your husband's best friend. Rule number two is: love your husband and rule number three is: love your children and make sure they know it. If you follow those three rules you won't go wrong. Personally, I don't see you breaking any of those rules, ever." As she finished up Martha realized that the side of her face was getting wet from Lois's tears. She pulled a hanky out of the pocket of her apron and handed it to Lois and said, "Here, dry those tears before you make me start." As Lois was drying her tears she started to smile at Martha. Martha clasped her shoulders and said, "There, that's better. Now, I think that the two of you need to get out of here so that you can come back after some adventures over on the other side of that doorway. When you come back you can tell us all about it and we'll have that much less time to wait for this grandchild of ours."

Lois looked at Martha and asked, "Do you get that kind of wisdom by being a parent?"

Chuckling, Martha replied, "No, I think *that* kind of wisdom comes only with *age*." She was quiet for a few seconds before she continued, "Lois dear, what are you doing for an OB?"

"Well, you see, I can't trust a regular OB because they would find out that I'm super, so Clark is planning to take a class and work with an OB to deliver some babies."

Turning to Clark, Martha said, "Oh honey, you don't need to do that."

Clark said, "I don't? But, I want to. Really I need to. I'd been planning to take a course in Emergency Medicine so that I could better handle injured people when I pull them out of wrecks and fires."

Turning back to Lois Martha said, "Clark doesn't know this, but back in the early '60s, before we found him, Jonathan and I knew that we couldn't have children and I decided that I still wanted to be doing something with children. I had been an office manager for a heavy equipment company in Wichita before we were married and I really wasn't in a position where I needed to worry about medical issues, but after we were married, being a farmer's wife put me in a position where I occasionally had to help deliver calves. That gave me an idea. At that time Dr. Harrison was the only doctor in Small County. Well, the name is Small but the county sure isn't and there were times when Doc Harrison was away on a call when a woman would go into labor. That's what happened with my best friend, Nellie Irig. When she went into labor, there was no one to help with the delivery and it killed her. That made up my mind for me and I took classes to become a midwife. It seems like I have delivered hundreds of babies, although the number is probably only around forty or so. It has been a while, but I think I still remember a thing or two about delivering babies."

Lois looked at Clark as if asking permission and after getting a nod asked, "Martha, would you please deliver your grandchild for us?"

Martha was laughing as she replied, "What took you so long to ask? I'd be delighted to as long as Clark will be your coach."

With a distinct look of relief Clark said, "I'll be the best coach around. Thanks, Mom."

Martha stood and said to Lois, "Lois, why don't you stretch out and let me have a look see."

Lois did as directed and Martha knelt next to the couch. She said, "Pull up your top for me."

Lois complied and then Martha started by laying her hands on Lois's belly, feeling for activity. When her sensitive fingers felt movement she got a satisfied expression and said, "Well, we've got a lively one here. That is promising. How many weeks along are you? I'd guess perhaps seven or eight weeks, maybe as much as ten."

Lois looked at Clark and said, "That's what I thought I would

be if I were Earth human. No, it's actually longer."

Martha raised an inquiring eyebrow, so Lois explained, "We don't know just how long a Kryptonian pregnancy lasts. I'm actually between ten and twelve weeks. It looks like a Kryptonian pregnancy is longer than an Earth human pregnancy." A thought suddenly occurred to Lois and she said, "Clark, since that is the case we could spend more time here visiting. In fact we need to do that so that my carry time is the same as an Earth woman's. Once I start to show we should probably spend one week here to every two or three weeks we spend on the other side of the door. What do you think?"

Clark looked at Martha and asked, "Would you guys mind us spending a week at a time here with you?"

Martha's face lit up with a smile at the prospect of having that much time with her kids and she asked, "Are you kidding? We'd love to have you guys here with us." Turning back to Lois she said, "Let me check something else."

By applying some pressure on various areas, Martha with her experienced hands was able to tell almost as much as a physician with an ultrasound device. She said, "You can pull your top down. Everything looks to be right where it's supposed to be. I don't think we will have any problems. If I'd had my training before Nellie went into labor I might have been able to get the baby turned by manipulation and prevented her problem. I might have saved her life and that of the child. Such a shame. Well, the good thing is that I can do this for you. Now, you guys are going to have to come see me regularly so that I can keep tabs on development. It will be good that you will be here for a week at a time." She patted Lois hand and then stood. With a look of confidence she said, "When the time comes, we'll be ready."

Clark had an idea and after a round of hugs Clark led Lois outside. The Kents followed them out. Before he pulled out the TaDT to open the window he said, "Mom, go get a good night's sleep. I'm going to use the TaDT to go back and forth until it's tomorrow morning. I'll do it out here so that I don't disturb you."

Martha looked at Lois and said, "You see how he is ... so thoughtful. I hope he takes as good care of you."

Looking at Clark, Lois said, "He does, every bit as good."

With a final farewell and a promise to see them the next day Clark triggered the device and they passed through.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

After they had stepped through, Clark turned to Lois and said, "I just had a better idea. I'll go back and do a patrol, a long patrol. Maybe I can find something interesting, like a mud slide or an earthquake to handle."

"That sounds a lot more productive than you just crossing back and forth. I guess I'll see you in five minutes."

Just like a businessman going off to work, Clark gave her a kiss and said, "Be back shortly."

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

While Lois packed for the trip to Australia, Clark went back. He started his patrol in Metropolis. He stopped two muggings and a jewelry store burglary.

Then he headed west, following the sun. In Chicago he stopped a high speed chase and helped with a high rise fire, rescuing a dozen residents, six of whom were children and one very important dog.

In Las Vegas he stopped another high speed chase, delivering the fugitives to the Vegas Police.

In San Diego he rescued a surfer who had wiped out and hit his head on his board, knocking himself out.

In Hawaii Clark diverted the flow of lava by using his freeze breath to solidify the magma, diverting the flow which threatened a scientific observation team.

In Shanghai in response to a silent alarm, he interrupted a robbery at a diamond merchant's.

In Indonesia he used his speed, flying back and forth underwater, to disrupt a tsunami generated by an undersea earthquake.

In Tibet he used his invulnerable body to divert a landslide, the boulders bouncing off of his chest, preventing the destruction of a small village.

In the Italian Alps he used his heat vision to turn an avalanche into steam, saving the lives of a climbing team.

In Holland he shored up a dike that was giving way under the pounding surf from a channel storm.

In the English Channel he prevented an overloaded ferry from capsizing in that same storm.

By this time it was early morning when he returned to the farm and standing on the porch he triggered the TaDT and stepped through into the living room of the farm house.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

Lois heard him return and called down from their room, "How did it go? Any big rescues? How long were you gone?"

"It went well. I killed some time, waiting till morning then I returned. I hope Mom got a good night's sleep. I've been thinking." He pulled the TaDT out of his pocket and looked at it as he spoke, "We could really use some control over this thing. I hope Herb shows up soon on a visit. I'm going to ask him to change something on this. We need to be able to change the time we arrive. If we could do that I'd have just set this for eight hours so that it would be the next morning." After saying that, he thought of all of the rescues he had just made and all of the lives he had just saved. He thought particularly of the six children that were suffering with only minor burns and smoke inhalation that could have died if not for him and thought better of his statement. He recanted, "Actually, I don't think I will. Now that I think about it, I think we'll leave it just the way it is. A world without Superman could go to hell in a handbasket in a lot less than eight hours."

Lois picked up on this change and asked, "You did a lot more than just kill time, didn't you?"

With the children on his mind, thinking about the child that they would soon be having and thinking that if it had been his child in that fire ... he would have wanted him rescued. How could he do that if he were AWOL? He replied, "Yeah, I guess I did."

After a few seconds, he continued, "There was this high rise fire in Chicago. I had pulled out eleven, six adults and five children. Suddenly one of the mothers started yelling for Carrie."

"I went up to her and she said, 'Superman, my daughter is still missing.'"

"What's her name?"

"Carrie, Carrie Harris. Please Superman, please find her."

"I'll do what I can to find her."

"I went back in and found her on the top floor. There were flames all around, but the room was not fully engulfed. She was hiding in a closet crying and calling, 'Mommy! Mommy!'"

"The fire cast an eerie red/orange glow over everything. Superman opened the door of the closet and Carrie cowered back into a corner, like she was afraid of Superman."

“Superman knelt down and said, ‘Hi Carrie. I’m going to take you away from here.’”

“Carrie cried, ‘My Mommy told me never to go anywhere with strangers!’”

“Superman was stumped for a second as to how to handle this before he said, ‘Your Mommy is very wise, but what did she tell you about the police?’”

“Carrie thought for a second and then said, ‘The police are good and they help people.’”

“Realizing he was on the right track, Superman said, ‘Just think of me as a policeman and I’ll take you to your Mommy.’”

“Carrie still hesitated for a second, processing this thought before she said, ‘Okay. What about Scrappy?’”

“Who is Scrappy?”

“With a don’t-you-know-anything kind of tone she said, ‘My dog, silly.’”

“That was the first that Superman noticed that there was a dog curled up on the floor. The dog had been behind Carrie so he was out of view until Superman picked her up. ‘Oh, okay. There he is.’”

“Superman picked her up and she clung to his neck with all of her might. She buried her head in his shoulder and closed her eyes tightly. With his other hand he picked up Scrappy. He wrapped his cape around both of them and flew them out.”

“When they landed he removed his cape from her, but she still clung to him eyes closed. He put Scrappy down and the dog stayed as close as he could to Carrie as she was carried to her mom. Scrappy was barking happily as he followed his little mistress. Superman carried Carrie over to her mommy and it still took a few seconds for her to realize just who it was and let go.”

“Superman finally got a good look at his passenger. She was about six with brown hair and big beautiful brown eyes. She looked like what I imagine you looked like at that age.”

Clark said, “She looked like she could be our child.”

“Scrappy had been bounding along as Superman carried Carrie to her mother. When Superman stopped Scrappy started sniffing at his legs.”

“Once Carrie was in her mother’s arms she first looked down at her dog and made a downward gesture with her hand and the dog immediately quieted down and sat watching his little mistress attentively then she pointed at me and said, ‘The nice man brought me to you. I know you said not to go with strangers, but he said he was like a policeman so I trusted him. He promised to bring me to you and he did.’”

“Her mother asked, ‘Carrie, do you know who the nice man is?’”

“No.”

“Carrie, the nice man’s name is Superman. He isn’t a policeman, but he helps people just like the police do. It was good that you trusted him.”

“I said, ‘Carrie, it was good that you trusted me, but you still need to be careful who you trust. Listen to your mommy. She is very wise. She loves you very much and wants to protect you.’”

“Carrie said, ‘When I grow up I want to help people too.’”

Clark continued the story, “It almost felt like I was talking with you in some ways. I reached over and pushed a stray lock of her hair behind her ear and then gave her a kiss on the top of her head. I said, ‘You do that, sweetheart. It would be good if everyone wanted to help others.’”

“I turned to Carrie’s mother and said, ‘Send me a note care of the Daily Planet in Metropolis. I’d like to help her help others.’ Her mother said that she would. I’d like to encourage her.”

Lois could see just how this chance meeting had affected him and said, “I’d like to meet this little heartbreaker. I want to help her too. I hope her mother sends the note.”

She moved into his arms and gave him a hug and a kiss, lingering, more than a few seconds in the kiss.

Chapter 13 – Carrie

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

On one of their trips to Lois’s home universe she and Clark went to visit her mom. They arrived at her door and Lois knocked.

Ellen Lane came to the door and spotting Lois as soon as the door was open she said, “Well, well, well. Look who it is. My wandering daughter. It has been a few weeks since you visited. Actually, I can understand, newlyweds, you’re in your own world. That’s the way it was with me and your father. Come on in, don’t stand outside the door. Make yourselves comfortable.”

They all moved into the living room and sat. Ellen Lane asked, “Would you like some tea or coffee? Sorry, I don’t have anything stronger, but with my job I have to be ready to go back to the office on a minute’s notice. You know, if we have a major trauma event, I have to be there to coordinate the nursing staff, call in off duty personnel, that kind of thing. I’ll be glad when I’m old enough to retire.”

In a light tone, Lois said, “Don’t worry about beverages, we’re fine. As to your retirement, that won’t be for a long time yet, Mom.”

Ellen replied, “It can’t be soon enough for me.”

With a derisive laugh, Lois replied, “You love your job and you know it. You wouldn’t know what to do with yourself if you retired.”

“I could find things to keep myself busy, knitting, crocheting, cooking ...”

“Like that would ever happen.” Turning to Clark she asked, “Do you want to know what her real passion is?”

“Sure, what is it that Ellen Lane is passionate about?”

“Writing! That’s where I get it from. Dad wanted me to be a doctor, but Mom always encouraged my writing. You can see who won that tug-of-war. She has been working on a manuscript for a book on Nursing Administration. Not the stuff of best sellers, but as a textbook for a nursing school it should top the charts.”

Ellen said, “Yes, well, enough about me, what have the two of you been up to. I’ve seen article after article from the two of you. You finally brought down Lex Luthor, of all people. Who would have thought that he would have been behind crime here in Metropolis? That must have been quite a feather in your cap.”

“That series of stories has been nominated for some awards.”

“Ahhh, more trophies for your cabinet. Will these be yours, his or both of yours?”

Lois laughed, “This will belong to both of us, jointly. We did it together.”

They spent a pleasant hour with Ellen Lane. Although Lois didn’t find an opportunity to tell her about the powers, that was okay. There was no rush.

A couple of days later Clark was going through his mail and he saw a letter addressed to Superman c/o Daily Planet and it was postmarked Chicago. It was on his desk because Superman had made the request for all mail to him be screened by Clark. When he opened it a snapshot dropped out onto his desk. He picked it up and turned it over to look at it and saw the smiling face of a beautiful 6 year old girl with brown eyes and hair. After looking at the picture for a time he opened the letters, there were actually two of them. The first, written in a practiced feminine hand read:

“Dear Superman,

My name is Phoebe Harris. My daughter Carrie was the little

girl you rescued from the fire a few weeks ago. I wanted to take a minute to thank you for what you did for me and my family. Carrie is a special little girl and very precious to her father and me.

In your brief encounter with my daughter you would not have known anything of her background.

It is not apparent, but Carrie suffers from a form of epilepsy. Her seizures can come on very suddenly and can be very violent. Until we got Scrappy they would be totally unexpected. We are very grateful that when you saved Carrie that you saved Scrappy as well. Scrappy is a working or companion dog. You had already left when Scrappy became very agitated and started barking which is the way he alerts us that he has sensed the onset of one of Carrie's seizures. Thanks to Scrappy and his alert we were able to properly care for Carrie and have her protected from injuring herself during the seizure. Normally her seizures are controlled through medication; however, they still do occasionally occur. In this situation, since the fire had destroyed her meds she suffered several seizures before we were able to renew her prescription. Scrappy was able to warn us each time. I don't know what we'd do without that dog.

Her epilepsy is a result of an inoperable brain tumor. Because of it we are not sure just how long Carrie will be with us. So far we have had her with us for six wonderful years.

Because of her affliction we have been homeschooling her. Because of the attention she receives she is already approaching grade level two even though she is just at the age for kindergarten.

Carrie wanted to write you her own letter and I have included it.

Thank you for what you did for my special little girl.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Phoebe Harris"

Clark just sat there re-reading the letter a few times before he picked up the second letter. This one was written in a child's scrawl.

" Mister Superman,

Thank you for saving me and Scrappy from the fire. Scrappy is my special friend and I would miss him. He helps me and helps my mommy and daddy take care of me. He lets them know when something bad is going to happen to me.

He helps me like you help other people.

When I grow up I want to help people too.

Love,
Carrie"

Clark was near tears as he folded both letters and placed them along with the picture in his inside pocket to show to Lois when he joined her in the evening. After doing this, he sat there, thinking about how he could help. He decided that two heads were better than one, and four heads were even better, so he would discuss it with Lois and his parents when he got home.

By the time Lois returned to her desk he had composed himself.

They were visiting with the Kents later that evening. After a dinner prepared by Martha, Clark brought out the letters. "Remember, I told you about the little girl I saved from the fire."

Lois replied, "Let me see, you mean the one you saved while you were 'killing some time' so that Martha could get a good night's sleep?"

Smugly he replied, "Yeah, that would be the one. Well, I received letters from her and her mother today. Before I read them, let me show you this." He pulled out the picture and handed it to Lois.

As soon as Lois saw it she gasped and said, "You're right! She looks like she could be our child. Here Martha, take a look."

Jonathan looked over Martha's shoulder as Martha looked at

the picture.

Martha gushed, "Is this a preview or what? She sure looks like she could be yours. The coloring is perfect and that mouth. It's shaped very much like yours. Her big doe eyes are just like yours too. She's an absolutely beautiful child."

When they had finished Clark said, "Let me read you her letter." He read Carrie's letter first.

When he finished Martha said, "That's so sweet. She wants to help just like Superman. How can we help her do that?"

Lois said, "I have one idea right off the bat. I had been saving for a trip to Tahiti." She smiled as she continued, "Since I won't have nearly the expenses now, I'd like to use some of that money to pay for her schooling."

With a downcast expression, Clark said, "Let me now read her mother's letter."

When he was finished, Lois picked up the picture again and stared at it for a long time while Martha wept silently.

Finally, in a subdued tone, Lois asked, "Is there nothing we can do? Isn't there a doctor we can contact to help?"

"I'm not sure. But, we have access to the resources of multiple universes. If we were able to contact Herb, he might be able to find a doctor in one of the other universes or even the future that could help."

"Let's start with the two we have direct access to. She looks so much like she could be our child ... I just want to hold her ... to somehow make her better. Clark, we have to do whatever we can to save this child."

"I don't know if we can do that. What if, in this universe, she is destined to ... die? We could be changing history."

"So what if we are? Look at her! That could very well be our child! We have to do whatever we can to save her."

"Lois, what if her death was the start of a chain of events that are supposed to have a positive effect in this universe and her survival disrupts that chain? By playing God we could be starting a negative chain or at least preventing a positive one."

"Clark, what happened when you went back to save 'your' Lois in the Congo? Were you able to save her?"

With a look of introspection, Clark replied, "Yes and no. From what Herb said, when I saved her she continued with me in another universe while I remained without her in the universe where she didn't."

"If I recall what you said correctly, the history of your universe wasn't changed. She was meant to die in that universe so she died. No matter what you did, she would have died. Who's to say that if we can save this little girl that it isn't just history playing itself out because it was meant to be?"

Clark asked, "I wish there was some way to be sure."

Martha had stopped sobbing and wiped her tears on a hankie that she had pulled out of her apron pocket as this conversation had been going on. She replied, "There's one way to be sure. Do everything you can to save this sweet child. If you can, it was meant to be."

Happy for the support, Lois spoke up, "Martha's right. We have to do whatever we can to save this child. We need to check in both universes."

Clark had a thoughtful look as he said, "I wonder if her parents would trust me to take Carrie for a little flight. If they will, maybe I could bring her here so that you could meet her."

"Oh, Clark, please, check and see if they will. I need to meet this little girl."

"The address is on the envelope. Tomorrow is a day off for us. In the morning I'll go see."

Superman knocked on a door in the Chicago suburbs. After a few seconds it was answered by Phoebe Harris. She said, "Superman, I wasn't expecting you."

He replied, "Clark Kent saw to it that I received your letters."

She said, “My, where are my manners? Won’t you come in?” She stepped back and opened the door to admit him. As she did she called, “Carrie, there’s someone here to see you.”

Carrie came running in with Scrapy on her heels. She stopped as soon as she saw Superman and shouted, “Mr. Superman! You came to see me?”

Kneeling down so that he was on Carrie’s level he said, “I sure did. I wanted to see how you are doing. Your mommy sent me your letter. I wanted to thank you in person for it.”

“Did you really like it? My mommy helped me with it.”

“It was a very nice letter. I will treasure it. Tell you what; I need to talk to your mommy for a couple of minutes. When I finish, we may have a surprise for you. Could you and Scrapy go back to your room for a minute?”

“Sure, Mr. Superman.” She turned and with Scrapy at her side headed down the hallway.

As soon as she was out of earshot, Mrs. Harris invited Superman to have a seat on the sofa.

Once they were settled, Superman turned to her mother and said, “Your letter was very touching. What has been done to find a cure for Carrie’s condition?”

“We’ve had her to some of the best neurologists and neurosurgeons in Chicago. They tell us that her condition is inoperable and that it is only a matter of time.”

“Mrs. Harris, I and some friends of mine have taken a personal interest in Carrie. I’d like your permission to find the best neurologist and also neurosurgeon in the world to examine her to see if there is anything that can be done.”

“My husband and I couldn’t afford that.”

“Mrs. Harris, it would be my pleasure to pay whatever it would cost.”

“Superman, that is very generous of you. I just don’t know what to say.”

“Please allow me to suggest the appropriate answer, yes.”

“Well, yes, yes, thank you, yes, you can help Carrie.”

“Now, before I start on that project, would you give me permission to take Carrie to meet some friends of mine? I promise to bring her back safe and sound after a short visit.”

“Who would that be?”

“Do you read the Daily Planet?”

“Of course.”

“Okay then, the reporting team of Lane and Kent. Clark Kent brought your letter to me. Lois Lane is his wife. They have asked if they could meet Carrie.”

“Where are they?”

“In Kansas visiting with his parents. It will take me about two minutes to fly there with Carrie. Can I take Scrapy too?”

“Only two minutes? Wow, uh, of course you can take Scrapy. She doesn’t go anywhere without him. Let me call her. Does she need a coat or anything?”

“That shouldn’t be necessary, my aura will protect her.”

Mystified about what he was saying, but accepting it Mrs. Harris called, “Carrie!”

A few seconds later Carrie and Scrapy came around the corner into the living room. Phoebe said, “Superman has asked if he could take you to meet some friends of his. Do you want to go?”

“Is it okay?”

“Yes, Carrie, it’s okay. Superman is somebody that you can trust. He wants to help you.”

“I want to help people too when I grow up. I’d like to meet your friends. Can Scrapy go with us?”

Superman knelt down in front of Carrie and said, “I wouldn’t even think of leaving Scrapy behind. He’s your friend and protector.” Standing up and taking Carrie’s hand, Superman led her to the front door, Scrapy following at her heels. Scrapy was yapping, expressing his concern at this unusual happening. At a

gesture from Carrie he settled down and simply followed. Once they were outside, Superman stooped and picked up Carrie and Scrapy. The last time Scrapy had been confused by the smoke and frightened by the fire when Superman picked him up. This time he yelped in concern, but Carrie spoke to him and hearing her voice he settled.

With a nod to Phoebe, Superman said, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of her and I’ll have her back before you even know that she’s been gone.” With that he took to the air.

This time Carrie wasn’t frightened by the fire and didn’t bury her head in his chest, but looked around inquisitively uttering the occasional “Ooooo,” and “Wow!”

A few minutes later they were landing in the yard of the Kent farm. As soon as they were on the ground, Superman put both of his passengers on their feet. Scrapy started sniffing around; however he never strayed far from Carrie’s side.

Superman led Carrie up onto the porch and knocked on the door. When the door was answered Martha stood in the opening. Superman said, “Carrie, I’d like to introduce you to Mrs. Kent. She’s a friend of mine. I’d like you to go on in for a few minutes. I have something I need to do. I’ll be back in just a few minutes.”

Carrie looked up and said, “If you say so, Mr. Superman. I trust you.”

Kneeling down Superman put his hands on Carrie’s shoulders and said, “That means a lot to me Carrie. You can trust everyone you meet here the same way. They all want the best for you.”

Martha held out her hand to Carrie and said, “Why don’t you call me Miss Martha? Come on in. I have some more people for you to meet.”

Carrie placed her hand in Martha’s and entered the house, Scrapy on her heels. Scrapy took his time sniffing Martha before accepting her and following.

The first person she saw was Jonathan. He was in his favorite chair and seeing Carrie he held out his hands to her. Carrie looked up at Martha with a questioning glance. Martha said, “It’s just fine. He’s my husband. Go on over and say hello to Mr. Jonathan. I think you’ll like him.”

Carrie walked over to Jonathan and he patted his lap, asking her if she wanted to sit there. Scrapy preceded her and sniffed around Jonathan. Apparently he approved of him because as Carrie climbed up Scrapy curled up at his feet.

As Carrie climbed up in his lap Jonathan said, “You know what? I haven’t had someone this small sit on my lap since my little boy.”

Carrie brightened up and asked, “You have a little boy? Can I meet him?”

Jonathan laughed and said, “He’ll be down in a minute, but he’s not so little anymore. In fact he’s all grown up and has a wife. He and his wife are getting ready to have a baby, so it won’t be too long before I’ll have another little one sitting here again, but until they do, anytime you visit, you can sit here, okay?”

Carrie nestled herself into his lap and leaned against his ample stomach. She said, “This is comfortable.” She was jiggled as Jonathan laughed at her comment.

Just then Lois came downstairs and Carrie’s looked closely at this pretty lady.

Lois came over and knelt in front of Carrie giving her a very close appraisal. As Lois was doing this Scrapy was checking Lois out. Apparently he was satisfied because shortly he lay back down.

Seeing both of them together, Martha said, “He was right. She looks like she could be a younger you or your daughter.”

Clark then came downstairs. Scrapy went over and sniffed once at Clark and then trotted over and lay down next to the chair that held his mistress.

Lois held out her hand and said, “Hi Carrie, I’m Lois Lane, you can call me Miss Lois,” looking back over her shoulder she

indicated Clark and finished, “and this is my husband, Clark Kent, Mr. Clark.”

Carrie surprised everyone when she asked, “You’re married to Mr. Superman?”

To say that Lois was startled would be understatement and Clark was shocked.

Carrie continued, “Why did you change clothes, Mr. Superman?”

“Uh, Carrie, why do you think I’m Superman?”

“Scrappy already knew you. You have to be Mr. Superman.”

Clark knelt down and ruffled Scrappy behind his ears and petted him, before he finally said, “Dogs aren’t fooled as easily as people. They have a sixth sense and a very keen sense of smell.” He looked at Carrie and said, “Carrie, do you know what a secret is?”

“Yes, that’s where you know something, but you can’t tell anyone else.”

“Yes, Carrie, that’s what a secret is. It is very important that the fact that I’m Superman be kept a secret. Can you do that?”

“Can I tell my mommy?”

“I don’t like to ask you to keep anything from your mommy, but this is very important. Why don’t we do it this way, if you mommy asks you if you know what my real name is you can tell her, but only if she asks. Is that okay?”

“Okay, only if she asks.”

Chapter 14 – An Interesting Theory

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name –

Alt2

%%%

Clark turned to Lois and said, “Why don’t you talk to Carrie while I make a couple of calls?”

Lois said, “Carrie, could I hold you for a while?”

Carrie looked apologetically at Jonathan and he said, “That’s okay, sweetheart. You go with Lois.”

Lois picked Carrie up. When she did, Carrie said, “You’re just like Mr. Superman. Can you do everything he can do?”

Shaken by this, Lois asked, “How do you know that?”

“The way you picked me up. I’m a big girl now and you picked me up just like Mr. Superman did. Can you fly too?”

Lois laughed, “Yes, Carrie, everything Superman can do I can do.”

“Do you have a special suit too?”

“Yes, Carrie, I have a special suit too. You know, you are a very smart little girl. You are just like me when I was your age.”

“Do you help people the way Mr. Superman does?”

“Yes, I’m Superwoman. I’m taking some time off because I’m getting ready to have a baby. Superman and I want to help you. We know that you have a special kind of sickness and we are going to do everything we can to help you get well.”

In the kitchen Clark placed a call to the Planet. Finally he got the one he was after. He heard, “Daily Planet, James Olsen.”

Clark was taken aback for a second trying to sort the universes out. Finally he asked, “James Olsen? What happened to Jimmy?”

Jimmy started to laugh, “James Olsen sounds more ... professional. Jimmy sounds too much like a kid when I answer the phone that way.”

Clark laughed and said, “There for a second I thought I was talking to the owner of the Planet.”

Jimmy laughed and said, “I wish! Whatcha need CK?”

“I have an unusual request this time.”

“Since when are any of your requests usual?”

“Okay, you’ve got me there, but this one is more unusual than

usual. I need you to research neurosurgeons, those that specialize in inoperable tumors.”

“But, if they are called inoperable, how can there be a surgeon that specializes in operating on them?”

Clark chuckled and said, “I told you this would be more unusual than usual.”

Jimmy replied, “You sure weren’t kidding. Okay, I’ll see if there is a surgeon that specializes in operating on inoperable tumors. Since I’m looking for a neurosurgeon, I guess these are brain tumors.”

“You’ve got it, Jimmy. Listen, I’ll call back later to see if you’ve had any luck. Thanks a lot, this actually is more important than you can imagine.”

Jimmy had been starting to get worried. Lois was out of the office and word was that she would be out for a while. He had to ask, “CK, is everything okay, I mean, with Lois? This search isn’t because she’s ... sick, is it?”

Clark put on a serious tone as he replied, “No, Jimmy, this isn’t because of Lois. I’m helping Superman. I forwarded a letter to him. Turns out it was about a little girl he had rescued from a fire. She has a brain tumor and he wants to help her.”

Clark could hear the loud sigh of relief as Jimmy relaxed and said, “Wow, that’s a relief, I mean, that it isn’t Lois. It’s a shame about the kid. I’ll see what I can find.”

“Thanks, Jimmy. I’ll call back.”

Clark returned to the living room and said, “I’ve got Jimmy doing a search. I think I need to get Lucy doing the same search.”

Lois said, “You go ahead. Carrie and I are getting to know each other. We’ll be fine.”

Clark pulled out the TaDT and triggered the device. Before he stepped through he said, “I’ll be back in five minutes.”

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –

Alt 1

%%%

Clark stepped through the portal into the living room of the Kent farm. Of course this one had no senior Kents or a Lois currently. He felt a small sense of loss because she was not by his side, but the knowledge that she was just a button push away was comforting.

He spun into his Suit and took off for Metropolis. After landing on the roof of the Planet he spun into his work clothes and took the stairs down to the bullpen.

Exiting the door he looked over at Lucy’s desk, but it was empty so he listened for her heartbeat. He knew it almost as well as Lois’s and heard it close by. Looking around he spotted her in the Editor’s office with a stack of printouts in her hands.

He walked over to the door to the office and knocked. James signaled that he should come in. Opening the door, Clark said, “I need some help. Can I steal Lucy from you for an assignment?”

“No need to ask. She is helping you full time anyhow. She was just doing Ken a favor and dropping off this data.” James accepted the printouts from Lucy and said, “Thanks.”

Lucy walked out of the office with Clark and asked, “What’ch need, brother-in-law?”

“I have a search that will require your unique talents.”

“Ah, just what I like, a challenge! What or who is it?”

“I need you to find a doctor for me.”

“For you? What kind of doctor would that be? I mean, you’re ... Superman.”

“Right, it’s not for me.”

“Lois!?!? Wait a minute; it can’t be Lois then either, right?”

“Right, not Lois either. We just met a little girl that needs our help. I need you to find me a doctor, a neurosurgeon, who specializes in operating on inoperable brain tumors. Think you

can do it?"

"Wait a minute; you want me to find a doctor who operates on inoperable brain tumors. Aren't those conditions mutually exclusive?"

"Not necessarily. Something declared inoperable by one doctor might just be seen as a challenge to another doctor, at least that's what we are hoping."

"Okay, I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks, Lucy. I'll check back later."

Clark left the bullpen and returned to the roof. After spinning into the Suit he headed for Smallville. They really hadn't decided to do it this way; it had just happened over time that they always used the farm house when they moved between the universes.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Clark stepped through the portal. Martha was just bringing in a tray of lemonade and a dish of homemade chocolate chip cookies. She said, "I poured a glass for you while I was at it. If you don't want it, I can always put it back."

He knew she was teasing and played along as he replied, "You know me better than that. I love your lemonade."

Lois spoke up, "Clark, we are really slipping. When a six year old can figure out our secret we have a real problem."

Clark sputtered, "Was it the fact that I'm Superman?"

"No, she figured it out separately."

Clark just looked at Carrie and said, "She is more like you than just in looks. She's very smart."

"She just may be smarter than I was. It's scary."

"All the more reason to help her. When we finish the lemonade and cookies I'll check back with Jimmy and see if he has anything."

Clark addressed Carrie, "Well, Carrie, do you like my wife?"

Carrie snuggled up against Lois and said, "Yes, she's nice."

Lois put her arm around Carrie's shoulder and pulled her into a hug.

Clark had a sudden inspiration and said, "Carrie, can you sit real still for a minute?"

She replied, "Sure. I can sit real still. Watch me."

She sat up and pretended that she was a statue.

Clark used his x-ray vision to examine her head. He combined it with his microscopic vision and performed a minute examination of her brain. He found the tumor and could see why the doctor had declared it to be inoperable. Because of its location it would have to be approached from an odd angle.

When he had finished his exam he said, "That was very good, Carrie. Thank you." He sent, "I got a good look at the tumor. I wonder if we could use our x-ray vision to destroy it. I have a theory, but I will need to talk it over with a doctor first." Aloud he said, "I think I'll call Jimmy." He got up and moved to the kitchen.

"Daily Planet, James Olsen."

"Jimmy, Clark. Do you have anything for me?"

"Sure CK, either it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be or I'm just that good. There's a Doctor Ferguson in Philadelphia that takes special, hopeless cases. He's had surprising success with cases that other doctors have called inoperable, but he has a waiting list a mile long."

"Thanks Jimmy, maybe Superman can run interference for me. What's his number?" Clark wrote it down as Jimmy dictated. "Thanks Jimmy, if I need any more, I'll get back to you." He hung up the phone.

He went back into the living room and told Lois what Jimmy

had gotten. She said, "Okay, it's a start." Silently she sent, "What's your theory about our x-ray vision?"

"Let's talk to the doctor first."

"Can't you give me a hint?"

"Let's go outside." Carrie, would you like to sit in Mr. Jonathan's lap again?"

Carrie replied, "Sure! He's soft."

This elicited a laugh from all of them.

Jonathan held out his arms, Carrie scampered over to him and he lifted her onto his lap where she snuggled in.

Lois and Clark went out the front door onto the porch. Once they were seated in chairs Clark began to explain his idea. When he finished she said, "That just might work. If the tumor can't be gotten to otherwise, we could try it."

"It would have to be done under a doctor's supervision, in this universe, where Superwoman is known to exist. We'd have to hide your condition somehow."

"I really haven't started to show that much and it's easily hidden. If we go into a hospital to do this we could wear scrubs and that would hide it." Lois mused, "I wonder if Lucy had as easy a time in the other universe?"

"Let me go check." He pulled out the TaDT and triggered it, stepping through into the other universe.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

Landing on the roof of the Daily Planet shortly after leaving Kansas, Clark spun into his work clothes and took the stairs down to the bullpen. Spotting Lucy as soon as he exited the stairwell he moved to her desk. "Have any luck on that search?"

"As a matter of fact, next time give me a harder puzzle to solve. In Philadelphia there's a doctor that specializes in hopeless, inoperable cases. His name is Nelson, Doctor Nelson."

This was a surprise for Clark. He had totally expected the parallels between the universes to hold, but in this case they hadn't. He asked, "Do you have contact information?"

The number she gave him was the same as the one he had gotten from Jimmy in the other universe. A theory formed and he decided to put it to the test.

He moved over to his desk and called the number. When the phone was answered he heard, "Nelson and Ferguson, Neurology Associates. How may I direct your call?"

"My name is Clark Kent. I'd ..."

He was interrupted by a gasp and the receptionist interrupted, "Aren't you Superman?"

In a humble tone he replied, "Why, yes, yes, I am."

"How can I help you, Mr. Superman?"

"Please, my name is Clark Kent. You can call me Clark."

Her tone became one of a sultry intimacy, "How can I help you, Clark?" She stressed his name and said it in a honeyed tone of voice. This proved that his and Lois's efforts to keep their marriage secret were being effective.

Thinking that her infatuation with Superman couldn't hurt his case, he replied, "I'd really appreciate it if I could speak with either Doctor Nelson or Doctor Ferguson."

"If you'll just hold on a moment, I'll see if Doctor Nelson is free."

Suddenly Kenny G was in his ear. After a short hold he heard, "This is Doctor Nelson. Am I speaking with Superman?"

"Yes, Doctor, yes you are."

"How can I help you, Superman?"

"Doctor Nelson, the other day I rescued a little girl from a high-rise fire. When I followed up on the rescue I was informed that she suffers from an inoperable brain tumor. I understand that

you and your associate specialize in those kinds of cases.”

“Your information is correct. Do you have her chart handy?”

“No, Doctor, however, I did just perform an x-ray microscopic scan of her brain. I should be able to draw it accurately and if you have an anatomical model I could show you exactly where it is located.”

“I have some time before my next appointment. Could you come in now and show me?”

“I’ll be there in less than five minutes. Thank you, Doctor, for seeing me so quickly.”

“I’ll let Bernice know you are coming. She’ll see you to the office.”

Once in the office Clark made a sketch of the appearance of the tumor and on a plastic model of the brain indicated its location.

Doctor Nelson asked, “Do you mind if I bring in Doctor Ferguson?”

“Not at all. Go right ahead.”

The neurologist depressed a switch on an intercom and said, “Bill, do you have a minute? I’d like you to join in on this consultation.”

“Be right there, Ben.”

When Doctor Ferguson entered, Doctor Nelson introduced him, “Superman, uh, Clark Kent, this is Doctor Bill Ferguson.” Turning to Dr. Ferguson he said, “Bill, Clark has brought us quite a problem.” Dr. Nelson proceeded to explain the situation and showed him the drawings as they conferred.

The two doctors discussed the information and after thoroughly digesting the information turned to Clark.

Doctor Nelson gave the answer they had come up with. “The type and location of this tumor, indeed makes it inoperable. In order to reach it we would have to go through critical structures.”

“What about the possibility of radiation?”

“For a tumor of this size, the amount of radiation needed would cause the death of a six year old child.”

“What if non-ionizing radiation were used?”

“What kind of radiation is non-ionizing?”

“My x-ray vision. I believe that it is non-ionizing. Can it be tested?”

“A simple question – does it fog photographic film?”

“Yes, but only if I exert myself. Normally, it doesn’t.”

The two doctors looked at one another and then Doctor Ferguson asked, “How finely can you focus your x-ray vision?”

“When I combine it with my microscopic vision I can make out structures at or below the cellular level.”

Doctor Ferguson looked at Doctor Nelson and said, “It might just be possible.” Turning back he asked, “Would it necessitate burning a complete path, from the outside to the tumor, like a laser cut?”

“If I applied that much power, it probably would.”

Nelson said, “Less power would not accomplish the task.”

Clark was quiet for a time and then asked, “What if it were possible to use two beams, from opposite sides, each at a lower power, which at the point of intersection have the requisite power when combined?”

The doctors mulled this over for a few seconds.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the intercom, “Doctor Nelson, your next appointment is here.”

He reached across, hit a switch and said, “Tell Mr. Hendrix that I’ll be a few more minutes and please, ask him to wait.”

“Very good, doctor.” She clicked off.

“That might work, but the problem, Superman, is how can you be in two places at the same time?”

“Would that work?”

“If at the point of intersection the radiation intensity were sufficient to kill the tumor tissue without harming the

surrounding structures, it just might work.”

“Thank you, Doctor, I think you have provided the answer I was looking for.” Superman stood and asked, “How much do I owe you?”

Doctor Nelson replied, “I personally consider this time well spent. This has been a very interesting exercise. As a result you have given me some ideas for a radical new approach to dealing with this type of tumor. I need to work with some radiologists and see if we can’t come up with a new device to do just what you have proposed. Two beams of lower level radiation which when applied from opposite directions can kill a tumor without injuring the patient because they only have the combined power to kill the tissue at the point of intersection. Well, Bill, it looks like we have some research ahead of us. We need to approach the NIH to see about a research grant.”

“A device like that could net us a Nobel!”

As the doctors were discussing all of the possibilities, Superman exited and flew back to Smallville.

Chapter 15 – Operation

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

After Clark returned to Lois’s home universe he joined her, Carrie and the Kents in the living room. He said, “Well, that was a profitable trip. My theory was taken very seriously by a pair of neurologists; in fact they were discussing a Nobel Prize winning medical device that they plan to invent. We are going to need to work with a ‘local’ doctor, you know, one that knows about Superwoman, but I think we can do this.”

Lois looked down at Carrie who had moved over next to her on the couch again and said, “I hope so.” She looked up at Clark and continued, “Now that I’ve gotten to know Carrie, I really ... I really want to help her. She reminds me so much of myself ...”

“I understand. Me too. Much as I hate to do this, I think I need to take Carrie home to her mom so that she doesn’t start to think I have kidnapped her little girl.” Looking down at Carrie, Clark asked, “Well, Carrie, are you ready to go home?”

She looked up with her eyes wide and asked, “Can I come back and visit again?”

Clark asked, “Would you like that?”

“Oh, I’d like that very much!”

“If your mom says it’s okay, then yes, you can. It has to be up to your mom.”

“I’m gonna ask her as soon as I get back.” Carrie hopped down off of the couch and immediately Scrappy was on his feet and at her side. She put her hand on his head and patted him. She looked at him and asked, “Do you want to come back here to visit?”

Almost as if the dog understood just what she was saying, he yipped in reply.

They all laughed at this and Clark said, “Well, I guess that settles it. Scrappy approves of us.”

Clark moved to a clear area of the floor and started to spin. Carrie was watching, her eyes growing wide as the colors of the Suit began to appear.

She said, “Wow!”

Clark stopped and now, Superman stepped over to her and asked, “Ready to go home?”

Still in awe at his transformation all she could do was nod.

He took her hand and with Scrappy following he took her outside. The whole family followed and after he had picked her and Scrappy up, Lois came over and gave Carrie a kiss on the cheek and said, “I hope your mom lets you visit us often.”

Carrie said, "I hope so too. Bye!" She waved to the Kents and Superman took to the air.

Two minutes later Superman was landing and putting Scrappy down on his feet. The dog scampered around Superman's feet as he carried Carrie into the house.

Carrie's mom welcomed them. "Well, Carrie, did you have a good time?"

"Oh, yes, Mom. The best time ever. I met Mr. Superman's friends and they're awfully nice. Can I go visit with them again? Please?"

"Well, if you liked them that much, sure, you can visit with them again. Right now, it's time for your medicine. It's over there on that saucer."

Obediently Carrie went over and took her pill. Phoebe watched as she did and then said, "Why don't you go play for a bit, then we can go over some of your lessons."

"Okay, Mom. Thanks, Mr. Superman. I really had a good time."

"You're welcome, Carrie. I'll be seeing you again soon."

Carrie scampered off, Scrappy at her heels.

Superman said, "Mrs. Harris, while Carrie visited with my friends the Kents, I spoke with some doctors. I don't want to get your hopes up, but there might just be a chance that we can help Carrie."

The play of emotions across her face was very evident. There was fear, and hope in various degrees. She said, cautiously, "Are you sure?"

"Mrs. Harris, I will say that this has never been tried before. When I proposed my idea to the doctors they became very excited at the possibilities. It will take some time and practice because Superwoman will be helping me. We will be working in concert to burn out the tumor without damaging the surrounding tissue. I am cautiously optimistic of success."

"You sound just like all of the doctors we've dealt with. Please be honest with me. Can you help her?"

"I think we can and we sure are going to try. One of the people she visited with was Superwoman and she wants to help Carrie just as much as I do. Between the two of us, there isn't much we can't do and we really want to do this."

"I believe you. Anything you need us to do just let me know. Her father and I are willing to do anything for Carrie. She's our only child and ... the only child we can have. Something happened in the delivery and ... I can't have any more children, so you see, she means everything to us. She's all we have. We were each only children and our parents have all passed on."

Superman contacted Doctor Bill Ferguson in this universe. It turned out that he had been in practice with Doctor Nelson, but that worthy had died in an auto accident the previous year. Superman outlined Carrie's case the same way he had in the other universe. The doctor was very enthusiastic about what was proposed and he agreed to oversee the case.

In association with a medical school, Doctor Ferguson arranged for cadavers with brain lesions for Superman and Superwoman to practice on.

Many days and hours were spent practicing before the doctor declared that they were ready to attempt the procedure.

Once they started preparing for the surgery Lois and Clark flew to Chicago to visit with the Harris family.

Clark knocked on the door. When Phoebe answered it he introduced them, "Mrs. Harris?"

"Why, yes. I'm Mrs. Harris."

"Good, we got the right address. Superman gave us this address. I'm Clark Kent and this is my wife Lois. We are friends of Carrie's."

"Oh yes, won't you come in." As they moved inside and Phoebe closed the door she continued, "Carrie has spoken of you

often. She really enjoys the time she spends with you and your family."

Lois said, "We have enjoyed our time with Carrie as well. We were so moved by your letter that we just had to meet her. She's a special little girl. We've really grown to love her."

Phoebe was looking very closely at Lois and finally said, "You know, Carrie looks like she could be your daughter, more than mine." The reason for this statement was obvious. Carrie's coloring was dark brunette while Phoebe was a redhead.

Lois sheepishly admitted, "Yeah, we had noticed the resemblance too. She looks just like me in my old pictures."

Phoebe asked, "Won't you come in and sit down?"

They all moved into the living room and sat. Warren came out of his study as they were getting settled and Phoebe performed the introductions.

Lois said, "Superman and Superwoman have been keeping us informed of the preparations for the surgery. We wanted you to know that we are here to support you also."

"That is comforting. We have no extended family. It's just the three of us. Carrie has spoken of your family a lot. Your parents, Mr. Kent, are almost like the grandparents she has never had."

Clark gently said, "Please, it's Clark and Lois. She does seem to have taken to my parents. My father is like a big teddy bear and he loves kids; possibly because my parents couldn't have any of their own. I was adopted."

Phoebe replied in a saddened tone, "Oh, Mr. Kent, uh, Clark, that's a shame."

Clark was smiling as he replied, "Actually, it isn't. I couldn't have wished for a better set of parents."

Warren asked, "Has Superman told you what they are going to try?"

Lois answered, "He and Superwoman have kept us informed every step of the way. The reason we are here is to make the arrangements for your trip to Philadelphia. Doctor William Ferguson, the neurologist that will be overseeing the surgery, has admitting privileges there so that is where the surgery will take place. Superman and Superwoman have volunteered to fly you to the city and put you up in a hotel next to the hospital. Carrie will need to be there the day before the surgery is scheduled."

Clark added, "Lois and I are making those arrangements."

Phoebe replied, "Clark, Lois, I don't know how to thank you."

Lois said, "I can suggest one way. Let us remain a part of Carrie's life. She's a special little girl and we love her to pieces."

Phoebe said, "I can see that. Wait here a minute." Phoebe got up and moved to Carrie's room. They heard, "Carrie, dear, there's someone here to see you, sweetheart."

They heard the sleepy voice of a child awakened from a nap, "Somebody to see me?"

"Come on into the living room and see who it is."

They heard Phoebe, Carrie and Scrappy come down the hall. As soon as she rounded the corner she spotted Lois and Clark, she shouted, "Miss Lois" and threw herself into Lois's arms.

This was not missed by Phoebe or Warren and Phoebe started to smile a gentle smile.

Finally, the big day arrived. Superman and Superwoman walked into the hospital in scrubs so that they would attract a little less attention and blend in at least somewhat. The only incongruous note was their masks and that only attracted attention until they donned the bonnet and surgical mask required in the operating room when it became less noticeable. Even though this was going to be a closed, non-surgical procedure, protocols needed to be followed.

Warren and Phoebe Harris were there to greet them when they arrived. Even though they trusted Superwoman and Superman they were still worried for their little girl and looked every inch

the nervous parents.

Phoebe said, “I can’t believe that the day has finally arrived. Carrie is so excited she hardly slept a wink last night. I stayed in the room with her and we talked well into the night.” She turned her attention to Superwoman and said, “Carrie has talked about you a lot. She really likes, no, that’s not a strong enough word, she really loves you. Next to me I think she loves you the most. You’d think that I’d be jealous, but I’m not. I’m happy that she someone like you showing an interest in her welfare. You’ve given us hope ... hope that we’ll have her longer. That we’ll actually see her grow into a young lady. That I’ll be able to plan her wedding with her. That her life won’t be cut short, while still a child.”

She looked over at her husband. At his nod she continued, “Warren will be able to walk her down the aisle in her wedding. That we won’t have to bury our baby.” By this time Phoebe was crying unashamedly.

Lois took the lead and said, “Mrs. Harris, we are very happy that we can do this for you and for Carrie. As we have come to know her better, we have come to see just how special she is. She has become very dear to us as well.”

Warren Harris said, “I want to add my thanks. I know that you help people all of the time, but this is personal. This is our child you are helping. We read almost every day how the two of you help people all over the globe, but this really brings it home. You will have our undying gratitude, no matter the outcome. Just the fact that you are going to try, that’s good enough for me.”

Superman put his hand on Warren’s shoulder and in a determined voice said, “We don’t intend to just try. We intend to succeed. We will do everything within our power to secure a positive outcome. Now, I think it is time for us to move to the OR. They will be bringing Carrie in shortly.”

Warren reached for Superman’s hand and they shook while Phoebe put her arms around Superwoman in a hug and while her lips were near her ear, she whispered, “Thank you.”

Superwoman pulled back slightly, looked directly in Phoebe’s face and quietly said, “We will do everything we can to return her to you, healthy.”

Carrie had been wheeled into the surgical suite on a gurney and transferred to the table. The support staff hooked up all of the monitors and the anesthesiologist started an IV drip to which would be added the sedative. Before he started it Superman spoke to Carrie, “Carrie, do you trust us?”

Carrie was a little frightened with all of this equipment, but she gave Superman her attention and when he asked her that question she nodded and said, “I trust you Mr. Superman. You’d never hurt me. You just want to help me.”

“That’s right Carrie. I only want to help you and when we finish you should be all better. You’re going to take a nap and when you wake up, your mommy, daddy and the Kents will be there with you. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Superman nodded and the anesthesiologist started the sedative. Within seconds Carrie was asleep.

Superman and Superwoman positioned themselves on opposite sides of the bed. They each sat on a stool near one of Carrie’s shoulders which brought them down to the level of the operating table so that they were looking directly at Carrie’s head and level with it. They began the procedure that they had practiced so much. Superwoman applied her x-ray vision at a predetermined intensity in a broad field striving to keep it planar, up and down and as thin as a sheet of paper. Superman focused his x-ray vision duplexed on his microscopic vision. Then pinpointing groups of cells of the tumor, he raised the strength of the x-ray vision and literally saw the cells die. Lois and Clark were in constant mental communication. He directed her

movement while he attacked the cells. At a speed somewhat lower than superspeed, he exercised caution, moving from group to group. The procedure took several hours of effort. Carrie’s vital signs did not vary from the norm at any time, which was a good sign.

When they finished they both felt drained with the energy expenditure and the effort of exercising that level of caution. When they stood up from the stools, Doctor Ferguson asked, “How did it go?”

Superman, as the main operator, answered, “I believe that we have been successful. We finished a few minutes ago. Superwoman turned off her x-ray vision and I continued, performing a post-op check. I didn’t find any other cancerous tissue anywhere in her brain and I could see macrophages starting to scavenge the killed tissue. That process will take some time.”

Doctor Ferguson said, “I’ll have her sent to post-op recovery.”

“Can her parents and friends join her there?”

“That isn’t normal procedure.”

“Please make an exception in this case.”

“Okay, they can join her in half an hour. I think they are in the waiting room. At the appropriate time I’ll get them.”

“Thank you, doctor, and thank you for your assistance.”

“Don’t mention it. This has given me a new line of research into how to cure lesions of this type.”

“If you don’t mind, Superman and I will be going now.”

After exiting as Superman and Superwoman they reentered as Lois and Clark and found Phoebe and Warren in the waiting room. As soon as they walked in, Phoebe threw her arms around Lois and said, “I’m glad you’re here. I wonder how much longer it’s going to take.”

Just then Doctor Ferguson came in through the door. He spotted the group and walked over. “Carrie has been transferred to recovery. You’ll be able to join her in just a few minutes.”

Phoebe, with trepidation in her voice asked, “How did it go, doctor?”

“Superman told me that it was a complete success.”

Phoebe let out a small gasp and said, “Thank God.”

When Carrie woke up there were four people standing around her bed. On one side were her mother and father. On the other were Lois and Clark.

Phoebe said, “Welcome back kiddo. Did you have a nice nap?”

Carrie replied, “Yes, but I don’t feel any different.”

Clark said, “Carrie, the only difference will be that you won’t be having any more of those spells you used to get. They aren’t going to bother you anymore. Won’t that be nice?”

“Can I still keep Scrappy?”

Phoebe replied, “Scrappy is yours dear. He wouldn’t want to go with anyone else now.”

Her relief at this statement was palpable. All of the worry left her and she smiled for the first time.

From that time on, hardly two weeks went by that Superman didn’t pick Carrie up for a visit with the Kents.

Chapter 16 — Australia

After having spent some time in Alt 2 with the Kents and Carrie Lois and Clark decided that they needed to return to Alt 1 to pursue their much delayed investigation into Luckabee, therefore as they were standing in the living room of the Kent farm house Clark pulled out the TaDT and triggered the device. As they prepared to step through, he said, “See you guys in about five minutes.” He took Lois’s hand and they stepped through.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation —
Alt 1

%%%

As Clark looked at the bags he said with a slight chuckle, to Lois, “You know, these five minute absences seem to get longer and longer. I’m glad it didn’t take any longer than it did though. If we had stayed any longer you’d be showing more than you should. Well, are you ready to get back to work on this?” Before Clark packed up the bags for the trip, since it would be dark when they arrived, they spun into their uniforms and took off for Australia. They knew that Luckabee was from the Sydney area so they headed for New South Wales, landing after dark in an alley. They spun back into their regular clothes and looked for their hotel. After registering they grabbed a few hours of rest before starting their investigation. When they got up they looked out and were enthralled by the view. Their room was on the west side and overlooked Lake Northam in Victoria Park.

After a leisurely breakfast they headed out for the central police station. Clark was in his usual GQ style business suit while Lois had decided on a more casual look. She had on a smartly tailored dark green pant suit with a jacket.

Lois asked, “While we’re here we might as well check on that valet of his. What was his name?”

“Smythe, John Smythe.”

“Smith? John Smith? How original. That has GOT to be an alias.”

“You could be right, but that is going to be almost impossible to follow up on. There could be hundreds of Smythes, J. Smythes in the phone book.” He completed his thought silently, “It would tax our combined superpowers and take longer than we have to follow up on all of them.”

Before they went to the Central Police Station however, they spent a couple of partially successful hours in a library checking the local phone exchange directories looking for Leslie Luckabee and John Smythe. For Luckabee the address they found was on Nicholson St. over towards Saint Leonard’s. There was no question but that this was their target. He was the only Luckabee in the book. Lois checked it against the address she had written down in her ever present notebook and it matched. She put a check by it and put it back in her case.

The search for Smythe was frustrating. There were literally thousands in the phone books. They would have to pursue getting his information in another way.

Leaving the library, they headed for Charles Street and the central police headquarters. Once there they went to the records department and filled out the form which, through the Australian Freedom of Information Act, would get the information that they needed. They were told that it would take several hours to fulfill the request so, since it was nearly lunchtime, they headed out to grab a meal.

Clark had done some side research and after hailing a taxi he gave the address, “447 Oxford Street, Paddington.”

When he did, the taxi driver looked back at his companion and smiled. “Right, mate! Taking the missus for a treat? I learnt about that place as soon as it opened and the old lady leant on me until I took her.”

Lois looked at Clark and asked, “What does he mean?”

“Oh, just a little surprise,” and turning to the driver, Clark said, “Take the scenic route, please. We’d like to see some of the city on the way.”

“Right you are, mate. You’ve got yourself the right taxi driver.” He pulled out from the curb and headed out giving the names of the sights as he drove. Eventually they arrived and Lois got her first hint as to what the surprise was. When they pulled up in front she saw the sign which read, “Max Brenner Chocolate Bar”. Stepping out of the car she got a whiff of chocolate and she

said, “Mmmmm, Clark!” She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him soundly before they moved inside, following the tantalizing aroma of chocolate.

When they were seated he ordered the chocolate and banana pancakes with a Sukao. When they were delivered Lois took a bite of the pancakes and just closed her eyes in rapture it was so good, but the best was yet to come. The Sukao was delivered. It was a small metal bowl over a spirit lamp which heated it. Into the bowl went dark chocolate shavings and a little milk. As the flame heated the mixture the chocolate started to melt and mix with the milk. The waiter handed Lois a metal straw/spoon which she used to consume this delectable creamy concoction. From start to finish the meal was an entire delight to the palate. Lois felt like she had died and gone to heaven ... chocolate heaven.

Looking at him over the bowl of her Sukao she had a sultry expression as she sent to him, “I just can’t wait until I have you back in the hotel room so that I can express my appreciation, appropriately.” Aloud she said, “Why don’t we go by that address while we wait for the records we asked for?”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll get the bill and we can leave.” He sent, “I look forward to getting you alone.”

They grabbed a cab and gave the driver the address. When they arrived, what they found certainly was not the residence of a multi-millionaire. It was a rather small flat in a decent, but not expensive area.

Lois said, “Well, this has to be it. It was the only Luckabee in the book. I wonder how he managed to move from here to the penthouse of the Plaza.”

“Let’s hope that the information we requested will help. Now that we have a firm address we should be able to backtrack and check local bank records, that kind of thing.”

“You’re probably right. I wonder, what about his passport? That should short-cut the search for Smythe some.”

“Let’s head back and see if they have our info and file another freedom of information request.” He gave the driver a new destination, “Driver, Charles Street, Central Police Station.”

“Right, mate.”

They picked up a packet of material on Luckabee and placed the request for the data on Smythe.

That evening was not spent in checking the information they had received on Luckabee. Lois was showing her appreciation for the lunch that she had enjoyed so much. They were careful to make sure that they were several feet above the bed so as not to disturb their neighbors.

When they returned to the room after dinner Lois put down her bag and turning to Clark with a wanton look, started slowly unbuttoning her jacket. Once it was open she dropped it across a chair and started on the buttons of her blouse. Slowly it parted. As more and more flesh was revealed her cleavage came into view. Nestled in between her breasts was her locket. When she opened the last button of her blouse she slowly pulled it open revealing her lacy bra. Through the bra her breasts were clearly visible. Clark was mesmerized. Smiling and in a sultry tone she said, “I like it when you look at me that way. That’s why I always wear these lacy bras, just so you can see how you affect me. You can see just how aroused I am.”

She continued her slow striptease by loosening the button on her pants and with a saucy wiggle she slid them down off of her hips, lifting her legs one at a time to free them. Then she was standing there in her lacy bra and equally see-through panties.

Clark removed his jacket, tie, shirt and pants at superspeed to stand there in just a pair of boxers.

Smiling, Lois whispered so that only he could hear her, “This is a treat. Twice in one day.”

Mystified, he blurted out, “Twice?!?”

Lois stepped over to him and, putting her arms around his neck, moved in so that she was whispering in his ear, “I didn’t

tell you, but that lunch you took me for was very sexual. You and all of that chocolate. I was thinking about how delicious it would be to put some of that chocolate sauce on you just so I could lick it off.” She moved in for a kiss as she massaged her breasts with his chest. Her hard nubs raking his chest. When one crossed his an electric thrill jolted through both of them.

When they broke from the kiss he asked, “Should I go get some?”

She moved up and started to nibble on his ear and then whispered, “I don’t think I want to wait.”

Remembering her tenderness, he cupped the back of her head as he pulled her in and deepened the kiss; their tongues were dueling as they each tasted the other.

As his hands left her head they trailed down her neck and back then they circled around and cupped her breasts.

As his hands again came into contact with her breasts she pulled back and released a contented sigh. He started to caress her growing globes gently, careful not to apply too much pressure because of the sensitivity of her pregnancy enlarging breasts.

Her hands came up and, grasping the sides of his face, pulled it to her and captured his lips in another kiss, long and deep while emitting guttural groans deep in the back of her throat the entire time as her arousal grew.

His arousal was growing in concert with hers.

Removing one of her hands, she moved it down until it dipped below the waist band of his shorts.

He took one of his hands away from her breasts and started pushing her panties down.

Breaking the kiss she said, “I think we’re both wearing too much.” Putting action to her words she slid her panties down her long legs while he divested himself of his shorts.

Only a few minutes of this was enough to drive both of them to distraction. They came together for a period of marital intimacy.

Lois welcomed his body’s invasion of hers. The feeling of completion when their bodies were joined in this intimate union was beyond expression. She wished it could go on forever and was disappointed in the knowledge that it wouldn’t, but looked forward to the ecstasy at the completion of their union.

As much as Lois enjoyed the slow pace that he was setting, her body wanted the ecstasy and started moving of its own accord.

Suddenly, neither of them could take any more and a guttural growl started at the back of his throat as she started to take a deep breath, preparing to scream her ecstasy and he clamped his lips to hers.

After a few minutes, she calmed down and said, “You don’t know what you do to me.”

He nuzzled her neck and whispered into her ear, “No more than you do to me, minx.”

They floated back down onto the bed. After a time. She said, “It feels like I just lost part of myself. I wish you had stayed right where you were and we had fallen asleep that way.”

With a grin he replied “I’ll keep that in mind for the next time.”

She smiled and said, “Something for me to look forward to.”

They lay for a time simply cuddling in the afterglow of their lovemaking, finally falling asleep in each other’s arms.

In the morning they awoke, arms and legs entangled. Lois was the first to awake and looking at her still sleeping husband moved slightly, planting a light kiss on his lips. It was just a light contact, but it was still enough that it elicited a response as he moved to deepen the kiss.

When they broke apart he said, “Good morning.”

Looking down he saw that in the night they had shifted around and Lois’s right leg was over his hips.

She said, “Looks like somebody is ready for a rematch.”

He grinned and started an intimate session.

After laying there for several minutes she levered herself up and wiggled her hips in a suggestive way. She said, “Let’s just stay this way for the rest of the day.”

With a grin he said, “I’d love to accommodate you, but we do have a job to do. We aren’t here on a honeymoon.”

With a pout she said, “Spoil sport.” She settled herself more firmly on his lap as she said, “Maybe I won’t let you up.”

“Lo-is.”

“Oh, come on Clark. We haven’t had that much alone time since Lucy moved in with us. Now we have Jack and Denny as well. I miss having some real private time with you.”

“How about this? Once we finish with this investigation, we’ll go away for some alone time, just you and me.”

“Promise?”

“Yeah, I promise. Cross my heart and hope to ...”

Pushing up so that she could look him in the face, she interrupted him and vehemently said, “Don’t say that! Don’t ever say that! I don’t even want to think about that possibility. Ever!” With a look of pain, she started tearing up.

He was startled by her tone. Putting his arms around her and pulling her back down into a hug he said, “Okay, don’t get upset. I’m not going anywhere.”

Losing the look of emotional pain, she started at the motion and smiling said, “Okay. I just don’t think I could stand to lose you. I already went through that once. I don’t ever want to have to go through it again, especially now.”

“I know. I feel the same way.” This time it was her turn to wiggle her hips which elicited a groan from him.

She raised herself up off of him which brought about a groan of disappointment from him. He said, “You didn’t need to do that.”

“I did if we’re to get anything done today. Besides, it will give you something to look forward to when you keep your promise. The sooner we complete this investigation, the sooner we get away for a while.”

After breakfast they went to collect the info on Smythe. Unfortunately, they were informed that there was insufficient data to provide the information requested.

Returning to the hotel, since it would be early morning in Metropolis, Lois placed a call to Lucy at the Planet. “Hi Luce, how’s it going?”

“Oh, hi Lois. It’s going just fine. I decided to call out for pizza last night. The guys loved it. What’s up Sis?”

“We’ve hit a snag. I need you to see what you can get on Luckabee’s valet, Smythe. Complete name, address here in Australia, possibly a picture?”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“If you come up empty on Smythe don’t be too surprised. In that case backtrack and see just when they arrived. Check with the Plaza to see when he checked in. That should give you a lead on when they entered the country. Once you know when check for incoming flights from Australia and see if you can find Luckabee. While you are doing that, Clark and I will be checking the outgoing. It would help if we had a time of arrival so as soon as you have a date, let me know.” Lois gave Lucy the phone number at the hotel. “As soon as you have the info, give us a call.”

“Will do Sis.”

“Okay, if I don’t hear from you, I’ll call back tomorrow. You can let me know what you have then. If you have something firm on their arrival we can backtrack departures here, in Australia. If you can get it, find the flight number. If you can get that we will check with the airline. If we have to we’ll check the entire manifest of each flight of every airline around that time.”

“I’ll see what I can do Lo.”

"Thanks, talk to you tomorrow, Sis."

After she hung up the phone she said to Clark, "I wonder if we could get access to the security tapes from the airport."

"Let me call the Plaza."

"From here?"

"Sure, why not? I need to ask the desk clerk for a description of Smythe."

"It might be easier to fly back and peek in the window."

Clark thought over Lois's suggestion and it made a lot of sense, so nodding his head he went to the closet and pulled out his snooping clothes. Lois smiled and moved to the dresser. She pulled out her dark turtleneck and black jeans. She said, "You aren't going without me, buster. I enjoy flying just as much as you do and I have been grounded most of the time in this universe because there is no Superwoman."

"Lo-is, what if someone sees you?"

"I'll fly high and fast. No one will see me." She put on a pout as she continued, "Come on Clark, I want to go with you. It'll be okay. Please?" As she was saying this she moved into his arms and looked up at him with puppy dog eyes, batting her eyelashes.

He was weakening, but he said, "It's broad daylight here!"

"We could go to the beach. It's a little cool and there shouldn't be many people there. We can find a secluded area to change and take off from there. It'll be dark soon in Metropolis. We could hover out of sight above the street. At the height of the penthouse, no one will see us. If you hold me like this no one will suspect that I was flying. They'd think you were carrying me."

"When could I ever deny you?"

She pulled back and with the look of someone that just won a contest she said eagerly, "All right! When do we leave?"

With a look of chagrin he said, "I guess we could just put these on for our trip to the beach. I don't think anyone would look at us twice."

With a smile she said, "Okay, first the beach and then next stop – Metropolis!"

They both spun into their snooping clothes and after locking their room they went out to get a cab.

After a cab ride to Bondi beach they started their stroll on the sand. There were numerous joggers as well as other couples strolling along the beach. In a thoughtful tone Lois said, "You know, we've come a long way since that first stroll on a beach that day in Hawaii."

Taking her hand in his and lifting it to his lips he said, "Who would have thought that day where we would be today, married and with a child on the way. It's like a dream come true."

There was fear and worry in her voice as Lois responded, "Let's hope it doesn't turn into a nightmare. There are so many things that can go wrong. There hasn't been a Kryptonian birth under these circumstances, ever. Think of it, this is going to be a super baby. *Fully Kryptonian*, born here on Earth. In a way I'm scared."

"We are going to do everything we can to make sure there are no problems. I promise."

With a shy smile she said, "I'm going to hold you to that, Kent."

Chapter 17 – Wrapping it up in Australia

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

Lois and Clark were approaching the southernmost point of the beach at the most distant point from Queen Elizabeth Drive. He smiled in reply and looking around asked, "I don't see anyone around. Shall we go?"

Smiling she said, "Let's," and leaped into his arms. They took to the air headed northeast. Once they were out over the Pacific, Lois flew out of his arms and flew under her own power.

As they were in flight Clark sent, "I just had a thought. Let's stop by the Planet on the way."/

"What do you need?"

"Let's get a camera from the supply closet."/

"Good idea! That way we can have a picture to show around. Let's do it."/ She put on a burst of speed and sent, "Catch me if you can!"

Since she was every bit as fast as he was he never did catch her, until she wanted him to. When he did they went into an embrace and soared up above the clouds while they kissed.

Eventually they arrived at the Planet and took out a still camera and a video cam. A few minutes later they were hovering over the street across from the penthouse of the Plaza.

The individual they identified as Luckabee was lounging in a chair watching the TV while Smythe was pacing the room behind him apparently in deep thought. There was no conversation to listen in on so they settled for a series of pictures.

They returned the equipment to the closet and taking the film and tape with them, returned to Australia.

The next day Clark dropped off the roll of film with the concierge service to have it developed.

Lois called Lucy. "Hi Luce, what do you have for me?"

"Hi Lois! Okay, here's the scoop. Luckabee checked into the Plaza ten weeks ago. I started checking arrivals from Australia around that time and found an arrival, flight 658 on Transunited Airlines at the appropriate time. I'm trying to get a seating manifest for the flight."

Lois had written the information down and said, "Thanks, Luce. I'll start working on it from this end. We can match up what we have after we both get manifests. We'll be here a few more days. Are the guys behaving themselves for you?"

Lucy looked around, making sure Jack wasn't within earshot, before she replied, "I think that Jack still has a crush on me. He and Denny have been as good as gold. No problems. Oh, and James had started teaching Jack more about computer technology. He says that Jack is a natural. He may eventually be able to replace me here as your researcher."

Lois was laughing as she said, "Well you can't fault him on his taste. You're a catch. I don't think I'd tell James that he has some competition."

Lucy started to laugh as well. She said, "I don't think he'd worry. By the way, what's Sydney like?"

"It's a lovely city. It is really clean and there are so many people, it's incredible. The Opera House is beautiful. We haven't gone in, but that white structure, right on the harbor, with the lights at night, is breathtaking."

"I'm trying to decide where James and I will go on our honeymoon. I just added Sydney to my list of possibilities."

"I'm sure you'd enjoy it here. I'll check in with you tomorrow Sis."

"Okay Lois. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

In the hotel in Sydney, after hanging up the phone Lois sat down next to Clark and said, "Okay, we have a timeframe. Lucy's information puts Luckabee in Metropolis a short time before we busted the bordello. There wouldn't have been time enough for him to have taken over the operation. How is it he was running that place? I guess we'll have to dig into that further. Luce gave me the flight information. We can start checking tomorrow to see if we can get a flight seating manifest. We can also see if we can get a security camera picture of the boarding. Smythe should be easy enough to identify."

"Once we have the pictures developed we could start

showing them around. Now that we know what he looks like we can see about the security camera footage. At least we now know about what day. As soon as we find out when flight 658 departed we will be able to narrow it down. Let's call the airline and see if we can get a seating manifest."

A little later they went to the airport and collected the manifests for flight 658 originating around their target date.

After returning to their room they started going through the manifests. They finally found the one they were looking for. Leslie Luckabee had flown first class. Looking through the rest of the names they did not find any Smythes, let alone J. Smythes.

Lois dropped the sheet on the table and with an I-told-you-so look and tone said, "I told you it had to be an alias. Okay, now we have to see about the security tape."

Clark called the airport and after identifying himself as Superman, asked for the security office. When he was put through he spoke with the supervisor. After giving him the date and time of the flight he asked for a copy of the security tape for the period shortly before to shortly after the flight time. He was told that he could pick it up after 5 P.M.

After picking up the tape they played it back on a player provided by the concierge service.

They were able to play it back fast forward and to them it was like slow-mo. They spotted Luckabee as he was boarding. A bit later they spotted Smythe. Based on the order of boarding they estimated that he was somewhere in coach around row twenty to twenty-five.

They started checking the names in and around that area. There were no names that they recognized.

In frustration Lois threw down the list and said, "He must have used a different alias for the trip. How are we going to track this down?"

"I wonder if there are hospital records for people with disfigurements like that."

"Maybe we should check the area's hospitals."

After dinner they settled down in their room and went over the data they had gotten as a result of their FOI request.

Lois reading from the account, summed it up, "Leslie Luckabee was arrested and served some time. He had been convicted of petty theft, numerous counts and one grand larceny, auto. He had started his criminal career early, in his late teens. The auto had been his last for which he was sentenced to five years. Get this, this man who somehow became a multi-millionaire was caught after the car heist because he didn't realize that what he had stolen was a diesel automobile and he put gasoline in it. It had mixed with the diesel still in the tank so it continued to run, after a fashion, but when he tried to outrun the cops, it quit on him. After four years he was released for good behavior and placed on probation. He had gotten a job as a busboy and kept his nose clean until he dropped out of sight. When that happened he violated the conditions of his parole by doing so and now there is an outstanding bench warrant for his arrest. It isn't something that the government would seek extradition on so until he returned to Australia he would essentially be safe."

"Interesting story. When did he disappear?"

Lois scanned through the document. Finding what she was looking for she did a quick mental calculation and said, "Six, almost seven months ago."

"In Metropolis he is known to be suave and sophisticated. I haven't heard too much about any women. That image doesn't match up with what is in that write-up," commented Clark. He continued, "The amount of time he was missing, before he turned up in Metropolis was about five months. He could have taken a crash course in suave and sophisticated. That wouldn't have left

much time for accumulating all of that wealth."

With a sly expression, Lois said, "There haven't been too many articles written about him and there have been no interviews. Maybe I should see if he'd allow *me* to interview him." As she finished up she batted her eyelashes, coyly.

"You just might be able to wangle and interview, but I'm going to be there with you."

"Why?"

"What if he has more Kryptonite?"

"All the more reason for you to not be there. If he has Kryptonite he would catch both of us at the same time. No one suspects that I'm Kryptonian so there's no reason to attack me with it. If you're there he might be tempted."

"Okay, you're probably right, but I'm going to keep an eye on you the entire time."

"I knew you would. Okay, as soon as we are back in Metropolis I'll see if I can schedule an interview with him."

"Since this will be our last night here in Sydney, do you want to go to the Opera House?"

Lois snuggled into his arms and said, "I'm not much for opera." She looked up at him and with a wonton look said, "Why don't we just spend a quiet night here, in bed?"

His answer was a kiss which took her breath away. She thought to herself, <Wow, it's a good thing we can both hold our breath for a looooooong time. Neither of us wanted to stop.>

The next day they returned to Metropolis.

The following weekend they all flew out to Smallville so that the girls could work on the weddings. Clark flew Lucy and Jimmy then Jack and Denny out in shifts. Then he went back for Lois who spent the last few miles in Clark's arms.

Pete brought Lana over and then asked if Clark could come with him. They climbed into Pete's car and he drove them to a house a couple of miles away. This was one of the many farms that were scattered around Smallville. When they exited the car the front door opened and a pregnant Rachel Harris Eck and Billy Eck came out. Clark was pleased to see both of these old friends.

Noting Rachel's condition, Clark said, "It's been a while since I've seen you guys! Congratulations. Your first, right?"

Looking back at Rachel, Billy replied, "Yeah, Rachel had to turn over the office to her chief Deputy until she can get back."

"I'm really happy for you. I'm looking forward to the day when we can have a child." He said this knowing full well that they had a child on the way, but not wanting to let on.

Billy turned to Rachel and asked, "Could you bring out the lemonade and some glasses? We have to talk about some things."

Rachel said, "Sure thing, guy talk, I get it."

After Rachel brought out the drinks, Billy asked, "Would you like to spend some time with Lana and the other girls? It would be a good chance to meet Clark's wife."

Rachel thought for just a second and then said, "I think I will." She went in and grabbed her purse and keys. As she came out she said, "I'll see you guys later." She got into the car and drove off.

Pete said, "Now we can talk freely. Clark, here's the story. I was able to get Billy here and Charlie and a few of the other guys together for that little project that Monday."

Billy added, "We gave the area between Schuster's field and Wayne Irig's farm a going over like you wouldn't believe. We used a fine-toothed comb. We found a couple hundred of those rocks."

Pete resumed, "We actually found more than we bargained for. We found some, they weren't green but they had that same characteristic glow but they were red! We weren't sure if they were the same problem or not so we decided to play it safe and treat them as dangerous."

Billy said, "It took us four days to completely cover the area,

but when we were finished we were pretty sure we had everything there was to find.”

Pete said, “That was the good news. The bad news is that a few days after we finished clearing the area a bunch of outsiders came in. They claimed to be a team of entomologists looking for a rare species of Corn Root Worm that could be very damaging to the local crops. They went to the sheriff’s office for permission to search the area and go on people’s property. Since this is a known pest, it made sense to give them permission so Rachel’s deputy gave them permission.”

Billy took up that narrative, “Fortunately, mine was the first farm they visited. They were fakes. I talked to one of them when they came on my farm. A couple of things gave them away. First, they didn’t have any sweep nets to collect samples. Second, they weren’t going through the fields, they were just covering ground. Third, when I asked him what was so special about this particular pest and how could I identify one if I saw it. The description he gave me was that of a Lady Beetle. If that guy was an Entomologist I’ll eat my hat, not the straw one either. I’m sure they were looking for those rocks. As soon as I was sure I called Pete and let him know.”

Peter took over again, “I called all of the gang and we took turns watching them. They actually got irritated at us when we stayed near them, but we know that they didn’t find anything. If they had, we would know about it.”

Clark said, “I don’t know what I did to deserve friends like you guys.”

Billy said, “Buddy, we were your friends before we knew what you could do. After we found out we all started to realize that some of the scrapes we had gotten ourselves into, it was you that got us out without saying a word about it. We started comparing notes and realized that you had been our guardian angel all along. If there’s anything we can do for you, we owe it to you.”

Clark was embarrassed and said, “Really, you guys don’t owe me anything. I’m just glad I was able to help out.”

Billy said, “Clark, I still remember when I was trapped under that tree and you lifted it off of me. We always thought that it was rotten or you had just had a burst of adrenaline or something. Now we know the truth. I, and most of us, owe you our lives, many times over. This is the least we could do for the guy that has done so much for us and never said anything or even asked for our thanks. Even if we didn’t, it’s what friends do for each other.”

Chapter 18 — Poison

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation —

Alt 1

%%%

Smythe was satisfied that the preparation of their underground lair was nearing completion and they would soon be moving, but in the meantime they were still in the penthouse of the Plaza.

Luckabee asked, “When do you start the next phase of *your* plan?”

Smythe answered, “Now that LNN is ours, it is time to start the destruction of Superman. The current news director has been given explicit instructions as to how any news of Superman’s exploits is to be treated. Let’s see if there has been anything recently.” He picked up a remote control and turned on a TV which was already tuned to LNN.

The announcer was obviously reading from a teleprompter, “In recent weeks Superman hasn’t been very visible, in fact he seems to have been absent. A recent house fire claimed the entire

residence. Fortunately for the family involved they were not in the house at the time. If they had been there is a great probability that all would have perished. Where was Superman? They lost everything, clothes, children’s favorite toys, pictures, computers, everything. It begins to appear that we can no longer count on our local superhero. Perhaps he had something better to do. Could it possibly be that he is being distracted by his new partner? Why does he have a partner anyhow? He was doing a good job until she showed up. Our sources confirm that she is a former employee of the Daily Planet, recently returned from an extended visit to Africa. Who will be the next to lose all of their possessions because Superman is being undependable?”

Smythe clicked the TV off at this point. He was smiling as he said, “There, the campaign has started.”

What Smythe did not see was the reaction of the people at LNN. The announcer, when they cut to a station break and commercial looked at his co-host and said, “What kind of drivel are they making us report, this is ridiculous! I’m sure there is a very good reason he wasn’t there. I hope this doesn’t keep up. I don’t know just how long I can continue to read this kind of crap.”

The co-host said, “I’d be careful if I were you. I understand that the new owner won’t take no for an answer. If you won’t read what he sends down, he’ll find someone that will.”

The host growled, “Let him! I’ll go back to the print media where I came from.”

The co-host was less than sympathetic as he said, “Yeah, right, you worked for the Star. Convince me that it isn’t almost as bad!”

“At least the Star was honest about the reporting. This is plain dishonest.”

Just then he had a ten second warning.

Later in the day Lois and Clark found out about what was being reported on LNN. Lois was, to say the very least, angry. LNN was attacking Superman and using her to do it.

Turning to Clark she said in a very indignant tone, “Unreliable? Something better to do? Distracted by his new partner? Okay, Clark, what were you doing when that fire happened?”

“I heard about that fire when I got back. I was dealing with that volcano in Washington State. The pressure had been building up and I drilled a hole to release the magma in a direction that would cause minimal damage. By releasing the pressure that way I prevented another Mt. St. Helen’s explosion.”

“That’s right! I was there watching you. I enjoy watching you flex those muscles, mmmmm.” Lois had a dreamy expression as she said this. When she snapped out of it she said, “Okay, here’s the plan. We write up an article explaining where you were and why at the time of the fire. People can’t possibly expect you to be in two places at the same time.”

“I think that in this instance what we need is a hard hitting piece, so why don’t you write it up?”

Her ire having been raised by this injustice, as she was sitting down at her desk she said, “You bet I’ll write this up.” She brought up her word processor and started writing.

That evening there was an article. It wasn’t the headline piece, but it did appear above the fold.

“Superman Prevents Disaster

By Lois Lane

Recently it has been reported that Superman has been neglecting his perceived duties to the citizens of Metropolis. It is the opinion of this reporter that this is a rather inappropriate view. Superman may reside in and claim Metropolis as his home town, but his responsibilities are worldwide. We do enjoy the benefit of his presence in that he is more readily available to handle emergencies.

In the recent incident reported on LNN It is unfortunate that the dwelling and all of its contents were destroyed; however, Superman was unavailable. Contrary to some speculation the reason he was not available was not a simple distraction. At the time of the fire, Superman was dealing with a volcano in Washington State which was threatening to blow its top a la Mount St. Helen's. He was drilling a hole into the mountain to release the magma in an area that wouldn't cause terrible destruction and also relieving the pressure, thereby preventing the eruption/explosion which would have occurred within a matter of weeks. That eruption would have caused incalculable destruction and cost many lives.

Superman has super powers, but being in two places at the same time is not one of them.”

Thus started the war. On one side was a campaign of disinformation and on the other side one of clarification and elucidation. Most of the time Lois's hard hitting style, presenting the facts, was used to rebut the aspersions, but occasionally Clark's touchy-feely style was the most appropriate.

Public opinion polls conducted by the Planet published on a weekly basis showed that Superman's popularity, rather than decreasing, was actually being enhanced. The general public for the most part only saw the headlines of the major events that the superhero participated in. As a result of this campaign the public was being made aware of many incidents which were never reported on or which because of Clark's modesty were never reported in the full. Now the public was being brought up to date on all of Superman's activities, not only on their behalf, but around the globe.

The number of stories that LNN put forward about Superman's apparent unreliability at times bordered on the absurd. While in other cases they could have been true, but for the actual facts of the matter all of which were printed in the Daily Planet.

The polls being run by the Daily Planet broadened out and started asking the viewing public about their viewing habits.

Many of the respondents replied that they didn't trust the new LNN like they had trusted ANN and they wished that it would return to its former management.

The ratings of the Planet gauged by sales had circulation going through the roof. Mr. Olsen was elated. He called the staff together while he stood on top of the ramp. "Listen up folks! Ever since this war was started by LNN we have had some really hard hitting responses to their accusations. The response has been outstanding! Our circulation numbers are through the roof. In the last couple of weeks I have had to order extra runs of each edition. We are thirty-three percent over our previous numbers. I just hope that this war continues for another month. There's no telling how high our numbers can go. Great job people! Keep it up."

After several weeks, it was abundantly apparent, even to those who didn't want to see it, that the campaign to discredit Superman was a dismal failure.

Luckabee was still behind the bar where he had just downed another drink when it all finally got to him and he challenged, "What are we going to do now? Your plan to discredit Superman has come a gutser. No matter what we put on LNN, the Planet not only refutes what is said, but adds additional detail and sways the public opinion even further in his direction. We were better off before we started that lurk."

Smythe didn't even deign to open his eyes as he said, "To be sure, that campaign has been less effective than I would have liked. It may be time to end it. The more the Planet refutes our stories, the more LNN is made a laughing stock. Before too much

longer no one will believe anything that they hear or see on it."

"What is your next move then?"

Smythe calmly replied, "It may be time to lure Superman into a trap. One of the people living with him can be used as bait. I would prefer it if it were Lois Lane, because I still need to repay her for her part in ruining the brothel, but one of the others would do. Still we will try her first."

"Like what?"

"Perhaps you should finally agree to the interview she has been requesting."

Luckabee could feel his throat constrict which gave his reply a choked sound, "Don't be a galah! If she disappeared while here on an interview, that would make me suspect number one."

"You're already suspect number one. One of my teams in Australia spotted them. They were checking up on you."

"What??? When?"

"A few weeks ago."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What good would telling you have done? It wasn't important."

"You didn't think it was important enough? What if they find out about me?"

"Trust me, they already have. The thing is that you are unimportant in the grand scheme of things."

"Unimportant?"

"What are they going to find out about you? That you were a petty criminal and there is no way you could have accumulated your apparent wealth. They will run themselves ragged trying to chase the funds. If they try to trace me they will find nothing. I even used a false passport for this trip and the name on it wasn't Smythe. Another dead end. So you see, you are the only one in a jam and if you don't follow my instructions exactly I'll turn you over to them. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, but do you understand that I know who you really are and I could tell them?"

With a tone full of menace, Smythe replied, "Trust me, you wouldn't live long enough to tell anyone anything. You know that liquor you are so happy to consume? It has been treated with a chemical. Initially it poisoned you. Now it has a different chemical which prevents the poison from taking effect. Your life is in my hands, Luckabee. If you bail out, you'll be cactus."

Luckabee had just drained his glass and he looked at it and slowly placed it back on the bar. A stricken look was on his face. He choked out, "Poison?"

"Yes, poison and if you don't get the antidote in time you will die or as you would say, cark it."

"You bloody bastard."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk casting aspersions on my parentage. I assure you my mother was married to Lex Luthor at the time of my birth which is more than I can say about your parents. Now get this and get it straight, your continued wellbeing depends on my giving you that antidote on a regular basis. Serve me well and I will give you the permanent antidote along with enough money to retire to the Gold Coast and live in luxury the rest of your life when this is all over. Do you understand?"

Deflated, Luckabee replied, "I understand," in a subdued tone but he was thinking, "Just wait, yer mongrel! Mr. Lex Luthor Junior. I'll get even, but not until I have that antidote.">

A few days later, Lois received a call, "Ms. Lane?" Lois didn't recognize the voice.

"Yes, this is Lois Lane. How can I help you?"

"This is John Smythe, Mr. Luckabee's valet and assistant. Mr. Luckabee received a request for some time for an interview. He has decided to make some time in his schedule to accommodate you. If you could be at the Plaza hotel, tomorrow at noon, you will have your interview."

“Thank you, Mr. Smythe. I’ll put it on my calendar.”

“Thank you, Ms. Lane.”

Lois turned to Clark and said, “They bit. Tomorrow at noon I heard the lion in his den.”

Clark switched to telepathy, /”We are going to have to be extra careful. If he’s carrying Kryptonite it would expose you. I’ll be there before you and scan the area to make sure it is clear before you arrive.”/

/”I’ll need to show up by cab to make it look good.”/

“We can work on your questions tonight, after dinner.”

Just then they both heard sirens in the distance. Lois shouted to Lucy, “Lucy, Clark just heard a siren. We are going to the scene. See you later.”

“Right, Sis. See you later.”

They headed for the stairwell. When they exited the roof door Superman was in his Suit and Lois was cradled in his arms. A short flight to Hobbs Bay brought them in sight of the fire. Clark landed with Lois where the fire chief was standing.

The chief acknowledged Superman as he asked, “Chief, is there any way I can help?”

The chief nodded and said, “I’d like you to start at the first floor and work your way up. My men will follow with hoses to make sure we don’t get a rekindle or a flash-over. Try to not destroy any evidence. We suspect arson and we need to be able to prove it.”

“Will do, Chief. Are your men ready?”

“My main attack pumper is in place and they are just finishing stretching the hose. They’re going to use the attack lines, the one and a half. They’ll be ready in a minute.”

Superman knew that one and a half hoses were one and a half inches in diameter and sprayed water at about 400 psi. Then he strode away and waited until the fire team was ready. There were two hoses and four men all in Nomex® bunker gear and airpaks. The team leader said, “Ready, Superman. Lead the way.”

Superman said, “Watch out, the supporting structures have been weakened somewhat.”

The nozzleman replied, “Don’t worry about us, Superman. This is how we make our living. We know the dangers. We’ll be careful.”

The teams stayed close behind Superman. He used his supercold breath to snuff the fire as he went along. The firemen marveled at the effects of Superman’s supercold breath. Where a few seconds ago there had been roaring flames, what moisture there was in the air was condensing on the now cold surfaces and turning, however briefly, to frost. The first team dropped off to monitor the first floor while team two continued upstairs behind Superman. They were hoping to avoid the use of the hoses as they wanted to leave the scene as undisturbed as possible. If there were accelerant residues, they needed to be able to collect and detect them. Team two stayed on the second floor and when team one was assured that there would be no re-ignite, they proceeded up to the second floor and followed Superman as he moved up to the third floor. This leapfrog progress was followed until the entire structure was flame free.

While the fire teams brought out their hoses Superman reported to the Chief. “The fire is out Chief. You are free to send in your inspection team. Although the fires were on multiple floors they appeared to be confined to specific rooms. We got to them before they had spread significantly. The distribution was unusual. The fires seemed to be on the walls of the rooms, excluding the wall with the door. It appears as though whoever started the fires allowed themselves an escape route through the door. These firebugs are smart. From the extent of the spread I would guess that they, whoever they are, started on the third floor and finished on the first. That way they were assured of not being trapped in their own fires.”

“Thank you, Superman. Actually I didn’t expect to find

evidence of arson, even though I know that is what this was. There has been a rash of fires like this. All of them have started unexpectedly. There is no evidence of accelerants which you would expect in arson. These fires just start. They start suddenly and spread quickly. I’m glad you got here so quickly. Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it Chief.” He turned to Lois and asked, “Did you get all that you need for the article?”

“One more thing, Chief, how many fires like this have there been and do you have any idea how they are being started?”

The Chief laughed and said, “That’s actually two questions, but that’s okay. There have been five fires that fall into this general category and I haven’t the slightest notion how they are being started. If I didn’t know better I’d say that Superman was starting them with his heat vision. That’s how mysterious these fires are.”

Lois looked at Superman and said, “I wonder if someone is trying to frame you.”

“That’s going to be difficult for them to do, because I am always somewhere else when they are started.”

Lois said, “Thank you Chief. We need to get back to the office so that I can write this up.”

Clark picked Lois up and they flew off while the chief looked on in envy, shaking his head in wonder that there was a woman, any woman, especially one as beautiful as Lois Lane, that could deal with the notoriety of being associated with Clark, Superman, Kent. She had to be one very special woman.

Chapter 19 — Interviews

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

Lois’ attire was designed to hide her expanding condition. She wore a smart pantsuit with a light colored silk shell with a deeply scooped neckline and a matching jacket over. She wore a hat and light gloves matching the color of the shell. The suit would hide her physical condition, her neckline would draw the eyes away from her middle and the gloves hid her ring. Since she had returned to the Planet, any time she went out on an interview, news conference or any other activity she had affected a pair of gloves. They had not announced their marriage, but Lois was loath to remove her ring. It meant too much to her. It was only in extreme circumstances that she would remove it.

She showed up at that Plaza hotel right on schedule. At the desk she was informed that Mr. Luckabee had rented one of the meeting rooms for the interview. She was directed to the second floor.

When she entered Luckabee was relaxing at the head of the table with a glass in front of him. His ‘valet’ was behind and to the right of his chair. As she entered he stood and walked over, hand outstretched in greeting. He had a somewhat startled expression which changed into appreciation as with a sweep of his eyes he took in her figure.

She was starting to show, but her condition was easily hidden by the smart business suit that she was wearing. It definitely appeared as though Kryptonian women had a longer pregnancy than Earth human women. That was probably due to the increased molecular density of the baby. That would keep the baby smaller for a longer period. Perhaps as the pregnancy went on the process would speed up. They would have to wait and see. That was probably the reason why she was more susceptible to the Kryptonite. The baby was drawing that much more on her body’s resources.

As soon as she had entered, Luckabee had looked up and

when he had seen her for the very first time she could hear his heartbeat begin to race. She sent, /"He likes what he sees. His heart rate is up around a hundred beats a minute. Maybe I can use that to my advantage."/

/"How could he resist your wiles, you temptress."/

/"You say the sweetest things!"/

When he approached her he held out his hand. When she shook his hand, he held her hand a trifle longer than was really appropriate and she noted his gaze lingering on her cleavage as he said, "Ms. Lois Lane, I presume. I've followed your work in the Daily Planet, but reading what you write and actually seeing the woman behind the typewriter are two entirely different things. Please, have a seat." With that Luckabee pulled out a chair and held it for her.

She graciously and gracefully sat in the offered chair. As he moved back to his chair she noted an expression of disapproval on Smythe's face.

While he returned to his chair she reached into her bag and pulled out her notepad, pencil and recorder; placing them all on the table before her.

She was still thinking about what Clark had said in her head as she turned on the recorder and picking up her pad and pencil, asked in a slightly husky tone as a result, "Well, Mr. Luckabee, what do you think of our country and its people so far?"

"So far I haven't seen much of America and not very many of its people, but if you are an example of the women of America, I can see that I need to get out more. Tell me; are all American women as beautiful as you?"

Clark sent, /"I would have to say no to that. There's not another woman in the world that can compare to my wife."/

Lois was blushing prettily at Clark's comment, but Luckabee thought she was reacting to his so he followed up with, "I must say that you are the most beautiful woman it has been my pleasure to meet."

Lois said, "Well, that's very kind of you to say, but you probably tell that to all of the girls."

"No, not at all. I mean every word. You have to be the most beautiful woman I have ever met."

Now she *was* blushing from Luckabee's flattery. She said, "Thank you." She fussed with her notebook, scribbled a note and then asked, "What is the purpose of your trip?"

"Well, Ms. Lane, I recently came into a significant fortune and decided that it would be prudent to invest at least part of it in money making enterprises. For instance I recently purchased ANN, the All News Network. I had also made an offer to purchase the Daily Planet. Now I am extremely sorry that the purchase of the Planet did not go through because if it had I would have met you sooner."

"Are you concentrating on commercial news organizations?"

"By no means! I recently purchased MiraLabs. I intend to diversify my holdings. For example I also just purchased MetroConstruct, a construction firm, as you can tell from the name."

"How did you decide to settle here in Metropolis?"

Smythe or Lex junior had prepared Luckabee for this interview and he was somewhat dismayed at Luckabee's deviation from the script. His flirting with Lois Lane had not been part of it. Smythe was getting more than a little irritated with him. He could still salvage at least part of it. He'd have to wait and see.

"Well, Ms. Lane, Lois, may I call you Lois?"

At her nod Luckabee continued, "Well, Lois, I was attracted to the vibrant energy evinced by this city. It is not a city with a history such as Philadelphia or Washington and I want to help create a history for Metropolis."

"Oh, and what kind of history would that be?"

"Obviously we can't have a constitution drafted here as was

done in Philadelphia. Metropolis will never be the nation's capitol in place of Washington. Currently Metropolis' fame is based upon the fact that the world's superhero, Superman, calls this city home. What will happen to Metropolis if he suddenly decides to move on or perhaps meets a foe he cannot defeat?"

"No. Metropolis needs to develop a name for itself independent of the whims of a superhero. I intend to create something great, something that will ensure Metropolis' place as one of the premier cities of the world."

Lois stopped writing and asked, "What makes you think that Superman would ever leave this city?"

"He's an alien! What is here that would hold the attention of an alien? If some others of his kind were to show up, what is to keep him from leaving? I'm sure he would feel better being with others of his own kind."

Lois sent, /"Are you listening to this?"/

/"Yes, his racial prejudice is very apparent."/

/"To my way of thinking, you're more human than he is!"/

Lois asked, "Don't you think that is just a little harsh? I think that Superman is committed to this city as his adopted home."

"Okay, but what ties does he have to keep him here? We don't even know where he lives. He works for the Daily Planet. Actually, isn't he your partner? How can you stand to work with him, knowing that he's an alien?"

Lois was starting to lose her cool with all of this race baiting and she snapped, "Actually, when you come right down to it, you also are an alien, Mr. Luckabee!"

"Ah, now, that's where you are wrong, for you see my father was from here."

Lois remembered what they had dug up on him and this didn't match, but she played along, "Oh, and just who would your father have been?"

"Some years ago my father was an important person here in Metropolis. He was a wealthy businessman, a philanthropist and among the most wealthy men in the world, but he died some years ago with his dream for this city unfulfilled."

Lois had a bad feeling about this. She knew he was lying, but why? What was his motivation for perpetrating this falsehood? Did he want this put into the paper? If she actually published it what would be the reaction? She needed to play along and let this farce play out to its end to see just what his motivation was. She asked, "Just who was this paragon that you claim was your father?"

"Well, Ms. Lane, I think you will know who I am talking about if I give you a few clues. My father had a business empire here in this city. When he was cruelly murdered his memory was maligning by those that were beneath him. They simply wanted to tear down a great man so that they could in some way make themselves that much bigger. I have started to reassemble his former empire. ANN, the All News Network, will return to its former name LNN. Other businesses will also be returning to their former names as the legal paperwork is completed."

Lois said, "I don't remember a Luckabee News Network being in Metropolis before."

"You are correct Ms. Lane, there was no Luckabee News Network, just as there was no MiraLabs or MetroConstruct. They are all going to be taking their former names."

"I can see that I have some researching to do."

"You do that, Ms. Lane and after you finish, perhaps we could schedule another meeting, perhaps a dinner meeting."

"A dinner meeting? Mr. Luckabee, would the emphasis be on meeting or dinner?"

"Take your pick. Personally I like the idea of dinner with a beautiful woman to being interviewed by a beautiful woman any day."

"I'll have to get back to you on that. Well, I think we have enough for this session." Lois turned off her recorder and put it

into her bag. Shutting her notebook she put it and her pencil in with it.

Luckabee stood to get her chair for her. She thanked him as he escorted her to the door.

When the door was closed and they were sure that she was far enough away from the door Smythe asked, “Why couldn’t you stick with the script? You almost blew it. What is it with you and the flirting? You know that *he* is her partner.” Smythe snorted in derision and disgust. “At least you put the alien idea into her head. At least you accomplished that much.”

Luckabee had a lustful look as he said, “I just couldn’t help it, mate. She’s beautiful, no, she’s more than beautiful. She’s a goddess. What I wouldn’t give to ...” He visibly shook himself before he finished, “I was waiting for the right psychological moment, mate. If I’d made the alien comment too soon it would have ruined the effect.”

“How many times do I have to tell you to be careful about the dialect? If she had heard you ... that would be it!”

“Why worry, mate? She’s gone. All she learnt was what we wanted her to learn.”

“You’d better be right, Luckabee. You’d better be right.”

As Lois had been exiting the room and then the building she had been using her superhearing to listen in on their conversation. She sent, “Did you hear all of that?”

“Yes, this was a well orchestrated plot to deceive. I wonder what we will find when we check those businesses. We already know Luckabee’s background and this story can’t stand the sniff test.”

Lois sent, “How would they come up with something like that?”

Clark replied, “It’s pretty obvious now, Smythe is really the one behind all of this?”

“Whoa, do you know what you are suggesting?”

“That this is all a setup by Smythe. He’s the one with the money and he is using Luckabee as a figurehead. People will accept Luckabee easier because of his good looks. If Smythe was out in the open people would be less accepting simply because of his appearance.”

Lois exited the Plaza and flagged down a cab to take her to the Planet. While she was in route Clark kept tabs on her and landed on the roof of the Planet building as she exited the cab out front.

When Lois arrived in the bullpen, Clark was at his desk with a search page open. He had a list of company names on the screen. As she settled in a chair next to him he clicked on one.

When the screen painted he started scrolling through the company history. Suddenly he sat back and Lois asked, “What? What did you find?”

He said, “See for yourself,” as he pointed to the screen.

She started reading out loud, “MiraLabs, formerly LexLabs, is dedicated to advancing the boundaries of knowledge through research in multiple disciplines ...” She continued in an irritated tone, “Lex Luthor.” Her disgust was evident in her tone, “Aren’t we ever going to be rid of him?” She switched to telepathy, “He’s dead in this universe! What does this mean?”

Without speaking, Clark brought up another search and another company was examined. “ANN, the All News Network, formerly LNN, the Luthor News Network, is dedicated to providing the viewing public with the latest ...” Clark finally spoke, “Lex Luthor again. Luckabee or perhaps Smythe is rebuilding Lex Luthor’s old criminal empire. Going by their apparent age, one of them must be his son.”

“How do we find out which?”

“How indeed?” He gave it a few seconds consideration and then snapped his fingers. “I just thought of a radical way to find

out if one is and if so which.”

“How?”

Switching to telepathy, Clark proposed, “Let’s take those pictures with us and make a trip to the other universe. I think we need to ask Lex Luthor some questions about his son.”

Lois was skeptical and she replied, “What makes you think he would tell the truth?”

“If you show him the pictures and he reacts that would be one indication. With his obsession with you if you tell him that this individual is pursuing you he may reveal even more.”

Lois shouted over to Lucy, “Hey Luce, we’re going out to grab a bite to eat. See you in a little while.”

“Sure Sis, I’ll hold down the fort.”

Lois and Clark headed for the stairwell and took off from the roof for Smallville.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

They stepped onto the porch of the farm house and knocked on the door. They heard Martha’s cheery voice call, “Come on in, it’s not locked.”

Clark allowed Lois to precede him through the door and she immediately crossed to the sofa and sat next to Martha. Martha stopped her knitting and held up the bootie she had already finished and showed Lois her progress on the mate. Since Lois and Clark were spending a significant amount of time with them, Martha had been able to knit at a more normal pace.

Lois lifted the completed bootie and felt it, then rubbed it on her face, feeling the softness. She said, “Martha, this is wonderfully soft. The baby will love them.”

With a pleased look Martha said, “Nothing’s too good for my grandchild.”

Then Lois stuck a couple of fingers in the small bootie and giggled, waving it about. “How can any living thing have feet this small!?”

Clark just smiled at her lovingly and sent, “You are just so cute, no wonder I’m in love with you.”

Smiling, Lois said to Martha, “Somehow we are going to see to it that you get as much time as possible with your grandchild. Maybe, if we talk to Herb, we’ll be able to work out some way that the timing can be worked out better.”

“How long has it been since you were here, last night?”

“Oh, it’s been a couple of weeks. We’ve been busy with this investigation. In fact, that’s why we’re here now. We need to interview Lex Luthor.”

Martha had a shocked expression at this statement and she asked, “The guy that had Clark killed? The guy that tried to kill Clark?”

“Yep, that’s the guy.”

“How can interviewing the Luthor in this universe help you in an investigation in the other universe?”

“It’s kinda hard to explain. There are a lot of similarities between the universes just as there are some differences. In the other universe, that Lex Luthor is dead, but we are dealing with someone claiming to be his son. We are here to show this Luthor pictures of the person making the claim to see if it’s true.”

“Well, I hope it works out for you.”

Jonathan spoke up, “How can you be so sure he’ll cooperate?”

Clark smiled as he replied, “He’ll cooperate whether he wants to or not.” He pointed to his ear and said, “We’ll be able to hear his heartbeat. We can tell if he’s telling the truth or not so either way, we will get the answers we need.”

Lois promised, “We will be coming for a nice long visit, soon. Right now I’m itching to get the answers to our questions.”

Turning to Clark she said, “Let’s go, partner.”

“Okay, partner.” They both stepped outside and they both spun into their uniforms. When they did Lois’ condition became very apparent. The spandex did nothing to hide her pregnancy.

Clark said, “Uh oh, Everyone will know that Superwoman is expecting. If a pregnant Lois shows up it could create a problem.”

“I’ll just have to fly high and fast. If I can avoid being seen I can change back and the business suit will hide my condition.”

“I think it would be better if I carried you. Superman carrying Lois Lane is nothing unusual.”

“I guess you’re right.” She spun back into her pant suit, leaped into his arms and they took to the air.

The flight to Metropolis was too short for Lois’ liking. They landed in an alleyway near the prison and Clark spun back into his work clothes.

They walked to the prison and presented their credentials. As soon as they did they were told that their names had been flagged and that they would have to go see the warden. They were provided with an escort who led them to his office while a call was made alerting him to their presence.

When they entered the warden’s office he offered them seats, which they took and waited for him to explain.

He picked up a folder from a stack on his desk. Flipping it open he finally said, “You requested to see Lex Luthor. I don’t know if I can allow that. There is a documented history of violence between the two of you. When he arrived here his mouth was wired shut because you had broken his jaw in a scuffle. His jaw is still not completely healed. He has to take his meals through a straw.”

In his own defense Clark said, “Warden, that was an unusual situation. He was attempting to abduct my wife, in the process of which he attempted to shoot me. I think clipping him on the jaw was showing a lot of restraint on my part. Trust me; if you allow us to see him, nothing will happen, at least on my part. We just want to ask him a couple of questions.”

Looking once again at the contents of the folder the warden leafed through it slowly, finally setting it down he said, “We just recently released him from the prison infirmary into general population. I’ll have the guard that brought you here take you to the visitor’s room. I’ll have another guard bring him in from the yard. I want a bulletproof glass partition between you and him.”

Clark laughed and asked, “Is that to protect him or us?”

With a deadpan expression the warden answered, “Both.”

Clark’s expression was one of stunned disbelief, but he just shook his head and stood offering his hand to Lois.

They only had to wait a few minutes for Luthor to show up. When he did he sneered at Clark and looked adoringly at Lois. He made motions to the guard asking for writing materials which he fetched for him. While Clark and Lois had been waiting, they had decided that Lois would take the lead.

While they were waiting for the writing materials to be delivered, Lois picked up the phone. Luthor picked up the one on his side and listened to what Lois had to say.

“Mr. Luthor, we would like to ask you just a couple of questions, if you don’t mind.”

With a wary expression he nodded his head.

Deciding to play the trump card right up front Lois said, “There is an individual that has been stalking me ever since you have been in here. I have confronted him and he claims that it is his right. He is your heir in all things and that includes me.”

There was a look of total mystification on Luthor’s face as she said this.

She continued, “I have a picture here. Could you tell me if this is your heir?”

Lois opened one of the pictures of Luckabee and asked, “Is

this man related to you?”

His look of mystification didn’t change and neither did his heartbeat. He shook his head in the negative. Then he wrote – “I never saw him before.”

Lois took the picture down and looking at it, feigned having made a mistake, “Oh, I’m sorry. That was the wrong picture.” She picked up the one of Smythe and looked at it as if to confirm that she finally had the correct picture then she flipped it around and showed it to Luthor.

Immediately Luthor’s heart rate kicked into overdrive even though he maintained an outward calm. After a few seconds he managed to shake his head in the negative and held up what he had previously written.

Lois said, “Thank you. You’ve been most helpful.”

Luthor was looking daggers at Clark as they got up to leave.

He tapped on the window to get their attention and wrote furiously for a few seconds and then held up the missive, “Lois will be mine and you, Kent, will be dead . . . soon.”

Clark picked up the phone and said, “I wouldn’t count on that. You’re going to be in here for a very long time.”

Because his jaws were wired shut, Lex couldn’t properly smile and it came out more as a death’s head grin before they turned away.

Chapter – 20 – Wedding Preparations and The Escape

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

After interviewing Luthor, Lois and Clark returned to Smallville. As soon as they walked into the living room Clark looked around. Sounds were coming from the kitchen so they moved in that direction. Martha was in the final stages of preparing iced tea and when she heard their footsteps she turned to greet them, “Hi! Who wants some iced tea?”

Lois replied, “That would be wonderful, I’ll have some.”

Clark added, “I’d never turn down your iced tea.”

Martha said, “Why don’t you go get your father? He’s out in the barn working on that old tractor.”

Clark said, “I’m on my way,” as he headed out the door.

As soon as the door was closed Martha turned to Lois and asked, “Now that he’s gone it’s time for some girl talk. His father is going to keep him there for a while helping with the tractor. How are things? I don’t know just how long it has been since we checked.”

Smiling because of the feeling of closeness the thought of girl talk gave her, Lois said, “It’s really confusing with all of this universe hopping, but it’s only been a couple of weeks. Everything is fine. I’ve been thinking about it and I think what we are going to do is spend a day or two here and one day there until we can really determine just how long this pregnancy will last, which will complicate things. I’m either going to have to take a leave of absence or be on ‘assignment’ so that a pregnant Lois isn’t seen in this universe. Would you mind if I worked from here?”

“Honey, I would love to have you here just as much and as long as you want to be here.”

With unshed tears in her eyes, Lois said, “Martha, I really love you! If I hadn’t had my mom, I’d have preferred you to any other.”

Martha placed her hand over Lois’s hand on the table and said, “I’m very happy that Clark was our son, but if we had had a daughter I would have wished her to be just like you and we are very happy that you are now our daughter in fact. Jonathan and I couldn’t love you more. We weren’t sure how things would be

when Clark's powers were transferred to you, but we haven't been disappointed. You've taken the super mantle and done honor to it and his memory. Now, you are a perfect couple, soon to be a trio. I still can't get over it. A grandchild, you're giving us a grandchild, a super grandchild, in more ways than one."

Lois apparently had been giving this some thought because her reply was immediate. "I'm still wondering how that will work out. Will he be super as soon as he's born or will his powers come on gradually? Will I have to deal with a flying infant or will he be like every other child until he's a teen?"

Martha's eyes lit up and there was a distinct twinkle in them and in a teasing tone she asked, "Are you giving me a hint? Is it going to be a boy?"

Lois laughed and said, "No, we don't know. We want it to be a surprise. I was speaking in the generic sense. Saying he or him is just better than saying it."

Still with a twinkle in her eyes, Martha replied, "Okay, I understand, but you can't blame me for trying. Will *he* immediately? Well, we don't know. We have absolutely no way *to* know. When we found Clark's ship with him inside, he was sound asleep. When we opened the canopy he woke up quite quickly. We didn't know anything about Krypton until Clark found the globe. We still don't know a whole lot. We figured that Clark had come from a wooded planet because of the pine-like odor that escaped from the ship when we opened it. We don't have any idea how long he was asleep, but he was very hungry when he woke up and he started crying. We saw something that looked like a timer on the control panel. I forget what the exact figure was but it read something like 30. We don't know if it was a measure of minutes, hours, days, months or years. If he wasn't just sleeping, but had been put into some kind of coma it could have been any of them. By his appearance we figured that Clark was only a few months old when we found him and he didn't start to develop his powers until he was about ten years old. Now, you need to keep in mind that he had come from a planet with a red sun and high gravity. He had never been under a yellow sun before. Right from the start we thought he was stronger than other children his age, but we didn't really think that much of it until his other powers started to manifest. The difference is that *your* child is developing under a yellow sun with an already super-powered mother and father. Anything could happen."

"But, I started out as Earth human."

"When you were hit with that laser, your physiology was changed and from that moment on, all bets were off. You became a superpowered Kryptonian just as if you had arrived at the same time Clark did. We'll just have to wait and see."

Just then, Clark and Jonathan walked in and Martha abruptly stopped talking.

Clark had been talking with Jonathan and hadn't been listening to the women. He knew that they were talking, so when they stopped suddenly he got suspicious and asked, "Talking about me behind my back? I wondered why dad asked me to help with the tractor. It wasn't anything he needed me for."

Martha started to laugh and said, "Look who has a guilty conscience. What would we be saying behind your back that we couldn't say in front of you?" Martha gave Lois a wink.

Lois played along. She stood and crossing to Clark put her arms around him and said, "Besides, what could we say that was so bad? After all, aren't you just the perfect husband?"

Clark was blushing at this praise and said, "I'm *not* perfect! Far from it, but I do try."

Lois floated up high enough to kiss his cheek without tiptoeing to do it and said, "Did you say you try or that you are trying at times?"

"Aw, come on Lois, you know what I mean."

Lois started laughing harder and finally said, "Yes, you do try your best. You see Martha; I told you he's the best. He must take

after Jonathan."

Jonathan started laughing at that one. He looked at Clark and said, "She's got you there."

Clark, with a downcast expression said, "I wish I had actually had your influence. I only had my Dad for ten years. Now, I have him back and I couldn't be happier."

Lois challenged, "Oh? Couldn't be happier now that you have your parents? What about me? What am I ... meat loaf?"

He was growing red in the face as he replied, "Awwwwwwww , you know what I mean. I'm happy to have my entire family."

Lois, Martha and Jonathan all started laughing at his discomfiture and Martha said, "We know what you mean Sweetie. We just couldn't pass up the chance to tease you a little. Now, how about that iced tea?"

They all sat at the table drinking tea and talking until it was time for Lois and Clark to return to the other universe.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation — Alt 1

%%%

It was nearing the time for the triple wedding. Each weekend they were all flying out to Smallville. Since Lana had introduced Rachel to Lois and Lucy she had become part of the 'inner circle'. Already being a friend of Lana's, Rachel had formed a fast friendship with both Lois and Lucy. The three girls had all asked Rachel to be part of the wedding party and she had accepted. Lois had relinquished her position of Matron of Honor to her and Rachel would be Matron of Honor for all three girls, preceding them down the aisle.

Even though he was a little older than the traditional age for it, they had talked Denny into being a ring bearer and had even made arrangements for his tux.

Lois had an idea, "Clark, what do you think about the idea of a flower girl?"

Instantly picking up on where Lois was going with this he said, "I think it would be a terrific idea. Next time we go over we can talk with Phoebe."

When Phoebe found out that Carrie would be in the wedding party for friends of Lois and Clark she insisted on paying for her dress.

In the underground bunker inhabited by Smythe and Luckabee, Smythe was sitting in an easy chair listening to "Cosi Fan Tutti".

Luckabee asked, "What is that? I don't recognize it."

"It's an opera by Mozart, a very rare opera. Loosely translated the title is 'All Women Do It.' At the time he wrote it the feeling was that it was too risqué even for that time. I was thinking about the lovely Ms. Lane. After finally seeing her, I can see why Mitzi took her in as one of her girls. If I wasn't bent on taking my revenge on her, I would be tempted to let her live if she would agree to be with me."

Luckabee looked at Smythe as if he had lost what little there was of his mind and asked, "Have you had a squiz in a mirror lately, mate? *I* might have a chance, but you?" He burst into laughter. "Besides, look at who her partner is. She *has* to be attracted to him, with all that he can do."

With a tone of incredulity Smythe replied, "Attracted to the *alien*? What woman in her right mind would be attracted to that ... that *thing*? Ah, but if your supposition were correct, what if he were out of the way, or, in my power? Perhaps she would agree to be mine if the alternative was his death. Perhaps she would choose to be with me in order to save him. I think I will give her that option."

Luckabee looked at him in disbelief. He said, “I might have a chance, given the same incentive, but you? You’ve gone nuts, mate. I don’t think that even that promise would be enough.”

Stung he retorted, “Oh, you don’t think I can be suave and sophisticated ... charming?”

Luckabee replied, “It won’t matter how suave and sophisticated you are, mate, as long as your face looks like it went through a meat grinder.”

Smythe had been getting angrier all the time Luckabee had been speaking. He barely kept his temper under control as he replied, “Some women, oftentimes the more beautiful and sometimes the more intelligent, are attracted to money and power. Lois Lane combines the best of those qualities. There is one additional characteristic and that is the fact that I am human and *not* an alien.”

Luckabee replied, “I still think I’d have a better chance with her.”

Smythe laughed at this suggestion and replied, “You?? You don’t have anything! No money, no power, not even any brains! All you have is a pretty face!”

Lois and Clark started off by spending two days in Alt 2 for each day they spent in Alt 1 where they continued the background investigation on Luthor junior. Lucy’s efforts were finally starting to pay off.

Knowing the general area she started checking banks around the Sydney residence they had identified as Luckabee’s. She found a bank account that hadn’t amounted to much until shortly before his departure for America. Just prior to his departure there had been a \$10,000 infusion. It was still sitting there. Tracking the source of the money put them on the trail of a numbered Swiss account. Lucy was busy tracking the transactions on that account.

Lois and Lucy were constantly together, most of the time in company with either Clark or James so even though there were unseen watchers they were not disturbed.

There were the inevitable shopping trips to find the perfect wedding gowns. When the watchers saw that they were together they would drop off and pick them up again later in hopes that Lois would be alone at some time. That being the case they were unaware that Lois and Lucy were both purchasing wedding gowns.

On the weekends the girls would fly out to Smallville and meet with Lana and Rachel. Frequently Lois brought Carrie with her, who quickly became a favorite of all of them. They asked where Lois had met her and Lois told them the story of the fire rescue, not mentioning that it had occurred in the other universe. It was adequate that it had happened in Chicago.

After some time, Rachel commented, “Lois, Carrie looks enough like you and Lucy to be a younger sister or ... daughter. Is there something you’re not telling us?”

Lois laughed and said, “No, every word is the truth. Come here, Carrie, dear. Please tell Miss Rachel your mommy’s name.”

“My mommy’s name is mommy and my name is Carrie, Carrie Harris.”

Rachel laughed and pointing at Lois asked, “Are you sure this isn’t your mommy?”

Carrie gave her a look of disbelief, “No, I’m sure, she’s not my mommy. That’s Miss Lois.”

Lois marveled at how things were working out. All of her life, to this point, she had been able to count her friends on the fingers of one hand, and girl friends, well, they were non-existent. This was a new experience for her. She had always had Lucy, but now, she was really developing a close relationship with Lana, the woman that initially had blamed her for stealing Clark. Mayson was another one. Mayson started off blaming her for the same thing. Now that she was married to Dan, she and

Lois were forming close friendships. Rachel had never been Clark’s girlfriend, even though he had been the one to take her to the senior prom. That had been a favor for Billy. Billy and Rachel had been dating, but at the last minute Billy had gotten sick and asked Clark, his best friend, who hadn’t been going to the affair, to stand in for him. Now, not only was Clark Billy’s best friend, but Rachel was becoming one of Lois’s best girlfriends. The cherry on the top of that sundae was Rachel and Billy asking Clark and Lois to be godparents for their soon to be born child.

Thinking about how her life had changed in so many ways since meeting Clark, both of them, but especially her super husband, she had a hard time recognizing the old Lois. Mad Dog Lane still showed up on occasion, but only on a story. Associating with Clark had worn off most of her sharp edges, making her a much softer person. She honestly cared about people now. Thinking back on it she knew that the person she had been would never have wanted to take on the responsibility for a couple of young boys, trying to help make them responsible, contributing members of society. She looked out the window and saw Jack and Denny shooting some hoops in an area Clark had set up for them at the side of the barn with Carrie looking on, clapping each time one of the boys made the shot. Lois couldn’t help but smile.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Lois and Clark were on one of their visits to the Kents in Smallville. Before lunch Clark had gone out to the barn with Jonathan to help him with a repair on his old tractor. Clark could only smile and sigh as he stood there looking at it. It was an old tractor that Jonathan insisted on using, but Clark suspected that among the many reasons that Jonathan didn’t invest in a newer model was the fact that he actually enjoyed tinkering with it to keep it running. It really had become his hobby and one that Martha allowed him to indulge in. It wasn’t a bad hobby. It kept him busy and around the house which was exactly where she liked him to be. Frequently, Wayne Irig would come over to help which gave Jonathan an opportunity to spend some quality time with his old friend. They would spend hours tinkering and arguing, in a friendly manner, about the best way to tune it up or what spark plugs were best. Today, Jonathan had wanted to work on the rear differential and Clark was helping because Jonathan didn’t have a mechanic’s lift.

When Lois and Martha called them in for lunch the guys were talking and had their arms across each other’s shoulders as they walked to the house. Once they had cleaned up they all had lunch together and talked. When they finished Clark and Jonathan were about to head out to the barn again, but Martha put on the radio, tuning in a news station. Just as the guys were about to step out through the door, there was an announcement,

“The following is a special bulletin. News Flash! Dateline – Metropolis! Metropolis Prison announced today that they have had a prison break. One individual, helped by outside resources, has escaped from the prison while in the exercise yard. Lex Luthor, in the prison post-Indictment and pending trial, has escaped.”

Clark immediately reversed course and all four moved into the living room where they turned on LNN in the hopes of getting more information. The information that they got from LNN was scanty at best. They would need to make some calls.

Using the phone at the farm they called Bill Henderson. It was time to capitalize on his knowledge.

When the phone was answered, “Bill? Clark Kent.”

“Hi, Clark. Where’s Lois?”

“Hi, Bill. I’m right here. We just heard the news. How’d it

happen?”

“Oh, you heard about Luthor, huh? He must have had resources other than those that we seized. He also must have had more accomplices than those we rounded up. He was in the yard for exercise when a scuffle started which distracted the guards. While they were distracted a helicopter equipped with noise-deadening stealth technology dropped in and picked him up. It happened so fast that the guards couldn’t respond quickly enough to prevent the escape. The chopper didn’t even land. It had a rope ladder dangling from the undercarriage. He just grabbed that and they lifted him away. It was as simple as that. They obviously had planned it down to the second. So, what have you guys been up to?”

Clark replied, “We’ve been taking some vacation time since we wrapped that story up, but, I’ll be there in a while to get the complete story for the paper. I think I’ll leave Lois here, undercover. She may just stay hidden until we have Luthor back in custody. Do you have anything more for us?”

“We don’t have a whole lot. This stunt really took the prison administration by surprise. We were still in the process of processing all of the documents we collected when Superman opened that vault for us. I’ll get you what I have and you can take it from there.”

“Thanks Bill. I appreciate it. By the way, we have been meaning to invite you over for dinner sometime. When would be a good time?”

“Oh, most any evening, how about this Friday?”

“Sounds good. We can arrange the details when I come in to get what you have on Luthor.”

“Okay, see you later.” They hung up the phones.

Clark turned to Lois and said, “This could be the perfect cover for you. You are going to stay undercover while Luthor is at large, possibly until after you deliver the baby.”

“Sounds like a plan. But, you’re the one he was after. You’ll be in danger.” Lois pointed out.

“I have a super edge, remember?”

“Yeah, until he produces some more Kryptonite.” Lois challenged.

“Why would he try to use Kryptonite on Clark Kent?”

Her concern was evident in her voice as she said, “He wasn’t using it on you before, but it was still there. If I hadn’t been there to prevent that thug from using a gun, you might not be here right now.”

“I know and I’ll be careful. At least we have found that the Kryptonite doesn’t affect our ability to communicate telepathically. If I feel the effects of Kryptonite I’ll call you immediately. You could hover out of sight and out of range of the Kryptonite and help me deal with it.”

“Just try to keep me away.”

In a teasing tone he said, “Trust me, I’m not going to do anything like not checking the depth before jumping in the water.”

“Ha, ha, ha, very funny. I learned my lesson, remember? Nigel’s statuette taught me a valuable lesson.”

“We need to call Perry and let him know what is happening.”

“He’s not going to like me hiding out.”

“I’m sure he’ll understand. We might as well take care of that right now.” Clark dialed.

“Daily Planet, Perry White.”

“Perry, Lois and Clark.”

“Well, you two. You still have some time on the books. Why are you calling? Is it about Luthor?”

Lois replied, “Well, now that you mention it, yes, it is. We just talked with Henderson. He’s giving us everything they have on him.”

“I knew I could count on you two. When can I expect you in?”

“Well, that’s the thing Perry. Clark doesn’t want me to come in. Luthor was trying to kill Clark but he’s obsessed with possessing me and Clark doesn’t want to take a chance on his succeeding in kidnapping me. We’ve decided that I’m going to stay in hiding. Clark will be working the investigation there in the city while I work remotely.”

“I guess that could work.”

“Listen Perry, a few days ago we interviewed Luthor in prison ...”

Perry interrupted, “You what? I thought you guys were on vacation.”

Lois was laughing as she replied, “Well, I guess you know us. Never really off the clock. Yeah, we went to see Luthor in prison. At that time Luthor promised that he was going to kidnap me and he again threatened Clark’s life. There was absolutely no indication from him that he was planning a breakout. Well, other than that, of course.”

Clark continued, “It’s bad enough the he’s after me, but I don’t want to have to worry about Lois too. By me coming in we could draw him out of hiding. If he goes after me again we might be able to catch him ... again. According to Bill, his resources should be rather limited. Now that we have the goods on him, since his hands are already dirty, he might decide to take a personal hand in whatever he cooks up. If he does, we’ll get him.”

“Okay, I guess you’re right. Clark, I’ll look for you. Lois, Darlin’, you stay where you are, wherever that is.”

“I’m in ...”

Perry interrupted her, “Don’t say it, Lois! I don’t want to know. Plus we don’t know if this line is tapped or not.”

“I guess you’re right, Perry. We will keep it our secret. Clark will be in later.”

“Let’s just keep it that way, for the time being. See you later, Clark.”

“See you, Perry.” They hung up.

“Perry’s right. We need to keep where you are our little secret.”

Exasperation was evident in her tone of voice as she asked, “What is this? Everywhere I go, I’m a secret. Either Superwoman is a secret or where I’m located is a secret. I hate secrets and they keep being thrust upon me.”

“There’s another thing about this, if I show up later today and the line was bugged there is no way they would think of looking for you here. It’s too far away for me to get to Metropolis that quickly from here.”

Martha started to laugh and said, “Besides, you’re holding another surprise package, you know. That little bundle of joy.”

Protectively, Lois put her hands over her tummy and said, “Yeah, I guess I am and it’s going to remain a surprise until he or she sees the light of day, so there. That’s one surprise I’m happy with.”

Clark said, “I’m glad you have found a surprise that you are happy with,” he pulled her into his arms and kissed her.

A little later Clark flew to Metropolis to meet with Henderson, who gave him all of the reports that they had so far on Luthor.

Instead of flying directly back to Smallville, Clark made a stop at a particular apartment. He spent a good deal of time there before heading back to Smallville.

Chapter – 21 – Triple Wedding

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –

Alt 1

%%%

The weekend of the triple wedding had arrived! Clark had flown Denny, Jack, Carrie, Lucy and James to Smallville the day before. They had all taken Friday off because Friday night was the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner. That morning he and Lois had flown out. Clark had gone and picked up Sam.

Eleven year old, Denny was going to act as ring bearer. Traditionally the ring bearer is a little younger, but they didn't want to leave him out. Jack was going to be the usher. To make things slightly less complicated, Billy Eck was acting as best man for all three grooms just as his wife Rachel was Matron of Honor for all of the girls.

Denny would be first down the aisle next would be Carrie as the flower girl. Then would come Rachel as Matron of Honor, then Lana on the arm of her father, Professor Lang. Finally Sam Lane would be walking both Lois and Lucy down the aisle, one on each arm.

After seating everyone, Jack would get Scrappy and would move to a front pew holding him.

There were a number of residents of Smallville in attendance as most of the town knew half of the members of the wedding party.

It was an absolutely beautiful day. Scheduling the wedding so far in advance they had been taking a chance on the weather, but the sky was a beautiful deep blue with scattered puffy white clouds.

There was a procession of cars that left the Lang house. Professor Lang drove his daughter while Sam Lane drove Lois and Lucy. Billy Eck drove the car with Rachel, Carrie, Scrappy and one more passenger as they all headed for the small All Faith Chapel in Smallville. There had been a brief shower earlier and the water on the grass and leaves glittered like jewels in the bright sunlight.

It was quarter to eleven in the morning and the day was still fresh. Kansas could be brutally hot in July, Lana had told them the night before, but the shower earlier had taken the edge off of the heat, however so briefly. It was turning into a perfect, fine weather day.

Lois looked over at Lucy next to her in the back seat of the sedan and squeezed their joined hands. "This is it, Luce. In a few minutes you are going to be an old married woman."

"What, marriage instantly ages you?" Lucy asked.

Lois giggled in reply, "Well, that, or makes you young again."

"Hey, I'm younger than you!"

"That you are sis, that you are." Lois was enjoying the whole wedding experience to the full. She had been married to Clark twice already, but both times had been civil ceremonies. There was just something different about a church wedding and it wasn't until now that she really realized just what she had missed out on. Silently she thanked Clark for suggesting that they do this. It was going to be a memory she would cherish for the rest of her life, especially now thanks to Clark's wedding present.

After the rehearsal dinner, the girls had spent the night at the Lang's. Immediately after they had entered the house they had all settled in the living room and started to chat. There was a knock on the door and Lana's mom said, "Now, who could that be? Lana, were you expecting anyone?"

Lois was listening with her superhearing. Suddenly she gasped and jumped to her feet. She said, "How?" Like one in a trance, Lois made her way to the door and was there as it was opened.

Lois started to cry. She managed to get out, "Mom, how?"

"Clark. He told me what you were doing and insisted that I not miss my daughters' wedding."

Lucy, hearing and recognizing the voice of Ellen Lane came

to the door. She felt like she was seeing a ghost. She gasped out, "Mom? How???"

Ellen turned and said, "Lucy. Yes, it's me. Maybe not the same me that you grew up with, but still me. Come here sweetheart." She threw her arms around Lucy as Lucy started to cry. Nodding to Lois, Ellen said, "Let's go inside." Keeping her arms around Lucy she led her inside.

They sat down on the couch. Lucy couldn't keep her eyes off of Ellen. She asked, "How can you be here? You died."

Ellen held both of her hands and said, "Do these hands feel like I'm a ghost? It was Clark's doing." Looking back and forth between her two daughters, Ellen continued, "You know he can do some very unusual things." Looking at Lois with an accusation in her eyes, "He told me about what happened to you and who he is. Why haven't you told me? Don't you trust me?"

"No, Mom, it's not like that. It just never came up. I've been meaning to tell you, honestly."

"Well, now you don't have to worry, he took care of it for you. Clark wanted to give you a wedding present and he also didn't want me to have to miss out on my daughters' weddings. He talked to me a while ago so that I'd have time to get a Mother-of-the-Brides dress. He showed me a picture of Rachel's dress and I got one in royal blue, the same color as a famous uniform. He came to pick me up a little while ago. He told me that there would be another surprise. One for me?"

"Yeah, Mom. Dad is here. He's giving us away at the altar."

Ellen suddenly had a stricken look. In a hushed tone she said, "Sam? He's alive? But, he died in Viet Nam."

"There, yes. Not here. Here he never joined the military. He worked in a civilian hospital."

"Oh, my." She turned to Lucy and said, "I know just how you feel, now. To have your mom suddenly show up, on the eve of your wedding. I'm going to see Sam again. I wonder if Clark will tell him that I'm going to be there."

Lois said, "Here's another surprise for you. Carrie, come here sweetheart."

Carrie came over to Lois and Lois put her arms around her giving her a little hug. She turned her around so that she was facing Ellen as she said, "Carrie, sweetheart, this is my mommy."

Carrie was a little bashful as Sam said, "I'm Carrie Harris. Miss Lois and Mr. Clark helped make me better."

Ellen held out her arms and said, "I heard all about it, sweetheart. I'm glad to finally meet you."

Carrie moved over and Ellen hugged her. Then she gave her a little kiss on the top of the head. She said, "Now, you make sure that Lois and Clark bring you to visit me sometimes, okay?"

Carrie smiled and said, "Okay. Can Scrappy come too?"

"Yes, sweetheart, Scrappy can come too."

Smiling, Carrie broke away and put her arms around Scrappy's neck and said, "You hear that Scrappy? You can come too."

The rest of the night they treated as a pajama party in place of a bachelorette party. That way, in the morning they could get dressed in private and then meet their respective grooms at the church. It had been all of the girls, Rachel, Carrie and Scrappy had joined the brides-to-be along with Mrs. Lang and Ellen Lane. Carrie had never been involved in a wedding before and she was excited. All of the women fussed over Carrie and she blossomed under all of the attention.

After the rehearsal dinner, when the women all went to the Lang's, all of the guys including Billy Eck retired to the Kent farm house. Lana's mother had even evicted Bertram for the night so that it would be all girls. Billy broached the idea of a bachelor party, but none of the guys were interested. They were all looking forward to the morrow. Clark pulled out some board games and since Monopoly was the only game that would

accommodate that number of players, that's what they decided on. He said, "Guys, I have an errand to run. While you get set up, I'll go do what I need to do. I'll be back in about five minutes." He exited the farm house and used the TaDT to cross over to the other universe. He picked up Ellen Lane with her suitcase and transported her back with him. He flew her to the Lang's house and then flew back to the Kent farm. They played for several hours and there was lively banter the entire time.

Like Carrie, Jack and Denny were really excited to be part of such a lavish affair. It was lavish by their standards anyway.

The arrangements for the morning had all been made in advance. Bertram Lang drove the lead vehicle closely followed by Sam with Billy bringing up the rear. The girls were all in their bridal finery and had been watching for the cars to arrive.

Therefore it was no surprise when Bertram Lang followed by Sam and Billy pulled up in front to pick them up.

Ellen Lane was veiled and had on a big pair of sunglasses as she left the house. In all of the excitement no one noticed the extra passenger and she got into Billy's car with Rachel, Carrie and Scrappy.

A short time later they drove into the dirt parking lot and Professor Lang announced, "Ladies we're here. We're going into the pastor's house first for any last minute touch ups and to let the men get into the church first."

The ladies piled out of the cars, wearing bedroom slippers because of the dirt parking lot, their strappy shoes in hand, and kept trying to suppress giggles. They knew that Sam was in for quite a surprise. Carrie looked a little confused, she couldn't understand why she was wearing bedroom slippers instead of her shoes, but was smiling happily with Scrappy trotting along by her side. No one was concerned about Scrappy's presence. He had been well schooled and did not jump up on people so the gowns were safe from his dirty paws.

Clark didn't often get nervous, but driving from the farmhouse to the Chapel, he was. He was glad that Pete was doing the driving because he was so distracted that he thought he might have made a wrong turn. It surprised him a bit since he and Lois had already had a wedding ceremony in the Congo, but this was different; it was home and he was pledging himself to his new wife again. And they had a bonus family in the form of a baby on the way. As they drove in he saw the cars parked by the pastor's house and assumed the girls were inside. He wondered if Sam had met Ellen yet. Firmly he resisted any temptation to peek at Lois, honoring the tradition of not seeing the bride before the wedding.

Clark saw the Right Reverend Montgomery waiting for them at the side door of the Chapel. After parking the car, the Reverend ushered James, Pete, Denny, Jack and Clark in through the side door. Billy had dropped Rachel off to the pastor's house earlier with the rest of the girls and he met them inside. He took Denny into to the back of the Church where the bridal party would line up. He would take Scrappy and lead him to the front where he would hold him during the service.

Finally all was in place beside the altar. First in the lineup to the left facing the altar was Pete, waiting for Lana, in the center was James waiting for Lucy and on the right was Clark, waiting for his soul mate. All that was needed was the presence of the women. Clark could hear some of the comments from the congregation along the lines of "What is this? A batting line up for a softball game?" Every one of their friends was aware of the multiple weddings and were in good humor. A couple of their friends from the Planet even made it to Smallville for the ceremony.

The church organist, Maisie Matthews, of Maisie's Diner fame, began the prelude on the small church organ precisely 7 minutes after 11:00 a.m. As the music swelled to full volume, filling the small chapel, Clark looked out at the small

congregation of friends who had come to wish them all well and smiled. Then he inhaled a deep calming breath, forcing himself to relax.

After Maisie had been playing for a couple of minutes, Jack came in escorting Mrs. Lang to the front pew on the Bride's side. After she was seated he returned to the back and brought in the veiled and sunglasses-bedecked Ellen Lane. She took a seat next to Mrs. Lang. After being seated, Ellen removed the veil and glasses. Next Jack went to the back and got Scrappy. He brought the dog to the front and sat on the far end of the front pew.

Clark's first sight after the back door was opened was Denny in his mini-tuxedo-like outfit. The boy carefully held the pillow with the rings, looking at that rather than where he was walking. Fortunately, all the rings were tied on with ribbons, so it did not matter whether he tipped it over or not.

Next came tiny little Carrie dressed in a blush pink sweetheart neckline dress with small cap sleeves and a pink ribbon sash with a small pink flower attached. Her skirt was ruffled blush pink tulle in three layers. She had small white socks and white ballet shoes, each with a small pink flower. Holding a basket of flower petals, she precisely and determinedly threw them carefully to the right of the aisle and then the left. The congregation laughed quietly at the precision with which she did her assigned job.

Attention switched back to Carrie when she suddenly dropped two petals together and bent to pick up the errant one to put it in its proper place. Rachel moved up close behind Carrie, bent down to stop her and whispered, "That's all right. Don't worry about it, sweetheart. Keep going up to Clark." Having been concentrating on her job with the flower petals, Carrie had been unaware that Clark was standing by the minister. Seeing him, Carrie broke into a huge smile and fairly danced up the rest of the aisle. She bounded up onto the platform and Clark scooped her up. When he did, her basket tipped and a bunch of the flower petals fell at Clark's feet. He smiled, gave her a kiss on the cheek and held her on his hip so she could see the rest of the procession.

Denny had barely made it to the front of the aisle before Carrie bounded up behind him. He made it without an incident, only pausing from his careful staring at the ring pillow to smile at his brother Jack.

Returning to her place as the Matron of Honor for all of the brides by pausing to allow Carrie to move ahead, Rachel continued calmly up the aisle. She was dressed in a tea length maroon charmeuse strapless gown, softly pleated in the center. Her baby bump caused the center of the gown to rise, giving a pleasing drape to the gown.

The organ music swelled as Lana proceeded up the aisle escorted by Professor Lang. Pete goggled at this vision of loveliness in a full length white taffeta gown with an overlay of white embroidered organza. She wore a sweet bolero of embroidered organza over her shoulders and had a full length veil. The veil was attached to a small coronet which, as well as covering her face, flowed down her back and formed a modest train.

Next into view was Sam Lane escorting Lois and Lucy with one on each arm. They wore identical knee length white strapless gowns. Immediately under the busts was a black ribbon interspersed with diamante jewels. The skirts were four layers of tulle. On their feet were matching open toed white shoes with ankle straps. Neither sister had a veil or hat. Their beautiful brunette hair shone in the light. They indeed looked like twins. Lois still did not have a significant baby bump so it did not mar the fall of the fabric.

Clark was openmouthed and would have almost dropped Carrie if it were not for his fast reflexes. Beside him, he could feel James give the same rapt attention to Lucy. Both women smiled widely at their men, but they looked so identical there was

a moment of confusion. Which was which?

When they reached the front, the fathers stood there with the brides-to-be and waited for Reverend Montgomery.

When the music stopped Reverend Montgomery stepped forward, to the right of Pete and addressed the fathers, “Who gives these women to be married?”

Sam and the Professor answered in unison with the formulaic, “Their mother and I do.”

Professor Lang turned to Lana and lifting her veil, revealed her face. He kissed her on the cheek and stepped back as she moved forward to join hands with Pete. Pete stepped down one step to meet her.

Sam turned to his left and kissed his one daughter on the cheek and stepped back.

That daughter stepped forward eagerly and James thought that since she was on that side it must be his Lucy as he started to move forward to join her on a lower step.

Clark saw James’ slight movement and looked at that sister. He quickly realized by the sparkle in her eyes and the sound of another, faster heartbeat that the sister on Sam’s left was his Lois. He realized that in the vestibule there had been a mix-up and Lois had been on the wrong side.

He carefully put Carrie down and told her to go sit by Scrappy and Jack. Then, with all the love in his eyes, he stepped in front of James and held out his hand to Lois.

For a second, James didn’t realize that there had been a mix-up and there was a flash of resentment that Clark had intercepted his bride to be. Then, over Clark’s shoulder he saw Sam kissing the other sister on the cheek and it dawned on him just what the problem was. He saw that it was Lucy on Sam’s right arm.

She smiled and winked at him in happiness. Once Lois and Clark stepped aside, Lucy moved over to James and the wedding proceeded as the fathers sat in the front pew. There was a small stir as Sam saw who was sitting there waiting for him. He stopped dead in his tracks. Ellen smiled at him and patted the pew next to her. She said, “Come join me, Sam.” He was stunned and as he sat she whispered, “You can thank Clark later. I already have.”

Sam gave a nod of understanding and turned back to pay attention to the ceremony. As he did Ellen slipped her hand into his. With a startled look he glanced down and realizing what was happening he clasped her hand and pulled it up so that her arm was entwined with his.

It was an affair to remember. Nothing like this had ever happened in Smallville before, or probably even in Small County. Even though they had limited attendance, the wedding party itself practically filled the church.

The pastor of the church had never done a multiple wedding before and was enjoying himself immensely. He had known Pete and Lana practically all of their lives and Clark while he was growing up. Of course, he had lost track of him when he graduated from high school.

The couples had been given the option of using the standard ceremony and doing it simultaneously but they had opted for individual vows.

Pete Ross’s went first. He said, “Lana, I’ve loved you for a long time. When I wasn’t your choice all I could do was hope that someday you would see me. The day you finally realized that I was there and decided that you felt the same way about me that I did about you was the happiest day of my life. I might not have James’s money or Clark’s powers, but I will do everything in my power to make you happy and take care of you.”

Lana gave her response. “Pete, thank you for being patient with me. You have always been there for me even when I didn’t know it. I know it now and I know that you will be there for me from now on. Please know that I do love you and will for the rest of our lives together.”

Next it was James Olsen’s turn. “Lucy, we’ve known each other for some time. When you lost your sister it was a problem, but now you have found your sister and we have found each other again. I don’t ever want to lose you again and so I promise to be there for you no matter what happens. I’ll take care of you. If you’re sad, I’ll make you laugh. When you’re happy, I’ll be happy too. If you get sick, I’ll take care of you. But, at all times, I’ll love you with all of my heart.”

Then it was Lucy’s turn. “James, when I lost my sister I lost my way and the best friend I had ever had. Now, I’ve found my sister and also my best friend, almost at the same time. I don’t know which made me happier. All I know is that I am happy now. I promise you that now that I’ve found my way back to you, I’ll never lose my way again. I’ll stay by your side. I’ll be your partner, sharing your joys and helping to ease your sorrows. If you are sick I’ll take care of you and at all times, I’ll love you.”

When she had finished, Clark spoke from his heart. “Lois, I lost my family at a young age. When that happened I almost despaired of having a family. When I finally found you, I found fulfillment. I found the one woman I knew that would challenge me and support me. Be my partner, confidant and comforter. The woman I could love with my whole heart and I do. I promise to be there for you, to protect you, to comfort you when you are blue and to take care of you when you need me to. You are the love of my life now and forever.”

With tears of joy in her eyes, Lois replied, “Clark, you are the first man that has ever been able to be my partner on the job that I could tolerate. Somehow when we were teamed up we meshed like two clogged wheels that were made for each other. I found not only a work partner, but a life partner. You are the first man I have really loved and I promise to love you for as long as we live.”

Denny brought the pillow with the rings to Pete, James and Clark. There was a bit of fumbling as they tried to untie the knots in the ribbon. Lucy whispered into the pastor’s ear. He nodded in understanding and stepped over to Denny. Leaning down he asked Denny which rings went to Pete. Denny pointed them out. The pastor followed the ribbon to the end and pulled out the pin that held the ribbon on the pillow and slid the rings off. He did the same for the rings destined for James and Lucy and then those for Lois and Clark.

After the rings were exchanged the three couples turned around and were presented to those present by their now married names.

The reception was held in the church’s fellowship hall and pictures were taken.

Afterward Pete and Lana left on their honeymoon.

Lucy, James, Lois and Clark all returned to the farm.

Lucy and James had their luggage for the honeymoon there. They had decided on Australia for their honeymoon. They were starting in Sydney and working their way north until they reached the Great Barrier Reef. They were going to do some scuba diving there before returning to Metropolis. Lois and Clark saved them the airfare out as their wedding present with Lois flying Lucy and Clark flying James. They landed after dark behind the hotel and dropped off James and Lucy. They took off immediately, before they could be spotted.

Clark returned Jack and Denny to Metropolis and then returned shortly to Lois. Using the TaDT they returned a tired but happy Carrie to Chicago before going to Metropolis. They were going to pursue the investigation into Luckabee and also share the duties of Editor-in-Chief until James returned.

Chapter – 22 – The Toasters

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation —
Alt 1

%%%

Luckabee was behind a bar in one of the underground chambers and, as usual, he was drinking. One would think that he was drinking from worry. His hands seemed to tremble slightly, and the neck of the bottle chattered against the rim of the glass as he poured. Being so completely in Smythe's power was really getting to him, but he couldn't see any way out now. If he didn't get that antidote he'd die.

Smythe was lounging in a chair while the sound system played the music from "Agrippina" by Handel in the background.

Luckabee, the music finally getting to him, almost shouted, "What is that caterwauling?"

Smythe didn't even bother to turn to look at him. He simply said, "That is an opera by Handel. It's about Nero's mother making him emperor. It is particularly fitting. Remember what they say, 'Nero fiddled, while Rome burned.' Well, our plans for the marina area on Hobbs Bay are about to move ahead. Properties in that area have been going up in flames. He has done a few test runs. Perhaps I should take up the fiddle. That would be particularly appropriate."

"How are you going to do that without the cops tumbling to it being arson?"

"Among the papers I recovered were directions to a secret storehouse. Most of the items were failed projects from LexLabs Weapons Division. One of the items I found was a device that would heat up objects using sound waves. I have 'provided' this technology to an individual who is capable of completing the project. He has assured me that he should have it ready for full implementation shortly. Since it doesn't rely on flammable materials it will be hard to say for certain that these fires are the result of arson."

"Why are you doing this? What is it about an upscale marina area that attracts you?" Luckabee asked.

"It was one of the dreams my father had. There are a number of obvious benefits and some not-so-obvious. We will be able to charge exorbitant rental fees for the condos and office space. That is the obvious benefit. One of the not-so-obvious would be having access to the waterfront where we can bring in and send out shipments, under the cloak of darkness, shipments of a, shall we say ... sensitive nature. If we had had that when we had the women they could have been put on board a launch and sent out to a ship standing off the coast. It might have made them harder to find."

"How soon will these fires start happening?"

"The leader of the group has completed the design of the devices and after this test said that he would be ready to move ahead. He has three devices ready and the massed fires will start shortly."

As if the conversation had been prophetic, the fires had started that very night.

Three days later

A team of three individuals dressed in flame retardant reflective suits similar to those used by firemen at airports, stealthily made their way into the third floor of a vacant building on the outskirts of Hobbs Bay. They each carried a device that looked like a parabolic satellite antenna attached to a box.

They dispersed to three sides of the room in the central part of the building. Each started to hum in a high pitch in an eerie harmony. After a few seconds they each depressed a switch on the box. Immediately, directly in front of the center of the antenna, the paint started to peel from the wall and the material under it started to smoke. A car horn sounded just outside. When that happened the composition board under the paint burst into

flame.

With a fire started at each of three walls they gathered in the center of the other wall where the door was.

One of them said, "It's amazing, what these devices can do. When that horn sounded it sure gave them a boost."

"Yeah, that really kicked them into high gear all right."

The first guy asked, "Why is that exactly?"

The third individual, apparently the brains behind the device, answered as if explaining to a five year old, "These devices pick up sound vibrations in the air, amplify it and turn it into energy. It works on the principle that heat is simply the fast motion of the molecules in a substrate. Sound is vibration and is easily used to make molecules move faster. The result is fire and we don't have to carry any gasoline around. Let's go down to two."

The trio, assured that the fire was taking hold, exited. They moved to the second floor and the process was repeated. Finally they did the same thing on the first floor.

Once outside the building they took off the fire suits and stuffed them into backpacks. The antenna looking devices were dismantled and the dish clipped into brackets on the top of the box. Once they were finished they looked like a trio of hip hop fans with their boom boxes.

They moved down the street a distance and watched. Someone must have seen the smoke because suddenly they could hear sirens in the distance, approaching rapidly.

When a crowd started to gather they moved in and mingled with them, watching their handiwork.

When it became apparent that the fire service had the fire under control they drifted off, separately, to meet up again later.

After they were back together, the leader placed a call. When it was answered he heard, "Report."

"A successful fire. Scratch off another building from your list. How soon do you want the next one?"

"Wait two days. Do you think you can start two separate fires the same night?"

"Sure, as long as they are fairly close together. We'd have to keep the suits on in between and if they aren't close we could be spotted."

"In two days see what you can do about two fires at the same time."

"You got it, Boss. When can we expect payment?"

"You have received your retainer. When the job is done you will receive your balance."

"We want more of a down payment."

"I said you have received your retainer."

"Okay, look, we've been thinking this over. You stand to make a lot of money on this deal and we want a bigger payday. We want an additional sixty grand."

"Our deal was for a total of one twenty."

"The price just went up. Now it's one eighty."

"I'll consider it."

"You'll do more than consider it, you'll pay it or we let the cops know who is behind these fires."

"You should think twice about threatening me. Do your job well and there will be a bonus. Go to the police and you will be very sorry that you did."

"Don't try to threaten us, big man. You aren't going to find anyone else with this technology. It was my research that enabled me to complete this device and there is nothing to compare to it. I've never tried it on a human subject, but I would guess that they would burn just like a wall does."

With a tone of menace in his voice, the Boss asked, "Will it burn a bullet out of the air?"

The spokesman for the toasters was visibly shaken by this question. He said, "Let's not get hasty. I didn't say I was going to the cops."

“You’d better not, because you wouldn’t live to regret it.”
The Boss hung up.

As Smythe hung up the phone he exhaled violently and said, “Threaten me, will they? They’ll find out that they can’t do that and get away with it.”

Luckabee asked, “What are you going to do, poison their liquor too?”

Smythe glared at him.

So far only buildings that had been condemned anyhow had been torched, but it was only a matter of time until occupied structures were targeted. The problem was that there was no way to anticipate where and when the arsonists would strike next. Superman was able to be there to help the fire service to put out the fires, however so far the flames had been so widespread and all-consuming that even with all of the efforts of the fire service and Superman the structures had been totally destroyed. Clark was becoming very discouraged.

They arrived at the office one morning and in the morning mail Lois received an anonymous note made up of block letters cut out of a paper. It read:

Lois Lane,
if you want To get to The souRce Of the fires in hObbs bAy
Find a ganG calliNg ThemselvEs the toasTers. I learnt about
them and Thought I’D pass it on to you.

Lois walked over to Clark’s desk and handed him the note. She leaned back against his desk and when she did her baby bump became more evident. Clark reached out a hand and gently laid it on her abdomen. He sent, /”I can’t wait until he starts kicking.”/

Lois giggled and sent back, /”How do you know it’s a he? Have you peeked?”/

/”Well, no, I haven’t and I won’t unless you say I can. I’m just hoping.”/

/”So, you want a boy, is that it?”/

/”I’ll be happy if it is a boy or a girl as long as the child is healthy.”/

Lois brought him back to the note, “What do you think about this?”

“Well, I don’t know.”

Lois said, “The grammar is okay, but there’s a misspelled word.”

Clark took a second look and got a look of understanding. He said, “I think this note came from Luckabee, and if not him some other Australian.”

Lois was flabbergasted. She spluttered out, “How do you know that?”

Clark replied, “Remember when we were in Sydney?”

Lois nodded her head.

“Remember the cab driver that took us to the chocolate bar?”

Lois said, “Yeah, but what does that have to do with this note?”

“Think about what the cab driver said.”

“He said that he had heard about the chocolate bar and his wife had insisted on him taking her.”

“No, what he said was ‘I learnt about that place as soon as it opened and the old lady leant on me until I took her.’ Notice how he pronounced learnt and leant.”

“Yeah, I see what you mean. He replaced the “ed” with “t”. That was done in this note as well.”

“Okay, so Luckabee or Smythe sent this note. Do we give it any credence?”

“I think we have to. This tells me that there may be a falling out between them. We will need to determine which one sent this.”

Over the last few weeks the resources of the fire service were

being stretched more and more thinly. They would no sooner snuff a fire than another would break out. There were several cases where the fires were nearly simultaneous and only a couple of buildings separated them. There were a large number that started in the daytime, but more and more were occurring at night.

Lois and Clark were home when they heard the sirens. Lois said, “Clark, let me help. We need to get to the bottom of these fires.”

“How can you help without compromising the secret?”

“I can wear snooping clothes and hover high overhead. No one will see me. We have really gotten lucky on this one. Before they were long gone before the fire alarm was called in. Recently, while you have been fighting a fire another has been started nearby, probably because you are occupied. If I can spot who is doing it I can let you know. I wonder just what a Toaster looks like.”

“That’s one of the things we need to find out.”

As Clark spun into the Suit Lois supersped to their bedroom and spin changed into her snooping clothes. When she tried to put on her black pants however, she found that she couldn’t button them. She thought, <Uh oh, I’ve gotten too big for my britches. Oh well, I’ll just leave them unbuttoned. I’ll wear this floppy sweater over so that I’m covered.> A few seconds later she joined Clark in the living room. With a shy smile she pulled up the sweater to display her predicament. She said, “I’m going to have to buy some maternity clothes.”

Clark had one of his multi-megawatt smiles as he said, “Anything my beautiful wife needs.”

“You realize of course that before this is over I’ll look like a beached whale. Will you still be saying things like that then?”

“You will only become more beautiful as the time goes on. What you are doing is a beautiful thing and it makes you the more beautiful because of it.” He leaned in and captured her lips in a tender kiss.

When he pulled back he noted that her eyes remained closed for a few seconds and then she released a contented sigh. “I’ll never get tired of that. You always know what to say to make me feel better and your kisses are like fine wine, intoxicating.”

“I’d like nothing better than to stay here kissing my lovely wife, but, duty calls. We have a Toaster to catch. Much as I hate to say it, I hope they try to start a second fire while we are fighting this one. Let’s go partner.”

They left through the back door. Lois soared up to one thousand feet and hid in the cloud cover. She flew directly over Superman so that if she were picked up on radar it would look like an echo from him and confuse the radar operator, thereby concealing her presence.

When he landed she paralleled his descent as far as the rooftops and then, staying as much as possible in shadow, she depended on her dark clothing and the fact that people would be more interested in the fire than what was in the air above their heads.

While he conferred with the Fire Chief she started searching buildings in her vicinity with her x-ray vision. The buildings around her apparently were still unoccupied. It was possible that any occupants had moved into the street to watch all of the activity.

Suddenly her superhearing picked up a sound. It sounded like a trio practicing a tune. But it was a steady set of notes, not a tune, just an eerie drone almost like the drone pipes in a bagpipe, only a higher pitch. Suddenly there was a new tone added. This new tone was in the ultrasonic range. Immediately she used her x-ray vision looking in the direction that the tone was coming from. What she saw startled her and she immediately sent a thought, /”Clark, there is a trio warming up in the third building

to your right.”/

He sent back, /”Perhaps I’ll have the time to listen to them perform, later. Right now I have a fire to deal with.”/

A mental chuckle made its way through the link as she sent, /”Oh, I think you should go hear them rehearse. I think the group’s name is ‘The Toasters’.”/

He sent back, /”What?”/

/”You apparently have at least a little time. I’m going to move over and get a closer look.”/

/”Be careful! We don’t know if they have Kryptonite or not.”/

/”I’ll be careful and I’ll keep an eye on them. Come as soon as you can.”/

Lois flew a high parabolic arc and came back down in the alley behind the second structure. Finding the door that the Toasters had used to gain access she snuck into the building.

Stretching her supersenses to the limit she followed their activities. She decided on a plan of action and when the trio moved down to the second floor she silently ascended the steps.

She listened to their chatter as they prepared and then made her move. Each of the Toasters was facing a separate wall and the hoods they wore to protect them from the heat blocked all but what was directly in front of them from view. Silently she closed the door through which they had entered the room. With a blast of heat vision she welded the knob so that it couldn’t be turned.

Lois returned to the third floor and her supercold breath came into play. She used it to snuff the flames on each of the three walls that the Toasters had started. Now, the Toasters were in a trap, a trap of their own making. If they noticed the door before the fires they were starting got too big they would be able to put them out before they suffered too greatly. If not, they would be uncomfortable inside of their fire resistant suits until Superman came to collect them.

Lois moved back outside and took off to hover in the shadows just above the roof. She sent, /”You can take your time, they aren’t going anywhere. They’re trapped in a room on the second floor.”/

She received, /”What did you do?”/

In reply, she sent, /”I welded the doorknob so that it won’t turn. That won’t keep you from turning it, though. How near are you to finishing?”/

/”I should be finished here in just a couple of minutes.”/

Lois was keeping an eye on the Toasters while she waited. A few minutes later she saw them spot the closed door. She was surprised with what she saw. Apparently these were not your run of the mill crooks. At least one of them was very smart. He didn’t panic. He tried the door. When it wouldn’t open the other two started to complain although they kept their ‘cool’ and waited for the leader.

The leader knelt in front of the door and examined the lock mechanism. He saw that it was clear and yet the knob wouldn’t turn. He said, “It looks like we’ve been found out. The knob won’t turn. Superman must have found us and tried to trap us so that he could come back later and collect us.”

One of his associates asked, “What are we going to do, Burt?”

Burt, the leader, thought for a few seconds and then said, “We can burn the door down. Aim your flamer at the door. We’re going to burn our way out.”

The Toasters lined up in an arc facing the door and aimed the parabolic dishes of their devices at the door. They started their eerie hum again and then when they hit switches on their devices, Lois heard the ultrasonic tone start. When that new tone was added she could see the wood door start to smoke. She knew it was only a matter of time until they would free themselves. She sent, /”Clark, you need to drop what you are doing and get here, NOW! They are using their firestarters to burn through the door. They’ll be out very quickly.”/

/”I’m on my way.”/

He joined her in the air above the building. She pointed down and he descended to the alley and entered through the open door. He flew up the stairs and positioned himself in front of the door with his arms folded over his chest. While he watched the door panel burst into flame and was quickly consumed. He sent a thought, /”Lois, can you call 911 please?”/

Lois sent, /”My pleasure.”/ pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and dialed 911. This was an untraceable prepaid cell phone and when she was connected she heard, “911 – What is the nature of your emergency?”

Lois replied, “Police are needed at One Hundred First and Baylin. Superman has the people that have been starting all of the fires in Hobbs Bay.”

“Who is this?”

“A friend, just a friend. There are three of them so you will need more than one car.”

“Can you put Superman on to confirm this?”

“No, you’ll just have to take my word on it.” As Lois was hanging up she could hear sirens in the distance and approaching. She sent, /”Cavalry is on the way.”/

Once the door had been weakened sufficiently by the flames, the Toasters crashed out of the room only to be greeted by Superman.

The leader said, “I was afraid of this. I knew we were pushing our luck starting more than one fire a night. Okay, Superman, you’ve got us.” They all put up their hands and the leader started to hum in a high pitched tone. A second later the other two joined in.

Lois sent, /”Watch it, that’s how they power their weapons.”/

Superman could hear an ultrasonic tone coming from the weapons and feel the center of his chest starting to heat up. Since the sound was being converted to heat the range of the sound was limited, which explained why he hadn’t heard it. The heat wasn’t anything that would even cause him any discomfort. He said, “You’re wasting your time. That won’t affect me in the slightest.”

The leader stopped humming and said, “You can’t blame us for trying.”

Superman said, “MPD will be here in a minute. Shall we go out to meet them? Uh, first, turn off those machines, if you don’t want me to smash them, that is.”

They all snapped a switch shutting the devices down and filed out of the room. Superman sped into the room and using his supercold breath, snuffed out the fires and was back before they even realized he had left.

The Toasters trooped downstairs and as they exited the building they saw the reception committee consisting of Metropolis’ finest. Their devices were confiscated and they were all cuffed before having their rights read to them. They were placed in the back of three black-n-whites to be taken downtown.

Superman flew off and joined Lois high in the sky, above the cloud cover. He said, “Thanks.”

Laughing she said, “Now you owe me one.”

“One what?”

She flew into his arms and with a wicked little grin said, “I’ll let you know when we get home.”

He smiled as he said, “I can’t wait to pay of this debt,” and flew off with her. When they got to Smallville the first stop was the hay loft of the barn.

Chapter — 23 – Bill

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Lois and Clark had moved to Alt-2 because they were expecting Bill Henderson over for dinner. They were in Smallville in the living room of the Kent farm house with Martha and Jonathan.

Jonathan leaned over and placed his iced tea glass on a coaster and asked, "So, Bill is supposed to tell you how you gave yourselves away. I have to admit, I'm really curious. Do you have any ideas how it happened?"

Just finishing a sip of her own tea, Lois replied, "I have no clue. It was right after the raid on Luthor's office. Clark pulled the safe door off its hinges, collected the evidence and then collapsed."

As Clark was putting down his glass, he asked, "Did you show, I don't know, excess concern for my welfare?"

"I don't see how, I mean, you are Superman and anyone, especially a friend, would be worried about you when you collapsed like that."

Looking over the rim of her glass, with mischief in her eyes, Martha added, "It has to be something along that line. It's hard to be 'just a friend' when you see your husband down like that."

"No, Martha, I was really careful, at least I tried to be. I don't see how, no, I'm convinced, that can't be it. I was really, really careful."

With a smile and a knowing look, Martha said, "I guess we'll see."

It was a little later that evening when Bill Henderson made his appearance at 348 Hyperion Ave. Before he even had a chance to knock on the door it opened to disclose both Lois and Clark standing in the vestibule. Clark said, "Welcome, Bill. Glad you could make it."

"Thanks for the invite. I hope I'm not too late."

Lois laughed and said, "No, Bill, you're right on time. We could practically set our clocks by your arrival."

Clark said, "I hope you are hungry. We're having pasta. Would you like a glass of Chianti?"

"Let's save that for when we sit down to eat."

Lois asked, "Coffee then?"

"Coffee would be good."

"Why don't you and Lois settle in the living room while I get the coffee?"

"This way, Bill." Lois led the way into the living room and they both took seats.

Bill was still looking around at the décor when only a few seconds later Clark brought in the tray with the coffee urn, cups, sugar, honey and creamer.

Bill chuckled and said, "One of the perks of the super powers?"

Clark replied, "Yeah, heat vision shortens the prep time, considerably."

"I can see that. Okay, I guess there's no sense in beating around the bush. What's the complete story? How long have you been super? Lois didn't appear to be super before Superwoman suddenly showed up. Superman took a vacation and then when he returned we had two superheroes."

Clark shook his head and said, "You believe in getting right to the heart of the matter, don't you?"

"Comes with being a detective."

"Well, where to begin. I guess first I need you to simply try to suspend your disbelief for a while. We're going to be telling you some things that are going to be, more than a little, hard to believe. I guess the first thing to tell you is that I'm not the Clark Kent you used to know."

"Right, somehow you acquired superpowers."

"That's actually, not what I was going to say. I'm not the Clark Kent you knew. I'm another Clark Kent."

"Wait a minute. Another Clark Kent? How can you be

another Clark Kent? Oh, wait a minute. Are you saying that you're a clone?"

"Well, no, I'm not saying that either. Here's where it really gets strange. Remember the bomb in Clark's apartment?"

At Bill's nod Clark continued, "The Clark Kent that you knew ... died in that explosion."

"What???? How did I not know about that?"

Lois said, "I found Clark dead. I had been dealing with an earthquake in California. By the time I got back, it was too late. I removed his body before the police arrived."

Clark picked up the narrative, "I arrived just then and assumed his identity."

"Okay, let's see," Henderson looked at Lois, "interfering in the process of an investigation and concealing a crime," he shifted his gaze to Clark, "identity theft, what else?"

Lois was shocked, "Bill, you're not going to charge us, are you?"

With his normal deadpan expression he replied, "No, I'm just keeping score."

Relieved Lois continued, "I took Clark's body away because I was afraid of what an autopsy would show. When Clark, this Clark showed up later it was a surprise. I know, it's confusing."

Bill turned to Clark and asked, "If you aren't Clark, who are you?"

Clark gave a wry smile and said, "Actually, believe it or not, I *am* Clark Kent."

"Wait a minute, you tell me that you're not a clone then you tell me that you aren't the Clark Kent I knew ... Clark Kent ... I ... knew. Okay, you're Clark Kent, just not the one I knew?"

"Right the first time. I *am* Clark Kent, I'm just not from here."

Mystified, Bill asked, "If you're not from here, just where are you from, I mean, other than Krypton?"

Clark asked, "Bill, have you read much science fiction?"

"Sure, in school I was really into it. I read most of the classics, 'Journey to the Center of the Earth', 'The Island of Dr. Moreau', 'From The Earth To The Moon', 'The Time Machine' ..."

Clark interrupted him at this point and said, "Okay, so you are familiar with Jules Verne and H. G. Wells."

"Who isn't?"

"What would you think if I told you that I am not only familiar with H. G. Wells, but he is one of my best friends?"

"I'd say that this story just became seriously unbelievable. I'm thinking I need to call for a straitjacket."

"Come on, Bill. You know that nothing like that would hold me."

"Not for you, for me, for believing all of this." Bill replied with his normal deadpan expression.

"Okay, you told me you would suspend your disbelief, now I really believe you are. There's more, go with me on this."

"Okay, I'll try. Go ahead with your story."

"H. G. Wells didn't only write about a time machine, he actually created one. Now, have you read any stories about parallel dimensions?"

"Yeah, a few."

"Okay, well, Herb not only moves through time, he also crosses the dimensional barriers. He brought me here from one of those parallel dimensions. I'm the Clark Kent from a parallel dimension or as we chose to call them 'universe'. So you see, I'm Clark Kent, just not the one that you knew, although I do know the Bill Henderson in my universe as well. In my home universe, Lois Lane died. That's why I came here, so that we could be together. We can go back and forth between the two universes at will."

When Bill failed to respond to this revelation Clark asked, "Is there a problem?"

“Is he a good cop?”

“Just like you.”

“Does he know?”

“Well, you see, Bill, that’s the thing. In my home universe everybody already knows that I’m Superman. It’s like an open secret. I was exposed by another time traveler ... a guy named Tempus. So you see to him it is not a mystery.”

“That’s a relief.”

“A relief?”

“Yeah, I’d really hate for you to have told me that he figured it out a couple of years ago.”

Both Clark and Lois burst out in laughter.

“Promise me that if he figures out that Lois is super you won’t tell him how much sooner I figured it out. I know how I’d feel and I don’t want him to go through that.”

Still laughing Lois said, “We have been keeping Superwoman’s presence a secret, but if I do come out into the open, we promise.” Shyly Lois asked, “What gave us away?”

Bill had a thoughtful expression as he said, “Well, it was blindingly obvious to anyone with eyes, trained observer’s eyes anyhow. That day, in Luthor’s office, when Clark pulled the vault door off its hinges exposing the Kryptonite, you winced in pain and stepped back out of the way. Then when Clark collapsed your reaction wasn’t that of a fan of the superhero it was that of a lover. You shouted to us to drag him out of the doorway, away from the Kryptonite, but you didn’t move any closer yourself. I would have expected you to be there at his side if you could have been, but because of the Kryptonite you couldn’t.”

Lois and Clark exchanged a look and Clark said, “I don’t know how that could have been avoided. If you hadn’t been there it would have prolonged my exposure. If it had been now, even that brief exposure could have knocked you out as well.”

Bill picked up on that and asked, “Why? What is different now?”

Clark started to smile and said, “We’re expecting. Lois’ condition has made her more susceptible to the effects of Kryptonite.”

Smiling, Bill said, “Congratulations. When?”

“That’s the thing, we don’t know, and we don’t want Luthor to know, so I’m going to stay in hiding.”

“Ahh, I understand. I agree, He’s the last one that you want to know about that. How can I help?”

“We are going to work the investigation, but Lois is going to be staying with my folks in Kansas while I work from here.”

“Probably a good idea.”

“Have you been able to trace him at all?”

“Apparently Luthor not only had access to a chopper with stealth technology but also a jet. We found the chopper at a small airfield. It had been destroyed so that the military couldn’t benefit from the technology. There was evidence of the presence of an exec jet size plane, configuration unknown, that had been hangared there. We checked with ATC in the area and the radar didn’t pick up any aircraft for the time period of his pick-up by the chopper until our finding the destroyed chopper. Dead end. There’s no telling just how far he could have gotten. The possibility exists that he could have flown overseas to a non-extradition treaty country. With his resources he could have had places to land for refueling, if not mid-air refueling capability. Who knows with him? Bottom line – he could be anywhere in the world by this time.”

Lois said, “Or, he could be right here in Metropolis, after having laid a false trail.”

Clark added, “That’s where I’d put my money. He is obsessed with possessing Lois. I don’t think he will get too far away, until he has accomplished that objective.”

Bill asked, “Does Luthor have any clue that Lois is Superwoman?”

“I don’t think so. When he first met her she didn’t have any super powers.”

Bill picked up on that statement and asked a follow-up question, “Just how long have you been super, Lois?”

Lois asked, “Do you remember the Wishing Well incident?” At Bill’s nod, she continued, “When Clark was hit with that laser his Kryptonian physiology was transferred to me and my Earth human physiology to him. That’s why he died in that bombing. He was normal, not super.”

“I see, so since that time you have been, what, no longer human, Kryptonian?”

Clark clarified, “Kryptonians are human, Bill. We can interbreed with Earth humans after we have been together for a period of time. I have friends, other Loises and Clarks, couples in other universes that have children. Their Lois Lanes are, well, modified Earth human.”

“Okay, so you are both Kryptonian human and you’re going to have a Kryptonian human child. I guess that is to be expected. Now, about Luthor. If your theory is correct, then we could possibly be able to lure him out of hiding if we were able to make him think that he could have another chance at Lois.”

“I don’t want to take that kind of chance, Bill. Especially with Lois’ enhanced susceptibility to Kryptonite it would be far too dangerous.”

“But, why would he expose her to Kryptonite?”

“He doesn’t know that I’m Superman so there would be no reason for him to expose me to it, but he did. He gave it to his men so that Superman and Superwoman wouldn’t interfere with the mugging.”

“There was Kryptonite involved in that? Why wasn’t that reported?”

“We mentioned it to the patrolman that responded. Apparently it just didn’t make an impression and never made it into his report. We were just as happy that it didn’t. The less Kryptonite is mentioned the better.”

“I’ll go along with that. Okay, so we can’t use Lois as bait. That’s going to make it tougher.”

Lois said, “What if I just show myself, occasionally, just tease him into thinking I’m around? I could write a story occasionally. Clark can feed me the details.” She started to snicker as she continued, “Or I could just hover out of sight and watch so that I can give an eyewitness account. Something like that should drive him nuts.”

Clark was smiling as he replied, “Yeah, as long as you stayed out of sight, but wrote up eyewitness reports he couldn’t help but wonder just where you were and try to find out.”

Bill said, “That just might work. You could even give a deposition or two about crimes you have witnessed to lend credibility to your being around. He probably has moles in the department and he’d find out about them.”

After they made their plans and had dinner, Bill returned home and Lois and Clark returned to the other universe.

%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –
Alt 1

%%%

In the underground office that was now their home, Smythe and Luckabee were both in the lounge area. As was his wont Luckabee was behind the bar. Now he wasn’t drinking out of boredom. Now there was purpose in it. He was making sure he had the poison antidote in his system in adequate quantities.

Smythe was relaxing in a chair while the strains of the overture to “Othello” by Rossini played in the background.

Finally, the lack of communication got to Luckabee and he asked, “What lurk is in the wind now?”

"I was notified that work is progressing on the Quantum Disruptor and it could be ready for testing within a couple of weeks. That woman is amazing."

"Yes, Lois Lane is amazing."

"No, you idiot! Not Lois Lane, Nell Newtrich. I might just change my mind about getting rid of her. She could be too valuable to dispose of too quickly. Do you know what she has done?"

Dryly he replied, "No, but I imagine you will tell me."

"She built a radioisotope thermoelectric generator. This is a very novel application of this device. I didn't know that RTGs were being used anywhere other than EPRAD nor that they would generate the kind of power this device will need, but by an equally novel application of capacitors she is able to produce the power needed for the device. The best part is that the radioisotope she is using is that green rock. It could add an extra little punch."

"Once the weapon has been created we will have to lure Superman into the trap. My cyber snoopers have accessed the computer system at STAR Labs. They have documented much of what Superman can do. Did you know that he is faster than a speeding bullet? Can leap tall buildings in a single bound? Can bend steel in his bare hands? Can see through solid objects? Some of those seem somewhat farfetched, but who am I to question the integrity of STAR Labs? There was one interesting piece of data. It would appear that Superman's powers are derived from and replenished by sunlight. Therefore, if we can diminish his powers and get him into an environment where there is no sun he should not recover his powers." At this point Smythe spread his hands wide as if to indicate their accommodations.

Luckabee swallowed loudly before he choked out his reply, "You mean to bring him here?"

"Can you think of a better place? We need to lure the fly into the spider's web. We will need some bait."

"What kind of bait would you use to bring Superman down here?"

"We may have to lure him to us at a different location and then, after knocking him out, bring him here."

"Again, what can you use as bait to bring Superman into a trap?"

"What do you have, mush for brains? I feel certain that Lois Lane would be just what the doctor ordered as far as bait is concerned. There could be additional advantages to using her. We could offer some terms ..."

"What kind of terms could you offer Superman that he would accept?"

"Who said anything about offering Superman terms? I may make Lois Lane, to coin a phrase, an offer she couldn't refuse."

"What kind of offer would that be?"

"Superman's life for her hand."

Luckabee started laughing uncontrollably. You're a nutjob if you think she'd go along with that."

"You never can tell what a woman will do when presented with such an alternative. We'll see."

Chapter 24 – Jack to the Rescue

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation –

Alt 1

%%%

Life was really complicated right now for Lois and Clark and Lois was grateful every day for her powers. They really helped her complete her chores and helped her do her job more efficiently. Since Lucy and James were still on their honeymoon, Lois was doing some double duty. She was acting editor-in-chief and still helping with the Luckabee investigation. Her skills with

the computer were not equal to Lucy's, but she still worked at it.

Lois happened to be at her regular desk on Wednesday, when she received a call. "Daily Planet, Lois Lane."

"Ms. Lane, this is John Smythe, Mr. Luckabee's assistant. Mr. Luckabee has an evening open later this week. He would like to extend an invitation to you for that interview. Are you available on Friday evening?"

"Let me check my schedule." She sent Clark a thought, "Smythe. Luckabee wants to have that dinner interview Friday."/

/"I'll stay nearby."/

"My schedule is clear that evening. What time and where?"

"The Plaza Hotel at 6:30."

"Fine, I'll put it on my schedule. Please tell Mr. Luckabee that I'll be there."

"I'll relay that message Ms. Lane. Goodbye."

"Goodbye." She hung up and turned to Clark. "Okay, Friday, 6:30 at the Plaza. How are we going to handle this?"

"You need to try to get as much information out of him as you can."

Lois showed up for the dinner interview promptly at 6:30. She was dressed in a smart business suit consisting of a rather short skirt, a low-cut blouse which accented her enlarging breasts, a jacket and as usual, a hat and gloves. She was starting to show more, but by carefully selecting her wardrobe, drawing the eyes away from her middle, she was able to conceal her condition. She wouldn't be able to do that very much longer. She needed to carry the deception through for a while yet. The attraction she had detected in Luckabee was something she could play on and perhaps cause him to slip up.

She knew that Luckabee had left the Plaza. When he had moved out they had lost track of him; however, their dinner meeting was still being held there. Perhaps when they left Superman would be able to trail them to their new digs. When she stopped at the desk to inquire she was directed to the same room on the second floor that they had used previously.

This time when she arrived she found a small table set for two with flowers and candles and subdued lighting. She was thankful for this because it would help hide her condition. All in all, it was a very intimate and romantic setting. If she played her cards right she should be able to use this to her advantage.

As Lois was opening the door, Luckabee hastened to receive her and escort her to her seat at the table. There was an ice bucket next to the table with a bottle of wine chilling. As he was conducting her to the table, Luckabee said, "Welcome, my dear. I am so happy you were able to make it. Thank you for accepting my invitation." He handed her into her seat and pushed her chair in decorously.

"Would you care for some wine? It is a rare vintage and by all reports it is excellent."

Lois nodded her head in agreement and Smythe pulled the bottle out of the stand and poured a slight bit into Luckabee's glass. Luckabee swirled it somewhat to generate some fumes which he delicately sniffed and then sipped on the wine itself. He smiled and indicated that Smythe could pour for both of them.

Lois accepted her glass and delicately sipped on hers, emitting a "Mmmmm," before placing the glass down.

She leaned into the table and crossed her arms before herself on the edge. This had the effect of allowing Luckabee a tantalizing view of the upper slopes of her breasts and hiding her lower body. She noted the rapt attention that he paid to the view she was giving him. She knew that he would have to be nearly dead to not appreciate the show. After all, naturally she was well endowed, but now with the pregnancy, her breasts were swelling and she was at least a half cup size larger. Wearing one of her usual bras had the effect of a push-up bra, enhancing her

appearance that much more.

She said, “That is a very nice wine. I seem to recall asking if this was going to have the emphasis on dinner or interview.” She looked around before she said, in a saucy tone, “I get the feeling that the emphasis is definitely on ... dinner.”

Luckabee struggled with himself to pull his eyes away from her obvious endowments before he could say, “Ahhh, yes, definitely dinner. I hope you like Lobster Newburg. But, first, a spinach salad with a balsamic vinaigrette dressing, and for dessert we will have baked Alaska.”

“That sounds heavenly, but I may have to spend some extra time in the gym to make up for it afterwards.”

“There must be ... other forms of ... exercise ... that would ... burn off the extra calories.”

The allusion was perfectly clear. He was about as subtle as an ox. Playing her part she thought about what she planned to do with Clark later and it brought color to her cheeks and a catch in her breath as she smiled at that thought. Of course Luckabee knew nothing of this and he thought that it was his proposal that brought the color to her cheeks and he was encouraged by it.

When Lois had composed herself somewhat she pulled out her pad and pencil and even though she already knew the answer, she asked, “The last time you gave me the current names of some businesses and said that they would be returning to their former names and glory. In my research I found that those businesses were named LexLabs, LuthorConstruction and Luthor News Network. Were you trying to infer that you are related to the late and I must say, in some quarters, unlamented Lex Luthor?”

“Yes, he was my father.”

“But, your name is Luckabee.”

“Only temporarily. I am using an assumed name so that I do not stir up controversy. Before too much longer I will be resuming my true name, Lex Luthor Junior.”

Lois asked, “Can you tell me about him? I was out of the country at the time when he became so prominent and he was killed before I returned. His rise to fame could be described as meteoric and to be killed that way. You must have been devastated.”

“Not as devastated as you would imagine. My father and I were ... estranged. He married my mother in Australia, but it was an unhappy marriage and they divorced quickly. I never knew my father, but I did receive an inheritance.”

The wait staff arrived at this point with the salad course, interrupting them. Once the waiters left the conversation resumed.

“So, Lex Luthor left you an inheritance. What was the extent of it?”

“Oh, cash, securities, holdings, but mostly a legacy. It is the legacy which I am attempting to reclaim.”

“What exactly was that legacy?”

“You were not here at the time to see it, but my father was a great businessman and philanthropist. He did a lot for this city. If I had been able to collect the whole of the cash and holdings he left, I would be farther along than I am, but most of that was and still is tied up by court actions. The breakup of the Luthor Empire has resulted in a diminishing of the reserves available. Many of the companies and other holdings were sold at pennies on the dollar.”

Noting the tone of voice of Luckabee, Lois couldn't help feeling that he was simply reading from a script. He had it all down and was going by rote, but there was absolutely no passion or any other feeling for that matter. Surreptitiously she observed Smythe and noted a look of approval. Apparently his ventriloquist's puppet was reciting his lines without a flaw. She wondered if she could get him off script.

Lois had finished her salad while he had been speaking and setting aside her fork stated, “I do remember reading about Lex

Luthor. I was in Africa at the time. I was investigating illegal gunrunning to the rebels. That was why I was not in this country. The rebels captured me and I was injured during my escape attempt. I had amnesia as a result. I have since recovered my memory and one of the things I remember is that Lex Luthor was one of the people behind the gunrunning.”

Smythe was standing close enough behind Luckabee for Lois to see both without shifting her eyes and she noted a flicker of expression cross Smythe's face at this assertion.

Luckabee also seemed to be startled. At this point the wait staff arrived with the lobster and seizing this opportunity of the interruption, he said, “If you will excuse me for a moment. I need to check another appointment with my assistant.” He rose from the table and he and Smythe exited the room.

Lois listened in with her superhearing as she knew Clark was doing and heard Luckabee address Smythe, “What do we do with this? If she had evidence of crimes ...”

“She has nothing but supposition. She wasn't here and unless she has proof that Lex was involved in the gunrunning it is an unsupported accusation. Treat it as such.” Smythe pulled out a cell phone and hit a speed dial number. When the phone was answered he simply said, “Begin the operation.” He closed the phone and said, “Let's go back in. It will take some time for them to arrive. She's going to be our alibi.”

Lois sent, “Okay, they're up to something. I'm afraid to find out just what it might be. I think I need to get out of here, fast. Think of something.” A second later the door opened and Luckabee and Smythe reentered. Luckabee resumed his seat as the wait staff retired.

She received, “I think we have some time. Let's see what else they will disclose.”

“Don't wait too long. From what we heard, someone will be here shortly and I don't want to be here when they arrive. I've been kidnapped once already and I don't want to have to go through that again. Besides, what if they are using this as a trap to get you? They could have more Kryptonite. I don't want to expose the baby to that anymore. We don't have any idea as to the effect it is having on him.” This mental conversation only took the blink of an eye to conduct and she was ready for Luckabee's return.

Luckabee was back on track and proved it as he said, “I have heard such accusations before, Lois. Most of them are simply unsubstantiated rumors. Dare I say that a number of them could have been conjured up by jealous rivals in the business world?” You know what they say, ‘If you cannot attain to the high level of your competition, bring him down to your level.’ Do you have documentation to support your accusation?”

Lois was very happy that Clark had briefed her on what he had found in the Congo while doing the investigation because it enabled her to bring specific information to bear. “No, I do not. It was lost when I was attacked and abducted, but I do know what I found and the information I had gathered was irrefutable. It indicated a partnership between Lex Luthor and Miranda Michaels. The company name was L&M Enterprises. I'm sure that if you check, that can be confirmed. The company was incorporated here in Metropolis around 1989 or 1990, not all that long ago. In a way he was responsible for what happened to me in the Congo. If not for him I wouldn't have been there following the arms. I wouldn't have been captured and injured.”

“I'm sorry that you feel that way. I assure you, that I know nothing of that which you speak. I do know that a number of others have claimed to have proof of wrongdoings on the part of Lex Luthor. Many of those allegations have been proven false.” Seeing the look of disbelief on her face, Luckabee continued, “No, don't get me wrong, I am not disputing your word, I am simply saying that I will need to check. It is just hard to believe ... believe that ... my father, my father could have been involved

in all of the things of which he has been accused.” He dabbed at his eyes as if he were on the verge of tears.

Lois was thinking, <Is this guy trying for an Oscar? I know he’s lying because he isn’t Luthor’s son, but this display could possibly have fooled someone that didn’t know that.> She sent, /”Are you hearing this drivel?”/

/”Yeah, almost brought a tear to my eye.”/

Thinking about how thoroughly Luthor had hidden his tracks in the other universe, Lois wasn’t surprised at this. It was apparent that in any universe, Lex Luthor was a master of deceit. It had taken super surveillance to create a wedge that could be used as a lever to turn his main trusted lieutenant against him to get the evidence the police needed to bring him and his criminal empire down.

Needing to get more information, Lois said, “Personally, I’m glad that I am dealing with Lex Luthor’s son and not the man himself. You’re nothing like what I heard he was like. I know what I know and I could never have gotten this close to him.” Lois left this implication out there for Luckabee to grab and grab he did.

As he finished his lobster he moved his chair slightly closer to Lois’. He reached out for her near hand and started taking her glove off. Fortunately it was the right hand and she chose not to resist. When he had her glove off, he picked her hand up and brought the back to his lips.

The wait staff chose that moment to return to clear the dishes from the main course and deliver the dessert.

While this was happening Lois slipped her glove back on. She sent, /”Come on, Clark, I think we’ve gotten all we’re going to get. I need you to think of a way to get me out of here, quickly, before this gets out of hand. Whoever he called could be here anytime.”/

A few seconds later she received, /”I have an idea. I’ll be right back. Look for the cavalry shortly.”/

Clark flew off at superspeed arriving at 348 Hyperion seconds later. He found Jack at the kitchen table working on schoolwork. Landing at the back door he walked in and said, “Jack, I need to interrupt you for a few minutes.”

With a look of relief Jack looked up from his book and said, “Anything to get me away from English Lit would be a welcome change. What’cha need?”

Superman said, “I need you to run an errand for me. I need you to interrupt a dinner party and rescue Lois.”

Jack was immediately eager to help. He said, “Rescue Ms. Lane? Just tell me what you need and consider it done.”

“Thanks, Jack. Let’s step outside.”

As they moved outside Clark briefed Jack on what to do. He picked him up and flew him to the Plaza.

Jack breezed past the desk and ran up the stairs to the second floor. He went straight to the door of the room that Lois was in and pushed it open.

All of the occupants looked up in surprise at the interruption. Luckabee and Smythe in irritation; Lois in relief.

Jack approached Lois and said, “Ms. Lane, I was sent to fetch you. You’re needed at the office, pronto.”

Not wanting it to look too much like this was a rescue and wanting to give the impression of wanting to spend more time with Luckabee, Lois asked, “What’s the big emergency?”

“Don’t ask me. I was just told to bring you back with me. I guess the boss will explain it when you get there.”

Lois looked at Luckabee with what she hoped he would take as a look of disappointment and said, “Sorry, you know how it is. There’s probably a fire or some other emergency he wants me to cover. Anyway, thanks for the lovely dinner. We’ll have to do it again, sometime.”

The disappointment was evident on Smythe’s face, but he didn’t make any move to prevent her leaving.

Luckabee replied, “Count on it. Mr. Smythe will be calling to schedule.”

Lois and Jack walked out, together. As soon as they were out of the building they hailed a cab and directed the driver to take them to the Planet.

As soon as they arrived they took the elevator to the top floor and then the stairs to the roof. Superman was there waiting for them as they came out through the door.

Lois walked over, threw her arms around Superman and gave him a kiss. She looked him in the face and said, “Thanks. I don’t know what they had planned, but it probably wasn’t good.”

Jack was still standing near the door. Superman looked over at him and said, “Thanks, Jack. That was an excellent rescue job. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Lois turned to Jack and said, “Yes, thank you. I think you just saved me from a fate worse than death.” She moved over and gave him a peck on the cheek.

Jack flushed and said, “Awww, I didn’t do nothin’.”

Lois replied, “On the contrary, you did what neither I nor Superman could do. You got me out of that trap. You’re my hero.”

“Nah, really, after all, I’m part of the team. We all have to work together. I’m glad I could help.”

Lois smiled and said, “You sure did that, partner.”

Jack started to smile and said, “Partner, really?”

Lois smiled even broader and said, “Sure, we’re all on the same team; that makes us partners.”

Looking back at Clark she said, “So much for tailing them to find out where they are now. We might have had a chance if not for this. I don’t know if we’ll get another chance as good as this one was.”

Jack spoke up and asked, “You want me to go back and see if I can find and follow them?”

“Not this time, Jack. We’ll keep that in mind for the next time.”

Chapter 25 – Jack – The Gumshoe

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

The following Monday, Lucy and James returned from their honeymoon. James resumed his position as Editor-in-Chief and at the morning staff meeting he assigned Clark to the threatened transit strike. Lois was going to spend some time bringing Lucy up to speed on the Luckabee investigation. After the meeting, while Lois and Lucy put their heads together Clark started looking into the entire transit system. Metropolis depended on buses and cabs, while many other major cities had either subways or elevated trains to take some of the load. The Transport Workers Union which controlled all of the bus drivers in the city was threatening to strike.

There was the unfinished and abandoned subway system that had been under construction some years prior. When Clark started digging into it he found that it was a remnant left over from Luthor’s days. The project had primarily been funded by Lexcorp and when Luthor had been killed, work on it had been stopped and the project abandoned. On the surface it looked like the project had been simply a goodwill gesture to the city. It had netted him the Man-of-the-Year title that year, so it appeared to have been a successful effort.

Clark was in the conference room looking at a sub-surface map when Jack came in. “Need a cup of java, Mr. K?”

“Thanks, Jack. Yeah, that would be good.”

Jack went to the coffee station and fixed Clark a cup. He

grabbed a cake donut and made his way back to the conference room. As he was putting the donut and coffee on the table he saw what Clark was looking at. He asked, “What’s so interesting?”

Clark, in a distracted way replied, “Oh, this is the sub-surface map of the old, incomplete subway line.”

“Oh? Let me see.” Jack moved in for a closer look. “Oh, yeah, I see it now. Denny and I spent some time down there, before we found that basement. Too many rats down there. I wonder why they never finished it.”

“Lex Luthor was funding it and when he died the funding died as well. Hmmmmmm, Lex Luthor, I wonder, Luthor never did anything that wouldn’t benefit him in some way.”

“What are you thinking, Mr. K?”

“This guy we are dealing with – it looks like he is trying to reestablish Luthor’s old criminal empire. I wonder if this could be part of it.”

“Want me to go scope it out for you?”

“No, Jack, I don’t think that would be a very good idea. It would help if you would keep your eyes peeled for those guys from that room, though.”

“You’ve got it, Mr. K.”

As usual, Luckabee was behind the bar and Smythe was sprawled in an easy chair. Apparently Smythe was in a good mood as evinced by the music that was playing. The tune was somewhat upbeat and Luckabee recognized a word, or was it a name – Figaro. He said, “I actually think I’ve heard this before. I recognize that name, Figaro.”

“Ah, yes, the barber, Figaro.”

“What is this?”

“This is ‘The Barber of Seville’. Figaro is the barber who advises the count to disguise himself so that he can woo the fair Rosina. There are parallels between this opera and our situation. I am putting on a disguise, you, to woo the lovely Ms. Lane.”

“Perhaps, but when he removed his disguise, he was a handsome count underneath. You ...”

“Watch it, Luckabee, my patience is wearing thin with you. You’re lucky that right now it would be difficult to spoil my good mood. Development has been completed on the Quantum Disruptor. It has been tested on some inanimate objects and it works perfectly. It is ready for the ultimate test. Now all we need to do is lure Superman into our trap.”

“Just how do you plan to do that little thing?”

“We need some bait. Once he has taken the bait we have the green rock to render him powerless. Once he is powerless, as long as we keep him from sunlight we will be able to use the weapon on him, but before we do we will have Ms. Lane attend so that she can be given a choice.”

The watchers had been observing all of the people living at 348 Hyperion Ave., reporting back any movements in and out.

The fact that Lucy was no longer there had been noted and reported.

Jack had been running an errand for Denise in research which had him over on the other side of town. He had just completed his errand and was starting back when he saw a limousine pull up to the curb some way ahead of him. Jack recognized the two men that got out as the men that had been in the room with Lois the night he had rescued her. The one with the messed up face was impossible to mistake. He thought back to the conversation about finding where they were holed up came to mind. He thought, <Mr. K and Ms. Lane want to know where these guys are hanging out now. If I follow them, I could find out and then tell Mr. K. I’ll do it.>

He started following them and he didn’t have to go very far before he saw them begin acting suspiciously. He was peeking

around the corner of a building half a block away when they started looking around to see if they were being followed or watched before they ducked down a set of steps that looked like a subway entrance.

Making a decision, he followed to see exactly where they were hiding and once they were down the steps and out of sight he hurried over to the steps. He looked down the steps and when he saw that they were vacant he entered and descended. What Jack didn’t know was that one of the men that had been watching the comings and goings from 348 Hyperion was stationed near the old subway entrance. He saw Jack enter and descend the steps. He signaled to a couple of the other guys that were stationed around the entrance and they closed in around the top of the stairs.

Jack followed Luckabee and Smythe down to the platform area and hung back until they moved into the tunnel itself. At least it looked like they did. Once they were out of sight he quickly crossed the platform to the point where they had disappeared. Peering around the corner, he saw their figures in the dim light of the passage provided by the trouble lights spaced at intervals down the tunnel. He saw them pass two lights and somewhere between the second and third they disappeared from sight.

Tiptoeing down the tunnel, he traced their path. After he passed the second light he started feeling along the wall on the right. Almost midway between the second and third light his hand lost contact with the wall because there was a side tunnel. He stopped and stepped back so that he wouldn’t be outlined by the light of the tunnel. Dim as that illumination was it would look like bright daylight in comparison to the pitch black of the side tunnel. He peeked around that corner and suddenly there was a sliver of light which rapidly became a doorway into a lighted room. He saw two figures pass through the door and then the door was closed.

Quickly he moved down the tunnel and listened at the door and when he didn’t hear anything he eased the door open a crack and peered in. The light wasn’t as bright as he had thought, being lit only by more trouble lights. It was only bright in contrast to the dark tunnel. Opening the door wider he saw another descending stairway. Cautiously he descended the stairs. At the bottom he found another shorter platform. On the right was a short tunnel, so short it could almost be called a vestibule with a door in it.

Jack crept up to the door and put his ear to it. He could hear some kind of classical music playing, lots of strings and brass, not the kind of music Jack favored. The problem was that the music drowned out all but the loudest sounds so he had a hard time overhearing any conversation. Suddenly he heard a cell phone ring which cut right through the music. He couldn’t hear most of the conversation, but the sudden outburst from Smythe of “What???” warned him. He quitted his post and was up the stairs almost before the door was opened. He managed to make it all the way to the end of the second tunnel before the door behind him opened. He turned to the right, down the tunnel, away from the direction he had come, hoping that being in that bright room would have affected the night vision of anyone in the room and keep them from seeing which way he went.

He ran a short distance and then he jumped down off the platform to the track area. Once on the ground he stopped and dropped to all fours and crawled close to the platform and then lay down flat against the base of the platform wall. He picked up a handful of dirt and smeared it over his face and the backs of his hands. He was thanking his lucky stars that today he had worn dark pants and a dark jacket over his white shirt. They would have a hard time seeing him.

He heard the sounds of pursuit and it was a lot more than two pairs of feet that he heard.

Once they passed by his hiding place Jack breathed a silent sigh of relief. He risked getting up and looking down the tunnel in the direction his pursuers had taken. He could see them as they passed the lights, and they were at least five lights away.

As silently as he could manage he started sneaking back toward the exit.

Hearing another pair of rushing feet approaching, he dropped back down to the tunnel floor until they passed.

Thinking that now the coast would be clear, he hoisted himself back up onto the platform and ran, as swiftly and silently as he could toward the exit.

He found the steps and started to ascend. He remained cautious, stopping every few steps to listen and look around.

When he was only a few steps below the entrance he stopped again and listened. He heard a cell phone ring and when it was answered he heard, “Yeah... Lost him? How could you lose him? ... I know it’s dark down there. ... You think he might have doubled back? Okay, we’ll keep a sharp eye out.” He closed his phone and said to his partner, “The boss says to look sharp. He could be coming back this way.”

Jack retreated a few steps. As he did he trailed a hand along the wall. Suddenly his hand fell away, or rather the wall fell away from his hand, just the way it had done at that side tunnel. He was instantly alert. With his hands he explored the space. It was a small alcove in the wall, probably meant as a nook for statuary. A plan formed instantly. He stamped his feet on the stairs and shouted as if in pain from a fall and then crawled into the nook. Once again he hoped that the lack of night vision would help conceal him. He held his breath as with shouts to each other three men passed his hiding place.

As soon as they were at the bottom of the flight Jack silently jumped out and took off up the final stairs into the light.

As he popped out of the stairs he heard a shout and started running as fast as his legs would carry him. He darted around a corner and saw a busy street in front of him. With reckless disregard he took off directly across the street. There were the screech of brakes and horns sounding as he crossed the busy lanes of traffic, narrowly missing being hit a number of times, but by this maneuver he managed to elude his pursuer.

What Jack didn’t know was that he had been recognized and his pursuer had called ahead to the watchers at the Planet with a description.

Jack was feeling really cocky. He had managed to escape from the subway tunnel and elude his pursuers without much effort. Now all he had to do was report to Mr. K and let him know just what he had found out.

Whistling to himself as he walked along he made his way back to the Planet. He could see the Planet building ahead and felt very pleased with himself that he was home free when suddenly he was grabbed from behind, dragged into an alley, his arms twisted behind his back and a hood put over his head.

He struggled to reach for his watch, but the hold on his arms precluded him doing so.

He was bundled into a car with a captor on each side. They drove for a time and when they stopped he was taken out of the car and led away.

Even though one of his captors each had one of his arms, he stumbled as his foot unexpectedly dropped farther than expected before it hit a step. Instantly he realized where he was, back at the subway entrance. A plan formed and he put it into effect. He deliberately stumbled again and wrenched his arm away from one of his captors and managed to push the button on his watch.

Thinking that he had stumbled because he couldn’t see, his guards removed his hood.

Suddenly, Clark and Lois heard the 85,000 hertz signal, “Zee,

zee, zee, zee” and knew that either Jack or Denny had activated the distress signal.

Lois looked at Clark and he started for the stairwell and as he did the signal seemed to fade, getting softer and softer as time went on. Before it faded completely he was able to get a general bearing and headed in that direction. Before he was able to get a definite location the signal faded so that he couldn’t hear it from altitude. He started a circling descent. On one leg he thought he heard it again and concentrated his search in that area.

Smythe and Luckabee had come out of their hideout to meet their men and see just who their captive could be.

When their men stepped off the stairs onto the first level platform they both recognized the office boy that had summoned Lois Lane back to the office, preventing her capture at the dinner.

The watchers outside spotted Superman as he was circling overhead and called their boss to report it.

When Shythe’s phone rang he answered it immediately, “Report.”

“Superman is circling overhead. Like he’s looking for something or someone.”

“Keep watching. Let me know if he gets closer.”

Trying to make his gravelly voice have an ingratiating tone, Smythe addressed Jack, “Is the alien looking for you?”

With a show of bravado, Jack answered, “Why would he do that? I can take care o’ myself.”

“The fact that you live with him might just have something to do with it. He has a number of powers, is one of them the ability to identify your thoughts? Perhaps he could take over your mind and see through your eyes. Blindfold him again.

Once again the sack was placed over Jack’s head and he was led away, down to the second level.

Clark was getting very frustrated. He would occasionally hear the distress call, but he couldn’t pinpoint it. Finally he decided that he had to get a lot lower so he finally landed and started walking the streets.

After wandering around in circles which mimicked his aerial pattern, describing ever-decreasing circles he finally started to hear the signal. It was so faint that at times he couldn’t be sure he was really hearing it. He started to move in that direction. Slowly the sound became clearer. The problem became one of direction. If he deviated left or right he would lose the sound and inevitably there were obstacles that he had to swerve to avoid. Fortunately he now had a better idea of the correct direction so he was able to reacquire the signal more easily as he got closer.

Smythe’s lookouts saw Superman as he was approaching. A call was made.

Smythe grabbed a small kit from a drawer. After he opened it he pulled out a preloaded syringe. At a signal from him one of his thugs pulled up Jack’s sleeve using two hands to hold him.

Jack shouted, “Hey, whaddya think you’re doin’? Leggo me!”

Ignoring his protests, tearing open an alcohol swab, Smythe, with a quick swipe, cleansed an area of Jack’s forearm and jabbed him with the needle, shooting the plunger home.

Jack shouted, “Oww! What was that???”

Seconds later the thug lowered the unconscious Jack onto a cot at the side of the room.

Smythe distributed his henchmen in such a way that they would be apparent as soon as Superman entered the room while he took up a position against the wall near the cot that Jack was on. In his hand was a fairly large chunk of a green glowing crystal.

The trap was set.

The phone rang once. There was a pause and then it rang once more.

Smythe said, "He's entered the stairwell."

Seeing where the sound was leading him, Superman saw the reason for his difficulty. Apparently Jack was underground. The signal was strongest directly in front of the stair opening. It would appear that the ground was muffling the signal, but that the tunnels and stairwells were acting as a wave guide conducting the signal above ground. Seeing the object of his pursuit nearby he took off and flew down the stairs landing on the platform. Slowly he spun around and finally located the direction that the signal was coming from. As he flew down the tunnel the volume increased, but just as he thought he must be nearing the source it started to fade again. Stopping, he hovered and turning around discovered that the sound was now behind him so he flew back, more slowly this time and using his infrared vision finally spotted the side tunnel. Flying down this he x-rayed the door. There was nothing behind it but another set of steps. Passing through this door he floated down to the lower level so that there would be no footfalls on the steps or platform. He thought, <I don't remember this being on that sub-surface map I was looking at earlier. This must have been Luthor's reason for funding this project.> He sent, /"I've found him in a sub level of the abandoned subway."/

/"How is he?"/

/"I don't know yet."/

/"Be careful!"/

/"Always."/

After landing at the bottom of this second set of steps he was confronted by yet another door. He tried his x-ray vision again, looking through the door, and this time he saw a room. He tried to scan through the wall, but there his vision was blocked. He thought, <The walls must be painted with lead based paint.>

Returning to the door, he looked through it and saw a number of thugs, none of whom he recognized. He sent to Lois, /"The room must be painted with lead based paint. The door is apparently new. I can see several gunmen. A few are sitting around a small table playing cards apparently unconcerned."/

Tuning in with his superhearing, what he heard was mostly the conversation concerning the game. He did hear a comment about the kid in the corner which told him that Jack was in there. Suddenly, he heard a voice, "Hey, this kid ain't lookin' too good. That shot must not agree with him."

/"There seems to be a problem with Jack. I have to get to him."/ Feeling assured that there was not much to fear, ten seconds later Superman pushed the door open and sped into the room.

Since he hadn't been able to check the room, except for what he could see through the door, before entering he had decided to superspeed in get Jack and speed out. The problem was that he couldn't locate Jack by looking through the door. Taking the chance that he would have the time he needed he decided to secure the thugs for the police so he had the thugs around the table bound before he realized anything was amiss. As he was about to tackle the remaining thugs he felt the pain of the Kryptonite as the rays tore through his body. Smythe had been standing against the wall next to the cot that Jack was on where he couldn't be seen and he was holding the Kryptonite.

The noise from Jack's signal watch was almost deafening at this range and it had masked the sound of the additional heartbeats. His step faltered when looking around he saw Jack on the cot, but before he could move in that direction his strength gave out. As he was collapsing to the floor he only had time to send, /"Kryptonite trap. We don't both want to be caught. Stay away. Stay safe,/" before he passed out. He only hoped she would heed his warning.

He had been able to deal with the relatively small piece of

crystalline green Kryptonite that Luthor had provided to his muggers because that had been a relatively small piece. The larger chunk in Luthor's vault had actually knocked him out due to its larger size. This piece was larger than even that.

When Superman collapsed, Smythe stooped and placed the Kryptonite on the floor next to him. Smugly he said, "He fell for it. We only had to say that line twice. As soon as he thought the kid was in trouble he just had to try to rescue him." Then he turned to Luckabee and said, "Take the limo, go to LexLabs and find Nell Newtrich and identify yourself. She should recognize the name of the owner of the lab. Tell her that she is to pack up the Quantum Disruptor and bring it with her. Bring her and the weapon back here with you. I need her to install this green rock into the power supply. Make sure you blindfold her. There's no reason for her to know where this place is."

As Luckabee was leaving with a driver, Smythe turned to two of the thugs who had just finished releasing their bound friends and said, "I have prepared an area for the execution. Drag him over here."

There were two pillars, probably primary support members for the floor above. Shackles were attached to each and Superman was hoisted up and a shackle attached to each wrist. Superman dangled there between the two pillars, hanging from his wrists with his arms stretched out and back behind him with all of his weight on his arms. Smythe placed the Kryptonite at his feet and stepped back.

Once this was accomplished Smythe moved over and lifted Superman's head so that he could look directly at him and said, "You're through interfering with my plans. You've been a worthy adversary, but I've won. The final act of this opera is about to begin."

After a short time Nell Newtrich arrived with a sack over her head. Luckabee was carrying a large case which presumably contained the Quantum Disruptor. Luckabee set the case down and removed the sack from Nell's head.

Smythe picked up the Kryptonite and handed it to Nell. "Here, install this in the RTG. Once it is installed, how long until the device is ready?"

"It will take some time to get it into the RTG. Once installed, it will take some more time to build up the power. It will take at least 3 to 4 hours to build up a sufficient charge."

Smythe ordered, "Get started. When you are finished installing the green rock, let me know."

An hour and a half and some miscellaneous cuts and pinched fingers later Nell announced that the job was done.

Smythe ordered, "Get her out of here."

The sack was again slipped over her head and she was led away.

Once she was outside, Smythe said, "Now all we have to do is wait for sufficient charge to accumulate. Let's allow a generous margin of error and place the call to Ms. Lane in four hours. By the time she is here, there shouldn't be any question as to the weapon's status."

Chapter 26 – The Quantum Disruptor

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 — Local designation – Alt 1

%%%

Jack had been missing for almost eight hours and Clark had gone looking for him over six hours ago. Initially they both had heard the signal watch, the high pitched "Zee ... Zee ... Zee ... Zee" signal. It was loud and clear, so with confidence Clark had

left with an admonition to Lois to maintain the secret at all costs. He didn't want anything to happen to her, especially now, in her condition.

That had been hours ago and Lois no longer heard the signal watch. Actually it was only a short time after Clark left that she couldn't hear the watch anymore. She wasn't sure just what that meant. It could mean that Clark had rescued Jack and the signal had been turned off, although at this point she felt that was highly unlikely. It could mean that the battery had died, also unlikely as Dr. Klein had said that the watch battery should last almost a full day, or that Jack had moved someplace that blocked the sound, which was most likely. The problem was that they hadn't shown up.

What concerned her more was the fact that she was unable to contact Clark telepathically. Even when they were not actively talking that way she normally was able to feel the connection that they shared, but for some time now that had been missing. It left her with an empty feeling. The final communication she had had from him was a warning that he had walked into a Kryptonite trap and that she was to stay clear. That alone was enough to worry her. She felt that emptiness, but it wasn't like what she had felt immediately after Clark, her first Clark, had been killed in that explosion. That, at least, reassured her. She was convinced that he was still alive, but it still left her with a feeling of uneasiness.

In frustration at this forced inactivity Lois paced the bullpen of the Daily Planet. She had on a smartly styled work outfit which had a short skirt, a low cut silk shell and a sleeveless jacket or vest which was long with the tails reaching below her knees. The vest swirled and flared with each turn she made, revealing her slender legs.

Lois's phone rang. In her anxiety about Clark she almost didn't answer it. When she did she recognized the voice. Leslie Luckabee said, "Hello, Lois Lane?"

"Yes, this is Lois Lane. How can I help you?"

"Well, actually darlin', this isn't about how you can help me, it's about how you can help your partner."

Relief flooded her instantly; Lois was still on alert because he wouldn't be saying this if Clark were dead and he obviously knew where he was, but he was still missing. She barely managed to keep her voice calm as she replied, "Oh, just what makes you think that Superman needs my help?"

"I think that if you don't help him and soon the blighter will come to some serious harm. He may even cark it."

She was bewildered by the term, but the context enabled her to figure it out. She said, "If I understand you correctly, that is serious. Just how would Superman 'car'k it'? He is invulnerable you know."

"Oh, not any more he isn't. He will die quite painfully, I assure you."

Knowing that she was going to have to play along she said, "Then it would seem that I have no choice. What are your demands?"

"You can meet me at the Plaza in one hour. If you come, alone, I'll take you to him. If you don't show up or if you bring anyone else with you, you'll never see him again." There was a click as the connection was cut.

Knowing that there was dirty work ahead she made her plans. She grabbed her bag and headed for the stairwell. Before she reached the door James Olsen stopped her.

"Lois, what's going on?"

"I just had a call. I have to meet Leslie Luckabee in an hour. He said that he'd take me to Clark." She lowered her tone as she finished, "I think they have Jack too. I'm going to see Henderson. I'll let you know."

"Okay, stay safe."

With a confident smile she said, "Remember, I'm a surprise

package. They might just be getting an unexpected surprise."

As soon as she was in Bill's office she said, "Bill, Jack and Clark are both missing. Remember what we told you about Leslie Luckabee? We've been investigating him as being the one behind the brothel and the kidnapped girls. Well, I just had a call from Luckabee telling me that he would take me to Jack. That means that he's directly involved. We could have him, as long as we can get incontrovertible proof. I need to be able to record the meeting. Can you arrange that?"

Without answering he picked up the phone and dialed an extension, "Madge, bring a wire to my office and be prepared to set it up." Hanging up the phone he looked at Lois and said, "Coming right up. The recorder is voice activated so it will record a full two hours of conversation."

A minute later, Madge entered Bill's office. Bill pointed at Lois and said, "Set her up."

Madge was very efficient and had Lois wired very quickly. She showed her how to start the recorder and left.

Lois said, "Thanks Bill. I hope to see you later today, with the proof we need."

Right on time Lois walked into the lobby of the Plaza. As soon as she was through the door Leslie Luckabee took her elbow and led her back out into the street. He pushed her into a waiting limousine and pulled out a blindfold. He said, "Sorry about this, but it is necessary. Turn around so that I can put this on you."

As he was applying the blindfold he said to the driver, "Ralph, you know where to go."

Once the blindfold was in place Lois relaxed back against the car seat and used her x-ray vision to watch exactly where they went. The driver took a very circuitous route. When they reached their destination Luckabee helped her out of the car and then led her in a wandering route this time on foot in an attempt to confuse her before leading her to a flight of steps leading down below ground.

As soon as they had stepped out of the car Lois had started to hear "Zee ... zee ... zee ... zee" at 85,000 Hertz, Jack's signal watch. Lois thought, <That has to be Jack's watch. No wonder it was hard to hear, he must be deep underground in this old, abandoned subway tunnel.> To make it look good she had her hands out groping and pretended to lose her footing occasionally. Eventually they reached the bottom of the stairs and he led her around in some circles to make her think that she was traveling a distance before leading her through a door to another flight of stairs. All the while the sound from Jack's watch was getting louder.

When they reached the bottom apparently he had tired of the game and led her straight to the door where they had their lair. Lois thought, <Sub level. I don't remember this being on the drawings.> Trying to look into the room, her vision was blocked, everywhere but the door. <Must be lead lined. I hope there isn't any exposed Kryptonite.> When the door was opened Lois was relieved that she didn't feel the pain of Kryptonite exposure. It had been a chance she'd had to take. Lois saw that there were several others in the room. She didn't dare move her head around to look because that movement could have given away the fact that she could see. She forced the sound of Jack's watch into the background, and her hearing picked out even more heartbeats.

When she and Luckabee stopped walking, Clark was right in front of her. To her relief she also heard one special heartbeat, Clark's, so she knew for certain that he was alive, just unconscious. She almost blew it right then because all she wanted to do was grab him and fly both of them to safety. Instead she decided that she would wait and see what she could record. She had started the recorder just before she had entered the Plaza.

After Leslie brought her to a halt he removed her blindfold.

She blinked as one would after having been blindfolded for a time and then she looked around. Directly in front of her, Clark was propped up between a couple of pillars and shackled to them. He was slumped in unconsciousness. An involuntary, but wholly expected exclamation escaped her lips, "Clark!" Then she looked at Luckabee and asked, "What have you done to him?"

The answer came from off to the side, not from Luckabee, "Nothing much yet, however, shortly I will be ending his life and his interference in my plans. Unless ..."

Lois asked, "Unless what?"

"If you promise to be with me, be my wife, I might let him live."

Looking at Smythe, she couldn't avoid the look of repugnance that took over her countenance. She needed more evidence so she asked, "Who are you, really? It would appear that you aren't really Luckabee's lucky."

Removing the hat that he habitually wore to at least partially conceal his face he said, "You know me as Smythe, however my name is actually ... Lex Luthor ..."

Lois interrupted him before he could complete his statement, "That's a laugh! Lex Luthor died years ago! If you're a clone, I'd say that whoever created you botched it. You don't look anything like Lex Luthor."

He was smarting from her comments, but he continued in a civil tone, "Never the less, my name *is* Lex Luthor, Lex Luthor, Junior."

Lois already had known what to expect. Ever since the interview they had had with Luthor in the other universe, they had known that Smythe had been lying about his name. Playing along, in a hushed tone Lois said, "Lex's son. Actually, we knew your name wasn't Smythe. We knew it was an alias because a Freedom of Information search in Australia came back negative."

Smythe was shaken by this revelation, but after calming himself he replied, "Yes, Lex's son and the inheritor of all that was his." He spread his hands to encompass their surroundings and hirelings. "Welcome to my world."

Getting back to the point Lois repeated, "What have you done to Clark? Why are you doing this?"

"Ah, why indeed? First you ruined my very profitable business run by Mitzie Daphne. That cost me not only income, but influence over numerous political figures."

"Oh, so you admit that you were behind the brothel. Both the prostitution and the blackmail."

He thought for a second and then said, "Why not, after all a wife cannot be compelled to testify against her husband." He let that hang in the air for a second before he proceeded, "Then you cost me the commissions on the women I had captured for a certain businessman in Libya. You could be meeting him; however, I would spare you that fate if you agreed to my proposal."

"As to what have I done to Superman, not much as yet. He has been rendered unconscious by exposure to a green rock. In a few minutes he will be executed for crimes against ... me. That is, unless you decide to stay with me. If not, I thought you would want to watch. That was why you were brought here. Of course, if you don't agree, it is the last thing you will see, outside of the four walls of a bedroom in Libya where you will be transported as soon as we are done here. You may have a long life, that is, as long as you continue to attract the attentions of the male patrons of the establishment."

Lois looked at Smythe, or Lex Junior, with disdain and laughed as she said, "You've got to be kidding. You want me to be with you? I'd rather cohabit with a monkey. He'd be better looking."

Smythe was smarting from her taunts and said, "You leave me little choice then. You have condemned him to death."

As she was listening to this she had been trying to contact

Clark mentally. She was thinking, <That explains why I haven't been able to talk to him. He's unconscious and it must have been quick. Has to have been crystalline K.>, Lois feigned a look of horror as he was saying all of this. As he finished, Luckabee snapped a pair of handcuffs on her wrists, behind her back. She played along and acted surprised as this was done.

Smythe, or Lex junior, now took a good look at Lois. With her hands secured behind her back her baby bump was uncovered. He said, "Oh, I see that you will have to have a doctor's appointment before you go to Libya. I don't think the bastard of this criminal should be allowed to live. I knew you were his partner at work, I didn't know that you allowed this ... alien ... to be your partner in bed as well," his tone and look of disgust were evident.

Lois stood up straighter and threw her shoulders back thrusting forward the obvious sign of her pregnancy which her vest along with the subdued lighting had hidden. With an air of pride in her voice she said, "This child is not a bastard in any way. I am proud to say that Clark and I are married."

Smythe was sputtering as he asked, "Married? You married this, this alien?"

Lois' answer consisted of a single word, "Happily."

She saw Jack, unconscious on a cot in a corner. Looking around she noted that there were eight gunmen besides Luthor and Luckabee and all eight had guns in their hands. Two of them were covering her, one was covering Jack and five had their guns pointed at Clark. Realizing that he had probably been kept down here, where the sun could not rejuvenate him and that Clark was probably still vulnerable she knew that it was up to her. She asked, "How can you kill Superman? He's invulnerable. And if you succeed how can you avoid being tried for murder?"

With a sneer on his face and in his voice Luthor Jr. replied, "There is no murder if there is no corpse."

"His corpse won't go away!"

"On the contrary." He picked up a device that looked like a small beer keg with a spout on one end, a pistol grip on one side and a small targeting laser mounted to the opposite side. "This my dear is a newly developed device. I've had MiraLabs working on its development since I bought them. This is called a Quantum Disruptor. It will disrupt molecules and the atoms they are created from at the quantum or sub-atomic level. It is powered by the same green rock that I used to subdue him. One good blast of this and all that will be left is a pile of very fine dust which I can sweep up in a dustpan and put out with the rest of the garbage." As he was speaking he threw a switch. As soon as this was done she could hear a whine, the sound of capacitors charging. Smythe said, "Ahhh, the sound of power. The power is being shunted into the power cells. It won't be long now."

Lois had been doing a slow burn. Hoping that she had gotten enough on the tape she used her x-ray vision to examine the mechanism of the weapon. She saw why she didn't feel the Kryptonite; it was sealed in a lead chamber surrounded by electronics. She was wondering how he could generate the kind of power the device would need. The switch he had thrown allowed current to flow to bank after bank of capacitors. Seeing this she realized that with this set up the output of whatever it was that was generating the power would be adequate. The power would be stored in the capacitors until needed and then sent as a high voltage burst to the mechanism. The trigger was a two stage affair. The first stage activated the targeting laser. The second would allow the burst of energy to fire the weapon. Lois used her heat vision to fuse the wires on the trigger which would cause a short when it was activated.

As he started to lift the device to firing position Lois glanced around once more. As he started to depress the trigger a red dot appeared in the center of Superman's 'S' crest. Just before the trigger clicked in for the second stage Lois shifted into

superspeed.

Everything around her seemed to stop.

She snapped the chain between the handcuffs freeing her hands. Then she moved around the room removing all of the guns from the hands of all of the thugs and crushing them into shapeless masses of metal. She realized that each of the thugs was going to suffer injury as a result, but it couldn't be helped. They each had a strong grasp on the weapon so that the grip safety was depressed so that the weapon could be fired and when she ripped the gun out of that clasp the bones of the hands and in some cases the bones of the forearm were snapped.

Once that was done she snapped the shackles from Clark's limbs and scooped him up and then she picked up the unconscious form of Jack from the cot and sped out, closing and blocking the door so that those inside wouldn't be escaping before the police arrived.

As soon as the door was blocked she slowed to normal speed. As soon as she did she heard a small explosion as the shorted wires of the weapon caused an overload and it destroyed itself mixed with cries of pain from the thugs as their injuries manifested. She thought, <The only one not injured should be Luckabee.>

Lois picked up her two burdens, and shifting back to superspeed and depending on her aura to protect both of her passengers, flew them out of the abandoned tunnels and into the air. She hoped that if anyone saw them they would simply see the colors of Clark's Suit and assume that Superman was active. She flew them to 348 Hyperion Ave and landing in the back yard, carried her burdens inside. She placed Clark in their bed and then carried Jack up to his room. She removed his handcuffs, turned off his watch's alarm and placed him on his bed.

Realizing that she would need someone to stay with Jack and being very thankful that Lucy had returned to work that week, she called the Planet and spoke to Lucy. "Lucy, I need you to come to our house. I have rescued Clark and Jack. I need to take Clark somewhere to get sun so I need you here to take care of Jack. Do you think James will mind?"

"No problem, Sis. I'm sure he'll understand. He may even come over with me. How long do you think you will be gone?"

"Maybe a few hours."

"I'll get there as quickly as I can. Where's Jack?"

"He's up in his room. Looks like they drugged him. He's out."

"I should be able to be there shortly. Why don't you go ahead and take Clark to get some sun. I'll use my key to get in. I'll make sure Denny works on his homework. It'll be just like old times." She was giggling as she finished up.

"Thanks, Sis. I'll see you when we get back."

Next she called Bill Henderson and gave him explicit directions as to where the perps could be found and gave him a summary of what she had recorded. She also told him that medical assistance would be needed.

As usual Lois quickly packed a backpack with towels and suits. She picked up Clark and they took off from the back yard. She headed west, and after leaving the US behind, headed for the south Pacific. Since their beach had been compromised she headed to the area near Pitcairn Island. She used her super-vision to find a small island that didn't appear to have any inhabitants. Landing on the beach she spread out the towels, stripped Clark and laid his naked body on one in the sun. Spinning out of her clothes she lay down on the other to drink up the sun's rays.

A short while later he awoke. Looking around he saw that he was on a beach, but it didn't look familiar. There were no cliffs and no people either. A few seconds later a naked and very beautiful, very pregnant Lois came strolling out of the lush tropical growth onto the beach. All he could do was stare at her.

She said, "Welcome back. You had me worried there for a

while," she said as she sat on her own towel.

He asked, "How long was I out?"

"Only about half an hour, once I got you into the sun. What happened? How did he catch you?"

"Before I go into that, what happened?"

"They lured me there by telling me they had you. Smythe was about to blast you with something he called a Quantum Disrupter. I shifted into superspeed, disarmed all of them, caused a malfunction in the weapon, picked up you and Jack, took you out of that chamber and blocked them in."

With a shocked expression he said, "They will know that you're super! We need to cover that somehow. We need to get back there."

Lois looked down at her nude self and then at his nude body and said, "Spoilsport. Oh well, I guess you're right." She spun into her clothes, he spun into the Suit and they took off for Metropolis.

Superman was carrying Lois in his arms when they arrived on the lower platform just as the MPD was clearing away the last of the debris Lois had used to block the passage.

As soon as the door was open, Bill Henderson said, "You're all under arrest! Come out with your hands up."

The gunsels started stumbling out cradling their gun hands and arms in their other hands, moaning in pain.

When Luckabee and Smythe came out, Smythe looked at Lois accusingly and pointing at her said, "She's as super as Superman! She rescued him! It had to be her. We had incapacitated Superman."

Lois started to laugh as she countered, "Look at me, do I look super to you," as she pulled her vest back to display her baby swollen belly and did a slow pirouette. "Just because you are from Australia you think you know everything there is to know about marsupials. Well, I've got news for you. Yours isn't the only country with them. We have one of our own. It's called an opossum. You know what that smart little animal does when it is threatened? It plays dead so that the predator will leave it alone. When someone plays dead to fool somebody, we say they are 'playing possum'. That's what Superman was doing to you, playing possum. At the right time he rescued me and Jack."

Smythe was sputtering and forgetting himself blurted out, "But my cyber team hacked into STAR Labs database and got the lowdown on his powers and his weaknesses. After we knocked him out we kept him out of the sunlight!"

Clark sent, /"That explains my quick recovery. I wasn't exposed to the Kryptonite the entire time. I had recovered from the exposure; I just needed to recharge my powers in the sunlight."/

This news from Smythe was highly instructive and Lois knew she needed to discredit this info so, again Lois started to laugh. She said, "I bet you even found out that he could see through solid objects and hear sounds that others can't hear. We worked with Doctor Klein to, how shall I say this, embellish his powers somewhat and put in some weaknesses that aren't really there. You can't believe everything you read."

Smythe's countenance fell as she was speaking. He finally said, in a chiding manner, "False data to lead us into a trap." He was still shaking his head as he was taken away on a stretcher because of his injuries. When the device had exploded the right side of his face had been damaged.

Lois held no remorse for what she had done and no sympathy for the criminal and taunted him somewhat, saying, "Look at the as an opportunity! When they fix the right side of your face, maybe they'll give you a discount on fixing the other side at the same time."

Luckabee strode up to the stretcher that Smythe was on and demanded, "The antidote! What about the antidote?"

Smythe was laughing as he replied, "What antidote? You

gullible fool! There was no poison therefore there is no antidote. That was just a story I came up with to keep you in line.” The medic wheeled Smythe away.

Luckabee visibly deflated. His relief was tangible. An MPD uniformed officer came up to him and put the cuffs on.

Before the uniform had a chance to lead him away and seeing that Smythe was out of earshot Lois turned to Luckabee and asked, “You are the one that sent the note about the Toasters aren’t you?”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“I didn’t. It was just a good guess. You slipped up and Clark spotted it. Why did you send it?”

“I was mad at Smythe. He had told me that he had poisoned me and would let me die if I didn’t toe the line and do what I was told to do.”

“Would you be willing to let us interview you, after the police have interrogated you, of course?” She nodded in the direction of Henderson.

“Sure, I got nothin’ to hide anymore. Smythe was the one. I was just his puppet, his ventriloquist’s dummy. If not for his threat about the poison, I’d have turned dog.”

“We had basically come to that conclusion already.”

He looked at Lois and said, “Such a shame.”

She replied, “What’s a shame?”

“That I never really had a shot with you.”

Lois pulled off her left glove and brought her hand up and looked at her ring.

Luckabee said, “It means that much to you?”

Lois replied, “Yes ... yes it does,” as she clasped her hands together. “It stands for our love, our ... forever love.”

“But, isn’t he an alien?”

“He’s no more of an alien than you are. Oh, he might have come from another planet, but he’s more human than ...”

He provided the object of comparison, “Smythe.”

Lois smiled and said, “Yeah, Smythe.”

The uniform put his hand on Luckabee’s arm and led him away at this point.

Chapter 27 – The Accident

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Since Carrie was no longer restricted by her illness she was going to a regular school, well not exactly regular, she was going to be in a class for gifted students. She consistently performed over grade level, which was attributed to the fact that previously she had been home schooled, and ever since her recovery was progressing rapidly.

It had now been several months, local time in Alt 2, since the surgery and Carrie had been seizure free in all that time. Lois and Clark had arranged for regular visits. One of the purposes of the frequent visits was that Clark was monitoring the clean-up of the dead tissue. The macrophages were doing their duty and the clean-up was progressing apace.

An arrangement had been made for Carrie to visit with the Kents for an overnighter on a Friday night into Saturday so that Phoebe and Warren could have a date night, something that had only happened on rare occasions while Carrie had been afflicted. This was the first time since Carrie had first been diagnosed that they had the opportunity for something like this. Now that they had developed a friendship with the Kents and had been allowing Carrie out for overnights on a semi-regular basis, they felt that they could use this time to celebrate.

When Superman arrived to pick Carrie up he found her and Scrappy waiting. In fact, she was so anxious for this outing that she answered the door. Within seconds Warren and Phoebe were there. Phoebe was wearing a short black cocktail dress and Warren was wearing a dark suit.

Superman commented, “My, aren’t we dressed up this evening?”

As Warren put his arms around Phoebe’s waist she said, “This is a special occasion. We happen to be married eight years today. That is one of the reasons we arranged for this overnight.” She looked back over her shoulder at Warren and finished, “We are celebrating. Warren got tickets for an early show and reservations for dinner at a fancy restaurant.”

Superman said, “Don’t worry about Carrie, the Kents will take good care of her. Go and have a good time.”

“We will! It is such a relief not to have to worry about Carrie. We know that the Kents will take good care of her.”

Superman noticed the emphasis that Phoebe placed on the name but didn’t think anything of it, at that time.

Phoebe knelt and took Carrie in her arms and said, “Now, you be good for the Kents and enjoy your time with them.”

Carrie smiled up at her mother and said, “I will, Mommy.”

Superman picked her up with her little overnight bag with one arm and Scrappy in the other and flew them to the farm. After dinner they had all played some card games, watched some TV and had ice cream. It went without saying that chocolate was Carrie’s favorite flavor. The time together was so easy that Lois was amazed at how well Carrie fit into their little family group. Carrie loved Mr. Jonathan like the grandfather she had never had and Martha, well, she simply adored Miss Martha.

Martha had her working with her in the kitchen. She looked so cute in her own little apron that Lois took several pictures. Martha had been making a cake and Carrie got to lick out the icing bowl. By the time she was finished you could hardly see the wide smile for the frosting that was smeared all over her face. Lois planned to give copies of the pictures to Carrie’s mom and dad when they dropped her off.

At 8 pm Carrie was put to bed in the room next to the one Lois and Clark used. Most of the time, Scrappy actually slept in the bed with Carrie. This was part of his initial training. When he had been acquired from the trainers his bonding with Carrie was facilitated by encouraging this and that bond was such that he was totally devoted to Carrie. He had been trained to respond to both spoken commands as well as hand gestures and his obedience to his little mistress was immediate and complete. The difference in his training and that of a police dog was profound. Scrappy was trained to assist and protect a handicapped individual, but protect only in that he would alert others to problems. In Scrappy’s case he had alerted when he sensed when Carrie had a seizure coming on. Since the operation he had become simply her friend and companion.

The next morning Carrie was up with the chickens, literally, helping Martha collect the eggs for breakfast and then she watched as Jonathan milked the cows. Scrappy was at her heels the entire time and at her gesture he remained quiet so that he didn’t frighten the chickens or cows. Then Martha had her working with her in the kitchen.

They all enjoyed a breakfast of pancakes, eggs and bacon washed down with copious amounts of fresh milk.

Carrie had a healthy appetite and after her time on the farm she now had a set of rosy cheeks to go along with it. She always had a cheery disposition and smiled most of the time.

After the morning chores and breakfast Carrie and Scrappy went out into one of the fields to explore. This was safe because Jonathan wasn’t going to be operating any of the heavy equipment that day. Lois and Clark went out into the fields with

Carrie and while she ran and played with Scrappy they watched her and talked.

“She’s such a happy child. She has had a rough go until now. That tumor, how could something like that happen to such a sweet child?”

“I don’t know. When I rescued her, there was no indication of a problem. There was no way to tell, just by looking at her. Even then she was a happy child.”

Just then Carrie came running up with a bug trapped in her hands. Lois knelt down and Carrie showed her treasure to her. Lois asked, “What kind of bug is it?”

Carrie said, “It’s not a bug, it’s a Lady Beetle.”

Lois decided to have some fun as asked, “How do you know it’s a lady and not a man?”

With an exasperated look said, “I don’t know if it’s a lady or a man. Lady Beetle is the name.”

Lois said, “Oh, I see, Lady Beetle is the name, whether it’s a man or a lady, right?”

“That’s right, Lady Beetles is its name.”

Lois thought for a second before she said, “I remember a nursery rhyme. I think it goes:

‘Ladybug! Ladybug!

Fly away home.

Your house is on fire.

And your children all gone.

All except one,

And that’s little Ann,

For she crept under

The frying pan.”[i]

Carrie had a faraway look as she said, “That’s how I met Mr. Superman. My house was on fire and I was inside. I guess I was Ann.”

“I know sweetie and I am very glad that he rescued you from that fire.”

Lois looked at Clark and said, “You know, it’s scary. She looks like she could be ours and she takes after you with her trivia.” Lois put her hand on top of Carrie’s head and ruffled her hair and then leaned down and kissed the top of her head.

Carrie bounded off again with Scrappy on her heels.

As she was standing Lois murmured, “Such a sweet child. I hope ours turns out just like her.”

Clark started to chuckle and asked, “Have you peeked?”

As she put her hands protectively over her swelling tummy, Lois flushed and said, “No, no I haven’t and you’re not to either.”

He was laughing as he said, “I promised I wouldn’t and Superman keeps his promises.”

Per their arrangement Superman arrived with Carrie at 6 pm, Saturday night so that Carrie would have time to decompress from her day with him and Lois and get ready for her 8 pm bedtime. When he arrived there was a newspaper from the morning on the stoop and mail in the mailbox. Clark was concerned and without setting Carrie down did a scan of the residence. There was no one at home. He checked the garage and there was no car.

He sent, /”Lois, there appears to be a problem. I need you here.”/

/”I’ll be there in two shakes.”/

A minute later, Lois Lane walked up the block and joined Superman at the door. He handed Carrie to her and said, “I have to check on some things.”

Carrie asked, “What’s the matter? Why don’t we go in? Where’s Mommy and Daddy?”

Superman replied, “I don’t know, Carrie. That’s what I have to find out. They could be out shopping and just lost track of the time. I’ll find them. Why don’t you go with Lois? She’ll take you back to the farm while I look for your mom and dad.”

Carrie said, “Okay. You’ll come get me when you find them, won’t you?”

“I sure will, honey, just as soon as I find them.”

Lois took Carrie away to a secluded area where she spun into her uniform and picking up Carrie and Scrappy again took to the air.

Clark flew to the nearest police station. When he strode in the sergeant on the desk sat up and took notice. He was an older man with graying hair. He asked, “How can I help you, Superman?”

“I’m here to inquire about missing persons. Who do I need to talk to?”

“That would be Sergeant Friday.”

Startled, Clark said, “Come again? Did you say, Sergeant Friday?”

The desk sergeant started to laugh and said, “Sorry, that’s just a little joke. Sergeant Baxter is who you are looking for. I’ll call him.”

A couple of minutes later Sgt. Baxter came to the desk. “How can I help you, Superman?”

Surprisingly he bore a striking resemblance to Jack Webb. <No wonder they call him Sgt. Friday.> “Well, Sgt. Frida, uh, Baxter . . .”

“Oh no,” he turned to the desk Sgt. and said, “Tell me you didn’t . . .”

The desk Sgt. was laughing with loud guffaws and nodding his head.

Baxter turned back to Superman and said, “Please forgive him, he’s entering his second childhood. How can I help you?”

“I’m trying to locate Warren and Phoebe Harris. They are acquaintances of mine and they aren’t at home. Apparently they have not been home all night. The morning paper was still on the stoop and mail in the mailbox.”

“Let’s go to my office.” He led the way down a hall. Once in the office he picked up the phone and dialed an extension. When it was answered he said, “Phil, I need you to make some calls.

Yeah, start with the hospitals, a couple . . .” He put his hand over the phone as he asked, “What were those names again?”

“Warren and Phoebe Harris.”

Speaking into the phone again he said, “Sorry Phil, Warren and Phoebe Harris. Age?”

Superman replied, “Mid to late twenties.”

“Age around twenty-five. Yeah Phil. Let me know if you hear anything.” He hung up the phone.

“Do they have a car?”

“Yeah, late model Toyota, gray.”

Baxter picked up his phone and dialed another extension. “Gene, traffic have anything on a late model gray Toyota? . . . I’ll hold.”

He said to Superman, “While Phil checks the hospitals; Gene will let me know if any tickets have been issued to a gray Toyota.”

He turned back to the phone and said, “Yeah, Gene, I’m still here. You do, when, what time? . . . Friday night. 11 pm. Where? . . . uh huh. Okay, which one? . . . Okay, I’ll let him know. Thanks.” He hung up the phone. He turned to Superman and said, “I’m sorry, Superman. A late model gray Toyota was involved in an accident, last night about 11 pm. The occupants were taken to Daley Memorial.”

As he finished the word Superman disappeared from his office. Thirty seconds later he was in the ER of Daley Memorial standing in front of the admitting desk. The unit clerk looked up and seeing Superman was startled and asked, “What can I do for you, Superman?”

“I need to check that status of a couple that was brought in last night. Warren and Phoebe Harris.”

“Are you a relative?”

He looked at her and said, “Well, no, but I am a friend.”

“I can only release information to relatives.”
 “Look. Miss, do you know just who I am?”
 “Yes, you’re Superman, but unless you are a relative, I can’t give you any information.”
 “Can you at least tell me if you have patients by those names?”
 “I guess that isn’t against regulations.” She flipped through her roster and said, “We have a Phoebe Harris.”
 “What about Warren?”
 She flipped through again and said, “No, no Warren Harris. Sorry.”

Superman used his x-ray vision to check the treatment rooms and spotted Phoebe in treatment 3. Her head and other parts of her body were swathed in bandages. He almost didn’t recognize her. If he hadn’t been able to x-ray through the bandages he might not have. He said, “Excuse me.” He turned and cape swishing as he moved, started down the hallway.

The unit clerk jumped up and shouted after him, “Hey, you can’t go down there!”

Superman ignored her and moved to treatment 3. He didn’t stop until he was at the bedside. Phoebe was asleep or unconscious. He picked up her hand.

A doctor bustled in, in response to the unit clerk’s summons. He said, “Here, here, Superman, you’re not supposed to be in here. I must ask you to leave.”

In his most stern tone of voice, Superman said, “Doctor, I know this woman and nothing short of Kryptonite will make me leave. I need to know what happened.”

Bowing to the inevitable and intimidated by the tone of Superman’s voice the doctor said, “She and her husband were brought in at about 12 last night by the medics. They had been in a three-car accident. They were sandwiched between two other cars. Her husband was DOA. She’s really banged up. I’m not sure she’ll make it.”

Just then Phoebe’s eyelids fluttered and opened. The doctor was at her side immediately. “Mrs. Harris, I’m Doctor Stephens. We are doing all that we can for you.”

She looked from him to the other side and saw who it was that was holding her hand. She started to speak but it was so soft that the doctor couldn’t hear what she was saying, but Superman’s superhearing heard her loud and clear. She said, “Carrie didn’t tell us who you are, we figured it out. Take care of my baby. Promise me that you’ll take care of her.”

He leaned down and whispered in her ear, “We promise.”

He pulled back and her lips formed the words, “Thank you.” She smiled just before her hand fell limply from his grasp and the monitor went flat line.

Instantly an enunciator started blaring, “Code Blue, Code Blue ...”

The doctor immediately dropped his clipboard and started doing chest compressions. Seconds later a nurse ran in with an Ambu bag and started pushing air into her lungs. Another doctor arrived and pushed Superman out of the way. He grabbed the defibrillator paddles. Another nurse applied the gel and he rubbed the paddles together to distribute the gel. He shouted, “Charge to 200!”

A few seconds later the nurse said, “Ready!”

He placed the paddles and shouted, “Clear!”

Everyone jumped back and he triggered the device. There was an audible thump as the device discharged. Phoebe’s body jumped up from the bed and fell back.

The monitor continued recording a flat line.

“Amp of bicarb, bolus!”

A large needle was stuck right into her chest and the plunger shot home.

The doctor with the paddles shouted, “300!”

A few seconds later the nurse shouted, “Ready!”

“Clear!”

There was an audible thump as the device discharged. Louder this time. Phoebe’s body jumped again.

After delivering the shock the rest of the crew returned to what they were doing.

He shouted, “350!”

“Ready!”

“Clear!” Again, there was an audible thump as the device discharged. This time, loudest of all.

“Again!”

“Ready!”

“Clear!”

Thump again.

After the fourth attempt the doctor with the paddles said, “Nice try folks. We’ve done all that we can.” He turned to Superman and asked, “What are you doing here, anyway?”

Superman replied, “She is ... was a friend of mine.”

“I’m sorry. Did she have any family?”

“Her husband was in the car with her. They had a daughter. She was with friends so that her mother and father could have a date night.”

“Poor kid. Does she know?”

“Not yet.”

“Who will tell her?”

Superman turned to the doctor for the first time and said, “That will be my responsibility.”

“Sorry, Superman. I wish there had been more that we could have done.”

“You did everything you could.”

“Poor kid’s going to be an orphan now.”

“My friends will take care of her until an arrangement is made.”

The doctor he had been speaking to nodded and left.

He contacted Lois. As soon as he did she knew it was bad news because she could sense it through their link. “Lois, I found them. They were in an accident, probably on the way home from their date. Warren was already dead. Phoebe spoke to me before she died. They had figured out who we are. Before she died, she asked us to take care of Carrie.”

“Clark, could we adopt her?”

“I don’t know. We can try. It’s for the courts to decide.”

Doctor Stephens made a notation of the time of death on her chart and asked, “What did she say to you?”

“It was ... personal.”

“Apparently your answer made her happy. She passed with a smile on her face.”

“She asked me to do something for her. I told her I would.”

He picked up her hand and gently placed it by her side.

The doctor said, “Do you know if they had a will?”

“No doctor, I don’t have any information on that.”

“I heard you say that they had a daughter. I hope they had a will, you know, to make provisions for the child.”

“Please notify the appropriate authorities.”

“That is standard procedure in cases like this. They may want to contact you, since she talked to you before she passed. A dying declaration as it were.”

Chapter 28 – The Aftermath

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Superman watched, as they wheeled Phoebe’s body away, presumably to join Warren in the morgue. Once this was done, Superman exited the hospital and headed for Smallville. A few

seconds later, Superman landed and spun into his casual clothes. When he entered he found Lois on the couch holding a crying child while Martha and Jonathan on either side attempted to comfort her. Clark knelt in front of Lois and Carrie. He said, "Carrie, I'm so sorry. I wish there was something we could do. Carrie, before your mommy died I was able to speak with her. She told me that she knew just who Lois and I are and ... and she asked us to take care of you. I told your mommy that we would. She thanked me and was smiling when she went to heaven. She smiled because she knew that Lois and I love you the same way she and your daddy did and we would take extra special care of you."

Carrie had been sniffing as he had been saying all of this and when he finished she threw her arms around his neck, buried her face in his shoulder and started crying again as he wrapped her up in his arms.

After a time she cried herself to sleep and Clark carried her up and put her to bed. Scrappy jumped up on her bed with her and in her sleep she rolled over and put an arm around his neck. Clark patted Scrappy and said, "Good boy." After ensuring that she would be okay he turned and left her room.

Joining Lois and the rest downstairs he said, "I need to call the firm that Warren worked for. They may know who his lawyer was. We need to find their will and have it probated."

That started a round of calls. It turned out that even though Warren was a corporate lawyer and wills weren't his specialty he had prepared his own will. The police found it in a fireproof strong box in a closet of their home. It, along with insurance forms and other important papers were delivered to a local judge.

On Tuesday, Clark received a call at the Planet. "Daily Planet, Clark Kent."

"Mr. Kent, this is Judge Burke, Sandra Burke in Chicago. Do you have a minute to talk?"

"Yes, judge. I assume that this is in regards to Warren and Phoebe Harris."

"Yes, it's my understanding that you have in your care a minor child, Carrie Ann Harris."

"That is correct; we were babysitting her for Warren and Phoebe so that they could have a night out."

"I must ask you to return her to this jurisdiction so that child welfare can take care of her until arrangements can be made for her disposition."

Clark, normally unflappable, was starting to lose his temper and it was in his voice as he replied, "Carrie is not a commodity that can be disposed of! She is a little girl who is in a lot of pain at the loss of her parents."

"Mr. Kent, it isn't going to help for you to lose your temper. This child needs to be returned to this jurisdiction so that child welfare can handle the case."

"I'm sorry judge, it's just, well, Warren and Phoebe trusted us to take care of Carrie. Why can't we just continue to do so? My wife recently had a similar loss and they have really bonded over it. It is helping Carrie to cope."

"That's all well and good, but the law is the law. You must return the child. How is it that she is in Metropolis, anyhow?"

"Actually, she is in Kansas. A friend of mine provided transportation."

"Oh, a private pilot?"

"Actually, no, Superman."

The tone of the judge's voice changed abruptly. "Did you say, Superman?"

"Yes, judge, he happens to be a friend of mine."

The judge paused for a minute in thought before coming back on the line. "If I were to have a positive character reference from someone like Superman about you and your wife coupled with the fact that you were in fact babysitting Carrie for Phoebe and

Warren Harris at the time of their demise, I may be able to have child welfare grant you temporary custody as foster parents. We will waive the required background checks and classes. You must understand however, it will only be temporary. Once the will is probated a decision will be made on the disposition of the child."

"Thank you, judge. I'll ask Superman to prepare a statement and fly it out to you. How soon will the will be probated?"

"Since there is an orphaned, minor child involved, I will be scheduling that for no-later-than Friday. The child will have to be here at that time. As a family friend, and for the child, it might be advisable for you and your wife to appear at that time as well."

"What time on Friday?"

"Now you're putting me on the spot. Let me check my calendar." He could hear her riffling pages. "I have an opening on Thursday, ten a.m. Can you be here?"

"We'll all be there. Thank you, judge."

"I look forward to seeing Superman in my office with that reference sometime soon."

"Don't worry Your Honor. He'll be there sooner than you think."

On Thursday at ten a.m. Lois and Clark with Clark carrying Carrie and Scrappy at his heels entered the judge's chambers in the courthouse in Chicago where the will was to be read.

When they walked in, besides the judge there was a member of the Chicago PD and two representatives of child welfare.

As they entered the room, one of the women from child welfare stood and approached Clark. She held out her hands to try to take Carrie.

Seeing this Carrie screamed, "No! No, I wanna stay with Mr. Clark!" She grabbed onto him as if her life depended on it and buried her head in his shoulder.

Lois stepped between the worker and Clark and asked, "What is it going to hurt for us to hold her? Isn't it bad enough that she has lost her parents?"

The worker tried to push her way past Lois, but the judge stopped her by saying, "Madge, let her stay with the Kents."

Madge gave the judge a questioning look and at the judge's nod returned to her seat.

Once Lois and Clark were seated, with Clark holding Carrie on his lap the judge proceeded. She looked at Madge and said, "I have the advantage of having reviewed this document in advance. You'll understand in a minute why I allowed this." She opened a folder that was lying on her desk and started to read, "Last Will and Testament of Warren and Phoebe Harris. Be it known to all present that the undersigned being of sound mind, etc., do affirm and attest that this is our etc., etc. Okay, here's the pertinent part. Lacking any living family other than our daughter, Carrie Ann Harris we do assign Lois Lane-Kent and Clark Kent to be executors of this will."

She looked over the document, straight at the Kents and asked, "Are you willing to serve in this capacity?"

Clark looked at Lois and at her nod answered for them, "We are, Your Honor."

The judge nodded and returning to the document said, "I thought you would otherwise they wouldn't have named you. Okay, yadda, yadda, yadda all goods and chattels. Insurance policies. Ah, here we are. This is the important part. We, Warren and Phoebe Harris out of concern for the continued welfare of our child, Carrie Ann Harris direct that Lois Lane-Kent and Clark Kent be appointed Guardians until such time as Carrie comes of age or until the time when with her agreement they, Lois Lane-Kent and Clark Kent decide that they wish to adopt Carrie. They have our full consent in this matter to act in the best interests of Carrie."

Lois reached over and grasped Clark's hand. Clark gave Carrie a hug.

The judge said, “Now that that’s settled, Madge, you and your partner and the CPD officer can all leave while I go over the details of the will with the Kents.”

Madge stood, nodded to the judge and stepping over to Clark and Lois held out her hand. Lois shook it as Madge said, “No hard feelings. I was just doing my job.”

Lois replied, “With a little too much zeal if you asked me. You need to think of the child more.”

Madge replied, “I was thinking of the child and what the requirements of the law are.”

Lois said, “Don’t be too surprised if you see an article or two about how the system abuses the children they are supposedly protecting. My husband was also an orphan. Fortunately he was adopted by a very loving family. That is what we hope to provide for Carrie.”

After Madge and the rest had left the judge said, “Don’t judge her too harshly. She has saved a number of children’s lives by getting them out of abusive situations. Now, the details of the will. As executor it will be up to you to make the funeral arrangements. I will push through the guardianship decree. There will be no necessity of keeping Carrie here in Illinois. Details of insurance policies, deed, mortgage details other debts are all outlined. Mr. Harris was very thorough. I don’t think you’ll have any problems.” The judge shoved the copy of the will she was reading from back into the folder and removed her reading glasses setting them on the desk. She looked at Carrie and saw that she was looking at her. She asked, “Carrie, honey, do you like the Kents?”

Carrie nodded her head and buried her face in Clark’s shoulder again.

The judge nodded and said, “I can see that she does. It’s as plain as the nose on your face. I’m glad it worked out this way. Lots of times the parents make no provision for the children and they wind up in the system. I’m glad that didn’t happen this time. Mr. and Mrs. Kent, if there’s anything I can do for you. Just let me know, oh, and thank Superman for me. It was a thrill meeting him.” She handed Lois the folder as they stood to leave.

The following weekend the funeral was held for Phoebe and Warren Harris. The principal mourners were Carrie and the Kents along with some friends and co-workers of Warren’s.

Lois kept Carrie’s hand in hers the entire time, lifting her up so that she could see her mom’s and dad’s bodies and say goodbye to each of them. At times she was overcome and buried her face in Lois’s shoulder as she cried. Lois comforted her, but at the same time encouraged her in crying in the understanding that the emotional release would be beneficial. It hadn’t been that long ago that she had been through the same process with her Clark and seeing Carrie’s expressions of grief brought it back to her making her the perfect comforter because of her identification.

A few months later

The Lex Luthor trial had been postponed due to the absence of Luthor. It had been four months since he had escaped from prison. All of the efforts of Superman and the team of Lane and Kent had proven futile.

Lois was now into her seventh month and her belly was growing at a moderate rate as the baby grew. They already knew that based upon that rate of growth that a Kryptonian pregnancy was considerably longer than an Earth human pregnancy. The decision had been made to spend some time in the other universe so that the term would appear closer to what would be expected. Thus they had been spending at least a day with Martha and Jonathan for every two days in Alt 1 with Lucy and James.

One evening as they were sitting around the dinner table with

Martha and Jonathan, turning to Lois, Carrie asked a question, “Am I going to stay with you forever?”

Lois reached out a hand and asked, “Do you want to?”

Carrie’s reply was exactly what everyone around the table hoped it would be, “Yes, I do. Next to mommy, I like you best of everybody. Do you want me to stay with you?”

Lois was out of her chair and kneeling next to Carrie as she took both of her hands in hers and said, “Carrie, we want you to stay with us, very much. Your mommy also wanted that. She picked us to take her place if something happened to her.”

Clark added, “Carrie, your mommy and daddy were very wise people. They knew that if something ever happened to them that you would need someone. They saw how much we loved you and that you really like us so they asked us if we would be the ones. I talked with your mommy, just before she died and she asked me to promise to take care of you. I promised that we would. When I promised she said, ‘Thank you.’ and smiled because she knew that I would keep my promise. Carrie, there was one more thing. Would you want to become our little girl? Would you like Lois to be your new mommy and me your new daddy?”

She looked at Lois and asked, “Could you?”

Lois replied, “Could I what, Carrie?”

“Could you be my new mommy?”

“If you want me to, yes, but you have to want it.”

Carrie threw her arms around Lois’s neck and said, “Yes, I want you to be my new mommy.”

Lois put her arms around Carrie and lifted her out of her chair and into a hug. She knew that this marked a milestone. Carrie had worked through her grief at the loss of her mom and dad and was ready to move on. She said, “It would make me very happy to be your new mommy,” as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Clark moved in and put his arms around his wife and his new daughter in a group hug.

Martha and Jonathan had been very interested observers and had arisen and were also hugging as they looked on. Martha was weeping softly and said to Jonathan, “We just got ourselves a granddaughter.”

Jonathan, also with tears in his eyes and at a total loss for words, said, “Yeah.”

After a few minutes, basking in the moment, Carrie broke the silence and in her child’s voice asked, “Mommy, can I have some ice cream for dessert?”

With a fresh outburst of tears at Carrie calling her mommy, Lois said, “Yes, honey, you may. I think we all will. *This* is a *celebration*.”

The lawyers were contacted and the paperwork completed for the adoption. Since it had been in the will and since Carrie had no other relatives, it was ordered in a very short time and Carrie Harris became Carrie Kent.

Clark, as executor of the estate, had access to all of the possessions of the Harris family. He took one of the portraits of her parents and had a reduced copy made and that, along with a snapshot of Lois and Clark, went into a locket.

After the final approval Lois and Clark presented a prettily wrapped box to Carrie. As he did, Lois said, “Carrie, it’s official. As of today, you’re our little girl. You are now Carrie Harris Kent. We changed your middle name. Do you like your new name?”

Distracted by the gift, Carrie replied, “uh huh.”

Lois chuckled and said, “Okay. Why don’t you go ahead and open the gift?”

Obviously eager to do just that Carrie ripped off the paper. When she opened the wrapping and then the box she said, “Ooooo,pretty!”

Lois asked, “Do you like it Carrie?”

Carrie replied, “Very much. It’s pretty.”

Lois said, “Go ahead and open it.”

Carrie tried and then Lois helped and showed her how it was done. When it was open Carrie saw the pictures and started to tear up. Looking at the picture of Phoebe and Warren she said, “Mommy and Daddy.” Then she looked at the other picture and said, “New Mommy and Daddy.”

Lois said, “Carrie, honey, we never want you to forget your mommy and daddy. That is one of the reasons we changed your middle name to Harris, your old last name. That picture is so that you can remember them and how very much they loved you. The other picture is so that you know how much we love you.”

Flashback

45 days earlier

The search for Luthor seemed to be going nowhere so after a short time in hiding Lois had returned to the Planet. Claiming that they were still concerned, she went back, in an undercover way. She started wearing a jet black wig with poker straight hair which reached the middle of her back, and big horn rimmed glasses. She wore flats to reduce her apparent height and conservative pantsuits. They put out the word that she was wearing padding to make her look like she was pregnant.

The disguise had been effective. The first day she showed up when she stepped out of the elevator Clark hung back. He had flown to the roof and timed his arrival at the bullpen floor to coincide with Lois’s entrance from the elevator.

As soon as she stepped out of the elevator, Jimmy, who happened to be standing there waiting for the elevator greeted her, “Can I help you Miss?”

Lois changed her voice and affected a mid-western accent which was fairly easy to do after years with the Kents. “Yes, you may. I’m looking for Lois Lane. I was told that she works here.”

“Uh, well, she does, but she’s been on assignment for a while now so she’s not here. Can I help you, I’m Jimmy Olsen? I’m one of her partners.”

Lois started to smile as she said, “Partner, huh? Since when?”

Jimmy was flustered and he stammered, “Well, I uh, you see uh, we work together a lot and I uh ...”

Lois decided to put him out of his misery so she said, “I already have a partner and he happens to be my husband.” She lowered her glasses.

It took Jimmy a few seconds to tumble to the fact that this was Lois, but when he did he started to smile and almost shouted, “Lois!” But all that made it out was, “L ..,” because Lois put her hand over his mouth.

She said, “Shhhhh. No one is supposed to know I’m here. Call me Olive, okay?”

Jimmy smiled and said, “Olive, huh? Okay, you’re undercover huh?”

“You got it. I’m going to be undercover or on assignment until Luthor is recaptured.”

Jimmy winked and said, “Got it, Olive.”

Lois asked, “Where’s the Chief?”

“He said something about having to meet with the suits upstairs. He should be back soon.”

“I guess I’ll check my phone and e-mail messages. Thanks, Jimmy.”

“See you later, Olive. I have to get this film to the lab.” He sprinted to catch the elevator car and got to it just as Perry stepped off.

Perry spotted the stranger in his bullpen and moved in her direction. “Can I help you, Miss?”

Using her other voice, Lois asked, “Can you help me? I’m looking for Lois Lane.”

“Well, I’m sorry, she happens to be on assignment at this

time. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Could I speak with you in your office?”

“Sure Miss ...”

“Olive.”

“Okay, Miss, uh, Olive?”

“Yes, Olive.”

“Okay, uh, this way.” Perry led the way to his office.

Once inside, he moved around his desk and sat. He asked “Now, how can I help you?”

Dropping the affected voice, Lois said, “You can let me use my desk. I’ve got work to do.” She pulled her glasses off and smiled.

Perry was flabbergasted. He said, “Lois?? Is that you, darling?”

Laughing she did a pirouette and asked, “What do you think?”

“You sure fooled me!”

Lois said, “Fooled Jimmy too. Look, Clark wants me to stay undercover until Luthor is caught. If this disguise could fool Jimmy and you, I don’t think Luthor will figure it out. It was the only way we could figure out that I could be here to work on the case and still be under the radar.”

“It sure looks like it’ll work. Well, okay. Olive huh?”

Laughing Lois asked, “Are you making fun of my middle name?”

Perry replied, “I never knew it. Okay, Olive it is. I guess you need to get to work. Where’s that husband of yours?”

“He hung back so that it would be less obvious. He’ll be here in a minute.” Just then Clark exited the stairwell, “See, there he is.”

“All right, the team of Lane and Kent, back together. Get busy and get him so that you can get out of that ridiculous outfit.”

“Right, Chief. We’re on it.”

End flashback

Carrie had a day off from school. Scrapy woke her up by licking her face. She hugged him and then got out of bed.

It was only a few days since the papers had been filed, finalizing the adoption. Now her name was Kent and she couldn’t wait to tell everybody.

She stood up and looked around at *her* new room. It was the room right next to the master bedroom at 348 Hyperion Ave. The walls had been painted a pale pink. Her new bed was a three-quarter so that there was room for Scrapy with white posts and a pink canopy. Her dresser and chest were also white with teddy bear decals on the drawers. The lamp on her bedside had a teddy bear sitting down with three blocks piled in a pyramid with ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’ showing and a pink shade matching the canopy. Her closet had been modified so that it had a bar at four feet so that she could reach her clothes.

She was smiling and humming to herself as she picked out what she wanted to wear because today was special. Today Mommy and Daddy were taking her to work with them and she wanted to look especially nice. She went to her closet and picked out a party dress that she was partial to, then she picked out her underwear and socks.

A few seconds later Lois came in and said, “Good morning, Sweetheart. How’s my little girl today?”

Carrie answered, “Scrapy didn’t want me to be late. He woke me up.” She pointed to her clothes and asked, “Can I wear those today?”

Lois looked and said, “Those would be very nice. You’ll be the prettiest one there today.” She smiled at Carrie and continued, “Okay now, wash your face and hands, and then put on your pretty dress, shoes and socks and then come downstairs for breakfast.”

“Okay, Mommy.”

Lois couldn't help but smile. To hear this dear sweet child call her mommy sent a thrill through her. She said, “I'll see you downstairs in a minute.” She gave Carrie a kiss on top of her head and headed out.

Chapter 29 – Recapturing Luthor

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

Carrie was holding onto Clark's hand when they arrived in the bullpen. There was an immediate stir in the bullpen. The word had gone around that Olive was taking Lois' place temporarily and partnering with Clark. Only a select few knew the truth. Lois was already at her desk when Clark and Carrie arrived.

Perry was out of his office like a shot. He asked, “Clark, who is that you have there?”

Clark chuckled and asked, “Why don't you ask her?”

Perry gave him a quizzical look and said, “Okay.” Then he looked at Carrie and asked, “What's your name little girl?”

Carrie giggled and said, “You're silly. I'm Carrie! Carrie Harris Kent.” She looked up at Clark and said, “This is my Daddy.”

Perry sputtered, “Daddy?”

Clark laughed and said, “It's a long story, Perry. We kept it under wraps until everything was finalized. Let's go into your office.” Kneeling he said to Carrie, “Why don't you go visit with Miss Olive, okay?”

Carrie had been told that she had to call Lois Miss Olive in the office so she understood. Mommy was pretending to be someone else because there were bad men that were after her so she was hiding. She replied, “Okay Daddy.” She scampered over to Lois' desk and climbed up in her visitor chair while Lois smiled at her.

Once in Perry's office Clark explained about who Carrie was and why she had stayed with Jonathan and Martha until the adoption had gone through.

Perry said, “Well, Clark, I guess you and Lois have started on your family. She's cute as a button. She actually looks a lot like Lois. She could easily be your own child. I'm happy for you.”

“Carrie had today off from school, but will be starting tomorrow. We will be enrolling her in the afterschool program in the daycare center on 2.”

“Where do you stand on the Luthor investigation?”

Clark sighed and said, “We've come up dry so far. We've had some hints, seen some anomalies. He had so many dummy and shell companies hiding money that it is almost impossible to track them all. It's just grunt work, follow each lead and see where it goes. If we pick up another lead from that one then follow it. I hope we get something soon. I need my wife back. Olive is okay, but you know what I mean.” This was said on the off chance that Perry's office was under observation or bugged somehow.

Perry went along with it and said, “I know, but since Lois isn't here you need someone and she's here. Make the best of it.”

“I will, Chief.” Clark walked out of Perry's office and over to his desk. He smiled when he saw Carrie up on Miss Olive's lap while Miss Olive was checking a file on her computer. He wanted so much to just go over and kiss his wife and hug both of them so much it hurt.

Suddenly Miss Olive called him over. When he was standing there looking over her shoulder she pointed at her screen and said, “I'm not sure but I may have found something. See here, we have a money transfer from an account that has been dormant

since before Luthor started going after you.”

“Where do the funds go?”

“Another shell.” A few keystrokes later she said, “Ah hah, it stayed local. Went to Metropolis National. We might be able to find out who picked it up.”

She picked up the phone and punched in a number. “Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Tartaglia, how can I help you?”

She looked around to make sure that no one was within hearing before saying, “Good morning Gino, Lois Lane. Is Bill Henderson available?”

“Ah, good morning, Ms. Lane. Mrs. Tartaglia sent some more cannoli in with me. Do you want I should save you one?”

“Not today, Gino. I don't think we'll be coming in. Thanks for the offer though, your wife's cannoli are simply wonderful. I really need to talk with Bill Henderson.”

“Right you are. Lieutenant Henderson, coming right up.”

There was a series of clicks then she heard, “Henderson.”

“Hi Bill.”

“Lois, what are you doing calling me?”

“We've been working on the Luthor story. Listen, I think we have him as still here in Metropolis. We found a money transfer to an account in Metropolis National.”

“Give me the account number. I'll get a warrant and subpoena the records for the account.”

She gave him the information he needed. He said, “I'll get back to you.” The connection was broken.

Lois looked at Clark and said, “Let's go into the conference room.” Turning her attention to Carrie she said, “Sweetie, why don't you bring your activity bag. You can read or color. There's a big table in there that you can sit at.”

“Okay Mo ... Miss. Olive.” She jumped off of Lois' lap, grabbed her bag and walked with Lois to the conference room with Clark bringing up the rear.

Once they were in the conference room, Lois got Carrie settled and then turned to Clark. “Okay, it looks like your supposition that he laid a false trail and really stayed here was correct. I think we have been overlooking something. We need to use all of the knowledge we have to break this case. The same way we came here to interview Luthor to help with the other case, let's use what we learned over there to help with this case. Do you think he could be holed up where you were trapped?”

As if a light had just been turned on Clark got a startled look, then he started to smile before he said, “There you go again, reminding me of just why I married you.”

She smiled as she repeated a familiar line, “I think of all of the angles?”

He replied, “Yeah. Okay, I think Superman needs to check the old subway area to see if there are any hidden bunkers. I hope they are lead lined, that would be a dead giveaway. If I find anything like that Bill will get a call. Wish me luck on this hunt.”

Carrie had a faraway expression on her face as she looked at Clark and said, “You'll find him, Daddy.”

“Thank you Carrie, I appreciate your confidence in me.”

“No Daddy, I mean that you *will* find him. The person you are looking for. He's there.”

Startled by this Lois asked, “How do you know that Carrie?”

“I don't know how, I just know. Daddy will find the bad man where he is going to look.”

Lois looked at Clark and lifted an eyebrow before she said, “I guess you had better go prove Carrie correct. See you shortly.”

Clark gave Carrie another look and said, “Okay kiddo, I'll be back in a few minutes.” He headed for the stairwell.

Lois moved over next to Carrie and asked, “Sweetheart, how did you know that Daddy will find the bad man?”

“I don't know Mommy. I just saw it, in my head. I saw Daddy find him. You need to warn Daddy not to go into the dark room. It would hurt him.”

Immediately Lois sent, /"Clark! Keep your distance. Carrie says that if you go in you'll get hurt."/

/"I'm in the air over that area of the old subway. Sure enough, there is a lead lined bunker down there. I'll keep an eye on it. Why don't you call Henderson?"/

Lois picked up the conference room phone and dialed the Twelfth Precinct. "Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Tartaglia. How can I direct your call?"

"Gino, Lois Lane. I need to talk to Henderson, ASAP."

"Sure thing, Ms. Lane."

There were the usual series of clicks and then she heard, "Henderson."

"Bill you need to get a squad over to the old subway entrance at Ninth and Battery. Superman has found an underground bunker that we suspect is being used as Luthor as a hideout. He can't go in because of Luthor's history of possessing Kryptonite. The bunker is lead lined."

"I'm on it. We should be there in less than a half an hour. Looks like Clark was right, huh?"

"Yeah, kinda looks that way."

"I'll let you know." The connection was broken.

She sent, /"Bill's on the way. He said it could take half an hour."/

/"Has Carrie said any more?"/

Lois asked, "Did you see anything else Carrie?"

"Tell Daddy that there's a back door and he needs to keep the bad man from using it."

/"Clark, Carrie says there's a back door and you need to block it."/

A few seconds later she received, /"I see it."/ ... /"I traced it to its far end and backtracked to the backdoor. I collapsed the tunnel, blocking the exit. He has only one way out and that will be through the MPD."/

A few minutes later he sent, /"MPD just arrived. I'm leading them to the tunnel."/

/"Remember Carrie's warning. He must have Kryptonite."/

Superman turned to Bill as they were about to make the final descent and said, "I have to hang back. Please search Luthor for Kryptonite."

Henderson replied, "You got it. We'll strip search him if need be."

Five minutes later Henderson came out with Luthor in handcuffs along with three accomplices, none of whom Clark recognized.

Henderson stopped and said, "Thanks, Superman. I would suspect that extra precautions will be taken to make sure he doesn't escape again."

"You're welcome, inspector. I hope they can keep him under lock and key this time."

Bill started to snicker as he said, "You should have seen his face when I told him that it was Lane and Kent that had figured out his hideout. It was priceless."

"Did he have Kryptonite?"

"He sure did! He had three pieces on his person. He was wearing a ring, a necklace with a crystal in a basket setting and a piece in a lead box in his pocket. I found a lead box big enough to hold it all. Here, you can dispose of this." He handed the box to Superman.

"Thanks Bill, I'll do just that. I guess I'll check back with you later."

"Call me if you need anything."

Lois said to Carrie, "Sweetie, Daddy is safe and they got the bad man."

Carrie said, "You and Daddy aren't safe yet. There's more hurtie stuff there."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, Mommy. More hurtie stuff."

Lois sent, /"Clark, Carrie says there's more Kryptonite."/

"Oh, Bill, one more thing, could you have a team go through that bunker with a fine toothed comb? I have it on good authority that there's more Kryptonite in there."

Bill turned to a couple of uniformed officers and said, "Kowalski, Hunter, stay here and guard this place. I'm sending in a team to search it once I get up top and can call the request in."

The two men stationed themselves on either side of the door to wait for the search team.

Superman flew back to the roof of the Plant and a few seconds later Clark Kent exited the stairwell and headed for the conference room.

As soon as he was inside he picked Carrie up and hugged her and kissed her cheek. He said, "Thank you, baby. Daddy is very proud of you."

Carrie threw her arms around his neck and hugged him for all she was worth. She said, "I love you, Daddy."

Clark said, "Mommy and I love you, sweetheart. Now, how did you know about the Kryptonite?"

With confusion on her face she asked, "The what, Kryptite?"

Lois interjected, "The hurtie stuff."

"Oh, that. I don't know, I just knew it was there and it would be bad and hurt you and Mommy and the baby. Pretty soon Mommy is going to have her baby and it's going to be a ..."

Lois interrupted her at this point and said, "Carrie, remember what we said about secrets? How you have to keep it a secret about who we are. Well, that's another secret you have to keep. Don't tell us if we are having a boy or a girl, okay?"

"Okay Mommy, I'll keep it a secret."

Chapter 30 – The Birth

1997

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 025 x Tau 036 – Canon Alt Clark universe also called – Alt 1

%%%

Lois and Clark were on one of their visits to Alt 1 after taking Carrie to Smallville for a visit. They would be in the other universe for at least a day and were going to visit with Lucy and James for dinner and even though they would only be gone for five minutes Alt-2 time they wanted Carrie to be with the Kents and not alone. A lot can happen in five minutes.

Lois and Clark were at home. Lucy and James had come over for dinner. Part of the dinner conversation had been about the Planet.

Clark said, "I spoke to Perry the other day. He has decided not to run for another term in office, so he will be available in about fourteen months."

James replied, "I guess I could hold on till then, unless, of course, Lois wants to take over as Editor-in-Chief again."

Lois had a frightened look as she replied, "Not on your life! Much as I liked seeing my name on the masthead, my place is beside my husband, investigating. I guess you're stuck in the big chair. Besides, I'm going to be taking some time off here, pretty soon." She reached over and put her hand in Clark's and squeezed then she pulled his hand over and laid it on her baby bump, which had become more of a mountain as she was nearing her term. "Really soon."

Lucy asked, "What's it going to be, boy or girl?"

Lois smiled and said, "This is one surprise package I want to wait for." She got a faraway look as she said, "Carrie knows."

Turning to Lucy and James she said, “Remember the flower girl?” They both nodded. “She is displaying psychic powers. She was about to tell us what the baby would be, but I stopped her.”

“So, you really don’t know?”

“We really don’t know.”

“Why are you keeping all of the arrangements so secret? You haven’t even told us what hospital you’re going to be in.”

“Lucy, we decided that there could be a problem with my going to a hospital so we thought that we would use a midwife, one that we can trust. We’ve been seeing her regularly so that she could monitor my and the baby’s progress and we’re both just fine. The important thing is that we can trust her to keep my secret.”

“How soon are you due, Sis?”

“We aren’t sure, but it could be anytime.”

“You’ll be sure to call me as soon as it’s born, right? After all I’m going to be the auntie.”

“You’ll be the first call I make.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha -120 x Gamma 255 x Tau -190 – Common name – Alt2

%%%

They were having lunch in the kitchen of 348 Hyperion when suddenly Carrie said, “Daddy, Mommy’s going to have the baby tomorrow.”

Lois looked at Carrie and asked, “Are you sure about that Sweetie?”

“Yes, Mommy, I’m sure. You’re going to have the baby tomorrow and . . .” Suddenly a look of fear overtook her features, “and then the bad men are going to try to take the baby away.”

Worried now Clark asked, “Carrie, Honey, are you sure about that?”

“Yes, Daddy, I’m sure. Mommy will have the baby and the bad men will come.”

Clark looked at Lois and said, “Forewarned is forearmed. We need to be ready.”

They had surprised Martha when they had arrived that afternoon. Lois told Martha that she expected that tomorrow would be a rough day.

They spent a pleasant evening together. Carrie spent most of it in Jonathan’s lap looking at the Farmer’s Almanac with him. Scrapy was curled up on the floor at his feet. Martha was finishing up on another project. She had been relieved that as a result of the longer pregnancy of a Kryptonian woman she had had the time she needed to complete the booties and blanket. With the extra time she had also made a sweater for the baby. She was just finishing up on another project, an afghan for Carrie’s bed. She had asked Carrie what her favorite colors were and Carrie had told her purple and blue. Martha had taken Carrie into town with her when she went for the yarn and allowed her to pick out the colors she liked best so the afghan was alternating stripes of those colors.

Carrie went to bed at 8 PM. Lois and Martha tucked her in. One of the nice things about being Kryptonian under a lighter gravity and yellow sun was the fact that pregnancy didn’t slow Lois down one whit. She was able to float upstairs where an earth human would have struggled.

Jonathan and Martha were in bed shortly after Carrie leaving Lois and Clark cuddling on the sofa in the living room watching a movie. The movie finished at about 11 PM and they also went to bed.

They had decided to sleep in so it was almost ten in the

morning when Lois woke up and blessed Martha for her foresight. Thanks to her, Lois had started sleeping on a waterproof sheet. Lois was awakened by a slight pain and a big wet feeling. She looked for Clark and saw his side of the bed was empty. She called him mentally, “Clark . . . Clark . . . it’s time to call your mom.”

Clark had been with his dad in the barn, but hearing Lois he dropped what he was doing and flew to her side.

A minute later Martha, with Carrie by her side and Scrapy on her heels, walked in and said, “Carrie told me that it was time and I figured I’d better get in here. Was that the first?”

“Yeah, the first and my water broke.” Just then Lois let out a groan as another pain hit. She started panting as she tried to deal with the pain.

When she started panting Clark was instantly by her side, holding her hand and encouraging her.

Shortly the pain had passed and Lois was able to get up out of bed.

Martha nodded and said, “Why are you just standing there? I have the area prepared. Let’s go into the spare bedroom, the one next to Carrie’s.”

Carrie said, “Mommy be okay, baby too.”

Martha had turned the spare bedroom into a birthing center.

Martha entered after them. She asked, “How often are the pains?”

Lois replied, “They just started. That was only the second one”

“Good, okay, the first thing for you to do is remove that nightie. For one thing it’s wet and for another it would just get in the way.”

Martha said to Carrie, “Carrie Honey, I want you to go play for a while, okay?”

“Okay Grammy. I go play in my playhouse.” She scampered out with Scrapy at her heels. Jonathan had built a small house out next to the barn where he could keep an eye on her, complete with a door and windows. He had furnished it with a kid sized table and chairs a play stove and sink. There was even a miniature bed for her stuffies and dolls. Scrapy had a dog house attached to the play house so that he would be right there for his little mistress. He would lay there in the doorway content to be near her.

Lois pulled the nightie off over her head.

Martha knelt in front of her and placed her hands on Lois’ abdomen. After feeling around a bit she said, “Good, the baby is head down already. Okay, you have a choice to make. You can use the birthing stool, you could use the bed or you could float or even walk around. Now, keep in mind that no decision is final. At one point any one may be more appropriate than the others and five minutes later that could change. I would like you to start off on the bed so that I can check to see how dilated you are.”

Lois floated over and lay down on the bed and in order to be comfortable her legs were up and her feet rested on the footboard which was somewhat elevated and which Martha had padded.

Martha did a visual exam and said, “Okay, we have a way to go. I’d say that you are only a centimeter or so dilated. You will need to be at least ten. Because of your invulnerability we will not be able to do an episiotomy. Nor will pain killers help. This is one time that your invulnerability isn’t going to help. Frankly, since this is a superbaby and you are a supermom all things are going to be equal. I don’t know just how much work this is going to be. Since all things are equal it may just be the same as a normal birth and you can’t expect any shortcuts to motherhood because of your powers.”

Just as Martha was finishing up Lois was hit with a contraction. She screamed in pain, “Aaaarrrrrggggg.” and started panting, breathing through the contraction which lasted over half a minute.

affect their Kryptonian physiology and even when utilizing all of their strength it was a rare event when they broke a sweat. Most of the times he had actually broken out in sweat were times of emotional upheaval or embarrassment such as when Suzanne and Colette had been trying to seduce him. This was eloquent of the effort that Lois was putting into this.

As he finished his musing the next contraction hit.

Lois screamed, “aaaaaAAAARRRRrrrrrrggggggggg.” She looked at Clark with anger in her eyes as she said, “This is all ... *your* ... fault!!!! AAAAAAaaaaaaahhhhhhhh You did this to MMEEEEeeeeeeeeee.”

Martha shouted, “PUSH!”

Lois was sitting up with Clark’s arm behind her and she screamed at Martha, “I *AM* pushing!!!!”

Nonplused, Martha calmly said, “Here it comes. I can see the head.”

The contraction passed and Lois collapsed back on the pillows.

Martha said, “It won’t be much longer now. One or two more. The rest should be easy.”

Lois gasped out, “Easy for you to say! You’re not the one on this end. Aaahhh here comes ... another ... one ... aaaaAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRrrrrrrggggggggggggggggg.”

Martha shouted, “PUSH!!!!”

Lois raised up with Clark’s help and bore down with all she was worth. She could feel movement. The second the head passed out through the birth canal and was outside she knew it and started crying in relief.

Martha shouted, “I have the head. One more push should deliver the rest of the body!”

Even as Martha was saying this the contraction hit. Lois was instantly up and pushing. This time she didn’t scream, her whole being focused on delivering this new little person. She felt it when the rest of the baby passed out of the birth canal. The feeling of relief was palpable. She knew that she still needed to deliver the placenta, but that was the easy part.

Martha held the infant up and used a squeeze bulb to clear the nose and mouth of amniotic fluid and holding it up by the ankles, gave it a slight swat on the bottom which it responded to with a lusty, healthy cry. Martha quickly used two clamps on the umbilical cord and turning to Clark said, “Use your heat vision to cut the cord, between the clamps.”

He did just that and Martha turned away with the baby to clean it up. She said, back over her shoulder, “Clark, rub Lois’ tummy in gentle circles. She needs to deliver the placenta. I need to clean this little one up.”

A few seconds later, Martha turned around with a clean baby and said, “Congratulations, it’s a ...”

Just then, unexpectedly, Carrie came running into the room and shouted, “Bad men are here!” Interrupting Martha.

Suddenly Lois and Clark heard a powerful telepathic communication, /”We search for Kal-El’s child!”/

The communication was so unexpected and forceful that both Lois and Clark were stunned for a second.

Stunned, Clark said, “Kryptonians.”

THE END

The next Volume in the set will be “Clark and Lois — When Worlds and Universes Collide — Matchmaker Chronicles Volume 8”