

A Pirate Affair

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Summary: Historical alternate universe. When her father, Commodore Lane of the British Navy in the Caribbean, is kidnapped, Lois sets off to rescue him, finding her way onto the Pirate Ship Kandor and falling for the First Mate: Kal.

Acknowledgements and Comments

While some plot points and characters are taken from Pirates of the Caribbean and Smallville this is definitely a Superman story and the portrayals of Lois and Clark easily fit with Teri and Dean.

Thoughts are 'like this'.

<<<Flashbacks are like this.>>>

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Prologue: Kidnapped

"Father!" Lois stormed into her father's office. "You can't do this to me." She was livid.

He stood slowly, a stern look on his face. "I most certainly can, young lady. I am your father... and Commodore of the Navy."

"But..."

"No buts. You are to sail back home to England to present yourself at court. Prepare yourself to leave in three days."

"You know I am no lady, father. I will disgrace you at court." She threw her defiant and unruly personality back at him.

"Lois, you will learn the ways of being a Lady and return here to take a proper husband. I will have no more of this childish disobedience." His gruff loud voice brooked no opposition and she turned on her heels and strode off.

Lois returned to her room, desolate. She was an unconventional lady, but she'd never defied her father, it least not in something so big. He was commanding her, not just as a naval officer, but as her father and there was no refusing him. She stood and looked out of her window.

The heavy drapes hung beside her and she clung onto them. Stepping forwards into the very centre of the full size window, and onto the tiny ledge balcony, she gazed out at the view.

Port Metropolis. The main trading centre of the Caribbean.

She'd been here for four months, since the King had commissioned her father on some secret mission. Commodore Lane had patrolled the British waters for years but something seven months ago had set him on a journey across the Atlantic Ocean to take up the mantle of Commander of the Caribbean waters.

Lois was not privy to the details or circumstances which had caused this... at the time... but she knew that her father was involved in something serious. She'd spent many hours eavesdropping at her father's study door since arriving, trying to discern the reason for the disruption in her life. All she had managed to uncover was that he was to deal with the pirate

problem... at its source.

But that didn't matter to her. All she knew was that Port Metropolis was her home now, and even though she had lived all her life on board ship, she had taken to life in the bustling port easily. She loved it. And her father wanted to send her back to England; to the land that claimed her mother and baby sister's lives.

To court.

Where she'd have to simper and preen for the aristocracy, and bow to the King.

She shuddered.

Life on board a navy ship wasn't easy, but it was all she'd ever known, and loved — till she arrived here. And now this place was home. More than that... she had family here. She'd finally been given a chance to befriend her cousin, although it was difficult to find a time that Chloe was not engaged in her maid duties at the Governor's mansion.

As the sun set over the ocean Lois felt a pricking at her soul. She couldn't bear to leave here now. But to be able to stay would mean defying her father. And that was not possible, at least not in person. Her defiance would have to be in absentia.

She whirled round suddenly, her mind made up, and began to pack but not in the way that her father expected. A basic canvas bag was appropriated from the store room and she filled it with as many simple clothes as possible; items that would be plain and allow her to pass unnoticed out of Port Metropolis.

Leaving the Port was contrary to her heart's desire, but it would enable her to make her own life choices, rather than live by her father's word. She may even be able to return shortly, or actually hide in plain sight. Rifling through her bedside drawers she found something to tie her hair back and then began changing into a brown woollen dress.

It was now past dusk, and barely forty minutes since she'd left her father's study. She extinguished her lamp and picked up her bag and shawl, heading for the large, open bedroom window. As she pulled back the heavy curtain to reveal the escape route there came an almighty scream from one of the maids inside the house.

"Rosie?" Lois voiced her thoughts. She was the youngest of the maids and it was a dreadfully high-pitched and loud scream.

Lois dropped her bag and cloak and ran to her bedroom door, flinging it open and searching for the screaming maid. She eventually found her in the Commodore's office.

"Rosie? What is it?" Lois tried to quiet the young woman but she was in hysterics. When the older maid arrived Rosie began to calm down. Mary was a calming influence on the flighty young girl.

"Now, deary. Pull yourself together and tell the mistress whatever it is," she said in a soothing tone.

All Rosie did was point to the desk. Lois walked around and found her father's military jacket crumpled on the floor. She picked it up and then dropped it again immediately when she felt a wet and sticky substance. Stepping back and into the light of a lamp she held up her hands to find they were covered in blood.

A rushing in her ears sent her dizzy, the bile in her stomach threatening to rise. She felt unsteady and leaned against the solid oak desk for balance. As she spread her fingers out, flat, the blood transferred itself to the table and Lois absently considered how annoyed her father would be. She took a deep, consciousness-restoring, breath and focussed on her hand. A minute wrinkle appeared in the centre of her forehead when she noticed the burn mark half obscured by her palm. Ever so slowly sliding her hand away to reveal the damning mark she brought her other hand up to her mouth to contain the sob of terror which escaped her lips.

The burn mark was unmistakable, although probably not recognised by very many people. Lois was one of the few who

did. Her regular eavesdropping had turned into exploration and she'd come across parchments bearing the mark on a couple of occasions over the last few months. This was the mission her father had been given by the Crown; the mission he had discussed in private with a secret officer on many occasions.

She reached out her finger and began to trace the shape, leaving behind a matching trail of blood.

The square border.

The two dots outside two opposing corners.

The lightning bolt striking from corner to corner.

It all merged together to make a stylised 'Z'; the symbol of the man her father had been tasked to hunt and arrest.

The mark of the Pirate King.

Chapter 1: Deception

The tavern was full. Clamour and smoke from the patrons filled the air. The floor was sticky, dried beer being the cause.

He didn't want to be here; didn't want to mingle with these people, but it was his job, his duty, and he would see it through.

He held the bile down in his stomach as he strode along the floor. His boots alternately struck, then stuck to the wooden boards. His wary eyes flickered around the room; looking for possible danger, looking for possible recruits, looking for a free table.

He spotted one in a dark corner and slid onto a stool. His automatic reaction was to slide further into the dark and avoid all contact with these people but that wouldn't do tonight. He needed to be visible. He needed to attract interest.

A tavern wench approached him and bent over the table. "Can I get you anything" she asked suggestively.

"Ah, just a..." he paused and adjusted his attitude. "A bottle... of whatever is your cheapest." He looked her in the eye, avoiding the ample bosom on full view. "Now," he growled when she didn't immediately scurry away to fetch his drink.

A foul taste in his mouth had him licking his lips. He hated this; hated acting this way, but it was his job, and that was one thing he took seriously. He pulled out a rolled up parchment and quill then waited. The bottle was placed unceremoniously on his table and he reached for it without looking up. He tossed some coins down and they disappeared immediately.

One swig of the foul liquid cleared his throat and then he shouted out over the loud din, making his intentions known to the whole room.

It didn't take long for a line to appear. His ship had a reputation. He took down names and gave out instructions.

The dungeon was a little warmer than usual today. He could tell because he wasn't shivering. He actually dared to uncurl his legs and climb out from under the thin, thread-bare blanket. When his bare feet touched the dank, slimy, grit floor he had to hold in the contents of his stomach.

He stood up and wrapped the blanket around his shoulder. It might be warmer than usual but that still meant it was bitterly cold down here... in the dark... in the forgotten places.

Shuffling along the floor slowly he headed for the faint light spilling through the small barred opening in the top of his door. He gripped the bars in his fists and pushed his head as far forward as possible. As he craned his neck and strained his eyes he caught sight of the jailor.

"Hey!" he croaked out. "Hey you!" The man shuffled, obviously uncomfortable, but didn't acknowledge him. "I need to get a message to someone. Up in the mansion." He gripped harder, more urgently pleading. "Please, I need to send a message."

The soldier obviously didn't want to keep up the pretence of continuing to ignore him when it could go on all night so he broke his post. Striding over to the cell he put himself nose to

nose with the prisoner. "I've been told about you... deceiver. I don't believe a word that comes out of that filthy mouth of yours so save your breath and get back in your cell."

With that, the jailor strode off and back to his post.

The prisoner let his muscles relax and he dropped away from the door. Sinking into the uncomfortable bed he sighed.

'I have to get word to someone? But no-one will believe me. The guards who imprisoned me down here were obviously under the pay of Lex.'

<<<<"But I'm the Governor!" he protested as he was dragged down the stone steps. "Stop right now and unhand me," he demanded.

"Not any more. Lex Luthor is Governor of Port Metropolis now." The soldier's reply was full of scorn. Horror hit his heart. *'What is Lex going to do now? What will become of the rest of the Luthor family? Port Metropolis will surely deteriorate under his leadership.'*>>>>

The guards under the pay of new Governor had paid no attention to his cries and pleas over the following months. Then, suddenly, they were all gone. Replaced by new soldiers.

He tried to get them to listen. He hoped they were not in Lex's pay. It didn't seem like it. But something worse had happened.

He'd changed. His beard and hair were long and unkempt. His body was weak and bony. His clothes were dirty, ripped and grimy.

No-one believed his claim to be the rightful Governor. Why would they? He certainly didn't look the part.

But even worse than that... Lex had convinced everyone that he was dead.

'I need to get a message to someone. But how? If only I could send just one word. A single word to my trusted secretary.'

But in the ten months he had been down here he had seen no-one but the guards. No visitors, no other prisoners... and the guards thought him mad and a trickster.

'Just one word to Gabe and he'd find me. I know it.'

As the liquid in the bottle drained away so the recruit line dwindled until only two were left.

"Name," he asked wearily.

"Jimmy... uh James Olsen, sir."

He looked up at the young sounding voice. "You're too young," he spoke. "Go home."

"Please sir, I'm fifteen. I can do anythin' you ask." He took in the young boy's appearance.

Curly ginger hair, boyish round face covered in freckles.

They were most likely caused by the beating sun. This boy had never seen work on a ship.

"You don't want to be a pirate Jimmy, go find a nice apprenticeship somewhere."

"No-one'll have me. I've been lookin' after my father an' he died last week. There's no-one at home an' no money to buy an apprenticeship. There's no food left..." The young lad's voice trailed off, almost breaking. "Please."

He sighed. This was too hard. Did he give in to the compassion for the boy?

But if he did then that would condemn him to a violent, dangerous, unlawful life as a pirate. Either that, or an early death... especially if he was assigned as a powder monkey, which was very likely.

He looked away and took a swig from the bottle then wrote down the young boy's name, dying a little inside. The lad grinned and walked off.

Blinking to clear his eyes from the smoke permeating the air in the tavern he forced himself to focus on the list of names gracing the parchment on the table in front of him. His fingers gripped tightly to the quill, ink dripping from the end.

'I'm condemning them all'. He gritted his teeth.

"Next," he spoke as gruffly as he could, not looking up. On the edge of his vision he saw dark brown trousers step into view and a nervous voice spoke.

"I'd like to sign up, sir."

"We don't take women," he replied instinctively. It wasn't unheard of for females to serve on pirate ships, or even to become Captain, but *his* Captain had forbidden it.

"I'm not a woman, sir," came the stronger reply and he glanced up to see a tall, not quite lanky boy, in ragged clothes stood at the table. He squinted to try and focus better through the dark. The lad's face was as smooth as his voice. Not yet old enough to shave.

"Lad, you should be at home." *'Not another one.'*

"I want to join. Please sir. I need to."

He felt something tug at his heart again. *'I cannot let emotion get to me, not if I am to fulfil my role.'* "Go home son." He returned his gaze to the recruit list.

"I have no home. This is my only chance." He sighed and dropped the quill. Lifting his hands he dragged them down his face wearily.

"Ok, then, what's your name?"

"Lois... um... Lewis Samson. Louis. Or just Lou." The pen scratched as he added the young lad's name.

"We leave at dawn tomorrow." He did not raise his gaze again but he heard a shuffle as the lad moved his feet.

"What do I call you, sir?"

"I am Quartermaster of the Pirate Ship Kandor." After pausing he looked up and directly into the new recruit's eyes. He felt strangely uneasy. Burying his emotions deep he continued. "You can call me Kal."

Chapter 2: Monikers

Lois stood on the docks at Tortuga. Early morning mist was rising from the sea. She felt anticipation in the air. As she peered around the line to her left she could see the ship.

Having been brought up on board HMS Four Star she loved life at sea. She was well versed in the running of a ship. There would be no problem acclimating. Unfortunately, masquerading as a boy and possessing a feminine, but thankfully, low voice she came across as a *young* boy. And how would a young boy be privy to all the inner working of a ship? Lois knew she would have to lay low until she proved herself.

Standing in line, her heart began to pound as she noticed a shadowy figure begin to descend the gang plank.

What fortune to find herself in the recruit line for The Kandor. Lois had desired to join a pirate crew... any pirate crew. She'd been willing to do anything and go anywhere to uncover the trail of the Pirate King. But to be on the Kandor... That was the most feared Pirate Ship in the Caribbean and was sure to lead her swiftly to the elusive 'Z'.

The figure hidden in shadow, sun behind him, reached the bottom of the ramp. Lois nibbled her lip. In this light would Kal notice that Louis was a little... feminine?

Last night she'd managed to convince him she was a boy, but the light had been dim, and he'd been tired... and possibly, partly drunk.

Her heart fluttered when the figure stepped on to deck and Lois frowned when it began to limp along the planks. Oh, it wasn't serious and he still walked at a fast speed but she could see the rambling gait in his stride.

At the beginning of the line of recruits he stopped and turned. The sun hit his face and Lois inhaled sharply.

It wasn't Kal.

"My name is Corbin!" he bellowed. "I am Second Mate and Boatswain... or Deckmaster." He started striding down the line again. Lois heard some muttering from further down the line but

she couldn't make out the words. Was this pirate well known?

"I enforce a spotless ship. Be aware I WILL work you to the bone." Lois shuffled her feet, uncomfortable at the violence in his tone. She felt the young lad beside her tremble slightly. "But if you can make a full tour then you will leave as rich men."

A cheer went up from the line of men at that final comment.

Corbin turned and began to climb the plank and the line followed him. As Lois walked on she felt eyes watching her and turned to look to her right. A tall figure was stood at the wheel. Somehow Lois knew it was Kal... and she knew he was watching her.

A shiver went down her spine and she consciously adjusted her walk so as not to glide gracefully. Not that Lois considered herself graceful — especially with her life-long sea legs, but women naturally had a smoother movement in their walk.

It didn't take long for Lois to realise that her first impression of the Deckmaster had been correct. He was mean and violent.

Jimmy, the lad in line with her, had received a strapping for knocking over a barrel of gunpowder on the second day. That was followed by a lamp to the jaw for an elderly man who had left a gun untied. Some of the sailors looked fit to burst at that but Kal had interrupted, not allowing John Corbin to initiate a brawl. Apparently he was well known for loving his fights. During raids he was always the first to board a captured ship. His violence was legendary among pirates.

But it was a completely unrelated incident which had given rise to the name whispered by the crew behind his back. As a young powder monkey, he'd been involved in an explosion where minute fragments of metal had superheated and burned through his clothes. All the right side of his body received the full force of the explosion and some molten metal pieces had burrowed under his skin. By the time the burns had healed there was no way to get at the metal fragments embedded in his skin. It was one of the contributing factors to his limp... and the main reason he was referred to as Metallo.

Lois glared at him. He was facing away. If he'd caught her staring she'd have been for the same punishment as Jimmy... or the old man.

That didn't seem such a bad fate when she remembered the way Kal had helped up the old sailor and walked him to Fine, the ship's surgeon... affectionately known as Prof, and sometimes referred to in jest as Brainiac, when he began to chatter on about body parts in great detail while imbibing the pilfered rum.

Everyone seemed to have a moniker on board... but she had yet to hear Kal's. In a way she dreaded knowing it. It was bound to reflect badly on him, and for some reason, she didn't like that idea.

Having only had that initial conversation with him she couldn't explain her fascination with him. She'd even dreamt of him a few times since that day, one week ago, when she signed up.

It must only be a passing fancy, she convinced herself. There was no basis for any more... just his piercing blue eyes, jet black hair, well worked body and deep sexy voice.

That was it. A passing fancy due to his good looks and exciting lifestyle.

Kal wandered the deck. All the newest recruits were working out fine. Some of the older men, with experience, had been put to work on the cannons, or the stores, or even in the galley, but the younger ones had been given muscle and stamina building activities.

The two he was focussed on now worried him the most though. They both put their heart and soul into it but he still hated them being here; hated that their path was now set, their fate decided at such a young age.

Before sadness could overtake him he pushed it away and remembered why he was here; remembered his job and steeled his heart.

Steel.

Some of the men called him the Man of Steel. He'd heard it whispered behind his back: whispered because of the stories. They followed him around, increasing his 'reputation'. As First Mate and Quartermaster on The Kandor he varied his clemency when dealing with the crew. They could never be sure what his reaction would be to an incident. The fact that he doled out harsh and lenient punishment with the same complete lack of emotion seemed to worry them. Little did they know that the emotions actually raged inside him. It tore at Kal's heart to mete out the punishments but it was necessary.

Over the week since The Kandor had set sail Kal had spent an inordinate amount of time planning and scheming. Things on-board needed to change soon. Major events were about to occur and he'd decided that he didn't want Louis and Jimmy involved.

Lois stared at the Quartermaster: Kal. She was supposed to be scrubbing the deck but every time he strolled onto the bridge she couldn't help but follow him with her eyes.

He was a mystery to her. How could such a tall handsome man be a bloodthirsty pirate? How could such a young person have made it to First Mate? And how could someone with such compassion in his eyes be a heartless murderer?

She'd seen the way he'd warred with emotions when adding Jimmy and herself to the list. She'd seen the way he tipped away one mouthful of rum, for every swig he genuinely took. But then, once on board she'd been regaled with stories by the veteran pirates of The Kandor. Kal was a disgraced Naval Officer. He'd been discharged about three months ago after murdering his commanding officer, but there was no proof to convict him. Plus, apparently, he'd been in constant trouble before that. Yet he had broken up many a fight on board — intervening when it became necessary.

Kal was an enigma and she was fascinated.

"Lewis," nudged Jimmy, "you're dreaming again."

"Oh, thank you," she replied in as low a register as she could manage. She and Jimmy had become fast friends since signing on the same day and working side by side for a week. He'd often caught her mid-stare and she'd managed to convince him that she was lost in a dream. Jimmy had fully accepted that Lewis had the personality of a 'dreamer', admitting to being a little the same himself.

Lois set her arm back to the deck and slopped the water out in front, then began to scrub.

"It's time." Kal spoke quietly to himself then began to descend the steps to the deck. *'Time to befriend them. Time to build a silent trust.'* Not only for their own benefit but because something drew him to them. Especially Louis. He found his gaze locking onto the strange lad constantly. Something felt odd; wrong. He couldn't put his finger on it, but every now and then he would flash back to their meeting. When Louis had signed up and Kal had initially thought he was a lady.

Kal narrowed his eyes as he approached the two of them. There was something fishy about Louis. But that didn't stop him wanting to befriend and save him from a horrible life.

"Sailors," he said in greeting as he approached. They both stopped suddenly but Louis dropped his scrubbing brush in a clatter. Jimmy stood to his feet and saluted.

"Jimmy, you're not on a Navy ship here... at ease."

"Sir," he replied and relaxed a little.

Louis, obviously pulling himself together, stood slowly and gradually raised his gaze to meet Kal's

"Is there anything wrong sir?" he asked. Kal tipped his head

and wrinkled his brow. Something about the way this boy moved bothered him.

"Nothing wrong, lad. Just wanting to see that you've settled in. I have to say I'm pleasantly surprised by how well a lad of your age has taken to sea. It's almost as if you were born on a ship."

When Louis's eyes widened in obvious terror at that comment Kal thought he had stumbled onto the source of his confusion about the lad. Louis had claimed not to know about ships even though he'd been desperate to sign up. But it was obvious, from the boy's instant sea legs, that he was well versed in ship-board life and customs. Why was he hiding this knowledge?

Chloe entered her mistress's chamber soon after first light. The lady was already awake, stood at the window.

"Miss Luthor," she spoke quietly announcing her presence. "How are you feeling this morning?" A recent illness was still lingering.

"Chloe," she turned and gave a wan smile. "I feel a little chilly."

Chloe strolled over and put her arm on the pale lady's shoulder. "Let me dress you then. I can find something warm."

"No," she replied, "the same as usual."

"But, mistress, you have worn the black of mourning for nine months. Surely it is time to move on."

"I shall never move on from this grief, Chloe. He was grooming me to take over, but because I am a lady he kept it quiet, not willing to deal with any problems until the deed was done. But when he died, that meant that no-one knew of his wishes." She turned and her voice became harsh. "And Lex became Governor instead. It should have been me. I was his daughter. I was his chosen successor." She broke down. "And now I've lost him," she sobbed.

"Miss Luthor... Tess..." Chloe spoke soothingly. "I understand. I do. I lost my mother a long time ago. And..." she let out a shuddering breath. "... and my Uncle went missing two weeks ago."

"What?" Tess whirled. "You mean..."

"Yes, Commodore Lane."

"But... how can the Commodore be missing without me hearing of it? Surely Lex knows."

"My cousin, his daughter, visited the day after he disappeared and begged him for help in searching. He has promised to send his best ships out."

"Ah. Then please help me dress. I must go and speak to Lex in all haste."

Tess, dressed in her usual black, strode around the Governor's palace on a mission of great importance. The Commodore was here on the order of the King. He was to help rid these waters of the pirate menace and allow Port Metropolis to prosper.

If he was missing then all that her father had been working for would end. His death nine months ago had started that collapse and now it was nearly complete.

She needed to speak to Lex. Although he was now Governor she couldn't ignore the training her father had given her, the sense of duty to her people. She saw the way the Port had been degrading since the previous Governor's death. Lex was obviously not a good Governor, but then he hadn't been groomed for the position.

As she approached his study she noticed voices drifting through the partially open door.

"HMS Planet will set sail tomorrow," spoke her brother. "I can delay this no more. I must be seen to be looking for Commodore Lane."

"I understand, sir." The reply was from an unknown voice. Tess moved closer and listened at the crack.

"It is up to you to keep Captain White from finding any trail of the Commodore. Whatever needs to be done. You can mislead, disable, confound and hinder him and the ship in any and all ways." There was a pause. Tess strained to here.

"I saw to it that you received the promotion to First Officer when the previous one disappeared. Do not let me down. I believe you understand."

"I do, Governor."

Tess covered her shock, hand over mouth and then backed away silently. She returned to her room and changed her clothes, dressing herself. She couldn't bring Chloe into this... and how would she even inform her that Lex was doing the opposite of searching for her Uncle.

It felt strange to dress in normal clothes again, rather than her stark black, but she couldn't risk standing out too much. At the door she grabbed a woollen cloak and a plain straw bonnet, placing it over her red ringlet curls.

She walked in a haphazard line trailing in and out of streets and shops. Eventually she came close to her goal and just before her ultimate destination she stopped and glanced up at the sign above the shop she was passing.

**Smallville Trading Co. General Store
Proprietors J&M Kent**

'They are major suppliers for food to the mansion. I should make acquaintance with them. Show them how much they are appreciated. I will return later.'

Next to the store she found the Queen Warehouse. She quickly glanced around to be sure no-one was watching then she slipped inside the warehouse.

A second week at sea and Lois was now physically exhausted. Life on-board HMS Four Star was nothing compared to this. John Corbin spoke truly when he said he would work you to the bone. Scrubbing the deck had exposed knuckle on more than one occasion.

She wiped a hand across her face, pushing away the rivulets of water running down her cheeks. A storm had appeared on the horizon earlier in the day. The Sailing Master had ordered a change of direction but the wind and rain had caught them up. Turning back to their original course to sail directly through had its benefits and drawbacks, but that was the current course they were on.

Heading directly into the wind meant the ship lurched around on the waves, there was greater chance of damage to the sails, the rigging and even the mast. But they would be through the danger quicker.

Lois glanced around the deck as she secured the barrels in place with strong lines. She was relieved that Jimmy was no longer a swabbie. Soon after Kal had approached them a week into the voyage Jimmy had been assigned as cabin boy to the Captain and First Mate.

Lois would have felt a little alone on deck if it wasn't for the fact that Kal seemed to hover around constantly. He even spoke to her often. Unfortunately it hadn't helped with her fanciful thoughts of him. And somehow finding out that they all called him the Man of Steel didn't help her resolve her conflict over whether he was a harsh man or a compassionate one. In fact, the more she watched him and the more he attempted to befriend her she became sure that he was not steel at all... rather silk.

"Why do I never see you in The Pit, Louis?" came a sexy voice from over her shoulder. She dropped her line and the barrel rolled away. She seemed to be dropping things frequently when he was around.

The Pit was the deep part of the hold where the crew would meet outside their shifts. Rum was passed around reasonably

freely and gambling was the main past time. Lois couldn't risk being found out so she stayed away.

"Sir..." she stood. The ship hit a particularly large wave at that moment and she lost her balance, landing in his arms. She pushed away from him wide-eyed and looked up to try and gauge his reaction.

His expression was one of puzzlement and his eyes were thin slits. Attempting to deflect him she tried to answer his question. "I have nothing to wager with sir."

"I've told you... it's Kal." He continued to consider her then suddenly stepped away. "You will have plenty soon enough. Keep up your good work and I will see that you receive your fair share of the booty on our next conquest."

As Quartermaster it was Kal's job to divide up the spoils. Was he a fair quartermaster?

Lois found Jimmy in his bunk later and spent some time discussing the day. She was determined to convince him to leave with her once she'd found her father. Possibly she could persuade her father to allow him into the Navy.

"What's your impression of our Quartermaster, Jimmy?" she asked quietly. Most of the other pirates were in The Pit, but a few were snoring in their bunks.

"Kal? Oh he's great." There was a wide smile on the young lad's face. "He got me the cabin boy position you know. Corbin was about to assign me as powder monkey but Kal stepped in. I've spent a lot of time chattin' to him,"

Lois nodded.

"Hey, Lewis." By the accent in Jimmy's voice she knew he'd got the spelling of her name wrong. Maybe he didn't even know how to spell. "Don't talk to anyone else about him like that though. I trust you as we signed on together but I've heard talk in The Pit about him. Some of the crew are suspicious of how 'e came to be First Mate. 'Specially Corbin. He expected to be Quartermaster but they pulled into shore three months ago and Kal appeared out o' nowhere... the Captain apparently took a shine to him."

"The Captain," Lois leaned forward conspiratorially. "I've yet to see him out on deck and it's been two weeks. How can a Captain run his ship like that. Well, all the crew are terrified of him, so I suppose that could help. You're his cabin boy, have you seen him?"

Jimmy nodded. His eyes were a little wide. "He keeps to himself but I understand why they're all afraid of him. There's somethin'... he seems incredibly sad and lonely... and sometimes very angry, but I caught him talking with Kal once. Seems Kal brings some other emotions out in him."

"Who..." Lois gulped, "who is the Captain?"

"His name is Zor El."

Lois breathed in, shocked. *'Zor El. Is this the mysterious 'Z'... the pirate king? If so then where is father? Not on board this ship for sure. I've cleaned every inch during these two weeks.'*

Lois resolved to find out more. If it meant encouraging Jimmy's and her own friendship with Kal then she was more than willing.

Kal stood at the wheel the next day. Louis was halfway up the rigging. The young lad had been on board two weeks and Kal found his attention on him constantly. His attempts at creating a friendship had been met with resistance at every turn. The lad kept to himself, only seeming to have made a friend in young Jimmy.

Now, Kal had easily opened dialogue with that lad. Jimmy was friendly, and affable, and willing to work. Getting him assigned as cabin boy had been a risky course. Corbin was responsible for the deck hands and countermanding his decision

to make Jimmy a powder monkey had probably damaged his already rocky relationship with the Deckmaster. But it had, hopefully, improved his reputation with certain other members of the crew.

Kal squinted his eyes a little against the sun and thought back to the accident which had thrust the boy into his arms. Kal had been sure that he'd felt something. The lad's arms were... slender, his hips wide. If he could use one word to describe the feeling it would be 'soft'.

Kal indicated to a nearby deckhand, Stuart, to take over the wheel and he strolled forward to lean at the rail.

Louis was patching up a small tear in the sail from the storm yesterday. Kal watched his movements, the way he reached out; stretching one leg out behind for balance — his toe pointed.

'He's definitely a natural-born sailor. I must try harder to earn his trust and get him to confide in me.'

Finished with his job Louis descended gracefully but lost his footing just towards the bottom. Kal's first instinct was to run and help but he steeled himself. He watched as Louis picked himself up off the deck and dusted himself down. He stretched out a leg and rested it on a barrel. Reaching forward she began to examine her ankle.

'Wait! She?'

Kal saw red. His first instinct had been correct. She'd deceived him; from the very first words out of her mouth. He had done nothing but try and save her from this, and then attempt to befriend her. And it had all been a lie.

He gritted his teeth and marched down the wooden steps to the main deck. He approached her without caution and ripped off the cap she was wearing. *'That should have been my first clue; the cap which never came off, even in the blazing sun. She must be boiling hot under there.'*

Long, thick, shiny brown curls tumbled over her shoulders and down her back. She looked up at him with absolute horror in her eyes and he instantly realised his mistake. Confronting her in public put her in danger, not to mention it would destroy all hope of her ever trusting him.

But it was too late now. He had to see this through and play his part as First Mate.

Lois knew her eyes were wide and her mouth was open. Her heart was beating rapidly. If she were a gentle English Rose she would be fainting by now. But she was no wilting flower. She was Lois Lane, daughter of the Commodore. But that would *not* be a good thing to reveal.

'What do I do now?' All the options buzzed through her head. 'Do I act all penitent? Do I beg for mercy? Do I stand proud?'

"Who are you?" Kal spoke, fire in his voice.

"Lois," she replied simply, but strongly. It seemed she was taking the proud course.

They both stared at each other, unsure how to proceed. A crowd gathered and they were brought out of their reverie by the mutters.

"You do know," Kal paused and blinked, "that woman are not allowed to serve on board this ship."

Lois caught the change in his tone, but she doubted that anyone else did. He had started soft, then seemed to remember his position and his voice had hardened in anger.

"I do, Kal." She continued her strong defence, referring to him by name, putting him on the same level as her. *'Well he had insisted.'*

"Then you must realise that I have no recourse but to..."

His words were cut off by a sudden increase in the muttering. Looking around Lois saw the crowd of pirates slowly part.

Walking slowly into view was a man she had never seen before. Someone who kept to himself, but still engendered loyalty, and fear, from his crew. The flamboyant garb, the red silk

sash, the decorated tri-corn hat complete with red feather all signified that this was the Captain.

Captain Zor El.

Chapter 4: Given

'Now! The Captain chooses NOW to come out on deck.' Lois groaned inwardly. Things couldn't possibly get any worse.

All the muttering among the crew faded away until there was absolute silence. Only the sound of the wind and the waves played in the air. All eyes were on the Captain as he came to a stand-still in the centre of the ring of pirates.

Lois and Kal turned to face him and he swept his harsh gaze over both of them. She saw his eyes flicker in pain and soften as he looked to the First Mate and when they looked back at her Lois saw the difference from a second previous.

"What do we have here, son?" The Captain's voice was deep and grainy. He spoke slowly and carefully. It gave him a sinister air.

"I have discovered a deception Captain. This young deck hand is actually a woman."

"I can see that!" he laughed and the tense mood suddenly broke. "Well," he smiled ever so slightly. "Do you know, miss, how long it has been since female feet walked this deck?"

Lois felt her head swimming with confusion. Captain Zor El was a complete mystery. His mood and emotions, his laughter and teasing, all bucking up and down within moments of each other. Possibly he was unstable... in his mind. No wonder the crew feared him, yet still followed him, even when he was absent.

"I do not know, sir," she replied. She looked him directly in the eyes, but did not speak too forcefully.

"Well then, what are you going to do with you? I presume you have been sleeping in the bunks." She nodded. "Hmmm," he rubbed his top lip with a finger. "We can't have that now." He stood up straight and frowned, dropping his hand. "But unfortunately this is not a Navy ship and so there are no ladies quarters." He turned abruptly.

"Kal. She can sleep in your cabin. As you discovered her it is your responsibility to keep her safe from these..." he swept his arm and his gaze over the crew, "lonely seamen."

With that, the Captain strode off. Lois turned to stare wide-eyed at Kal. He was not looking back at her but she could see the tension in his shoulders.

"Oh!" came a shout from across the deck. "Find her some suitable clothes from the booty in the hold. And bring her for supper at my table after sundown."

Lois stood in a small cabin, shock finally catching up to her. She blinked and looked around. This was Kal's cabin.

Kal.

He'd turned away from her after the Captain give his orders and stalked off, almost as if he wished to wash his hands of her. But that was not possible, the Captain had ordered him to protect her. And so she found herself in his cabin.

It was plain and simple. A canvas bag leant against a small wooden table. A half melted candle sat inside a lantern on the table. Turning slightly she saw his bed; a low pallet covered in blankets.

There was a rap at the door and she started a little. "Yes," she called out and the door opened immediately.

"Your bath, miss," spoke the young pirate who entered. Lois stepped further into the cabin to allow him entry.

"Thank you Jimmy." She smiled at him but he turned away. "Jimmy," she reached out. "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I'm still the same person. I'm still your friend." He turned and looked back then nodded at her. He left the room after depositing the tin bath in the centre of the room, giving her a small smile on the

way out.

'Well, maybe that's one friend I still have. Not that I actually made friends with anyone else anyway.'

She sighed and put her fingertips to her temple. Kal had tried to make her acquaintance but she had felt intimidated by him, plus she could finally admit — now that she was a woman again — that she was attracted to him. She'd kept him at a distance to avoid discovery, but that had been futile. He'd realised anyway. Instead, she could have been building up a friendship and trust, so that when she was found out he would have been an ally. Much better to have the First Mate as ally than the lowest cabin boy. Not that she didn't appreciate Jimmy's friendship.

Lois berated herself. She'd signed on to get close to pirates, close enough to find links to the Pirate King, but the only one she'd made friends with was a new deck hand.

She was still determined to find her father, but maybe her strategy had to change. It was time to be herself, to be Lois... to be a woman.

Another rap at the door had her smiling, expecting Jimmy to have returned, but when she opened the door she was greeted by the Deckmaster holding two buckets of water. Her smile dropped and she shuffled backwards, uncomfortable. John Corbin entered and placed down one bucket of water then lifted the other and poured it into the tin bath. It hardly covered the bottom.

Lois shuffled nervously as he bent down for the other one but he paused, half bent. Lois watched as he turned his head a little. She became convinced that he was staring at her legs, even though they were covered by her grimy deck hand clothes. When he straightened and lifted the bucket Lois caught his leering look before he turned away and emptied the other one.

"Thank you. I'm sure that will be enough." She smiled as graciously as possible, hoping he would leave, but instead he turned back to her.

"You know," he drawled and then limped over to her, "I never would have put you on such physical work had I known you had such delicate, beautiful hands."

She stumbled backwards and the back of her foot brushed the bed. Lois saw him begin to raise his hand and she widened her eyes, terrified. A noise disturbed him and he turned away. Lois let out a breath in relief when the door opened again and Jimmy entered. He had returned with two more pails of water.

As the water was poured out Lois managed to calm herself. This was so far removed from her usual life that she'd been caught unawares by Corbin's advance. After taking a deep breath she found her resolve and as the two pirates left she spoke.

"Thank you, sirs. Now if you don't mind," she looked directly at the Deckmaster and spoke rather sternly, "I would appreciate some privacy whilst I bathe."

Kal held the dress in his hands, felt the heavy weight, rubbed his thumbs along the soft brocade. This was the one. The pale cream would match her skin, yet let her dark hair contrast beautifully while falling down her back.

The moment Zor El had ordered someone to fetch suitable clothes for Lois Kal had known that he should be the one, so he had strode off immediately. In the hold he had opened chest after chest of pillaged items until this dress had tumbled out.

A moment of frustration spilled out of him and he crushed the material in his tightened fists. Things were not going as planned, and this was going to complicate things even further. After regaining control he set off to his cabin.

Back on deck he passed John Corbin; a mean look on the man's face. Kal worried every single day about John. His situation was precarious enough without a resentful second mate watching his every move. Lost in his thoughts he exited the deck and climbed to the main cabins. He opened the door to his cabin and strode in without pause.

"My lady," he began respectfully, "I brought you a..." His voice trailed off when he glanced up to see her sat bathing in a tin bath in the centre of his room.

His whole body stopped, engulfed in shock. His eyes swept up and down and he couldn't help but stare. Soft smooth curves, slightly glistening, were hardly covered at all by the lather from the cake of soap in her hands. And he'd been right. Her skin was a lovely pale cream. It brought to mind a sweet, delicious desert he once tasted at...

Blinking out of his reverie he dropped the dress but still unable to look away he spoke.

"My apologies," he stammered and backed away, quickly shutting the door behind him.

Lois put her hands to her stomach and attempted to calm her nerves. The few moments in her bath, before Kal had strode in, had given her chance to arrange her thoughts, design her strategy. And then all thoughts had fled from her at the sight of him.

No, she couldn't deny it. She felt the strong pull of attraction. As he stood there shocked at finding her in a vulnerable state she had been unable to stop her mind from recalling the look of *his* bare chest. Over the two weeks she had spent on board he had removed his shirt while on deck on numerous occasions.

And then he had broken the moment and left.

Now she stood facing the door. Her hair was tumbling down her back, still wet and she worried at the stain it might put on the fancy material of her new dress.

But that was actually the least of her worries. She was about to face the Captain and he was bound to have many questions. Again, though, she felt at peace over that. She knew what her answers would be to the questions he was bound to answer, and she had a strategy to win him over.

It was Kal.

He would be at the Captain's table too. How would she face him knowing he had seen her in the altogether? How could she look him in the eye and speak to him? And how could she share a cabin with him come night time?

'Father. It's all for father,' she reminded herself, and then she knew she could face anything. She would be Lois, wholly and truly.

She stepped forward and opened the cabin door only to be greeted by Jimmy. He turned and looked at her in shock.

"Miss Lois, how did you manage to hide yourself for two weeks?" he said incredulously.

"With great care, Jimmy." She smiled at him. He was obviously seeing her as a woman now. Even back in the cabin before her bath she'd still been in pirate clothes. He knew, technically, that she was a woman, but now... it must have been strange for him, especially at only fifteen years of age. "You can take me to the Captain's cabin now. I'm ready."

Jimmy nodded then turned away. As Lois followed every step felt like a return to her true self. She was ready and able to be Lois again, and with some minor adjustments to what she felt comfortable with she could complete her mission in this manner.

Arriving at the Captain's room Jimmy knocked and opened the door immediately. Lois suddenly knew that she could even face Kal. She could even look him in the eye and wash away the whole debacle as an unfortunate but negligible incident.

Jimmy moved away and she entered.

The Captain rose from his seat to greet her. She smiled at him and gave a deep curtsy. "I hope this meets with your approval, Captain," she said sweetly.

When she rose and looked back at him she saw the shock on his face, even though it was well controlled.

"Well, my lady," he spoke, the rough edges of his voice grating on her a little. "I would say that Kal chose well. Very well indeed." At the slight flicker of his eyes she glanced to the side

and her heart missed a beat when she saw Kal stood there. He was still, and calm. His expression was unreadable.

'Kal chose this dress personally!' she thought.

"So, Lois," the Captain continued. He held out an arm and indicated a seat at the table. As she turned he continued. "Is there a family name with that beautiful Christian name?"

"No, uh!" she coughed. "Just Lois."

"But everyone has a family name. The house of El is a great and proud family. Tell me of yours."

"Just Lois, please. Anyway, it seems to work well enough for Kal." She smiled up at the Captain as he held the chair for her and as she lowered herself to the seat it seemed that a frosty chill fell over the room.

"Oh, Kal most definitely has a family name, everyone does." Lois watched as he looked up and across at Kal. "He just claims not to know it." Lois frowned at the sudden tension in his voice.

"Sir, you should not tease our guest so," Kal spoke. As he seated himself directly opposite Lois she saw the returning tension in his face. Kal turned his gaze slightly to be looking directly in her eyes. "The Captain knows quite well my history. I am only Kal. There is no other name that I am aware of."

Captain Zor El moved from behind her chair and then seated himself at her left hand side, on the third edge of the rectangular wooden table. "Food!" he shouted out and a hidden door opened immediately. As food was brought in and served the elder pirate shifted mood again. "Kal here was found as a baby, only a medallion around his neck to tell anyone of his name. Show her the medallion Kal," he indicated.

Lois turned and looked questioningly at him and so she saw the tightening of his eyes at his Captain's words. Without speaking he lifted a hand to his collar and slowly lifted out a chain. At the bottom of the chain dangled a metal medallion. Before she could see any more he slid it back out of sight.

"So you see, Lois, our Kal is one of a kind. No family name." The Captain looked back to her. "Although, I see that is no longer the case as you refuse to acknowledge one also."

"Sire, I do not wish to trifle over this." She smiled at him again. "May we not eat? It looks lovely. And I have had naught but travel rations since we set sail." Lois groaned inwardly at her vocabulary but she hoped that it was creating the right atmosphere.

"Indeed," he replied. His returning smile was confusing. Lois couldn't tell if he was mocking her or returning her flirtation.

As the meal progressed Lois continued to smile and banter with the Captain. Kal spoke rarely but she could feel his gaze on her. Was he disapproving of her, or was he remembering finding her naked in his cabin earlier? *'Anyway,'* Lois decided, *'neither of those possibilities bothers me.'*

Kal watched her playing up to the Captain so overtly. *'What is she up to? Firstly she wishes to be un-noticed hiding as a boy, and now she parades herself in front of the Captain like a... a...'* but he couldn't bring himself to think it. She looked nothing like a whore. Her skin was too smooth, her hair shiny and sleek, and she was graceful. Even her flirtation was actually ladylike and almost regal.

As she laughed delightedly at something that the Captain said, Kal felt the sudden stab of jealousy. The only thought that calmed him, though, was the realisation that it would all be in vain. Zor El might be engaged in the conversation but Kal knew his moods and his desires and his psychoses.

"So, I can wait no longer, Lois. You must tell me the true reason that you are on my ship."

Kal turned and watched as she paused momentarily before continuing to lay down her fork.

"I want to be a pirate." Kal didn't believe her. Something about the tone in her voice. It was so different from all the

flirtation.

"A pirate? Why would you wish that? A fine woman such as you should be landing a rich husband."

Lois turned and blinked at the Captain. "Maybe I want the richest husband of all, Zor El." She had taken to calling him that part way through the meal. "I want to capture the Pirate King." The inflection she put on the word *capture* made it clear her intentions. But again, he didn't believe her.

Kal looked across at his Captain at the mention of the Pirate King and he saw the affable man change in an instant. Lois did not see the change though, but she wouldn't... she didn't know.

"You wouldn't happen to know where I can find him would you?" she simpered. "Perhaps even, you," she pointed at him, "are the pirate king. After all, you do Captain the most feared pirate ship."

Kal saw Lois start in shock when the Captain jumped to his feet. The scowl on his face was menacing. "You do not know what you are asking. You cannot possibly. The pirate king..." he paused and glanced back down to the table. "I think, perhaps, that the meal is over. Return to your cabin. Rather, return to Kal's cabin. I wish you a pleasant sleep, Lois."

She stood slowly. There was a mixture of shock, disappointment, and more... evident on her face. She stepped away from the table and gave a deep curtsy to him and the Captain then left.

Kal turned to Zor El immediately. "Sir, she meant nothing by it," he defended.

"Of course not, Kal. But she should not..." Kal watched the older man's jaw tighten.

"Perhaps if you told me more. Maybe I could help."

"You know enough, Kal. You know *too* much." He strode off then turned. "I have never told anyone what you have wrested out of me. And you will garner no more information." He paused. "Go. Go back to her. I gave her to you earlier. And from the way she was behaving tonight, she is in need of some loving." Kal widened his eyes in shock. "But I am not the man for her. I saw the way you looked at her while we dined. Go. She is yours."

"But... the Pirate Code. Captain. It is forbidden to force yourself on a woman. We cannot break the Pirate Code."

"The Pirate Code means nothing, Kal. Not since Zod. Not since he..." The Captain's jaw clenched again. "The Pirate King has made the code null and void. Pirate Captains do as they please." He laughed, a little manically. "When was the last time there was a free election on board. I am no longer Captain by the *crew's* choice, although hopefully they would still choose me if we were to hold true. It is fear, and the Pirate King's word that keeps me in control of this ship. This. Damned. Ship."

Kal watched as the man he had grown to admire... a little, and care for... in a confusing way, left the room without further word. He hung his head and then left himself.

Back at the door to his cabin he paused momentarily. The memory of her body came unbidden to his mind and he quelled an unfamiliar feeling as quickly as possible. He opened the door and then stood in shock again. He'd done it... again.

At least this time she was not naked. But the nightgown that someone must have found for her was only halfway over her body. Her arms were in the air and she was wriggling her hips to make the material slide down.

She glanced up and her mouth dropped open when she noticed him. A single blink and then her whole demeanour changed. "Kal, you really must learn to knock before you enter."

Recognising her tone as the flirtatious one she'd been using all evening on the Captain he felt angry that she would now turn her attentions to him after being rejected by Zor El. "Knock?" he growled back. "This is my cabin. You would do well to remember that."

He shut the door behind him and then unrolled the item in his

hands. As he reached up to the boards above his head and began fixing a hammock he watched Lois continue to prepare herself for sleep. When she began to brush her hair he stilled, unable to continue. All he could do was watch the movement of her hand over her hair and down her back. Long, gentle strokes.

When she stopped he was still transfixed and she turned around to discover him staring. He saw a knowing smile cross her face and then she spoke just two words.

“Goodnight, Kal.” Kneeling on the floor she drew back the blankets on his pallet and slid in.

Kal continued to hang his hammock and once it settled in place he removed his boots and jacket. Striding over to his small desk he bent down and blew out the candle in the lamp. Two strides and he was back at the hammock.

He climbed in at the same time as sliding his pistol out of his waistband. Holding it in his hand as he shuffled into place he slid onto his side, facing the door.

Out there were dangers. He had to be alert and aware at all times. He was in such a delicate position and he couldn't risk anything tipping the balance here.

But then he thought about the lady resting behind him; hopefully asleep. She was definitely tipping the balance, but in what direction. And it was possible that she was a greater danger than the rest of the crew outside the door.

Chapter 5: Beginnings

Lois woke the following morning with a start. She bolted upright in shock when she remembered where she was. It had been the best sleep she'd had since this whole affair had started: since the kidnapping of her father.

'Just the comfy bed,' she told herself, 'and the lack of snoring pirates surrounding me. Nothing to do with the other occupant of the cabin.'

Kal didn't snore, or she'd been too asleep to notice.

Her pounding heart subsided when she realised that she was alone. The hammock, which he had hung last night, was now folded up on the small table. She wondered how long he'd been gone.

She dressed herself in the only clothes she could find in the cabin, the cream dress, and then went out on deck. It was obviously still early morning. There was always a subdued air about the crew at first light. Lois suspected that was the fault of the rum that had been imbibed the night before.

As she wandered the deck, heart in her throat but acting confident, she received a few nods from the crew. Some of them tipped their head, others acknowledged her 'ma-am'. One leered greedily and she turned away the moment she noticed.

That just happened to bring into view, standing at the wheel, the very person she'd been looking for, but trying to put off finding. Kal. A smile came to her lips and she stood still and just watched him from afar for a minute.

She was broken out of her dream state when he moved away and another pirate replaced him at the wheel. Kal walked away and rested against a wooden banister. A quick movement of his arms and he had removed his shirt. She watched as he closed his eyes, facing himself to the sun. As he basked in its warmth Lois gazed at his now bare chest.

This would be the third... no fourth, time that she'd been privy to the sight of the Quartermaster's glistening, bronzed chest. A flutter began deep in her abdomen. Lois took a deep breath and placed her hands on her stomach to control the nerves.

'Well, to battle. The Captain is not going to fall for my charms... thankfully. He is old enough to be my father, though he is handsome... in an old, rugged way. But, he's too unpredictable. And his reaction when I mentioned the Pirate King. I now doubt that he is the Pirate King, but judging by the effect the name caused, I also doubt that he would be forthcoming with any

information.'

'Kal, on the other hand.'

He opened his eyes and turned, his eyes locking with hers, as if he'd know she was staring.

As she strode the length of the deck and ascended the steps to where he stood on the bridge she kept her eyes trained on his. He watched her the whole way. She kept her gaze steady and attempted a gentle smile.

Kal was by no means old enough to be her father. And she was already drawn to his good looks. She also suspected that she'd seen a flare of desire in his eyes when he'd discovered her in the bath. Kal would be easy to seduce. She'd get him to trust her then ask him to take her to the Pirate King. Surely he would be in the know as the First Mate on the *Kandor*.

“You were gone when I awoke,” she spoke as she reached the bridge.

“That was my intention,” came his reply.

Lois couldn't interpret the tone of his voice and he was now longer looking directly at her, but out to sea. She rested her elbows on the wooden banister as close to him as she dare.

“I wanted to ask you a question.” She turned to look at him and when his head turned towards her she fell into his blue eyes. *'My goodness, they are the very colour of the sea.'* Lois found that her breath was struggling to release from her lungs. Never had she been so enraptured by a pair of eyes before. He raised his eyebrow mockingly. Lois' stomach clenched and the spell of his eyes was broken when she realised that he was probably making presumptions about her intentions towards him based on her behaviour at supper the night before.

“Do tell,” he spoke patronisingly.

“The return of my clothes,” she paused to take in the look of confusion on his face. “To get back to work.” The confusion turned to shock and Lois felt a flash of triumph in her chest. If Kal was under the impression that she was out to seduce him, after her disastrous attempt with the Captain, then he was absolutely correct. But Lois was not about to make it that obvious. She knew many ways to kindle the spark of interest in a man. And one of the most difficult techniques was the one she realised would have to be employed in this instance.

Honesty. Hard work. Friendship.

With maybe just a touch of *'accidental'* flirtation.

“And why would you wish to work, Miss Lois?” He tilted his head and before she had a chance to explain he turned and walked away. He swung out his arm to indicate at the whole ship. “You now have free passage until we return to port. All the men here are paid to work.” He looked back at her, steel in his gaze. “And you made your intentions clear last night. A rich husband. Why would a lady such as you be eager to work?”

Lois felt the need to defend herself against Kal's arrogant opinion of her. He'd judged her immediately without any basis in fact. “I am not averse to hard work, I would have you know, Kal. I am quite willing to pull my weight and contribute.” She held her head high and stepped forwards until she stood chest to chest with him, although her chest was considerably lower, and his was still bare. “I know you watched me, Kal. I know you saw what I could do. I am a good sailor. Put me back to work.” She gentled her tone. “Please!”

Moments passed as they stared at each other. The moments stretched into eternity and Lois felt like she was falling into his soul. The blue of his eyes rippled like the waves and she drifted on those waves out of control. She felt her body swaying a little and, for a moment, was convinced that she'd seen Kal's head dip.

“You are right. Lois, you are a great sailor.” He blinked and stepped back freeing her from his power just as her heart soared in joy at his compliment. “We are fortunate to have someone with your skill on board, especially in combination with your young and acrobatic body. I will speak to Corbin about placing you

somewhere.”

“No!” her heart jumped. “No, please don’t send me to Corbin. I’m sure you can assign me something yourself.” She pleaded with him.

Kal frowned and narrowed his eyes. “Has Corbin done something?” he asked, almost stating it as fact rather than raising the question.

“He... he...” she faltered.

Kal grabbed her by the shoulders and stepped up to her again. “If he has touched you, or threatened you I will see to it that he limps with *both* legs.”

Lois dropped her mouth open in shock at the fire and anger in Kal’s voice.

“No, Kal, no. He hasn’t, please just...” she found herself dithering over her words and as the passion grew in his eyes she knew she needed to find her own calm. “Kal!” she spoke clearly, to herself as much as to him. “I am just a little wary of him... now that my, um, feminine charms have been revealed.”

“I see.” Lois watched as he found control and then backed off. “I will find you some responsibility, Lois. Be assured, if you wish to be useful then you shall be.”

Tess slowly ascended the stone steps leading to the Commodore’s manor house. She arrived at the top and paused, then brushed down on her coat and dress. It still felt unusual to wear brightly coloured clothing but she’d slowly begun to realise that her father would rather that she honoured his memory than grieved over it. The best way she could think of to honour him was to become the lady that he had wanted her to be. That meant fulfilling her role as Governor. In the current situation, that had to be done in secret, though, and currently it was the world’s best kept secret as no-one but herself was privy to it.

Tess lifted her hand to grab the door chain. One swift pull set the bell ringing. She waited patiently for a minute or two before repeating the action. A distant voice came to her, only just piercing the thick wooden door.

“Alright, alright. Hold on to ya britches.” Tess smirked at the broad English accent and obscure phrase. When the door opened she was greeted by an elderly woman dressed in simple brown woollens and clutching a dirty rag. “What is it? There’s no-one ‘ere.”

“I am Miss Luthor. I’ve come to investigate the disappearance of Commodore Lane.”

“Oh!” Old, but bright eyes, widened slightly. “Oh! Miss Luthor. I do beg your pardon. Please come in. Please.” She shuffled backwards and dropped into a small curtsy before opening the door as wide as it was able.

“Thank you,” she smiled at the servant. “And you are?” she asked with an openly friendly face.

“Mary, miss. I’m the housekeeper for the Commodore. At least, when he’s here, that is. There’s usually more of us, but Rosie left when the Master was taken and Josiah and Jeremy were sent home the day Miss Lane went missing. There’s no-one ‘ere to tend to so I’m just lookin’ after. You know, cleanin’ and carin’ for.”

Tess strode into the house and began to look around the hallway, familiarising herself with the new layout. She had visited long ago, and well before the new Commodore’s appointment by the King seven months past.

“Oh, look at me rattling on. I do beg your pardon miss. I’ll be thinkin’ you want to see his study?”

Tess turned to look at Mary. “Yes, I will. Thank you Mary.”

“This way then.” She held out her arm to indicate the direction then strode ahead at a quick pace.

At the door to the study the elderly servant stopped. “He’s been missin’ for over a month now.” She hung her head, hand placed against the door ready to push it open. “And then for Miss

Lois to run off too. It’s such a shame. I never thought such ill luck would fall on such an honourable family.”

Tess tried to recall her father’s wisdom on dealing with situations of grief but she could not bring them to mind. She felt compassion in her heart, almost the resonating of her own grief and loss, but somehow managed not to get distracted by it.

“I completely agree, Mary. I never met the Commodore, or his daughter, but I have heard such wonderful things. I am most grieved that I did not have their acquaintance and I am most determined to help the Governor in the matter of finding the Commodore.”

Tess felt no guilt over the tiny falsehood which sprung from her lips, but it was necessary at the moment. Her brother was Governor, in her place, but she would uphold the honour of the position as long as she could. Then take it back when the time was right.

Entering the study a shiver travelled up her spine, as if the foul act lingered in the very air.

“I’ll be fine on my own here, Mary. Thank you.”

“Of course, Miss.” She peered past Tess and into the room, tension showing on her face. “Would you care for some tea?” She asked as she straightened up and turned to leave.

“That would be wonderful,” Tess replied.

Finally alone Tess sat herself down in a high backed chair and sighed. *‘Lex is going to send this Port to ruin if I cannot find the Commodore and put an end to his Governorship. I cannot believe he would be so devious.’*

Tess shook her head to bring back her concentration and then she stood and began to wander around the room. The first point of interest was a writing cabinet. She opened the top drawer, flipped out the wooden supports and then pulled down the writing flap. As she searched through the papers she continued to muse over her brother’s actions.

‘I know Lex is not a good Governor, but I cannot understand why he does not wish the Commodore to be found. And to place someone on board HMS Planet to sabotage Captain White’s mission. What is Lex trying to hide?’

As she carefully searched through the papers, only finding blank parchment, she began to worry over the direction of her thoughts. There was only one reason that Lex would interfere in the attempt to find the Commodore.

She closed up the cabinet and moved further round the room. At the large oak desk she slid out the grand chair and slipped onto the plush, red velvet cushion.

‘Lex is somehow involved in the disappearance.’ Tess felt her heart plummet and a cold fear steal into her chest. Lex was not merely incompetent, as she has hoped, but he was purposefully acting in this way.

A clatter at the door made her start in shock and then Mary entered carrying a tray. She placed it on the table and poured out some tea into a delicate cup.

“Mary, has there been anyone else investigating the Commodore’s disappearance?”

Mary stretched out with her arm to hand the cup across. “Governor Luthor sent someone two days after the... incident. He took a little look around.” Tess heard no inflection in the maid’s voice.

“Has he returned at all, or sent word of how his investigation is progressing?”

Mary paused and straightened. “No miss.” Tess now heard the confusion in the old lady’s voice. “Is the investigation not goin’ too well?”

Tess raised the cup to her lips and took a sip of hot tea. “I’m not sure, Mary. I will find out for you.” *‘But I suspect that there is no investigation at all.’*

The servant turned and exited the study leaving her alone again. Tess took another sip and then sighed, putting the cup back

down. She was not paying particular attention and so misjudged making some liquid spill onto the table. She jumped back quickly to avoid the spill reaching her clothes and as she patted at it with a napkin from the tray she began to notice deep scratches in the table.

She frowned and looked closer, drying off the tea as much as she was able. An inspiration hit her and she ran for a piece of paper and some graphite from the writing cabinet.

After carefully rubbing the pattern into the paper she studied it for only a few seconds before leaving swiftly.

Kal stood at the bottom of the steps to the hold just in the shadows. A chill came over his body at the sudden difference in temperature down here, and out of the blazing sun. He reached for his shirt but then remembered that it was still up on deck.

“I need someone to complete an inventory for me. I have a previous one in my cabin to compare your results with when you are done. It will help me to know whether...” Kal paused, not wanting to raise his suspicious to the lady who had deceived him, and everyone on board, once already.

“You suspect someone is pilfering the... um pilfered loot?” she smiled at him mischievously. He frowned. *‘Does she know something? Or is she just very observant, possessing good instincts?’*

He turned and strode to a desk hidden behind the wooden steps and picked up a piece of paper in one hand. Using the other hand to rummage through a box on the floor he found a quill and ink.

“Here are your writing implements, Lois.”

She pursed her lips momentarily and Kal felt desire shoot through his body at the thought that it looked as if she were preparing for a kiss. “How can you be sure I am literate,” she teased.

He stared into her twinkling eyes but felt no humour himself. “I just know,” he breathed out softly.

Suddenly the mirth disappeared and was replaced by something unexpected. Sounds faded away and all he could hear was the pounding of his own heart and the ragged breathing coming from Lois. He noticed that she was staring at his chest. As he breathed in and out it expanded his ribcage and her eyes followed. His nipples hardened with the cold air and charged atmosphere. She gulped and looked back up at him.

An uncontrollable impulse came over him and he felt his mouth descending ever so slowly.

Tess arrived at the Queen Warehouse in under ten minutes. Never had she walked so quickly while trying to seem as not in a rush. She stopped and nodded and smiled to many people on the way and every time the knot in her stomach tightened.

As she strode past the general store, which provided food for the mansion, she resolved to call in after her errand was complete. She quickly glanced around to see if anyone was watching before slipping into an alleyway. At the end of the darkened passage she encountered a wooden door.

She knocked and waited.

Hearing footsteps coming from inside, she let out a sigh of relief. *‘They have returned.’*

The door opened and Tess was greeted by the sight of an old friend. Someone she hadn’t seen in years, since her childhood. “Uncle Robert!” She smiled and then a big grin appeared on his face. He wasn’t truly her Uncle but the phrase came easily to her.

“Tess! Little Tess, is that you?”

“Yes it is.”

“Come in, please.” He smiled and motioned with his hands then allowed her entry inside. “So, what brings you to my humble warehouse?” he asked.

“I, uh, need the services of The Justice.” Tess spoke shakily.

Robert Queen stopped and turned.

“The Justice?” he asked looking completely oblivious.

“I know you are the King’s paid Privateer, Uncle. I need you. Lex is involved in a potentially disastrous scheme.”

“Tess,” he smiled, “you are mistaken. I am no Privateer, just a businessman. I was once on the Port Council when your father was Governor, but I am no longer of such importance.” He turned and continued to walk through the warehouse. Tess followed and kept her silence until they reached a study room.

She seated herself opposite Mr Queen and waited till he seemed comfortable. “I came to find you a fortnight ago but the warehouse was all shut up. You have been away?” she questioned innocently.

“Yes. I took Laura on a trip to investigate new channels of trade.”

“Mmm hmm,” nodded Tess wryly. “Look, Uncle. The Commodore went missing over a month ago. There is much reason to believe it is suspicious. I came to ask for your help at that time but you were away. Now I have more evidence and I desperately need you to put to sea.” She reached into her bag and pulled out the piece of paper with the graphite rubbing on. “This was burned into the desk in the Commodore’s study. Also his daughter has gone missing.”

Robert Queen lent forward with a serious look on his face. He took the paper depicting a square with a lightning slash and two dots outside at opposite corners and then sat back in his seat.

“I also have reason to believe that my brother is involved. I overheard him instructing an officer to sabotage Captain White’s mission to look for the Commodore.”

The older gentleman, who’d been a close friend to her father, studied the paper intently but said nothing.

“Please, Uncle,” she pleaded.

“Tess, you have the wrong idea. I am not the King’s Privateer. But,” he sighed, “I will do my utmost to help you. I do have... contacts.”

“Thank you,” she breathed out in gratefulness. “Now I should leave. I believe it is time to inform my maid of the truth to this whole messy situation. She is entitled to know as it is her Uncle who has gone missing.”

Once Tess left Robert closed the door behind and then turned. Running through the warehouse as fast as he could without disturbing his stock he made it to the door which connected his store to the house. He flung open the door and raced in.

“Ollie!” he called. “Oliver!”

“Yes father,” came a shout from the kitchen.

“Oliver. You must set sail at once.”

“Father?” he frowned.

“The Commodore is missing and this was left at the scene.”

He held up the paper with the stylised — boxed in — ‘Z’ pattern. Oliver’s eyes widened and he turned and ran to the main entrance.

“Is The Justice ready?” he shouted out.

“Always, son.”

“Then I’ll be back in an hour with my crew,” and he left, sprinting through the streets of Port Metropolis on the way to the homes of his fellow shipmates.

Lois felt her heart skip a beat as she noticed Kal’s head lower, his lips descending. All thought of being the one in control of this seduction fled and she fluttered her eyes closed. The boat swayed, hitting a relatively large wave, and something crashed to the floor separating them in an instant.

Her eyes blinked wide as she stared at Kal, nervously. *‘What just happened? Is my plan working already? And why did I lose all concentration?’* Kal’s chest rose and fell with his deep breaths and she purposefully tore her gaze away from the bare, goose pimpled flesh and into his eyes. That was of no help to her

disposition, to see the passion staring back at her.

Kal slowly turned his head to search for the source of the interruption and Lois followed. He strode past her and then crouched down when he found a small wooden crate on the floor.

"I'd wager that this was stacked up here," he explained and stood up to full height indicating the top of a stack of boxes. "And the swaying of the ship toppled it off." He turned round to look at her. "And non to soon," he whispered.

He brushed past her and headed for the steps back out to the deck.

"Kal!" she called. "My clothes. It would be much easier for me in my clothes."

"I'm afraid, Miss Lois, that they have been taken to be washed and cleaned. They will be returned to you after the mid-day meal I would expect."

With that he turned and left and Lois set about cataloguing the items in the hold... still dressed in the aristocratic dress from the previous evening.

Chapter 6: Shift

Lois wiped her forehead with the back of her wrist. The hold started cold but heated up throughout the day. Lois longed for her pirate clothes. The thick, cream, brocade material weighed heavy on her chest.

Returning to the table she marked off another box full of rum with a tick and then sighed. It wasn't all rum, but a large proportion represented booty of the liquid type.

"Miss Lois," a tentative voice called down the steps. "Are you here? Miss Lois?"

"I'm here," she replied and stepped out into the light coming through the opening.

"I have your clothes. I'm told you wanted them?" Lois heard the confusion in the young pirate's voice. He was not as young as Jimmy but still quite fresh to the lifestyle. He obviously could not understand Lois' desire to work, or to be in her deck clothes.

"Thank you," she smiled. The pirate stepped down, folded clothes in his arms. "José is it?" she asked.

"Yes Miss." He nodded and smiled shyly. When he handed over her clothes he turned and scrambled back up the steps only to stop and turn at the top then give her a blistering look.

'Hmmm, maybe he's not that young.' she thought, wryly. She returned to the desk and put down the quill then headed for the crew quarters.

"I presume this is the best opportunity I will get to collect my bag with the least male presence there."

Once her canvas bag had been appropriated she headed for her cabin... *'Kal's cabin'*, she corrected. She struggled with her bag and clothes a little while trying to open the door and ended up tumbling over the threshold suddenly when it freed.

As she stood up straight and raised her head she encountered the muzzle of a pistol pointed directly at her. She dropped her clothes in shock and stumbled backwards, fearful for her life, but as she gathered her wits she realised that the pistol was held by Kal.

He blinked and sighed and lowered his arm. After a moment he lay back down on his pallet and that was when Lois noticed that he was in bed. She frowned and stepped forward allowing the door to finally close behind her.

"Kal?" she queried.

He grabbed his thin sheet and pulled it up and over his shoulders covering his bare chest. "You no longer need worry Miss Lois. When evening comes you will have this cabin to yourself." He closed his eyes. "I will be on night watch until we next dock allowing us to share the cabin without disturbing each other."

"But I need to change into my clothes," she blurted out in shock.

He opened his eyes and levered himself up onto one elbow; his chest bared once more. "I will turn away. You have no reason to worry." He turned over and pulled up the sheet once again.

Lois stood in the centre of the cabin quietly shaking in terror. She'd just had a pistol pointed at her, and now she needed to undress in Kal's presence. Under other circumstances she would consider this the perfect opportunity for seduction.

'Other circumstances?' she questioned herself. *'If that's true, then why not this circumstance?'* She nibbled her lower lip while she pondered the idea and then smiled. Not that Kal would witness the smile as he currently faced the cabin wall... and most probably had his eyes closed.

Lois slowly began to unlace the dress and made sure to make Kal aware. She let her breath sound deep and heavy, as if she were completing difficult work. And when the dress was ready to step out of she, instead, let it fall to the floor in a heap making an obvious rustling sound. Out of the corner of her eyes she saw some movement from the bed.

When she dressed herself once more for pirate work she again made sure to give Kal enough hints as to what she was engaged in.

Once finished she licked her lips and smiled. She faced the pallet directly and freely allowed herself to gaze at the sight. Covered only by a light sheet which fell in parallel with his body Lois was given a good impression of Kal's body shape and muscles. When there was a slight shift in movement she jumped in shock, suddenly beset by the terror of a few minutes ago. Thankfully he did not turn over to face her, or discover her voyeurism.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath of relief and then tidied her clothes away in a corner.

"I will be sleeping for a few hours this afternoon to prepare myself for the night watch Miss Lois. After that we will be on opposite shifts and you will have the cabin to yourself each night." His voice was a little mumbled, coming from beneath the sheet and facing the wrong direction.

Lois felt a sharp pain in her chest at his words. He had put himself on the opposite shift to her. He had removed himself from her path. He was avoiding her at all opportunities. She felt a sob almost escape her lips but instead she pulled herself up straight and tall.

"That seems very sensible, Kal." She paused and then headed for the cabin door. Just as she opened it and stepped out she couldn't resist leaving without a final word of flirtation. "But I'm not sure how safe I will be without a strong, handsome pirate to protect the door while I sleep." Without waiting for any reaction she latched the door shut and set off back to the hold to complete her inventory.

Kal squeezed his eyes shut. When the cabin door finally clicked shut he allowed his body to relax. The tension coursing through his body while Lois had been undressing had been almost unbearable. The dress had rustled to the floor and he'd shifted uncomfortably. The image of her naked body had come to mind so easily. When she'd made natural groaning and sighing noises while dressing he'd found his distress growing... along with something else.

Although the general tension had left his body along with her leaving the room there was one part of his body which still couldn't relax. He groaned in pure annoyance and turned himself over. It would be impossible to catch a few hours sleep now. But he was determined to swap to the night watch even so.

As the minutes ticked away Kal's mind flitted around deck. He spent many moments thinking about what Lois could be doing, then many more reminiscing over last night's meal. Time spent imagining her talking to other crew members set him off gritting his teeth together and clenching his jaw. When it began to

ache he realised his reaction and forcibly relaxed himself once more.

Sleep finally came only for him to be plagued further by his dreams.

Lois was stood in the centre of his cabin, facing away. Her hair was piled on top of her head and tumbling down in luscious curls just as far as her bare, creamy, smooth neck. Kal took a step forward and lifted a hand to her neck, carefully picking up one curl and moving it to the side. He bent his head placing his lips to her flesh and then began to drag the strap of her nightgown over the smooth curve of her shoulder. Moving his lips to follow he placed sweet kisses in a trail down her arm. She turned her face to look over her shoulder at him. Their eyes locked and she smiled. "Clark."

He jerked awake immediately.
'Why? Why that name?'

He thrust the thin cover back and sat himself up. He groaned at the obvious proof of his unfulfilled emotional state. He gauged the time he had been asleep and decided to dress.

Kal stood and strode over to the small table in the corner of his cabin. As he pulled his shirt over his head he stared down at the three sealed letters on the desk. "Maybe these are why she called me *that* name in my dreams?" he spoke out loud. Reaching to lift up one folded parchment there were three initials scrawled on the front.

M J K

"A name I cannot afford to be referred to by."

Putting it back down he quickly put on the rest of his clothes and then strode back to his bed carrying his boots in one hand and the three letters in the other. He sat down and pulled on his boots then pondered over the letters in his hand. '*When Lois walked in I was sure it was another pirate. My immediate reaction was to pull out my pistol. Thankfully it wasn't. But even so, if Lois, if anyone, had seen these...*'

One by one he looked at the initials on each letter.

M J K

He'd written this last of the three, just before attempting his sleep, and was the most likely explanation for the incorrect name used in his dream.

C S

This one had been the first letter he'd written. A little fear and worry pricked at his heart but he pushed it away.

C S L

His eyes narrowed slightly and his jaw clenched. '*Duty must be done.*'

He slid all three letters into his boot, stood and then strode out onto deck.

Tess left the Queen Warehouse knowing her Uncle would help. She knew he was Captain Arrow. Her father had all but told her during her studies. Reaching the end of the alleyway she emerged into the light and turned. Almost immediately she passed the door to the General Store. She stopped and looked up at the sign.

**Smallville Trading Co. General Store
Proprietors J&M Kent**

'*I promised myself that I would visit and speak with them. Well, now is the time.*' She pushed open the door and entered.

A gentleman turned from his position behind the counter and gave her a welcoming smile. Tess was about to step up to him when she heard a familiar voice from the other end of the store.

"Have you heard anything from him?"

"No, sweetie, but I wouldn't expect to."

"Martha, he promised."

Tess strode down past a stack of blankets and called out. "Chloe? Chloe is that you?" She made it to the darker end of the store in time to see her young maid turn away from talking to an

older lady and look at her slightly shocked.

"Miss Luthor! What are you doing here?" She dropped a small curtsey.

Tess smiled. "I thought I would visit the store and make acquaintance with the proprietors. They have supplied the mansion's kitchens for many years now."

"Oh, then you must speak to Martha here." Chloe turned a smile at the lady. "Sorry," she turned back and the smile dropped to be replaced by a professional calm, "Mrs Kent, that is."

"No, Martha is fine," came the deep, comforting voice from the other lady. "Miss Luthor, I am very pleased to make your acquaintance. Chloe speaks of you often. I am sorry for your recent loss."

"Thank you Mrs Kent," she did not feel it appropriate to call her Martha, "but I suppose it was not so recent, and I have come to terms with it." Tess realised that she spoke the truth. Looking into the eyes of the greying woman she saw sympathy shining out. She watched as those eyes flicked between her and Chloe, eventually settling on the plainly dressed maid.

"Any word on your Uncle, Chloe?" Martha Kent's voice was soothing. She reached out a hand and placed it on Chloe's shoulder.

"I..." she glanced to Tess, "I don't know."

Tess wrinkled her brow. It was time to confide in Chloe a little, but not here. She deserved to know.

"Mrs Kent," Tess stood up tall, "I am personally involved in the investigation." She saw Chloe's eyes widen at her statement. "I can assure you that I am most grievously distressed at this whole situation and am determined to see the Commodore home safely." She smiled as genuinely as she could.

Chloe breathed deeply in relief and returned the smile. "Chloe, would you accompany me back home?" she asked and tipped her head. Chloe nodded and her short, blonde curls bounced.

Tess and Chloe made their goodbyes and, as they sauntered back through the bustling Port, Tess revealed to Chloe that she had visited the Commodore's home and taken a personal look around. As they finally approached her home she glanced around to discern their level of solitude. It was clear that they were in a deserted part of the mansion's gardens on the way to the kitchen entrance.

"Chloe," she suddenly spoke quietly, turning and grabbing her arm. "I think you deserve to know that something underhanded is going on here. Lex is not running any investigation. In fact I overheard him ordering someone to *interfere* in the official search. I fear that he is not to be trusted and I worry for the state of this Port if he continues as Governor."

"Miss Luthor," Chloe whispered shocked. "What... what do you mean to do?" she pleaded.

"I spoke the truth to Mrs Kent. I am conducting my own investigation." She paused.

"And what about Lex?" Chloe asked, a dark tone evident.

"I mean to expose him when I have the advantage." Tess looked at Chloe calculating her business value to the case. "I feel you may be able to help me, Chloe. You're relationship with your father is... good?"

"Yes miss."

"I have been remiss in getting to know him and I feel terrible that he was reduced to the position of butler once my brother took over. I think it would be prudent of us to speak with him. The knowledge and experience he gained as my father's secretary could be invaluable."

Kal stood on the bridge as the sun set over the horizon. The stunning reds, pinks, orange and golds shot across the sky and reflected in the ocean. As the deck gradually became quieter

throughout the evening Kal found his thoughts becoming gradually darker. The solitude which stalked him every day felt more tangible. The mystery of his background had always set him apart. He felt the metal of his medallion heavy against his chest, hiding behind his shirt. He didn't need to look at it to know the symbol engraved on one side and the name etched on the other.

Kal.

It was the only truth he knew. His name was Kal. Apart from that, his true origins were a mystery.

And that was one of the reasons he always felt alone.

Possibly it was also a factor in his personality which had led to the 'Man of Steel' name. He felt no malice at the moniker. In fact he often used it to his advantage. It helped to keep him in his current position, and still working towards his ultimate goal.

The quiet evening intensified his feelings of solitude. He stood at the wheel, surveying the whole deck and, even though he saw other deck hands at their work, or on the way to 'the pit', he felt no inclination to talk with them. He actively countered that inclination on many occasions. The relationships he forged and the trust he built would make all the difference in the days ahead, but it was never easy to act against his instincts of 'self-preservation by isolation'.

But tonight was too peaceful. Kal enjoyed the calm and there was no need for conversation.

A movement in his peripheral vision had him glancing down to the deck casually. Many movements had caught his eye as the sun was setting, increasing the shadows, but this one was different. This movement was subtle and graceful.

Lois strode slowly across the deck. Resting on the barrier at the Port side she gazed out into the ocean. Kal watched her. She was wearing the cream brocade dress again. He supposed that she had changed once she'd completed the inventory.

Until she had entered his life the story of his birth had been the biggest mystery in his life. Now, it seemed that she was. He could not interpret her actions, or resolve her words with her conduct. Her claim to be in search of a rich husband did not ring true when he observed how much heart and spirit she put into her work. And the fact that she requested, nay, almost insisted, on working, confused him. So why did she return to the indulgent gown once her work was finished?

She turned and faced the opposite direction. Kal was struck by the full extent of her beauty for the first time when the rays of the sunset hit her face. She was unaware of his gaze and he watched as a look of awe and contentment spread across her face at the radiant sight on the horizon. Kal shifted uncomfortably against the wheel when she glided across the deck in the direction of the sunset. When she reached the Starboard side and rested on the side of the ship he groaned audibly. She'd bent over slightly and he could see the shape of her backside in the material.

He once more felt relief at having swapped himself to the night watch. How he would have slept tonight, in the same cabin as her, he had no idea. It had been difficult enough when she *wasn't* there this afternoon. And, it seemed that the reaction his body had to her was becoming permanent.

As he stared at her, his breathing erratic, she slowly turned her head until their eyes locked. She was on the lower deck, he on the bridge and she had to raise her chin.

They stared at each other in silence for a lengthy period. Neither one looked away. Neither one moved an inch or changed facial expression. Kal's heart was in his throat and he began to imagine her speaking to him.

I'll miss you tonight.

I cannot be around you Lois.

But I shall be lonely.

Do not tempt me, my sweet lady.

She stood up straight and turned to face him fully and he was overwhelmed by the desire coursing through his limbs at the sight

of how the tight bodice proudly displayed her chest. He recalled, again, the sight of her naked breasts with soap bubbles trailing down them. He almost thrust himself away from the wheel ready to stride down the steps and take her in his arms but a movement at the other end of the deck suddenly shocked him back to reality.

Lois turned at the sound of another pirate on deck and Kal felt a stab of jealousy when he saw the natural smile come to her mouth. It was identical to the emotion which had plagued him while he tried to fall asleep this afternoon, thinking of her conversing with any other pirate on board. At the realisation of the name he had given this emotion — jealousy — he flung himself away from the wheel and turned away.

He had to fight this; fight the attraction. Avoid her; avoid further chances that his desire would grow.

But he couldn't help himself. He turned back, desperate to know what was happening. He finally allowed himself to recognise the sailor: James Olson, Jimmy. His eyes narrowed in anger.

Lois had become fast friends with Jimmy while she was still in disguise. Had that friendship progressed now?

As Kal watched Jimmy and Lois stepped closer to each other. The sound of their conversation didn't reach his ears but their manner translated easily enough. Jimmy looked unsure, Lois looked confident. She reached out and touched him on the shoulder and he nodded.

Kal gripped tightly onto the wheel. Only one full day had passed since she had been discovered and she had decided to elevate her relationship with the youngest lad on board.

As Lois walked off-deck with Jimmy she felt sea-blue eyes boring into her skull. Her heart was beating wildly, just as it had been since the moment she stepped out on deck ready to continue her seduction. Acting as oblivious as possible had been almost impossible when she was aware of Kal's watchful gaze. When they had locked eyes and spoken wordlessly she'd felt an imperceptible draw towards him. No longer was she acting from a place of reason, but she had turned, then almost began the long walk up to him on the bridge. Only the appearance of Jimmy had halted that.

She was truly pleased to see him, and relieved that he seemed to have discovered how to feel comfortable with the change in Lois. Deciding to put into motion a completely different plan she had developed she had approached Jimmy and within moments they were leaving the deck. Hopefully this friendship would lead to a better life for Jimmy and she was determined to give him the best possible chance to leave the ship safely and with high prospects.

As they left the deck and away from Kal's view Lois sent up a silent prayer that Kal would spend all night thinking of her.

Chapter 7: Attack

It had been more than a month since she came on board; weeks since her exposure. Kal's life had been as unpredictable as the sea since then. Calm one moment, stormy the next. Lois represented all kinds of weather. The bright, blazing sun on a hot, clear day described her beauty; the danger and passion of a hurricane perfectly encompassed her personality. He could no longer recall the number of times they had crossed paths with it ending in harsh words. Either that or breathless glances.

He found his thoughts straying to her constantly. Being on the opposite watch didn't help, or maybe it did. In the dark of the night, while he strolled the deck, he purposefully imagined her undressing and climbing into his bed. His bed... that he had only just climbed out of. He didn't even try to deny it. He enjoyed thinking about her. Thankfully he could indulge in this new past time with no risk now that he worked at night.

The early morning sun was rising and Kal felt the tiredness

creeping up on him, it would be time to sleep soon. The deck was subdued, as always in a morning. Kal watched as men began to emerge into the light and make their way to the mess for breakfast. One pirate, Oswald... the Prankster... always bright and cheery, having fun, began a pirate song. It soon caught on and the sound grew.

*Ships come,
Ships go,
Hey Ho,
Hey Ho.
I'll sing of an island,
That's heavy in blood,
And I'll tell you a tale,
Of a Captain that could.*

Kal thought that *sometimes* it was good to be a pirate. Yes they were criminals. Yes, they pillaged and murdered without prejudice. But there was also camaraderie, friendship, excitement. And some special bonds were created between fellow crewmen. One bond in particular came to mind.

*Ships come,
Ships go,
Hey Ho,
Hey Ho.
We travel the seven,
And visit the few,
And no ship is safe,
From the man and his crew.*

But Kal knew that, on the whole, he hated this life. The benefits did *not* outweigh the evil. But without his current position on board, his current mission, then he would not have met Lois. And that thought cut him to the bone. The thought of not knowing her tore at his stomach and he was filled with a sense of dread.

*Ships come,
Ships go,
Hey Ho,
Hey Ho.
The finest of booty,
Is what we require,
But soft gentle beauty,
Is what we desire.*

Lois came out on deck and the whole world faded in his view except for her. The final refrain faded away as he gazed on her. Beauty personified: Glorious passion.

*Ships come,
Ships go,
Hey Ho,
Hey Ho.*

Taking a deep breath he decided to confront her. Only two steps down to the main deck and a call came from the crow's nest. "Ship Ahoy!"

Kal raised his head to look up at the crow's nest. He then followed the direction of the telescope to see a tiny speck on the horizon. He turned and ran back to the bridge grabbing his own telescope.

When he managed to focus it on the blur at the very edge of his vision it came into view sharply. It was definitely a ship. The flag on the mast was not visible, wind being low. Kal put his telescope down and set off running to the Captain's cabin. Along the way he shouted out.

"All hands on deck. All hands on deck."

Breakfast complete Tess rose from her chair and announced loudly that she was returning to her chambers for the day. "And since my brother has seen fit to take some time away from work and is away for these next two days I think you may all enjoy some time off."

The servants relaxed and smiled as a ripple of approval went through them.

"I would appreciate the cook returning for evening meal each evening though." She laughed genteelly. "Otherwise you may all leave."

The maids curtsied. "Yes miss," they all replied intermingling their voices, then left.

Tess made the pretence of returning to her room. She ambled slowly to make sure to give all the servants time to leave and then took the left turn on the landing rather than the right. At Lex's study door she glanced around and then slid inside.

She was greeted by Chloe and her father, Gabe Sullivan. He'd been her father's personal secretary but Lex had demoted him to butler. Nowhere else to go, and still loyal to the office of Governor in addition to looking after his daughter who was Tess's maid, Gabe had humbled himself and continued in the role regardless of the shame.

"Ready?" she asked and they nodded. "So we all know what we are looking for?" Again they nodded.

"Anything that can prove Lex's plans... why he wants The Planet sabotaged, why he doesn't want the Commodore found." Gabe spoke confidently. It reminded her of what he'd been like only a year ago when he'd been in her father's trust, rather than discarded by her brother.

The three of them worked through every drawer and cupboard methodically, always putting back everything exactly as they found it. Tess became distressed at the papers she was finding. Oh, none of them pointed to her brother's guilt but they definitely pointed to his incompetence. Soaring debt, irresponsible spending... and struggling merchants. She comforted herself with the thought that, if she found the evidence she desired, then she would oust him and rectify all his mistakes herself.

"Miss Luthor," came Gabe's voice from the other side of the room. She turned to see him with one arm half out of sight. He was bending over the bureaux and his arm was reaching behind. A gentle click sound was heard and a secret door popped open just under the writing section of the table.

Tess rushed across and pulled out the drawer. Inside she found only three pieces of paper. She handed them out and they all began to read.

Tess felt a smile appear on her face. '*This is it. I have proof. He's been in communication with someone who has admitted to kidnapping the Commodore.*' She looked up to see similar grins on the faces of her comrades.

"We have him," Chloe said and waved her own piece of paper in the air. What was on it was surely even more evidence.

"Yes we do," stated Tess.

They waited with baited breath. Silence reigned throughout the ship. As the vessel on the horizon sailed closer Kal felt the war inside himself grow. A hatred of what he was about to do burned inside him but, somehow a dispassionate side spoke louder.

'Duty. I must fulfil my mission. No matter the cost.'

The wind started to blow and the flag whipped around the mast. Kal grabbed his telescope and looked out hoping to see the approaching flag wave out. After only a moment the distant flag unfurled in the wind and Kal's heart dropped.

An eye.

'It is The Justice. The King's Privateer. What do I do now? I cannot betray my King. Those people are on the side of right. But I cannot expose myself to the pirates on board. And if I were to order The Kandor to turn and flee I would be suspect.'

As Kal pondered what to do and how to make the best of the situation the decision was taken from him when the man in the crow's nest shouted down.

“It’s The Justice!”

A large cheer went up from the waiting pirates. Not only would they get to raid a ship, something they’d been waiting to do since leaving port, something Kal had skilfully managed to keep from happening, it was their very own arch enemy. The King’s Privateer; paid to hunt them down.

Kal groaned inwardly. There was no way to avoid the attack. This might be the very end of him. He could see no way of this situation bearing fruit for him. In the five months since his appointment as First Mate he had taken part in a total of five raids. Kal had chosen wealthy targets so as to keep the Captain and the pirates happy with such few raids. He had also chosen targets that would allow him to fully participate in the action, without truly betraying his own principles. All five ships had been foreign pirate ships.

He turned away, unable to look at the ever growing ship only to notice Lois in the line of pirates standing on deck. He strode to her quickly.

“Lois. What in God’s name do you think you are doing?” He grabbed her arms and began dragging her off.

“What does it look like?” she replied sharply.

“I cannot have you fighting. A lady does not fight and you are not an official member of the crew.”

“How else am I to prove my loyalty to you, Kal. He else will I gain your trust?”

“You desire my trust so much?” he asked.

“Yes,” she replied plainly.

“Then you will do as I ask and stay in the cabin till this is over.” When she looked about to protest he stopped her. “Either outcome of the fight will then secure you safety. If we are victorious then you have been kept safe and can come back on deck after. If they win...” Kal paused. A ripple of nerves shot through him. *‘Is that what I really desire — that this mission be over and a dangerous pirate ship be removed from the sea?’* “If they win you can claim you were my captive.”

Kal saw Lois’ breath catch at his words. They reached the door to his cabin. “Am I, Kal. Am I your captive?” she spoke breathlessly. They stood in silence. Kal’s heart pounded in his chest. He couldn’t reply as any answer would have been a falsehood in one manner or another.

A distant sound of cannon fire broke him from his thoughts. “Please, Lois. Stay hidden,” he pleaded then turned. He heard the cannon ball hit the water and create a deep splash on the way back to deck. As he arrived he was shocked to see how close The Justice had come. Corbin shouted out some instructions and the deck shuddered slightly; cannons letting loose from below.

As the gap between ships lessened Kal readied himself. He felt the tension rising in his legs, preparing to spring across to the other ship, but as they finally crashed together, side on side, grappling hooks holding them that way, it was sailors from the other ship who leapt first and The Kandor was boarded.

As he fought he saw men falling in his peripheral vision. Were they his or theirs? Not wanting to waste ammunition he had ordered the use of swords rather than pistols before the fight began. He clashed swords with an unusually dressed sailor, red tunic and breeches with yellow ribbons streaming out behind in the wind. The short man was incredibly agile and Kal had to concentrate to keep his ground. Something soared through the air and hit his opponent, distracting him long enough for Kal to knock him out with his elbow. He turned to meet another foe. Their swords clashed and then they both stilled.

“Clark!”

“Ollie!”

Both spoke at once and then Clark caught his wits about him and dragged Ollie behind a large stack of barrels, hiding them both.

“What are you doing here?” Clark asked. The moment he’d

seen Ollie, there was no denying his real name any longer.

“Me. What are you doing here? This is a pirate ship, Clark.”

“I know. I’m First Mate.”

“First Mate! What?”

“I’m on a mission.”

Ollie frowned. “This is your secret commission. The thing your parents refuse to speak to me about.”

Clark nodded. Suddenly he put the pieces together and he gasped. “You’re Captain Arrow.” Ollie kept his face expressionless but his silence was answer enough. “Ollie you have to get your crew away.”

“No. We’re here on the King’s orders, to capture pirates. Plus another related mission.”

“Ollie you are putting me in jeopardy. Please.” He reached inside his boot and pulled out the three letters he kept in there. “Return to Port Metropolis and deliver these. Many lives depend on it. I assure you, though you miss out on *these* pirates you will be helping in a much larger operation.”

Ollie took them and glanced through quickly. “MJK?” Clark smiled and Ollie nodded. “CS?”

“Chloe.” Ollie nodded again.

“CSL?” Ollie’s tone was not at all confident. He had obviously guessed the other two before even asking.

“Commodore Samuel Lane.”

“Clark, I can’t deliver this,” Ollie grimaced.

“What? Why? You don’t need to compromise your identity. Just leave it at the door.”

“No. I can’t. He’s missing.”

“Missing.” Clark’s heart jumped in shock. “How?”

“I’d wager it was a planned kidnapping. A symbol was left burnt into his desk at the scene. I’ve seen it before, always in conjunction with pirate affairs.”

“What was the symbol, Ollie,” Clark asked with an ominous tone.

“A ‘Z’ in a box.”

Clark gritted his teeth. “The Pirate King. Ollie, you must return. Deliver my letters and let me continue my mission. If I am successful it will fulfil both our objectives.”

“How, how can I get my crew to stop fighting? Or you get yours?”

“I cannot stop mine. If I were to convince them they were in trouble and to flee they would then wonder why you didn’t pursue. But... if you get back to your ship and make it list. As if caused by some cannon fire... then I can convince my crew to take a few barrels of booty and leave you all to drift.”

Ollie nodded then peered round the barrels. “We’d better proceed quickly then. All clear.” He motioned with his hand and they both sprang back onto deck silently wishing each other good luck.

The successful raid on The Justice put the pirate crew and the Captain in an exceptionally good mood. Some of the new recruits were a little disappointed to realise that they wouldn’t receive their full cut until the next time they docked. It was a rule put in place to stop gambling from getting out of control on board. Clark wandered the deck as dusk fell. He was unsure whether to feel relieved at the outcome of today, or worried.

He had managed to come out of the situation in the best possible way. He had been personally responsible for no deaths, The Justice had escaped yet he’d still managed to satisfy his pirate crew with a few barrels of brandy and rum, plus a chest of weapons.

He should feel elated. But all he could remember were Ollie’s words that the Commodore had been kidnapped. And it seemed that the Pirate King was responsible. Did this mean his mission was over? Or did it mean that it had become much more urgent. He could not decide.

He forced his mind away and his thoughts automatically drifted to Lois. He had been about to confront her this morning. It seemed he'd made some kind of decision regarding her. The thought that he might never have met her if he was not on this mission had distressed him. But even more so had been the thought, as The Justice drew closer and closer, that she might not live through the day.

'Maybe I should finally acknowledge my feelings for her. Maybe I should attempt to reconcile us together, rather than continue the fighting. God knows I hope I can get her to leave with me when it is time to go.'

Lois looked up from the desk when the cabin door opened. She knew it would be Kal; Jimmy would have knocked. But, even knowing that it was him, her heart still leapt in shock, unprepared for the effect he seemed to have on her. It fluttered in her chest whenever he looked at her intently. It skipped a beat if they happened to brush by each other.

Kal stepped in and their eyes locked. They seemed frozen in time until he moved and stepped past her fully into the cabin. "I am off to the Pit. I shall return later Lois. I have not slept at all due to the attack this morning and my timing is off for watch tonight. In fact..." he paused. "I feel it is time for me to return to the day watch."

Lois' heart leapt. "I will sleep in the hammock," he stated without emotion and her heart skipped about wildly. It had been two weeks since they had last shared the cabin overnight... for one night only.

"Well, try not to wake me then. You're sure to be extremely late if you are going gambling," she retorted quite scathingly to cover her unreasonable hope.

"I'm sure you will be well into your beauty sleep, my lady," he replied and she heard a touch of sarcasm.

She turned away and began arranging the blank parchment papers on the desk. "Yes. It's very important to me... to get my beauty sleep." She interjected a haughty and prideful tone and she somehow felt Kal's anger and condescension rise behind her.

"Then I would hate to be the one to interfere with your beauty," he growled. Lois tried to focus on the parchment but tears stung her eyes. His comment was so close to the truth.

Interfere with... her beauty... her body.

In the intervening weeks since her discovery; having to spend this time with him, the irresistible pull she felt towards him had grown. Her plans to get him to trust her, maybe even bed her, in the hopes he'd then confide in her about the whereabouts of the Pirate King, had never come to fruition. Sometimes she thought they were working, when he stared at her and growled his words deeply. Other times she was sure that he was unaffected. He seemed able to ignore obvious openings for seduction and he had chosen to distance himself from her in many situations.

Lois heard him looking through a bag and then the cabin door opened. She turned in shock, her mouth open and eyes wide. She felt one of the tears which had been pricking at her eyes escape and slide down her cheek. *'He's leaving already. One minute, that's all he stayed.'* She didn't want him to go. *'Stay,'* she pleaded silently. *'Stay and we'll talk, we'll bond, become friends.'*

He turned at the door and looked back to her. Did he see the emotion so plain on her face? Did he see the single track of her tear?

"Goodnight my lady," he whispered.

"Goodnight," she gulped but he'd already latched the door shut. Lois was still sat staring at the door a few minutes later when there was a knock at the door. She stood and opened it without checking who it was. Foolish, but thankfully it was her expected visitor: Jimmy.

"Come in Jimmy," she smiled. He warily glanced around the

cabin and then entered. They'd been doing this for weeks now, but Jimmy still seemed nervous. Lois led him to the seat and tried to reassure him.

"Kal has gone to the Pit. He won't disturb us. Now, let's get started."

Chapter 8: Surrender

Clark entered the Pit and stood at the door. He looked around at the store room off the end of the hold and quickly noticed which pirates were present. It was no surprise to see the usual men.

Gambling for money was supposed to be forbidden by the Pirate Code. The disagreements and scuffles that could ensue after a challenge of cheating, or just the basic greed of men who wanted to win it all could seriously limit the crew capacity on board a pirate ship. The type of men already inclined to be a pirate, coupled with the natural greed that accompanied a gambling spirit would inevitably lead to loss of life. Until Zod had declared himself Pirate King, Zor-El had assured Clark that the Pirate Code had been followed to the letter. Over the years it had gradually been unravelled.

Clark limited the gambling by only passing out the crew shares of a raid once a tour was complete. The monetary capacity of each pirate on board was actually very little, so no real competition or greed entered the situation.

As he stood in the doorway and let the sounds wash over him he realised that he hadn't been to the Pit since putting himself on night watch: it wasn't possible. That had been a mistake. Clark made a point of being the final calming influence during the gambling session and his presence had obviously been missed. The laughter was louder, more raucous than usual, the rum was being tossed around so much that the floor was sticky: and, worst of all, it looked like Corbin had set himself up as the pack leader.

Visiting the Pit tonight had a two-fold motive. He needed to re-establish order, put himself back in charge, but he also needed a way to forget about the lady back in his cabin. Hopefully he'd keep distracted long enough that she would be asleep when he returned. Either that or he was hoping that the rum would give him the courage to speak plainly to her about their... relationship.

There was a sudden roar in laughter at something that Corbin said and Clark swaggered into the room then lowered himself onto a wooden stool. "Kal," a voice spoke up in greeting. Remembering *who* he was supposed to be was more difficult since the conflict this morning: since seeing Oliver. *Clark* had resurfaced. Clark nodded over at the pirate who had greeted him, Jose. He was a good lad, one that Clark felt was more on his side than Corbin's, but he did like to get into a fight and loved to feel part of the gang.

"Haven't seen you for a while," Corbin growled, practically spitting out his annoyance that the First Mate was back.

"Night watch," was Clark's only reply. Someone thrust a mug into his hand and he looked down into the dark liquid which sloshed out and over his hand. He always moderated his own intake, carefully leaving the impression that he was fully partaking, but his mind flashed back to the woman probably laying herself down to sleep on his bed right about now and he lifted the mug to his lips. He swallowed the whole shot in one; burning rum sliding down his throat.

Time seemed to pass slowly. The one and only drink of rum seemed to put him in an attitude of uncaring. What did it matter if there was a beautiful, passionate woman waiting for him? Because she wasn't: waiting for him. As the late evening progressed into night time Clark realised that it would take a lot of work to reign in these gambling sessions again.

"So," John Corbin whined. "Not on the night watch tonight Kal?" he asked.

"No. I'm returning to day duty." Clark tossed down a card

and a couple of pirates hissed. Possibly they knew that their hands had been beaten.

“Do you want to enlighten us as to the reason you put yourself on night duty?” John smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“I felt that Miss Lois would need some privacy at night. And I could use the cabin in the day.” Clark kept his tone as even as possible.

“Privacy!” Corbin, sing-songed mockingly and looked around at the other men. Clark saw him widen his eyes suggestively. “I’m sure a lush lady such as Lois is in need of plenty of privacy.” The men laughed. Clark gritted his teeth.

“It seemed a logical solution, Corbin.” Clark spoke plainly again, looking him straight in the eye. The room went quiet while a few men perused their cards, discarding some.

“And would there be a particular reason that you feel she no longer needs this privacy?” John laughed suggestively.

“There would not. I just require the return to a day shift.” Clark watched Corbin out of the corner of his eye. He saw him take a drink from his tankard then slam it back down, growling at the same time.

“Lord, she can drive a man crazy. That dress is divine.”

While Clark completely agreed he felt an arrow of concern in his belly. “If I ever find the designer of that dress I will personally fall at their feet. And I must say that the neck line would be the *piece de resistance*, allowing that creamy bosom to spill out.” He gesticulated with his hand to emphasise his meaning and grinned around at the gathered men. “You know, I’ll wager that her ‘privacy’ has well been taken advantage of.”

Clark narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean?” A nervous tingling in his stomach was growing.

“Oh, don’t tell me you’ve never visited her during the night. We all know that the Captain gave her to you.”

“I would suggest you cease this line of thought, John,” Clark glared.

“Oooooooo, tugged on a cord, perhaps? Possibly you *want* to invade her privacy, but instead you’ve stood by,” he began to chuckle, “and watched the cabin boy visit her every night.”

‘Cabin boy?’ Clark’s heart lurched. ‘Who’s been visiting her every night? Olsen? Jimmy is much too young for what Corbin is insinuating.’

“If a ripe body like that was waiting back in my cabin there’s no way I’d let a wet behind the ears youngster like Olsen take what was rightfully mine.” Corbin’s boastful attitude roused the pirates even more and they laughed, some of them even patting him on the back. Clark glared at Corbin feeling a fire beginning to consume him. Every muscle in his body twitched with the urge to move.

“You know, when she’s done with Olsen tonight I might just decide to show her what a real man can do.” Rage overtook him and Clark launched up from his stool. He brought back his fist and then let it fly at Corbin, meeting his jaw with a crack. The Deckmaster went skittering backwards off his stool and landed in a heap on the floor. Clark turned and stalked off, finally ready to confront Lois.

Back up on deck the air was cool. The dark, clear sky blinked myriad stars down on him but his anger didn’t cool with the temperature or the calming scene. As he crossed the deck he saw a slight figure at the far end step out of the officer’s passage. Drawing closer it wasn’t difficult to recognise the young, slim shape of Jimmy Olsen. The cabin boy slipped down the side and took the steps to the crew quarters avoiding passing close enough for Clark to challenge him. Instead he increased his stride, desperate to get back to his cabin.

He reached the door and stopped. ‘*It can’t possibly be what Corbin was insinuating.*’ With a large intake of breath he reached for the handle and pushed open the door only to be greeted by a sight which proved that it was *exactly* what Corbin had been

insinuating.

Lois was sliding into her nightgown.

All of Clark’s fears were realised and the anger he’d felt against Corbin spilled out of him.

“Olsen?” he shouted in question. She turned in shock and her gown finished sliding into place. She blinked at him and he saw the sudden terror on her face. “Olsen!” he repeated louder, then strode in and slammed the door behind him. “This is what you’ve been doing every night since I gave you the cabin.” She continued to stare at him, frozen. “How could you. I knew you were just after a man; a marriage that would be of advantageous nature. But... Olsen. He’s a young boy.” He strode up to her and grabbed her shoulders.

“Lois, I thought,” his temper was seeping out of every pore, his blood was boiling. “I thought you were different. All that talk about working on deck, pulling your own weight. But you had me fooled, didn’t you? Have you got him fooled too? What did you tell him? What lies have you fabricated? And what could you possibly be getting out of this?” Clark stopped, out of breath, his chest heaving.

He was staring straight into her eyes so he could tell the moment she regained control. Shocked eyes became cold and calculating. “So, Kal, are you insinuating that I haven’t been spending my nights alone?” Clark wanted to shake some sense into her. “If you are, then I should remind you that what I do with my time is none of your business. And you are the one who chose to leave me alone in here... every night... when you put yourself on night duty.” She turned and attempted to step out of his grasp but he turned her back.

“But it is my business, Lois. This is my cabin and the Captain gave you to me.” His possessive tone was obvious. Her eyes widened. “He made me responsible for you,” Clark quickly explained.

“Well, I free you from that responsibility. I am a grown woman and I can take care of myself, thank you!” she replied sarcastically. Clark’s energy suddenly drained out of him. She wasn’t denying it. The final glimmer of hope in his heart faded away and he let go of her arms. This time she stepped back and fully turned away.

“But, Jimmy?” he pleaded.

“Not... your... business,” she spat back out, still facing away.

Clark took one step and found himself standing right at her shoulder. Something flickered in his peripheral vision and he turned to see papers strewn all over the small table. The lamp in the corner guttered and illuminated the childish writings and Clark’s heart dropped, his world turning upside down in a moment.

“You...” he gulped. “You’re teaching him to read?” He saw her shoulders tense and her head look up and straight ahead. He took hold of her and forcibly turned her around. Looking deep into her eyes he finally saw through to her deepest truth, her soul. “You’re teaching him to write,” he whispered out in awe. He saw the glistening in her eyes betraying the build-up of moisture possibly about to overflow. Something deep inside him welled up and he drew her close then plunged down to take her mouth.

His heightened emotions raged up and down his body and he released her arms then enfolded her completely in his. She sank into him immediately and desire shot through him at her instant surrender. He opened his lips and slanted them across hers, tasting her. He felt her arms come round his back and cling onto him then she opened her lips and the kiss deepened.

Clark moaned into her mouth, “Lois.” She returned with a sigh of her own. He began to nibble and tease at her lips, he slid his hands up her back and trailed them over her shoulders and up into her hair. “Lois,” he whispered again. Something had broken in his heart when he realised that she had been teaching Jimmy to read and write. The undeniable pull between them that he’d

attributed to physical attraction suddenly took on an emotional level. His compassion, almost completely repressed over the last few months, reared up and spilled out. She obviously was a compassionate soul too.

“Kal.” He heard her breathe out as he parted their lips for just a moment. He immediately crashed back down onto her mouth when he realised the unspoken question that she’d added at the end. Her meaning was clear: in the panting of her breath, the tone used in speaking his name, the flush of her chest which he’d noticed in a quick glance. But the largest indication was the way she was pressing her body into his. She could have no misunderstanding over his intentions based on how their hips were pressed tightly together. Clark put one hand down to her waist and the bottom of her spine and gently drew her even closer. Her hips rocked and if there had ever been a slight chance of hiding his arousal it was now gone.

Lois felt like she was floating. Her whole body was humming with pleasure: Kal was kissing her. Her arms reached up his back and pulled him down, deeper into her lips. When he’d surged in and accused her of taking advantage of a young boy she’d been horrified and her state of undress had probably not helped the situation. How was Kal to know that she’d begun undressing the moment Jimmy had left and that she was now remarkably quick at the change, always worried that someone would burst in.

She became embarrassingly aware of her state of undress when Kal’s hand began to slide down her back. Somehow she couldn’t bring herself to do anything about it, though: she just opened her mouth and allowed him to sweep his lips across hers. When his hand reached her lower back he pulled her closer and their hips touched. She instinctively rocked against him and he groaned. A small part of her became aware of something. She’d assumed he was wearing his pistol but his closeness and her flimsy nightgown material made it clear that he desired her. Rather than shocking her into breaking away she felt euphoric and an answering desire pooled in her stomach: ached at her to pull him closer. It seemed he felt the same way as his arms surrounded her and crushed her close.

Clark balled his hands into fists, bunching up the material of Lois’ nightgown. He had to stop his hands from roaming any further, but there was nothing that could draw him away from her lips. The movement of the material skimming at her legs at an unexpected height finally shocked Lois out of the bliss of Kal’s kiss. They parted, bodies still touching, lips only inches apart: Clark’s hands still gripping her nightgown. As they stared into each other’s eyes Clark saw Lois’ complete surrender. Her arms were already at his shoulders. She lifted them and held them straight up. Clark tensed his fingers to hold tight and then swept the nightgown up and over her head, stepping back.

Lois brought her arms back down slowly and dropped them at her side, exposing herself fully. Clark gazed in wonder for a moment then released the nightgown. It dropped at his feet. He stepped over it and took her in his arms again.

She was frantic now. She’d surrendered to him and he’d accepted. She gripped the material of his shirt and pulled at it. It released from his trousers and hung down free. She slipped her hands underneath and she was touching skin: caressing his back with her fingers as he did the same, all the while his lips never leaving hers. The feel of his warm skin was intoxicating, she wanted more so she grabbed his shirt and lifted. It met resistance as his arms were still wrapped around her.

In silence they parted again. Lois blinked up at him and he looked back. She released her hold on his shirt and nibbled her lip as she brought her hands up to his neck. Lois pulled gently on the laced up cord at Clark’s neck. His breath came in shallow pants, his heart pounding just beneath her fingers. He kept his eyes on her face but he longed to take in her whole body: the beautiful alabaster skin she’d freely exposed to him: skin he’d

been touching, feeling with his callused, worn fingers. The cord lacing up the front of his shirt loosened and she reached for the red sash over his shoulder. Sliding it down over his arm, she followed with her gaze and when it dropped to the floor she looked back up into his eyes. She reached for his shirt again but as she was about to lift it his height became apparent. He realised and crossed his arms then drew the shirt up in one swift movement revealing his tanned, muscular chest.

Lois couldn’t help but stare at it. She reached out with a hand and placed it over his heart. He closed his eyes and breathed in deeply. She undoubtedly could feel the erratic rhythm beating beneath her palm. It would betray how much he truly desired her, how nervous he was. Lois watched as Kal tilted his head back and closed his eyes at her touch. She trailed her fingers along his chest, exactly as she’d imagined on every occasion that he’d been without his shirt on deck. She felt him shudder and she flicked her eyes back up to his face in time to see him open his eyes and lower his gaze back to her.

They stared at each other for an immeasurable time; questioning, asking, giving permission: such serious expressions looking back at each other. Lois allowed her hand to trail lower and when it reached his waistband she reached out with her other one and then released the buttons on Kal’s breeches. They dropped silently to the floor and he stepped out of them, swiftly, and gathered her in his arms in one smooth motion.

When his bare chest met hers Clark realised that the passion and fire he’d been feeling so far had been a pale imitation of the blaze now raging in his body, in his soul. He gently manoeuvred Lois backwards a few steps and then began to lower her down onto his bed. The simple blanket cover was already pulled back, obviously in preparation for Lois to climb in. Clark felt the moment that Lois’ back touched the bed and he loosened his hold then climbed in next to her. A little late for modesty, but still wanting to act the gentleman, Clark pulled up the blanket over her body, sealing them together in bed.

She turned her head to his and, for the first time since he’d stormed into the cabin, he smiled at her. She returned the smile without hesitation and his heart skipped a beat. The natural interpretation of such a look, in such a situation... no, it wasn’t possible. Clark pushed the thought aside not letting himself live in such hope, or ponder the consequences for her, if she were to get anymore tangled up in his life.

Lois saw the warring emotions flicker over Kal’s face. It just proved that her instinctive assessment of him was correct. He was not the Man of Steel that everyone made out. He was not a murdering dishonourable ex-naval officer. He was Kal, that was enough. She snaked out her arm from under the blanket and slid it up his neck and into his beautiful black wavy hair, then she pulled down and his head descended, their lips tangled again.

Kal dove into the kiss, assaulting Lois’ mouth ferociously. She felt his legs move from beside her and then he was above gazing down on her.

“Kal.” Her voice was so soft that he nearly missed it. “Kal, please. I need you,” she begged. He entered her slowly and it was absolutely no surprise to him when he encountered resistance.

“Lois,” he groaned, overtaken by waves of pleasure.

She cried out. “Kal... aarghk.” In Clark’s desire haze it almost sounded like ‘Clark’. ‘*One day*,’ he thought. ‘*One day she’ll call out my real name.*’ “Oh yes. Kal,” she moaned. They soared over the edge together and then Clark crashed down on top of her.

Only a few moments later he carefully rolled to the side and turned her to follow. For some reason neither of them seemed able to speak, they just smiled. Clark gathered Lois into his arms and she snuggled onto his chest. Within minutes they were both asleep.

Clark had his back to the cabin door: something he never let

happen, and for the first time since he came on board he slept without his finger poised on the trigger of his pistol. Instead he held tight to the woman sleeping in his arms.

Chapter 9: Disclosure

Morning light filtered through the small porthole and began the gradual process of waking Clark. As he flicked his eyes back and forth behind his closed eyelids he began to notice a tingling feeling in his arm. He opened his eyes slowly to be greeted by the sight of beautiful, shiny auburn hair spilling over his chest. His mouth opened slightly, the corners twitching into an unbelievable smile.

A self-preservation instinct, which he had ignored last night, had him peering over his shoulder to the cabin door. *‘How could I have been so lax as to allow myself to sleep in such a vulnerable position?’* Clark never put his back to the door, and he never left his pistol on the table: out of reach.

He turned back to the vision lying in his arms and smiled. He had his answer. *‘Goodness she is beautiful. I just wanted to rest with her in my arms.’*

He reached out a hand and lifted the hair spread over her face. Tucking it behind her ear, he must have disturbed her slightly as she shifted her head. The pressure change on his shoulder allowed blood to flow once more and the tingling increased.

Still Clark dare not move. He twisted his body slightly and found a comfortable position then began to study her sleeping countenance. Her high cheek bones were tipped with natural blush. Her long lashes touched her cheeks. Her lips were parted slightly. His eyes lingered on them and he instinctively lowered his head, but he couldn’t reach. Dropping his head back he sighed then smiled. He brought his free arm up and lazily began to stroke up and down her arm.

Things had definitely changed now. He’d known they would the moment he uncovered her deception, but this new intimacy presented him with further complications. Until now he’d been content to wait for the allotted time to fulfil his assignment. He’d attempted on a few occasions to move events along quicker, but to no avail. And the desired end result was still inevitable. He just had to wait. Now, all he could think of was helping Lois to escape from this life. Immediately, not in three more months after the Pirate Meet and the... fulfilment... of his commission. Clark resolved to speak to the Captain again. He would, once more, attempt to garner the location of the Pirate King’s island and then he would find a way to leave the ship sooner and take Lois with him.

The joy which rose in him at the thought of being free from this burden, and at taking Lois, had him fighting the sudden urge to leap out of bed and confront Zor-El immediately. But that would most assuredly wake Lois. Instead he levered himself up slightly and then she rolled gently away.

Lois felt her change in position and frowned. Something felt wrong, and as the morning light filtered through her closed eyelids she realised that it must be morning. She shuffled around trying to find the comfortable position she had been in a moment ago, but it eluded her. She reluctantly opened her eyes and was greeted by a close up of the cabin wall. She turned her head over her shoulder then followed with her body. As the cabin came into view, a smile came unbidden to her face.

Kal.

The memories of last night flooded her and she became completely aware of her nakedness only hidden by a rumpled blanket. Her body responded immediately when she recalled the feel of Kal’s hands on her. She nibbled her lip and attempted to control her breathing.

Kal’s current state of undress did nothing to help her

composure. His shirt covered his chest, rather disappointingly, but hung only as far as his thigh. His pants were dangling from his fist, obviously the next item to be put on, but now forgotten. She finally looked up to meet his eyes only to see that he was staring back at her. He dropped the forgotten garment and stepped back to the bed.

“Lois,” he breathed out then dropped to the bed.

“Good morning, Kal,” she smiled shyly.

“Lois,” he repeated then brought his hand to her cheek. He slowly descended and brushed his lips across hers. Immediately her heart buzzed in delight but he didn’t deepen the kiss. When he straightened back up she followed, holding herself up on her elbows.

“I didn’t mean to wake you.” He stroked a finger over her cheek. “I must speak to the Captain.” She nodded and lifted out a hand to reach for his cheek. As she cupped his face he turned to kiss her palm and the blanket covering her chest tumbled down. Lois felt Kal’s body still against her, his lips still pressed to her hand. His eyes were fixed on her chest and a blush crept up her neck. She hadn’t felt so self-conscious after encouraging him to remove her night gown last night. “Lois!” he whispered and then drew her back for a searing kiss.

She reached for him, sliding her hands up his thigh and under his shirt. She encountered his desire immediately and he moaned into her mouth then began lowering her back down to the bed.

Clark closed the cabin door behind him leaving Lois to her privacy. He had intended to be up and out before she awoke. The sudden passion of last night had somehow been inevitable but still shocked him and he’d been unsure how to behave this morning. He’d also been desperate to confront the Captain now that the idea was planted. But she had woken and he’d been drawn back to her again.

As he strode to the Captain’s cabin he attempted to tamp down the desire still raging through his body, even though he had only just satisfied it. *‘Tonight,’* he told himself and then intense anticipation hit him at the thought, making him long for the day to be over. He rapped on the door and then waited. After a moment he heard shuffling then the Captain called out.

“Come in Kal.” Somehow he always knew. Maybe it was just that Kal was the only one to ever visit the Captain, or possibly he just knocked in the same way every time.

Clark opened the door and strode in.

“Good morning sir. I thought I would come and discuss things with you following yesterday’s confrontation with The Justice.” Zor-El just nodded and strode across the cabin. He sat himself down at his desk and pulled out his parchment and pen. Clark lowered himself to a chair and waited. The Captain spent most of his time in his cabin writing. Clark had no knowledge of what musings passed onto the paper through the older man’s fingers. Early on in his position on board he had wrestled with the idea of delving into the Captain’s private writings to garner the information needed. As he became more used to the persona of ‘Kal’ he’d easily reconciled himself with the conclusion that it was necessary, only to find out that Zor-El wrote all day, only to burn everything at night.

‘What does he write? What tortured knowledge is he attempting to purge by confessing each day, yet burning each night?’

“I am most pleased with our victory Kal. Have you given out any booty yet?”

“No sir. It was mostly rum, weapons and supplies. I have handed out a few small bags of coins then the men can enjoy a simple wager or two. But you know that I like to limit the chance of greed overtaking someone while out at sea.”

“Yes. Very shrewd of you Kal. I knew you would take to this job as if born to it.”

Clark winced inside and shifted on his seat. Zor-El often made pertinent remarks about his origins, birth and family. ‘Kal’ had no family, at least one thing in his deception was utterly true. He felt the medallion weighing heavily against his chest. But ‘Clark’ had loving parents, friends and a family name he was proud of.

“Uh,” he cleared his throat. “We are approaching the time for the Pirate Meet. I was wondering if you wanted me to prepare the route we will take.” Clark’s heart pounded in his chest as he tried to play the ever faithful and diligent officer.

“Kal you worry so. It is still three months hence. I would hope that you have other raids planned before then. We must show up fully stocked... minus the crew’s percentage.”

“I just wish to be well prepared sir. If... if I knew where the Pirate King’s Island was then I would plan our raids most fortuitously along the way. And I could discuss with the Sailing Master what knowledge he has of the waters.”

“He will not be privy to the information.” Clark frowned. The Captain put down his pen. Not that he had written a jot yet. “Before we set off for the island and the Meet the crew will disembark. Only you and I shall be travelling on.”

“But sir. We cannot man this ship only two of us.”

Zor-El stood and his stool shot backwards. “We most certainly can, Kal.” His voice was suddenly raging. Clark’s eyes widened a little, but he had become used to the outbursts that would appear and disappear at random. “There is a port near enough,” he calmed his voice. “And the trip on from there will be simple enough for the two of us.”

“Why?” Clark questioned. “Why just the two of us?”

“All the Pirate Captains are to come alone. We have always done it that way.”

“Then...” Clark began.

“But I have need of you, Kal. I...” He turned and picked his stool back up then proceeded to place himself back at his desk.

“Will...” Clark swallowed and tried again. “Will the Pirate King be there?” Somehow Zor-El’s past, his link with Zod, was of paramount importance. Clark was convinced that whatever had happened between the two of them many years ago was also a clue to where the Pirate King resided.

“Yes,” came the blunt and simple reply.

“If I am to accompany you, Zor-El, then I believe I must understand the intricacies of the pirate upper echelons better. I do not wish to dishonour you, or to instigate a *faux pas*.”

“I have full confidence in your abilities, your natural understanding and your ability to assess a situation, Kal. Do not trifle over this.”

Clark groaned inwardly. As with all previous attempts he had made no headway at all. It seemed that he would have to wait the full three months. At least by making the crew disembark Lois would have to leave. The relief at the thought that she would be safe was overwhelming and he closed his eyes involuntarily.

“Although.” Clark’s eyes shot open at the questioning tone in his Captain’s voice. “Maybe it *is* time for you to understand more of the history of these waters.”

Clark lent forward and clasped his hands together. Zor-El’s voice took on a story-like quality.

“When I was younger, newly married... I was reckless. I made many terrible choices. Choices that led me here. To this ship. Only it was a different Captain then. I never expected that I would be Captain of the Kandor, but I felt alive, and strong, to be a pirate on board this ship. The Captain took a shine to me. I have no idea why, he just did. I confessed that I had abandoned my wife to seek a large fortune, but that my greatest wish was to return to her once I had acquired it. Time went on, and my fortune grew, but Zod kept convincing me that I needed ‘*just a little more*’. Eventually he approached me with a plan. One that would fulfil all his, and all my, dreams. All I had to do was

participate in a strategic attack on a ship travelling to Port Metropolis. I agreed. He placed me as Captain on board The Argo and, together with The Kandor, we attacked.” Zor-El paused. Clark had noticed the man’s breathing becoming more erratic and now his voice broke. “It was not until after the deed was done, when Zod made me Captain of The Kandor as I walked the decks of the defeated vessel that I realised how much I had been deceived.”

Clark shuffled forward on his chair. This was it. This was the reason for Zor-El’s hatred of Zod. And what must tear him up even more was that he could do nothing about it as Zod was a fierce foe, and he was the Pirate King with all the protection and power that brought.

“Every last passenger on the ship had been slaughtered. Zod sailed the ship back to its origin and took the island as his own, setting himself up as Governor in place of my... in place of the man he had killed on board. But Governor was a false title and it soon became clear what his real title was.”

‘*Pirate King*,’ thought Clark.

“Every last passenger,” Zor-El repeated on a whisper and looked through lowered lashes over at Clark.

“But why would that bother you, sir,” Clark asked carefully. Zor-El had often ordered similar slaughters in raids over the years, Clark knew. Or had he just become more hardened as the years went by?

“Because...” Clark saw the pain in his Captain’s eyes.

“Because some of the passengers were my family.” Clark’s heart missed a beat. “Including my... wife, and young daughter... Kara.” He choked out the last word then turned to his parchment and began writing.

He heard the creak of the far door and his heart skipped a beat. Food. No matter the awful taste and consistency, it was still food. He pushed up with his bony arms and swung his legs over the side of his pallet. Weaker and weaker by the day he lent backwards to the wall to gather some strength. His eyes rested closed. When he heard the hatch in the door slide he opened them again. A hand pushed through a misshapen metal plate. As the hatch was well above waist level all the food tumbled off, as usual, and the plate landed on top.

“An extra special treat for you today,” came the mocking voice from the other side of the door.

Weary, but ravenous, he forced himself up and shuffled to the door. Crouching down he tentatively removed the plate to reveal a stale bread roll underneath. His heart sank, yet he still reached for it and lifted it to his lips hungrily. His teeth immediately met resistance, yet not from the dry, hard crust. He pulled the bread away from him mouth and sighed. No wonder the guard had been in good humour. Not only was the roll stale, but it had been hollowed out and filled with a large stone.

The prisoner shuffled back to the bed, carrying the plate in one hand and the roll in the other. He dropped to the grimy sheets and frowned. He released the plate and then began to extract the rock. He revealed a particularly sharp edge and began to consider it seriously while nibbling on the remaining bread. When the last of the crumbs were eaten, satisfying his hunger in some minor fashion, he picked up the metal plate, scrutinised it then turned it over and began to scratch away at the bottom using the sharpened stone.

Three days. Three days of bliss. Since that first night in the cabin, which started with an argument and an accusation and ended in intimate expressions of feelings not yet verbalised, Kal had kept his smouldering gaze on her every second of the day and kept his tender hands on her at night.

It was the end of another day of heated looks across the deck which had set her heart fluttering in anticipation of shift change.

Kal closed the door behind them and sealed them off in his cabin for the rest of the night. He immediately reached for her and dragged her up to his waiting mouth. She parted her lips and his tongue dived in. His hands left her waist and travelled up to cup her cheeks. He softened the kiss and held her while he gently teased her bottom lip.

“Lois,” he breathed out.

“Yes, Kal,” she replied, neither person actually asking a question, just accepting the inevitable.

He stepped away and unclipped his belt letting his pistol slide down to the floor. Lois reached up and loosened his sash and pulled his shirt out of his breeches. Kal’s fingers deftly dispensed with the knot in her shirt laces. His eyes caught and held hers. She couldn’t tear them away although she continued to undress him. As his pants dropped to the floor so did hers. They both stepped away from the discarded pile of clothing and settled into the bed. Kal reached for her again then continued his tasting of her lips with his, adding his tongue to the exploration. Lois responded by arching her body into his and sliding a hand up his chest.

“Kal, please,” she begged of him. He’d brought her to the very edge and she needed satisfaction, not more teasing.

He smiled slowly, deep affection twinkling in his eyes. At least she hoped it was deep affection. If this was just a short affair while she was on board, then so be it, but her heart was already dreaming of so much more.

He positioned himself over her and his lips descended as they joined.

When they finally parted, bodies glistening with sweat Kal drew Lois close and she rested her head on his chest.

“Ahh, Lois. Seeing you on deck, the sun streaming down onto you, giving your cheeks a rosy glow... I find it so hard to keep to my duties.”

She giggled and cuddled up close to him. “I’ll wager that you remove your shirt as punishment for me, Kal.”

“Hmmm, I’ve been uncovered,” he responded theatrically.

Lois levered herself up on one elbow and let her eyes scan down Kal’s body. “Yes. Yes you have,” she growled. As her lazy appraisal of his body passed his chest then up to his face she caught his eyes. They showed not one ounce of teasing. There was no smile on his lips. He lifted one hand and cupped her chin letting some fingers tangle into her hair.

“I see who you are Lois,” he whispered. Her breath caught in her throat. *‘He knows. Oh dear Lord. What if he tells the rest of the pirates that I’m the Commodore’s daughter?’* “I do not believe that you wish to be the Pirate Queen.” She let out the breath and managed to finally rip her gaze away from his eyes. This was the first time they’d allowed themselves to venture into serious territory but thankfully Kal had not discovered her most dangerous secret. It was possible that he was getting close though. “I’ve seen the way you work. I’ve seen the compassion you have for Olsen. I cannot reconcile this beautiful creature, currently resting in my arms, with the lady who claimed to be looking for the Pirate King to ensconce herself as his Queen. You are no more after a marriage of financial convenience than...” with that, Kal ran out of words.

“Than you ever killed your commanding officer?” Lois raised her eyebrows in challenge yet also showing her faith in *him*. “I’ve seen you too, Kal. I’ve heard the stories and know that the crew call you the Man of Steel. Somehow I cannot imagine you ever killing someone in cold blood, or even by accident.” Lois frowned and shook her head. “And to think that you are First Mate on The Kandor. It makes no sense.”

They stared at each other, knowing that their facades were slowly being ripped away by the other. They both felt exposed, but neither one could raise a single morsel of worry. Instead they smiled at each other.

“I should tell you...” she coughed to clear her tense throat. “I am most definitely looking for the Pirate King. But you are right. I do not wish to be his bride.” When Kal’s eyes questioned more she shook her head. “I cannot tell you any more, Kal.”

He nodded. “Thank you for admitting that to me, Lois. I guess I should reciprocate and confirm your faith in me. I did not kill my commanding officer. I was not even discharged from the Royal Navy, but I, also, can tell you no more at this time.” When she opened her mouth to speak he pre-empted her. “Please, do not ask any more of me, my sweet Lois. Please.”

His sincere voice and desperately pleading eyes melted her heart. How could she deny him this request when she wouldn’t yet reveal all? Especially after he called her his sweet Lois.

The Justice moored itself at the far edges of the port and Captain Arrow prepared to disembark. It had been five days since his encounter with The Kandor. Five days of confusion and concern. His childhood friend and next door neighbour was undercover on a Pirate Ship. The boy they all called Sir Lancelot. Yet here he was, ready to deliver messages for him. Since when did he become a delivery boy for a Pirate?

‘But he’s not really a pirate. You know that Ollie,’ he berated himself. *‘He’s a good man. Probably the best man I know.’* He sighed as he climbed out of his ship’s costume. All around him his crew were changing into their ‘home’ clothes and shedding their Justice personalities. In a few minutes they would all leave via the bridge to the caves outside Port Metropolis and leave behind their secrets.

Ollie checked his pockets for the three letters he had been entrusted with. He knew which would be the easiest to deliver, and be the most appreciated. He also knew that he’d be delivering it first, leaving the difficult ones to come. He’d much prefer it the other way so that he could end the day visiting with Mr and Mrs Kent, but it was not to be as he would pass home, and therefore the general store next door, on the way to the mansion... and he knew that Chloe would need his company after receiving a letter from Clark.

It was far too short a time later when he crept into the gardens at the Governor’s mansion and inched his way around to the servant’s quarters. A careful peek in through the window to the kitchens revealed an empty room. He slipped inside. When he hadn’t met a single soul by the end of the first corridor he began to worry. The house should be teeming with servants. The faint sound of footsteps came to him and he pressed himself against a wall. They approached at a swift and military regularity but then faded again. Ollie peered round the end of the corridor in time to see a guard disappear around the far end of the corridor.

Rather than follow him, Ollie continued to head towards the Lady Tess’s quarters. Chloe would not necessarily be there, but it was the best place to start his search. At the top of the first set of stairs he heard footsteps again. This time they were light and slightly erratic indicating both femininity and lack of military training, in comparison to the guard. Ollie took a gamble and strode around the corner to confront the servant.

“Ollie!” Wide, astonished eyes stared back at him. Chloe dropped the pile of clothing in her arms and stepped forwards.

“Chloe, what in God’s name is going on here. Why is this place like a ghost ship?”

Chloe looked him up and down, still suffering from shock. “Um... Governor Luthor has left on a business trip and Miss Luthor dismissed the staff during that time. There is only the cook still here.”

Ollie frowned. He’d definitely seen a guard walking the lower passages. He dismissed that as inconsequential and sighed in relief. “Good, then we shall have privacy for this.”

“For this?” Chloe replied. “For what?”

Ollie grinned and pulled a letter out of his coat pocket then

passed it over. Chloe looked at the address on the front. It simply said C. S.... her initials. She crinkled her brow and looked up at Ollie, half smiling. Sliding her finger into the gap she popped the wax seal and unfolded the pages.

Chloe

I hope this letter finds you well. I am still away on the request of your relative yet will return in due course. I would like to ask that you visit with my parents regularly. I wish that I had thought to ask this of you before I left. I know it has been many months since we last spoke but I am hoping that you have continued to think on my proposal that you move on from your position in the Governor's household. I do believe that you could find more rewarding work elsewhere and I worry that you miss your full potential.

Please give my regards to the Governor.

Clark

Chloe blinked and then re-read the letter, utterly confused. "Chloe?" Ollie enquired, quietly.

"Ollie, something is wrong." She looked up to him. "How... how did you get this letter? Why are you delivering this to me... a letter from Clark. That should not be possible."

"Chloe..." he began. "Is there somewhere we can sit and talk?" She nodded and then gathered up the discarded clothing.

After delivering the items to the laundry she led Ollie to a small study. Once they were both inside she shut the door then turned on him. Waving the letter in the air she asked again. "How is this possible and what is going on. Clark mentions things that... that are just not correct."

Ollie sat down in a high backed chair. "I presume, if he speaks incorrectly then he is trying to send a message. The... circumstances I found him in lead me to believe that his letter to you is of great importance, but he could not risk speaking directly." Chloe lowered herself next to Ollie. "I also have another letter that he asked me to deliver. One I *cannot* deliver. It may be related, and I'm seriously considering opening it myself." Chloe frowned once more. "What is incorrect, Chloe? What is Clark trying to tell you?"

"He asks me to visit his parents wishing he'd remembered to ask this of me before he left. He *did* ask me before he left. Also, he speaks of a conversation we had that I should move on from the Governor's house. Move to more rewarding work. He has never once suggested that I move on from this household. In fact he had often suggested that I should take over my father's role as Aide to the Governor. At least, before Lex... Governor Luthor reduced him to butler."

"Hmmm," Ollie pondered. "I am *sure* that all the falsehoods are to indicate that we should be reading more into this than just the surface words. But which of the false data is most pertinent. Could it be that he thinks you *should* leave?" Ollie glanced down at the letter and read the last few lines. "Does Clark think you are missing your full potential?"

"No."

"Then I'm inclined to look at the word 'worry' as important. And why would he mention the Governor? He would *never* send regards to Lex."

"That's it. Clark wants me to leave because he worried about me... about Lex. Ollie, I think you should know what Tess and I have found out."

Chapter 10: Betrayal

It was an unusual company that sat at the kitchen table the following morning: the grieving daughter determined to live up to her beloved father's expectations, the shy ladies maid with a sharp mind, the butler who once advised the Governor and the gentleman rake with a secret heroic identity.

Ollie stared at the letter in his hands.

C.S.L.

The initials glared back at him. Commodore Samuel Lane.

"I think we need to open it." After Chloe had told him of Lex's purposeful incompetence and they had arranged this secret meeting he'd become more and more sure of that. "Clark still wanted me to take it even after I told him that the Commodore had been kidnapped. He could only mean for it to be opened." He looked up and around hoping for agreement from the others. He got it in the form of positive murmurs. Taking a deep breath he nodded. "Alright then." He reached out tentatively. Why he should feel such reticence was beyond understanding. Perhaps his respect for Clark was higher than he ever realised, or possibly the thought of what he would read terrified him.

"Oh, give me that," Tess reached out and snatched the letter from his hands. She popped open the wax seal and unfolded the sheet then frowned. Chloe leaned over and read, then frowned identically. Gabe stood from his seat on the opposite side of the table and strode around. When he peered over Tess's shoulder he read it aloud.

"Meeting guaranteed in three months." There was no signature.

"What can that mean?"

"Clark is on a secret mission for my Uncle. That's all I know," Chloe spoke.

"He is searching for someone, I think. And I guess that this is an update. But if there *is* any more to this than meets the eye then only the Commodore would know." Ollie sighed.

Gabe leaned forward and picked up an empty plate. He carried it over to the sink and brushed off the crumbs then dipped it in the hot water. Falling naturally into his butler duties he returned and cleared the table then began to clean the cutlery and crockery that they had all used for their early morning breakfast.

"So, how is all this linked with my uncle's kidnapping?"

"And my brother's duplicity?"

"I do not know, but Clark indicated that he and I were effectively on the same mission. And to return to Port Metropolis with this letter would further both our causes."

"What is your mission Ollie?" Chloe asked tentatively.

"I... uh, I was searching for any clue about the Pirate King, or the Commodore's whereabouts. Although..." he paused and glanced around at the three people about to be taken fully into his confidence. "Although, my *on-going* mission from the king is to capture any pirates that cross my path."

"As a privateer," Tess stated, revelation dawning. "I was mistaken, wasn't I. Your father has passed on the mantle to you. You are Captain Arrow, are you not?"

"I am," he admitted.

A loud clatter and a shocked exclamation caused them all to turn away from Ollie's revelation and look at Gabe, still by the sink. He was staring down at the floor. Clearly Ollie's secret identity was *not* the cause of Gabe's shock.

"Father?" Chloe stood, concerned. He slowly bent down to the floor to pick up a metal plate that he had dropped. Water dripped off it and onto the stone floor.

"Who used this plate?" he asked as he straightened up.

"None of us Gabe," Tess replied. "We all had the wooden ones."

"Then how did this get in the sink?" He held out the plate, bottom side on view. A curved letter 'V' surrounded by stars was quite crudely scratched into the base. The light caught the scratches making the stars seem to twinkle having exposed shiny metal under the dulled surface.

"What is it?" Ollie stood and wandered over.

"Only three people would know this sign, but I am the last one alive." By this time everyone standing around the butler, listening intently. "It represents Veritas; the code name for a treaty which was to take place many, many years ago. This..." he shook the plate. "This is not possible."

“Then where did it come from?” Ollie questioned.

“These are the plates used in the guard room. Why would it be in the main kitchen?” Chloe explained.

“Well, possibly the guards are all too lazy to do their own cleaning,” Ollie grinned.

“But they have all been dismissed along with the rest of the staff, while the governor is away.”

“Not all.” Ollie’s voice was suddenly deep and grave.

“Pardon?” Tess turned to him.

“I saw a guard wandering the halls yesterday.”

“But, that’s not possible.” Tess was in a fury now. Gabe looked across at Tess, an unknown expression in his eyes. Possibly hopefulness, possibly grief. He slammed down the plate and turned to Ollie, full of determination.

“Where did you see this guard?”

“Follow me.” Ollie spread out his arm in gesture. After a few corridors and turns he pointed to a door.

“That is the guard room,” Gabe whispered. Ollie tentatively pushed open the door and stepped into the empty room. The rest of the group followed then Gabe strode directly ahead and pushed on a section of the wall causing it to swing open. Everyone gasped in shock.

“What is it Gabe?” Tess looked around at the damp stone steps and dark corridor leading downwards.

“The Governor’s personal dungeon. Lionel only ever used it twice in the whole time I was his aide. I wasn’t aware that Lex even knew it existed.”

As they descended, an expectancy came over the group. What would they find at the bottom? Who would they find? Turning a corner, dimly lit by a distant torch, they reached the bottom of the stairs and stopped in shock to see a guard leaning against the wall.

“Hey, soldier!” Ollie took over with his Captain Arrow personality seeping through. “Why are you down here. Miss Luthor dismissed all the staff.” The soldier started at the shout and stood straighter. When he turned to be confronted by a stranger, someone definitely *not* his superior, he gave a disdainful smirk.

“I *need* to be here.” He paused. “And that’s all *you need* to know.”

Tess stepped forward into the light. “Watch your attitude, sentry.”

“Miss Luthor.” His eyes widened. “Um.” He stuttered as he searched for an answer. “We couldn’t leave. We, uh, have to guard the prisoner.”

“Prisoner!” Chloe exclaimed.

“What prisoner?” Gabe demanded to know. He was beginning to suspect who was down here and flicked a glance at Tess. “What prisoner?” he repeated deeper. The man just stared at him and shrugged. His eyes flicked back and forth in panic. “Get out,” growled Gabe and Tess looked at him in shock. He reached for the keys hanging up next to the lamp, took both, and then he strode to the door across. He failed to get the key in the lock on the first two attempts as his hands were shaking excessively. Eventually the tumblers clicked into place as he turned the key. He swung open the door and called into the cell.

“Hello?”

“Gabe...” came a soft, scratchy reply, then a shadowed figure in the corner uncurled itself to sit on the edge of the bed. “Gabe, is that you? I knew my message would get to you somehow.” This time the voice came stronger.

“Yes. Yes, sir, it is.” The sound of relief in Gabe’s voice was unmistakable. The group crowded forward to see who it was. Tess pushed passed into the lamp light just in time to see the prisoner struggle to his feet and look up. Her eyes met his and she sobbed.

“Father!”

“Tess,” he replied and stumbled forward with his arms outstretched. She raced to him, clutching his bony body to hers as he collapsed onto her. “Daddy,” she repeated, smiling, tears running down her cheeks, unchecked.

Back at the door Gabe stood, grinning. He put his arm around his daughter who looked utterly stunned. Ollie stepped forward and nodded a greeting to the man who met his eyes over Tess’s shoulders. “Governor Luthor.”

“Miss Lois. I would have a private word with you.”

Lois looked up and around, over her shoulder, at Kal. His tone indicated — First Mate needing a talk with a deck hand — but the expression in his eyes, privately looking over her, indicated something entirely different.

“Of course Kal,” she answered as casually as possible. She stood and shook out her dress then followed him.

“You remember when I asked you to inventory the hold for me?”

“Yes,” she nodded.

“Well, I believe it is time for another stock take.”

“It has been almost three weeks, Kal, and we have raided only two ships and not yet set in to port. Do you think that there has been further pilfering?”

They stepped off the deck, descending below, at that point Kal turned and enveloped her in his arms. His mouth crashed down on hers and his tongue parted her lips immediately. Her arms came up and encircled his neck.

“Oh, Kal,” she moaned as his lips began to travel down her neck. “Do you really want me to re-inventory?” He nuzzled up and under her ear. “Or was that just a ruse.”

“Both,” he mumbled. “It *is* needed... but it can wait.” Lois couldn’t stop the smile on her face.

“So it *was* a ruse.”

“I needed to touch you. I needed... “ he buried his head in the curve of her neck. “I needed you Lois. I sometimes wonder whether I should have come to you that very first night. The Captain said you needed a man and told me to take you.”

“I...” she gulped. “I was a virgin.”

“I know. I felt it, that first time.” He lifted his head and gazed into her eyes. “Why. Why did you give it to me?” His voice was soft.

“I wanted you to have it.” She exposed her heart with that comment, knowing what was showing in her eyes. Was Kal reading them? Was he interpreting her hidden meaning?

“It’s this dress,” he said, as if it explained everything. His eyes roamed over the bodice, then back up. “I remember choosing it for you after the Captain gave you to me.” Lois felt her heart leap with joy at Kal claiming her as his with that phrase. “Somehow I knew it would perfectly compliment your silky skin.” Lois arched her back and he nibbled round her neck to the other ear. “And now I just want to take it off you.”

Full of longing and unable to resist him she replied breathlessly. “Then why don’t you?” She sent up a silent prayer of thank you for the accident earlier which had caused her to have to change out of her deck clothes and into her cream lace dress.

Clark raised his head again, searching her eyes for either teasing or sincerity. All he saw was desire shining back at him. He released her body and took her hand. She followed along, a secret smile on her lips. At the far end of the hold was a smaller room where the better booty was kept. Clark unlatched the door and pulled her inside. The moment the door clicked shut behind he pushed her against it.

Diving for her mouth he brought his hands up to cup her cheeks, but his hold wasn’t gentle. He pressed his body against hers, crushing her to the door. *‘Two months. That’s all I have left with her. It’s not nearly enough. Not when I want... forever.’* Soul-wrenching pain ripped through him at that thought. Sometimes he

let himself dream that he would be coming back, that he would have a life with her. Other times, like now, he accepted the inevitability of his commission. He should probably tell her the truth before it was too late. Before she was put off the ship and he sailed to his destiny. But would she accept that if he told her now. Would she fight it? Would she reject him? She seemed so taken with the pirate life. If she knew he was really...

He tangled his hands in her hair tighter and rocked his hips against her. She moaned. Clark loved that sound. Loved that he could make her like soft clay in his arms. "Oh Kal," she moaned when he left her mouth. 'Kal. 'If he told her, then she'd know his real name. Fear spiked his heart; fear of losing her, and he felt an instinctive need to hold her close. As close as was physically possible.

He trailed kisses over her cheek to her ear and nibbled while his hands travelled down her chest. Using his sense of touch he found the lace that kept her dress together and began to pull.

Soon passion overtook them. Lois felt the undeniable need rising in her again. Desperate desire drove her to take hold of Kal by the shoulders and lift her legs around him. She felt him intimately, perfectly placed. He moved his hands round to her back to help support her and then rocked against her fiercely. "Kal," she mumbled. "I need you now." Kal crushed her lips with his and then thrust inside her, his whole body moving. The need drove them together until she balanced on the edge for just a moment, her whole body tense: expectant, and then she crashed down into his arms, burying her face in his neck while he shuddered into her.

John strode away, anger burning in his belly. No, it was worse than anger. It was rage: burning green, jealous rage straight through his heart.

Kal. He had everything that should belong to John. First Mate position. Ear of the Captain. Respect of the crew. And now the delectable body of the desirable Miss Lois. He had it all. And he'd *taken* it from John.

The sneer on his face as he strode across the deck, away from the sickening love-birds, sent quite a few men scattering from his path. "Something needs to be done. Kal also suspects about the cargo," he muttered to himself. It had been the half heard conversation between Lois and Kal that had sent him following them down into the hold in worry over possible discovery. What he'd been confronted with, though, had nothing to do with investigating the cargo. Kal and Lois had been disappearing into the far room and he'd crept over to listen in, hoping for a clue as to whether they knew it was him or not. Instead he had heard intimate talk, soft moans and deep growls. The feminine moans had turned him on immensely, yet the growls were like knives in his heart.

"Time for Kal to leave the ship, I think." The idea had been rolling around in his mind for many weeks and this was the final straw. In fact they'd actually provided him with the reason he could legitimately use to banish Kal.

John laughed. "Well, as legitimate as it can be to 'frame' a man." John's excitement bubbled over until he remembered to be circumspect. If he acted too swiftly, without covering all the eventualities, he would find himself off the ship, rather than Kal. He needed the crew's backing, he needed to keep himself safe from the Captain's wrath. Time. Just a little time, then he would make his move.

It was a very different feel permeating the air when the group sat back at the kitchen table much later on. Shock was the overriding emotion in each person, although relief seemed fairly widespread also. The prisoner, finally clean, warm and satisfied, readied to explain about Veritas, curiosity gnawing at each mind.

Tess sat close to her father, clutching his hand as he finished

off the last mouthful of bread. Ollie sat on the other side, glancing between the two of them. He'd always respected the old Governor. His father's close association with Lionel had meant frequent visits to the mansion when he was younger. It had also been one of the reasons for his friendship with Chloe. For some reason he'd never been friends with Tess or Lex though. Possibly his reckless attitude, evident even at an early age, had inclined him more to the servants in the house than the residents. Yet Lionel had always welcomed him and his father, and Tess in particular had sometimes attempted to join in their games. To see her now, alive with purpose as the intended Governor, and doubly alive to be reunited with her father, he recalled her tentative attempt to kiss him under the mistletoe one Christmas tide at eight years old.

"Are you sure you are up to this, sir?" Gabe asked. Ollie dismissed the memory and concentrated on the Governor.

"Please, Gabe, just Lionel now. I tolerated 'sir' before as a professional measure, but we were always more than that."

"Yes, sir," he replied, affection and friendship showing even though he still used the formal title.

Lionel smiled: a tired, weary smile. "Veritas was the name of a treaty I was to sign twenty years ago. Port Metropolis and Port Krypton were to become allies. Not that we had ever been enemies, but we wished to see a stronger bond and safer waters. On the journey to Port Metropolis Governor Jor-El's ship was set upon by pirates. The man who set himself up as Governor in his place had no interest in the treaty after that."

Tess nodded. "So that is Veritas. I'm presuming that this symbol, this seal, was to be made... but only you, Gabe and the Governor of Port Krypton..."

"Jor-El."

"Jor-El, knew of it. That's how Gabe recognised the etching on the plate you had made."

"As my aide, although new to the position, he helped with much of the communication between islands. In the dungeon... I needed something that would stand out as a message to the right person but mean nothing to anyone else."

"Krypton! I heard that it was a wonderful place," Chloe whispered.

"Yes, Jor-El was a wonderful ruler and the land was fertile and prosperous. After the incident, people talked. Rumours abounded. Slaughter, death, rivers of blood, famine. The island became known as Isla de Muerta."

"Island of death." Chloe gulped at Ollie's translation. There was a tangible silence as the story Lionel had told settled around them. Eventually Ollie coughed and spoke up.

"Well, as much as that fascinated us, and we were all quite curious being as how Veritas led us to find you..." he paused. "What actually happened to you, Governor?"

"Lex," replied Tess before Lionel could say anything.

"Yes," he nodded. "I began to suspect that he was up to no good but I was not quick enough to curtail his schemes. He bribed the guards, imprisoned me and then set himself up in my place." He sighed deeply. "I still wonder how I could have got it so wrong with Lex." He turned to Tess and reached out for her hand, smiling at her.

"Father we have discovered more. We believe that he is in league with the Pirate King. Also he is interfering with the investigation to search for the Commodore."

"Commodore?"

"When you 'died' so soon after the previous Commodore's 'demise'," Gabe explained, "I sent word to the King in England. He despatched my brother-in-law immediately. Commodore Samuel Lane arrived six months ago and has been under orders to focus on ridding us of the Pirate menace."

"And he is missing?" Lionel breathed out in horror.

"Kidnapped. Two months ago. His daughter went missing

soon after.”

“No!” he choked out. Chloe gave a little sob and Gabe put his arm around her.

Ollie pulled out a wrinkled piece of paper from his pocket and smoothed it out. “This symbol was found at the scene of the kidnapping. I’ve been told, by a most reliable source, that this is the Pirate King’s symbol. We have seen it on many occasions, always connected with Pirate activity, but it was confirmed to me recently that it is indeed the *personal* symbol for the Pirate King himself.”

Lionel reached out and slid the paper across. “Zod,” he croaked.

“Zod?”

“The man who set himself up as Governor of Port Krypton.”

“He’s the Pirate King?”

“It seems so. And as Jor-El’s ship was set upon by pirates I would wager that Zod was deeply involved in that ambush and betrayal.”

“But how is all this connected and what is Clark’s mission?” Chloe asked, pleading for further understanding, hoping for more revelations to help with the search for her uncle and cousin.

“Clark!” Lionel turned his head. “Clark Kent?”

“Yes,” Chloe replied, confused at Lionel’s tone. Lionel had sponsored Clark’s entrance into the Navy and been exceptionally proud to see him move up the ranks to Officer in quick time.

“I happened across Clark, undercover on a private mission from the Commodore. He has been gone for months, obviously commissioned before the Commodore was kidnapped. He was not aware of the kidnapping. He did indicate that both he and I had the same ultimate mission, though.”

“You mean he and... Captain Arrow?” Lionel stated. Ollie blinked. “I knew that you would take over from your father soon. It was always in your eyes Oliver.”

Tess smiled to herself, glad that her father still had all his faculties about him, and glad that she seemed to have taken after him in her instincts. Standing she raised her head high and spoke clearly. “Well, it seems clear to me that the Commodore was taken by the Pirate King to scupper his plans for annihilation of the Pirate population and if Zod is the Pirate King then we will find him on Isla de Muerta... Port Krypton.”

At the first sign of a ship on the horizon Ollie called for Emil. As people gathered on the deck, hearts pounding in anticipation, Dinah, in the crow’s nest, kept a watch for the moment she could make out the flag.

“It’s the HMS Planet,” she called down.

Ollie whooped, it being one of the objectives of their current mission. “Emil? Ready with the flags. We need to talk to the Captain.”

“Aye, aye Captain,” he replied and moved to stand at the edge of the deck. As Ollie relayed messages to Captain White through Emil, Dinah shouted out the replies. When the ships came alongside each other, crew members stood at attention on each side, a deep, sharp voice called out.

“All right. You say the Governor is on board and wishes to converse with me.” The greying man in well-presented military uniform strode to the edge.

Lionel stepped forwards. “I do.” His voice was no longer strained and croaky. It had been three days since his rescue and he’d spent most of that time on board the Justice under the care of the carpenter Doctor Emil. His strength was returning and the sea air was refreshing him.

Captain White’s eyes widened in shock. “Governor Luthor,” he exclaimed. “Your son said you were dead!” It was clear that he had expected Lex Luthor when they had announced the Governor as being aboard.

“I know,” he replied. “May I come aboard? I must speak with

you in private.”

“Of course,” he nodded.

There were whispers among the crew of The Planet as the Governor of Port Metropolis and Captain Arrow strode along the deck with Captain White. Once locked away in the Captain’s cabin he introduced his First Mate.

“Mr Gabriel. He’s been with me a little over two months.” He turned and addressed the man. “Grant, this is Governor Lionel Luthor, father of Lex... and Captain Arrow of The Justice.”

Ollie’s heart rate rapidly increased at being introduced to the man that Tess claimed was under Lex’s pay. How would Lionel deal with this? Lionel had made it clear over the course of the journey that he considered himself immediately back in the role of Governor, and fully in charge of the investigation into the Commodore’s kidnapping.

“I would ask... Captain... that this meeting be between just you and I. To show no favouritism I shall request that Captain Arrow leaves, if you will send Mr Gabriel away also.”

The confusion on the Captain’s face was evident but he complied and the two men left.

“Perry,” Lionel sighed once they were alone. “It has been too long. You were my best Captain and I trusted you with my special project. What happened to him?”

“He disappeared five months ago. I was distraught. You were right. Mr Kent was a fine officer. I am glad that you convinced me to take him on as my First Mate. But I do not know what happened to him. The Commodore summoned him repeatedly while we were in port. We were then sent on patrol and he never came back on board after we made port on Granville Island.”

“I have a suspicion about what happened, Perry, but I do not wish to speculate aloud at this time on matters that are minor detail in this affair. What I can reveal is that he is undercover on board The Kandor and I believe that we must find him. That is our secondary goal though. Our first goal is to find the Commodore. I believe that Lex sent you on that mission seven week since.”

Captain White nodded.

“Am I also to understand that your journey had been plagued by mishap and difficulty?”

The Captain frowned in surprise. “Yes. How do you know?”

“It seems that my son is more devious than I realised. I knew he was only ever self-serving and so I never trained him for the position of Governor. Instead, he took it himself and placed me in the dungeon. Since then I believe that he has been making an alliance with the Pirate King. Whether directly or indirectly involved in the Commodore’s kidnapping he gave orders to someone aboard this ship to sabotage your mission, even though he’d placed you on that very mission himself.”

“What!” He stood immediately. The anger in the man’s voice was clear. Someone on board his ship had betrayed him.

Someone had been interfering in his mission. All the accidents... all the equipment failures... it was not possible. But, yes it was. The *coincidence* was now clear.

“Who. Who is this traitor?”

“Your First Mate.”

“Grant!” Perry fell back into his chair. “No. He is not half the officer that Clark was, but I cannot believe it.”

“My daughter overheard the very conversation where Lex ordered this of Mr Gabriel. I would also remind you that Lex was the one who pushed for you to take Grant as your First Mate when Clark disappeared.” Tess had also overheard that snippet of information in the same conversation.

Perry’s mouth hung open in shock. He blinked slowly then stood once more. Striding to the door he swung it open, his eyes searching the corridor for the men who had been expelled from the meeting. The corridor was empty. He strode along and emerged out into the sun and onto the deck. His eyes flicked back

and forth again until they finally rested on the man he was searching for.

Grant Gabriel saw the Captain's eyes settle on him. The look of anger on his face shot straight to Grant's heart and he panicked. He turned and ran, pushing through the sailors crowding the deck. His attempt to flee was utterly futile. A quick shout from the Captain and a dozen sailors were after him, chasing round the mast. Grant Gabriel was an agile sailor, though, and he evaded them all heading for the bridge. "Give it up Gabriel. There's nowhere to go. We are out at sea man." He turned round and round, heart pounding. He was now surrounded and there was nothing to do but surrender.

Lois fingered the medallion around Clark's neck. Her head lay on his shoulder, his arm cupped around hers and tenderly stroking down her arm. Lois shuffled under the light blanket and shifted her leg across Clark's, cuddling up as close as possible. Her breath lightly passed over his bare chest and his nipples peaked in response to the gentle stimulation. He suppressed his immediate desire knowing that he needed to start controlling himself more when around Lois. He couldn't let his desires rule his life. Besides, it was also going to be time to go out on deck soon.

"So... when was the last time you tried to find out what this means?" she asked. Clark shifted, not immediately replying. "I mean, it would drive me mad, not to know."

"Lois..." he whispered. "I..." He sighed and closed his eyes. "I guess it does, but I've got used to it. I am who I am." He kept his answer vague but completely truthful. Lois had got out of him the basic story of his medallion over the course of their affair. It had now been eleven days since the attack by The Justice and their subsequent consummation. Their private time together consisted of many intimate moments, both physically and emotionally. They had chatted on various occasions after their passion subsided, unlike their very first time where they had fallen asleep in each other's arms without a word spoken.

The first thing Clark had confided was that the name Kal, inscribed on one side of the medallion was the *only* thing he understood. On the reverse was a symbol that meant nothing to him. A geometric shape enclosing a letter. Lois had trailed the outline and remarked on it being almost the shape of a diamond. The inner letter had been reminiscent of the letter S. A little playful flirting had then ensued as she listed the many words it could stand for. Clark had acted offended at all her suggestions, but he had secretly stored one particular word in his heart. "Super," she had announced. "Super Kal." She giggled and he'd smiled. "Yes, that's it. My Kal. My super man." She looked into his eyes and her smile had dropped at the same moment as his. Lois had referred to him as 'hers' and it had set a fire in his belly that needed immediate relief.

A few days after that he had revealed that he'd been found as a baby, drifting in a tiny boat in the centre of a ship's wreckage. That had led to difficult questions about his upbringing by Lois. Goodness, she was inquisitive. He'd answered as best he could without compromising himself. She knew that he'd been brought up by a childless couple who loved him dearly, but he left her with the incorrect assumption that they had named him after the word on his medallion. She'd also indicated that she thought his lack of true roots had led to his insubordinate career in the navy: a desire to strike out in frustration.

"How did you come to be First Mate?" The question suddenly pulled him out of his memories in shock. The way her mind worked in concert with his scared him sometimes: asking that question just as he pondered over her beliefs of his less than sterling career in the Navy. His heart beat erratically. This was it, the perfect time to tell her the truth. Mixed in with how he came to be aboard was the whole story of his undercover mission, his

true identity... Suddenly he knew: it was time to reveal everything and trust his heart.

He took a deep breath and began with the 'accepted' story. "After I was... ejected... from the Navy I spent a lot of time in the taverns of Tortuga. I was on the lookout for... opportunities." Lois lifted her head from his chest. Resting her arm and hand across and pushing up slightly she looked into his eyes. Obviously she'd heard his hesitations. His nervousness was evident in the wavers in his voice. He flicked his eyes back and forth over her face, looking for some final sign that it was right to continue. All he could see looking back at him was acceptance, curiosity, trust... and that other emotion he'd been toying with yet avoiding naming. He repeated his deep breath then began again. "I feigned drunkenness and violence while attempting to find my way on board a pirate ship. Any pirate ship. It was the most unbelievable luck that Zor-El, Captain of The Kandor no less, found me. He seemed to take to me immediately and it didn't take much to convince him to take me on board. He then immediately appointed me as First Mate, to my complete surprise."

"Feigned drunkenness?" Lois questioned. He opened his mouth but didn't know how to proceed. "I understand Kal. I actually saw it myself on the night you recruited me. You were not half as inebriated as the empty bottle of rum should have indicated." She frowned. "What I don't completely understand is why. I mean, I have some ideas but... and what did you mean by all this. It sound like it's all a deception for some reason."

"Lois..." he began and lowered his eyes for a moment before looking back. "I'm not who..."

Suddenly the door to the cabin flew open. Clark turned his head quickly and pulled up the blanket to cover Lois instinctively. His eyes widened in horror to see John Corbin stood in the doorway, men crowding around him. His arm was stretched out in front and his pistol was pointed straight at the couple in bed. "Corbin?" Clark asked in angry question.

"Kal," he replied. Clark stared at the barrel of the pistol, all the reasons for sleeping facing the door with his own pistol already in his hand coming flooding back. Except now that he was facing his nightmare he was actually calm. It was the inevitable end to his assignment. "Get up. And get dressed." His voice was full of disdain. Clark eyed the pistol again and knew to comply. He began to slide out from the blankets when Corbin's next words shot a chill through his bones. "And get your whore dressed too. In her duchess dress." Clark's head shot back up to look at Corbin's face. *'No. He wants Lois too.'*

His mind raced as they both dressed quickly, watched intently by the group of pirates at the door. There must be some way out of this. But what was 'this'? He didn't yet know what was happening. And how was Lois involved? Could he get her out of it?

Corbin led them both out onto deck. Clark was disturbed to see most of the crew out, all staring at him with a combination of hate, disappointment or pity. His stomach clenched. *'I've been discovered. It's the only explanation.'* His heart groaned at the punishment that was to come. Betrayal, subterfuge, deception, infiltration. He was guilty of it all as far as the crew would be concerned. But it had never been them that he was after. They would not understand that, though. *'If I can just convince them Lois had no knowledge of my true identity or mission.'*

Suddenly the crowd opened out and Corbin pushed Clark out into a space. Lois followed, stumbling into him then grabbing onto his arm to steady herself. She had indeed put on the cream brocade dress as instructed. His fingers remembered the feel of the stitching as he gripped her tightly. His body remembered the... He shook his head to clear it of the distracting memories.

John Corbin, Deckmaster of The Kandor, stepped out into the open circle. Crew members who had been lining the walk from

the officers' cabins were now filling out the edge of the circle, hemming the three of them in together. Corbin gave Clark a sly grin then his face, wiped of the obvious look of selfish victory, turned to the watching men.

"This man here... a man we have trusted for months... a man who promised us fair and just discipline, strong leadership, a fair share of the booty and much more in his stirring speech the day the Captain introduced him... this man had been deceiving us." Clark breathed deeply. '*Yes, here it comes,*' he thought. "He has been raiding the store for himself." The crew took in a collective shocked breath. Both Clark and Lois joined in that sound.

"What?" he shouted out in surprise.

"You," Corbin turned to speak to him directly. "You have had the hold re-inventoried to cover your tracks. And you have been planning the same exercise again to eliminate more recent discrepancies."

Clark's jaw dropped. His own diligence and duty to his current position on board was being used against him. The Deckmaster turned back to the crowd.

"He has been keeping our share of the treasure from us. His reasons are sound, on the surface... but it is all a ruse. He has betrayed us. Quite simply..." he paused dramatically. "Kal has been stealing from ALL of us."

"No!" he whispered out shaking his head. He looked around at the crew hoping to notice support among them, but all he saw was more anger and disappointment.

"Kal, you are to be marooned with one bottle of powder, one..."

"No, it's not true," came a new voice. Clark turned. Lois had removed her hands from his arm and stepped forwards. "Kal would do no such thing. I know. I'm the one who did the inventory."

There were new murmurs among the pirates at this revelation.

"She incriminates herself," John declared striding round.

"Well, I was going to bring up this point myself, dear, but thank you for freely declaring it to us all." Clark gulped at the look on Corbin face: the grin baring his teeth. "Your punishment will be a little different though, as you are on this ship under false pretences and not a crew member bound by the code." Clark turned to watch Lois. He could see the temper rising in her. Fists were clenched at her side and her chest was heaving. "So, Kal. By order of the Captain..." Clark's mouth dropped open again. '*Zor-El knows? No, that's not possible. I know he trusts me.*' "You are to be marooned with one bottle of powder, one bottle of water, one small arm and shot."

Clark felt the tears pricking his eyes. Partly relief that his true deception had not been discovered and at the *NON*-fatal punishment, but much more at the grief of failing his mission, and even more so at leaving Lois behind... to whatever John had in store for her.

Corbin walked forwards, the crowd beginning to part. Clark lifted his head and finally noticed the surroundings. The ship was anchored, no movement, and off to the starboard he saw an island. '*Land Ho*'. He sighed and closed his eyes remembering the call from the crow's nest in the extremely early hours of the morning, while he'd been... distracted. When he didn't immediately move to follow he felt prodding from behind. Glancing over his shoulder he saw the ship's carpenter and surgeon, Fine, digging his cutlass in his back. '*Brainiac*.' Clark gritted his teeth. He'd never really like the man. Just as with Corbin, there had been an instinctive feel that he was a danger to Clark's mission.

He was herded in the direction of the plank, black dread beginning to invade his mind. He tried to evaluate all scenarios of escaping, of freeing Lois, but nothing came to mind and he found himself bouncing on the end of the malleable plank of wood

looking down into the clear Caribbean waters below. His last thought was for Lois. He turned and looked at her, his eyes now watering freely. He saw the pain reflected in hers. Her lips were trembling. "What will you do to Miss Lois?" he asked, turning to look at John Corbin.

"That, Kal," he spat the word out, as if it no longer held any inherent respect, "is no longer your concern. But let's just say that she'll definitely be contributing to the working life of the crew." The suggestive look on Corbin's face had Clark turning to leap out at him in rage, protecting Lois' virtue, but John stretched out his arm, now wielding a cutlass, and poked it in Clark's ribs. He bent over at the pain, wobbled then lost his balance and plunged into the water.

"Kal!" Lois cried running forwards, tears streaming down her face. She'd known it was coming from the moment Kal had been pushed onto the plank, but the suddenness of it, the sword in his side... her heart had missed a beat. Before she could make it to the rail arms pulled at her and dragged her back. The circle of pirates reformed around her and John, but now they were at the ship's edge: the ocean just a leap away. Lois calmed her heart and prepared. '*Don't make your move too early. Don't rush this and give away your plan.*'

John strode up to her and grabbed her chin. "Miss Lois. That's what he called you. Perhaps he was misspoken. Do you think he meant 'my Lois'?" He released her and stepped back. "Well, I think it's fair to say that I will definitely be calling you..." he looked at her intently... "*my Lois*." She stood as still and calm as possible. Her racing heart would no longer comply with her wishes though. The tension was unbearable. If only he would step just a little further away. "Take off the dress."

"What?" she choked out and her legs almost gave out under her.

"The dress. I think you need to *earn* the right to wear it again." Lois immediately knew what he was insinuating. But possibly this was to her benefit. The dress was bulky and heavy, and thank the Lord she had put her slip on underneath it when getting dressed. Feeling more confident she began unlacing it, strongly, defiantly. It fell to the floor and crumpled round her feet. She needed to step out. Trying to look completely natural she stepped out... backwards... putting herself closer to the ship's edge and further from the crowd of pirates.

"Now... *my Lois*... I think it's time to return to work." He narrowed his eyes on the final word and swept his gaze down her body. "Now..." he continued but Lois took the word personally to heart.

'*Now,*' she thought, then turned and leapt off the ship.

Chapter 11: Marooned

Lois dragged herself out of the surf attempting to hold up her sodden shift to keep it from tangling round her legs. Stumbling up the gently sloping, warm, sandy beach she looked up and around, trying to catch sight of Kal. Had he made it to shore already? He did get pushed off the ship before her. But he was injured. Was he drowning, bleeding into the sea. Panic overtook her when she couldn't see him. She turned back to the sea. The Kandor was already heading off to the horizon leaving her behind. Searching the waves she held her breath looking for the tiniest sign: a dark patch of water, a hand struggling up to the surface. She waded back in striding along and calling out. The panic inside her was now out of control.

"Kal!" She screamed out. "Kal! Please, are you out there." A sob escaped her and she strode further back into the waves. Her shift became swamped by the waves again, wrapping around her legs. It became difficult to move easily. She cried out again. "Kal! Please. Answer me."

"Lois?" she heard. Whipping around to the clear and steady sound coming from behind she saw Kal striding out from the tree

line.

“Kal,” she called in relief and set off running as fast as her water-logged nightgown would allow.

“Lois,” he whispered back, but she could see his lips moving as he ran to her. When they met, half way up the beach, she opened her arms and he took hold of her tightly. “Lois, I thought you were back on the ship. I thought...” his voice trailed off and he brought his lips to her neck. Quickly kissing round to her mouth she found herself smiling into his seeking lips. She returned his kiss, trailing her hand up to his hair and holding on tight. When he finally lifted his head, and their eyes met, he smiled. She could see them glistening. “I thought you were back there. With Corbin. I... Oh goodness, I thought I’d had to leave you with him... leave you to...”

He couldn’t finish the thought and he just dived for her mouth again. She opened up for him and melted into his embrace. When he left her mouth and went searching for the crook of her neck she whispered out. “I couldn’t stay. I couldn’t let him touch me. And I couldn’t leave you Kal. I can’t leave you.”

“Oh Lois,” he groaned and lowered her to the sand.

Kal took her to the heights of ecstasy as usual. The sun beating down on their bodies, the warm sand caressing her back, the rustle of the wind in the palm trees behind them. It all combined into the perfect setting which overwhelmed Lois emotions. She cried out as Kal thrust deep inside her and whispered into her ear of his relief that she was safe; was here in his embrace.

As they relaxed into the sand and came down from their pinnacle of bliss Lois sighed in utter contentment. ‘*Can anything be more perfect than this,*’ she thought? ‘*Clear blue sky, crystal waters, soft sand...*’ She rolled over to gaze at her lover. He was looking up at the sky, a smile on his lips, his arms linked behind his head. ‘*And to be here, in this paradise, with Kal. This is heaven. My personal heaven... forever.*’ She smiled and a tear leaked out of the corner of her eye. Leaning over she placed her palm on Kal’s chest, careful to avoid the ragged scratch caused by Corbin’s sword. He turned his head to look at her and smiled. She saw the emotions in his eyes and knew that it meant the same as hers. ‘*I could stay here forever, with you, Kal. I’d be utterly content to live my life on this deserted island and just have you.*’ She opened her mouth to say the words, knowing that it was time for her to confess her heart to him, but all that came out was a sob.

Kal frowned and lifted a hand to her cheek. She burrowed into it as the sobs came faster. He reached over and took her in his arms, sitting them up. He held her while she wept.

“Lois, Lois. What is it?” He spoke gently to her. His body rocked ever so slightly, comforting. “Lois, Lois.” He murmured her name into her hair while placing soft kisses across her brow.

“Kal,” she let out a sob. “Oh Kal. Are we marooned here forever?” She raised her head and looked into his eyes, hopeful for a reassuring answer.

“Lois, I do not know.” He swept his thumb over her cheek. “I need to look around the island first. It’s possible that it’s a regular stop for ships, it’s possible that it’s not even deserted, but...” He sighed and looked away. “If... if we were...” he paused. “What would you think... if it was... forever?” He turned back and Lois saw the bare emotion in his eyes. Was he looking for some reassurance from her?

“Kal. If I had to live the rest of my days on this island, with you, I can honestly say that I would regret nothing.” She lifted her hand to cup his face and then the tears began to fall again. “Nothing,” she sobbed out, “... except my father.”

Kal didn’t speak, he just caressed her face and looked at her with compassion.

“He... he’s missing. I’ve been searching for him. And now that we are left here...” she tried to control her breathing and

speak clearly. “He is lost...”

“Oh, Lois. I am so sorry. What happened? It seems you love your father dearly.”

She nodded. “Yes. Although he never understood me, and I was not the lady of court that he wanted, he was my daddy. And he was kidnapped.” Her voice faltered again.

“Kidnapped?” Kal’s voice was suddenly quiet. An unexpected ominous tone entered it. “Are you sure?”

She nodded again. “Yes. Kal, I haven’t told you the complete truth about why I’m looking for the Pirate King.”

“Well, I know that it’s not to become the Pirate Queen,” he grinned and teased her.

She joined in his laugh for a moment then dropped her gaze. “The Pirate King is the one who has kidnapped my father. At least, that’s what I believe. He left his brand, burned in my father’s desk.”

“Who,” Kal gulped. “How long ago was your father taken?”

“Two months.”

“Who is your father, Lois.” Kal was now whispering. His eyes were wide, almost in terror. Lois couldn’t comprehend why Kal would be fearful at this moment.

“Commodore Lane. My father is the Commodore of the King’s navy. I am Lois Lane.”

Clark’s mouth dropped open and his heart stopped beating for more than just a moment. He commanded his lips to move, to speak, to say anything, but they wouldn’t obey. Instead his legs jerked and he stood, leaving Lois sat on the sand. He paced away a little then turned back. He took a moment to look down at the lady on the sand. The woman who’d caught his heart. The mysteries of fate that had brought her to him confounded his mind. How many times had he visited the Commodore for briefings, how often had he walked the corridors of that home, never to meet this beautiful creature, never to lay eyes on her, until they were both undercover on board a pirate ship.

He saw worry written on her face. Immediately he understood. ‘Kal’ was a pirate, and also a disgraced naval officer. She had just admitted to being the daughter of the Commodore. Was she fearful of his reaction?

“Lois. I have not been completely honest with you.” She frowned at him in question. “I did tell you that I have not been discharged from the Navy, as the rumours go. It is true. I also did not kill my commanding officer.” He took a deep breath. “I am still an officer in the Navy. The rumours are all a ruse. My name is Clark Kent and ‘Kal’ is a fiction.”

“What?” Lois looked distraught. “Kal doesn’t exist?” She looked away and her lips began to tremble.

“No! No, Lois.” He dropped to the sand next to her. “I exist. I am Kal. The medallion, it’s all true. I was found in the wreckage of a ship, but I was raised by a childless couple who loved me very dearly. My parents, they named me Clark. I grew up in Port Metropolis and joined the Navy. A close bond and friendship with the Governor enabled me to rise in the ranks quickly and I became First Mate on The Planet. A little over five months ago I was called by the Commodore and spent time preparing for a secret mission. He briefed me on a few occasions and then commissioned me to find... and eliminate... the Pirate King. I then left, as usual, with my Captain. When we made port in Granville I slipped away and made my path to Tortuga where I set myself up as Kal and started the appropriate rumours that would get me a place on board a pirate ship.”

Throughout Clark’s story Lois’ eyes had been widening. Her mouth opened into a gradual smile. The expression of joy and wonder on her face broke out into her first words. “You. It was you, in my father’s study. I listened in. I knew he was meeting with an officer. I knew he’d sent someone off to find the Pirate King. It was you.”

He nodded and couldn’t help the smile that appeared.

“Clark?” she said tentatively. “Clark!” She lent forwards and touched her lips to his.

John raised his hand then hesitated. The important part of his plan was complete. Kal was gone. But now he had to face the Captain. Now the plan was all about covering his tracks, protecting himself, weaving the right tales. He nodded to himself in confidence then raised his head, assured of his success. This time, when he raised his hand he knocked.

“Yes!” came the call through the Captain’s door.

“Sir,” Corbin strode in to face the most feared pirate in these waters. If the Pirate King ever actually set to the sea again then that would be disputed, but as it was, Zor El, Captain of The Kandor, was greatly feared. John remembered what he was like before Kal came on board. He remembered the cruel, emotionless man that had little pity for anyone he came across. John was certain he would be the next First Mate. He was made for the position, fitting so rightly with Zor El. Except... Kal. He had appeared out of nowhere and the Captain had taken a shine to him. Kal also seemed to have an unexpected effect on Zor El. He never, well hardly ever, came out on board anymore. When he was seen he wavered between the man of John’s memory and some new... personality.

As he stepped into the room Zor El looked up from his desk, paper laid out, spidery writing covering much of it. “Corbin?” came the disdainful voice, questioning his presence. Only Kal ever visited. “Where is Kal?”

“Sir, Kal is feeling unwell and has taken to his cabin. If you wish me to relay a message... or I can bring his messages to you?” His heart pounded wildly in his chest. If the Captain was at all suspicious then this would be where his plan fell apart. If he also happened to take one of his rare walks on the deck there was the chance he would find out what the crew did to Kal. Granted, he couldn’t keep the truth from the Captain forever, but just long enough to leave that island far behind. Plus Corbin was already working on a further twist to the tale he would tell, ensuring that Zor El would have no problem in letting go of Kal when the time came.

“Oh, well.” Zor El looked confused for a moment. The man Corbin knew before would never have acted in that way. “I suppose you will have to liaise then.” The tone of voice made clear the Captain’s thoughts. Again John saw the difference. Kal had changed this man... somehow. Six months ago Zor El was ready to take John as First Mate, and without any of the distaste that was currently showing. How had Kal done this?

As he left the cabin, the anger towards Kal that boiled inside his heart grew once more.

The Justice and The Planet sailed alongside each other, heading for Isla de Muerta. Governor Lionel Luthor’s directions were very vague. It had been twenty years since the Veritas treaty and he had never been a man of the sea. When, after three days, Black Canary called down from the crow’s nest that The Kandor was in sight a frantic plan was put into place. They hadn’t specifically set to finding it, rescuing the Commodore was priority. But, just as with coming across The Planet and exposing Captain White’s saboteur, it seemed as if fortune were on their side.

“This is our chance Governor,” Captain Arrow argued. “Clark could know things. His knowledge could be the difference between success or failure.”

“And if you are wrong? Hmmm?” Lionel raised his eyebrows. “His letter to Commodore Lane gave no indication that he had any knowledge. Just that he was assured of a meeting.” He paused for dramatic effect. “In three months! Not even imminent.”

“But if we know where to find the Pirate King, if we are

prepared to rescue the Commodore and take out the Pirate King, then why are we leaving Clark on that ship?” Ollie gestured out over the water. “Plus we have two ships. We could take out the most feared pirate ship in the Caribbean waters here... now.”

Lionel dropped his head and sighed. “Yes. Alright. You’ve made your point.” He looked back up, a determined gaze landing on Ollie. “What do you propose? You have taken them on once before.”

Ollie grinned. “And we lost. By design. They will be far too arrogant when they see us approaching.”

Lionel smirked. “Do you think they will be so blind as to not see the colours of the Royal Navy flying on the ship following us.”

“Well,” Ollie tipped his head in embarrassment. “I guess not. Possibly they will turn and run at the first sign we are chasing them.” He laughed then looked up to the crow’s nest. “Dinah. Anything to report?”

She lowered her telescope and called down. “They have definitely spotted both ships. Looks like they are turning.”

Ollie leapt over the bannister and ran for the wheel. “Emil,” he shouted, “Signal Captain White to follow. We’re taking the pirates and returning his true First Mate to him.”

The battle was over pretty quickly. Chasing down the pirate ship took more time than the fight. Although The Kandor opened fire with its cannons once in range they were swiftly caught and shackled. The naval officers and the privateers boarded and overwhelmed the pirates, tying them up and lining them on their knees on deck. To Lionel it was as if time passed in a blur. Never having experienced anything like it before his mind was in a whirl. A whole gamut of mixed emotions waged in his body as he strode along the line of restrained men. Anticipation, anger, excitement, even euphoric relief as the fear of battle finally left him. “He’s not here,” came a shout from Captain Arrow.

Lionel turned to the pirate closest. “Where is your First Mate?” he demanded. The pirate lifted his eyes, but not his face, from facing the deck. His eyes then flicked around and his mouth opened then closed. “Speak!” he shouted but the man’s lips tightened into a white line. He turned just in time to see Ollie grab another man, actually young boy, by his shirt and lift him up from his kneeling position.

“Where is Clark?” he growled.

“Clark?” The boy looked confused.

“First Mate!”

“Um, sorry... sir... but the First Mate is called...” he paused and gulped, looking around nervously. “Corbin. John Corbin.”

“And where is this John Corbin?” asked Lionel, striding over. “*It must be an alias,*” he thought. The young boy opened his mouth to speak, just as the other man had, and then paused. “Anyone?” Lionel shouted and turned around to look over all the pirates. “Where is John Corbin?”

“Um,” the boy spoke up and Lionel looked back. “He’s there. That’s the First Mate.” The ginger haired, freckled boy pointed at a man kneeling almost opposite. Lionel turned and strode over. All the members of the Justice crew looked on in anticipation.

“Stand up,” Lionel spoke. Oliver appeared at his side.

“Stand up Corbin,” Ollie shouted.

The subject of their scrutiny raised slowly from the deck. It was quite clear that this was not Clark. Lionel spluttered. “But, but...” He took a deep breath and regained his composure. “You are the First Mate?”

“Yes,” came the growled reply.

“Where is your Captain?”

“In his cabin. He hardly ever walks the deck.” Narrow eyes and a sneer peered out at his captors

“Well, then I think we should pay him a visit.” Lionel held out a hand indicating that Corbin should lead the way. The smile

on his face was all pretence, hiding the worry inside. *‘Where is Clark?’*

He followed the limping pirate off the deck and into the cabins. At a sturdy wooden door he raised his hand as if to knock then wavered. Lionel pushed him aside and reached for the handle. Inside he was greeted by the sight of a greying man sat at a wooden desk. The windows behind let in the light and view of the ocean. So focused on his writing was the Captain that he did not raise his head.

“Victory?” came the single word in question, obviously presuming that the First Mate had come with news.

“Yes!” Captain Arrow spoke clearly, beside Lionel. The man looked up in shock. “For us.” Ollie completed the pronouncement. When Corbin was pushed into the cabin by Arthur, stumbling to the floor in an angry growl, the Captain of The Kandor stood slowly.

“So I see,” he murmured.

“Where is the man who was First Mate before him.” Lionel pointed to John Corbin, rising slowly.

The Captain frowned. “Before? This man is not First Mate.” He strode over and gripped John by the neck. “First Mate?” he growled deeply. “What is meant by that? Where is Kal?” Lionel’s heart missed a beat at the name. *‘Clark!’*

“Um, in his cabin Captain sir, where I told you yesterday morning. He is still unwell.” Lionel could see the fear in the man’s eyes. It seemed he was more afraid of his Captain than his captors.

“Kal would never stay in his cabin if the ship needed defending. No matter his health.” It was doubly clear that Kal was Clark after that description from the Captain. “Where is he?” This time the question was shouted but Corbin clamped his mouth shut and refused to say another word.

Ollie raced back to the deck as quickly as possible. “Search every room,” he called out to Victor on the way. Once stood out in the sun again he raised his voice for all to hear. “Whoever can tell me the location of Kal will be given immunity by the King and can accompany us on our eventual journey back to port on the safety of The Justice or The Planet.” He waited for any response. He waited in silence. Lionel appeared at his side.

“It’s no use, Ollie. They will not betray their Pirate code, or their First Mate,” he whispered.

“But which one? Are they trying to protect their current First Mate, or the previous one... Kal?”

When a little movement caught the corner of his eye Ollie turned back to the men, still knelt on deck. The young lad he had shook before was once more on his knees but he raised his head and caught Ollie’s eye. He then shook his head slowly, followed by nodding off to his left. Ollie wasn’t quite sure of the message being relayed but it was a promising sign.

“Victor,” he called and the man appeared at his side. “Did you find anything... anyone?”

“No Captain Arrow.”

“Take them all down to the hold, I’m sure there will be suitable places to... restrain them.” He spoke clearly and then turned away. Just as Victor stepped away he grabbed his arm and drew him close. “Be sure to... forget... to take the young lad.”

Victor nodded and strode off.

Lois rung out her white cotton shift and spread it over the flat rock beside the fresh water spring. Dressed now only in small, thin white undergarments she turned away from the shaded pool just at the edge of the palm trees and gazed out over the bright sandy beach. Sunlight twinkled off the sea like sparkles of magic and she smiled. It was beautiful and peaceful here on their island. Yes she was calling it ‘their’ island after only two days. Somehow telling Clark the truth and admitting to her worry over her father had actually helped her to come to terms with the

current situation. After Clark had scoured the island and found no sign of it being on a trade route it became clear that they were not likely to be found. Crying into Clark’s arm had been extremely comforting and she’d soon accepted the inevitability of her life from now on.

It had also been easy to accept Kal’s new name. Or should that be ‘old’ name: Clark! As she got to know the young naval officer rather than the pirate quartermaster she realised that Clark was a much more appropriate name. ‘Kal’ seemed almost lacking in emotion and compassion in comparison to the sound of ‘Clark’ on her lips. Clark was so much more than Kal. The glimpses of kindness, compassion, duty, morals, friendship she’d seen hiding under the cover of Kal were now on display for her to see in all their fullness and she finally realised that what she’d felt for Kal had not been love, no matter how much she’d thought it was. Compared with how her heart leapt at the sight of Clark now, the nerves she’d been constantly assailed by back on board ship were as an acorn to an oak tree.

A sound to her right had her turning to see Clark emerge from the tree line. *O yes*, she thought to herself. *‘My tiny acorn has definitely grown into a strong oak tree.’* He strode out into the direct sunlight and let the heat warm his bare chest. *‘Yes, my feelings for Kal are not ‘different’ to my feelings for Clark. The oak tree cannot grow without someone planting the acorn. They are effectively the same plant. But one is older, stronger, mightier than the other. The oak tree is mature and deeply rooted.’*

Lois pondered more on the metaphor of her feelings for Clark as an oak tree as she strode over to him. He turned and his gaze swept her up and down. Perhaps, some time in the past, such blatant admiration of her barely covered body would have set her blushing. That, or verbally flaying, but no more. At least not with Clark.

“Lois!” he spoke, his voice low and husky.

“Did you collect any more fruit?” she asked, attempting to engage him in light conversation.

“Yes, we have a nice variety now.” His eye didn’t meet hers, they were stuck at chest height.

“Good.” She let her voice trail off. Her heart began to race, breathing increasing to meet the demand. Clark’s eyes darkened as he watched her chest rise and fall.

He blinked and shook his head then finally raised his gaze to meet hers. “I,” he paused, as if losing his thoughts. “I think we should consider building a more sturdy shelter.” His eyes looked away for a moment, as if afraid to say his true meaning. He needn’t have worried. Lois knew that this was now their home. She lifted up one hand and brought it to his cheek. He turned into it and met her eyes once more.

“Clark, we need a home. We cannot sleep under a few palm branches every night for the rest of our lives.” She smiled at him, knowing that there was pain and regret showing in her eyes, but also trying to convey her contentment with the lot that fate had given them. “I know it will take a while, but I agree. We should build... our home.”

Clark searched Lois’ eyes for the true depth of meaning he hoped was in her words. He knew that he wanted ‘forever’. When she spoke of a home his heart filled with joy. “Our home.” He repeated back to her. When she smiled, so tenderly, he dipped his head to touch those lips. Her palms flattened against his chest, fingers splaying out. She inched them up and over his shoulders. Clark let his tongue lightly trail over her lips and then he ended the kiss. His eyes opened and he moved his face away ever so slightly. He could see her eyes still closed, face tipped up, lips parted slightly. Her hands finally met at the back of his neck. She tightened and pulled him back.

Clark drew his arms around her body. The white undergarments she wore felt soft against his fingers but they were in the way. He kissed her lips, slowly, as his fingers worked their

way under her top. He trailed lazy circles up her back as he nipped her bottom lip gently.

Lois let her fingers slide into Clark's thick hair. When his teeth grazed her lips she sighed. A feeling of warmth, belonging and contentment flooded her body. She drew her hands round until her palms cupped his cheeks. His arms tightened and drew her into his solid embrace. When she felt the gentle prompting from Clark she allowed him to lower her to the ground.

The sand was warm and moulded to her body. Opening her eyes she saw Clark settle himself above her. Their eyes met and she smiled at him. His gaze was questioning for a moment. He seemed to be searching her features for something, his eyes intense. The light brush of a fingertip swept across her cheek.

"Lois. I love you." He exhaled gently.

Her heart soared. She had hoped beyond hope that his feelings mirrored hers. It was clear that he desired her, that he cared in some manner, but without being marooned on an island with no hope of rescue, would he have been interested any further than only the ship-board affair? A constant feeling of abandonment which had dogged her since her mother and baby sister had been taken from this life had left her concerned that Clark might similarly leave her. Yet the emotion in his eyes, the complete truth shining out, fulfilled all her dreams for the future. She never doubted his sincerity, nor presumed that he was 'feeling' this way *only* because of their circumstances.

"I love you too," she replied, a catch in her voice causing it to crack. "Clark, I love you too," she repeated stronger as she stroked her fingers over his cheek.

His mouth descended and took her so very lightly she could only just feel it. She sighed in contentment as he gave her kiss after kiss, never deepening them, just repeating and repeating the loving action. A hand began to trail up her ribs. She felt his fingers circling round and round, mesmerising her. Lois found herself mimicking the action along his back, both hands stroking fingertips gently up his spine and then along his shoulders.

Clark remembered the many times they had done this on board ship. Also the morning they had been marooned. Somehow there had always been something frantic about it, although to varying degrees. This time he wanted to express himself fully. He wanted her to know how much he loved her, desired her, cherished her. The way she stood up to John, flirted with the Captain, tutored the cabin boy. How could he not love such a woman? It was an impossibility.

So he kept the pace slow. He began to kiss his way down her body. Pausing for a minute at the crook of her neck he nipped and sucked, gently. Lois took in a deep breath and held it as Clark began to cover her stomach with his feather-lips. His hands were now on her waist, thumbs circling the skin, made sensitive by his loving ministrations. "Oh, Clark," she breathed out. "Clark!" She let her eyes drift closed and her head rested back into the sand.

"Lois," he murmured back. "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever know". His hands travelled lower, skimming her shapely hips, dragging down the other tiny piece of underwear that seemed almost pointless on this deserted island. As he revealed her bottom he cupped it with both hands. She raised her hips involuntarily. It was an unspoken invitation. One that Clark was unable to resist. He dragged the cotton garment off and tossed it away then began to kiss his way back up her body. "Siren of the sea. I've heard your song and am captured."

Lois giggled in delight. At her neck, he buried his head once more. He settled his body back over her, chest to chest, hips to hips. "Are you saying that I've... oh Clark!" she paused when he nipped her shoulder gently. "Are you saying that I've lured you to your doom, sailor?"

"Oh yes." His mouth reached hers and dived down. "This is my glorious doom. I love you," he whispered. "Forever."

"Clark, I'm yours, forever," she replied. "I love you."

When the insistent rhythm, calling them to abandon themselves to each other fully, could no longer be denied they let go, then soared on their love for each other until they crashed back into the sand, as the waves crashed on the shore.

Shackled in the hold, as if he were only a lowly swabby, Captain Zor El looked around at all his crew, similarly restrained. What had happened? Kal would never have lost a fight, even against two ships in alliance. Or, if he weighed the situation circumspectly, he would never have engaged them at all. The situation confirmed to Zor El the rightness of his decision to make Kal First Mate, and to distance himself from Corbin.

Kal's presence in his life over the last few months had changed so much. The pain which had pierced his heart when he first saw the medallion around Kal's neck was still with him to this day. The duel edged sword of knowing that he had contributed to his own family's slaughter, of Kal's family's slaughter, along with the joy of finding family still alive... it tortured him every day. Each morning he wrote out the many confessions of his life, sometimes with the desire to give them to Kal, sometimes just to unburden himself. Yet he couldn't bring himself to give them over and he destroyed them in the consuming, purifying fire instead.

Finding his... nephew, yes he could say it... had restored some of his humanity and he could see the evil all around him once more. The evil that he had let overtake his soul, eat away at his compassion, his kindness... his love. He saw this evil particularly in Corbin. He even felt it rear up inside himself regularly still. It was difficult to rid oneself of such ingrained ways of living.

As he regarded Corbin, sat directly opposite, he felt that ugliness rise up once more. Hatred, tempered by worry for his nephew, led to a growling deep in his throat. "Corbin?" he asked. John looked up in shock. Everyone had been silent for hours. "What happened? Tell me the truth. Where is Kal, for I know he is not aboard the ship."

Corbin shifted on the floor. He looked away and Zor El saw him swallow before looking back, a clear sign of dissembling if he ever saw it.

"I caught him stealing from the hold. He'd been falsifying the inventory reports to cover it. He'd even enlisted the help of Miss Lois, corrupting her." He coughed and looked away again. "I thought it my duty to free you from this braggart. He was marooned yesterday at dawn." Corbin returned his gaze to Zor El and his spine stiffened in resolve. "He did not deserve to serve on this ship, and most certainly not in the position of responsibility you had so generously trusted him with." His face softened for his next words but his eyes betrayed him, as they did not similarly soften. "You must feel so betrayed Captain."

"I do," he spoke bluntly. Reaching into his boot he felt around till his fingers touched metal. He carefully worked the item up and out into his hand. "I really do," he reiterated, then aimed the pistol at Corbin and pulled the trigger.

Chapter 12: Confrontation

Zor El stood and yanked at the chain round his hands. The metal links entering into the wood at the side of the cell held fast. Hearing the naval guard come running he knew he would have to work fast, and he knew that the wood here was weak. "Up men," he called. The six pirates currently sharing the same cell as him struggled to their feet and all took hold of the Captain's chains. "One, two, three," he called and then they all pulled. He stumbled back when the pin pulled free from the wooden wall, but the surrounding men steadied him by their close presence. Zor El turned and strode to the cell door just as the guard arrived to see what had caused the gun shot noise. Reaching through the bars he grabbed the surprised officer with one hand and stuck the pistol

in his side with the other. “Don’t move,” he whispered ominously.

Looking around Zor El gestured to Jose with his head and the man came to the bars then began to rifle around in the jailor’s pockets. A jangling sound announced the presence of the keys and these were soon inserted in the lock.

The door swung open and the seven pirates exited. Zor El now held the pistol aloft and aimed at the naval officer from a distance while ushering him back into the cell. Once the door was locked Zor El discarded the now useless one-shot pistol. The Naval man, peering through the open bars of his cell, gasped in shock. “I used up the only shot on him,” Zor El explained, motioning to the lifeless body occupying the cell with the officer. He turned away and then began the work of freeing the rest of his crew.

“Captain, what is the plan?” asked Jose.

“We take back the ship, then we head for Isla de Muerta to depose the Pirate King. It’s long past time he paid for his betrayals.”

“But... Kal,” protested Kenny.

“He’s safer where he is. But, rest assured, I will be back for him once this is all done.”

“Back for him?” Jose questioned the meaning. “You don’t really believe Corbin do you? I know he rallied most of the crew to his side yesterday morning but we soon realised our mistake.”

“No. I know exactly who is the most trustworthy member of our crew, and I will return to rescue him and put him in his rightful spot once Zod is... removed.” Zor El looked around at his assembled crew. “But first, we take the deck. Follow me.”

Jimmy listened intently, his eyes flicking between each speaker, his heart pounding. How could they even be debating this? Kal was marooned along with Miss Lois. Although they kept calling him Clark.

“We can’t leave him there. Jimmy here has told us exactly where they are. We must go and get him.”

“Zod is our priority,” relied the tall, gaunt grey-haired man.

“With all due respect, Governor,” the green clad Captain Arrow replied, “the time taken to rescue him would be inconsequential. Plus he may be privy to more information we need. He has been working on this for months.”

“We have three ships at our call now, there will never be a better time than this.”

“I cannot believe you would abandon him there.” The younger man’s voice rose. “I’ll take the Justice, we’ll catch up after.”

“No, we need all three ships.”

“You are not in command of the Justice, Governor. I *will* leave to collect Clark with or without your permission.”

“No you will not, but not because of who is in command, rather because I know that you see the necessity of us all staying together.” He paused. “I know you recognise the truth of our strategy and your conscience will lead you in no other direction except the one that leads to Zod.”

“Sir.” Jimmy finally decided to speak up. After giving over all the information he had, only silence had been required of him. “Please. We can’t leave ‘em there. What if there’s no food to be found? Kal was kind to me... a friend. He got me a good job as cabin boy and protected me. And Miss Lois, she was wonderful. She taught me to read. I’m real good now. I can’t leave ‘em. Please?”

Both men turned to study him and then Captain Arrow turned to look at the Governor, challenging him. It seemed he was about to speak when a commotion outside the door caught their attention.

The cabin door burst open and Arthur stumbled in, dripping wet. “Captain. Zor El has taken back the ship. He threw me and

the officers overboard. He’s sailing off with the Kandor. I swam over as fast as I was able but the other men are still in the sea.

Everyone hurried back to the deck to see the pirate ship sailing off and the men in the sea slowly heading for The Planet and rescue.

“Well,” spoke the Captain. “We are only two. Where is your strategy now? What do you suggest Governor?”

“You rescue Clark, we’ll retake the Kandor. After that we both head for Isla de Muerta and rendezvous just outside the Phantom Zone.” The Governor set off to return to The Planet and organise a chase while Ollie ran directly for the wheel, calling Jimmy to come with him.

Anticipation quickened his pulse. “Jimmy, stay with Victor here at the wheel as much as you can. Relate to him what you told us of the island and let him know when you see anything familiar.”

Jimmy nodded. He set his face out to the ocean and hoped desperately that he could lead them back to Kal. At best it would take them a day. He prayed for great favour. The dark skinned man at the wheel turned and spoke.

“Jimmy is it? I’m Victor. Hopefully you can lead us to Clark within just a day.” He smiled and Jimmy smiled back. Somehow he knew that he’d just become a crew member of The Justice.

The knock at the door, though no different to most other knocks, was somehow ominous, resonating through the whole house. Tess looked up from her papers on her desk and Chloe looked over. Their eyes met and they both rose at once. Exiting the study they walked along the upstairs corridor and stopped to look over the balcony and down the staircase. They watched as Gabe crossed the hallway and opened the door.

“I have a message from the dock for Miss Luthor,” came the breathless voice. Tess immediately began descending the stairs and Gabe opened the door wider, allowing entrance to the messenger.

“What? What is the message?” she demanded, half way down the stairs and increasing her speed.

“The Governor returns. The Cadmus has been sighted.”

“Thank you,” she replied. Gabe immediately reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin.

“Good boy, now be on your way.” He pressed the coin into the boy’s hand. A grin lit up the young face and the lad turned on his heels, then began racing away, gripping the coin tightly.

Once the door was closed everyone dropped the last vestige of pretence and began sprinting.

Jimmy picked up the telescope and brought it to his right eye, he’d learnt this new skill over the last day, and set the focus correctly almost immediately. As he swung his head around he noticed a blur on the ocean. Stopping and returning to that patch he refocused and then almost dropped the telescope. As he fumbled with it in his hands he started sprinting across the deck. A day had passed since he’d been welcomed on board. A day in which he’d familiarised himself with every part of the ship.

“Victor,” he called as he descended the steps from the bow. “Starboard. Look starboard. It’s there. Rock shaped like an ‘orser ead.” He continued on and arrived at the Captain’s cabin in under a minute. He knocked on the door and waited.

“Jimmy, what is it?” came Ollie’s question when he opened the door.

“I’ve seen it. Were ‘ere,” he panted. “I recognise th’ strange rocks at th’ edge of th’ island.”

“Fantastic. Thanks Jimmy.” Ollie strode out of his cabin and up onto deck.

Lois was running, faster than ever before since they’d been marooned on the island. She needed to get away, escape... before

he...

Clark grabbed her from behind, his arm snaking round her waist, and then both tumbled to the sand. Struggling to crawl out of his tight embrace she wriggled against him. He only held her tighter and manoeuvred her round to be facing him. Her back settled into the sun-warmed sand and Clark brought himself directly over her.

"No," she squealed as his hands reached out for her chest. "Please no!" She began her desperate attempt to flee again when his fingers reached round and began to tickle under her arms. "Clark, stop." This was what she'd been running from. "No." He increased the pressure "Please, ha ha." The laugh began to bubble up in her. She increased her wriggling, trying to escape his heavy body draped over her. "Aaargh, ha ha ha ha." She twisted around, trying to turn over. He held her tightly, grinning in pure joy.

A sudden large wave crashed over the top of them and they separated, spluttering. Standing, Lois glanced over at Clark, his wet breeches pulling low on his hips. A quick look at her own clothes revealed a different problem, the cotton clinging to her body, quite see-through.

"Lois!" his eyes darkened. She knew that their flirtatious chase through the sand and water had been leading to this eventuality, but now that it was here her heart quickened, as it always did at Clark's attentions. He stepped forwards, a hand reaching up to her face. His thumb brushed her cheek and his head lowered. Lois' eyes flickered closed and she parted her lips. Her breath was a sigh on her lips, waiting for that gentle pressure. When it never came she opened her eyes. Clark's head was still lowered, his hand on her cheek, but his face had turned to the sea. She watched as his mouth dropped open slowly and she turned to follow his gaze.

As her eyes adjusted and began to pick out the shape of a ship on the horizon, Clark dropped his hand and stood up straighter, looking out into the distance. Lois felt her heartbeat rising: her chest was heaving with the recent exertion. After a minute staring at the sight of possible rescue they both turned back to each other. No words were spoken. They gazed into each other eyes. Clark stepped forwards, eyes sparkling with unshed tears, and wrinkled brow expressing his regret. She felt exactly the same. Their eternity together... in paradise... was at an end.

Clark dipped his head and brushed her lips so lightly that she barely felt it. As he pulled back she read the apology in his face. *'I'm sorry too, Clark,'* she thought. *'But there's no changing the fact that we've been rescued.'* It seemed he read her thoughts because his face changed into steely determination and he looked up and over her shoulder. She knew what he was looking at and she nodded.

Immediately they both set off running to the end of the beach. Clark made it to the fire first and he reached in with a long branch waiting till it lit. He then turned and pushed it right into the centre of large, waiting bonfire. Lois arrived soon after and added another. Very soon the fire stretched out into the sky, alerting the passing ship to their circumstances.

Lionel strode up onto the deck, returning from his enlightening conversation with Captain Zor El. The recapture of The Kandor had gone not quite as smoothly this time. The Captain had been on deck and rousing his crew most valiantly. It was as if he had new purpose, new energy. Eventually the Planet had been successful, and this time Lionel had spoken directly with Zor El about his plans rather than locking him up. They had come to an agreement, both being of the belief that Zod needed to be disposed of. A bargain had been struck and Zor El was allowed his ship and crew, if he would voluntarily join with The Planet in its assault on Isla de Muerta.

The conversation which flowed between them was both startling and intriguing. Zor El freely spoke of his history with

Zod, of his sibling relationship to the last Governor of Port Krypton, of the discovery of his nephew Kal, but most importantly of his desire to take revenge on Zod for tricking him into being involved in the slaughter of his own family: brother, wife and daughter. Lionel grabbed onto this desire as his leverage and now both ships were poised to head for the edge of The Phantom Zone where they would wait for The Justice to arrive. Then the three ships would attempt to cross the dangerous section of ocean littered with destroyed ships, jagged rocks, shallow water, barely submerged islands and the Pirate King's personal guard ship, The Phantom.

Barely ten minutes after the messenger had arrived Tess was waiting on the dock, Chloe by her side. Gabe had run to the Constable, although he should have already received the same message, via another runner, from the guard stationed at the harbour. Excitement and worry coursed through her body. This moment had been planned for a week, since her father had left with The Justice, the very same day he had been found, although the final arrangements had only been completed for two days. A visit to the local Constable by the recently 'resurrected' Governor on that day, along with the proof which Tess, Chloe and Gabe had found the week before, had begun the preparations for the downfall of Governor Lex and the return of Governor Lionel.

Tess thanked the Lord once more for the safe return of her father, along with the fortuitous circumstance that Lex was still away. His intended two day journey, which he left on two weeks ago, had been extended, and Tess was most grateful. She doubted that her father would have been found if Lex had returned before last Sunday. And there would have been little time to prepare this... assault... if he'd returned earlier.

The anticipation was almost too much for Tess but her ever faithful maid calmed her. "Miss Luthor, do not be concerned at your actions today. Although Lex is your brother he has shown himself to be enemy rather than family."

Tess smiled and sighed. Somehow Chloe had seen what she had missed. Much of her nervous disposition came from the worry that she was betraying family. But Chloe was correct. Lex was not family. Her family was her father. Chloe and Gabe. And possibly even that rogue: Oliver.

As the ship drew closer she glanced around looking for sign of Constable Jones, but found none. That was to be expected. If a contingent of guards was spotted from on board ship it may turn away and not dock at all. Lex needed to feel secure in returning home.

The tension in Tess's body was causing cramps in her legs by the time the ship drew in and dropped anchor. Lex was the first to disembark, aiming directly for her. The smile on his face was as fake as his clam to the Governorship but Tess returned it all the same.

"Sister, dear. I'm so glad that you would come to welcome me home."

"I have been eagerly awaiting your return, brother," she replied in complete honesty.

"Really?" he inquired, suspicion now clear in his voice.

-

"Yes." Tess took a quick look around and saw Constable Jones stride out along the dock. She smiled then turned back to Lex. "Yes, indeed I have waited on tenterhooks for this moment."

Jones appeared at her side and immediately spoke. "Lex Luthor, you are charged with kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment and conspiring with pirates. You will accompany me to the..."

"What?" he interrupted. "Tess, what is this madness?"

"You are no longer Governor, Lex. That position had been returned to its rightful owner."

"Rightful owner?" Lex raised his eyebrows. "You?" he sneered.

“No, Lex. Father.”

“Father is dead, sister dear. Or don’t you remember all those months you wore black.” He betrayed no sign of worry at all.

“I remember them perfectly, Lex.” She narrowed her eyes and spat her words out. “Needless. Months of needless grief.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” Lex laughed, although it seemed somehow strained.

“If you fight this, Lex, there will be bloodshed. The Constable has guards stationed all around the harbour and your ‘bought and paid for’ soldiers back at the mansion have been dismissed. Oh, and your crew on board is currently being restrained as we speak. Don’t turn this into a farce. If you do, the only one who will lose out will be you. Your reputation, your dignity will all suffer greatly. As it is, scandal can be concealed and no-one need ever know of your evil schemes. But if you resist then everyone will learn of the true man who had been ruling Port Metropolis for the last year. And rather than a simple, comfortable house arrest I will ask the Constable to place you in the same cell as you have kept father for all that time.”

Lex’s face paled. At the mention of her father’s jail cell he’d finally realised that Tess did know the truth. He took a deep breath and turned back to his ship only to see armed men at the top of the gang plank preventing any of Lex’s men from coming to his aid. He turned back and pulled his back straight, holding his chin in the air.

“So, what’s it to be Mr Luthor?” asked the Constable.

He avoided directly answering the question, just swiped his arm out majestically and indicated his acquiescence. “Lead on Constable.”

Clark climbed the ladder and jumped over the rails onto deck. He was immediately assaulted by the crew members; handshakes, shouts of encouragement and strong pats on the back. He brushed them aside, even ignoring the welcome from Ollie, to turn back and reach over the side. He grasped Lois’ hand and pulled her up. Once she was safely in his arms he turned to greet their saviours.

“So... Clark. Who is this lovely lady?” came the charming voice of the Captain.

“This would be Lois Lane.” He grinned down at her, love shining from his eyes. “The Commodore’s daughter.”

Clark heard Ollie’s shocked intake of breath as he looked back up. “This is the missing daughter?”

“Missing daughter?” Clark questioned, his brow furrowing.

“She disappeared soon after the Commodore was kidnapped. Chloe feared the worst.” Ollie was staring, wide-eyed, at the woman tucked under Clark’s arm. He tightened his hold a little.

“Chloe is my cousin, Clark. She works at the Governor’s mansion. We only knew each other for a short period before... well, you know... but we became fast friends in that time.” Lois dropped her gaze to the planks of the deck. “I cannot believe I didn’t think to tell her what I was doing before I left Port Metropolis. She must have been so distraught.”

“Miss Lane,” Ollie spoke. “She most definitely was, but she has not been idle in your time away. She has assisted Miss Luthor in returning the rightful man to the position of Governor. And I believe that when we can return you home she will be most relieved.”

Clark released his hold on Lois and stepped up to Ollie. “What do you mean, rightful man? Who is Governor? What has happened to Lex?”

“Well.” Ollie lifted a hand and scratched at his small blonde beard. He turned and began to pace. “It’s possible that Lex has been arrested by now. When we left port a week ago plans were being made. In regards to the rightful Governor... that would be Lionel.”

“But Lionel is dead,” Clark growled.

“Clark. A lot has happened this last month.” He paused and

motioned for them to follow him. Setting off for his cabin he continued. “It seems that Lex has been in league with the Pirate King. He had his father imprisoned and convinced everyone Lionel was dead. When I returned to Port Metropolis with your communications — your mother and father were most pleased and send their love — I discovered that Tess and Chloe had uncovered Lex’s plots and were considering what their next move should be. While we discussed and contemplated this, along with your letters, we came across a message sent by Lionel. He’d scratched a symbol on a plate which had made its way to the kitchen. When we went searching we found him in the dungeons under the mansion.” Ollie reached the door to his office and opened it. Clark, Lois, Arthur, Jimmy and Bart entered after him. “Lionel told us the history of the Pirate King which resulted in us realising where he probably resided and we immediately set off to find you once more. This was a little over a week ago.”

Clark sat himself down in the cabin and Lois took a seat next to him.

“Has there been any word on my father?” Lois asked.

“No. I’m sorry Miss Lane. Lex purposefully sabotaged the rescue efforts, but we have put them back on track. Currently we have The Planet chasing after The Kandor. In fact, I’m hoping they are already re-captured.”

Clark’s head shot up and the mention of his naval ship. “The Planet. And what do you mean ‘re-capture’?” It was only then that Clark finally noticed Jimmy standing quietly in the corner. “Jimmy? Wha... how did you get on board The Justice?”

“Kal, I... uh, sorry... Clark. The Kandor was captured yesterday by The Justice and The Planet. I, uh, gave Captain Arrow ‘ere directions to where you’d been marooned. Um. They let me on board. I’m not a pirate no more.” He grinned shyly. Lois stood from her position next to Clark and went over to Jimmy.

“Jimmy. I’m so glad to see you off that ship. You deserved better than life as a pirate.” She smiled, a tear glistening in her eye. “So glad.”

Ollie finally sat down at his desk and continued the story Jimmy had begun. “Somehow Captain Zor El escaped his bonds and he and his men took back the ship. I’d left Arthur in command along with a group of sailors from The Planet but they were all tossed overboard and the ship sailed off. Lionel took The Planet to try and re-take The Kandor and we, with assistance from Mr Olsen here, came searching for you.”

“Ollie. You said you knew where the Pirate King was based.” Ollie nodded. “Then we must head there now.” Clark’s voice was like steel. Determination rolled from him into the room. “He has Lois’ father and he holds these waters in fear. He must be taken.”

“We are to rendezvous with The Planet, and hopefully The Kandor, on the edge of the Phantom Zone. It should take us a little over a day. From there we mean to take Isla de Muerta and the Pirate King.” Ollie turned to look at Lois. “Within two days, Miss Lane, I hope we can reunite you with your father.”

It was a little less than two day later when The Kandor led the ships through the narrows, shallows and dangers of the Phantom Zone. Zor El personally took the wheel and The Planet followed directly behind, not straying from the path Zor El was showing by even an inch. The Justice completed the line. After a pre-arranged signal from Zor El, Captain White and Captain Arrow knew they were in freer waters. Only one sea-bound obstacle remained: The Phantom.

With three ships battling against the Pirate King’s personal ship, a ship that hadn’t actually seen battle in many years due to the dangers of the Zone keeping non-pirate ships out, the conflict was soon over. The ship left sinking, pirates abandoning it to leap into the water, the three allied crews pulled into the harbour. Landing parties were ready and streamed down the ramps

immediately, meeting no resistance at all on land. Zor El led his enthusiastic and angered crew. His open attitude and sharing of his history had reaffirmed all their loyalties, especially upon reflection of how Corbin had manipulated them regarding Kal, a man each pirate had respected. Although assaulting their own headquarters, not a single man had any qualms about fighting fellow pirates.

Lieutenant Lombard led the Planet's men. His military orders and shouts kept them moving in precise formation and coordinated attack.

Clark led the brightly coloured crew of The Justice. Although Ollie ran by his side there seemed to be an unspoken understanding that this was all part of Clark's mission from the Commodore and so he led.

The Pirate King's residence was at the very edge of the harbour. The open gardens led straight to a large courtyard. There was no sign of defence until the men all rushed into the courtyard. Out from behind the pillars, statues and other large ornaments stepped men dressed completely in black, each one holding out his cutlass in obvious threat. The combined forces for The Kandor, Planet and Justice immediately ran into battle, swords swinging and clashing.

Clark was holding his position easily when he found himself fighting next to Zor El. He felt a little unsure and wary, not knowing if Zor El was privy to the truth of his deception. When he spoke Clark got his answer.

"Kal, my boy. Good to see you." He stopped to swipe at an attacker. "When I heard of Corbin's treachery I was most distressed. Be assured he is no longer a crew member."

Clark lunged and stumbled, pushing a pirate away. *'He called me Kal. He doesn't know that I'm Clark, that I deceived him.'* "You marooned him?" Clark guessed. A fitting punishment and turnabout.

"No. I shot him."

Clark choked. "What?"

Zor El stopped his fighting when there was a lull and he turned. "Kal. We are pirates. Why would that shock you?" Zor El's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "No matter," he shook his head. "We are here for Zor El. Come, let's leave these men to keep the forces at bay while we head for the main rooms." He turned and sprinted off, pushing through the fighting. Clark immediately set off after him.

"Zor El. Wait," he called. Under an archway and round a corner Clark found himself finally inside the mansion. Zor El was ahead and disappearing round the next turn.

"Come on Kal. I mean to take my revenge this day."

"No. Zor El. There are enough of us..." he chased after the older man "... we could capture him. He will face trial." Clark knew he'd been given the task of eliminating the Pirate King many months ago, and he had come to accept that, but the fortuitous circumstances gave him an opportunity to do this correctly... morally.

As he turned the corner he saw that Zor El had encountered resistance. He was tackling three of Zor El's men and was stumbling to the floor. Clark raced up and immediately slammed into one of the pirates. As he took on the other two, Zor El made it back onto his feet.

"Kal. I always suspected..." He paused and Clark wondered why he wasn't joining back in the fight. Zor El took a step back: away from the fray. Clark whipped his sword around faster and faster. "You are too good to be a pirate. I wondered..." He stepped again. "I cannot have you stopping me." Clark turned away from his attackers for a moment to see the look of pure anger on Zor El's face.

"No. Zor El," Clark turned back in time to step away from another attack. The first pirate, which had tumbled to the floor, was now stood once more. "Help me. We'll go to Zor El together."

Clark raised his voice as the man ran off. "Zor El. NO!"

He disappeared out of sight leaving Clark to fight for his life. A couple of swipes to his arms and chest had drawn blood. He could also taste it in his mouth. Spots swam before his eyes but he fought on.

Zor El knew his way around this building completely. He'd grown up here. He'd worked here, for his brother. And he'd paid tribute to the Pirate King here on many occasions. Well, today, he'd have his revenge here. After leaving Kal to struggle with the pirates, which caused a little stab of pain, but he was sure that Kal would cope, he headed straight for the throne room.

The wooden doors now stood in front of him. They were closed. Was Zor El behind them, protected from the fighting? Were there more guards? "It matters not!" he muttered to himself and pushed at the doors. They swung open to reveal a spacious room with chairs down either side. Zor El strode in and his boots struck the marble floor as he walked down the centre to the dais complete with table and ornate chairs at the far end.

The man seated in the main chair rose slowly and his hand reached out. Guards stationed around the room stepped forward but they stopped at the flick of his wrist. Zor El continued on his journey. He knew Zor El. He was sure that he was safe... for now. Zor El would want to play the victor before the fight even began.

"Zor El. Why have you come two months early?" Zor El's deep voice resonated around.

"I am not here to bring tribute, Zor El!" he replied. Stopping as he approached the Pirate King, Zor El rested his wrist on the pommel of his sword swinging at his side. "I'm here..." he paused and looked around taking stock of the situation before carrying on. There were only seven guards. Not good odds in his favour, but much better than they could have been. *'It's worth it,'* he thought to himself before speaking again. "I'm here... for revenge."

"Revenge. Well, that's an interesting proposition. Who's revenge... on whom?" Zor El knew that Zor El could hardly be unaware of what was happening in his courtyard. He was obviously playing games.

"My revenge. On you." He stood up straighter, but held off from attack. "It is far past time that you paid for your betrayals."

"My betrayals," Zor El choked out on an unbelieving laugh. "I think your memory is failing, old friend. If I recall, it was *you* who betrayed *your* family." Zor El stepped down from the raised platform and set his piercing gaze on Zor El. "It was *you* who turned to piracy and left your brother. Left your wife. It was *you* who led the attack on Governor's ship." He began to pace forward, his face menacing.

"You have played on my guilt for too long, Zor El. I know my part. I know what part I *am* to blame for. But I will no longer let *you* live without judgement. You are the one who led the attack. You schemed to take over from my brother. You slaughtered everyone on board. You returned home to cause more slaughter." Zor El gritted his teeth and took in a deep breath. "My guilt is dealt with. Oh, I'm not saying that I'm forgiven, but I have accepted my role and it was of prideful, greedy, fool. You deceived me; tricked me into a situation I would not have chosen if I'd known who was on board."

Zor El smiled and laughed. "Zor El. You chose to be a pirate. Why complain that you ended up in morally murky waters?"

"Murky! They were black." He screamed. "Well no more. Now they will run red... with your blood." Zor El grabbed his sword and unsheathed it. Zor El mirrored his action and then they faced each other.

Out of the very corner of his peripheral vision Clark saw a flash of red and turned in shock. "Lois!" he choked out.

She ran past him, red jacket standing out brightly, and struck

one of the pirates. Clark took advantage of the change and kicked out at another of the men. From behind came the sound of more footsteps and then Governor Luthor ran into the fray. The three of them, even with the bone thin body of the Governor, soon overpowered the small group of pirates leaving their victims unconscious on the floor.

Clark turned to Lois. Their eyes met and she faced him openly, knowing he would be angry to see her in the fighting. “What are you doing here?” he growled. “I thought we agreed you’d stay on The Justice.”

“No. You ‘said’ that I should stay on board. I pretended to agree. I knew if I argued that you’d find some way to *keep* me on board, so I agreed, knowing I’d be able to follow on shortly after you left without problem.”

“Lois,” Clark’s voice deepened even further.

“Clark, my father is somewhere here. If he’s even still alive. I need to do something.” The pleading and determination in her voice broke his anger and he nodded.

“Stay close to me.” He grabbed her hand.

“I mean to,” she replied.

Clark set off down the corridor following after Zor El. The man was mad and bent on utter revenge. Clark knew he needed to catch up as quickly as possible and hopefully quell the old man’s anger. But even more importantly, Zod was not likely to be alone, wherever he was, and Zor El could not take him on alone, either. Clark meant to stand by his Pirate Captain’s side while hopefully bringing him back to sanity.

As Clark, Lois and the Governor raced down the corridors the sound of clashing swords grew louder. Two voices grunted in pain and exhaustion. Clark sped round the final corner to see a large set of double doors open wide, revealing what seemed to be a throne room. He took in the complete scene in just a moment, noticing firstly the two old pirates locked in their combat in the centre of the room. Guards, obviously loyal to Zod, watched on. Possibly they were fully confident of their master’s prowess, or more likely Zod had ordered them to stay back, sure of his own.

As the three of them passed the threshold to the room, they were noticed by the guards. They were under no misconception as to their ability to engage any *new* enemies and so Clark immediately let go of Lois’ hand and raised his sword in readiness. He felt Lois do the same. Convincing Zor El that Zod could be captured would be fruitless now. They were all fighting for their lives, unless by some providence the rest of the allied crews came along within the next few minutes.

As the seven guards attacked, Clark attempted to take the bulk of them on himself. Governor Luthor was in no shape to fight, although he seemed determined to take part, and Lois... Clark could not bear the thought of something happening to her. He was determined that she would be safe. Clark pierced the side of two guards in the first minutes of the fight. Lois stumbled to the floor at his right but immediately clambered back up protecting herself with her sword held defensively above her head. Clark turned and swiped across the back of Lois’ attacker. He yelled in shock and tried to swipe back. Lois stood once more and together they took out the guard, leaving him bleeding from slashes on his chest and arms while the first two struggled back to their feet.

“I see your backup has arrived,” Clark heard coming from the other conflict. “Pity they can’t help you,” Zod laughed, “as my guards are keeping them busy.”

Zor El growled and lunged forward. The battle was tiring him. It needed to be finished soon. “It seems your guards are steadily being defeated, Zod,” he taunted back.

“Ah, but I’ll be done with you by the time they are free to assist you, Zor El.” He deftly sidestepped and ducked to avoid another slash. “You see I am the better swordsman here. I must admit,” he grinned and struck out with his cutlass, “I did wonder,

for a moment, when you arrived...” He swung round and slashed Zor El across the shoulder. “It has been a while since my last... battle. But it seems my worry was pointless. This will all be over in only four more strikes.”

Zor El screamed out and jumped at Zod. “Do not be so confident. You speak the truth about your lack of... recent practice. And it is *quite obvious*.” He managed to nick Zod’s neck with a high swipe. A very small trickle of blood made its way down the Pirate King’s collar.

“Your final lucky shot Zor El,” came Zod’s voice, now low and sinister. He took a step back then a deep breath in. Lifting one arm he then strode forward, skipped to the side then swiped under Zor El’s arm. Zor El cried out and stumbled. Zod turned and then pierced the other pirate’s ribs from behind with a dagger in his other hand. Blood gushed out and over Zod’s hand. Zor El fell to his knees.

Clark, still battling with the final four guards, obviously the more experienced fighters, shouted out. “NO!” He attempted to push through the men to rush to his Captain but they punched at him and he felt a sword slash his stomach, stinging badly. He watched as Zor El’s hand came out to break his fall. His sword clattered beside him. Zod stepped back, a triumphant look on his face. Zor El tried to feel round for the dagger but it was out of reach. He coughed and spat out the blood rushing into his lungs. One final push with his hand braced on the floor brought him almost upright again. He slid his hand inside his jacket. Zod began to walk around.

“So, you came here, bent on revenge. Managed to convince your crew, and somehow brought along a naval ship.” He laughed. “What a waste. What a shame. It was all for nothing.” He appeared in front of Zor El and stood there, proudly.

“Not all,” Zor El choked out, along with more blood. He pulled his hand out from his jacket in a swift movement, aimed and then pulled the trigger. Zod’s mouth dropped open in shock then the expression froze on his face, eyes open wide. He fell back in one smooth arc and crashed to the floor. Zor El followed, folding over on himself.

The men fighting Clark, Lois and the Governor stopped in shock then turned and ran. Clark, panting deeply, grabbed Lois’ arm. She turned and looked up at him. Her breathing was as ragged as his. Once he assured himself of her safety he turned and sprinted over to the two bodies on the floor. Zod was clearly dead, blood blossoming out from underneath him and spreading along the floor. Zor El lay on his side, weak coughs causing his body to spasm.

Clark knelt next to him and reached out. “Zor El?” he whispered.

“Kal!” He coughed and rolled over, the dagger still sticking out of his back touching the floor. A tortured moan sent him rolling back. Clark took hold of his shoulder.

“Rest. Don’t move Zor El.” He turned round to look at Lois, a pained expression showing. Lionel shook his head in sorrow. “It’s alright Zor El. We’ve won.”

“Then... then you are avenged, Kal El.” Clark frowned and jumped back removing his hand from Zor El’s shoulder as if it were suddenly hot. “We... our family... is avenged.” He took a final, shuddering breath and then his body went limp resting almost face down on the floor.

“Wha... wh...” Clark couldn’t formulate any words. He reached out and touched the pirate’s shoulder once more. “Zor El?” he questioned. “Kal... El!” he repeated.

“Your name,” came a deep voice from behind him. He turned to see Governor Luthor stepping up.

“How? My name? But...”

“Many years ago I arranged a treaty with Port Krypton. The Governor was a wise and kind man. We communicated on many occasions. He and his family were on the way to sign the treaty of

Veritas when his ship was attacked. All on board were killed by Zod and by..." Lionel paused.

"And Zor El. It is all right. I know that he was involved in an attack a long time ago. One that plagued his conscience every day since. His family were on board."

"His family... and yours, Clark. The Governor was a man named Jor El. He was Zor El's brother. He travelled to Port Metropolis with his sister-in-law, niece, wife and... son." Clark took a deep breath and stood, facing Lionel, listening intently. "All on board were killed. All except the son, who was found drifting in a boat by a passing merchant ship. On board was a childless couple, travelling to Port Metropolis hoping to start a new life, hoping to open a general store. They took the boy and cared for him, named him, gave him a home."

"Me," Clark whispered, knowing instinctively that this story was his. Lionel continued.

"They had no idea who you were, they saw your name, Kal, on the medallion, but wanted to give you a new name as a sign of your deliverance from the ship wreck. By chance I once got to see the medallion. It was when you were around four or five. I recognised the symbol: the house of El. I put it all together and realised that you were Kal El, son of the murdered Governor of Krypton."

"You've known all this time. You've known my name, my home... my father... and never told me." He felt the anger rising in his stomach.

"What would you have had me tell you Clark? You have parents that love you. Jor El and Lara are gone. Port Krypton is gone. The Pirate King ruled the Caribbean waters."

Clark's anger dissipated and he turned to look over his shoulder at the man... his uncle... lying on the floor. "He knew, didn't he? He saw my medallion and knew who I was. That's why he took me on as First Mate when he quite clearly had no reason to." Clark felt a hand slide into his and he looked down. Delicate fingers wound into his and squeezed. Looking up he found Lois' eyes and saw the love and compassion shining out.

"I'm sorry, Clark. This must be such a shock to you. So many surprises all at once. I'm so sorry." She lifted a hand to his cheek and he buried his face in her palm, kissing her delicately.

"Lois," he breathed out then sighed. He straightened his back then spoke clearly. "Let's find your father."

In the depths of the mansion, almost mirroring the incarceration of Lionel, they found the jail. After making their way back to the courtyard in time to see the allied forces being victorious, they had searched every door and corridor. Now, in the dark, hidden places of the old Governor's mansion, they walked, carrying torches.

Lois trembled in anticipation, knowing she was about to reunite with her father, yet as they approached the entrance she became convinced that she would find just the opposite. She froze in position and Clark, still striding on, pulled on her hand. He turned when he felt the tension and looked into her eyes.

"Clark!" she croaked out in terror. "What if..." He was immediately with her, enfolding her in his arms. She buried her face in his chest and he rocked her gently.

"It's all right, Lois. Come on," he encouraged. With one arm held tightly round her waist he took them through the mossy, stone archway and entered the jail area.

"Daddy?" Lois called, but without any power in her voice it was just a squeak.

"Commodore Lane?" came the much stronger call from Captain Arrow. "Are you here? The Planet and The Justice have come to rescue you." Lois held her breath, listening for a reply. When none came she clung tighter to Clark.

"Commodore? Sir?" Clark added his voice to the search. As they moved down the corridor they were checking the cells and

continuing to call out but there was no reply.

The light suddenly increased and Lois twisted in Clark's arms to see more men arriving with torches. The greater illumination dispelled a little of Lois' concern, but the lack of answer from her father could not be ignored.

"Father?" she called once more, moving forward to the next cell door. "Father are you here? It's Lois. Please answer." She stepped up to the tiny window in the thick wooden door and peered through. "Clark!" she took in a deep breath. "There's a heap in the corner of this one. A shadow." He reached for the keys that Lionel was holding and then began unlocking the door. Naval men crowded round, holding up their torches. When the door swung open Lois slipped out of Clark's embrace and ran inside.

"Lois, wait. What if it's not..." Clark began, but she paid him no mind.

"Father?" she dropped to the floor next to the heap of clothes. Reaching out she rolled over the body and gasped. "Daddy." As the light increased once more, when the men appeared behind her, she began to check for signs of injury. "Daddy, wake up. I'm here," she pleaded, but he lay as still as death. *'No. I won't think that,'* she told herself. She held out a trembling finger and brushed his cheek. Cold, but not frozen. His chest rose ever so slightly. *'He is alive.'* Lois felt a tear trickle down her cheek. Someone brushed past her.

"Let me look," came the voice of The Justice's carpenter and surgeon. She nodded. As Emil tended to her father she stood and took a step away. She felt warm hands grasp her shoulders and immediately felt calmer. "He is alive," the man confirmed, "but he is suffering badly from malnutrition and hyperthermia. If we don't do something soon... he won't ever wake up."

"No," Lois cried and shot forward once more. Kneeling beside her father again, the calm support of Clark's hands missing, she let go of her emotions. "Wake up daddy. You have to wake up." She sobbed. A presence next to her showed that Clark had placed himself beside her, on the floor. "Please wake up daddy. If you... if you wake up, if you get better... then I'll go to court, just like you wanted. Please. Just wake up." Clark's arms encircled her and she clung to him for support as the men picked up her father and began to carry him back to The Planet.

After one day of sailing Commodore Lane began to stir. Lois' relief was total. "I think he's past the worst of it, Miss Lois," Emil told her. She smiled and grasped his hand.

"Thank you, thank you."

"It was my pleasure. I am glad that I was allowed on board to continue his care. Although, don't give me too high praise yet. I have no way to know if there will be any permanent health problems due to this."

"I understand. I do. I'm just so happy that he's going to live." She smiled and then turned. She sprinted away, leaving the doctor with her father, and searched for Clark.

She found him exactly where she knew he would be; in the Captain's study with Captain White. Bursting through the door she immediately gave the news. "He's coming round. He's past the worst. Clark! He's going to be all right."

"Lois, that's wonderful." He stood from the desk where he was filling out reports and crossed to her. Lifting a hand to her cheek he smiled. "I'm so glad." Lois found herself unable reply, unable to speak. When Clark had been dressed as Kal she had been so completely attracted to him. The danger and excitement had swept her away. The deep passion in his clear blue eyes had set her heart racing. Yet now, dressed in naval uniform and being the most honourable, steadfast, caring man she'd ever known, she lost her heart all over again. His eyes, still the colour of the beautiful ocean, radiated joy on her behalf at her father's recovery. There was no intimate passion in his gaze, there was

only love and respect. Lois knew that she had never loved him more than at this moment.

“Thank you,” she smiled and finally found the words to say. “Thank you for everything you have done, everything you have been for me these two months.” She lifted her hand to his cheek. “I love you, Clark.”

He let out a contented sigh. “I love you too, Lois.” His grin widened. “We’ll be home... Port Metropolis... within a few days.” He paused and swept his fingers across her cheek to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “I can’t wait to introduce you to my parents.”

She nibbled her lower lip, catching it between her teeth. “Taking me home to your parents? Clark!” she teased. He returned her teasing just by the twinkle present in his eyes. A cough intruded on their moment and they parted.

“Well, I am most pleased to hear the news of your father Miss Lane.” She turned to acknowledge the Captain. “But if you don’t mind...” His voice suddenly turned most stern. “I need my first officer back. He has five months of work to catch up on.”

Lois gulped and took a step away from Clark, heading for the doorway. Clark slipped back into his chair and stammered out an apology. The laugh that came from the older man’s chest was a relief and Lois felt the sudden tension fade away. Smiling she nodded at him. “Thank you Mr White.”

“Perry. Please call me Perry. Mr White, or Captain, is only for my crew.”

“Perry it is then. You can call me Lois.”

He smiled at her, warmly. “All right. Now off. Back to your father.”

“Yes, yes,” she replied and scurried out of the door. As she passed the threshold she glanced back to catch Clark’s eyes. He was watching her leave and she recognised the look in his eyes.

“I’ll have supper with you later Lois,” he whispered. ‘*Oh yes,*’ she thought. ‘*Supper sounds great. I think I’ll ask for a bath to freshen up.*’ Out on deck she let the late afternoon sun warm her face. ‘*And maybe I’ll linger in the bath long enough for him to catch me in it again.*’ She giggled to herself. ‘*And then this time...*’

Epilogue: Reunited

“Lois,” came the quiet, croaky voice from the bed.

“Yes, father?” she replied eagerly, happy that he’d woken.

She sat by his bedside constantly, waiting for him to wake, ready to provide help. Seeing him struggle to sit up in his bed brought her a dual-edged sword of emotions. She rushed to help him, glad that he was alive and recovering, yet the pain in her heart at his sufferings was so sharp. He’d been awake for a few hours the day before, but not spoken much. Water had been the only thing past his lips.

“Thank you,” he whispered once he was propped up. Lois passed him a glass of water. He held it with trembling hands and brought it to his mouth. Lois reached out and helped him to steady the glass. After sipping gently he rested his head back and closed his eyes. “I remember something,” he spoke. His voice was now without the dry crack after his drink of water. “I heard you coming, Lois. I heard you all calling for me, but I couldn’t answer. I wanted to shout out.”

“Oh, father,” Lois choked out. She swallowed the sob which threatened to follow and brought a smile to her face instead. He said nothing else and she suspected he’d fallen back to sleep until he coughed a little. She helped him to take another sip of water and this time he didn’t close his eyes. He kept them fixed on hers.

“I heard something else.”

“What?” she asked. His gaze, steady and unwavering, suddenly worried her. A rapid increase in her heart rate sent a rush of blood to her cheeks. She felt the heat radiating from them in a blush. ‘*Did he hear my pleading? Please no, he didn’t!*’

“Lois, did you mean it? Would you truly go to court for me?”

Her heart sank. Waves of crushing disappointment overwhelmed her. ‘*Clark!*’ she screamed out in her head. ‘*Clark, I have to say goodbye. How can I say goodbye to you?*’ She closed her eyes to hide her distress from her father then she answered.

“Yes.” She nodded and sighed. “I promised that I would go to court if you would wake up. And I meant it.” She opened her eyes to see tears rolling down the face of her stern, emotionless father. She wrinkled her brow and sat forwards on her chair. “Father, what’s wrong?”

“Oh Lois. You were right. Court is not the place for you. I was sending you because I had received word of a kidnapping plot. I feared for your life. But it turned out that I was the target for kidnapping.” His eyes sparkled with joy. “Please don’t go, Lois. I would miss you so much.”

“Daddy?” Her mouth dropped open in shock. “I... daddy, I don’t want to go. I won’t go. I’ll stay and look after you. You know that.”

“Yes,” he nodded. “Although I think the life of nursemaid is also completely unsuitable for my adventurous daughter.” She laughed and dropped her face in embarrassment. “But I would like you to find a husband all the same. I miss your mother so dearly, but the time I had with her... I would not trade it for anything. I want you to know that same joy and love, that same companionship. I want you to find someone that you can share everything of yourself with.”

Lois parted her lips to reply and then all words skittered away from her. This man was not her father. This Commodore Samuel Lane was a very different man to the one who’d threatened to send her away. But as she pondered over his words she realised that this was the veneer of military stoicism stripped away, revealing the true Sam Lane. She felt a tear drop from her cheek and onto her hand.

“Daddy,” she began tentatively. “I *have* found someone.” She took a deep breath and prepared herself for the oncoming interrogation. ‘*Perhaps this is the perfect opportunity to test how much this kidnapping has truly changed him,*’ she thought.

“You have?” he perked up and sat forwards in anticipation.

“Yes. He was on board The Kandor. I met him while trying to find you.” Lois had related her story, although briefly, when he first woke yesterday.

“A pirate?” Sam’s mouth dropped open. “You mean to say that you are considering a pirate to be a suitable husband!” His voice rose. In his weakened state it could almost be considered a shout. His violent opposition to this idea was quite evident.

Lois forged on with her confessions and her plan. “Yes, he was a pirate. But... he doesn’t wish to be. He is a good man.” She injected all the integrity she could into her voice. In fact, she had not actually lied.

“Truly?” Sam frowned and rested back to his pillow. “And you are sure? You believe his story?”

“I do. You know what I have been through, father, to find you. Trust me. And I would not be prone to *romantic* notions of adventure.”

“Hmmm,” he sighed. “I will have to think on this. He obviously cannot continue to be a pirate if you are to...” He stared at Lois, trying to evaluate her story. “Perhaps you need to tell me more about him. What is his character like? What does he feel for you?”

“Father. I want your blessing on this, but I am old enough to look after myself and I shall marry him, with or without your permission.” Lois held her breath. Here was the moment of truth. How much would her father trust her? Would ‘Commodore Lane’ return or would she keep her ‘daddy’?

“Well, in that case...” he paused and his face softened. “I would still like to know him.” He smiled and his eyes began to sparkle again.

“All right daddy.” She let out the breath she was holding and

rested back in her chair.

Clark knocked on the door to the Commodore's office. It had been five days since their return from Isla de Muerta: three since the Commodore first woke fully. He'd received a summons to attend the mansion and had dressed in his naval uniform immediately. Walking up from his parents store, he had tried to calm his beating heart. Of course the Commodore would want to discuss his report on the assignment, but would he also wish to discuss his daughter?

'Lois!' The thought that he may have an opportunity to see her while here at the mansion quickened his heart once more.

"Come in," came the shout of a gruff voice through the door. Clark turned the handle and pushed open the wooden door. It had been over five months since he was last here. "Ah, Lieutenant Commander Kent."

"Sir," he replied and strode forwards then stood at attention.

"I have read the report you submitted, Clark. I must admit that I was quite impressed that the pirate ship you managed to infiltrate was The Kandor. And to become First Mate. It seems my faith in you was well placed. It just seems that circumstances beyond your control led to a very different ending to this mission than I foresaw. But all in all, I think that ending far surpassed what we could have expected: capturing The Kandor, retaking Port Krypton... and discovering the old Governor."

"Yes, sir." Clark nodded and agreed.

"I think we can drop the sir. I understand you are on leave."

Clark relaxed and let his mouth smile. "I am. My parents are spoiling me now that I am home." The Commodore smiled back.

"Good, that's good. I think you deserve a rest. And a reward. I was thinking of speaking to the Governor about some compensation... reward... for your dedicated service."

"Begging your pardon, Commodore." Clark coughed and looked away. "But there is only one reward I would ask." He turned back and then straightened his spine and focussed on a spot somewhere over the top of the Commodore's head. "Sir, I would ask for your daughter's hand in marriage." Clark's heart stopped beating as he waited for the older man to speak. The silence in the air almost became too much for him to bear.

"Well..." Clark glanced down from his stiff stance to see an unexpected look on the face of his superior officer. He would almost describe it as a smirk, but it looked more like he was trying to hide something. "I see. Um. Clark I think I must tell you that Lois has expressed her desire to marry a pirate that she met while searching for me. She seems most determined."

Clark's heart skipped a beat. "Then..." he began but was interrupted.

"I would be most honoured to have you as a son-in-law Clark, but it seems you may be too late. If you wish to ask her, then you have my blessing." His lips twitched, almost into a smile. "But do not hold out too much hope."

Clark's face split with a wide grin. "Thank you. Thank you for your blessing sir. And... I think I may surprise you."

"Well then. I expect you'll be wanting to look for her. She mentioned having a walk out in the gardens." This time the Commodore really did smile.

Clark bowed then turned and left the office.

He was directed through the house and exited out onto a spacious patio. Steps immediately ahead led him down into perfectly managed gardens. As he descended he saw her at the far end, just about to enter a patch of wild flowers and bushes. Her feet just touched the gravel of the path, leaving behind the short clipped grass when he called out to her.

"Lois."

She stopped and turned swiftly. Her face lit up in surprise and joy. As he strode across the lawn she grabbed hold of the skirt

part of her dress and hitched it up a little then set off at a run. Clark could no longer keep the smile from his face. He had to hold himself back from also running towards her, but he was on an important, serious mission now, and he also had a strange feeling of being watched, so he restrained himself.

Lois slowed her stride for the final steps and came to a stop just in front of him. She grinned. "Clark, you're here."

"Yes," his smile disappeared only for the time it took to speak the word. "Your father wanted to discuss my report."

"Oh," she whispered. Her eyes shone and Clark started to drown in them. His breathing quickened and he felt himself drifting towards her.

'No, not yet,' he scolded himself. He had to blink a few times to escape the spell of her gaze. She was irresistible to him, especially so after four days apart. "Lois," he began to speak and she lifted a hand, wanting to reach out. He knew that if they touched he would be lost. He couldn't afford that just yet. There was something he needed to do first, so he stepped back: away from her reach. Her face dropped in confusion. "Lois," he repeated "We have experienced so much together in these last two months. When you came on board The Kandor you puzzled me like nothing else ever has, and when you were revealed to us as a woman you tempted me like no other woman ever has. And to fall in love with you was so easy. But I fought it so hard, because my whole life was a deception at that point. I saw... hoped... that you were feeling the same way, but knew that it wasn't the real 'me' that you knew. But, in the end, I needed you too badly. When we were marooned and you got to know the truth; that was the best moment of our relationship so far." Clark paused in his story and smiled. "Our time on the island... I miss it, Lois." He gulped, attempting to get his emotions under control. "When I saw that ship on the horizon I... I seriously considered just turning away." He blinked at the moisture building in his eyes. "I didn't want to return to civilisation, where you could possibly be taken away from me. For just a moment I was the most selfish man on earth."

"Oh Clark," Lois sighed and stepped forwards, reaching out once more. Clark stepped back again.

"I... I missed you these last few days. There has been a hole in my heart, in my life. I knew it would be like that, which is why I wanted to stay on the island. Lois, I can't live without you." He stopped, took a deep breath and then fell to his knees. "Will you marry me?"

Standing at the window overlooking the gardens, Commodore Samuel Lane was not at all surprised to see his best officer down on his knees. He'd moved to the window the moment he'd sent Clark on his way, hoping to glimpse what he suspected may happen. Trusting in his daughter when she told him of the man she'd found, a pirate, had been the latest in a long line of good decisions, all involving the man currently proposing. When Clark had asked for Lois' hand he'd immediately known that standing before him was the pirate of his daughter's heart. It had been difficult to keep the laughter from bubbling out. As a father, there was no man on earth good enough for his daughter, and the thought of a pirate as son-in-law was most distressing. But, if he'd been forced to choose, the one man that would have had Sam's unwavering respect and approval would be Clark Kent.

As he watched, Clark looked upwards from his bended position. Lois looked down. Sam was too far away to see any expressions, but when Lois nodded vigorously and Clark stood to embrace her, he knew his suspicions were fully confirmed.

The long, tight embrace eventually came to an end and Sam saw them pull apart. Clark kept his hands at Lois' waist and then he dipped his head. When their lips met Sam turned away, smiling.

Clark's lips on hers made Lois feel as if she were flying. Eyes closed, heart racing, she put all her passion into returning his kiss. She felt Clark's hand drift up her back then pull her in tighter. The closeness of their bodies delighted her. She brought her hands up to his face and deepened their kiss further. Her lips parted and his tongue dived in to taste more of her. She let her body melt into his arms. When they eventually parted she rested her forehead against his, continuing to cup his face in her hands.

"I think I'm going to like being married to Clark Kent," she breathed out. Clark smiled and rubbed his hands up her arms and shoulders. "But I think I'm going to miss Kal a little," she teased.

"Oh!" he raised his eyebrows and separated their faces. His hands travelled over her shoulders to her back again and tugged her closer. "Well, I think he's still around somewhere," he growled.

"Really?" she squeaked out in anticipation.

"Yes. I'm pretty sure there's still a little bit of roguish pirate left in me."

"Good," replied Lois, then pulled him back down to her lips once more.

THE END