

Foundling – Matchmaker Style

By KenJ <ken.janney@kjanney.com>

Rated: PG13

Submitted September 2015

Summary: This is the eighth story in the Matchmaker Style series. Clark finally learns about his origins, but in the process Lex Luthor almost learns too much. In the process of looking for the missing orb, Clark finds and recovers some missing or unknown works of art.

Story size: 27,728 words (146Kb as text)

When Virginia proposed the challenge of taking a first season story and having it result in Lois and Clark being married I took up the challenge and “The Green, Green Glow of Home — Matchmaker Style” was the result.

That was all well and good, but then I started thinking — What about future episodes? How would the fact that they are now married affect the dynamic? For instance, how would “Pheromone My Lovely” have been changed by the marriage? How would it affect “Honeymoon in Metropolis” and “All Shook Up”, “Witness”, “Illusions of Grandeur” and “Ides of Metropolis”?

In the previous stories, you’ve seen my take on the answer. So, now, to answer the question — ‘What if Lois and Clark were already married when The Foundling happened?’ I offer the following.

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

In this, the sequel to Illusions of Grandeur — Matchmaker Style. Lois and Clark have been back from the assignment in Smallville for a few weeks. The events of PML were delightful; however, Lois really has no recollection of what happened. Clark finally had a chance to give Lois a real honeymoon. Then her life had been threatened because she had witnessed a murder. Next, they investigated the kidnappings of the children of wealthy families. Now they are dealing with an innocent man accused of murder and a threat to the internet.

Lois and Clark now have returned to Clark’s ‘old’ apartment.

In this particular story, a lot of the dialogue is taken from the script text. I wish to express my thanks to my Beta readers Artemis and Ray Reynolds for their invaluable help. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

* * denotes emphasis

< > denotes thoughts

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

Chapter 1
%%%

Universal Locator Designation
Alpha -34 x Gamma 255 x Tau -225
%%%

Winter had faded into spring in Metropolis. Spring — the season when a young man’s fancy turns to the woman that he loves, but that is not apparent from what we see.

Lois was in bed, alone, clutching Clark’s pillow to her breast so that she could breathe in his masculine, musky scent. This hadn’t been done consciously, but reflexively. Clark had left the bed almost an hour before, having been awakened by a neighbor’s radio broadcasting an emergency request for Superman. An Air France flight was circling Orly Airport, running out its fuel prior to attempting to make an emergency landing because the port side main landing gear would not lock in the down position.

Superman had responded and immediately had seen the problem. He had cleared the jam and had pulled the gear down manually. After doing that he had flown up next to the cockpit and signaled for confirmation. The flight engineer had checked his panel and confirmed a green light so the pilot had signaled okay. Superman had stayed with the plane, actually flying under the port wing as it landed so that if the gear collapsed he would be able to support the wing and prevent a tragedy. The tragedy was averted and the plane landed safely.

Being mindful of having left Lois alone in bed, Superman didn’t stick around for the media coverage, instead claiming another emergency had demanded his attention and flew off.

He had been gone just over an hour when he landed on the balcony and reentered the bedroom of the apartment. As soon as he stepped in, he spun into his sleep shorts and stopped in his tracks, taking in the scene before him ... the object of his fancy.

Lois was curled around his pillow with her face buried in it. Most of the covers had been thrown off and he had a perfect view of her slender shapely legs from the point that the shorty nightie and her bikini bottoms ended.

He marveled, not for the first time that this woman, this most beautiful of women would consent to marry him. Him, of all people, an alien — not exactly a stranger to the planet — yet not of this Earth. Despite being born on another planet, he had grown up here as an Earthman, having powers that had set him apart from humanity. The simple fact that she accepted him, as he was, with all of his quirks and abilities, amazed him once again. He knew that she loved him, as much as he loved her and that too was unbelievable to him.

He wondered, not for the first time, how long it would have taken to get to this point in their relationship if Herb hadn’t given her the future memories. Herb had told them that there were many parallel universes in the multiverse and that — in almost all — there were versions of each of them. He tried to imagine how things would have worked out without that interference. She hadn’t been too thrilled, initially, about being teamed with him; and seeing the interest that Luthor was displaying in her, he wondered if perhaps he might have made a play to woo her.

Shaking his head at the thought, he wondered how something like that would have played out. Would she have married Luthor? How could he have competed with Lex Luthor? Talk about an uneven competition, a working stiff against the third richest man in the world. How could he compete in that arena? But thanks to Herb and the memory transfer here she was as his wife, sharing his bed and her body, deeply in love with him.

Floating to make no noise, he moved over the bed and positioned himself so that he would be spooned against her back and sharing her pillow when he lowered himself to the bed.

As he settled onto the bed, she stirred. He put his arm around her waist and she sighed in contentment and relaxed back against him in her sleep. Not for the first time, he marveled at how well they fit together, the feeling of completeness he felt when she was in his arms. Her sigh of contentment told him that she felt it also,

and he smiled in that knowledge.

Suddenly, a bright light shone out into the room. It was bright enough to wake Lois. In a sleep slurred mumble, she asked, “Why’d you turn on the lights? It’s not time to get up yet.” She opened bleary eyes and looked at the clock. “It’s 4:02 in the morning, Kent. We aren’t in Kansas anymore, farmboy. We don’t have to get up with the chickens.”

Looking around in surprise, he replied, “I ... I didn’t! I don’t know what that is.” He finally spotted the source of the light emanating from the last place he would ever have expected, a small chest on his bookshelf. The light was streaming out of the crack where the lid met the body of the chest as well as miscellaneous cracks between the slats of the chest. He let out an explosive breath as he recognized the source. He said, “I don’t ... how??”

Lois asked, “What? What is it?”

“The globe!”

“Globe? What globe?”

“Oh, yeah. I never told you. Remember way back when we broke into the Bureau 39 warehouse on Bessolo Blvd?”

“Yeah, there was a lot of junk that Trask thought could have come from UFOs. I didn’t see anything that even came close to convincing me of UFOs.”

“I never told you ... he had my ship.”

Wide awake now, Lois was startled, “He had **what?**” she exclaimed.

“Trask had my ship, the ship my parents found me in. He also had a file about Smallville in 1966. Apparently, he found it where my dad hid it. He had dug it up or his predecessor had. It must have been his predecessor; he wasn’t that old. Whoever it was they had the ship and the file.”

Sitting up, Lois felt some anger stirring. “Why didn’t you tell me about it at the time?” She challenged

Clark was somewhat sheepish as he replied, “Well, that was before we were close ... and ... and at that time ... all you could talk about was Superman. You weren’t too thrilled about me being there with you.”

“Okay, I guess you’re right, but what is this?”

“Along with the ship there was this small globe. It looked like an Earth globe until I picked it up and then it changed ... the colors changed and the continents changed shape and I had a mental image of a word ... Krypton. That was when I knew the name of the planet of my birth.”

“How come I didn’t see it while we were in the warehouse?”

“As soon as I found it, I put it in my coat pocket. With my jacket unbuttoned it wasn’t too obvious. You were busy looking around on the other side of the room.”

“So, you took Superman’s, your, globe and stuck it in your pocket and never said anything to me, your partner, about it.”

“I planned to ... I just never got around to it.”

Lois was becoming impatient, wanting to see this object and gesturing as she said, “Well, now’s as good a time as any. Let’s get it out and take a look.”

Clark climbed out of bed and pulled a small key from a nightstand drawer. Walking over to the bookshelves, he picked up the small chest and carried it over to the nightstand. After setting it down, he used the key to unlock it and open the top. When he did, bright light flooded the room.

When he opened the lid, Lois and Clark could see the face of the Earth on the globe. When Clark reached in to pick it up, however, it changed color, becoming predominantly reds and greens, and the continents melted and flowed into those of Krypton.

Suddenly, the light from the globe increased in intensity and several beams of coherent light streamed out from the globe intersecting to form a life sized holographic image. What Lois and Clark saw was the image of a man. A very distinguished man that

to all appearances was about the same age as Clark with somewhat longer hair and looked very much like him dressed all in white with Superman’s crest on his chest.

Lois nudged him and said, “You’d look good in white. Did you ever consider that when you were planning the costume?”

Clark was staring at the image floating in the air of the bedroom and just shook his head. “No, Mom thought that bright primary colors would be best ...”

If he was going to say any more about the costume design process she would never know, because he was interrupted not by any audible sound, but by a mental voice:

“My name is Jor-El, and you are Kal-El, my son. The object you hold has been attuned to you. That you now hear these words is proof that you survived the journey in space and have reached your full maturity. If you have found your life mate and she is also attuned to you, she will also hear me. Now it is time for you to learn about your heritage. To that end, I will appear to you five times. Watch for the light, listen, and learn.”

The holographic scene shifted; instead of a blank background, it now showed what appeared to be a laboratory. There were tables with consoles scattered around with other equipment. Jor-El was standing before a waist-level console, which he was manipulating by weaving his hands in the air above it. Attached to the console was a large view screen on which multicolored lights swirled. To one side was a long work table, strewn with odd bits of metal and plastic. To the other side, was a large, plain pedestal upon which rested an egg-like capsule of some transparent material. The interior of the capsule was suffused with mist.

As the scene panned across the laboratory they continued to hear Jor-El speaking. ***“Time grows short and we continue to search. The immensity of space is both a blessing and a curse. In that near infinite variety there must be someplace suitable. We search for a suitable refuge. Hope and desperation drive us in equal measure.”***

As the hologram continued to play, a woman, dressed elegantly in purest white almost Grecian style robes entered the scene. Her long chestnut colored hair cascaded down her back past her shoulder blades. Her features held a classical beauty. She also had the Superman crest on her robes.

Looking back and forth between the couple in the hologram and Clark, Lois thought to herself; <With parents that looked like that, it’s no wonder Clark is so devastatingly handsome.>

As they continued to watch, the woman joined Jor-El who was standing next to the capsule. She gestured toward the screen and Jor-El simply shook his head. Moving closer to the capsule, they both peered inside. Lois and Clark could see a vague form in the capsule through the mist.

Jor-El continued his narrative over the video scene. ***“My life mate, Lara, works by my side. She is tireless and endlessly patient. Considering what is soon to come, this is my greatest consolation: that we are together.”***

Suddenly, the audio cut out and the scene started to shake, not that the image was unsteady, but the objects being recorded were in turn being shaken by a planetquake. In the background, one of the consoles started flashing an alarm. As the shaking proceeded, Lara sought the safety of her life mate’s arms. After less than thirty seconds, which seemed an eternity, the quake subsided and the console stopped flashing its alarm. As Jor-El released Lara, the beams of light retreated into the globe.

Shaken by this experience, Clark, with trembling hands, replaced the globe in the chest and closing the lid, relocked it.

Lois was the first to say anything, “Wow! That was amazing. I wonder if this has something to do with why you are here.”

Still almost in shock, Clark muttered, “Kal-El. My name is Kal-El.”

Lois put her arms around Clark and said, “Yes, now we know your Kryptonian name. Kal-El. I think I like it. It suits you, Kal.

The ‘El’ part must be the family name, like Kent. I like it, but I think I like Clark Kent better. Wow, we might finally find out why you were sent here. It doesn’t look like you were abandoned. It sure looks like there was a problem, all that shaking, like an earthquake. Did they live in a place like California or was this a planet-wide problem?”

As he was replacing the chest he said, “I don’t know. I guess we’ll have to hear more before we will know for sure.”

After Clark put the chest back on the shelf, Lois pulled him back toward the bed. “Come on, Honey. It is still 4:30 in the morning. I need some more sleep. Tomorrow is Saturday. We have the day off so we’re going to have a long day ahead of us. I think we ought to go to Smallville and talk this over with your parents.”

“Are you sure we need to talk this over with your parents?”

“Yes, I do. As your adoptive parents, they’re involved. I’m right and you know it.”

“Why are you always right?”

“I just am and you’d better not forget it, Mr. Kent.”

“All right, Mrs. Kent.”

Lois yawned, pulled him down next to her draped his arm across her stomach, and snuggled into his side. She closed her eyes and was quickly asleep.

Sleep didn’t come as quickly for Clark. He watched her sleep and thought about what they had seen and heard.

Lois, Clark, Martha and Jonathan sat around the kitchen table having breakfast. Seeing that Lois had finished her eggs, Martha asked, “More eggs, Dear?”

Lois patted her lips with her napkin, then patted her belly. “No thanks, Martha. I’ve had plenty. It’s all so delicious. I love your breakfasts. I’m glad you taught Clark how to cook. I’ve always been helpless in the kitchen.”

Clark stopped her. “Not anymore you aren’t,” he said.

Martha gave her a questioning look and raised an eyebrow.

In reply to the unasked question, Lois smiled and said, “Clark’s been teaching me. We started off with simple things. I’m becoming a breakfast chef; although, I’ll never be as good as you or Clark, but I can make eggs several ways, French toast and even pancakes and I usually avoid providing a burnt sacrifice in place of breakfast.”

Martha smiled and said, “Good. Next time we are in Metropolis, I’ll let **you** cook.”

With a frown, Lois mumbled, “Me and my big mouth,” but secretly she was pleased that Martha was willing to give her a try.

Clark, Martha and Jonathan all laughed at that one. Eventually, Lois even joined in after she came to the realization that Martha, because of who she was, wouldn’t be judgmental if she failed.

Jonathan asked, “So, tell me, what was so important that you needed to make a special trip out here this morning?”

“It is because of the globe.”

Not comprehending, Jonathan said, “If you need a globe, I think we still have the one we had when you were in school around here somewhere.”

“No, Dad. We don’t need a globe. This is about the one we have.”

“What’s so special about this globe that you needed to come out here?”

“This is a very special globe. It was in the ship that brought me to Earth. When Lois and I broke into Bureau 39’s warehouse ... I found my ship under a tarpaulin. On the nose, there was a little globe showing the map of the Earth. Out of curiosity I touched it, it, sort of, spoke to me. When it did, the image changed and became a map of Krypton. Somehow I knew that it belonged to me so I ... stuck it in my pocket and ... and I didn’t tell Lois anything about it.”

“Why didn’t you tell Lois about it, son?”

“This was back when I first started at the Planet, before we were together. Lois had a thing for Superman ...”

“You can say that again. All I could see was Superman. I couldn’t see the great guy right there next to me, but that’s all ancient history now,” Lois chimed in.

“With all that’s been happening, pheromones, nightfall, murders, kidnappings ... I just never got around to telling Lois about it. It just sat there in the chest ... until last night, or rather early this morning. “

“But why now? Apparently, you’ve had it for months. What happened this morning?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know, Mom. Except, Jor-El, that’s my father’s name, said it was ‘attuned to me and my companion.’ Maybe it and I weren’t meant to be separated for so long. Maybe it’s taken a while to ... warm up and maybe to add Lois.”

Lois added a thought, “Or perhaps it took a while for us to be attuned, whatever that means. Could that mean that we are becoming more simpatico or maybe something deeper? Herb said that I was being changed and that eventually that would make it so that we could have babies. Maybe that’s the kind of change needed for me to be attuned to you.”

Jonathan asked, “What did it show you?”

“My biological parents, Jor-El and Lara — he called her his life mate — and a world in chaos.” He gave Lois a grin and said, “I guess that makes Lois my life mate.”

Jonathan was now finding this to be awkward — as the adoptive parent to be speaking of the biological parents. “The people, Jor-El and Lara, do you have any memory of them at all?” he asked.

Clark shook his head and said, “No, none.”

There was a moment of shared silence that was broken by Lois, “How do you feel about this, Clark?”

“Scared. Excited. Overwhelmed.” He paused in thought before he looked at his parents and continued, “I’ve gone my entire life not knowing how or why I was left on your doorstep. So many unanswered questions ... What was Krypton like? Who were my parents? Did everyone there have powers like me? Will I continue to age normally? Can I die?” He paused again before he continued. He threw up his hands and said, “Now I’m about to find out.”

Chapter 2

The rest of the weekend had been uneventful, except for his regular patrols.

On Monday morning, since it was a work day and Clark was quicker at cooking breakfast, it was his chore. Lois practiced on the days that they didn’t work.

This morning, using his heat vision, he had cooked some bacon strips, crispy without being burnt and — crumbling them up — added them to the egg batter. Pouring it into the buttered pan, he started omelets that he added three kinds of cheese to before he folded it over expertly. He brewed a special blend of coffee and added mocha creamer to Lois’s and hazelnut to his own before pouring it into their travel mugs and breakfast cups. When Lois made it to the kitchen, her breakfast was waiting for her. Before sitting down to partake, however, she moved to Clark, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him, long and deep.

Looking at the breakfast that was waiting, she said, “I was always a toast or donut and coffee for breakfast person until you came along. Your mom introduced me to country breakfasts and I started to like them and now I look forward to them in the morning. You spoil me and I love it.”

“Just one of the ways I show you that I love you.”

“I know,” she gave him another brief kiss before she sat down to eat with gusto.

The ride up to the newsroom in the elevator was not the usual

intimate time that Lois had gotten used to. There were two ‘suits’ that were going to the office suites above in the car with them and Lois felt let down as a result. She had started looking forward to that final kiss with her husband before starting the chores of the day. As the doors opened, she resolved that she would have to compensate herself in some manner before too much time had elapsed. She looked at Clark with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

He caught her looking at him and asked, “What?”

“Oh, nothing. Talk to you later.”

As they stepped onto the newsroom floor, Clark had his hand at the small of Lois’s back in a gentle slightly possessive gesture and it was apparent to both that it was going to be a slow news day. Reporters and support staff were going about their routine duties in a relaxed manner.

They both moved to their desks and booted up their workstations to check e-mail.

After checking her e-mail, Lois made a show of rummaging through her desk, looking for something. As time passed, she appeared increasingly frustrated as she failed to locate the item. She finally slammed the drawer closed, stood up and walked over to Clark’s desk. “Clark, could you give me a hand in the supply room. I need something from a top shelf.”

“Sure, Honey,” he replied, flicking his monitor to screensaver, he stood and followed her to the supply closet.

As they entered, Lois took one final look around; seeing that no one appeared to be interested in them, she stepped in after Clark, closing and locking the door. She stood there for a second with her back to the door, facing Clark.

He had heard the click of the lock and turned to see her standing there with a wanton look in her eyes.

That only lasted a second because she launched herself at him.

He caught her and held her as she started a deep, soul-wrenching kiss. He felt her right leg come up and hook around his legs as she ground herself against him. As she raised her leg higher, there was a slight tearing sound from her left side as the slit in her skirt lengthened itself.

His hands came up to the back of her head, and he twined his fingers in her silky tresses as her hands also played with his hair.

After a minute, which seemed like an eternity, they broke from the kiss; she clung to him with her arms around his neck as they both panted heavily to make up for the oxygen deficit.

After another minute of gasping breaths, they separated. Clark asked, “Is this the real reason you needed me in the supply closet?”

She choked back a laugh and said, “Busted.”

He grinned mischievously and said, “We can’t afford to do this too often. People will start to talk.”

“I was so frustrated that we didn’t have our ‘elevator kiss’ this morning. I just had to do something.”

He floated up and grabbed an eraser from the top shelf. As he handed it to her he said, “Here you go. I think this was what you were looking for.”

She smiled slightly in response. “I got what I needed. Thanks.”

She paused at the door to regain her poise before unlocking and opening it.

Hearing the supply room door open, Cat happened to glance up just as they were exiting and was curious. Lois looked a little ... flushed. Cat saw Clark exit right behind her so she took a closer look, looking for the ‘signs’. Cat was one that always paid attention to fashion and giving Lois a thorough once over she observed some frayed strings at the top of the slit in her skirt, noting that it was higher than it had been and that her hair was somewhat ... mussed.

Smiling in pity at what she could only think of as rookie behavior and nodding to herself, Cat decided that she would have to train her, so she reached into her top drawer and picked up a

little packet. As Lois returned to her desk, Cat got up from hers — the little packet in hand — and moved over to Lois. As Lois sat in her chair, Cat approached. Lois looked up into Cat’s face as she leaned on Lois’s desk with one hand and with the other finger combed Lois’s slightly mussed hair.

Lois was surprised to feel Cat touching her, and she was about to say something, when Cat stopped her. “If you plan to lure your husband into the supply room on a regular basis, take a comb in with you, otherwise people will catch on.”

Lois started to blush and asked, “Were we that obvious?”

Cat raised an eyebrow and replied, “Only to me. Oh, and ... here,” she handed her the little packet. “You will need to carry a sewing kit ... for minor repairs.” Cat looked significantly at Lois’s skirt as she handed it to her.

Lois looked down at her skirt and saw the damage to the slit. She smiled ruefully and said, quietly, “Thanks for the pointers and the kit.”

Cat smiled and said, “Anytime. Any more questions, just ask the pro.”

As Cat retreated to her desk, Jimmy came in with his nose buried in a magazine.

As Cat picked up a nail file and started on her nails, Jimmy sat down in Lois’s visitor chair and grunted, “Huh!”

Happy for any distraction to take her mind off her super sexy husband and back to business even though that was the lesser alternative, Lois asked, “What?”

Jimmy slapped the magazine and said, “According to Metropolis Science Magazine, the statistical probability that any two people living in Metropolis are blood relations, is over ninety percent.”

Cat stopped her filing and with a tone of disbelief asked, “You and I are related?”

In an offhand manner, he replied, “As long as our families have lived in the area at least three generations.”

Cat gave Jimmy a look of disbelief and then said, “I don’t think so!”

Lois was starting to enjoy this discussion. Cat’s discomfiture with the idea of being related to Jimmy was too good to pass up. She reached over and put her hand under Jimmy’s chin and turned his face profile to profile. Then she looked at Cat and said, “I don’t know ... There **is** a definite family resemblance.” Even as she was saying it, she started to feel bad. Cat had just covered for her and here she was repaying that kindness with teasing.

Cat was stunned at this assertion, but chose to try to cover it up by returning to filing her nails as if unconcerned and repeated her earlier statement, “I don’t think so.”

Jimmy saw this as an opportunity so he challenged, “Wanna bet? That you and I are related by blood?”

Cat was actually sensing blood in the water. This had to be a sure thing, “What are the stakes?”

Clark had finished going through his e-mail and was starting to pay attention to the discussion just as Jimmy announced the stakes, “If I win ... a night of passion.”

“Whose ... yours or mine?” Cat sneered.

Jimmy, in a voice lacking some confidence said, “Optimistically, ours.” His voice faded almost to inaudibility as he finished, “Realistically, mine.”

Lois spoke up, “And if you lose?”

“**When** you lose,” Cat scoffed.

Jimmy, fearing the worst said, “Name it.”

Cat’s bravado had returned along with that blood in the water scent, “You repaint my apartment, every room, top to bottom.” In an aside to Lois she added, “Pink fades.”

Jimmy was crushed at what his penalty would be, but then his confidence reasserted itself and he reached out to shake on it.

Without being asked to be the judge, Lois assumed that position, stating, “I expect detailed family histories including

charts from both of you no later than tomorrow. Also, blood tests.”

Perry was dressed in a shirt and tie with his vest on and his sleeves rolled up as he walked out into the bull pen. He stopped near Lois’s desk and clearing his throat said, in a loud voice, “Everyone, listen up. Your editor-in-chief has an announcement.”

Cat, Jimmy and Lois were so engrossed in their conversation that they completely ignored Perry. The rest of the newsroom staff didn’t have even that excuse, but the result was the same, total disinterest.

Cat spluttered out, “Why ... why blood tests?”

Jimmy tried to minimize it as he murmured, “She’s kidding.”

Lois looked at him and said, emphatically, “No, I’m not!”

Perry tried once more. “Your editor-in-chief has an announcement to make to anyone currently employed by the Daily Planet and about to undergo their quarterly salary and expense review.”

The word ‘salary’ penetrated the fog of the discussion and grabbed everyone’s attention. Silence reigned and Perry looked around in gratification. He said, “Much better.”

He waved some papers that he was holding in the air as he said, “It is my pleasure to announce that this year’s candidates for the Meriwether Award for Journalistic Excellence have just been released and the Daily Planet’s very own writing team,” he paused dramatically before he used his hands to indicate Lois and Clark, “of Lois Lane and Clark Kent are among the nominees.”

There was a burst of applause from around the room along with shouted congratulations.

Lois wanted to stand up and take a bow, but decided that it would be best to appear honored and humble so she simply smiled and said a general, “Thank you.”

Clark was pleased, but truly humble and simply smiled and nodded.

Over his shoulder, Jimmy shouted to Clark, “C.K.! You’re the man!” Then he caught sight of Lois’s glare, after all she was part of the team as well, and in a small voice he added, “And, Lois, you’re the woman.”

Cat added, “More or less. I guess more, now that she’s married to Clark. He seems to bring it out in her; of course, **he** would do that with any woman.”

Perry deemed that enough adulation had been bestowed and decided to call a halt by grumbling, “All right, all right, back to work. It’s an announcement, not a national holiday.”

As everyone returned to their tasks, Perry turned to his star reporting team and said, “Good job you two. Just don’t expect to rest on your laurels.” He turned to Lois and asked, “How you coming on that piece on the recent rise in crime in Metropolis?”

Lois tried to be vague as she replied, “You know, gathering information, checking sources, compiling data. That sort of thing.”

Perry was not easily fooled and asked, “That bad, huh?”

Lois shrugged and replied, “I’m still looking for an angle.”

Lois started nervously tapping her desk with the eraser of her pencil as Perry delivered some pearls of wisdom. “Angles, unlike angels or demigods in capes, don’t just drop from the sky, Lois.” To emphasize his point, he pointed to the heavens and Lois stopped tapping and followed his pointing finger. “We have to create them,” Perry stated, his voice low and serious. He looked back and forth between Lois and Clark as he continued in a semi-conspiratorial manner, “The Committee vote on the Meriwether Award is only a couple of days away. Be nice to show them a strong finishing kick.”

Lois gave her desk a few more, harder taps before she threw her pencil down and buried her face in her hands in frustration.

Just then, Clark’s phone rang. Perry took that as his cue to leave and headed back toward his office.

Clark lifted the receiver and said, “Daily Planet, Clark Kent.”

Clark listened intently and a look of concern creased his features, then he said, “We’ll be right there, thanks,” and hung the

phone up.

Lifting her head and looking at Clark, Lois gave him a questioning look and asked, “What?”

“That was our neighbor, our apartment has been robbed!” Standing he grabbed his coat and shouted to Perry who was just about to disappear into his office, “Perry, we have to go. Our apartment has been robbed.”

Upon hearing his name, Perry had turned and hearing what Clark had said, waved them off and said, “Go. Deal with it.”

Lois was shocked and started mumbling, “This is awful. To be violated that way again. To have absolute strangers pawing through our personal belongings, to endure it ... AGAIN!”

As they entered the elevator, Lois said, “Look on the bright side. Maybe this is the angle I’ve been looking for.”

As the doors closed he whispered, “I hope they didn’t find the spare Suits ... or ... or the globe. Things that will tie us to Superman.”

The ramifications of what had happened finally hit her and she growled in frustration at the old elevator, demanding, “Can’t this thing move any faster?”

Chapter 3

When they arrived at the apartment, they found an absolute mess. Clark’s books had been scattered and thrown around as if they had been examined and cast aside. This was logical since many of them were not even in English. Any robber, unable to read the contents, would probably have gotten rather frustrated with the literature. Drawers had been pulled out and overturned, the contents mixed with the books. From the first look, it was hard to tell if this had been a simple case of vandalism or a robbery. Most of the items in the apartment still were Clark’s. Lois had moved some personal items like pictures, but her furniture had been left for Lucy. Looking around, Lois was thanking her luck stars that she had procrastinated in moving the bulk of her possessions to the apartment.

Clark was in a daze as he wandered through the clutter; however, Lois was furious. She had felt like she had been invaded when Luthor had sent his goons to examine her apartment while they were in Smallville. They had gone so far as to rifle through her lingerie and duplicate it. That invasion of Lois’s privacy had been the final straw, fueling her resolve to bring down Luthor. As a result, she knew just how Clark was feeling. She watched with sympathy as he knelt and started to pick up a book that was lying open.

Gently, Lois said, “Clark, you shouldn’t touch anything. This is a crime scene.”

Clark picked up the book anyway and said, “Lois, this is **our** crime scene.”

“If you go messing up fingerprints, how do you expect the police to catch whoever did this ...”

With a shake of his head he interrupted her flow of words, and said, in a flat tone, “I don’t.”

She finished, almost as an afterthought, “If you insist on tainting the evidence ...”

Lois was interrupted when Bill Henderson stepped in through the door and said, “Someone call a cop?”

Lois let out a sigh of relief, “**Finally.**” Then surprise took over, “Henderson? What are you doing here? I thought you headed up Homicide.”

As if instructing a six-year-old, Henderson replied, “I do, but when I saw the name on the report, I stepped in. I put out a directive that any time your names show up, I’m to be notified. I don’t want to inflict you on anyone else. It’s bad enough that I have to deal with you, but I think I’ve gotten used to you. You know, I think you’ve mellowed a little since you married Kent.”

Lois smiled, “Maybe I have ... a little.”

Turning to Clark he said, “You’ve been a good influence on

her.”

Starting to feel a little uncomfortable, Lois said, “Okay, Henderson, what’s our first move?”

Henderson turned to her and asked, “You live here, Lois?”

She put her hands on her hips and replied, “Of course I live here! We are married, after all!”

Undeterred, he countered, “Oh? I think Detective Sergeant Reed said something about you still having your apartment over on ...”

Lois interrupted him, “All right, I do, but my sister Lucy is taking over that lease. Clark and I live here ... together.”

“Now that we have that straightened out ...” Henderson paused as he turned to Clark and asked, “Anything missing?”

Clark was still shaken and replied, unsteadily, “Yes, Inspector. I mean, we haven’t ... checked everything.”

Henderson reached into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out a folded sheet of paper, “Fill this out. Bring it down to the station.”

Clark looked at the paper, blankly, “What is it?” he asked.

Henderson could see that Clark was shaken by this experience and took pity on him, “Inventory of stolen items. Don’t forget serial numbers. Something turns up, we’ll call you.” He started to turn away, but thought better of it and faced Clark again, “Don’t hold your breath. We’ve had a lot of these type break-ins in this neighborhood lately.”

As Henderson finally turned to leave, he was accosted by Lois, “That’s it? That’s all? Don’t you look for clues? Dust for prints?” she asked incredulously.

Henderson stopped and addressed Lois in his normal, phlegmatic tone, “Waste of time.”

Lois had really been hoping for something a little more helpful and this no help response just served to irritate her. “Waste of ... let me tell you a little story, Henderson.”

Humoring her, Henderson said, “Shoot.”

Lois warmed to her topic and started painting a word picture: “It’s late at night. A sweet, innocent little old lady, probably someone’s grandmother, is preparing for bed. Suddenly, burglars burst in, knock her down, and steal her life savings from underneath her mattress.” She paused for a reaction. When she didn’t receive the reaction she had hoped for she asked, “Wanna know why?”

Henderson deadpanned, “I’ll bite. Why?”

Lois, confident that she was about to score a point against Henderson, replied in an almost scornful manner, “Because some cop like you was too lazy to dust for prints on a prior, so the burglars were never caught.”

Unmoved by Lois’s story, Bill replied, thoughtfully, “Good story.”

Smugly, Lois replied, “Thank you.”

Henderson thought for a second and then asked, “Now I got one for you. Wanna hear it?”

Lois threw Henderson’s words back at him when she said, “Shoot.”

Henderson put his hands in his pockets and rocked somewhat on his feet as he spoke, “That same sweet, innocent, little old grandmother is preparing for bed when she hears burglars breaking into her house. She rushes to the phone and dials 911, but, by the time help comes, it’s too late. Wanna know why?”

Lois was a little afraid to ask, but she couldn’t avoid it, “Why?”

Henderson could very well have been as smug in his reply as Lois had been with hers, but he maintained his deadpan delivery as he replied, “Because all the good cops are out somewhere else **dusting for prints.**” Henderson turned his head and nodded to Clark; then, he turned on his heel and walked out of the apartment leaving a fuming Lois in his wake.

Clark walked over to her and said, “Calm down, Lois. He’s right and you know it.”

“Yeah, but I don’t have to like it.”

Together, they walked into the bedroom. They both breathed a sigh of relief when they realized that the closet with their clothes and the secret compartment with his spare Suits was untouched. Lois pointed and said, “Thank heaven for small favors. At least the secret is safe.”

The rest of the room was in as much disarray as the living room had been. Standing in the doorway, Clark used his telescopic vision to examine the space.

Suddenly, he gasped and sped over to the area by the wall.

Lois asked, “What is it?”

Clark picked up the little chest and displayed it to Lois. In disheartened tones, he said, “The globe, it’s gone.”

Lois looked stricken. “Oh, no. After all this time ... you were about to find out your history. You know, I’ve been looking for an angle on the robbery story, this could be it. It isn’t so much the monetary value — although that is something — it’s the emotional trauma of losing keepsakes. Forget the monetary loss: It’s stealing parts of a person’s past. The sense of vulnerability, of invasion, urban angst and violation you feel are bad enough; however, the memories involved — those kinds of things are irreplaceable. Let’s just hope that this doesn’t fall into that category. Look, let’s think about this. The globe said that there would be five messages, right?”

Clark nodded absently.

Lois persisted: “It said that it was attuned to you and since we were, what, attuned to each other, then it was also attuned to me, right?”

Starting to see where she was going with this, he perked up some. “Right. Attuned to you and me.”

She was thinking out loud, bouncing ideas off him the way they did when they were working on a story. “Will it work for anyone else?”

He was deep in thought for a few seconds before he answered: “I don’t know. I wasn’t even aware that it would do anything until the other morning.”

“Let’s assume that it will only work for you or me. Does one of us have to be holding it for it to work?”

“Again, we don’t know. It started by itself the other day. It lit up by itself. After I touched it, the hologram started.”

“Well, unless the light turns on again, maybe whoever took it will think it’s just a plain old globe.” She grabbed her bag and slung the strap over her shoulder then she reached for Clark’s arm and said, “Don’t worry, Clark. We’ll get it back, maybe the rest of our stuff as well. Maybe the **police** can’t help, but I know who **can.**” She dragged him toward the door.

In an alley in a rundown section of Suicide Slum, a young boy of perhaps sixteen was cautiously making his way through the deserted streets, constantly checking to make sure he wasn’t being followed. Suddenly, in the near distance, he heard a police siren and flattened himself against a wall, his body hidden behind a dumpster. Once the police car was past, he peeked out to assure himself that the coast was in fact clear before coming out from behind the dumpster. Making his way further down the alley, he spotted his objective, but before hazarding an entrance, he had to be certain that he wasn’t being followed. He crouched down behind a pile of debris and scouted the area with his eyes and ears. He could hear some vermin crawling around, in the garbage which littered the entire alley, but no other noises intruded. Looking around, he concentrated on the shadows. When none of the shadows had moved for a minute, he broke from his cover and sprinted — as well as he could while bearing the burden that he had — for the boarded up doorway to the abandoned building. His skinny frame slid easily through the gap in the boards that covered the entrance. Once inside, he held his breath and listened again. This time all he heard the soft snoring of his brother and he started

to relax.

Making his way deeper into the building, he finally entered a room that had a couple of beds, a makeshift table, and some cartons serving as chairs. His brother was dozing on one of the beds. He unslung the canvas bag that he'd had over his shoulder and dumped it on the unoccupied bed. Out tumbled a miscellaneous pile of odds and ends, mostly sports trophies and personal property like a CD player with CDs and a VCR. In amongst these odds and ends was a small globe and an instant camera.

Suddenly, the globe started to glow while the face melted and flowed, changing from a representation of Earth to once again assuming the map of Krypton.

The thief reached down to pick it up. The globe floated up out of his hand and beams of coherent light started to emanate from it. Just as the picture of a man started to solidify, he muttered, "What are you?" As if responding to his voice it suddenly stopped and fell to the bed.

The noise of the stuff clattering onto the bed had awakened the sleeper.

As Lois was attempting to comfort Clark, suddenly they both 'heard': "*This is the second of the five times I will appear...*" However, that was as far as the message went before it was suddenly cut off.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look and both muttered, "The globe."

Clark had a worried expression as he said, "I wonder if whoever has it now can see and hear the messages."

Lois replied, "We can only hope not. We don't want too many people knowing too much about Superman. They might be able to fit the puzzle pieces together and that could be dangerous, especially in the wrong hands..."

With chagrin, Clark replied, "Yeah, like Luthor."

"Jack?" the sleeper called from the bed,

Turning from looking at the globe and said, "Yeah, Denny. I'm here. Thirsty?"

Denny was sitting on the edge of the cot, rubbing sleep from his eyes when he nodded in reply to Jack's question and accepted the canteen from his older brother.

After taking a deep draught he asked, "How'd you do?"

Jack had an odd expression on his face as he replied, "I did good."

Denny got up from the cot and moved to Jack's bed. Seeing the pile of stuff, he started rifling through it. He saw an instant camera and picking it up, pointed it at Jack. "Smile," he said as he clicked the shutter triggering the flash. The camera spit out the picture as Jack grabbed the camera from his brother.

Chiding him, Jack said, "Cut it out!"

Spotting the globe, Denny started to reach for it. As he did, he asked, "What's that thing?"

With a crooked grin, Jack answered, "That's our ticket out of here." He looked significantly around the room indicating their surroundings.

Denny started to reach for the globe, but Jack stopped him, saying, "Careful! Don't touch it!"

Denny had been about to make contact when Jack said that and jerked his hand back as if from a hot stove. Once he had retreated some, he asked, "What'll happen?"

With a conspiratorial air, Jack said, "Never mind."

Denny picked up on Jack's mood and looked at the globe, suspicion in his eyes. "Think it's worth something?"

Jack considered for a few seconds before he answered, "Yeah. A lot. But we've got to find the right buyer."

Denny was quizzical, "How do we do that?" he asked.

Suddenly realizing that he was still holding the camera and an

idea forming with that knowledge, he said, "We advertise."

Jack removed the picture Danny had taken of him and prepared the camera for more pictures. Once it was ready, he picked up the globe ...

Chapter 4

Lois almost had to drag Clark from the apartment because he was still intent on filling out the paperwork that Henderson had given to him. "Come on, Clark. We want the stuff back, right? Thanks to Henderson we know that we can't count on the police. Let's go get it back."

"How do you plan to find it, Lois?"

"Not me, but I know someone who can."

"Do I really want to know who this is?"

"Come on, Clark. Go with me on this. Trust me. We'll get the stuff back."

The longer Lois drove, the more Clark became concerned. They were in a rather disreputable area, even for Suicide Slum when Lois parked. Clark looked around uneasily as they exited the Jeep.

Lois spotted a loiterer and stepped up to him. She fished in her bag and pulled out a few bills. She whispered something to him and the bills exchanged hands. He nodded, stepped over and leaned against a pole next to the Jeep.

Lois hooked Clark's arm and pulled him along.

Clark's worry was evident as he said, "But the Jeep. It won't be safe there."

Lois looked back over her shoulder and said, "Don't worry. Willy is watching it."

Clark stopped her and asked, "Willy?"

Lois resumed her trek and replied over her shoulder, "Yeah, Willy. Don't worry. Unlike what happened to the apartment, nothing's going to happen to the Jeep."

Not sure how Lois could be so confident, Clark gave one last backward glance as she pulled him down a short flight of steps and through a doorway.

The room that they entered was smoky. There was a bar at one side and pool tables spread out through the room — a few of which actually had players standing around. The players were dressed in working clothes, not a tie or jacket among them. As they entered, the players universally stopped what they were doing and turned to look at this well dressed, obviously far out of place couple that had invaded their domain with undisguised curiosity.

Clark was uneasy, not for himself; after all, there wasn't much that could happen to him. He was worried about Lois's welfare. Lois, for her part, was completely at ease. She walked up to one of the players and said, "I'm looking for Louie."

Unfazed, the player ignored her and turned back to the game. As he bent down to line up his next shot, Clark in a nervous voice said, "He's not here. Let's go."

Not willing to be ignored and determined that she would have her way, Lois leaned over and picked up the cue ball and tossed it to Clark.

As she was tossing the ball away, the player let out a complaining exclamation, "Hey, whadda think you're doin'?"

Lois pinned him with a piercing gaze and repeated, "Louie. Tell him it's Lois Lane."

The stubborn look on his face faded in response to Lois's equally stubborn expression. Finally, he put his cue stick down and crossed the room.

As he exited through the door, Clark ran his hand through his hair and said, "This is a mistake."

Clark walked over, placed the cue ball back on the table and picked up the cue stick.

Lois stopped him and asked, "What are you so nervous about?"

Clark's worry was evident in his voice; however, with a show

of nonchalance he started to line up a shot as he asked, “Where do you know this guy from?”

Flippantly, Lois replied, “Around. I’m a reporter, Clark. This is my city. I grew up here. It’s my business to know the people who know what’s going on in this city.”

As she finished, Clark took his shot and sent the three-ball into the corner pocket.

Given Lois’s secretive and mysterious response, Clark knew that there was more to the story than Lois was letting on, so he wasn’t going to her off the hook easily. He asked, “And?”

Lois shrugged and in a small voice said, “And, his daughter was my tennis doubles partner in college.”

Behind them the pool player and Louie entered through the door. Louie was a short and balding, jovial middle-aged man. He was wearing a dress shirt, open at the collar, with lots of bling and large rings on his fingers.

Clark smiled as she admitted this and was about to say something when he was interrupted, “Hey, kid. Over here.”

Lois and Clark both looked to see who had spoken. As Lois started to move in Louie’s direction, Clark took another shot. There was a cluster of six balls which the cue ball threaded, hitting each one and sending each one toward a pocket. Clark gave five of them little puffs of super-breath to assist them in falling into the pockets. For the final one, he gave the cue ball a puff of breath which caused it to reverse course like it had a back spin, and it hit the final ball, sending it into the pocket.

Nodding to himself, Clark shrugged, put down the cue stick and followed Lois over to Louie’s table in the corner. When they sat down, Louie was indulging in an Italian sub. He asked, “What can I do for you?”

Lois explained their errand.

Lois shrugged and asked, “Kicked in the door?”

Clark nodded in response.

Louie shook his head and in a scornful tone, said, “Amateurs.”

Lois asked, “What do you think?”

Louie took a bite of his sandwich and chewed before he replied, “I can maybe find ‘em.”

Skeptically, Clark asked, “How?”

Lois shrugged and said, “They gotta try and sell the loot. I know guys who know guys.” Shrugging, he took another bite of his sandwich and a swig of a beer to wash it down before he finished, “I’ll need a list. Anything special I should watch for?”

Clark and Lois had discussed this on the way over. The concern over expressing an inadvertent interest in the globe could cause questions to be asked that they couldn’t afford to answer, so Clark, in a defeated tone said, “No. Look, the police have all the information. Maybe we should just leave it to them.”

This didn’t fit in with Lois’s plan and she expressed her disapproval by slugging him in the arm. “Come on, Clark. We talked about this. Look, we need to get the stuff back ... and ... it’ll be great for the article.”

When Lois said that, Louie started to look apprehensive. “Uh, Lois, these guys I know don’t exactly like to read their name in the papers.”

Lois gave him a look and said, “Louie, this is Lois.”

Still unsure, Clark asked, “So, if you do this, what are we supposed to do for you?”

Louie smiled, using his sandwich as if it were a pointer and said, “For the kid? It’s a freebie. What a backhand she had.”

Lois smiled and said, “Still do. What do you think?”

Louie set his sandwich down and wiped his hands. “I’ll call ya.” He turned to Clark and asked, “You need help on the insurance claim? I know guys who know guys.”

Clark, who was concerned about the legality of all this, simply replied, “Uh, no thanks.”

Louie turned to Lois and pointed at Clark. “Straight arrow, huh?”

Lois quirked an eyebrow at him and said, “Tell me about it, but it’s part of his charm. One of the many reasons I love him so much.”

Louie was surprised. He pointed back and forth between the two of them. “You and him?”

Lois held up her left hand to display her wedding rings and said, “For a while now.”

Louie broke out in a smile and said, “Congratulations. You need to give Constance a call and let her know.”

Lois was shamefaced realizing that she had forgotten to call her old friend, “I’ll do that Louie. It’s just ... we’ve been so busy ... and it was only a few months ... I’ll call.”

“You do that little thing. I’m sure she’ll be happy for you.”

That afternoon, Jack had put his plan into operation. Using the instant camera, he had taken pictures of the globe with the unearthly continents and had even managed to snap a picture of the holographic image of the man with the Superman symbol on his chest. He still had no idea what it was. Jack was streetwise and had seen a lot of science fiction so holographic images, especially if they were in some way associated with Superman, were just something to accept. He was surprised that all the mysterious globe did was float and project the image of the man in white. Even so, he was hopeful that he would be able to make a big score with it. His only concern was Superman’s reaction if he found out it was him that stole this gizmo from that apartment. He really didn’t want Superman on his case. The more he thought about it, the more he was inclined to just return it and scoot, but the lure of the money it could bring in was too much. He finally decided to show the pictures around and see if he got a bite. If something didn’t materialize quickly, enabling him to unload the merchandise and take off, he’d have to return it.

Jack took the pictures to a pawn dealer that everyone knew was a fence and told him that he’d check back later.

The fence, for his part, recognized the Superman logo on the man and knew that it must have something to do with the superhero. Word on the street was that ‘The Boss’ was interested in anything to do with Superman and that he was willing to pay big bucks for information.

As soon as Jack was out of the door, he picked up the phone and called a number that he had been given.

On the second ring, the phone was answered by a cultured, British English voice. “What do you have for me?”

The fact that no name was mentioned was to be expected. He said, “Word on the street has it that ‘The Boss’ is interested in anything dealing with Superman.”

“That is quite correct.”

“Well, I just had a kid in here that showed me some pictures that prove he has somethin’. I ain’t sure exactly what, but I think ‘The Boss’ will be interested.”

“I will have a representative there within the hour to pick up this evidence.” The phone line went dead.

The fence wasn’t surprised when he wasn’t asked his name or the name of his shop. That just seemed to be par for the course as far as ‘The Boss’ was concerned. He knew everything.

Thirty-five minutes later a non-descript individual entered the shop and approached the counter in the back. Without preamble, he said, “Hand it over.”

The fence reached below the counter, pulled out the photos, put them in an envelope and placed it on the counter.

The pick-up man placed a ‘C’ note on the counter picked up the envelope and left.

The fence pocketed the bill and turned back to his work.

The pick-up man dropped the envelope in a post office box that he had a key to. He picked up two one hundred dollar bills from the box as he deposited the envelope. He closed and locked it.

One of the workers opened the box from the rear, picked up the envelope and put it into a messenger packet. It was addressed to a downtown office and he called a bike messenger to deliver it.

The messenger picked it up and rode his bike to the building, took the elevator to the fifteenth floor and dropped the envelope through a mail slot in the door. If he had looked into the office behind the door he would have found it to be deserted. If he had tried to open the door, he wouldn't have lived to regret it.

Five minutes after the messenger left, a tall distinguished looking gentleman approached the door. He checked the markers to make sure that the door hadn't been opened since the last time he had been here, pressed a hidden switch to disconnect the booby traps, and produced a key to open the door. Bending down, he picked up the envelope, pocketed it and reversed the opening process, resetting the booby traps and markers.

Once this was finished, he turned on his heel and headed for the elevator. Taking it down to street level, he exited the building and entered a limo. Directions were not needed, and the limo immediately entered the traffic flow.

Ten minutes later, Nigel St. John walked into Lex Luthor's office, pulled the messenger packet from his inside pocket and placed it on Luthor's desk in front of him.

Luthor, as if to savor the moment, picked up the packet and simply looked at it for several seconds; then, reaching down, he picked up an ornate silver letter opener, and used it to slit open the packet. Reaching in, he pulled out the envelope. This was not sealed so he placed the letter opener back on the desk and asked the rhetorical question, "What have we here?" as he pulled out the pictures. He laid them out on the desk and leaned down to look closely at them. Nigel looked over his shoulder. After several seconds' perusal, Luthor looked up into Nigel's face, smiled and said, "Make the call."

Evening had come and gone. Now it was nighttime, dark as pitch especially in the alley that Jack had specified as the meeting place for the sale of the gizmo.

Jack was nervous. He knew that what he had was pure dynamite. It had to be to get a response this quickly. He kept looking around and up, afraid that Superman would somehow find him and ...

His musings were interrupted by the noise of people approaching. He couldn't see them clearly in the dark, but that meant that they couldn't see him too well either and he liked it that way.

Slowly, as they neared, he could make out the outlines of two men in long overcoats. They were walking Indian file, one behind the other. The one in the rear had a hat pulled low and he kept his head bowed so that the brim concealed his face.

The one in the lead, Nigel St. John, stepped forward and pulled the picture of Jor-El from his pocket and held it up for Jack to see. He said, "You have something for me?"

Jack took a step closer, warily. He nodded to Luthor and asked, "Who's he?"

Nigel ignored the question and asked, "Where is the item?"

Jack was scared, but the lure of the money was too strong, so he stammered out, "It's ... It's a thou ... thousand."

In response, Nigel reached into an inside pocket.

Seeing the movement, Jack ducked thinking that Nigel could be reaching for a firearm. When he saw the corner of a white envelope appear from the coat instead of a gun, his confidence was restored and his bravado with it. "Let's see it."

Nigel extracted ten one hundred dollar bills from the envelope and fanned them out.

Jack reached for the money, but Nigel withdrew it. "The item, then the money."

Jack reached behind the dumpster that he had been standing next to and picked up his canvas bag. Delving into it, he pulled out

the aforementioned item wrapped in a kerchief. As he started to unwrap it, the glow was evident.

Luthor spoke with a voice hoarse with excitement. "We were led to believe that there was a display."

"Yeah. Some dude in a white outfit."

As he finished speaking, the globe started to float and the light beams formed the hologram. Jor-El was visible, and they could see that he was speaking, but they didn't hear anything."

Across town at 344 Clinton, Lois and Clark were having a late dinner and talking about the situation of the break-in when suddenly they both 'heard' the familiar voice emanating from the sphere. "*This is the second of the five times ...*"

They were both startled, and Clark bolted upright.

They exchanged a look and Lois asked, "Do you think you can zero in on its location?"

"I'm not sure." Standing up, he started to turn around, trying to sense where it was coming from, but before he could get more than a general impression — the signal was cut off.

Lois felt the signal cut off the same time Clark did and said, "Rats! It cut off. Were you able to get a direction?"

"Just a general direction — Suicide Slum."

Grumpily, Lois replied, "Figures."

"Either it was working for someone else or else it started itself again the way it did last time."

"Let's hope it's the latter."

"Yeah. I'd hate to think it would work for someone else."

Jack threw the kerchief over the globe; the projection stopped and it settled back in his hand.

In a hoarse voice, Luthor said, "Pay him."

Nigel held out both palms — in one was one thousand dollars and the other was empty.

As Jack snatched the money, he dropped the globe in Nigel's open hand.

Trying to make it sound like idle conversation, Luthor spoke up again, "You found this, you say?"

While Jack was counting the money, he said, "In a dumpster on Third. People throw away strange stuff sometimes." He was hoping that his fabrication was being accepted and continued in an attempt to deflect: "I guess it has something to do with Superman."

Luthor wasn't put off, so he asked, "If you find any more 'strange stuff,' you'll let us know?"

Jack had started to turn away, but said, over his shoulder, "I'll do that. How do I get in touch?"

Luthor replied, "Just leave word. We'll find you."

As Jack's form retreated down the alley, Luthor held out his gloved hand for Nigel to hand it over. Luthor's head came up, and Jack got a bare glimpse of his features when he looked back. He heard Luthor say, "Something to do with Superman, indeed."

Chapter 5

Lois awoke the next morning, finding herself in bed with the distinct memory of having fallen asleep in Clark's arms on the sofa while they were watching an old movie. Their sleep hadn't been disturbed by the mental messages the rest of the night. She stretched and reached for Clark, but his side of the bed was empty.

She frowned and started to sit up. She was taking a deep breath to call Clark, but pulling the air in through her nose also brought with it the scent of freshly brewed coffee, toast, bacon and eggs. Her frown turned upside down into a smile and she muttered to herself, "You just gotta love that man."

As if he had heard her, which he probably had, he stuck his head around the partition and said, "Breakfast will be ready as soon as you are."

Jumping out of bed, she headed for the bathroom and said,

“Be there in two shakes.” Realizing that her shakes were slower than his, she said, “Better make that three.”

He smiled and said, “Take your time.”

When she came out and sat at the table, she started laughing as if to a joke.

Clark asked, “What’s so funny?”

“Cat and Jimmy. They have this bet about their families. Jimmy claims that they have to be related. Cat can’t stand the idea that she might be. The look on Cat’s face at the very idea was priceless. If Cat wins then Jimmy has to paint her apartment.”

“And if he wins?”

“Cat gets another notch on her headboard, or would it be Jimmy?”

“I don’t know who to root for.”

When Clark and Lois walked out of the elevator, Lois immediately spotted Jimmy and Cat at Cat’s desk. They had sheets of paper spread out. It looked like they were researching something for her column, so Perry hadn’t said anything.

As Lois was approaching her desk, Cat let out an unladylike snort and as she pointed at an entry on one of the sheets of paper which apparently contained a family tree said, “Your Great-Uncle Howard married the same woman twice?”

Jimmy was warming to his topic and said, “Well, see, he didn’t **realize** it was the same woman ... until after.” He paused to recall and then said, “Howard had poor eyesight, and Aunt Millie suffered from a hormonal imbalance. She used to go through these huge weight fluctuations.”

The possibility that their families might actually at some point intersect and she would be related to Jimmy caused a cold chill to run down her spine and a feeling of terror overtook her. She said, “If it does turn out we have any of the same genes, I’m having mine altered.”

Smiling at Cat’s quandary, Lois sat at her desk and booted up her computer. Once it was up, even before checking her e-mail, Lois brought her word processor up and started typing up her article — using her and Clark’s personal experience as the basis. She started slowly, but as she warmed to her topic, her typing sped up until she was typing furiously.

She stopped to review what she had written: “And so the cycle repeats itself. Stolen goods traveling from owner, to thief, to fence, to wholesaler, to retailer, and finally to a new and unsuspecting owner...” Clark had drifted over and listened in on the last part. Lois looked up and asked, “You think it’s too wordy?”

Clark had rolled his chair over by her so that he could look over her shoulder. Lois noticed that he was less than his usual alert, bright-eyed self. While she watched, he yawned, shrugged, and then tiredly rubbed the back of his neck. Lois stopped typing and rolled her chair backwards so that she was behind him and started massaging his neck. She quipped, “You’re so tight! You’re like iron.”

Turning it into a joke he corrected her: “Steel.”

She chuckled and asked, “Didn’t you sleep well, honey? We got to bed at a reasonable time.”

“Actually, I lay awake watching you sleep and thinking ... I guess I was worrying. That globe ...”

Coming to the realization that she could wear herself out trying to massage the ‘man of steel’ with nothing but tired hands to show for it, Lois stopped and slid back under her desk.

He surprised her when he asked, “Why did you stop? That felt good.”

“Really? You felt that?”

“Of course I feel that. I can’t be hurt, but I can feel everything, especially when it’s my wife doing the touching.”

Lois smiled and resumed her massage. “Did you finish the inventory list?”

“No.”

Moving so that she could look him in the face, she asked, “Clark, why are you stalling on that?”

“Oh, I’m not, it’s just that ... what do I put in about the globe?”

“Just list everything else and hope that the globe turns up with the rest of the stuff.”

“Yeah, I guess we could do that. How’s the article coming? I liked the part you read to me.”

“I plan to put in your list. See, I put the list in the article as an example of how some people get unreasonably, sentimentally attached to their old junk. Not that it’s junk to you, because of the sentimentality quotient.”

“Lois, you’re right. Aside from the globe there isn’t a lot there that can’t be replaced. Maybe we should just forget the whole thing.”

Lois was shocked. She could see a good part of her article disappearing and blurted out, “You can’t do that.” She paused to think of a good reason for him to continue, “What about Louie?”

Clark shrugged and said, “There’s no way that guy will come up with anything.”

Lois was disappointed at his reply and was about to say something when her phone rang. She picked up the receiver and said, “Daily Planet, Lois Lane.” When she heard the voice on the other end, she started to smile, “Louie!”

Clark was surprised and refrained from listening in.

Lois said, “You did? That’s wonderful. Uh, huh. We’ll be right over. Thanks a bunch.” As she hung up the phone she said, “Remind me to call Connie. Come on Clark. Let’s go collect our stuff.”

As on the previous occasion, the guy that had said his name was Willy was loitering outside the pool hall. This time — when Lois approached, he refused to take her money, but he still moved over to watch the car. The fact that she was a friend of Louie’s had been made known to him.

Clark joined Lois and they entered the pool hall. Lois spotted Louie across the room at his booth with one of the pool players and dragging Clark headed in that direction.

When Lois was standing in front of Louie, she challenged, “All right, where is he?”

Louie looked up from his sandwich and jerked a thumb toward the far wall.

Turning in that direction, Lois and Clark saw Jack sitting hunched against the wall with his hands behind his back. He had a sullen and yet stubborn expression. On a pool table next to him was a pile of goods which Clark immediately recognized as ‘their’ stuff.

Turning to Louie, Clark asked, “Are you sure he’s the one?”

Unfazed, Louie pointed at the pile of Clark’s belongings and asked, “That your stuff?”

Clark sorted through it and then said, “Most of it.”

Lois picked up on his tone and whispered to him, “The globe?”

He whispered back, “Missing.”

“Oh, no.”

Louie explained, “Kid tried to move it through a guy who knows a guy I know.” Louie held up a thousand dollars in hundred dollar bills. “Had this on him too. Yours?”

Seeing what he was holding, Clark said, “No.”

Louie offered the money to Lois and after a moment of thought she took it, and she and Clark approached Jack. Clark could tell that Jack was scared. His heart was racing, and there was a sheen of sweat on his forehead, but he was putting on a tough act.

Jack’s bravado surfaced and he said, “That’s my money, lady.”

Lois challenged, “You robbed our apartment?”

Jack tried the same subterfuge he had used on Luthor, “I found

that junk in a dumpster. I should of left it there.”

Lois could see that Clark was weakening. He always had a soft heart. It was one of the things she had found endearing about him even before the memory transfer.

Clark asked Jack, “How old are you?”

Jack sensed that he might have an out with this guy and shot back, “How old are **you**? Look, I don’t know anything. Just let me go.” He moved his arms to the side and displayed the handcuffs that in fact were on his wrists.

Lois looked at Louie with a reproving glance. “Louie!”

Louie shrugged and nodded to the pool player who threw the keys to Lois.

As Lois was catching the keys and moving toward Clark and Jack, Louie said, “Careful. You got yourself a real rabbit there.”

Lois hesitated, but only for a second. Clark encouraged her as he said, “We’re not the law, Lois. He’s just a kid.”

Lois gave in, nodded to Clark, and reached to release the cuffs.

Once the cuffs were off, Jack started rubbing his chafed wrists. Now that he was released his bravado increased. “Yeah, I could sue you for kidnapping.”

Louie said, “Ya got me quakin’ in my boots, kid.”

Lois stood her ground. “I’m waiting for an answer. Did you rob our apartment?”

Jack kept silent, but his eyes were darting this way and that as he evaluated his possible escape routes.

Shaking the money, she still held in her hand, Lois challenged, “Where’d you get all of this money?”

Clark interrupted this line of questioning. “Look, this doesn’t have to go to the police. I just want to ask you some questions about ... some personal items that are still missing. One in particular.”

At this statement, Jack looked up quickly, then, just as quickly, dropped his eyes again. Jack realized that this guy was saying that he knew the gizmo belonged to Superman, but he wasn’t saying any more. If he identified him to Superman, he would be in deep trouble. He needed to get that money and get out of there as fast as he could; then, he and Denny needed to put as much distance between themselves and Metropolis as possible.

Clark had been watching, and this was exactly the reaction Clark was hoping for. Jack’s heart rate kicked up and his pupils dilated slightly.

As Lois started to speak, his fear spurred him into action.

Lois was saying, “You could save yourself a lot of trouble...” He jumped up, grabbed the cash from Lois’s hand and fled. Lois shouted, “Hey!”

Louie’s pool playing pal tried to make a grab for Jack as he passed, but he missed.

Seeing him go, Lois shouted, “Clark, grab him!”

Even though he passed close to Clark, he made no try at stopping him.

After he was past, Clark said, “I’ll go after him.”

Lois realized that Clark probably thought that he might be able to get more information through one-on-one communication, so she simply nodded.

As Clark rushed out, Louie chuckled and said, “Like I said, a real rabbit.”

After Clark exited, Lois moved over and started going through the pile of stuff that had been stolen from the apartment. She found some photos and gasped when she saw them. Pictures of Jor-El and the globe showing the continents of Krypton. She quickly pocketed the evidence.

Louie had heard her gasp and asked, “Problem, sweetheart?”

“No, Louie. There’s just evidence here that proves the kid was lying.”

“You want we should catch ‘im again and maybe, toss him around a little? Get the truth outta him.”

“No, Louie, I think we’ll handle it Clark’s way from this point

on.”

Chapter 6

Once he had grabbed the money from the dame’s hand, Jack had run for all he was worth without looking back. Although Jack was both young and strong, his diet hadn’t been healthy enough to sustain his growing body as it needed, so he tired fairly quickly. He pulled up panting, leaning against an alley wall. He stood there for several seconds catching his breath and regaining some of his strength before putting more distance between himself and those people. He tried to breathe quietly so that he could listen for sounds of pursuit. Hearing none after almost a minute, he finally stepped away from the wall and looked around. Getting his bearings, he decided which way he needed to go and started to jog away at a more sustainable pace.

As he rounded a corner he ran right into ... Clark’s arms.

He was startled, and feeling trapped again he started to struggle to get free; however, he quickly realized that this guy was no push-over so he wasn’t going to get free that way.

As Jack stopped his struggles, Clark eased his grip and said, “I’m not going to hurt you.” To make sure he heard him, he repeated his statement: “I said, ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’”

As Clark’s words finally penetrated, and he looked into Clark’s eyes. What he saw in Clark’s eyes surprised him. He would have expected hate and anger, but he didn’t. What he saw was hurt and concern. He ceased his struggles.

When Jack stopped struggling, Clark said, “Be straight with me and I’ll let you go. I promise.” At an imperceptible nod, he took a deep breath and continued, “Do you have the globe?”

Jack just shook his head. Finally, he stated, “I sold it.” His defiance reasserted itself as he finished: “I had to.”

“Who did you sell it to?”

The gentle tone that Clark was using had an effect. Jack was still defiant, but he did open up some, “I don’t know. Some guys. I took pictures of it, passed ‘em around, you know. Older guys. Kinda strange.”

“What did they look like?”

It was apparent that Jack was lying when he said, “I don’t remember.”

“Do you have any idea where the globe is now?”

His answer had the ring of sincerity as he said, “No. That’s the truth, man.”

As Clark released his grip on Jack, he asked, “What’s your name?”

“Jack.”

“Just Jack?”

“Yeah, just Jack.” He looked at Clark again and asked, “Is the globe yours?”

“I’ve been keeping it ... for a friend.”

Jack asked, “How does it work? Who’s the guy with Superman’s ‘S’ on his shirt?”

It appeared as though his worst fears were being realized. Inadvertently, Clark again grabbed Jack’s arms and forgetting himself applied a lot of pressure. Seeing Jack wince in pain, he immediately relaxed his grip. Realizing that he had let himself lose his control momentarily, he said, “I’m sorry. I...” He changed his mind on what he was about to say and instead asked, “How do you know about him?”

Jack was more than a little scared now. This guy looked like a lightweight, but his grip was like that of a weight-lifter. He stammered out, “When I touched it. A man appeared. It looked like he was talking...”

Becoming even more concerned, Clark asked, “What did he say?”

“That’s just it, it looked like he was talking, but I didn’t hear anything.”

“You didn’t hear anything?”

Jack nodded in agreement and asked, “You gonna cut me loose?”

Clark could see just how scared Jack was and pitied him. He asked, “Where will you go?”

Jack was even more scared at this question, not just for himself, but his brother, Denny. “No way am I gonna tell you. And don’t try to follow me.”

Even though it was now spring, there was still a chill in the air and Clark saw Jack shiver because he didn’t have a jacket.

Recognized that he probably wasn’t going to get anything out of Jack, Clark said, “I won’t follow you.” He thought for a second and then pulled a business card from his pocket. As he handed it to Jack, he said, “Call me if you want to talk.”

Jack took the card hesitantly and looked at it. Again, Clark saw him shiver. He removed his coat and held it out to Jack.

Jack looked at it with avarice, but hesitated to take it.

Extending it to him, Clark said, “Go ahead. Take it.”

Jack finally reached for the coat, and Clark watched as he put it on.

The coat was several sizes too large for Jack and he looked ridiculous in it, like a little kid playing dress-up, but at least he was warm. Warily, Jack started to back away. When he saw that Clark was honoring his word and not following, he turned on his heel and took off.

After Jack was out of sight, Clark continued to watch, slipping his glasses down his nose so that he could use his super-vision. After he saw him enter a boarded-up building, Clark turned and moved in the direction of Louie’s. Once he was there, he found that Lois had loaded their stuff into the Jeep and was sitting in it waiting for him.

As he slid into the passenger seat she asked, “Well, did you catch him?”

“Yeah, but I let him go.”

“What?”

“I didn’t know what else to do. I couldn’t hold him.”

You talked to him, though?”

“Yeah. I asked about the globe.”

What’d he say?”

“He said he didn’t have it. He sold it. That must be where the thousand came from. Had to be a high roller, someone like Luthor.”

“Then you believe him? That he didn’t still have it or know who did?”

“Yeah, I believe him. He was panicky and scared, but aside from that the physiological signs were in line.”

“What else did he say?”

“Something interesting . . . he said that he could see the hologram, but he didn’t hear anything.”

Lois sighed with relief. “Thank heaven for small favors. At least he didn’t hear Jor-El. Which doesn’t change anything. What if someone else **will** hear it? You’ve got to get the globe back before it gives up any more information about your past.”

“I know. I’ve never felt so **exposed**. And if I’m exposed, you and Mom and Dad and everyone else close to me are too. What if whoever has the globe discovers I’m Superman?”

Always the voice of reason, Lois said, “Look, as long as we are the only ones that can hear Jor-El the damage that the globe can do is limited. We just need to work on finding it before too much more **is** revealed.” Lois thought for a second and then asked, “Do you think it would do any good to scan Luthor’s penthouse to see if it’s there?”

Clark shook his head and said, “He’d be too smart to keep it there. Knowing that it belongs to Superman and knowing that I’d suspect him, that’s the last place it would be. He will probably hide it somewhere else. Who knows? It could be in a secret vault or in a laboratory being analyzed even as we speak.”

Lois had been driving while they had talked and pulled up to

the apartment as they finished.

As soon as they had unloaded, following along on that train of thought, Lois picked up the phone and dialed. “Jimmy? Lois. Jimmy, we need you to find the locations of **all** of Luthor’s holdings. Especially the laboratories.” Lois held the phone away from her ear so that it wouldn’t be damaged by Jimmy’s shout.

“What?!?!?!? Lois, you’ve **got** to be kidding! Do you have any idea of his holdings? There have to be hundreds if not thousands of offices and buildings in and around Metropolis alone and places outside of Metropolis on top of that!”

Once he was calmed down she said, “Yeah, I know that it will be a long; okay, a very long list, but it’s important. In this particular case, I don’t think that Luthor would want it to go too far from his control. Concentrate your search here in Metropolis. We’ll be in shortly so if you could start on it and have at least part of it for us that would help, a lot.” After Lois hung the phone up, she looked at Clark and asked, “Do you think you should scan Lex-Tower to see if it’s there?”

“Lois, that’s a pretty tall order. You’re talking over a hundred floors.”

“I would think that you could concentrate on his office and quarters, maybe the floors immediately below. I don’t think he’s going to allow it too far from his person.”

“At this point he’s had probably twelve hours or so to hide it.”

“Any lead lined enclosures would, of course, be suspect,” Lois offered.

“Lois, I can’t just go barging in there and ripping open lead lined safes. That would require the police and a search warrant. In order to get that we would need probable cause. Now, if Jack would identify Luthor as the person that bought it, that would be probable cause, but he won’t. He claimed he doesn’t know who it was.”

“I’m going to head on in to the office; you, my dear husband, need to go look over Luthor’s lair. I’ll meet you at the Planet. If you spot the globe, you need to recover it — no matter what. If Luthor tries to have you arrested, he’ll have to prove that the globe is his and not yours, which will be impossible for him to do.”

Later, Clark came out of the stairwell, straightening his tie. As he approached his desk, Lois lifted her shoulders in question. Shaking his head in the negative, he dropped into his chair, the very picture of disappointment. Lois got up and moved over to his desk. She perched on the corner and bending down she asked, “Nothing, huh?”

“I scanned the top ten floors. There was actually very little that I could see. If it isn’t lead sheets, Luthor has gone to the extent of painting a majority of his offices with lead based paint, probably just so that I can’t monitor his activities.”

With a smirk, she said, “There you go! If he had nothing to hide, why would he do that? Okay, while you were out, Jimmy got me a partial list.” She jumped up and went to her desk retrieving a piece of paper. Returning to his desk, she placed it in front of him. Pointing to entries, she said, “My guess is that he would want to have it ‘checked out’ to make sure it’s legit. That means that he’d probably send it to one of his labs. I’ve highlighted those on this list. I think you need to check them out. Who knows, we might get lucky.”

Taking the list, Clark headed for the stairwell once more.

As he was disappearing through the door, Perry came out of his office and approached Lois’s desk. “Where’s Clark off to?”

“Oh, hi Perry. He’s, uh, helping me with the crime story. Since it became personal with our apartment being robbed. He’s gone to check on a few things . . . for the story.”

“Do you have anything you can give me yet?”

Lois considered and then asked, “Can I speak with you in your office, Chief?”

Curious, Perry said, “Sure. Anytime. Let’s go.”

Lois got up and followed Perry into his office. When they were inside with the door closed, Perry, sat behind his desk and asked, “Okay, what do you have?”

“Well, you see Perry, it’s this way. This story is about petty crime, but we think there are bigger fish involved. There have been rumors of a crime boss running most of the rackets in Metropolis. We’re starting to work on that angle. We don’t know where it will lead, but we may have to go undercover at some point.”

“Will you need more assistance?”

“Jimmy is helping.”

“Is there someone that you suspect?”

“I hesitate to say. Let me just say that it isn’t someone you would suspect.”

“That covers a lot of territory, Darlin’.”

“I know, Perry, but if we can get the goods on him, it will blow the lid off of the rackets in Metropolis for good. We could be talking Pulitzer here.”

Perry sat back in his chair, stunned. He started to smile and said, “That big, huh?”

“Yeah, that big.”

“If you and that husband of yours can pull this off, it’ll be the coup of the century.”

Later that night, Nigel and Luthor approached a large vault door in a darkened sub-basement. Nigel entered the combination and the ponderous door slowly swung open. As they entered, Nigel flipped a switch which lit the enclosure with a subdued lighting. The center of the room was suffused with indirect light, supplied by the lights in the alcoves around the walls.

Luthor was carrying an ornate black lacquered box as if it contained the British Crown Jewels in his gloved hands. In the center of the room, a crystal pedestal had been erected. The top had a velvet drape, but other than that it was empty.

Luthor stopped short of the pedestal and looked around, speaking in a musing tone as he did so. “My treasures.” Then, he looked at the box he held and stepped closer to the crystal pedestal. Almost reverently, he opened the box he held and removed the globe. As the box was opened, it started to glow. Luthor placed it carefully in the center of the top of the pedestal and stepped away, staring at it in awe.

Nigel joined him, standing slightly behind and to one side as they both stared at the glowing object.

In hushed tones, Luthor said, “Magnificent. See how the light catches its depth, Nigel. Like a perfect jewel. I want it analyzed atom by atom.”

“As you wish, sir,” was Nigel’s simple reply.

Luthor threw his hands out expansively as he said, “We stand on the verge of a historic moment.”

“I can feel the vibrations.” Nigel commented, eliciting a reply from Luthor.

“Can you?” He started another survey of the vault as he said, “The accumulated plundering of a lifetime: the missing arms of Venus de Milo’s, Gainsborough’s ‘Yellow Boy’, Beethoven’s ‘Tenth Symphony’, Van Gogh’s **better** self-portrait, the full figure ‘Mona Lisa’. Unknown and unseen by the world at large, they exist solely for my pleasure. But, my private collection was incomplete. **I** was incomplete.” Luthor slowly, deliberately removed his gloves. “No more. In many ways Superman remains a mystery. Despite all our conflicts, I still lack the knowledge, the wedge that will bend him to my will or break him. Perhaps, finally, this globe will shed some light.”

Following on the heels of this speech, Luthor approached the globe and with his now uncovered hands placed both palms on the globe. Apparently, in response to his touch, the globe changed its appearance and started to glow. Soon the beams of light were sent out and the hologram formed.

Across town, Lois and Clark were in the office studying a map of Metropolis. The map was marked off in a grid pattern. Using the list of LuthorCorp facilities that Jimmy had produced, Clark was marking the locations so that he could plan his search when suddenly they both looked up and at each other as they telepathically ‘heard’ Clark’s biological father’s voice: “***This is the second of the five times I will appear. You may wonder that I speak your language, and not my native Kryptonian: I don’t. That is another property of the object; it converts the sound to telepathy and broadcasts it directly to the brain of those it is attuned to.***”

Lois gasped and said, “The globe.”

Chapter 7

Back in Luthor’s lair, Luthor and Nigel were both watching the hologram and feeling increasingly frustrated. Intuitively, Luthor knew that there had to be an audio track to go along with this video presentation, but he couldn’t hear a thing. He tried to use his skills as a lip reader, but the words being formed were not in any of the multiple languages with which he was familiar.

He was determined to gather as much information as he could still, so he concentrated on taking in the scene.

On a gleaming white work table, a man and a woman performed delicate “surgery” on a helix-shaped object of thinly-twisted metal — or what appeared to be metal — using instruments whose purpose and application Luthor couldn’t even begin to guess. With a sensor/probe, the man touched various points on the object’s surface and was rewarded with a holographic depiction of the helix. Corresponding points of light began to blink on the hologram.

Lois and Clark heard a series of beeps and then Jor-El’s voice came once more: “***Unmanned Kryptonian probes have, explored every corner of the known galaxy and beyond. For thousands of centuries we have received data back from those probes. I have every confidence that, given enough time, we can achieve the conversion to a manned vessel. But, will we have the time?***”

As Luthor watched the scene became increasingly unsteady, items in his field of view began to shake. Luthor decided that he was witnessing a violent planet-quake. The man and the woman grabbed the table for support until the shaking ended. When it finally subsided, both immediately turned to the capsule on the pedestal. The contents of the capsule were indiscernible due to the mist that suffused it. It was intact, and they breathed a sigh of relief, but the viewing screen above the nearby console blazed and flickered with light. The man helped the woman up, and they approached the console. The man waved his hands above it. It responded with new patterns of light. Whatever the man read in the display clearly worried him.

Lois and Clark heard Jor-El’s comments: “***The pattern of core disintegration continues to accelerate. Even I cannot predict when it will end.***”

As Luthor watched, the couple in the hologram looked into the capsule, but the mist obscured the contents. Luthor wondered just what the contents were.

Lois and Clark heard the following: “***There is an ancient Kryptonian saying: ‘On a long road, take small steps.’ Precision and care are our watchwords. Yet, we still have far to go.***”

As Luthor watched the display screen, the warning indicator became the center of the display.

Deciding that he wouldn’t be gathering any additional

information, he released the globe. As he did, coincidentally, the glow faded.

Luthor said, “Interesting.”

Nigel added, “To say the very least. It was like watching a silent film, but without the dialogue placards to let you know what was being said.”

Thinking that he might either have a replay or the next installment, Luthor reached out and placed his hands on the globe again, but this time the globe didn’t respond.

Nigel offered, “Resting? Recharging?”

Luthor replied, “Too bad. I can hardly wait for the next chapter. Were you able to hear anything?”

“No, sir.”

“Neither was I. Could you read their lips?”

“I am not very skilled in that area.”

“Well, I am and I wasn’t able to understand a single word. I have a basic understanding of all of the world language groups and that was totally foreign.”

When the message cut off, Lois and Clark both looked at each other as if coming out of a daze. Clark started to berate himself, “I shoulda tried to get a line on it.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself, honey. It was a surprise and we were both listening. I wonder if whoever has it heard the story.”

“I don’t think so. Remember, Jor-El said that it was broadcasting to those minds that it was attuned to. That’s just you and me.”

The next morning at the Planet, Lois was in a grumpy mood and Clark looked just plain tired. Lois had grabbed a croissant in the coffee area along with a mug of coffee, and Clark had a donut also with a mug of newsroom coffee. Lois was out of sorts because she hadn’t had one of Clark’s fabulous breakfasts, nor did she have her travel mug with his special brew. The reason for this also explained Clark’s tiredness. She had overslept, and he had been out all night searching Luthor owned facilities for the globe and had returned only in time to leave for the Planet with Lois. He was quite bleary eyed as he perused the map that they had prepared the day before. Looking at it, it was apparent that he had been very busy because there were many blocks that were crossed out.

Observing the unpredictable direction of the fierce wind stirring around Lois, Cat and Jimmy were huddled at Cat’s desk to avoid her for fear of being on the receiving end of her wrath, again perusing charts of their family trees. As time had progressed, more and more entries had been made, and the sheets were almost completely covered at this point.

Suddenly, Jimmy exclaimed, “Wait a minute! Wait a minute! See here, your mother’s half-sister, Elena by your grandfather’s second marriage — married, for her **third** marriage, a man named Stanley Nugent.”

Cat sighed and said, “I never liked that man.”

Jimmy almost chortled seeing the tape of the finish line in front of him as he said, “And Stanley was, in fact, my Great-Aunt Edna’s son out of wedlock by a man named David Wilson, Uncle Dave, who she later married, but not until after her marriage to Uncle Harvey.”

With a stricken look, Cat said, “This is a nightmare.”

Jimmy opened his arms in welcome and said, “Cuz!” He gave this a second to register before he asked, “Your place or mine?”

Fortunately for Cat they were interrupted by Perry as he approached Lois and Clark. He said to Lois, “Good piece. I loved the personal angle.”

There was bitterness in his voice as Clark replied, “Yeah, at least our robbery came in handy for something.”

Cat and Jimmy had been listening and Jimmy said, “I thought

you got all your things back. No harm, no foul.”

Lois chimed in, “No, not everything. There’s one particular item. We were holding it ... for someone else. It’s still missing. We are still searching for it. We suspect that it might have been sold.” Hoping that she hadn’t said too much, Lois started ripping apart her croissant in frustration.

Perry looked from Lois to Clark as Clark started to gather up his map.

Clark said, “I have to go.”

Lois nodded and said, “Yeah, you need to go. Be careful.”

As Clark disappeared into the stairwell, Perry turned to Lois and asked, “You okay, Lois?”

Lois shrugged and said, “No.”

Sensing that there could be a problem and deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, Cat and Jimmy gathered up their charts and adjourned to the conference room, giving Lois and Perry at least a modicum of privacy.

After they left, Lois addressed Perry in a resigned tone: “Okay, lay it on me.”

Perry was all innocence as he replied, “What? Oh, I suppose you expect me to pry into what’s bothering you, then tell you a story relating what’s going on in your life to some obscure event in the life of Elvis Presley. Well, I’m not going to do that.”

Skeptically, Lois asked, “You’re not?”

In a matter-of-fact way, Perry answered, “No. For one thing, any connection I made would probably be vague and not particularly useful. For another, if I did that it would seem like I cared more about telling **my** story than helping **you** with your problem. What’s goin’ on, Darlin? Is it related to what we discussed yesterday?”

“Yeah, Perry. This thing is a lot more difficult than we thought it would be. Clark was gone most of the night following up on leads. I missed him being in bed with me. I hope we can resolve this thing quickly so that we can get back to normal.”

“You’re sure that’s what it is? There was that time that Priscilla left Elvis ...”

“No, Perry, it’s nothing like that. It’s just the situation. It could actually present a danger, not to just us, but a lot of people. That’s really weighing on him. I’m worried ... about him ... for him. This isn’t a normal situation.” She gave a snort and continued, “As if any of our situations are what you would call ‘normal’, but this is really serious. We’re both worried.”

“As long as you are sure about this and trust him ...”

“I trust him, Perry, like no one I’ve ever trusted before. I trust him with my life and my happiness.”

“Good. I’d hate to have you not trust Kent. Trust shouldn’t be abandoned without a fight. Especially between you two.”

Lois thought about this for a second and then said, “You know, I think I like the Elvis stories better.”

Perry smiled and said, “Next time, I got a million of ‘em.”

Superman had been flying back and forth across the cityscape all morning. Suddenly, he headed down and landed out of sight in an alley. He checked around with his super-vision and hearing to make sure he was isolated before he spun out of his uniform. He knew that he was taking a chance, but he had to try to get more information and that was why he had traced Jack.

He dropped all appearance of stealth as he walked down the alley toward a particular building. Approaching the boarded-up entrance, he moved a board slightly and slipped inside.

Clark found a stairwell and ascended the steps, quietly, but not stealthily. At the top, he found what appeared to be an empty room. His super-hearing told him that the room was in fact inhabited so he called out, “Jack?”

Hearing his approach, Jack and Denny had both ducked out of sight. Hearing his name being called, Jack stepped out of the shadows. When he did, Clark could see that he had a piece of pipe

gripped like a baseball bat.

Clark put up his hands and Jack, seeing that he wasn't making any threatening moves, lowered the pipe. Jack challenged, "What are you doing here? How'd you find me?"

Clark gave him an answer that he thought he would accept. "Louie. He knows guys who know guys." Seeing Jack relax his stance some, he pressed ahead: "I need an answer to a question." Suddenly, his super-hearing picked up another sound and peering into the gloom, Clark challenged, "Who's there?"

Denny stepped out of the gloom and stopped next to his brother. Denny was also armed. He had a section of a 2x4 in his hands.

Jack was surprised when he saw Clark start to smile. He didn't know that it was in response to the sight of Denny dressed up in Clark's Jacket.

Jack was beginning to feel that he could probably trust Clark, at least a little, so he said to Denny, "It's all right." He didn't want Denny to become too involved, which he would if he heard too much. Jack looked down at Denny and said, "I want you to take a walk."

Denny expressed his reluctance: "Aw, Jack..."

Not willing to accept any rebellion and wishing to keep him safe, Jack said, "Do it. Just don't go too far."

Reluctantly, Denny obeyed his brother. He dropped the 2x4, pulled the jacket close about his skinny frame and walked out, giving Clark a wide berth and watching him warily as he did.

Clark gave Denny a chance to exit the building before he addressed Jack. While he waited, he took in the surroundings in detail. When he finally spoke, he said, "You can't expect to live here like this."

Jack's bravado hadn't deserted him and he replied, "We've got a plan. Soon as I get enough money together ..."

Clark interrupted him, "By stealing?"

Not wishing his lifestyle to be disputed, Jack challenged, "Ask your question and get out."

More concerned with what he had observed, Clark asked, "Who's the other boy?"

Jack challenged, "What's it to you?" When he saw that Clark wasn't going to back down he decided that the information would probably be safe, he replied, "He's my brother."

Clark always cared about children, especially those that appeared to be abandoned, like these two looked to have been. "What about your parents? Your home?"

Clark could see the shake of Jack's head in response to his question and pressed on, "Isn't there someplace you can go? Someone?"

Jack could feel the sincerity in Clark's words and attitude. Intuitively, he knew that this was someone that actually cared so he started to open up. "We tried that. Lots of times. We're better off this way." Then his natural reticence took over and he returned to the subject, "What's your question?"

Clark sensed that he had pushed about as far as he could, at least for now, so he asked, "The man who bought the globe: What did he look like? Please. The truth this time. It's very important."

"There were two. The one I dealt with was tall. An English dude. Never saw him before or since."

Clark asked, "That's all? Nothing else?"

"Well, I did get a glimpse of the other. He was younger, but not much. Tall, but not as tall as the English dude. He had a hat on, but I did see his face. Clean shaven. Dark hair. I think I've seen him before, but I can't be sure."

Clark had been nodding in understanding as Jack had been giving his descriptions. The descriptions fit Nigel St. John and Lex Luthor.

Clark heard Denny coming up the stairs. As he entered the room, Clark looked back and forth between them and said, "I can help you — both of you — if you'll let me."

Jack replied with disdain: "You want to help? Leave us alone."

Clark could see the look of determination on the faces of both boys. With a nod of his head, he decided to give them what they desired — at least for the time being. He turned away and made his way from the building.

After talking with Jack, Clark returned to the Planet. Lois thought that he had simply been searching. She said, "I think we need to talk to Jack again. He knows more than he said. After you ran out after him, I found these," she continued, laying out the pictures she had found. "They prove that he was lying."

"I know. I just had a talk with him. He described the men who bought the globe. A tall Englishman and another man ... tall, younger with dark hair. Sound familiar?"

Lois had gasped at the word, Englishman and as he had continued, her ire had escalated. She spat out, "Nigel and Lex." "That's my guess as well."

"I guess that confirms our worst fears then."

"I guess so."

Chapter 8

Nigel had taken the globe, enclosed in a lead box, to one of Luthor's laboratory facilities on the outskirts of the city with directions for them to perform a complete analysis. There was a single stipulation — no one was to touch the device with a bare hand at any time and even contact with a gloved appendage was to be kept at an absolute minimum.

Nigel had stayed with the globe as it made its way from lab to lab. At each stop, the personnel responsible for each test explained what it was and what the expected result would be; then, they asked for his permission to do the necessary analysis. Everyone knew Nigel by sight, since his reputation had preceded him; therefore, no one wanted to do anything that would draw his ire. Actually that was bad enough, but everyone knew that they wouldn't survive Luthor's wrath.

The globe was submerged in various liquids — weighed, measured, and bombarded with lasers of various frequencies and characters. They tried ionizing and non-ionizing radiation. It was subjected to electrical discharges, freezing baths, and boiling liquids. Files of tempered steel and even diamond imbedded were used to try to get a sample of the material without so much as a particle being removed.

After a full day of testing, the globe was completely unscathed and the report had been presented to Nigel.

The globe had been replaced in the lead enclosure, and Nigel had returned it to Luthor's private art exhibit.

Late in the afternoon, after Lex had disposed of the business of the day, he called Nigel to his office.

When Nigel entered, he asked, "Well?"

"The analysis has been completed, sir."

Placing his hands on his desk, he pushed his chair back and standing said, "Good. Let's go look at my prize."

Once again, Nigel and Lex approached the vault door. Nigel opened it and he and Luthor entered. When Nigel threw the switch to turn on the lights, it looked like a new one had been installed over the crystal pedestal, but appearances can be deceiving.

Luthor didn't see this right away because he was busy going over some papers that Nigel had handed to him just before they had entered. He read aloud the following: "Let's see ... Impervious to harm by any force known to man: heat, cold, radiation, pressure, puncture, nothing. So dense it can't be scanned for content or composition. Warm to the touch, but with no obvious moving parts or power source. Definitely of ..." he looked up as he finished saying, "... alien origin."

Nigel commented, "Unquestionably."

Luthor finally glanced up from the papers in his hand and saw the light coming from the globe. He gestured at the glowing device and asked, “Shall we?”

Nigel bowed and said, “After you, sir.”

Stepping over to the pedestal, Luthor reached out and placed his fingers on the surface of the globe. The light increased and the hologram started.

After speaking with Jack, Clark had been out most of the day, searching. He had finally returned to the newsroom to join Lois. He had brought in take-out for dinner, and they had been going over the additions to the list of Luthor facilities that Jimmy had provided.

Suddenly, they heard Jor-El speaking telepathically: “***There is no longer any doubt. The chain reaction has begun. As panic spreads, the population awakens, too late, to its fate. Our future is inevitable.***”

There was a pause, and then they heard a computer like tone.

As Luthor watched, the man in the hologram waved his hands above the console that he had seen before. Suddenly, the scene started to shake again, the result of another obvious planet-quake. A light began to blink on the panel in front of him.

The man and the woman were knocked to the floor by the violence of the tremor. When the shaking subsided, an urgent light began to blink.

The man struggled to his feet and did something at the console that turned the light off. Then, the woman joined him. Another, different light started to flash on the console. The console screen blinked in sequence — then scrolled data which was unintelligible to Luthor.

After the tone, Jor-El’s voice returned: “***At last the computers have located a suitable destination: a planet physically and biologically compatible with Krypton whose inhabitants resemble ours, and whose society is based on ethical standards which we, too, embrace in concept, if not always in deed.***”

As Luthor and Nigel watched, the screen in front of the man resolved into first a star chart, then telescoped in until a representation of the Earth as seen from space filled the screen.

“***The inhabitants call it simply, Earth.***”

Lois threw her arms around Clark and said, “That means that the selection of this planet was not random. You must have been sent here deliberately.”

As the light from the globe faded, Luthor withdrew his hands. He was somewhat out of sorts. He was learning a little without really learning anything of any consequence. The fact that there was no audio to go along with the video was frustrating him.

He said, “It ended with a picture of the Earth. Was it coincidence or was it the object of a search and if a search, for what purpose? Did they send Superman here deliberately, just to make my life miserable or present me with a challenge?”

Nigel offered, “The holographic technology is amazingly clear.”

In an offhand manner, Luthor agreed, “Yes, the picture quality rivals cable.”

“If we could duplicate the technology every home in America would be clamoring for one.”

“Assuming we could add audio.”

“Of course.”

Just on the off chance that he would get a response, Luthor reached out and touched the globe again. There was no response. He muttered, “I must have patience.” Thinking again and turning to Nigel he said, “There is **one** thing you could do for me in the

interim.”

Nigel almost came to attention as he said, “Ask away.”

In an offhand manner, Luthor said, “I’m suddenly more than ever interested in where this thing came from. Can we do something about that?”

“Oh, I think that there might be something we can do.”

Lois and Clark were both at his desk looking at the map. It was a patchwork of ‘X’s which indicated all of the facilities that he had been able to search. After the last message, they knew that it was becoming critical that they find the globe. The connection between Krypton and Earth had been established in the last message and — undoubtedly — an explanation of how Kal-El had been sent there as a baby would be coming up soon. If the fact that he had come here as a baby was revealed, there were only a few short steps between that fact and Clark Kent.

Lois pointed at a block of buildings just outside of center city which was void of any markings. “I wonder why Lex doesn’t have any holdings in that area.”

Looking at it, Clark said, “That’s not really a commercial area. That’s where the museum and all of those shops are located. It’s more touristy.”

“Oh, you’re right. I knew that. I guess the lack of sleep is catching up with me.”

Denny was surprised when Jack came in with a bag of groceries; he had been expecting burgers and fries from a fast food joint. “What’s up with this, Jack? I thought you were going out to get something for dinner.”

With a shrug, Jack replied, “They wouldn’t sell me anything. When I tried to pay with a hundred-dollar bill they just asked where I got it, like it couldn’t really be mine. I had to go to a grocery store and tell them that my mom had sent me out for food. It’s still edible. Make yourself a sandwich and quit gripin’.”

They had eaten a couple of sandwiches each when Jack heard a noise in the building. He couldn’t be sure that he had heard something so he signaled to Denny to be quiet. Because of the lifestyle that they had led for so long, Denny obeyed without question.

When Jack heard the scrape of a shoe sole on the rubble of the lower floor repeated, he signaled to Denny to disappear.

They each picked up their preferred weapon, Denny the 2x4 and Jack the section of pipe, and disappeared around the corner into an alcove.

Their caution was rewarded when two toughs stepped into the room and looked around. Seeing the groceries, one said to the other, “Look around. He’s gotta be here.”

Realizing that they were only looking for him and wanting to protect Denny, Jack signaled to him to stay put and then he stepped out into the room. He held the pipe up in a threatening attitude and said, “What do you want?”

The leader said, “Look at what we have here. He’s a feisty one.”

“Get out of here and leave me alone.”

“No can do, kid. The boss wants to talk to you.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk to him. Leave me alone.”

“The boss don’t like it when he doesn’t get his way. You’re commin’ with us, kid.” The thug reached for Jack.

When he did, Jack swung his pipe like a baseball bat, hitting the thug with a solid thwack on the arm. The thug howled in pain and grabbed his arm.

Before Jack had a chance to recover the other thug was on him and had him in a bear hug. While he was being held, the thug Jack had hit roared in anger and used his uninjured hand to back-hand Jack across the face.

Jack was knocked unconscious by the blow. He was young, but his constitution was weakened by poor nutrition for an

extended period of time.

The thug that had been holding Jack slung him over his shoulder and started to carry him out, while his partner cradled his injured arm with his good hand.

Denny had wanted to go to Jack's rescue, but Jack had cautioned him over and over that if anything happened he was to remain hidden. He didn't come out of hiding until he could no longer hear them moving around in the building. Then, he grabbed the jacket and throwing it on, headed out of the building.

In a disreputable part of Suicide Slum, Denny, wearing Clark's jacket, was running through the alley, heedless of any danger. He was in an almost blind panic. Breaking out of the alley, he stopped dead in his tracks and looked around. On the corner, he spotted an all-night drug store. Reaching into the pocket of the jacket, he felt around and found what he was looking for. He pulled out the business card that Jack had given him and looked at it. He wasn't sure just how much help this guy would be, but he had seen him in their hideaway, and he had seemed like he wanted to help. He thought that of all the people in Metropolis, he was the only one he could trust.

Breaking from his cover, he headed for the drugstore. He found a phone booth in a corner, pulled some coins from his pocket, and dropping them into the slot, placed the call.

Clark was just coming back from making them each a cup of coffee when suddenly his phone rang.

Lois picked it up and said, "Daily Planet, Clark Kent's phone."

Denny asked, "Is Mr. Kent there?"

"I'm his wife. Can I help you?"

"I gotta talk to Mr. Kent."

"Okay, he'll be right here. Hold on." She placed her hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Clark, it's a kid."

Clark brightened up and asked, "Is it Jack?"

"I don't know. He didn't say."

Setting down the coffee, Clark took the receiver and said, "This is Clark Kent."

"Mr. Kent, this is Denny. They took Jack." He started crying into the phone.

Clark was startled, "They took Jack? Who took him?"

"I don't know. A couple of tough guys. Jack hit one of them. I think he hurt him because he got mad and hit Jack, and I think he knocked him out."

Lois, who could see Clark's expressions and hear his side of the conversation, was becoming concerned.

Denny voice was shaking with fear as he continued. "They took Jack. I don't know who the men were." He paused to catch his breath. "I'm afraid that they're gonna hurt him."

Clark tried to calm him with his voice. "Where are you?"

Denny told him the location of the drug store.

"Okay. Look, Denny, I want you to go straight to the 12th Precinct police station and ask for Inspector Henderson. Got that? Inspector Henderson. My wife, the woman that answered the phone, will be there too. If she isn't there when you arrive, tell Henderson I sent you. Don't worry about Jack. I'll find him."

Clark hung up the phone and turned to Lois. "It looks like Luthor has grabbed Jack. I don't know what Jack told him, but he probably wants to know exactly where Jack 'found' the globe. If Jack tells him that it was in our apartment, it could tie us to Superman and I don't think that Luthor will be put off as easily as Jack was by saying that we were holding it for a friend. I need to go look for him. I need to rescue him before he tells Luthor about us."

"I agree with you. You have to rescue him. Not only to protect the secret, but I don't think that Luthor would let him live to testify against him."

"Yeah, you're right. I need you to go to the Twelfth and find

Denny. Honey, I need you to take care of him. He's thirteen or fourteen and he's got no one but his brother. He needs someone to look after him."

Lois grabbed her jacket and started out, but she turned and said, "Okay, I'll find him. Be careful out there. You know who we are dealing with."

Chapter 9

As Lois was entering the elevator to go down to the parking garage, Clark was disappearing into the stairwell. Seconds later, Superman was crisscrossing the city searching for Jack. While he was searching for Jack, he also kept an eye on Lois and saw that she made it safely to the Twelfth Precinct. He hoped that she would find Denny.

The two goons had delivered Jack to Nigel at a location far removed from Luthor's private museum, and he was still unconscious when the transfer was made.

Nigel had driven off and had taken a circuitous route back to the facility. Jack was still unconscious as Nigel lifted him out of the back of the car and carried him through the labyrinth into the facility.

Once inside, Jack was tied to a chair and blindfolded.

Nigel said, "I am somewhat concerned. He resisted and was struck. He has been unconscious ever since. Such a severe blow could cause a concussion and even concussive amnesia." Nigel opened a satchel and pulled out a blood pressure cuff and applied it to Jack's arm. He performed the simple procedure of taking Jack's blood pressure and pronounced it acceptable.

Luthor replied, "That would be a shame. I want to know where he acquired the device and he can't do that if he has amnesia. At least he isn't going to die on us, at least not immediately."

"Did they send in his finger prints before they turned him over to you?"

"Yes, they were quite efficient."

"What did they turn up?"

Nigel pulled out a sheet of paper and read, "Abandoned by his parents. Raised in a succession of foster homes and state institutions. Escaped from the last with his younger brother three months ago. He's living on the street and supporting himself by acts of petty crime."

With a sarcastic sigh, Luthor said, "A young life failed by the system."

Nigel replied, "I'm afraid so."

"No one will miss him."

"Possibly his brother."

"If Jack can tell us where he got this globe ..."

Luthor was interrupted by the globe suddenly beginning to glow.

"... but that will have to wait. It's showtime." Luthor reached out and touched the globe. The globe emitted the beams of light that formed into the hologram.

Superman was above center city searching for Jack. He had been concentrating on Luthor's facilities and coming up empty each time he had checked an office or building.

He stopped and hung motionless in the air, trying to decide if it would be best to continue the search or approach the police to report the kidnapping. As he continued thinking about it, he considered the best course since Denny could testify to the assault and kidnap. His musings were interrupted almost as if he had received a physical blow. He started to hear the next message from the globe.

After a moment's disorientation, he pushed the message to the back of his mind and tried to zero in on the source.

In the Twelfth Precinct, Lois had just found Denny and was

sitting with him in the visitor’s area. Bill Henderson had been called, but he was out of the office, so they had been asked to wait.

Suddenly, Denny noticed that she went stiff and her eyes went unfocused. He didn’t know it, but she was listening to the message.

Luthor had seen the same man and the helical spiral from the previous message, and he was currently in the process of attaching it to another device that resembled an oversized message pod like those used in pneumatic transport systems.

Lois and Clark heard Jor-El speaking simultaneously. ***“We have installed the hyper-light drive and tested it as best we can. So much is unknown.”***

As Luthor watched, the man stepped to the console and picked up a small device. He recognized it as the globe that he was touching.

“Contained within the sphere is the navigational computer that will guide the ship through the maze of hyperspace, as well as this account of our final days.”

As Luthor watched, the man walked over and inserted the globe into a hemispherical depression on the capsule. When he did, the continents flowed and changed to those of the Earth.

Meanwhile, Superman had been flying in slow circles trying to see where the signal from the globe was strongest. His circles became arcs which decreased in size as he moved in the direction indicated until he could follow an almost straight line. He used his super-vision to see where he was headed. His destination appeared to be in that area of the city that contained museums and shops. The area he had discounted because there were no Luthor holdings indicated.

The man walked over to the mist filled capsule, peered inside, and then lifted it from the pedestal before carrying it over to the larger capsule. The woman had opened a catch and lifted a lid. The man placed the smaller capsule inside.

“All is in readiness. We have selected the ship’s exact destination on Earth and programmed it into the computer.”

Because of the mist that enveloped the smaller capsule, Luthor was unable to see the contents – an infant boy swaddled in blankets.

“Kal-El, our child. Under Earth’s sun his Kryptonian cells will give him powers and abilities no Kryptonian has ever had.” There was a short pause, as if the speaker were gathering his thoughts, “He is the last son of Krypton.”

The scene in the hologram started to shake again.

Superman was now nearing his destination. He used his x-ray vision to look below the ground directly before him. He saw a lead lined bunker under the museum. He didn’t recall any such structures on any of the architectural drawings he had ever seen for this building, immediately making it suspect.

Scanning the area, he decided that he didn’t have the time to waste so a brute force entry was required. To think is to do and he smashed into the ground.

When he did, he encountered unanticipated resistance in the form of reinforced concrete construction. It would take some time to tear his way in, but he would do it with his bare hands.

The light faded and Luthor removed his hands from the globe. Just then, Jack started to stir in the chair he was bound to.

Luthor said with satisfaction, “Ah, now for some answers ...”

He was interrupted by an alarm sounding.

Nigel hurried to a panel and after checking it, he said, “Incoming.”

Luthor replied, “Activate defenses.”

Nigel threw a switch, and immediately, the sound of doors closing and steel plates sliding into place could be heard.

Above this noise, they heard a continuous crashing.

Nigel studied the panel. He reported, “Level one breached.”

Incredulous, Luthor replied, “It can’t be.”

Another crash was heard, louder, closer.

Nigel reported, “Level two.”

Luthor suddenly realized who he was facing. “It’s him.”

There was yet another crash, even louder and nearer.

Nigel said, “Level three.”

Luthor, near panic now said, “Emergency evacuation, on my count ... now.”

In response, Nigel threw another switch. This time red lights began to flash, and a timer panel began to count down from thirty. Jets of vapor began to spout into the room, and a small metal door popped open looking very much like an escape hatch.

Nigel moved toward the arms of Venus, but Luthor stopped him. “No, leave it. Leave everything.”

Nigel nodded in Jack’s direction. “The boy?”

“Him too. There’s only one thing I want.” He stepped toward the pedestal that held the globe, but as he approached it was as if the globe sensed the approach of its rightful owner and floated up toward the ceiling as if to meet him and out of Luthor’s reach.

Nigel reported, “Level four, sir.”

Luthor was fixated on the globe. He jumped as high as he could and still couldn’t reach it.

Realizing that he was running out of time, Luthor finally gave up and joined Nigel at the escape hatch. With one last backward look, he ducked through the hatch, and Nigel closed it behind them.

Just as the hatch closed, there was a final crash and concrete and debris cascaded into the room from the ceiling followed by Superman, his uniform covered in concrete dust.

His attention was immediately drawn to the flashing lights and the countdown timer. Grabbing the lever that Nigel had used to activate it, he reversed the switch, but the timer continued its count. He used his x-ray vision to see the workings and saw a manual switch that would be triggered by the timer. When the timer read three seconds, he used a blast of his super-cold breath to freeze the panel and the moisture in the air within the mechanism, preventing the trigger from closing and buying some time. Then, using his super-strong fingernails, he pried the panel off the front and reaching inside ripped out the wires to the detonator.

Stepping to the center of the room, he lifted his hand and the globe settled into it.

After placing the globe in the hidden pouch in his cape, he went over to check on Jack. He removed his blindfold and bonds then steadied him as he stood. “Who did this to you?”

“I ... I don’t know. Denny and I were eating. These two guys came in. I got hit. That’s the last thing I remember.

“We’ll see that you’re taken care of.” Now that all the excitement was past, Superman looked around, saw the exhibits, and marveled at what they were.

He forced the vault door open and led Jack out through the labyrinth of corridors, forcing doors open as he went, and finally emerging in a sub-basement of the actual museum. Using his x-ray vision, he found a secret entrance from a tunnel. He used his heat vision to weld the door closed and planned to follow it to its source later.

He led Jack upstairs. It was after closing, so only the night watchman was on duty. Seeing Superman in the museum after hours made him curious, but not concerned, until he saw his companion. He asked, “What’s goin’ on, Superman? Who’s that with you?”

Superman placed a hand on Jack’s shoulder and said, “This is a friend of mine. He just helped me recover some of my property. Can I use a phone? I have to call the police and the museum curator. I think they will be interested in what we have found.”

“Sure. Come with me.” The guard led them to an office and opened the door. “The phone’s on the desk there.”

“Thank you for your help.” Superman picked up the phone and dialed the number for the Twelfth Precinct.

“Twelfth Precinct, Sgt. Cooper.” When Sgt. Cooper heard the voice on the other end, he sat up straighter in his chair and listened.

“Sgt. Cooper, this is Superman. I would like to request that Lieutenant Henderson meet me at the Museum. He should bring Lois Lane and the young boy that is there with her along with him.” He looked at Jack as he finished, “I think his brother would like to see him, to make sure he’s okay.”

The look of worry started to disappear from Jack’s face as he heard this.

“Sure thing, Superman. Ms. Lane and the boy are right here. I’ll let Lt. Henderson know right away.”

“Thank you Sgt. Cooper. I’ll look for them.”

Superman next called the museum curator and asked him to come in.

When everyone was gathered, Superman led them all down to the hidden museum. Once there, Superman said that he had to leave for another emergency, but that he would stop long enough to call Clark Kent and inform him as to his wife’s whereabouts.

Twenty minutes later, Clark showed up with Jimmy Olsen in tow. Jimmy started using his camera as soon as he stepped through the vault door, documenting everything.

Chapter 10

Lois convinced Henderson that Jack and Denny should be held as material witnesses and put up in a motel, temporarily, and then she and Clark went home to write up the story.

The next day, the Daily Planet ran the following headline:

“Crime in Metropolis: Superman Unearths Treasure Trove Beneath Metropolis Art Museum!”

By: Lois Lane and Clark Kent

“Late last night while searching for a missing youth, Superman uncovered a cache of unknown and stolen artwork. The possessor is as yet to be identified. Once identified prosecution is expected. If authenticated, the value of the trove is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Story continues A2”

A sidebar read: “Masterworks Donated to Metropolis Museum of Art.” It was accompanied by a picture of Bill Henderson holding up the Venus de Milo arms.

Photo credit: James Olsen

Before the alarm went off, Lois reached over to turn it off and then scooted around so that she was facing Clark.

All of her movement had awakened him and as soon as she was facing him he started a kiss.

Without breaking the kiss, she moved so that he had to roll over on his back, and she was lying triumphantly on top of him with her elbows on the bed and her hands at both sides of his head.

Reaching under her nightie, his hands slipped up her sides and caressed the sides of her breasts. She pulled herself up so that he could get his hands between their bodies, and he could cup her breasts. Her moan of pleasure was swallowed up in the kiss.

Breaking the kiss, she pushed herself up so that she was straddling his hips and grasped the hem of her nightie, pulling it

over her head. Clark’s hands were still caressing her globes and she smiled in pleasure. She said, “I think we are both overdressed.”

She rolled on her side and started to push off her bikini panties as Clark slipped his sleep shorts off.

This started a period of marital intimacy.

When they finished, she sighed and said, “Now, that’s the way to get the day off to a great start.”

He laughed and said, “I guess you aren’t going to be luring me into the supply room today.”

Lois laughed and with a wicked little grin said, “No, not today. Tomorrow is another story.”

After breakfast, they headed into the Planet. When they got in, Perry was waiting for them. He was beaming when they exited the elevator.

He was standing near their desks and as they settled in said, “I suggested a strong finishing kick for the Meriwether judges, but I didn’t expect anything like this! If this doesn’t cinch it, I don’t know what will. Congratulations!”

Lois looked up at Clark and at his nod said, “Thanks, Perry. From both of us.”

Luthor was headed to a meeting at another facility

As they passed through the lobby of Lex Tower, he had Nigel procure a copy of the Daily Planet for him.

As soon as Lex saw the headline, he snapped the paper shut in disgust.

Knowing the source of Luthor’s irritation, Nigel said, “You could visit them on exhibit.”

Shaking his head, Luthor said, “It won’t be the same.”

Nigel offered, “Quite right.” He noted that Luthor wasn’t anywhere near as upset as he had expected and voiced his question: “If you don’t mind my saying so sir, you seem remarkably composed considering your loss.”

With an equanimity born of fatalism, Luthor replied, “Give and take, Nigel, win some, lose some. One step backward, two steps ahead.”

Nigel nodded, even though he didn’t really understand and then asked, “In what direction?”

“Actually, I’m not sure. We actually have more questions than answers. That globe, how long has it been here? Did it arrive recently? What were the contents of that capsule? It was rather small, too small to be a transport vehicle. Was it simply a message capsule, or was it more? Will there be more? Will we have a regular procession of message capsules from Superman’s home world, giving him directions on how to soften us up for the take-over? Are they sending food-stuffs that he needs to stay alive? If only we could have seen through that mist. We need to find out more. We need that globe back, but he will in all probability place it somewhere that only he can access it from now on. As I said, ‘Win some, lose some’.”

“Yes, sir. I understand, sir.”

“Nigel, on that other matter ... how are the arrangements for the accident coming?”

“I think that there will be a regrettable traffic incident ... soon.”

“Good. Keep me informed.”

“Yes, sir.”

That night, as Lois and Clark were preparing for bed, the globe came to life again. This time they could watch the hologram as they listened.

Jor-El and Lara were both standing next to what they knew to be Kal-El’s ship. The cover was open and there was a wire still attached to the globe using a magnetic or suction grip, obviously receiving these final scenes.

Once again they heard Jor-El speak to them telepathically: *“I try to picture where you are now as you hear this last chapter. What do you look like? Are you alone? Have you found your life mate? What have you become? Lara and I will never know. But that you should live to experience this ... that is enough. We are content.”*

Jor-El touched a button and the mist in the capsule cleared. When it did, an infant could be seen. Jor-El started to seal the spaceship door. Before he did, Lara lightly touched the capsule’s surface and the infant reached for her. Jor-El touched another button and once again, the mist suffused the capsule. Jor-El closed the ship’s door as another tremor began.

“We give you to Earth, to a realm called America, and a place called Kansas. The mist will cause you to sleep until the capsule is opened. Fresh air will revive you. Remember us, but do not regret our passing. All is fate.”

As Jor-El’s voice faded, the view shifted to a view of Krypton as seen from space. The globe must have been in communication with satellites in orbit. On the planet’s surface, a pinpoint of light could be seen. Rapidly, it grew in size and soon its nature was discernable. It was the miniature ship that Jor-El had been working on, the ship that carried Kal-El. As the ship flashed by the satellite, the scene continued to center on Krypton. As they watched, they started to see explosions scattered across the face of the planet. More and more became apparent until finally in a great cataclysmic blast the entire planet exploded sending chunks of debris in all directions. With the death of the planet, the controller for the satellite was destroyed so the scene winked out of existence.

A few seconds were needed by them to recover from what they had just witnessed. Clark’s hand sought Lois’s hand. Lois squeezed his hand and then turned to him. When she looked at him, his face was wet with tears.

Lois was also crying as she put her arms around his neck and said, in an awed tone, “Your parents **didn’t** abandon you! They **saved** you. Instead of trying to build a larger ship to take all of you away and probably failing in the attempt, they concentrated on building the small ship to save you.”

After a few moments of comforting one another, Clark looked once again at the globe. It had resumed the appearance of the Earth and had ceased to glow.

Clark, in a hushed tone, repeated Lois’s words, “I wasn’t abandoned by my parents, I was saved.”

“Clark, I think we need to go to Smallville. We need to tell your parents what we found out and I don’t think we should use the phone.”

Still a little shaky, he replied, “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

“No probably about it. Come on, flyboy. Get changed. I’ll carry the globe.”

The Kent family, all four of them, were sitting around the kitchen table. The globe was sitting in the center of the table.

Lois was finishing the narrative, “... so there you have it. That’s the story.”

Martha asked, “Why couldn’t they save themselves?”

Clark replied, “I don’t know. It didn’t say. Lois thinks that perhaps they didn’t have time to build a larger ship, so they concentrated on the smaller one. The globe might know. Maybe it will tell me ... someday.”

Lois stood and moved behind Clark. She wrapped her arms around him and said, “Maybe, but we do know that they loved you. They loved you enough to try and save you from a planet-wide disaster ... at the expense of their own lives.”

Jonathan asked, “What about the kids, Jack and ... Denny?”

“We’re going to ask Henderson to help us with them. They may have to split up, at least for a while. I think we can work through the Superman Foundation to find him a good home. It

won’t be as good as the doorstep I ended up on, but better than where he was. Jack’s a little old for that. I’m thinking a half-way house. A place where he can live and maybe get a job. He’s basically a good kid that was put into a bad situation.”

Jonathan asked, “No idea who took him and the globe?”

“We suspect that it was Luthor, but we can’t prove it. He can’t identify the toughs that took him. It was too dark and they knocked him out. He was unconscious until I found him. The partial description he gave me about who bought the globe fits Nigel and Luthor, but that’s not enough.”

A couple of days later, Lois and Clark were returning from the Dojo. They had parked up the street and on the other side because of all the cars parked along it.

Lois got out of the driver’s side and moved to the back to get her gym bag.

As he was exiting, Clark saw an elderly woman crossing the street, jay-walking. He hustled to help her across.

As he entered the street, a medium size truck suddenly roared to life and barreled toward him.

Lois’s attention was attracted by the noise of the revving engine, and she looked up to see the truck heading for Clark. She shouted a warning.

He turned to face the truck and dropped to the pavement. He allowed the truck to pass over him and then floated up until he was hovering just under the engine block. He flew there, staying with the truck until it came to a stand-still. Swiping his hands across the bottom of the engine, he used the oil and grease he picked up to stain his hands and clothes.

When he heard the door open, he crawled out from under the truck and captured the driver.

The driver was taken completely by surprise and struggled against Clark. It was a sorely uneven contest. Clark used some of the karate he had been learning and put the man out. Picking him up by the collar, he dragged him to a phone booth and placed a call to the MPD.

A few minutes later, Bill Henderson drove up. Looking Clark over and noting the condition of his clothes, he asked, “Okay, what happened?”

“This individual tried to run me over in that,” pointing, he indicated the truck. “Fortunately there’s enough clearance under those that I was able to hold on to the tie rods and motor-mounts and not be dragged to death.”

“Deliberate?”

“He didn’t stop to see if I was injured. Hit-and-run at the least.”

“We’ll see what we can get out of him.”

Just then, Lois drove up. She jumped out of the Jeep and ran to Clark. “Clark, honey, are you okay?”

Henderson turned to her and asked, “You were there? You saw it?”

“Sure I saw it. It was deliberate. He tried to kill Clark.”

“Okay, we’ll hold him for questioning.”

Perry came out of his office a few days later, as usual, he was wearing a vest without his jacket with his sleeves rolled up and his tie askew. Peering around, he saw Cat and Jimmy clustered around Lois’s desk. He didn’t know what was so interesting about the charts that they were looking at, but passed it off as research. Clark was busy typing away on his computer.

He was carrying the copy of the paper that had the story of the art find. Waving it in the air, he said, “Incredible piece of Journalism, Lois. Too bad about the Meriwether Award, though. Maybe next year.”

Lois looked at Clark and seeing he was busy answered for both of them: “Thanks, Chief.”

Cat, offended on Clark and Lois behalf, said, “Well, I for one

am not satisfied.”

Lois quipped, “Big surprise there.”

Cat warmed to her topic: “We still have no idea where the art works came from, or who was keeping them in a secret vault underneath the museum.”

Lois was having a hard time keeping herself from telling what she suspected, but finally managed to control herself.

In reply to Cat, Perry said, “I hear questions, but I see follow-up stories. Lots of them.” Spotting a copy boy passing, Perry said, “Hey, how ‘bout some coffee here?”

The copy boy stopped and turned around. Lois recognized Jack. It had been almost a week since she had seen him last and she almost didn’t recognize him. He had cleaned up, looked well fed, and was healthy and neatly dressed. Nodding to herself, she thought that Clark had probably used the influence of the Superman Foundation to get him a job here.

Jack glanced at Perry and answered, “I don’t do coffee. It’s not in the job description. Read the manual, Gramps.” Turning on his heel, Jack went back to what he had been doing.

Lois made a mental note to have Clark talk to Jack about his attitude.

Perry was irate as he spluttered, “Who is that kid? Hey, you!” Perry chased off after him.

As Perry hurried off in pursuit of Jack, Jimmy was almost chortling as he said, “I love it. I no longer occupy the bottom rung of the food chain.” He thought for a second about Jack’s history and added, “But you better hide the silver.”

Cat turned to leave, but Jimmy stopped her. “So, when is the big night?”

Cat stopped and turned to face Jimmy. She sighed and had a pained look on her face as she said, “I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that.” Her expression changed only slightly. Seeing Lois looking at her, she winked as she continued, “I think I’m going to have to declare the bet null and void.”

Disappointment and dismay were evident in his expression as he demanded, “Null and void? Why?”

Cat was bordering on smug as she replied, “Jimmy, I’ve always thought you were kind of cute. And, if before this you’d told me that you found me attractive, who knows what might have happened? But, now that I know we’re related by blood, I can’t go through with it. After all, ...” she patted him on the cheek as she finished, “we’re family.”

Cat turned and started to saunter away. Jimmy was stunned at her statement, but still hoping to changing her mind, he followed her. He said, “It’s not illegal!”

Lois smiled and getting up from her desk approached Clark. “How’s it going, honey?”

He didn’t look up as he typed. “Just a sec. Let me finish this.” He typed a few more words, sighed and sat back.

Lois leaned in and read what was on his screen. She said, “That’s nice. They’re going on exhibit that quickly?”

“Yeah, the curator doesn’t see any need to delay the exhibit. All of the items recovered have been authenticated. The Venus arms may be sent to the Louvre so that they can be displayed with the statue. They may even attempt to reattach them.”

“That was a nice thing that you did for Jack.”

“The kid deserved a chance.”

“I think you need to talk to him about his attitude. I think he rubbed Perry the wrong way.”

“I’ll talk to him, but I don’t know how much good it’ll do. Part of the reason I got him the job here was so that we could keep an eye on him. If it **was** Luthor and he doesn’t know how much Jack knows or doesn’t know, Jack is a threat to him and he may be wearing a target on his back. Having him here could keep him at least a little bit safer than anywhere else.”

“How’s Denny making out?”

“He’s in a good foster home. Jack sees him on a daily basis.

He’s in school and adapting well.”

“I was just thinking about the globe. Do you think it’ll be safe there?”

With a smile, he said, “Who would ever think of looking for something belonging to Superman in a child’s tree house in Kansas? As long as we don’t say anything, I don’t think mom or dad will, so it should be as safe as if it was in an ice palace in the arctic.”

Luthor saw the write-up of the attempted hit-and-run and depressed a switch on his intercom. “Nigel, a moment of your time, please.”

A few seconds later, Nigel entered Luthor’s office. “Yes, sir?”

“The hit on Kent failed. You must take care of the driver.”

“Immediately, sir.” Nigel started to turn away, but was stopped by Luthor.

“And the woman that lured Kent into the street?”

“All she knows is that she was to J-walk there at that time. No way for her to be traced back to us.”

Luthor thought for a second and then said, “Take care of her nonetheless. She knows that Kent was the target. Let’s not leave any loose ends dangling.”

Nigel nodded and started for the door, but before he had a chance to make it through the door, Luthor said, “Try something else next time.”

“Unquestionably.”

THE END