

# Fallout – 2016 – Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 1 CG3

By KenJ <Ken.janney@kjanney.com>

Rated PG-13

Submitted: December 2016

Summary: This is the NextGen story that follows up on the events of Thanksgiving and Christmas 2015 and reveals the outcome of the interactions with Bud.

Story Size: 50,692 words (266Kb as text)

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. There are many characters that are my creations in this story.

I wish to express my thanks to my Beta readers Artemis (Welcome back, Artemis!) and Ray Reynolds (Get well soon) for their invaluable help. This was a VERY rough draft when it first landed in their hands.

/ “text”/ indicates telepathic communication

\*text\* indicates bold

<text> indicates thoughts

This Next Gen story takes place ‘today’. It is set in fall 2016. This story is going to be very topical and ‘gritty’ dealing with drugs, alcohol, child abuse, terrorism and mass shootings. No one will die, but it isn’t like they weren’t supposed to. Although, Lois and Clark, AKA Ultra Woman and Superman, are featured, the main characters are their children, principally the oldest son, Jon, and daughter, Lara. Hattie Kaplin and JJ, James Olsen Junior, and Lara’s soul-mate boyfriend, Mike Lee also star.

The first three chapters will be something of a refresher

Chapter 1 is from Clark and Lois – When Worlds and Universes Collide - Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 8

Chapter 2 is from Thanksgiving 2015 - Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 1 CG1

Chapter 3 is from Christmas 2015 - Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 1 CG2

\*\*\*

## Chapter 1 – Lucy Almost Reveals the Secret

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

When Jon found the empty office he was surprised. He hadn’t been told about Herb and the fact that he was a time traveler. He couldn’t very well go back to the game room and announce that Mom and Dad were missing.

Hattie had only been there since school let out and already she had come too close to the family secret more times than he cared to contemplate. If he said that Mom and Dad had disappeared, that would be the straw that broke the camel’s back. He knew that he

had to cover for them somehow.

Jon closed the door and headed for the kitchen. Under the circumstances he felt confident that his mom would authorize the snack and he could use it as a distraction. He got out some chocolate chocolate chip cookies, everybody’s favorite, and a bunch of glasses of milk. Once he had everything prepared he called the rest from the play room.

Hattie had Sam in her arms when they came out to the kitchen and she settled him on her lap when she sat. She broke off a small piece of cookie and gave it to Sam and Jon didn’t object because he had seen his mom do the same thing before.

Suddenly Jon realized that there was one person missing – Lucy!

Thinking back just a few weeks Jon started to panic. The last time he had lost track of her she had almost flooded that bathroom by overflowing the tub and had flushed almost a whole roll of toilet tissue down the commode. Then she had gotten into Mom’s cosmetics ...

Fearing the worst he enlisted Lara’s aid, “Lara, Lucy’s missing! We have to find her before she does something that will get us in trouble. Come on! Hattie, can you watch the rest?”

“Sure Jon, but why all the panic? Maybe she’s with your parents.”

Jon replied without thinking, “I don’t think so.” Then he thought better of it and added, “They went into the office with their visitor.” He turned to Lara and said, “Come on, Sis. We \*have\* to find her before she does any damage! I’ll check upstairs, you check down here.”

They both left the kitchen quickly. Once out of the kitchen they both shifted into superspeed.

After a few seconds Lara appeared in front of Jon on the second floor. “Have you found her?”

“No, I take it you haven’t either.”

“Right, I haven’t found Mom or Dad, either. What’s going on? Where are they? I thought you said they were in the office.”

“I don’t know, sis! They went into the office with Mr. Wells. When I went to ask about us having a snack, they were all gone. Mom, Dad and Mr. Wells had just ... disappeared. I saw them go in, but I didn’t see them come out. It’s like a magician’s trick. Now you see them, now you don’t.”

At this point Lara was really becoming concerned, “What could have happened to them?”

“I don’t know, but they are invulnerable and the only thing that can hurt them is Kryptonite, so we shouldn’t worry.”

“But, with all of the stories Mom has told us about Tempus and the Prankster and Toyman and all of the others ...”

“Sis, in that list the only one that knows their secret identities is Tempus, and he hasn’t been around for years. Oh, what am I saying? Tempus is a time traveler. Wait a minute. Tempus is a time traveler. We all have read that book, ‘The Time Machine’ by ... H. G. Wells ... Mr. Wells! Do you think???”

Lara looked shocked. That thought had never occurred to her. Could Jon be right? “Jon, if you’re right then they could be anywhere or anytime.”

“And like Tempus, he could show up anytime. No wonder he doesn’t seem to age. Look, we still need to find Lucy. It doesn’t look like she’s in the house. Let’s look outside.”

They found Lucy in the back yard playing on her kiddie swing. She was swinging with maximum effort and laughing harder the higher she went. Seeing this Jon heaved a relieved sigh. At least she wasn’t up to any mischief.

Jon and Lara stood on the back porch and watched Lucy for a minute to talk. “Lara, we have to cover for Mom and Dad. We can’t let Hattie find out that they went missing. That would be all she would need to figure out what’s what.”

Lara looked at her watch and said, “It’s Sam and Lucy’s bedtime. We can say that since Mom and Dad are tied up they

asked us to put them down. Hattie likes to take care of Sam and that will keep her occupied. Afterward we could put on a movie.”

“What should we watch?”

“I think this could call for a double feature. Kung Fu Panda and Kung Fu Panda 2.”

“Sounds like a good idea. I’ll get Lucy.”

Jon went over and stood in front of Lucy as she swung higher and higher on the swing. He simply held out his arms.

Seeing him Lucy started to smile broadly. This was a game that she and Jon had been playing for some time. She gave an extra exuberant swing and as she approached the top she kicked free of the swing. Squealing with delight she flew through the air in an arc and Jon caught her.

“Good job, squirt! That was a good one. We need to go in, it’s time for bed.”

“Awwwww, don wanna! Wanna swing some more!” She started trying to squirm out of Jon’s grasp. The effort was doomed before it began and Jon simply headed for the back door.

Once they were inside, Lucy forgot all about the swing when she saw Hattie. She squirmed some more and said, “Be wis Hattie.”

Jon set her on her feet and she made a beeline for Hattie. Hattie handed Sam to Lara and picked up Lucy. She said, “Hey Squirt. Where were you?”

“I was on swing! I was high in sky. I fly and Jon caught me.”

Hattie looked at Jon. She said, “Squirt, you can’t fly.”

“Yes, Hattie! I fly!”

Jon clarified, “It’s a game we play. She was on her swing. She swings really high and lets go. She flies off the swing and I catch her.”

Hattie nodded in understanding. Turning back to Lucy she said, “I think I understand. You fly off the swing.”

“Someday I fly for real, like mommy.”

Hattie’s head snapped up and she looked at Jon with a question in her eyes.

Jon was stunned. Why would Lucy come out with something like that? Had she seen Mom change and fly off? Had she seen Dad? How could he cover this up? He had to think of something and he needed to think of it fast! He stammered out, “Uh, well, she, she was uh, uh, looking ... looking at pictures of Superman flying Mom out of danger, yeah, that’s it. Pictures of Mom with Superman. He had saved her a lot of times. We have a whole scrap book of those kind of pictures.”

Hattie gave a hesitant nod still giving Jon a curious look. “Yeah, I’ve seen some of those pictures on the front page of the Daily Planet. But, come to think of it, I haven’t seen too many of them recently.”

Jon made a mental note to tell his mom that she needed to be seen being rescued by Superman more often even though she was super powered now. He needed to distract Hattie somehow. Thinking furiously, he finally came up with a plan. He said, “Let’s get these kids down and then Lara and I can tell you about the Halloween party and what happened.”

Hattie immediately perked up and excitedly asked, “You’ll tell me what you know about the new superheroes?”

Jon thought before responding, “I don’t have much to tell, but what I can I will.” He thought, <Well, that wasn’t exactly a lie. I said I’d tell her what I can.>

From that point on Hattie was anxious to get both of the little ones down, but that didn’t keep her from enjoying her time with them. Jon and Lara allowed her to do the bulk of the prep – putting the sleeper on Sam and the footie pajamas on Lucy and even telling Lucy a bedtime story.

Once the two littlest were in bed Jon, Lara and Hattie all moved downstairs.

Lara asked, “Feel like watching a movie?”

Hattie asked, “Which one?”

Jon chimed in, “We were thinking about a double feature, ‘Kung Fu Panda, 1 and 2.’”

Hattie warily said, “Okay, but first, Jon, you promised to tell me all you know about the new superheroes.”

Jon had been hoping that Hattie would have been so distracted that she would forget, but he should have known better. He said, “Let’s go into the living room and get settled.”

Once they were all on the couch, Jon started. “Well, Lara, Mike and I were at Maisie’s stand ...”

Hattie interrupted, “Maisie Matthews?”

“Yeah, she has a diner in town and she had set up a stand in the park serving eats. Well, while she was preparing our orders she discovered that she was out of condiments and said she had to go into the diner to get some. Well, we waited and waited. Finally Lara and I couldn’t wait any longer and so we with to the rest rooms. When we came back, Miss Maisie still wasn’t back and we had to wait some more. Finally we saw Miss Maisie and Sheriff Broadhurst come out of the diner with a guy in handcuffs. When Miss Maisie came back she told us she had been robbed. Here is where this gets interesting. She said that a couple of kids saved her. The crook had her tied to a chair and was threatening to kill her. The kids disarmed the crook and tied him to a chair and then brought in the sheriff.”

“Come on Jon, most of that was in the paper! What’s the inside scoop?”

“Well, she did describe the kids. She said that the guy’s uniform was a lot like Superman’s, but the colors were off. I think she said that instead of blue it was black.”

Lara added, “She said that the girl’s uniform was just like Ultra Woman’s, except that the colors were ... are you ready for this?”

Hattie nodded.

“Reversed! Where Ultra Woman’s uniform is pink this one was turquoise and vice versa.”

“Didn’t they get any pictures?”

“Nope and Miss Maisie said that they disappeared once the sheriff was there to take charge.”

“How did she know they were kids?”

“I don’t know. By their size I guess.”

Hattie thought for a second before she said, “Now, if I was a superhero using an appearance generator to look human and I wanted people to think that there were more heroes around, I’d use the appearance generator to project a different image. Going smaller, changing the colors hmmm, I wonder if they have a voice activated interface so that all they need to do is say, ‘Make the suit black.’ And it’s done. It’s possible that they haven’t done this before because it took time to do the programming.”

Jon said, “Let’s watch the movie.”

“Okay, but I’m going to have to think about this.”

Lara turned on the TV and hit play. The other kids heard the TV and came in and settled in to watch.

The first movie had just finished and they were about to start the second movie when the office door opened and Lois and Clark stepped out.

Jon heaved a silent sigh of relief. They had been in a bind and between him and Lara they had managed to dodge the bullet.

Lois looked around and didn’t see Lucy or Sam. She addressed Lara, “Where are Sam and Lucy?”

Lara replied, “We knew that you were tied up in your meeting, so we didn’t bother you. We just put them to bed when they were supposed to go down.”

Lois said, “Thanks, Kiddo. You did good.” Turning to Hattie she asked, “Have you been having a good time? What have we missed?”

“I’ve been having the best time ever. Jon was telling me about your scrap book.”

Lois got a worried look as she asked, “Which scrap book

would that be?”

“The one with all of the pictures of you flying with Superman.”

Lois knew that no such scrap book existed. She realized that Jon must have come up with this to cover up something and she wondered just what that something was. She knew that she’d have to play along so she said, “Oh, that old thing. How did that come up?”

“Oh, Lucy said she was looking forward to when she could fly like you. Jon explained what she meant you flying with Superman. By the way, when you fly with him, does he feel, I don’t know, normal? No extra arms or tentacles or anything?”

Lois started to laugh, “Extra arms or tentacles?”

Jon explained, “We watched ‘Galaxy Quest’ earlier and Hattie has this theory that Superman and Ultra Woman could be using appearance generators to look like Earthlings.”

Hattie added, “Yeah, you see, that would explain the new superheroes. If that was actually Superman and Ultra Woman they could be changing their appearance to make the world think that there are more superheroes around and then crooks would have more to fear.”

Clark nodded and said, “That’s an interesting theory. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see if, maybe sometime, some new superheroes will make their debut and Superman and Ultra Woman might be standing there next to them.”

Hattie was surprised. She said, “But, that would mean that there really are new heroes. Maybe they are really their children. Do you think that is possible?”

Clark replied, “I guess anything is possible, especially when it comes to superheroes.”

Hattie was looking directly at Clark so she didn’t see Lois wink at Clark. She also didn’t see Jon smile at Lara.

Hattie finally looked around and caught Jon’s smile fading and started to get angry, “You guys are just pulling my leg! Was that a phony copy of the Planet with that story inserted to get me going?”

Lois tried to mollify her, “No Hattie, we aren’t. That was right from the newsstand. We wouldn’t do anything like that. We all heard about the new heroes. We just don’t know when or where they will show up again. From what we heard they are a lot like Superman and Ultra Woman. They show up when and where they are needed. In this case, Maisie was in real trouble and they showed up to help her out.”

“But, how did they know she was in trouble? Were they there to see it? Were they flying overhead and saw her with their x-ray vision? Did they hear something?”

Lois laughed, “Whoa, slow down Hattie. So many questions! The only ones that could answer them aren’t even here. I think we can possibly make some guesses. Did they see what was happening? Perhaps . . . we don’t know the extent of their powers; after all, they were only there for a short time. We do know that they are fast and strong from what Maisie and the sheriff said. Those are two of the powers that Superman and Ultra Woman possess so it could be logical to assume that they have the same powers.” Lois knew that she was treading a very fine line so she had to be careful. “Based upon that assumption, they could have been flying over and saw what was happening with x-ray vision as you suggest because those are also powers that Superman and Ultra Woman possess.”

Deciding to use this opportunity to its fullest, Lois continued, “We know that Superman showed up about sixteen years ago and Ultra Woman made her first appearance about fourteen years ago and then came back, apparently to stay about three years ago.”

Hattie interrupted, “I wonder where she was all of that time. Do you think she went back to New Krypton?”

“Well, Hattie, you’d have to ask her that question. All we know is that now she is here and it looks like she will be sticking

around.”

“Do you think that these new superheroes are their children?”

“Well, Hattie, has Superman been away for any long periods of time?”

“He went missing for a while back when the Nightfall asteroid was a threat.”

“Right, but that was only a few days.”

“Then he went to New Krypton.”

“Right, but that wasn’t for a long period of time.”

“You mean that these new heroes might not be their children? They could be some new visitors from New Krypton?”

“Well, I don’t know. I guess that would be a possibility. What do you think?”

Hattie was shocked speechless. She finally said, “Wow, more Kryptonians and kids, like us. I wonder how many more will join us.”

Lois said, enigmatically, “Only time will tell,” as she thought of each of her eight children and how each of their spouses would eventually become super through exposure to the Kryptonian aura and the use of the pendant. Then she thought of that peek she’d had into Hattie’s future and started to smile. Hattie would become a member of the family. She had seen Hattie interact with JJ whenever he was over at the same time as her. She knew that Hattie liked him and he liked her. It made Lois happy that they would eventually marry and that they would both become super. “Only time will tell.” She repeated with a shake of her head.

Without them realizing it the memories of the trip began to fade. Eventually the block that Herb had initiated was in place and they forgot that they had even been away.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 2 From Thanksgiving 2015 - Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 1 CG1

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120

Local designation - Canon Universe also called Prime

%%%

It had been a crazy week at the Planet and a frustrating week for the superheroes. There had been more terror attacks at scattered locations across the globe and there had been little or nothing that they could do about them. Accidents can be dealt with, most of the time in a car wreck the victim will be there until rescued, but a terror attack happens and is over so quickly that there is no stopping or preventing it. Superman and Ultra Woman had been able to airlift some of the victims to hospitals, but that was all.

Things had quieted, somewhat, and by Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup>, Lois and Clark were happy to be heading home with four children in tow.

They were actually going to be having a rather large gathering. JJ Olsen, his brother and sister were joining them as were Jack and Mel Kaplan and Hattie. Jimmy and Lucy frequently availed themselves of the time that their children spent with Lois and Clark to have some alone time together. Added to that, recently Jimmy had started a new tech company and was busy getting it off the ground. He had kept his job at the Planet so that they would have a steady source of income until the business was bringing in enough of a cash flow. That made eighteen mouths to feed so they were actually cooking three turkeys. With four cooks it was going to be somewhat crowded in the kitchen so a division of labor was devised. One was an oven roast, one was going to be smoked and one was scheduled to be deep fried. The smoking and deep frying were going to be done out back and that was where Jonathan and Clark would be doing the cooking, leaving Lois and Martha in the kitchen to make the oven roast, stuffing, sides and desserts. Martha was doing the turkey, stuffing and some pies in the oven

while Lois worked on the vegetables.

Jonathan had the smoker set up with mesquite chips for flavor and once it was ready he hung the cleaned turkey inside.

Clark had the deep fryer set up on a stand over a propane fire. That was going to be the trickiest of all, because he had to guard against hot spots and an improperly thawed turkey. Any ice (water) could cause geysering when it flashed to steam. If there was an oil geyser it could ignite. Clark made sure that the bird was properly thawed by using his heat vision on it and was able to lower it into the oil without incident.

The time that each bird was started were staggered due to the different cooking times so that they would all be finished at about the same time.

\*\*\*

The Kents had borrowed a number of folding tables and chairs and the children were in charge of setting them up and putting out the place settings. Sam's highchair would be at Lois's side.

Just before the first of the guests was to arrive, Lois, Clark and the four oldest kids heard voices raised in fear and they sounded fairly close.

Jon and Lara immediately went to Lois and said, "That sounds like the Livingstons's, down the street. We want to help."

Lois nodded and they spun into their uniforms as did Lois. They joined Clark in the back yard. Clark put an arm around Jon while Lois did the same for Lara and then they took off, straight up, travelling too fast for the eye to follow and arced back down from a slightly different direction.

As they approached, Lois saw Karl and Carol Livingston and their two older children on the sidewalk. Smoke was billowing from the house. Carol had her head buried in her husband's chest and was weeping inconsolably. Before they landed, Lara said to her mom, "I don't see the baby. I want to go for her. I babysat her just last week. I know where her room is."

"Okay, Sweetie, go get her," and as they landed, Lois placed Ultra Woman 2 on the ground. As soon as her feet had touched the sidewalk, Ultra Woman 2 used her super-speed to enter the house at a run while Ultra Woman stopped to talk to the family.

Carol Livingston was frantic and seeing Ultra Woman screamed, "My baby's still inside. The smoke was too much. It drove us out of the house. I couldn't go for her."

Ultra Woman placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder and a restraining hand on Karl's shoulder as he started to move in the direction of the door, and in somewhat stilted phraseology said, "Ultra Woman 2 has gone in to see if there is anyone left inside. I am sure that she will find her."

While Ultra Woman and Ultra Woman 2 were dealing with the family, Superman and Kam-El went in to see what was happening to the house and found that the kitchen was in flames. Superman immediately saw a deep fryer on the gas stove in the kitchen and, picking up a large lid, used it to smother the fire in the pot. Kam-El turned off the gas supply to remove the source of ignition and then Superman carried the pot out the back door while Kam-El tried to use his super-breath to put the flames out. The problem was that this power wasn't fully developed in him as yet so all he did was fan the flames. Before it became a problem though, Superman reentered and said, "Hey, sport, not that way. Watch." Leaning in close to the flames he inhaled, sucking away the oxygen and heat, snuffing the flames."

"Thanks, Pop. Guess I've got a lot to learn. Hey, I hear a siren approaching."

"That's what I'm here for, to teach you." Superman put an arm across Jon's shoulders and gave him a man hug. "You're doing just fine. You'll learn all the little tricks. It just takes time. Yeah, the fire truck should be here shortly. I guess we are finished here. We may as well go outside. I'll have to talk to the firemen."

Meanwhile, Lara had sped directly to one year-old baby Virginia's room and bundled her up in a blanket. Virginia had been

crying, but Lara had spoken to her in a low soothing tone. That and the fact that the baby recognized the voice quelled her fears and she settled down. Covering the baby's face with the blanket and throwing her cape over her, Lara shifted to super-speed and took her out of the house. As she exited the door she slowed to a walk and approaching Carol first removed her cape to reveal the bundle that she carried and then handed the baby over, opening the blanket to reveal the smiling baby's face as she saw her mom.

Carol hugged her baby to her chest and looking at Ultra Woman 2 said, "I don't know how to thank you."

Lara lowered her voice a tone to disguise her natural voice and replied, "No thanks are necessary. Just knowing that she is safe is enough."

A few seconds later, just as a fire truck pulled up out front, Superman and Kam-El came out of the house. Kam-El stepped over to where the family was standing while Superman moved over to talk to the engine captain.

Several residents were out in the street; some of them had their cell phones out and were taking pictures of the superheroes.

Amber, the oldest Livingston girl, who was a year younger than Jon, seeing Kam-El approach screamed, "Oh, Kam-El," threw caution to the winds and quickly stepping over to him, threw her arms around the young superhero's neck and kissed him on the lips. There was more than one flash as pictures of the incident were taken. As he disengaged himself from her she rushed on, "Could we go out on a date? I know all about Emerson. I'm not famous like her, but could we?"

The color in his cheeks could be seen beneath his mask. Without hurting her he pushed her gently away and lowering his tone a bit said, "Uh, thanks, but, uh, I don't date."

Just then Superman finished with the engine captain and joined the rest of his family. Standing next to Jon and placing an arm around him, he said, "I think we need to go."

Placing an arm around Ultra Woman 2, Ultra Woman joined Superman in waving to the Livingstones as they took to the air and making a wide circuit they returned home.

They immediately spun back into their regular clothes and moving through the house and into the street made their way to the crowd around the Livingstone's house.

Addressing the first person she met, a neighbor named Donna Jordan, Lois asked, "Hi Donna, what happened?"

"Oh, hi Lois. The Livingstons had a fire. The superheroes just left. Say, Lois, you're a close friend of Superman's. You just missed him. Hey, wait a minute; didn't you have a thing for Superman some time ago? Are you disappointed that he married Ultra Woman?"

Lois smiled and replied, "Let's see, I'll try to answer your questions in order. Yes, Superman and I were friends and still are. I am sorry I missed him, but oh well. Yes, a long time ago I had a 'thing' for Superman, but I got over it. I'm married to Clark now and I am happy that Superman is happily married too. Now, how are the Livingstons?"

"They seem to be okay, but it doesn't look like they will be having a happy Thanksgiving."

Lois thought for a second and then said, "We'll see about that."

As she made her way through the crowd she telepathically called Clark, /Clark?/

/Yes, Lois./

/Are they going to be able to have Thanksgiving dinner?/

/I'm afraid that their turkey was ruined along with most of their kitchen./

/Let's invite them over. We will have plenty./

/If you want to, okay by me./

By this time she was standing next to Carol Livingston and Lara was at her side. Lara held her hands out to baby Virginia and the baby reached for her in turn so Carol let Lara take her.

Lois put her arms around Carol as she began to cry and mutter, “Ruined. It’s all ruined. Dinner, the house, everything is ruined.”

Clark had gone over to stand by Karl and heard what the engine captain said after his inspection. “The kitchen sustained some damage. Fortunately Superman got here and put the fire out quickly. I think you will need to replace the range, some of the tile, perhaps a couple of cabinets. Most of the other damage is from the smoke. You may be able to get away with cleaning the drapes and such, to get rid of the smoky smell.”

“Can we return to the house?”

“I don’t see why not. Thanks to Superman and Kam-El we didn’t have to go in with water. They had the fire out before we even got here so there’s no water to sop up or soaking your carpets. What happened?”

“I was deep frying our turkey.”

The captain interrupted him, “Inside? On the range?”

“Yeah, is that a problem?”

“I’ll say that’s a problem. Always do that outside. You need a burner stand to hold the pot and a gas tank for the burner. Let me guess, the oil sprayed out and ignited.”

“Yeah, I was careful, but it happened anyhow.”

“It only takes a little water in the bird for that to happen. Okay, I think I have enough to complete my report. We have to return to the barn in case we are needed elsewhere. Have a good day, what’s left of it.” (Barn is a nickname firemen use for the station house. It is a nickname dating back to the days of horse drawn fire engines)

As the fire truck drove off, Lois turned to Carol and said, “You, Karl and the kids are joining us for Thanksgiving dinner. Go lock up and come with us.”

“No, Lois. No, we can’t. That would be too much of an imposition.”

Lois countered, “It’s no imposition. Look, Clark and I have been meaning to have you guys over for a while now. This is a perfect opportunity.”

“Well, I have to check with Karl.”

“I think Clark is talking to him.”

In fact, Clark was talking with Karl. “Karl, you guys will be needing something to eat. We’d like to have you over for Thanksgiving dinner with our family and friends.”

Karl was hesitant and said, “Thanks, Clark, but that would be too much of an imposition.”

“It’s no imposition. We are inviting you and your family to join us.”

“I’ll need to check with Carol.”

“I think Lois is already talking to her.”

In a defeated tone, Karl said, “Okay, okay, you win. We’ll come over for dinner.”

“Good, we’ll set a few extra places.”

“I really need to call my insurance agent.”

“Okay, we’ll expect you in about an hour.”

“One hour it is.”

Carol looked over and saw Karl talking to Clark and catching his eye, looked questioningly. He nodded and she turned to Lois and said, “Okay. We’re coming.”

Since Lara had been the one to rescue the baby, she was feeling somewhat possessive of her and asked, “Since you are coming for dinner, can I take Virginia with me?”

Carol looked at her daughter, the daughter that she almost lost in the fire and seeing how contented she was in Lara’s arms said, “Sure. You can take Virginia.”

Jon asked, “Can Amber and Karl Jr. come now?”

Carol looked at her kids and said, “I don’t see why not. We have to do some things here before we can come over, but they are free.”

Amber had something of a crush on Jon and was happy to hear that they could go early and moved next to Jon. As soon as Karl Jr. joined them they along with Lara and Virginia headed for the Kent

residence.

When they got there they found that JJ and his siblings were already there and a few minutes later Hattie Kaplin and her parents arrived.

Amber knew Hattie from seeing her at the Kent’s home on other occasions and apprised her of what had happened. “... Then Superman and Kam-El swooped in along with Ultra Woman and Ultra Woman 2 and we just knew that everything was going to be all right. Sure enough it only took a minute for Ultra Woman 2 to find baby Virginia and bring her out. Then Superman and Kam-El put out the fire.” She paused and took a deep breath before she continued and almost screamed as she said, “Then I kissed Kam-El!”

Hattie was flabbergasted and burst out with, “You what??”

“I kissed Kam-El! Can you believe it? Right on the mouth! Wow, he’s a dreamboat.”

Hattie was disgusted and muttered, “I keep missing him. This is the third or fourth time he’s been seen and I haven’t seen him yet!” Then she raised her tone and said, “And you got to kiss him!”

Amber could see that Hattie was bothered by her revelation and couldn’t help rubbing it in as she reiterated, “Right on the mouth,” in a somewhat dreamy tone.

Hattie was steamed, but Jon didn’t let it ruin the day. With the help of JJ, he quickly brought her out of her dark mood.

\*\*\*

As they sat down to dinner, Lois looked around at her family and friends and said, “We have so much to be thankful for.”

Standing, Clark nodded his agreement, “Yes, we each have a lot to be thankful for, even Karl and Carol. They can be thankful that even though they went through this trial, no one was hurt. The house can be repaired, but there will not be any hospital time for anyone.”

Karl and Carol each reached for and clasped the hand of the other as they both nodded their agreement.

Martha stood as Clark sat back down and said, “Jonathan and I have been around for quite a long time. There for a while, all we had to be thankful for was each other and then suddenly, Clark joined our little family. Then we became that much more thankful for what we had. It was about thirty years later that Lois joined our family which only increased our thankfulness that much more. Now we have eight lovely grandchildren and our thankfulness cup overflows.”

As Martha sat down, Mel Kaplin spoke up, “When we finally had Hattie, we thought that there wasn’t much more that we could be thankful for, then Hattie made friends with Jon Kent. Through Jon we met this marvelous family. At first we weren’t sure about their relationship because of what we had heard about,” she nodded at Lois, “the famous Lois Lane and how she was always getting into scrapes that Superman had to get her out of. Once we got to know Lois and Clark though we saw how the stories were all blown out of proportion. We saw their family and realized that a family that demonstrated so much love for each other couldn’t be nearly as dangerous as the papers made them out to be. We are thankful to be associated with the Kent family, all of them.”

JJ as the oldest of the Olsens, felt it was incumbent upon him to speak for his family, “We are very thankful for our aunt and uncle and our cousins,” he looked directly at Hattie as he finished, “and the friends we have made.”

Hattie blushed prettily as she took his meaning. She really liked JJ and she felt a little sorry for him. She knew that he had a poor self-image because of his weight and hoped he would get over it with time.

Standing, Jonathan, as the senior man present, said, “Let us bless this food,” and proceeded to pronounce the blessing before starting to carve one of the birds. As he did, he smiled and said, “You have a choice to make; we have three different birds

...

\*\*\*

After the dinner, the kids helped to clean up and then they went to the play room while the adults adjourned to the living room for coffee and wine.

Clark addressed Karl, "Did you get hold of your insurance man?"

"Yes, he'll be out tomorrow morning to inspect. He said that I can probably expect a check for the repairs in a week, but that I should go ahead and start the work."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"At least a week. There will be a lot of clean-up and some cabinets need to be replaced, the range and some of the tile on the floor as well."

"What are you going to do for meals in the meantime?"

"I don't know. Take-out I suppose."

Lois said, "Let me handle that."

Carol, gulped, "What?"

Lois reiterated, "I said, let me handle that. I'm going to talk to our neighbors about providing meals. That's what neighbors do for each other."

\*\*\*

Lois called all of her neighbors and arranged a meeting. A couple of hours later they were all assembled in their living room and Lois addressed them, "I want to thank you all for coming out on such short notice. As you all know, one of our neighbors had an unfortunate incident today. As a result, they are not able to prepare any meals. This situation could pertain for a week. Perhaps, we, as their friends and neighbors could get together and share the load to provide them with the meals that they would need. Breakfasts and lunches don't necessarily need to be cooked so we will concentrate on dinners."

Florence Rose, one of the neighbors grumbled, "Why can't they just order take-out?"

Lois looked at her and asked, "If it were you, would you like to depend on take-out for a week. Or would you appreciate your neighbors chipping in and providing meals?" Lois looked around and caught the eye of Donna Jordan. She addressed the crowd, "When we got there to see what was happening, I spoke with Donna. Donna remembered that I am a close friend of Superman's. I want to point out something, all Superman does is help people. He takes people to the hospital when they need it, he prevents crime, he pulls people from mud-slides and floods, he even prevented a huge asteroid from crashing into the Earth and killing almost everyone and Ultra Woman, ever since she arrived, is right there beside him, also helping out. I realize that those are big saves, saves on a global scale, but in our little corner of the globe, helping out our neighbor in need is every bit as important as those flashy rescues. Now, I ask you, what would Superman and Ultra Woman do? Would they say to the Livingstons, 'Order take-out,' or would they help?"

Looking around at her gathered neighbors, Donna spoke up, "Lois is right. What would Superman and Ultra Woman do? I think they would help and I for one want to follow that example. Carol, I'll be providing your dinner tomorrow night. In fact, why don't you guys come over for dinner and the evening? It'll be fun."

Following Donna and Lois's example, it had not been mentioned, but everyone knew that the Kents had invited the Livingstons to their home for Thanksgiving dinner, the Livingstons were scheduled for visits for the rest of the week. One of the invitations came from Florence Rose.

After the meeting broke up, Carol turned to Lois and said, with a tear in her eye, "Lois, I don't know how to thank you. I'm overwhelmed. You really have made a difference here. I know I can speak for Karl when I say, we appreciate all that you have done for us."

Lois shrugged it off, "It was nothing, Carol. It's just neighbors helping neighbors."

"But you did it. If not for you we'd be eating take-out and be miserable. This way, we can concentrate on the repairs."

Lois gave her a hug and said, "It's just what Superman or Ultra Woman would do, Carol. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone did it too?"

"Yeah, you're right. You know, I haven't been the best friend I could be to some of my neighbors, but that is going to change. I'm going to use Ultra Woman as my example. I'm going to try to be more helpful, be a better neighbor."

"You do that, Carol. I'm sure that would make her happy."

\*\*\*

In the evening of Friday, the twenty-seventh, the doorbell was rung and when Lois answered it, Bud Kyle was on the stoop, holding a pumpkin. When she had opened the door, she said, "Well, Bud, did you want to see Jon?"

When he looked up she could see that he had some healing bruises on his face and around his eyes and he said, "I came to replace the pumpkin I ruined." He proffered the large orange squash to her, "and to say that I'm sorry."

Lois accepted the pumpkin and said, "I hope you have learned a lesson."

In a somewhat belligerent tone, he replied, "Yeah, I have." As he turned away, she saw that he moved stiffly, as if her were in pain. Using her x-ray vision, Lois checked and saw bruising and red welts on his back and ribs.

Bud didn't hear her gasp of dismay. She stopped him, "Bud!"

He turned back to her as she asked, "What did your father do to you?"

He hung his head and said, sullenly, "Nothin'. He didn't do nothin', as he turned away and left."

\*\*\*

Lois placed the pumpkin on the porch where the other had been and then stepping back into the house, called her husband, /Clark/!

Having just returned from a rescue, he replied, /I'm upstairs./ She rushed upstairs and plopping down on the side of the bed, she said, "I think we have a major problem."

"What would that be?"

"Bud Kyle was just here to deliver the replacement pumpkin. Clark, I think he is a victim of child abuse. I think his father beat him because of what he did. His face was bruised and when I checked using my x-ray vision, so is his body and he had red welts on his back."

"Lois, you know we aren't supposed to violate individual's privacy by using our x-ray vision on them."

"This was justified. That kid was injured."

"I know and I sympathize, but there are just some things we don't do."

Chagrined, Lois replied, "I know. It's just like old times. I was jumping in before checking the water level, but it was probably my fault! I was the one that took him to the police."

He could sense that she was on the verge of breaking down, so taking her in his arms, he said, "Look, maybe the appearance in family court will help. We can only hope that it will and that they will be ordered into counseling."

Lois relented and slumped in his arms, "Yeah, you're right. I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

\*\*\*

### Chapter 3 – From Christmas 2015 - Matchmaker Chronicles Vol 1 CG2

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120

Local designation - Canon Universe also called Prime

%%%

When Ultra Woman entered the courtroom, the judge welcomed her and said, “I know how valuable your time is so if you will take the stand we will precede.”

After the bailiff swore her in, the judge addressed her, “Ultra Woman, are you aware of why you were asked to appear?”

“I had assumed that it was to testify about the evening I apprehended two teenaged boys in the act of damaging private property and littering.”

“Yes, actually, it is about that night, but not about that act.”

The lawyer standing next to Bud and his family started to speak and Lois was astonished at what she was hearing.

“Bud claims that you beat him up for this minor infraction because you and Superman have a special connection with the Kent family.” He produced some pictures and said, “Your honor, I have here pictures taken of Bud shortly after he was picked up by his parents from the precinct. They clearly indicate bruising of the face and black eyes. These injuries, he claims, are the result of the handling he received from Ultra Woman. These are the pictures already placed into evidence.” He then handed the pictures to the judge.

The judge leafed through the pictures, a thoughtful expression on his face as he refreshed his memory. As he placed them down on his desk, Ultra Woman asked, “May I see them?”

The judge nodded said, “Certainly,” and handed them over. Ultra Woman looked them over and then handed them to the judge.

The judge asked, “Do you have anything to say?”

“Yes, your honor, those injuries look real enough, but he did not sustain them at my hands. When I dropped him off at the precinct, he was ... unblemished.”

Bud’s lawyer challenged, “Then how do you explain these injuries?”

“I have no explanation. All I know is the he was uninjured when I dropped him off. The sergeant on the desk that night can verify my statement. If he sustained his injuries after I dropped him off and before he was picked up by his parents they were either self-inflicted or else he had a fight with the other teen that was with him when apprehended.”

The judge said, “I thought of that and asked for the cell tapes for the night in question. Unfortunately the camera in the cell was malfunctioning. I had already tried to contact the sergeant. Again, unfortunately, he is unavailable. He just got married and is on his honeymoon.”

Ultra Woman thought for a few seconds and then a thought came to mind. She said, “That night, when I brought them in, there were a number of patrolmen there. Some of them were taking pictures of me. Perhaps the boys could be seen in some of those pictures.”

The judge smiled and said, “There will be a short recess while I contact the precinct and request that those patrolmen e-mail those pictures to me. We will reconvene in one hour.” He banged his gavel and said, “We stand in recess.”

When Ultra Woman made that suggestion, Bud started to sweat. His lawyer gave him a close scrutiny and as the judge exited, he said, “We have to have a discussion.” Inviting Bud’s parents to accompany them, he led the way from the room.

\*\*\*

Lois had been blind-sided by this accusation and hadn’t known what to do. Instead of being there simply to testify as to what Bud had done, she had been the one placed on the defensive. She continued to sit in the witness stand as she watched Bud, his family and lawyer leave. She knew she was innocent, but had no way, other than possibly the pictures taken by those patrolmen to prove it. She decided that she needed to talk to Clark.

Lois walked out of the courtroom, down the hall and out the door so she wouldn’t disturb anyone any more than necessary.

Once outside however she moved faster than the eye could follow and within a split second she was on the roof of the Daily Planet building. As she passed through the roof access door she spun back into her beige business suit before descending the stairs at super-speed. Exiting the stairwell, she crossed to Clark’s desk and said, “We need to talk. Conference room.”

Clark could see that she was upset, but had no idea as to the cause so he stood and walked with her to the conference room, his hand at the small of her back. He could feel the tension in her body which added to his concern. As soon as they were inside he closed the door and the blinds then he turned to her. He could see that she was having difficulty restraining tears. In a comforting tone, he asked, “All right, what happened?”

Stepping to him and throwing her arms around his neck, she sobbed, “Oh, Clark, they accused me of child abuse.”

“What? How could they?”

“Remember the night that Bud brought over the replacement pumpkin? I told you about the bruises. He is claiming that Ultra Woman did that to him.”

Clark stuttered out, “But you didn’t. You wouldn’t have. There’s just no way.”

“I know, but he had pictures and is claiming that I did that to him.”

“There’s always someone looking to turn us into a big payday. Don’t they have surveillance on the cells? What about the desk sergeant?”

“They already thought of that. The camera was on the fritz and the desk sergeant is away on his honeymoon.”

“There has to be someone. What about the patrolman that put them in the cells?”

“Fortunately I thought of them and some of them were taking pictures of me which may have the kids in the frame. For once I am very happy about the skin tight suit. If not for that, they might not have been taking pictures.”

Pulling her in tighter, he said, “I love you in that suit. Frankly, though, I love you better ... out of it.”

Smiling, she tilted her head up and kissed him, then she sighed and said, “You always say the sweetest things.”

\*\*\*

While this was going on, the lawyer was talking to the Kyle family, “You said this would be a sure thing.”

Bud replied, “It should have been. I noticed the out of order sign on the camera. I knew it would take Pop a while to get there. In that time they were sure to have a shift change so the same guy wouldn’t be on the desk. I threatened Mike until he hit me a few times, hard enough to make bruises. I forgot about those cops takin’ pictures of Ultra Woman.”

“All right then, the only thing to do is say it was all a mistake.”

Bud’s father stopped him and said, “Nothin’ doin’. I hired you to keep my kid out of juvie and to keep me from havin’ to pay that fine and make some money in the deal. You’re gonna go in there and convince that judge that she done it. Then we all get a big payday.”

“That is going to be impossible if those pictures show him unblemished.”

“Maybe they won’t. We’re just gonna have to wait and see.”

\*\*\*

When the hour had elapsed they had all returned to the courtroom. The judge addressed Ultra Woman, “Please resume your place in the witness box.”

After she had resumed her seat, he said, “I just received the pictures.” He pulled them up on his laptop and said, “It is hard to tell. The pictures are rather small.”

Ultra Woman zoomed in with her microscopic vision and in her anxiety went too far, seeing a field of dots spaced wide apart without seeing a picture. She backed off on the magnification and

scanned the pictures. Pointing to two of them, she said, “If you have these two enlarged and printed, I believe it will show that Bud was unblemished at the time the pictures were taken. From the angles I would say that these were taken by two different individuals.”

The judge checked the original emails and saw that her supposition was correct. He looked at the lawyer with a stern expression, “Well, counselor, what do you have to say?”

The lawyer was in a panic and chose to throw his clients under the bus, “I didn’t know anything about that, your honor. They came to me with the pictures and told me that Ultra Woman had done it. That’s all I know.”

Bud’s father responded with a loud snort.

Hearing that, the judge replied, “Counselor, if there was any way I could prove that you willingly participated in this attempted fraud, I’d have you disbarred. As it is, all I can say is - get out of my courtroom and thank your lucky stars that I can’t prove it.”

The lawyer hastily grabbed his bag and left. As the door closed behind him, the judge muttered, “I hate ambulance chasers,” then turned his attention back to Ultra Woman, “I want to apologize for doubting you and taking your time this way. You are excused.”

“Thank you, your honor, but might I ask what is to be done here?”

“I have to say, I don’t like what has happened here. First, there was the incident that brought this young man in, in the first place, but complicating that is what they tried to do to you. I don’t know if I should blame the child or the parents. I think it is apparent that the parents had some level of involvement.”

“May I speak on their behalf?”

“You want to speak for them, after what they tried to do to you?”

“Yes, your honor. The attempt has failed. They paid for a lawyer unless he was working on commission. I think there is a fine for littering. Let that be the end of it, unless you feel that family counseling would help.”

“I am inclined to agree with you.” He turned so that he was facing the Kyles and said, “The fine for the littering will be fifty dollars and I agree with Ultra Woman, I think that family counseling is needed and it is so ordered.” He brought his gavel down with a loud thwack. “Pay the bailiff. Court dismissed.”

As Ultra Woman was leaving, she could hear Bud’s father grumbling and muttering indistinctly. She couldn’t make out the words, but the tone was a threatening one.

\*\*\*

As soon as Lois was back at the Planet, she sat on the corner of Clark’s desk and looked at what was on his computer screen. It was a write-up of a recent Superman rescue.

He asked, “How did it go?”

“I’ll never complain about my uniform being too tight again.”

“The pictures showed that he was uninjured.”

“Sure did. Their lawyer threw them under the bus, claiming he had nothing to do with the attempted fraud, but I think the judge knew better.”

“All’s well that ends well.”

“Yes, all’s well that ends well and this ended well. They’ve been ordered into family counseling.”

“It just might do some good.”

“To borrow a phrase from Herb, ‘Only time will tell.’”

They didn’t hear anything further from the court system which was not unusual in cases like this where the records are normally sealed.

Jon did report to them that after the winter holiday, Bud did not return to school immediately. There was a period of close to two months that he was absent from school. Speculation was that his family had moved, but suddenly, in March, he reappeared.

After he returned, Jon noticed that Bud gave him a wide berth.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 4

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator Designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120

Local designation - Canon Universe also called Prime

%%%

It had been several months since the events of Christmastime. Sam and Ellen Lane had taken up their residence again in Metropolis and once again assumed leadership of the practice that they had founded.

They had since become an integral part of the Kent family, spending a lot of time getting to know their grandchildren.

\*\*\*

The Spring semester of the school year had passed without any further problems from Bud Kyle. In point of fact, Bud was out of school for a while immediately after the Christmas / New Year’s holiday season. There had been some speculation that he had been transferred to another school, but after a month he returned. When he did, he was much subdued, but there was an air of repressed hostility that was unmistakable.

For all of that, Bud apparently had decided that he needed to clean up his act and he didn’t cause any trouble the rest of the year. He didn’t make the honor roll, but he did make passing grades for the rest of the year.

\*\*\*

The summer of 2016 had been a quiet period in the lives of the super family, but it did have its interesting moments. Superman was handling most of the rescues, but there were occasions, especially in mass casualty events, when Ultra Woman helped out.

There had also been a couple of occasions, like the Thanksgiving earthquake in 2014, where both Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 helped out, but these were unusual circumstances. The very rarity of their appearances fueled a lot of speculation as to their origin and location.

Now there were two more new superheroes in the wings just waiting for their turn.

Sean and Celeste had both celebrated their twelfth birthdays. They were both strong and fast and their super-hearing had also kicked in. As soon as they had turned ten their powers had started to manifest and they had been brought in on the family secret. Over the previous summer, on one of the many visits that the family made to Smallville, they had each had time with Grandma Kent designing and making their Suits.

In the case of Sean, he hadn’t been sure what colors he liked so he had decided to put off his decision and opted for a simple all blue uniform. He was planning to follow Jon’s lead and simply use his Kryptonian name, Dan-El, as his super persona.

Celeste had decided to use her Kryptonian name also, Noel (No of the house of El), and decided to capitalize on the obvious pronunciation and its association with the holidays and go with that as her color scheme. She finally settled on a green suit, like a Speedo swimsuit with a short red pleated skirt, red cape that came to her waist and red calf high boots. Her mask was in the same green as the suit. The El family crest, in red and green, in a diminutive form was on her chest. The boots, like Lara’s, had low heels.

The low heels were Martha’s idea. There were a couple of good reasons, first- low heels would emphasize her petite stature and help to differentiate her super persona from her civilian self wearing heels. The second reason was even better - high heels were vulnerable to breakage. How would it look for a super heroine to have a broken heel?

\*\*\*

One of the incidents that made the summer of 2016 interesting happened over the Fourth of July weekend. It was an incident that

required more than two pairs of hands.

Even though neither Jon nor Lara could fly as yet, they were both strong and fast, their super-hearing and invulnerability had kicked in and in Jon's case so had his vision powers.

They had been spending time in Smallville so Jon had a pretty good handle on his vision powers at this point.

On Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup> the Kent family was having a cookout. Sam and Ellen Lane were visiting as were Jonathan and Martha Kent. They were all outside when they heard a news flash over the radio in the house next door. There was an excursion vessel in trouble. It was a harbor fireworks cruise which was to last until after the fireworks display which would start at dusk.

Jon and Lara, Sean and Celeste all heard it at the same time as their parents and looked at them imploringly. They all wanted to get in on the act. Lois and Clark both nodded to Jon and Lara, but shook their heads at Sean and Celeste. Since none of them were wearing their uniforms the four of them moved into the house. They quickly put on their uniforms and spun back into their regular clothes. Leaving the house again they moved out of sight to the secluded area behind the shed and spun back into their uniforms. Clark put an arm around Jon as Lois did for Lara and they took off too quickly to be seen clearly.

Approaching the scene they could see that the cruise ship listed starboard. Passengers were struggling to remain on board, clinging to the railings, some on the high or port side, a large number against or on the starboard side while a number were actually in the water.

They stayed near each other as they descended and when they were near the scene, still several hundred feet above the water, Clark and Lois released their holds on Jon and Lara as he said, "While Mom and I work on righting the boat; you two rescue the people in the water. Diving from this height it will look like you are flying on your own."

Lara released a delighted "Wheeeee!" as she started her dive.

Jon shouted, "Right, Pop."

Rolling into tight balls they spun around so that they could each grab the sides of their capes, then straightening out again they stretched their arms out at their sides used the capes like parasails to control their direction and speed of descent.

When Lois and Clark released them with looks of joy, both Jon and Lara dove for the water. Jon and Lara 'flew' side by side heading for the people in the water. This was the closest either had come to flying on their own and they both loved it. They were both excellent swimmers and divers and it was evident when both cleaved the water cleanly in perfect dives.

Leaving Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 to their assigned task, Superman and Ultra Woman veered away and also dove for the surface. Ultra Woman dove below the surface on the port side of the ship and curved her course under it, and then she stabilized the ship, preventing it from slipping any farther to the side.

While she did this, Superman started looking for the cause of the disaster. What he found was an underwater mound, a remnant from when he had dug the trench to defeat the tsunami that had threatened Metropolis when Thaddeus Roark had caused Luthor's Shockwave device to overreact. He thought he had returned all of the rubble to the trench, but he obviously had missed some. He knocked the mound down so that it wouldn't continue to be a hazard. While he was doing this the surface of the bay was roiling like a boiling pot.

While Superman was doing this, Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 were busy. They started by rescuing those most distant from the ship and worked their way closer. Assuming a lifeguard like hold on those they were rescuing, they were able to kick at super-speed and moved like torpedoes through the water. Once they reached the ship, since the starboard deck was still near the surface of the bay, they lifted their passenger aboard at that point. As soon as they discharged one passenger they were off to get another.

While Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 were swimming at super-speed and using their powers to pull those in the water back to the ship, Superman and Ultra Woman monitored their progress.

Superman had finished his self-appointed chore and joined Ultra Woman under the ship and when the final passenger had been returned to the ship and Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 had joined them, Superman and Ultra Woman started to raise the ship and right it. While they were doing this, Kam-El used his heat vision to dry his sister's uniform and his own cape. As he was doing so he was thinking, <It's a shame that Lara doesn't have her heat vision yet.>

Passengers that hadn't fallen into the water and had some presence of mind had their cell phones out and were taking pictures of the new superheroes. Some had even taken videos of the rescue efforts.

The group of passengers that they had rescued had all gathered around them to proffer their thanks until Superman and Ultra Woman started to right the ship and the ship started to move under them and then they were all grabbing something for support because the ship shifted under them.

One of the people that they had rescued, who was standing on the fringes of the crowd, was knocked off balance as the ship went airborne. With a scream of fear she tumbled to the side and was in danger of toppling over the rail again and back into the water. The ship was gaining altitude and a fall from the height it had attained could have been fatal for anyone other than one of the superheroes. Hearing the scream, Kam-El spun around and spotted her. Putting on a burst of super-speed and running to her he placed himself between her and the railing and prevented her from falling overboard, instead she fell into his arms. When he grabbed her, in reflex, her arms went around his neck and she held onto him like a lifeline in a storm. Possibly in relief at being saved a second time, she buried her head in his chest. When she stopped shaking and was steadier she finally looked up at him and he got a good look at her. She was a teen about his age, a very attractive girl with expressive features, large brown doe-like eyes and medium length brown hair naturally streaked with blonde. She was dressed in shorts that weren't too short, a tank top and sneakers. Jon noted that she wasn't dressed in such a way as to excite the libido, but he also noted that she had a very good figure for a girl her age. She was a little timid as she looked up at him, but remembering what she had seen in the tabloids, she became bolder, said, "I want to thank you for rescuing me," pushing up on tip-toe and tightening her arms around his neck, she kissed him, soundly.

Flashes were going off as people continued to take pictures and Kam-El was shocked into immobility, but he could hear his sister snickering.

The girl, whose name was Cynthia, didn't release him until the ship was at the dock and the adult superheroes joined them on the deck. Reluctantly, she removed her arms from his neck and as she did, in an embarrassed tone she said, "Oh, my. I shouldn't have done that. That's not like me ... to do something like that ... I mean ... It's just that ... I'm so thankful that you rescued me." She paused for a second, thinking, then said, "I just moved to Metropolis and I don't know anybody, yet, so if you are looking for a girlfriend, I'm available. Oh, why did I say that? I'm not usually that forward. I'm babbling, aren't I? Yes, I am. I'm babbling. I only do that when I'm nervous."

Kam-El stood back, with his hands on her upper arms, and said, "I'm sorry, miss ..."

"Cynthia, but my friends call me Morgana."

"I'm happy that I was able to save you, but, well, I'm sorry, Cynthia, I don't date."

In a dreamy tone, she replied, "That's a shame."

Having landed, unnoticed, next to Kam-El, Superman asked, "Am I interrupting something?"

Shifting his attention to Superman, Kam-El replied, "Uh, no.

No you aren't."

Looking back and forth between Kam-El and Cynthia, Superman said, "Then I think it's time to go."

Nodding in relief, Jon dropped his hands to his sides and replied, "Right."

To the accompaniment of more flashes, Superman put an arm around Kam-El and Ultra Woman did the same for UW2 and they took off, slowly at first.

Looking down as they did, Kam-El could see Cynthia with a smile on her lips, shielding her eyes with one hand and waving to him with the other.

In reflex, Kam-El returned the wave.

Seeing that Cynthia started smiling that much more.

There was a good reason why Jon would remember this incident later, fondly.

\*\*\*

The rest of the summer of 2016 passed as an unremarkable one for the Kent family. Jon celebrated his sixteenth birthday. With each passing day, Jon became more and more impatient for his eighteenth birthday, because he knew that it would be around that time that he would be able to fly and he desperately wanted that power above all of the others. The times he had flown with his father had been marvelous.

Lara too was looking forward to when she would be able to fly herself. She was almost a year and a half younger than Jon and she just knew that the first time she saw her brother fly under his own power, she would just die from envy. There was some question about when Lara would be able to fly. Early on, Jon had demonstrated a slight ability to float. His parents had noticed this, but not remarked on it. It was becoming apparent that the powers were, to a certain extent, tied to puberty. The onset of puberty was slightly earlier for Lara than Jon and Lois suspected that she might just not have to wait to the age of eighteen. In fact, she would be surprised if they didn't both start to fly at about the same time.

The incident over the Fourth of July holiday had only whetted both of their appetites that much more. Diving from that height had been so much like flying . . .

Jon and Lara were as close as any brother and sister could be and there wasn't a situation where she wanted him to fail, but the she dearly wished that she could join him. She would be happy for him when he was able to loose the bonds of gravity and soar into the sky under his own power. It was something that she looked forward to with both joy and trepidation. Joy for her brother and trepidation about her response. She didn't want to rain on his parade. It was just going to be hard.

Ever since they had started getting their powers, they had used them together. It had all started in 2014 when Grandma Kent had made their uniforms at Halloween. They had acted together to save Maisie from the robber that had been threatening her life. That had been their unofficial debut and they had helped out a few times since when more than a couple pairs of hands had been needed.

Lara still chuckled when she thought about the time that she and Jon had helped out in the California earthquake. That had been, more or less, their 'official' debut. It was Thanksgiving and they had all been in Smallville. Mom and Dad had decided to take them along to help out. When things were winding down she and Mom had been looking for Jon and Dad. When they had found them they were each being kissed. Dad was being kissed by the TV and movie actress Teri Hatcher and Jon was being kissed by her daughter, Emerson. It was a result of that encounter that Mom and Dad decided that they needed to announce to the world that Superman and Ultra Woman were in fact married, not just super-work partners.

In the announcement that Superman and Ultra Woman were married, they had said nothing about the new heroes so they were considered 'fair game' by everyone. That was the main reason that

on the occasions that Lara and Jon helped out, frequently, Kam-El was on the receiving end of female appreciation. It had happened the previous Thanksgiving season, when they had helped a neighbor family. Their neighbor's teenage daughter had managed to ambush Kam-El and kiss him. Most recently, over the fourth, a girl named Cynthia had kissed him. Lara was happy that she hadn't been subjected to the same, although she did realize that her time would be coming . . . all too soon. Fortunately, for her, young males tended to be somewhat intimidated by women that were stronger than them and she most definitely was, while most young women were attracted to a strong man.

The identities of Jon and Lara were kept ambiguous. As a result speculation was rampant as to their origin. The one time that the press had been around to ask questions after a rescue, Ultra Woman 2 had been asked why she had chosen that particular name. The reporter was obviously attempting to get her to admit that she was Ultra Woman's daughter, but her reply had been simply, "Ultra Woman is my role model. It is a sign of my respect for her that I have chosen to name myself after her. She would be a positive role model for any young woman on whom to model her behavior."

Since Ultra Woman had been absent for about seventeen years, only returning about six years previously, in 2010, the predominant theory was that the new superheroes were additional visitors from New Krypton which Lois and Clark didn't discourage.

The fact that Ultra Woman had been absent, presumably having returned to New Krypton since her first, brief, appearance, the apparent age of the new superheroes couldn't correspond to her return, but now that it had been announced that Superman and Ultra Woman were in fact married, there was rampant speculation about a Superman Junior at some time. Once the announcement had been made papers like the Star started running contests trying to guess when Ultra Woman would actually become pregnant. The odds makers in Las Vegas were even taking bets on the sex of the child and when it would be born.

They were to be sorely disappointed because if a pregnant Ultra Woman were to appear at the same time as a pregnant Lois Lane it might threaten the family secret.

The one saving grace was that Lois and Clark had started using makeup to appear to age somewhat while Superman and Ultra Woman hadn't appeared to age in the 29 years since he first appeared and Ultra Woman looked the same age as when she had first appeared about 27 years earlier. Along with that they had decided to finish raising this current generation before starting the next. The nice thing was that with Lois's physiology having started off as Earth human, birth control pills still worked on her. If anything happened and Lois became pregnant, Ultra Woman would simply be called back to New Krypton for a time.

\*\*\*

To facilitate Sean and Celeste's preparation for their roles in the family business, as well as continuing to refine the use of Jon and Lara's powers, the family spent a lot of time at the farm in Smallville so that they could practice. They were joined for part of the summer by Mike Lee, Wayne Irig's grand-nephew, when he came to help out on the farm. Lara and Jon spent most of their evenings with him. It had become an open secret that Mike liked Lara and that she reciprocated.

They were already making plans to go to school together. Mike was using a program for early admission available to students that carried high academic averages with Advanced Placement classes and Lara was doing the same. Both were carrying 4.0 averages and the deal was that as long as they maintained it they would be accepted at the school of their choice, with academic scholarships. They had both applied to Stanford, pre-law, and had been accepted. Lara was taking extra classes in summer school so that she could finish a year early and she and

Mike could start the same year. As it stood, she, Mike and Jon would all be graduating after the next school year.

On vacations and also on some weekends the family went to Smallville. On some weekends they went to Smallville Lake for the day and the figures that fourteen year old Lara and twelve year old Celeste were developing were on display because they copied their mom's beach attire which was a skimpy string bikini. Nine year old Jessie wore a more modest two piece and four year old Lucy continued to wear a one piece suit. Lois made sure that Lucy and Sam were safe allowing Lara the time to be with Mike.

Lois and Lara had had a number of talks and Lois had explained about the Kryptonian love at first sight trait and Lara managed to convince Lois that what she felt for Mike was undeniable. She had been drawn to him the minute that she had stepped out of the van that first day of 4-H Summer Camp three years previously. Lois and Clark had spoken with Wayne and as a result had a good feeling about the match.

\*\*\*

As the summer had progressed, Sean and Celeste turned twelve and after Martha had made them their uniforms they joined Jon and Lara in practicing their powers. They were twins, but as Lois had surmised, Celeste's powers started manifesting slightly earlier than Sean's. They both had their super-hearing, were strong and fast.

Sean was showing a musculature that would be the envy of a weight-lifter and Celeste was filling out and showing the promise of an attractive womanly figure, perhaps slightly on the voluptuous side.

In school, Sean and Celeste hung out with a select group of friends that shared some common academic interests, but neither of them had any interest in dating. As was common with the rest of the family, they were both involved in karate training. There were certain shows on TV that interested them above any others and they all dealt with hospitals. Lois could see their interest and was looking forward to both of them becoming doctors.

Lois smiled a self-satisfied smile in the knowledge that her family was on the way to be the leaders they were destined to be on the road to utopia.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 5

[b]September 03, 2016[/b]

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

The week before the Labor Day weekend was very hot and humid. It was the end of the summer vacation and so it was a time when most of the teens wanted nothing so much as to be at the beach or a pool.

There were some activities that required special motivation in that kind of weather and one of them was tryouts for the varsity football team. Most of the guys that were considered 'Jocks' were there as well as some surprising candidates. Eligibility for the tryouts was based upon the previous year's academic standing. Anyone on academic probation or with less than a 2.0 average was barred from the tryouts.

After a grueling week of running drills, on Friday, it was finally time for the candidates to actually show what they could do. The returning members of the previous year's varsity team were pitted against those that were trying out in a scrimmage. After the mock game the coaches decided just who had made the cut.

Jon was there and just like his father, tried out for the position of quarterback. Since it was his first year he was not selected as first string, that honor going to Matt King, the senior that had been the previous year's starter, but Jon did become the second string

quarterback.

Jimmy junior was also there for the tryouts. Because of his weight and size he tried out as a lineman and won a first string position as a left tackle. The coach was amazed at the quickness he displayed for someone of his size.

Jon was surprised to see him, but Bud Kyle was also there. Apparently, even with the time he had been out over the winter, he had managed to bring his grades up. He was trying out as a fullback. He won a second string position. Jon wasn't too surprised when Bud's cronies also show up for the tryouts. Half of them also made the second string as linemen and one of them as center. Two of them didn't make the cut, but were placed in the reserve. Because of that, Jon started to worry. With the animosity shown by them toward him, would they actually play their position, or would they deliberately throw a game to get at him?

Practices would start right after the Labor Day weekend. The games would start in October. In some ways, Jon dreaded this because it meant that he would have to work with Bud. Since they were both second string he would, as the quarterback, be passing off the ball to the fullback or halfback for running plays. That is, of course, if they even got the chance to play. As second string, the only playing time they could look forward to was a few plays at the end of the game if it was already in the bag or if the first string got hurt.

\*\*\*

Finally, it was Labor Day and the Kent family was preparing for a picnic. This was to be a large gathering. They had invited the Olsens, the Lanes and the Kaplins. Martha and Jonathan Kent were already there. Superman and Ultra Woman had picked them up on Friday night. The rest of the guests were due to arrive around noon.

While Sam, Lois's youngest, was two he was almost as much of a handful as his sister, Lucy, had been at that age, almost, but not quite. She still held the crown. Lucy and Sam had been born just over a year apart so Lucy was now four while Sam had just had his third birthday.

At the last second, Jimmy and Lucy begged off, but dropped off their kids so that they could attend the party.

As part of the set-up there was a picnic bench under an awning. This had been set up in deference to Jimmy Junior (JJ) and Hattie, each of whom was a fair-skinned red-head that sunburned fairly easily.

Clark had set up a Wi-Fi extender so that the kids could use their pad computers to play games at the table instead of having to go inside.

As soon as the Kaplins arrived, Hattie spotted JJ, Jon, Lara, Sean, Celeste and JJ's brother and sister at the picnic bench and headed over in that direction. They were already playing a FPS game and Hattie pulled out her pad and joined in. They decided to jump onto a web-server and be a team.

Jack and Melissa had joined Lois and Clark on some lawn chairs and were talking. They were all smiling at what they could only perceive as a successful combat patrol as the kids coordinated their activities and warned each other of dangers.

\*\*\*

After a while there was a lull in the battle and the kids spent the time talking.

"So, what's been happening? We just got back from a vacation to the Poconos. We went camping at a place called Promised Land. It's a man-made lake. We were in the rustic camping area. It was nice and cool. There were streams to wade in, a swimming area and lots of hiking trails. I even saw a bear! He was at a distance, so no problem." Hattie related.

Lara replied, "Sounds like fun. I wish I'd been with you. We had to stay here because of the guys."

Curious, Hattie asked, "Why, what were they doing?"

Jon replied, "Football team tryouts."

“Oh, that’s right! How did you do?”

Jon smiled and said, “Second string, quarterback. Now, JJ, that’s another story – **first string** left tackle,” as he clapped him on the back.

Hattie looked at JJ smiled and said, “I’m impressed! My football hero. Are you going to win any games?”

JJ, with an embarrassed smile, shook his head and said, “Not too many games won by tackles.”

Hattie was upbeat as she replied, “There’s always a first time. I guess I’ll have to go to the games so that I can cheer my hero on.”

JJ asked, “You’d go to the games just because I’ll be playing?”

“Well, there is that. But I thought I’d go to all of the games.”

“Home and away?”

“Yeah, home and away.”

With a quizzical expression, JJ asked, “How will you manage that?”

Hattie laughed and said, “By being a cheerleader! I’m trying out for the Pep Squad.”

Jon laughed and asked, “Are you doing that just because my mom was a cheerleader?”

In a fake, innocent tone, Hattie asked, “Was she?”

Lara replied, “You know very well that she was.”

Hattie laughed and replied, “Yeah, I knew that.”

\*\*\*

Jon shouted over to their parents, “Hey, Mom, Hattie wants to be a cheerleader!”

Hearing this, Clark barked out a laugh and said to no one in particular, “Two peas in a pod.”

Lois smiled and shouted back, “If she wants any pointers, I’m available.”

Mel Kaplin, Hattie’s mom, said, “I take it you were a cheerleader.”

Lois nodded and replied, “Yeah, I was the captain of the squad. It was a lot of fun. I got to date a lot of the jocks.”

“I don’t know that I like the sound of that.”

Lois reached over and patted Mel’s hand and said, “I don’t think you have anything to worry about. Yeah, I dated some, but I was too interested in my future career as a journalist to get serious with any of them. I think Hattie will be the same way. Like Clark said, we are as alike as two peas in a pod. She is really following in my footsteps. I suspect that like me, eventually, she will have her own personal super guardian angel. Once Superman showed up, I might have gotten into some trouble, but he always protected me.”

In a worried tone, Mel asked, “You think that Superman will watch over Hattie? What makes my daughter so special?”

“Oh, I don’t know, he seems to watch out for kids and investigative reporters. Besides, he isn’t alone anymore. Since Ultra Woman returned about six years ago, she’s been helping him watch out for people. There’s word on the street that there are a couple of new heroes in town. I guess they are real because they were there on the Fourth of July, helping Superman and Ultra Woman. People are saying that they are also from New Krypton. Maybe they’ll help too.”

“So, Hattie is going to be a cheerleader, because you were. You’ve been giving her tennis lessons and she is going to try out for the women’s team. She is studying karate. Next thing you know, she’ll be joining the school newspaper.”

Lois laughed and said, “I wouldn’t be too surprised.”

“Before I met and got to know you, I was concerned. Hattie was using you as a role model and I have to admit, I was a little jealous. I was disappointed that I wasn’t her model, but if she wants to be a reporter, I don’t think she could have a better model.”

“She has almost become a part of our family. The friendship between her and our kids ... it’s almost as close as siblings. She’s

like another daughter. I’ll do my best to keep her safe.” Mel wasn’t to know it, but there was a much, much deeper meaning to this promise than she could ever imagine, because it was Ultra Woman making that promise and there would be a time in the future when she would literally save her life when the Main Street Bomber tried to blow her up. (See Hattie and the Main Street Bomber)

With a relieved sigh, Mel replied, “I appreciate that.”

\*\*\*

Turning to Lara, Hattie said, “I wish I had thought to ask you along on our vacation.” Hattie apparently thought of something else and said, “Would you believe that while I was on vacation, I met someone that is transferring into our school? Her dad was just transferred to Metropolis by his employer. We hit it off right away. I’m sure you would have liked her. Her name is Cynthia, but nobody calls her that. She likes to be called Morgana, you know after the Jazz singer Morgana King. Apparently her grandmother was a big fan and started calling her that and the name just stuck.”

Jon and Lara were both thrown back in memory to the Fourth of July when they had helped rescue the passengers from the cruise ship. The name Morgana and her statement that she had just moved to Metropolis hit both of them, but they had to make sure that they didn’t betray the fact that they had actually met her already.

Lara replied, “I’m sure that if you like her, we will also.”

With a smile, Jon added, “Yeah, I’m sure she’s a nice girl.”

Hattie picked up on something in the tone and expressions on her two friends and challenged, “Okay, what is it? What do you know?”

Jon and Lara verbally walked over each other as they said, “No, nothing.” “Uh, nothing. What could we know?”

Hattie looked at them skeptically, “Yeah, nothing, huh?”

Jon calmed down and said, “No, really, we don’t know anything. You just met her while you were on vacation. We were stuck here in Metropolis all the time. We were just happy for you, that’s all.”

Hattie was still skeptical as she replied, “That’s all it was, huh? Okay, if you say so.”

Lara replied, “We say so. We were just happy that you made a new friend.”

“I guess you guys will meet her when we start school. Lara, you’re in our building now, right?”

Lara smiled a secretive smile and replied, “Yeah, I move to your building this year.”

Hattie chalked off Lara’s smile to the fact that they would finally be in the same building, but she didn’t know Lara’s real reason.

\*\*\*

The following week signaled the start of the school year. Once again, Jon and Hattie were in the same homeroom with Bud Kyle, but there were no immediate problems

Cynthia’s last name was Winley so she was in a different homeroom.

First period, Jon, J.J. and Hattie had Algebra with Ms. Spargo and as they walked into the room. J.J. followed along as Hattie grabbed Jon’s arm and pulled him to a desk in the center of the room. As they were approaching, Jon recognized who was sitting there. It was Cynthia. He recognized her even if her hair wasn’t plastered down from being wet. This time she wasn’t wearing a shorts outfit, she had on a skirt that dropped to her knees with a short sleeve oxford shirt, ankle socks and loafers. Now her hair was fluffier and shoulder length, dark brown with naturally occurring blond streaks. Jon thought, <She’s prettier when she hasn’t had a dunking.> Jon knew that he had to be careful not to reveal too much.

Cynthia looked up as they approached and she smiled when she saw Hattie, but retired slightly at sight of Jon and J.J.

As they approached, seeing this, Hattie said to them, “She’s a bit shy around strangers, but once she gets to know you, she’ll loosen up.”

When they got to her desk, Hattie said, “Morgana, this is Jon, Jon Kent and his cousin, JJ Olsen. I guess that J.J., Jon and his sister Lara are my best friends.” Indicating Jon whose hand she was holding, she continued, “Don’t worry, he’s tame and won’t bite.”

Morgana started to laugh when Jon added, “At least not much.”

They were all surprised when Lara entered the room and moved in their direction.

Jon was stunned and asked, “What are you doing here, Sis?”

“I wanted to surprise you. As you know, I’ve been taking AP classes, well, I’ve moved up a grade as a result. Are you going to be able to handle having me in some of your classes?”

“That’ll be great, Sis!”

Hattie chimed in, “I agree with Jon. It’ll be great having you in the same classes. By the way, this is Morgana. I was telling you guys about her at the party.” Turning back to Morgana, she said, “This is Lara, the girl I was telling you about.”

Lara reached out her hand and said, “I feel like I already know you. Hattie has told us so much about you. You’ll have to come over some time.”

Smiling shyly, Morgana replied, “I’d like that,” as she shook Lara’s hand.

Just then Ms. Spargo came into the room so everyone selected desks to sit at, all clustered around Morgana.

As Ms. Spargo was taking the roll, she said, “We have two Kents in the class. Any relation?”

Jon spoke up, “Brother and sister.”

“That’s unusual. Twins?”

Lara replied, “No, actually a year apart. I skipped a grade.”

“Is that so? Well, we’ll see how well you do.”

Lara smiled in reply. She had an ace in the hole, Jon. She just knew that her big brother would help her out if she was having a problem.

After finishing the roll the class proceeded.

\*\*\*

Next class period was a study hall for all of them and they all started discussing their class schedules and forming study teams.

Jon and JJ were at another table going over a homework assignment while the girls chatted.

Hattie asked, “Have you heard about the new superheroes?”

Lara asked, “Who hasn’t?”

Morgana replied, wistfully, “Yeahhhh, isn’t Kam-El just a dreamboat?”

Hattie replied, “I couldn’t tell. The pictures I’ve seen weren’t good enough to tell.”

Morgan let out a sigh and said, “Trust me, he is.”

Hattie was more than a little curious and asked, “How do you know?”

Morgan was cast back in her memory, “It was the Fourth of July, we were on a cruise. The ship was in trouble. Some of us were thrown over the side. Kam’El and Ultra Woman 2 flew in to our rescue.”

Hattie interrupted Morgana, “You saw them flying?”

Morgana replied, “It sure looked like it to me. They came diving out of the sky and dove in near us so that they could rescue us. Anyhow, they got us all back on the ship and then Superman and Ultra Woman started to move the ship. I was almost thrown over the side again. Kam-El caught me. He wrapped those big strong arms around me and made me feel safe. When it was all over, I thanked him.”

Hattie, let out a breathy, “Wow!”

Seeing her response, Morgana decided to really blow her away and said, in a more matter-of-fact tone “That’s when I kissed him.”

Hattie felt light headed as she asked, in a raised tone, “You did what?”

The study hall monitor noted Hattie’s raised voice and said, “Not so loud.”

“I kissed him. To thank him ... for saving me.”

Hattie complained, “I’m the investigative reporter and I keep missing him. I’m never there when he’s around.”

Lara asked, “What about Ultra Woman 2? What is she, chopped liver?”

Hattie looked at her and replied, “She’s another girl.”

Lara was disappointed and it came out in her voice, “Oh, just because she’s another girl, she’s not important. She’s a superhero too, but you dismiss her, out of hand, because she is a girl. I bet she saved just as many from drowning as Kam-El.” Lara got up, in a huff and stormed over to the table that JJ and Jon were and flopped down.

Jon asked, “What’s the problem, Sis?”

She spat out, “Women!”

“Oh, okay, you know you’ll have to explain, later.”

In a disgusted tone, she replied, “Yeah, I know.”

\*\*\*

That night at home, Lara and Jon were talking.

“Well, that was weird! What would be the odds of that happening? I never expected to see Morgana again.”

Lara laughed and replied, “Just remember ... Don’t let her kiss you. She might remember where she kissed you before.”

“Yeah, something to think about.”

“Is she the one?”

“Nah, I don’t think so, sis. She’s a nice girl and all that, but it wasn’t like what Mom and Dad described. She’s just a nice girl and a friend, I hope.”

“Yeah, I agree. I’d like her as a friend. I guess we’ll have to wait and see.”

“I have a feeling that we are going to be seeing a lot of her.”

“We just might at that.”

\*\*\*

With a little encouragement from Hattie, both Morgana and Lara went out for pep squad and became cheerleaders.

The three girls became almost inseparable and one was rarely seen without the others. They were like a female three musketeers.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 6

September , 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

One of the reasons that Hattie and Morgana had hit it off so well was Morgana’s interest in writing. She didn’t aspire to be a top investigative journalist on a great metropolitan newspaper the way Hattie did, but she did want to do something involving writing. Perhaps she could achieve fame by writing ‘The Great American Novel’ that was such an elusive goal for so many writers. If not she might realize her desire by writing fiction and entertaining herself and others in so doing.

The first week of school, Hattie convinced Morgana and JJ, who also wanted to be a reporter, to go along and meet the editor of the school paper. His name was Nick Carter and he was a senior.

They caught up with Nick in a study hall and had a hushed conversation in a back corner of the room.

Hattie addressed him and said, “Nick, my name is Hattie Kaplin and these are my friends, Cynthia and Jimmy Olsen.”

Nick shook hands around and then muttered, “Olsen ... Olsen ... I’ve heard that name somewhere.”

JJ smiled and replied, “My dad, James Olsen, is a

photojournalist with the Planet.”

“Oh, right! I’ve seen a lot of his pictures. Glad to meet you.”  
Hattie spoke up, “We’d like to join the paper.”

“Let’s take this conversation to the office. Nick looked around and spotting the study hall monitor, went to her and asked if he and his group could go to the newspaper office. Once he received permission, they all left.

Once they were in the office, Nick asked, “Oh, what kind of qualifications do you have?” Looking at JJ with some regret, he said, “We don’t have much call for photos.”

JJ replied, “Photojournalism is my dad’s thing. I want to be a print reporter.”

Turning to Hattie he asked, “And you?”

“I plan to be an investigative journalist just like my mentor, Lois Lane.”

Nick let out a surprised gasp and asked, “Lois Lane? Did you say that Lois Lane is your mentor? She, along with her partner, Clark Kent are the top reporting team anywhere.”

Hattie smiled and replied, “I guess you didn’t know that Lois Lane and Clark Kent are married.”

“They are? Figures. Sounds like you know them personally.”

“Yeah, I do.” She put a hand on JJ’s shoulder and said, “JJ here is their nephew.”

The wheels were almost visibly turning in Nick’s mind and then he asked, “Do you think we could get them to come and give a talk to the staff? That would be terrific!”

Hattie smiled and replied, “I think that could be arranged. They like to encourage anyone interested in reporting.”

Nick turned to Morgana and asked, “Okay, how about you?”

“Oh, well, I don’t have high-powered friends in the newspaper industry, but I am interested in learning what it is to be a reporter. I want to write, I just don’t know if journalism is my thing, yet. I’d like to give it a try and find out.”

“Well, I must say, if that is your goal, you’re in good company.”

“Yes, it would appear so. Hattie hadn’t told me any of this.”

Turning to Hattie, she asked, “Lois Lane is married to Clark Kent? Does that mean that Jon and Lara are their children?”

Hattie nodded and replied, “I never think to mention it because I’m so close to the family, but, yes.”

Curious, Morgana asked, “So, why aren’t they here?”

“Oh, well, you see, reporting is their parent’s thing. Their interests don’t run in that vein. Jon wants to be a scientist and Lara wants to be a lawyer.”

Nick interrupted, “Okay, so it looks like we have three new staff members.”

Hattie asked, “Do we get press passes or some other kind of ID?”

“Yeah, we have the form all prepared. All I need to do is enter your names and use the PC Cam to take your picture.” He moved over to a computer and asked, “Okay, who’s first?”

Hattie stepped forward and he asked, “Okay, name?”

“Henrietta Kaplin, but can I use Hattie?”

“Sure, I got no problem with it.”

“Great, then it’s Hattie Kaplin.”

Nick typed in the name and then picked up the camera which was attached by a USB cable and said, “Look right at the camera.” Once he was satisfied he punched a button, there was a flash and he said, “Be ready in a minute.

“While that’s processing, who’s next?”

Morgana stepped forward.

“Name?”

“Cynthia Winley, but I’d rather use Morgana. Morgana Winley.”

“Morgana Winley it is.” He typed it in and then used the camera.

As Jimmy stepped forward he said, “Let’s use JJ Olsen.”

“JJ it is,” and the process was repeated a third time.

When Nick pulled out the IDs he handed them around and said, “Welcome aboard.”

\*\*\*

It wasn’t too long before JJ found some human interest stories for the paper. In their school there was a handicapped individual in a wheelchair. His story detailed how he had been a passenger in his father’s car when they were hit by a drunk driver.

The result of the article was increased understanding of his situation and a less standoffish attitude by the other students.

While JJ was working on that article, Hattie was doing a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the teams that the Wildcats would be facing in the upcoming season. This required her to attend the practices of the other teams, covertly. She used binoculars and a telephoto lens on her camera. She also merged with the other girls that were swarming the football fields trying to catch the eyes of the players.

On a couple of occasions she was so successful that she had dates with players from the other teams and she was able to work in questions whose answers she used in her columns.

When Jon heard what she was doing he became concerned and went to her. “Hattie, don’t you think you are taking a big chance going on dates with guys that you don’t know? These guys are jocks and are used to having girls throw themselves at them and most of them are willing, if you know what I mean. They could try to take advantage of you, force you to do something you don’t necessarily want to do.”

In a fake southern drawl, Hattie replied, “Oh, Jon, are you worried about little ol’ me?”

“You could say that. I don’t want you to be forced to do something you would regret later.”

Hattie turned serious, “You don’t need to worry about me, Jon. You know what I can do.”

“Yeah, I know what you can do, but some of these guys are easily twice your size. You might not be able to handle them. They are a lot stronger than you are.”

Hattie was confident in her abilities and replied, “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard that before. There’s another saying, ‘Famous last words.’ Besides, you don’t really need to be doing this. The coach gets the films from the other games and shows us the highlights.”

“Yea, but what I get is personal. He’s not gonna get that from the film.”

“I’d still feel better if you weren’t doing this.”

“Oh, Jon, it’s for the paper. I’ve had several articles already and I plan to have more.”

Knowing how irrepressible Hattie could be, Jon determined to take steps to protect his friend. He knew that Hattie would participate in cheerleader practice which coincided with the football practice. She would then change clothes and drive to a nearby rival’s field and join the crowd waiting for the players to exit the practice.

Jon took a quick shower and dressed in a hurry, exiting the building in time to see Hattie as she headed for her car. Jon didn’t have a car of his own so he would have to follow her on foot. To forward his plan, he had dressed in dark clothes. Staying out of the streetlights, Jon used a fraction of his super-speed to keep up with Hattie as she drove on unaware of his presence. Jon hoped that nothing happened, but he wanted to be available if something did. Hattie was his closest friend and if he could keep her from getting hurt, he would.

This was the second time he had followed her and her fourth excursion of this nature. He knew that each time increased the likelihood that something would happen.

He watched as she joined the crowd waiting for the players. With her striking figure and flame red hair she easily stood out

even in such a crowd. It wasn't too long until she attracted the attention of a player who, by his size had to be a lineman, and Jon saw him wrap an arm around her waist and lead her away. Staying in the shadows, Jon followed. The lineman led Hattie to the football stadium; however, he didn't lead her to the bleachers, instead he took her under the stands. Seeing this, Jon immediately began to worry and closed the distance somewhat.

It was a good thing he did because almost immediately he heard Hattie as she shouted, "Hey, what do you think you're doing? **Stop that!**"

He heard a gruff tone, "Why should I? That's what you came here for, isn't it? Have sex with one of the players? Well, I'm willin' to oblige. You're too pretty to turn down. Let's get those clothes off."

Jon closed the distance and saw Hattie with the lineman's hands on her breasts.

Hattie shouted, "**Hey, hands OFF!**" then she struck out, but because of the close quarters was unable to put much force behind the blow.

"Oh, you want it a little rough, huh? Okay, that's how it will be." The lineman retaliated with an open handed slap that stunned Hattie for a second and she fell backward from the force of the blow.

As she fell backward he ripped open her top and leaning down started to paw her, attempting to rip off her bra.

Stunned though she was, instinctively Hattie struck out.

Just then, Jon, silent as a wraith, closed the distance and grabbing the lineman by the back of the shirt collar pulled him away from Hattie. He made sure that he was behind him and unseen as he tapped him on the temple. The lineman was instantly unconscious and Jon eased him to the ground. He could see that Hattie was starting to come around so he faded into the background, out of sight.

Getting to her feet, Hattie readjusted her bra which had been moved askew, then pulled the sides of her shirt together and stared down at her assailant. Shaking her head she muttered, "How'd I do that? Oh well, don't quibble. I need to get out of here." She started to move away, but thinking about what had happened, she returned and standing over the unconscious figure said, "I can't let you off so easy. What you tried to do was wrong." Pulling back her foot, she kicked him in the crotch. Mercifully he was already unconscious. "Take that and think about it the next time you try something like this." Turning, Hattie stumbled away from the football field and to her car. She dug into her bag and pulled out her cheerleader sweater and put it on to cover her torn shirt. Starting her car, she headed home.

Jon decided that Hattie would probably head directly home so he stayed to make sure that no further injury was done to the lineman by other people or animals. After another ten minutes he came around. When he did he grabbed his crotch and rolled around on the ground for over a minute before his pain subsided sufficiently for him to stand. He staggered away from the stands and returned to his car. Climbing in he started the car and drove off.

Jon followed him and after he went inside his home, Jon wrote a note and left it under the windshield wiper. It read, "I saw what you tried to do. That little girl really put the hurt on you. If you try that again, I'll tell everybody about the little girl that took you out." He left it unsigned. The note showing up on his car should lead him to believe that it was written by someone that knew him and was a witness. He wouldn't know who it was and it most likely would drive him buggy trying to figure out just who it was.

\*\*\*

The next day, after football practice, unexpectedly, Hattie was waiting for Jon as he came out of the locker room. He was dressed in dark clothes because he was planning on following Hattie if she went to yet another school to try and get inside information. Jon

was surprised to see her standing there and walked up to her. "Hey, Hattie! What are you doing here?"

"Well, actually, I was looking for you. You know, you might have been right."

"Oh, about what?"

"I don't think I'll be scouting the competition anymore."

Looking around and seeing the crowd, Hattie said, "Let's walk to the car."

As they walked, Jon asked, "What about your series of articles?"

"Nick will have to be happy with what I've submitted so far. You're right. It could be dangerous."

"What convinced you?"

"Oh, nothing. Can't a girl change her mind?"

Stopping her in her tracks, Jon looked at her and said, "Hattie, I know you too well for you to convince me that you just 'changed your mind' What's wrong? Look, this is Jon; you know you can tell me. What happened, Hattie? Do I need to go somewhere and kick some butt?"

Hattie broke down and started to cry. The story came out between sobs, "Oh, Jon, it was horrible! There was this big guy and he ... he tried to force me and ... he ripped my shirt and had his hands all over me. I struck out ... I didn't think it did any good, and he hit me ... and suddenly he stopped and he was on the ground ... and I don't know what happened ... and I don't ever want to be in that situation again."

She leaned into his chest and he wrapped her up in his arms, comforting her, "There, there, I don't think he'll be bothering you again." Jon realized that if he wasn't careful he would make a mistake so he stopped talking. He was thinking, <I'm glad I followed her and saved her from that. Why do guys need to be like that? Thinking they can take whatever they want from a girl, whether they want to give it or not.>

"What kind of investigative reporter will I be if I get scared off by something like that?"

Jon placed a forefinger under her chin and lifted it so that she was looking at him as he said, "A smart one that will live to investigate other stories."

"Yeah, I guess. If I had Superman as a guardian angel like your mom had, to pull me out of spots like that, it would be another story, but I don't."

Jon thought, <If you only knew. But then, if you did, would it make you more reckless? Some people think it made Mom more reckless once Dad showed up and started protecting her.>

Hattie buried her head in Jon's chest again, so she couldn't see it, but Jon smiled. He had been her guardian angel, but she didn't know it and it would have to stay that way. He could see though, that if nothing were done, it could become a full time job. He suggested, "Why not talk it over with my mom. I'm sure she would have some suggestions. She might help you not get in over your head."

She sniffled and replied, "Yeah, I think I will."

Jon was relieved. He knew that his mom would give her good advice.

\*\*\*

**Chapter 7 –**  
September, 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation  
**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

Football season, but not the games, had started almost as soon as the school year had commenced. Starting the very first week the coach started tracking the player's grades to ensure their eligibility. The first few weeks of school there were daily practices, mostly just running drills and learning plays. The actual

games wouldn't start until October.

Jon loved playing football and it showed in his performance. His special abilities served to enhance his performance. His telescopic vision enabled him to see his receivers clearly even when far downfield. The coach watched each play closely and was well satisfied that if anything happened to his starter he had a good replacement.

Jon was gratified to see that Bud and his cronies also wanted to play and were serious about winning. On plays where Jon handed off to Bud he took the handoff and ran the called play without fail. Most of his posse had been made linemen and they performed adequately, they were not outstanding players, but they did make an opening in the defensive line for Bud to squirt through.

The season finally started and in the game against the Badgers they rang up a 24 to 10 win. That had been the first game and the coach had cautioned them that they couldn't let down with the win, because each week was a new game. They didn't win every game, but the Metropolis Wildcats were rolling up an impressive series of wins.

With each win the players came under additional scrutiny. The school administration was anxious to make sure that they followed all of the rules because they didn't want any student to lose a possible athletic scholarship because the school was lax on their requirements. The coach was highly motivated to have all of the players eligible and kept a constant check on his player's grades. He actually took it a step further, requiring his players to provide weekly updates of grades on quizzes.

As long as the players kept up their grades he was happy. If he saw some grades starting to slip, he took steps to have them brought up, and he even arranged for tutors in the necessary subjects.

\*\*\*

]October, 2016

\*\*\*

The school year was going very well for Hattie and her posse. They were all serious students and spent many study halls working together. Morgana proved herself to be an outstanding English and French tutor. Jon handled the sciences while JJ handled the maths and Hattie and Lara took care of the humanities.

Because of the easygoing attitude evidenced in Jon, Lara and JJ, Morgana had quickly warmed up to them. She was still somewhat shy around strangers, but she was rarely bothered because most of the time she was in the company of Jon or JJ. As a result other guys outside her group who were attracted to her looks and bubbly personality still stayed away from her. Morgana knew that she was attractive, but because of her shy disposition, didn't want the attention and was happy that the other guys actually kept their distance. She was comfortable the way things were.

It actually reminded her of her previous school. Her brother Dave had been an upperclassman. She had hung out with him and his buddies most of the time. His buddies knew that a 'hands off' policy was in effect for his little sister and they honored it, behaving toward her like additional brothers. An added benefit was that other guys were intimidated by Dave and his buddies, so they left her alone and she liked it that way.

Dave had graduated before they had moved and was now away at college. Morgana missed her big brother and looked forward to holidays and vacations when she would be seeing him, but found the companionship of Jon and JJ. comforting with him away.

Morgana really liked the friends she had made, but in some ways, was unsure of where things stood. As an 'outsider' looking at the individuals involved, she could see that Hattie was carrying a torch for Jon and yet there was an obvious closeness with JJ. She could see that JJ preferred Hattie's company over all others. She

could also see that Jon considered Hattie a close friend, but that he treated her like a sister, much the same way he treated Lara.

Now, Lara had a boyfriend, but he was all the way across country in California, but they did correspond and saw each other on holidays and vacations. Morgana envied Lara her relationship. She didn't know if she would be able to handle being separated from a boyfriend by three thousand miles, but Lara seemed to be handling it well.

Morgana found that she was attracted to the quiet, unassuming, Jon Kent. She knew that Hattie was attracted to him, but that he didn't reciprocate the interest. In some ways he was treating her the same way, but there were hints that there might possibly be more there. Her interest only grew as time went on and she wondered more and more what it would be like to date Jon. She had never been one to make the first move, so she limited herself to expressing interest and dropping the occasional oblique hint.

\*\*\*

At the end of the fourth week of the school year, Saturday, October 1<sup>st</sup> was the first game for the Wildcats and the team had gotten the year off to a good start with a win.

Eight weeks into the school year though, things changed.

Down a side corridor nestled in between a pair of classrooms was a door. On the door was a sign. The sign read, "*Wildcat's Lair - Authorized Personnel Only!*"

Behind that door, in the old supply closet that had been converted into the school newspaper office, Hattie and Morgana were discussing their investigation.

They made a stark contrast. Hattie was a petite red head with piercing blue eyes and a fiery disposition. Morgana was a bit taller with light brown hair with blonde streaks from being in the sun with large, brown doe eyes.

They were talking about an investigation that they had started as a result of an anomaly that Hattie had picked up on.

Hattie said, "I think we have proven that there has been collusion on the part of some of the members of the football team to steal the answers to algebra exams. So, you think we need to speak with Ms. Spargo."

Nodding, Morgana replied, "I think we do and when we do, I have an idea I'd like to propose."

"What is it?"

"Let me propose it to her and see what she thinks."

"Okay, it's your idea. Let's go see her."

Packing up their evidence they went to see Ms. Spargo. She was in her classroom, but there were no students.

Sticking her head in the door, Hattie asked, "Ms. Spargo, can Morgana and I have a moment of your time?"

Ms. Spargo, closed her grade book and turning to the door, said, "Sure, come on in. The two of you are among my better students. I always have time for you."

As they entered, Morgana closed the door behind them.

Hattie acted as spokesperson, "Ms. Spargo, we are here from The Wildcat's Den, the school paper."

Ms. Spargo smiled and asked, "Ah, so this isn't a social call or an attempt to get some hints on the latest homework assignment. What can I do for the members of the fourth estate?"

Morgana said, "Ms. Spargo, we have been tracking the grades as they are posted for all of the classes. We know, from personal experience, just how tough algebra can be, maybe a little tougher than some other courses. We noticed something that piqued our curiosity."

"Oh, what would that be?"

"Well, there are five members of the football team that are all passing algebra and have gotten identical scores on all of the last five quizzes."

"And?"

"Don't you think it odd that they should all get the same

score?”

Ms. Spargo looked at the door, making sure that it in fact was closed. Once so assured, she said, “I don’t want this to get into the paper, at least not yet, so, off the record?”

Hattie and Morgana both nodded.

“Okay, well, as a matter of fact, I did think it was odd. It wasn’t until the fifth quiz that I noticed that particular phenomena. That was when I pulled out the original answer sheets and started comparing them. In each case, the same answers were missed by each of the five. Now, there is a possibility that they study together, but to miss the exact same questions, somehow I don’t think that explains it.”

“Do you keep your answer key on the school’s computer system?”

“No, I guess I’m old fashioned. I have the test and the key on paper. I find it easier to grade the quizzes that way. By having the problem worked out on paper, I can not only check the answer, but I can see how the student arrived at the answer they gave.”

Morgana was eager to see where this had led and asked, “What’d you find?”

Ms. Spargo, looked around again and then in a conspiratorial tone said, “Almost identical.”

Hattie offered, “If the work is right, it **should** all look the same.”

“Yes, I agree, but all of the errors were in the same places.”

“Do you think someone got hold of your answer key?”

“I don’t see how. I keep it locked up in my desk.”

Hattie was tempted to show Ms. Spargo just how easily she could pick the lock on her desk, but decided that she didn’t want to put herself in that position.

She was saved from revealing that skill when Morgana suggested, “How about installing an ‘IP Nanny-Cam’? That way, if someone accessed the papers, you’d know who it was.” She looked around and spotted a chart on the wall. Pointing at it, she said, “It could be placed behind that chart. It would have a clear field of view of your desk and probably wouldn’t be noticed. You could monitor it on your home computer.”

Adding to it, Hattie suggested, “You could also make up a fake answer key with enough wrong answers so that if it is used they fail.”

Ms. Spargo, looked back and forth, between Hattie and Morgana, started to smile and said, “I like the way you girls think.”

Hattie smiled and said, “It’s the kind of thing my mentor would do.”

Ms. Spargo asked, “You are being mentored? In what? By whom?”

Hattie smiled and replied, “Yes, I am. I’m learning to be an investigative reporter from Lois Lane the best investigative reporter there ever has been.”

“Well, I must say, she is teaching you well.”

Hattie could only smile. “Once the trap has been sprung, can we have the story for the school paper?”

“I don’t see why not. I’ll try to have everything ready before the next quiz. That’s scheduled for next week.”

“I think I know someone that can help set up the IP Nanny-Cam.”

“Who would that be?”

“Another one of your students, James Olsen Junior. His father is very good with computers and JJ has learned a lot from him.”

“Thanks for the suggestion, but he’s on the team. Wouldn’t he warn the other guys?”

With confidence, Hattie replied, “No, he doesn’t like cheaters any more than I do. Besides, he’s on the paper too. He’s a real law and order guy. If there is cheating going on he will want the perpetrators caught.”

“As long as you are sure of him, I’ll trust him.”

“We’ll go talk to him and let you know.”

Hattie and Morgana left and returned to the Wildcat’s Lair office.

When they arrived Jon and JJ were both there.

As they entered, JJ and Jon both looked up from what they were studying and smiled. Hattie and Morgana both smiled back and Morgana said, “JJ, just the person we were looking for.”

“Oh, what’s up, Morgana?”

Morgana replied, “We need to set up a Nanny-Cam.”

JJ replied, “No problem. I’ve helped my dad set up a few of them.” Teasingly he said, “Aren’t you a little old to have a nanny? Or is it to check on you and not your nanny?”

Morgana gave a sour expression and said, “Poor joke. It isn’t for me or my parents, it’s for Ms. Spargo.”

Surprised, JJ blurted out, “The algebra teacher? I didn’t think she had any kids at home. I have heard of people setting them up to monitor their pets...”

Morgana interrupted him, “This isn’t for her home. It’s for here, at school, her classroom.”

“Whoa, her classroom? Why?”

Hattie stepped in, “Here’s the story. We’ve been looking at the quiz grades and we think there’s something fishy going on. Bud Kyle and his four cronies have all gotten the exact same grade on each of the last 5 quizzes.”

Jon, always one to try to see the best in people suggested, “Maybe they are just studying together. That could explain it.”

Morgana answered, “Maybe, but they are all getting the same questions wrong. That goes beyond simply studying together.”

Nodding, JJ said, “Sounds fishy to me too.”

Morgana pressed, “Then you’ll help out?”

JJ replied, “Sure. I think dad has a spare IP Webcam at the house. I’ll borrow that.”

“That’s wonderful. How soon could you bring it in to set up?”

“I don’t know, Hattie, maybe as early as tomorrow. What does Ms. Spargo want to do with it?”

“She wants to set it up in a concealed location that overlooks her desk. She thinks that someone is copying her answer key. She keeps it in her desk.”

“I think her room is empty during the fifth period tomorrow.”

“That should work. I have a study hall that period and I can just tell the monitor that I’m getting some help from her on an assignment. I can use the school’s Wi-Fi. I’ll just need a power source nearby.”

Morgana supplied, “There’s a poster on her wall that the cam can be hidden behind and there’s a wall outlet below it.”

“Sounds ideal. I’ll set it up tomorrow.”

\*\*\*

Over the weekend, after dark, Jack, one of Bud’s cronies, snuck onto the school grounds. His destination was a window into the basement that he had used many times before. Opening the window, he crawled through and lowered himself to the floor, silently. He used a mini-flashlight so that he didn’t trip over anything that might be in his path, but he masked it with two fingers leaving only a slim slot for the light to come through. Once he was out of that basement storage room he stealthily made his way to the stairs and ascended them to the second floor. Now that he was in, he wasn’t too worried. There wasn’t a roving guard or anything. Making his way to Ms. Spargo’s room, he let himself in.

Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a key that he had made and unlocked her desk. Pulling out the contents, he used his flashlight to examine them. He stuck the base of the flashlight in his mouth so that he could use two hands and his face was illuminated by the backwash of the light reflected from the papers. Finding what he was looking for, he pulled out his cell phone and used the camera to photograph the pages.

Once he was finished, he replaced the papers, as well as he could remember they had been placed, closed and re-locked the

drawer. Shielding his flashlight once again, he retraced his steps to the storage room and out of the building.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 8

October 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

Ms. Spargo was preparing for bed when a buzzer stopped her. The buzz was coming from her computer so she moved over to it and wiggled the mouse to bring it out of screen saver mode.

When the screen resolved there was a window open in the center of the screen and she could see a light moving. She muttered, “I think we are about to catch our fish.”

The light moved to her desk, but she couldn’t make out any features until he put the light in his mouth and then she finally recognized who it was when his features were lit up by the light.

\*\*\*

JJ had told Hattie the IP address of the camera and she had been monitoring it as well. She was sitting at her desk preparing an e-mail to a friend when a window popped up. It took a few seconds for her to realize just what she was seeing, but she had the presence of mind to activate the record function to preserve what she was watching.

\*\*\*

The Algebra test was scheduled for Tuesday and no one said anything about the break-in.

The grades were posted on Thursday and there were five very surprised students. They were surprised because each of them had received a failing grade!

They were all gathered around the board when the grades were posted and they all made loud exclamations at the results.

\*\*\*

That afternoon each of the failing students were called into the principal’s office.

When Bud arrived he found that the football coach was also there.

The principal said, “Come in, Bud, and sit down.”

Once Bud was seated, he asked, “Do you know why you were called in?”

“The Algebra test grade?”

“Right the first time. The Algebra test grade. You failed this test and there is a suspicion that your grades on the previous tests may not be correct.”

“But, I passed all of them.”

“Yes ... yes, you did, but there are some doubts. Since there are some doubts, Ms. Spargo is going to re-test you on those concepts. If you pass the make-up, then fine. If not, you will be off the football team. Do I make myself clear?”

With a woebegone expression, Bud replied, “Yeah, I mean, yes, sir.”

“Okay. The make-up exam will be tomorrow.”

“That soon?”

“Yes, that soon. What are you worried about? You’re supposed to know this material already.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

\*\*\*

Bud left the principal’s office in a dejected mood. As he left he saw the other members of his posse waiting their turn. All he could do was shake his head as he passed by.

\*\*\*

After school they got together and compared notes. Each had been told basically the same thing.

Bud asked, “What went wrong? We had a sweet deal going.” He pinned Jack with his eyes and asked, “Are you sure you got the

right test?”

“Sure I am. I recognized the questions. I put down the answers we had, but somehow they were wrong.”

Bud, with a sudden flash of insight asked, “Do you think that Spargo found out somehow and we were set up?”

“How could she have gotten wise? I was very careful.”

Replied Jack, defensively.

“Well, something sure went wrong, now we have to re-test on all of the quizzes and if we don’t pass we’re off the team.”

Jack got up and as he started to move away said, “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’m going home to study.”

Bill, echoed his statement, “Me too,” as he got up and moved away.

Watching the rest move away, Bud grumbled, “What’s the use,” got up and headed home.

When he got there, he didn’t even crack a book. He went into his father’s liquor cabinet and reaching into the back, pulled out a bottle of vodka. Taking it into the kitchen he poured a drinking glass full and then ran tap water into the bottle until he had replaced the missing fluid. He replaced the bottle and then took the glass full of liquor went to his room.

He made a sign that said, “Do not disturb – studying” and hung it on his door. Then he locked the door, just in case.

Crossing to his bed he lifted the glass of clear liquid and took a large gulp. The alcohol burned its way down his throat and he grimaced. He looked at the glass in his hand and making up his mind, took another gulp. This time it didn’t burn quite so much, perhaps those taste receptors had been burnt out or just numbed, he didn’t know, or care. It was enough that it didn’t hurt as much the second time so he upended the glass and drained it is a few more gulps.

Grabbing his MP3 player, he stuck the ear-buds in his ears and turned the volume up on his favorite Gangsta Rap music. Then he picked up a hand-held game machine and started blasting away opponents. He opened his window and dug out his stash. He rolled a joint and smoked it as he played.

It wasn’t too long until he was so affected by the alcohol and drugs he had consumed that in his mind he was in the game and really killing people. As he did a death’s head grin appeared on his face.

\*\*\*

That afternoon, while Bud and his cronies were being called to the principal’s office, Hattie, Morgana and JJ brought their findings to their editor, Nick Carter. He told them, “Write it up and I’ll edit it. If you get it to me by the end of the day, it will make it into the next edition.”

Hattie was irritated and challenged, “And if we don’t it will be held for another week? In another week it will not be news, it will be history. Look, this is going down NOW! If we can’t get this all written up by the end of the day I would suggest you put a hold on the current issue and put this out as a special. This story is too important to put on hold! This is BIG! Major! Five members of the football team caught cheating! They are being kicked off the squad even as we speak!”

Nick was taken somewhat aback. He was used to Hattie’s intensity by this time, but this was attitude on steroids. All he could do was put up his hands to fend off her wrath and say, “Okay! Work on it. If you can’t finish by the end of the day, we’ll hold the issue, but only a single day. We have to go to press the following day whether the story is ready or not.”

Mollified, Hattie replied, “Don’t worry. We’ll try to have it to you today. If not, first thing in the morning.” Turning to Morgana and JJ, she said, “Let’s get busy. Morgana, you and I will start the write-up. As soon as we have something, we’ll turn it over to JJ for formatting.”

As soon as Hattie finished organizing her team they all got to work. While Hattie and Morgana started the write-up, JJ pulled up

the doc prep software and started prepping the format. As soon as the girls had some copy for him all he would need to do is plug the text into the frames.

While he was doing this he could hear Hattie and Morgana discussing how to present the details. There was some little discussion about wording. Eventually, they came to an agreement and started writing it up. Since Morgana was a faster keyboarder, Hattie made comments while Morgana typed the article up. It wasn't too long until JJ saw that his inbox had a new document.

He opened the document and copied and pasted it into his frame. As he started the formatting he also started editing what the girls had produced. He saw some repeat words and replaced some with synonyms. He spotted some other grammatical errors and corrected them. When he was finished he looked at the time and released a relieved sigh. "Made it, with time to spare." He hit the send key which sent it to Nick's inbox, formatted and ready to print.

\*\*\*

The headline on the Wildcat's Lair two days later read,  
**"EXAM CHEATING SCAM EXPOSED! FIVE MEMBERS OF THE FOOTBALL TEAM BOOTED"**

By: Kaplin, Olsen and Winley

"In an exclusive investigation by the Wildcat's Lair staff in cooperation with the teaching staff it was proven that the answer keys to the tests were being copied and the answers being provided to certain members of the football team. As a result of this investigation, five members of the team have been booted off the squad because they were cheating on the tests. In this sting operation a fake answer sheet, with incorrect answers, was prepared and left in the location normally used by the teacher for her answer key. (Story continues page 2.)"

\*\*\*

The day the paper was distributed, Jon took a copy home so that his parents could see it.

After a close perusal, Lois looked at Clark and said, "Nothing ever changes! How many cheating scandals will there be? You'd think that by this time they'd wise up! Honesty and study are the way to get ahead. There are no real shortcuts."

"Right, and technology just makes it that much easier to get caught."

"They thought that they were using technology to get ahead and it only put them behind the eight ball."

There's an old saying, 'It takes a thief to catch a thief.' In this case it took technology to cancel the technological advantage."

"Our girl did a good job on this one."

"She had a lot of help. You know. They make a good team."

"Who? Hattie and JJ?"

"Well, yeah, but I was talking about Hattie and Morgana. They led the investigation. JJ just helped with the technology."

"If she keeps going like this, she will be an excellent addition to the Planet."

"You've taught her well. She is really following in your footsteps."

"I couldn't be more proud of her if she were my actual daughter."

"If she keeps it up though, she's going to need a super-guardian angel."

Lois turned serious as she said, "I made Mel a promise and I intend to keep it. I'll do everything in my power to protect her."

Clark nodded and replied, "We all will."

\*\*\*

Rumors had started to spread as soon as Bud and his buddies had been seen going into the principal's office, but the entire story wasn't known until the Wildcat's Lair was available.

Once all of the details were known, most of the students were angry that all that had happened was kicking them off the team. General opinion was split two ways. One faction was of the

opinion that they should have been expelled. The other faction wondered if they could get away with something of the sort to improve their own grades.

Hattie and her posse refrained from publishing any details of how the deed was done, but all of the teachers were warned about how it was accomplished so that they in turn could take steps to protect their testing materials.

\*\*\*

The following week there was a headline on the Wildcat's Lair that was almost as disturbing:

**"QUARTERBACK INJURED!"**

By: Kaplin, Olsen and Winley

*In the Wildcats' most recent game against the Woodstock Beavers, Wildcats quarterback Matt King was sacked from the blind side in the second quarter and suffered a season ending knee injury.*

*The good news is that he has already been granted a football scholarship to Villanova in Philadelphia. With proper care he will be able to play in his freshman year for that college.*

*Second string quarterback, Jon Kent, was able to step in and finish the game. Kent showed great promise in the position. The score had been tied when King was injured and Kent led the team to a 24 to 21 victory. (Details of the game and story continued on page 2)*

That had been only the fifth game of the season and the team coalesced around Jon and he was able to lead them to a string of victories, remaining undefeated from that point on. Going into November the school's stats were an impressive 7 wins against only a single loss.

JJ was really put on his mettle protecting the quarterback. As left tackle, that was his assignment. Jon was right handed, so the left side was his blind side. Matt King had been left handed and the right tackle had let the defenseman through that had sacked him. JJ was especially aggressive because he knew there was a chance that a defenseman tackling Jon could be hurt.

\*\*\*

The Homecoming game was to be played the weekend before Thanksgiving and as a result there was an election to see just who would be Homecoming Queen.

Since almost all of the most attractive girls in the school were on the pep squad it was no surprise that all of their names were in the election.

It was traditional that the player voted Most Valuable Player in the Homecoming game would be the Homecoming King and would date the Homecoming Queen for the Homecoming Dance and most of the pep squad along with the rest of the team would be the royal court.

Hattie was the one that was most excited about the upcoming celebration. She was a very attractive red head with naturally curly hair. Her figure was better than most, an athlete's body, well muscled and toned. Everyone could see that her legs were long and lean which was very evident in the short, short tennis skirt that she wore when leading the Lady Cats, which is what the girl's tennis team was called.

Jon knew from personal experience just how fit she was. They had spent a lot of time together at each other's dojos working on karate. Jon was learning the softer, kung fu, styles that Hattie had learned and she was learning the 'harder', Korean style, which Jon had been schooled in. The spandex workout gear that she wore under her gi (pronounced gee) left hardly anything to the imagination.

By the same token, Hattie almost found herself drooling over Jon's body. Jon was in the habit of wearing only a pair of spandex bike shorts under his gi which showed off his well muscled chest through the gap in the gi's front. He wasn't vain about it, but he had the physique of a bodybuilder and extreme athlete rolled into one.

That physique combined with his personality only served to increase her desire to have more than a sisterly relationship with him. She even fantasized over the possibility of a sexual relationship with him. She knew that fantasy was as far as she would take it because theirs just wasn't that kind of relationship.

Hattie was disappointed that JJ didn't share her, Lara and Jon's interest in karate. JJ preferred to spend his time studying and working on his computer. He was becoming a real whiz with the office package that they all used for typing up their homework assignments. When any of them needed help formatting a paper to make it a better presentation, he was the go to guy. He could take a plain document and dress it up by changing the formatting to make it an eye catching presentation, invariably raising the grade at least one notch.

Morgana was somewhat taller than Hattie. Hattie was five foot two while Morgana was five foot four. Morgana had been a student of kick-boxing in their previous city. Since moving to Metropolis she hadn't found a kick-boxing class nearby. Hattie had offered to take her as a guest to her dojo and Morgana found out that she liked karate every bit as much as kick-boxing so she had joined a class. Morgana had been impressed by Hattie's hard toned body when she saw her in her spandex workout gear. However, she hadn't been envious, because Morgana knew that hers was also a well toned physique having worked hard at kick-boxing and other sports like swimming and tennis.

Since she was now taking karate along with Hattie, Lara and Jon, she also had seen Jon Kent in his workout gear. Seeing him made her want to run her hands over his skin. There was something hauntingly familiar about him, but she couldn't put her finger on it and that only made her interest in him more intense.

The main difference between Morgana and Hattie was the fact that to this time Hattie had only seen a few pictures of Kam-El and they hadn't been very high quality, while Morgana had seen, with her own eyes, up close and personal, the superhero. She had been in his arms and had actually managed to kiss him.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 9

November 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

After being caught cheating on the algebra tests, Bud and his cronies had all been booted from the football team. They were together at their favorite hangout, sitting in a booth grumbling about it.

Bud said, in a harsh whisper, "My old man is fit to be tied. When he found out that I'd been kicked off of the team he almost went into orbit. I didn't tell him why. I said that they were giving preference to that wuss Kent and his friends and that didn't leave any room for us. If he ever finds out, I'll probably get worse than I got for that pumpkin incident."

Ben asked, "What'd he do to you for that?"

"I had the worst beating of my life and I've had some pretty bad beatings. I won't let that happen again. If he finds out, it's the school's fault and I will get even. Are you guys with me?"

There were nods from each in assent.

Bud asked, "Can any of you get your hands on guns?"

"What do we need guns for?"

"Just in case. I want to do something big. I also want to get back at Kent and Kaplin. I'm pretty sure they were involved in that trick that got us caught."

There was a chorus of "Yeahs," around the table.

"Let's get outta here and go to Ben's house. Too much chance of being overheard here."

They each finished their sodas and made their exit.

\*\*\*

They went to Ben's house. His parents were both at work so they had the house to themselves. They gathered in the living room and pulling out the play system they started playing a shoot-em-up game. As they did, they were shouting at each other.

During a break in the play, Bud said, "I'd sure like to do that to Kent."

Ben replied, "Don't you think that would be a little drastic?"

In a heated tone, Bud replied, "I can't prove it, but I'm convinced that him and that side-kick of his, Kaplin, were the ones that got the goods on us and got us kicked off of the team. My old man is threatening to kick me out of the house and forcing me to work as soon as I graduate. He actually said, 'assuming I graduate.' Because without a football scholarship there's no way I can afford to go to college."

Ben agreed, "Yeah, my Pop said the same thing. He just can't afford it on his salary."

Jack said, "Come on; let's get back to the game."

Bud said, "Let's have another drink first."

The others agreed so they raided Ben's father's liquor cabinet.

After a couple of drinks each, with some reluctance they returned to the game. Game play continued for a while and suddenly, Bud, dropped his controller.

Seeing this, Jack, his speech somewhat slurred challenged, "You givin' up, Bud?"

Bud, with an odd expression replied, "Nah, I just had a wickedly awesome idea. We want to get back at them for kicking us off of the team, right?" His speech was not as slurred as Ben's had been.

After taking some time to mull this over, the other guys nodded their agreement.

Pointing at the screen, Bud said, "I just planted a time bomb so that I could be away from it before it exploded. Why don't we do something like that?"

"How could we do that without getting caught?"

"We just make sure that nothing can be traced back to us, maybe we could even throw suspicion on Kent. I saw a movie, I think it had Stephen Segal in it, he needed to blow something up, but he needed to be away from the explosion. He put a portable propane tank on a gas range with the burner on high. I don't know why, but when it got hot enough, the tank exploded. If we could steal one of those cylinders, maybe from Kent, we could put it on the cook stove in the cafeteria.

"Yeah, I hate that cafeteria food anyhow. No great loss. Let's do it."

"When shall we do it?"

Bud snapped his fingers and said, "Homecoming! That should really ruin the party!"

I plan to get even with Kaplin and Kent, but we might as well include that new girl, what's her name ... Morgan something."

"Morgana," Bill supplied.

"Yeah, Morgana, that's her. One of you should make sure you get her. She was in on setting up that trap that got us caught. We've got a score to settle with her and that JJ character."

\*\*\*

Lara had sent an e-mail to Mike about homecoming and he asked his parents for permission to fly east. He had been working a part-time job that he had started over the summer and had the money for the airfare.. They had given their permission and he had flown out midday on Friday. He had called Clark and arranged to be picked up at the airport. Nothing had been said to Lara. He wanted to surprise her.

Clark picked him up at the airport at 4:30 so he was at the Kent homestead when the kids got home.

He was in a side room when Jon and Lara walked in the door. Lara was in the middle of complaining about going to the Homecoming Dance alone when he stepped into view.

Lara was stunned for a second and then with a screech of his name, “Mike!” She threw herself into his arms. She gasped out, “What are you doing here?”

He had overheard her complaint as she was entering and replied, “I couldn’t let my girlfriend go to the Homecoming Dance alone, now could I? Also, I didn’t want to take the chance that you’d meet someone else that you might like better.”

With conviction, she replied, “No chance of that!”

The cheerleaders were all there in their uniforms as they had been all day. It had been a tradition that all of the cheerleaders wore their uniforms to school on the Fridays prior to games. Since she was in her cheerleader uniform and he said, “Stand back, I want to get a look at you.”

Noting the short skirt with her leg peeking through on the left he let out a whistle and said, “Wow! I’m glad I got here in time.

\*\*\*

It was mid November and the weather was, as was typical of New Troy, changeable. It just so happened that this particular week had been very mild, the typical Indian Summer. The night before the big game followed along in that trend. It was a very mild night, almost balmy. As a result the cheerleaders had eschewed the use of the leggings and were simply wearing their skirts with the tights.

Later in the evening, after dark, Jon and Lara, along with Mike, returned to the school because there was a pep rally at the football field. It was being held there because there was a team decorating the gym for the Homecoming Dance.

A bonfire had been built just outside of the end zone between it and the parking lot. At the conclusion of the rally an effigy of the Gotham Grizzlies mascot was burned. The pep squad men had created it from papier-mâché and cotton batting.

The marching band was there to play and the cheerleaders went through some of their routines.

Almost all of the guys watched, with great interest, as the girls did their dance steps, leaps, splits and tumbles, but hardly any as interested as Mike in one particular girl and she did her best to please him. Lara wasn’t really vain, but she did know that she was attractive and at fifteen had a womanly figure much like her mom’s.

Jon found himself in a quandary. His attention was split between Hattie and Morgana. The close friendship he had had with Hattie for so long had formed an unbreakable bond between them. He wasn’t attracted to her the way a boyfriend is attracted to his girlfriend, but there was still an attraction there, it was undeniable.

Then there was Morgana. Jon could close his eyes and remember that kiss she had given him as Kam-El. Soft and inviting. He could also remember the kiss he had received from Emerson on the pool apron after he had helped save her from that collapsing roof during the earthquake. Actually, it was very easy to remember each and every kiss since there had only been three. The other had been Amber Livingstone, the neighbor girl. They had helped put out a kitchen fire and she had wanted to ‘thank’ him.

So far, of the three times he had been kissed, Morgana’s kiss had been his favorite. With that thought in mind, he started trying to concentrate on Morgana and her performance. It was almost like she could feel his eyes on her because she looked directly at him and smiled as she did a leaping split that showed off her legs.

\*\*\*

After the pep rally Morgana and Hattie joined Jon and JJ, Mike and Lara in the car and they went out for burgers and shakes. When they got to *Burger Shack* they all piled out and going inside claimed a table.

The three girls in their cheerleader uniforms made an attractive trio. As they walked in they attracted the attention of most of the male patrons. The stares were obvious as they moved to a table with JJ, Jon and Mike following in their wake. When

they sat down, Lara, Mike and JJ sat on one bench while Jon sat between Hattie and Morgana on the other side with JJ across from Hattie.

\*\*\*

Because of the cheating scandal, Bud and his friends were barred from participating in school activities, so that night, Bud and his cronies had gotten together to make sure that they had everything that they would need. Bud had made good on his plan to steal a propane gas cylinder from the Kent’s back yard. He had waited until they had all gone out for an evening’s entertainment before he committed his theft.

They gathered at Jack’s house. After he sat the cylinder down, he was handed a glass of liquor which he downed in a gulp. Looking around he saw that each of his friends had already imbibed before he got there. Jack said, “Ben brought the booze.” He looked around in a paranoid fashion and then pulled out a bag of leafy material and a pipe. “I found where my old man keeps his stash. He’s such a hypocrite! Tells me that he’ll beat me black and blue if he catches me smoking weed and he does it all the time, like I couldn’t tell!” As he was talking he was filling the pipe with the dried flakes of weed. Picking up a lighter he struck the flame and applied it to the bowl of the pipe. He inhaled deeply and then, holding his breath, passed it over to Bud. He followed suit and passed it on. When that bowl was finished, Ben refilled it and they passed this second one around.

By the time they had finished five pipes they were all happy.

Bud reached into his back pocket and pulled out Smith and Wesson .38 special that he had stolen from his father’s gun locker. Waving it around, negligently, he bragged, “My old man won’t even know that this is gone. I found where he put the key to the lock-up and let myself in. I got a box full of bullets as well. How’d you guys do?”

Jack sat down his glass and produced a semi-automatic version of an AR-15 and said, “I got this and two extra clips.”

After setting down his glass, Ben produced an automatic pistol, a 9mm Glock 19 and said, “I got this and two clips.”

Smiling, Bud said, “Nobody better get in our way. We’ll show ‘em.” He looked around conspiratorially and said, “Okay, we meet here tomorrow at six. Bring everything. Dress all in black and wear ski-masks so that they can’t tell who it is on the security cameras. I’ll take care of the bomb then we meet in the hallway outside the newspaper’s office. We trash it and then move on. By that time that the dance is well underway and we can move on the gym. It’ll be just like WOW. Just remember, Kent, Kaplin and that new girl are mine.

They spent some time finalizing their plans, smoking additional weed as they did.

As they were finalizing their plans the hate they felt was exacerbated by what they planned and also the drugs they were consuming. By the time they were finished they were all consumed with a red hot fury at the school, and especially those that had perpetrated their exposure which resulted in their removal from the team and the revenge they would exact.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 10 – The Big Game

November 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

Saturday, November 19, 2016 dawned slightly overcast, threatening rain, but as the day progressed the sky slowly cleared.

That same morning, after breakfast, Clark called Jon to the office for a pep talk. “Come on in Sport and close the door.”

Jon entered and closed the door before taking a seat. Clark leaned back against the desk and thought for a few seconds before

speaking, “Jon, I can’t tell you how proud of you your mother and I am of how you’ve handled yourself on the field. Personally, I think you couldn’t have chosen a better position. Quarterback enables you to avoid most possibilities of hurting someone. How did you make that decision?”

“Well, Pop, like you said, this way there isn’t much chance of my hurting anyone. As long as JJ does his job and protects me the way Uncle Pete did for you, there isn’t much chance of my being sacked and once I get rid of the ball the chances are I won’t get hit. The other team doesn’t want to be hit with roughing the passer.”

“I must say, it has worked out well. You’ve run up some impressive statistics already and it’s only mid-October. It was a shame that Matt King got hurt in the second game, but that gave you your chance. You’re on track to set a school record for passing TDs.”

Jon smiled and said, “The nice thing is that I don’t even have to depend on my abilities, well, maybe just a little. My vision abilities are coming on and I can use my telescopic vision to see where the receivers are. Beyond that I just use my normal agility to avoid tacklers. That way I don’t attract too much attention.”

“Are you worried?”

“About what, Pop?”

“The MVP in today’s game is going to be Homecoming King at the dance tonight.”

“Why would I be worried about that?”

“Who is the Homecoming Queen this year?”

“Morgana, Cynthia Winley won the contest. She’s another junior. She’s actually pretty nice. Most of the pretty girls are total airheads, but she is sweet and brainy. Actually, I see a lot of her. She comes with Hattie to karate class and we all study together and she works with Hattie and JJ on the school paper. Aside from that, I’ve run into her a few times when I’ve gone to see Hattie or JJ in the paper’s office. She’s also one of the cheerleaders.” Jon thought for a second before he finished up, “She was also one of the people we rescued from that cruise ship on the Fourth of July holiday.”

“Isn’t she the one that kissed you?”

Jon started to blush as he replied, “Yeah, she’s the one.”

“If you’re chosen MVP, won’t that create a problem?”

“Why would it?”

“Well, Hattie . . . she’s your best friend. I thought you might have asked her to the dance.”

“Nah, I was going to, but JJ already asked her. I plan on being MVP so that I can take Morgana.”

“Oh, okay then, go out there and do your best.”

“I will, Pop, I sure will.”

A short time later Jimmy Olsen and JJ picked up Jon to take them to the field house to suit up.

After the typical locker room pep talk from the coach it was time to take the field.

\*\*\*

The Homecoming game was between the traditional rivals, the Metropolis Wildcats and the Gotham Grizzlies.

Metropolis had taken a page out of the Pro’s book and had a large paper barrier stretched across the exit from the locker room. Two of the male cheerleaders were holding the sides. The rest of the pep squad formed an aisle and when the announcement was made, Jon, as the quarterback, led the squad out, breaking through the barrier and passing between the two lines of cheerleaders as they charged onto the field. Each player was named as they entered the field. Jon was so excited that he had to use extra caution to prevent himself from using his super-speed and waved to the fans in the stands. Rather than their normal home jerseys which were white, they had opted to wear their more colorful red and gold travel uniforms.

The pep squad uniforms consisted of red sweaters with gold arms and red wrap skirts with red socks and athletic shoes. The

mascot, a wildcat, was pictured in gold on the chest of the sweater. The wrap skirts were designed so that as the girls walked the slit would open and reveal their left leg. The tights they wore were red to match the skirts. The two squad leaders had gold scarves tied around their necks. The male members wore red slacks, and similar sweaters. All had golden pom-poms.

Hattie had convinced Morgana and Lara that joining the pep squad would be fun so they were side by side as the team passed.

As Jon passed he received the biggest cheer from his sister and friends.

The mascot was a member of the pep squad dressed up in a wildcat suit with a red and gold uniform.

Once the home team was at their bench the same activity was repeated with the visitors who were wearing their gray and black uniforms. The jerseys were gray as were the leggings with black trunks. Centered on the chest was a yellow oval with their number in black within it.

The Gotham pep squad was dressed in grey unitards with black trunks over and black pom-poms. The mascot was a pep squad member in a grizzly suit with a grey unitard, black trunks and a black cape with a scalloped edge.

\*\*\*

Metropolis won the toss and opted to take the initial kick-off and the game was underway.

Metropolis took the kick off at the 20 yard line and ran it forward to the Metropolis 42 where they ran the first play from scrimmage.

On the first play, Jon took the snap and faded back for a pass. With his telescopic vision he spotted his wide receiver in a crossing pattern and floated the ball over the line for a catch and a 15 yard advance. The next play was from the Gotham 43. Taking the snap, Jon faded back and faked a pass, handing off to the full back for a dash up the center, but he was stopped after a gain of only 2 yards.

On second and 8, Jon again faded back to pass. This time the wide out was running a fly pattern down the sidelines. Jon timed the throw so that he caught it on the 10 yard line and was knocked out of bounds on the 3 yard line. The next play from scrimmage resulted in 6 points on the board for Metropolis. After a good kick the score was 7-0.

The lead changed several times during the first half with the half-time score being 14-10 Metropolis.

As the team was leaving the field for the half-time festivities, Jon was passing Hattie and noticed that she was wearing a gold scarf. He stopped and asked, “When did they make you one of the squad leaders?”

She shouted, “At the last practice. Joanie said she couldn’t be here.”

Jon laughed and said, “Bad for Joanie, good for Hattie!”

After a half-time pep talk where the coach cautioned his players about becoming complacent because they had a lead, they took the field again.

The second half kick-off was taken by the Gotham Grizzlies and they marched straight down the field in fourteen plays to score a touchdown. After the point after that made the score 14-17 Gotham.

In the fourth period, Metropolis managed to put three more points on the board to tie it up at 17 all.

In the last two minutes of play, Metropolis had needed to punt and had gone for the coffin corner with the ball going out of bounds on the 4 yard line.

The Coach called a time out. During the time out, he called JJ over and after a whispered conversation, sent him in to replace the left tackle and take in the play. This was unusual because JJ was an offensive lineman.

At the end of the timeout the two teams lined up. At the snap Metropolis pulled a trick play. Instead of dropping back into their

usual zone defense, they blitzed. JJ's deceptive quickness got him through the line and he sacked the quarterback in the end zone for a safety and the referee blew his whistle, signaling the end of the play.

Once he was sure of the sack and hearing the whistle, JJ jumped up and threw his arms over his head in a victory gesture as 2 points were put on the board. Play had stopped and the rest of the team looked at the end zone. Seeing JJ standing over the Grizzlies' quarterback who was on his back, ball still clutched in his hands they all charged into the end zone. They picked JJ up and carried him off the field on their shoulders.

While this was going on, the crowd went wild! As they watched the play go down, the cheerleaders all sprang to their feet and started jumping exuberantly. Once it was finished and the whistle had blown, it took several seconds for the pep squad captains to regain order and call for a particular cheer. The cheer called for Morgana on one side and Hattie on the other side to be catapulted into the air and caught by the male members. It was one of the more dangerous moves that they executed and they performed it flawlessly.

The touchback forced the Grizzlies to turn over the ball with a free kick.

The Grizzlies didn't have enough time outs to prevent it so Metropolis froze the ball on successive downs and left the field with a 19-17 victory.

The cheerleaders all formed two lines that the team passed through on their way back to the locker room.

As Jon and JJ passed through could each pick out the voices of Hattie, Lara and Morgana shouting their names.

There was jubilation in the locker room. There was a lot of back slapping and high fiving.

When the players finally left the locker room they were greeted by the cheerleaders once again as well as many of the students that were celebrating the win. Jon looped an arm around his sister, Lara and another around Morgana while JJ looped an arm around Hattie and they moved to the parking lot where they met Lois and Clark with the rest of the family. Jon had his own car as did Hattie.

As Lara detached herself from her brother, Jon introduced them, "Mom and Dad, this is Morgana. Morgana, my mother and father, Lois Lane and Clark Kent."

Lois reached for Morgana and said, "Jon has told us a lot about you. I'm happy to finally meet you," as she wrapped her up in a warm hug.

Morgana smiled at the affectionate greeting and instantly knew how Jon and Lara had become such nice people. Once she was released, she said, "It's a pleasure to finally meet Jon's parents."

Jon interrupted and said, "If it's okay, I'm gonna take Morgana home. She has to get ready for the dance."

After the game the sportscasters and commentators all voted to decide who the MVP would be. The vote was surprising. In view of his performance in protecting the quarterback, enabling him to connect on so many passes and his performance on the last defensive play from scrimmage where he sacked the opponent's quarterback in the end zone, JJ was voted MVP!

As soon as the decision was made the coach made a call to the Olsen home to give JJ the news.

\*\*\*

When JJ got the news, he was elated, for a second and then it suddenly dawned on his exactly what that would mean.

"Oh no! I've been voted MVP!"

Lucy and Jimmy were standing there as he had taken the call and when he announced this, Jimmy clapped him on the back and said, "Congratulations! This is quite a feather in your cap! Not many linemen get selected as MVP!"

Lucy said, "That's nice, honey. Quite an honor. What goes

along with it?"

"That's the problem; I get to be the King for the Homecoming Dance. Morgana was voted in as the Queen. That means that I'll be with Morgana when I was supposed to be with Hattie. Jon was supposed to be with Morgana! I guess he'll have to go with Hattie."

Lucy suggested, "Do you have to be with her the entire night? Perhaps you could switch off."

As what Lucy said sank in, JJ brightened and said, "Yeah, thanks, Mom. That should work! Well, I guess I should go and get ready."

Jimmy said, "Don't you think you should call Jon and let him know? And what about Hattie? I think you guys need to get this straightened out before you get there, don't you?"

"Yeah, you're right, Pop. I guess I have some calls to make."

\*\*\*

When Jon answered the phone, he said, "Hi, JJ! What's up?"

"Jon, everything is messed up."

"What? What's messed up?"

"Jon, they picked me to be MVP!"

"That's great, JJ!"

"No, Jon. No it's not! It means that I'll be with Morgana!"

It finally hit him and Jon said, "Oh, wow! That's right!"

"Look, my mom suggested that we could switch after we start the dance."

"Yeah, that'll work. Okay, I'll pick up Hattie and you pick up Morgana. We'll meet at the dance."

"Okay, Jon. You're a pal."

\*\*\*

## Chapter 11

### November 2016

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

Because he had been named the MVP of the Homecoming Game, JJ and Morgana were to be the Homecoming King and Queen at the Homecoming Dance.

After the game everyone had gone home to prepare, but the election of JJ as the MVP had put a serious crimp in everyone's plans.

As a result of this Hattie was less than disappointed by the fact that she was to be Jon's date. She had been looking forward to dating JJ, but she had always liked Jon, even more than JJ. Since she had been going with JJ, and they had planned to coordinate their outfits, but now she wouldn't match Jon.

Jon and JJ each had their driver's licenses now so Jon rather than using his own, smaller car, borrowed his mom's car and with Lara and Mike riding in the back seat set off to pick up Hattie.

Lara was wearing a turquoise gown with a hem that fell just below the knee. It had a fitted bodice with a scoop neck and little cap sleeves. Her shoes matched the dress color. Her wrap was a white shawl. Mike was wearing a rented tux with a turquoise vest and bow tie.

Lara gushed, "This'll be just like a double date, won't it?"

Jon smiled and replied, "I guess so, Sis, only there will be a lot of other people there. Once we get there, we may not see each other the entire night."

Lara and Jon, as the oldest of the children had been working on improving their ability to use the Kryptonian telepathic ability. Jon thought to Lara, "Sis, remember, if you need me at any time, just think at me and I'll do the same."

Lara replied in the same manner, "Right. I just hope nothing happens to ruin our evening."

"What could happen? Let's just relax and have a good time."

Jon pulled up in front of the Kaplin house, parked and said,

“Okay, here we are. I’ll go get Hattie and be right back.” He stepped from the car and went to the door. Mel Kaplin answered the door and said, “My, Jon, don’t you look nice? Hattie will be here in just a second. Come on in.”

Jon stood just inside of the door to wait and his first glimpse of Hattie as she stepped to the head of the stairs took his breath away. She was a vision of loveliness and for the first time, Jon looked at her as more than a sisterly tomboy friend. She was a beautiful woman. She was wearing a royal blue, knee length, off the shoulder gown. The only jewelry she wore was a black velvet choker with a large blue sapphire stone. Her hair was done in an up-do which emphasized her peaches and cream complexion and her long neck. Her makeup was understated to allow her natural beauty to show through.

Jon was speechless and released a slow whistle as Hattie descended the stairs.

Hattie could see the stunned expression on Jon’s face and smiled at his reaction. She was finally getting the reaction from him that she had always wanted. She had always been open with her mother and she had discussed her disappointment that her relationship with Jon never seemed to move beyond simple friendship. Her mother understood and knowing how much of a gentleman Jon Kent was, she had no objections and actually would have been happy for her daughter if he had expressed more interest.

Jon had planned on being with Morgana and had coordinated his outfit with hers, thus there was something of a mismatch with Hattie’s outfit. Looking down, he said, “Sorry. We sort of . . . clash. I was planning on being with Morgana.”

Hattie dismissed it and said, “No problem. You look nice.”

Blushing at being remiss, Jon replied, in a hushed tone, “You look more than nice . . . you’re . . . beautiful.”

Smiling and blushing slightly at the compliment, Hattie replied, “Thank you, kind sir.”

Crooking his arm at her, he asked, “Shall we go? Your chariot awaits, fair maiden.”

Hattie reached for and took his offered arm, but before they had a chance to move further, Mel interrupted, “Hold it. Let me take a picture.” They posed while Mel took a couple of shots and then they moved to the car.

As Jon handed Hattie into the car, Lara said, from the back, “Hi Hattie! You look really, really nice.”

Twisting around, Hattie said, “So do you, girlfriend. Who’s that?”

“Oh, that’s right; you’ve never met my boyfriend, Mike. Hattie this is Mike Lee. Mike, this is Hattie.”

Hattie and Mike tied at they both said, “Oh, you’re the one I’ve heard so much about.”

They all laughed and Lara said, “Yeah, you’re both right.”

Mike said, “Pleased to finally meet you.”

Hattie replied, “Same. You flew all the way from California for the Homecoming Dance?”

Mike replied, “Yeah, I couldn’t take a chance on my girl finding someone else to replace me.”

Lara smiled and said, “No chance of that.”

The conversational banter continued until Jon parked in the school’s parking lot.

\*\*\*

Jon had been looking forward to dating Morgana. He had heard all about the Kryptonian love at first sight thing, and he hadn’t experienced it with Hattie. He knew that Hattie liked JJ and he was happy for her and his cousin. He had wanted to give Morgana a chance by dating her, but that wouldn’t be happening this night. He would just have to make the best of it. There was the possibility that they could exchange partners after the initial ceremony.

\*\*\*

Lucy let JJ use her car and he went to pick up Morgana. He parked in front of the house and went to the door. After he knocked, the door was opened by Morgana’s mother and she invited him inside. After closing the door, she said, “Cynthia will be down shortly. I think I’ve seen you before. You’re JJ aren’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am, JJ. It stands for Jimmy Junior. My dad is James Olsen of the Daily Planet.”

“Ah, I believe I’ve seen some of his pictures.” Just then, Morgana appeared at the head of the stairs and her mother nodded in that direction.

JJ looked in the indicated direction. When he first saw her, he started to smile and thought, <This won’t be so bad!>

The reason that Morgana had been voted the Homecoming Queen was very apparent. She was a vision of loveliness as she descended the stairs. Morgana looked like the Empress Josephine. She was wearing a long coral gown with white lace capped sleeves. Her dark brown hair was curled with streaks of blonde. Her make-up was light. Her jewelry consisted of pearl earrings, a pearl choker and pearl bracelet.

JJ had been planning to be with Hattie so his tux and cummerbund were both in royal blue. Looking down at himself, he said, “I’m afraid that we clash somewhat. I hadn’t planned on being the MVP, that honor should have been Jon’s. I was planning on dating Hattie.”

Morgana smiled at his discomfort and said, “Don’t worry about it. If you want, as soon as we start the festivities, we can switch off.”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“No, it’ll be okay. Everything will work out.” She looked at her mom and then back at JJ and said, “Shall we go?”

“Huh, oh, yeah, sure,” he crooked his arm at her and taking it, she turned to her mom and said, “See you later.”

She smiled and said, “Have fun, dear.”

Morgana smiled and said, “I will, I’m sure.”

\*\*\*

Tables and chairs had been brought into the gym and it had been decorated. The tables were ranged around the perimeter of the floor leaving the center clear for dancing. At the front of the gym, under the scoreboard, a platform had been set up as a dais with two chairs that had been decorated to look like gilt thrones. On one side, between the doors was what looked like a moon launch electronic control center where the DJ would ply his trade. He could be seen, wearing headphones, behind an electronic console in between two speakers that were taller than him. He had various record players, CD players and tape decks with records, CDs and tapes scattered in what looked like discord however; was sorted by his system so that he could grab what he needed to keep the entertainment flowing.

On the opposite side of the room there was a long table set up with punchbowls and finger foods laid out.

Jon and Hattie were among the first to arrive. They made a striking couple and when they walked in heads turned. Hattie was hanging on Jon’s arm and enjoying the attention that they were receiving. Looking around, Jon nodded to the other members of the team while Hattie waved to the other cheerleaders that were there.

Since it was early, Jon took Hattie over to the drink table and got her a cup of punch which she sipped at while they strolled around greeting other couples.

As they strolled around, punch cups in hand, they joined a number of couples who had already arrived and were standing around in small groups chatting. They were slightly ahead of the bulk of the crowd and capitalized on the opportunity that presented to talk in a tone below a shout. Both of them were popular and as soon as they entered they had been hailed by a

group on the far side of the room. When they finally made it to that group, it turned out to be a couple of the other players and a couple of the other cheerleaders. The guys started doing a post mortem of the game while the girls started their own conversation. The girls' conversation included a lot of spinning to show off their gowns and accessories and then they started talking about school assignments, their dates and what they had planned for after the dance. Joy, who was dating one of the running backs, said, "Frank and I have fake IDs and we plan to go out for drinks after the dance and, who knows, I may let him score another touchdown."

One of the other cheerleaders, Carol Lombard, pulled Hattie aside and asked, "Hattie, how'd you get so lucky?"

"Lucky? Wha'd you mean?"

"Dating the quarterback, that hunk, Jon Kent. Is he as good as he looks?"

"What are you talking about, Carol? You're with Jed. He's the fullback! He's a hunk too."

Carol asked, "I know. He might be a big guy, but ... well, he isn't that big all over, if you know what I mean. How about Kent? Is he big ... all over? Want to trade?"

Finally getting just what Carol was talking about, Hattie looked at Jed and then at Jon. Hattie had had feelings for Jon ever since that first day that they had met, way back in middle school. She had actually had fantasies about Jon and even, at times, wished that their relationship was different and that they were having a sexual relationship. Hattie started to blush at that thought. She wasn't sure if it was just her or not and as she wondered if she was denying him an opportunity by not allowing him to date Carol who appeared to be more than willing. Thinking about Jon and remembering how he looked in his spandex workout gear, her blush deepened and she replied, "Come to think of it, yeah ... Jon is that big ... all over."

Seeing Hattie's blush, Carol licked her lips and smiled a cat got the cream smile. She couldn't wait to see if what Hattie was telling her was true or not.

Hattie knew that this was only temporary, but she was enjoying being Jon's date and shaking her head, replied, "Jon and I are friends ... just friends." To Carol, Hattie's color belied her words. She was convinced that Hattie was having a sexual relationship with Jon and didn't believe her as she said, "No, we haven't had sex. Jon has never asked. I don't know what I'd say if he did. I might be willing." She thought about the situation for a second and then replied, "No, I don't think I'll trade. Jon and I have never really dated and I want to enjoy it while it lasts."

Carol's face fell. She had gotten her hopes up while Hattie had been talking and now the rug had been pulled right out from under her feet. Carol thought, <Liar, liar, pants on fire! How would you know just how big he is if you didn't have first-hand experience? > Aloud she said, "All right then. You want to keep him all to yourself, I get it." She spotted Jed and turning away from Hattie stalked over to him and grabbed his hand. As she was dragging him away, Hattie heard her say, "Come on, Jed. Let's go out to the car. The air is stuffy in here."

More couples arrived each minute and it wasn't too long until the gym was crowded. JJ and Morgana's entrance was supposed to be delayed until most of the attendees were already in the gym so that they could make a grand entrance. When they arrived the cheerleaders and their dates formed a corridor from the doors to the platform.

Once everyone was in place, Morgana and JJ were each given crowns and passed through the corridor to the platform that had been set up. On the platform were two thrones and as they were announced, they stepped up and moving to the thrones sat down. Standing again, Morgana announced, "Let the festivities begin."

That was the signal for the music to start.

When it did, Morgana and JJ both stood and took the floor. It was traditional that the King and Queen take the floor together for

the first dance. The music was an intermediate hip-hop piece by Michael Jackson.

JJ, even for all of his size, was fairly light on his feet and they danced without incident. JJ was even able to do a moon-walk which entertained Morgana immensely.

After the first few bars other couples started dancing and soon the dance floor was filled with couples.

After the first song was finished, Carol and Jed returned to the gym. Carol was flushed and Jed's clothes were somewhat askew, but neither cared.

After the first song, JJ and Morgana headed for one of the tables to get some of the finger foods provided.

When they got there, Hattie and Jon joined them. Hattie wanted to spend some more time with Jon, so she said to Morgana, "Maybe we should not change partners yet. I want to be with JJ, but how would it look if we changed after only one song?"

Morgana was actually enjoying JJ's company and was eager for the chance to get to know him better so she agreed. "I'm okay with it. Let's not change for a few more songs."

Smiling at how easy this had been, Hattie replied, "That's what I was thinking." Turning to Jon, she grabbed his hand and started dragging him back to the dance floor as she said, "Come on, Jon. You're mine for a few more songs."

Jon looked over his shoulder at Morgana and shrugged.

Morgana smiled at him and nodded her head. She wanted to be with Jon, but she knew how much Hattie cared for him and had decided to not stand in her way. It was a small sacrifice to make for her friend. Turning to JJ she said, "Looks like you're stuck with me for a few more songs."

JJ took her hand and as he led her back to the dance floor replied, "I wouldn't put it that way. I like dancing with you."

\*\*\*

Bud and his gang could hear the music from the gym and knew that the dance was in full swing. To enter the school building, they were using the same basement window that Jack had used when he broke into the school to steal the algebra test answers. After he slipped in, Bud passed the gas canister in to him and then they all passed in their firearms. Once they were all inside they reclaimed their guns.

Bud pulled out some additional things from the bag. Holding up two bottles, he said, "I brought these along. Let's drink them before we start." He opened one bottle and took a long swig as he handed the other bottle to Jack.

Once Bud had swallowed some of the fiery liquid he handed the bottle to Ben. As he accepted the bottle, Ben pulled his hand out of his pocket and popped something into his mouth and then took a drink.

Seeing what he did, Bud challenged, "What'd you take?"

Reluctantly, Ben put his hand back into his pocket and pulled out a handful of pills. "These are some uppers my old man had. He uses them to lose weight. I've been taking them a couple at a time and saving them. They're great!"

Sticking out his hand, Bud said, "Don't hog them all to yourself. Hand some over."

Ben handed Bud four pills and the bottle of liquor.

Grabbing both, Bud tossed the pills in his mouth and washed them down with the liquor. He wiped his mouth and asked, "What kind of pills did you say these were?"

"Common name? Christmas Trees or Uppers. They're a form of meth that you can get with a prescription. My dad got them to help him lose weight."

They tarried in the basement until they had finished the liquor and negligently left the bottles sitting on top of a box. Picking up their burdens, they headed for the cafeteria.

The pills were starting to take effect, and their judgment was being impaired by both them and the liquor that they had

consumed. The effects of the alcohol were manifested by slurring of their speech and a slight unsteadiness in their gait. The effect of the pills was to make them jumpy and fidgety.

Paranoia started to set in and Bud called a halt. "I think we need to get out the guns. We should have them in case someone tries to stop us."

Bill echoed the sentiment, "Yeah, Jack, open the bag so that we can get them out."

Jack set the bag down and they all delved in to grab their own weapons. Once they were in hand, Bud said, "Yeah, now I feel better. Now we have the power, not the teachers or the Principal. I wish I had him here now. I'd show him a thing or two. Kick me off the team, will he? I'd fix him." Bringing up his gun, he pointed it at the door that they were standing next to, which happened to be the Principal's office. He mimed pulling the trigger and said, "Pow."

Jack asked, "Do you think that Spargo will be one of the chaperones for the dance? If she is, we can get even with her tonight too."

"I don't know. It'd be nice, but I think that Kaplin and Kent put her up to trappin' us. They're the ones I want to get even with. Kent especially. I had to do that cockamamie counseling because of him and his stupid pumpkin. And Kaplin, she tripped me and made me fall into that locker." The more he talked the angrier he got. Finally he stopped talking, picked up the tank, said, "Let's do this," and they started their 'mission'.

Moving stealthily they headed for their first objective, the cafeteria. Moving in the dark since they didn't dare use flashlights they could almost feel the darkness pressing in on them. Hugging the walls, they traversed several corridors. Hopped up as they were on drugs and alcohol, each time one of them or the propane cylinder banged into one of the lockers which lined the walls, the sound echoed down the corridor and seemed much louder than it actually was, they all froze in place. After what seemed like an eternity they reached their objective. Unlike the classrooms, many of which were locked when not in use because of the valuable equipment contained in them, the cafeteria was unlocked. Once in the cafeteria they moved between the rows of tables and chairs and into the kitchen area. Once they were in there, Bud hefted the propane tank onto the range. In the dark, not being familiar with commercial equipment, it took several seconds to find the right control. When the flame sprang into existence, Bud smiled in satisfaction and said, "There. Now all we have to do is put the cylinder on that like a pan." Suiting his actions to his words, he hefted the tank into place.

Ben asked, "How big should the flame be?"

Bud bent to look at the flame under the tank and replied, "I don't know." His thinking processes were fuddled from the alcohol and drugs and the answer eluded him for a time. Finally he said, "I guess we don't want it too high because then it might go off too soon." He reached for the knob and turned the flame down somewhat. "There, that should be a slow boil and give us plenty of time to do what we have to do. Let's go crash the party."

There was a chorus of "Yeahs" and they headed out.

Before they had climbed the stairs from the basement, they had each donned their ski masks and as a result they almost completely blended into the shadows.

\*\*\*

As time went on, more and more couples had been arriving. Being a major metropolitan school the total attendance was measured not in the hundreds, but not quite thousands either. It wasn't too long until the gym was pretty well packed. The bleachers had been pushed back to make room for the tables and chairs. The bleachers formed a solid wall around the perimeter of the room.

Seeing the need for more room on the dance floor a majority of the tables were pushed back making an almost impenetrable

barrier around the gym floor. Because of this the emergency exits and even the access to the rest rooms was blocked. Anyone needing to use the rest room had to leave the gym and go down a hall.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 12

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

By the time that Bud and his cronies started their assault on the gym they were even more sloppy and jumpy than they had been when they had been placing their propane tank bomb.

Since there was a need to leave the gym to use the rest rooms, there were some couples just outside the doors to the gym. One of the girls spotted them as they approached. They were hard to spot since they were all dressed in black and had on black ski masks, but she thought she had detected movement. Her curiosity was piqued and she looked closer and pointed, saying to her date, "I thought I saw something move down there."

He peered into the gloom and said, "I don't see anything. It must be your imagination."

"No, I'm sure I saw something move." She squinted and concentrated on movement rather than shapes and, "Yes! There. I saw it again. There's somebody there! They're all dressed in black."

"Yeah, you're right. I see it now. What could it be?"

When they got closer the girl could make out weapons in their hands. She panicked and grabbed her date and shouted, "Guns!"

Realizing that they had been spotted, Ben brought up his Glock and snapped off a shot.

The shot went wild and impacted the wall five feet over their heads and three feet to the side, between them and another couple.

At the sound of the shot, all of the girls screamed and their dates grabbed them, pulling them into the 'safety' of the gym.

The sound of the shot had registered on all in the gym and a panic ensued in all but a very few attendees.

Hattie was instantly alert. The only thought in her mind was to get the story. She and JJ stopped dancing and Hattie headed for the table where she had left her purse. In that purse were her cell phone, pad pencil and tape recorder.

Already panic was setting in and the crowd was moving, but the movement was like the Brownian movement of molecules in a volume, without definite direction. Panic started to set in when it was realized that they had blocked the exits when they had moved back the tables to make more room on the dance floor. Worried, JJ followed her.

Jon had been dancing with Morgana, but at the sound of the shot, he stopped, pulled Morgana to the side and as he pushed her under a table whispered, "Stay here and be quiet."

She started to ask, "What about you," but realized that he was already gone.

As Jon ducked behind some decorative flats, he sent a mental summons, "Lara we need to change clothes!"

Her reply was immediate, "Already doing it. I was in the Ladies' room. I think I'm behind them."

The panic was contagious and everyone started running. In the crush, Hattie and JJ were separated and Hattie was knocked off of her feet. As she fell, her head hit a table and she was stunned. As she fell she was bumped again and rolled under the table, out of sight because of the table cloth and was as effectively concealed as Morgana where Jon had placed her.

When the panic started, Mike became worried about Lara. She had left him at the punch table saying that she would be right back after visiting the facilities. He started calling her name, "Lara! Lara Kent! Where are you?"

Jon sent out another mental summons, /"Mom, Dad, we need you."/ Receiving no reply he sent to Lara, /"Mike's worried about you."/

There was no reply from their parents. Either Jon's telepathy wasn't carrying far enough or else they were away on a mission. Lara replied, /"When it's all over we can make excuses. I don't think I want to bring him in on the family secret, just yet."/

Realizing that they were on their own, Kam-El came out from behind the flat, just as Bud and his team were entering the doors. Bud and Mike each fired a shot into the ceiling. Those first couple of shots were designed to create terror in those in the gym and they surely accomplished their purpose. The panic that had already been spreading swept over the crowd like a wave and they all fled to a far corner, but were blocked by the bleachers and tables.

Suddenly, between Bud and his cronies and their victims appeared Kam-El

Crossing his arms over his chest the same way he had seen his father do so many times, in an attempt to intimidate his opponents, Kam-El spoke, in a commanding tone "Put down those weapons!"

Bud was aware enough to realize that they had numbers on their side and commanded, "Spread out. Keep your guns on the crowd. He won't do nothin' as long as they are hostages." Since they all were now inside the door they were able to do as Bud commanded.

Jon realized that even at super-speed it would be difficult for him, even with Lara's help to protect the crowd from four guns at four different locations, widely spread as they were.

Morgana, hearing Kam-El speak and recognizing his voice, came out from under the table that Jon had thrust her under. As she stood she was spotted by Bud who shouted, "There's one of them!" He swung his gun in her direction.

As he did, Kam-El glanced in the direction that he was looking and saw Morgana in the open. At super-speed, Kam-El ran and interposed himself between Morgana and the assailant that threatened her. Just as he got into position, Bud fired. In the training he had received from his mother and father he had been taught to instantly analyze the situation. There were times when simply allowing bullets to bounce off his chest would be appropriate and other times when a possible ricochet could be a problem.

In this situation, he couldn't afford to miss in his attempt to snag a bullet out of the air so he stood close to Morgana, facing the gun and allowed the bullet to bounce off of his chest.

Seeing this, Bud snarled and shouted, "Not again! You interfered with me once before. You're not gonna do it again!" Bud started firing, but the shots, because of his inebriated, drugged condition went wild.

This time it required Kam-El to use his hands to snag the slugs from the air. He was fortunate that there were only four bullets left in his revolver. He intercepted two with each hand before the hammer of his revolver fell on an empty cylinder.

Opening his hands he allowed the slugs to fall to the floor, hoping to intimidate the shooters.

The immediate threat was over and before Bud had a chance to reload, Kam-El started to move in his direction to disarm him, but he hadn't reckoned with his accomplices. Jack fired into the crowd.

That shot connected. As Jed collapsed to the floor with a bullet in his shoulder, Carol Lombard screamed, "**Jed!** He's been shot!"

Jack had pulled the trigger for the shot, but he then proved that all of his practice was on video games. He was thinking that he was holding an automatic weapon whereas it was a semi-auto which required a trigger pull for each shot. When it failed to continue to fire, he looked at it in consternation. Releasing the trigger he used the heel of his right hand to hit the forward assist, thinking that the round simply wasn't chambered. Without thinking or aiming, he pulled the trigger again. This time the shot

went over all of the heads of the partygoers and buried itself in the wood of the bleachers behind them. A couple of people were injured by splinters thrown out as a result, but his first shot had wounded one of the guys.

Jack was staring at his recalcitrant rifle, trying to figure out what was wrong and that was when Ultra Woman 2 made her move. All of the weapons were dangerous, but the rifle had a larger magazine than the rest so at super-speed she entered the fray, running in and snatching the rifle out of Jack's hands.

After snatching the rifle she had continued until she was standing at the side of Kam-El and holding the rifle over her head so that all could see, she bent the barrel, making it unusable. Dropping the now useless hunk of metal to the floor, she quipped, "Now you can shoot around corners, maybe, or maybe not. I don't know if I'd risk it."

The shot that had hit Jed had arrested Kam-El's motion. He knew that he had to protect the crowd so he had fallen back to a position between the crowd and the gunman and even with Lara now at his side it was a virtual standoff.

He sent a thought, /"Lara, we're on our own. Mom and Dad aren't answering."/

/"We'll just have to do our best. How about using your heat vision?"/

/"Good idea."/

Jon concentrated on the Glock in Ben's hand and trying to focus the beam on the slide poured what heat he could into it. As long as Ben didn't move he thought he might be able to disable the weapon. Slowly a spot on the side of the slide started to glow red.

Ben noticed it and demonstrating just how muddled his thinking was, jerked the gun away and shouted, "Hey, none of that!! You ruin this gun and I'll never hear the end of it from my ol' man."

Bud had finished reloading by this time and again threatened Morgana. "She's one of them, but the ones I want are really Kent and Kaplin." Addressing the crowd, Bud announced, "I want Kent and Kaplin. Send them out and I'll let the rest of you go."

The words finally solved the puzzle of who this was for Jon. The voice had been somewhat muffled by the ski mask, but the animosity toward him and Hattie were a dead giveaway. He just hoped that no one would really die.

Over his shoulder, Jon said, "Stay close to me, but behind me. I won't let him hurt you."

Morgana replied, in a heartfelt whisper, "I know. This isn't the first time."

Kam-El replied, "I remember."

"Looks like I'll owe you another kiss."

"Looks like."

Just then, Bud loosed another fusillade at Morgana. This time, knowing that Morgana was close behind him and protected by his body, he again snatched the bullets from the air. It was comparatively easy since Bud was using a revolver as opposed to an automatic weapon.

When Bud had finished this cylinder, Kam-El said over his shoulder, "Start moving back, away from him. I'll stay between you, don't worry."

Meanwhile the crowd was shouting, some incoherently, for Jon and Hattie. Fortunately Hattie was still unconscious and out of sight of the fear deranged crowd or they might have done as the gunman had asked.

Even with all the shouting, Jon heard Morgana say, "I stopped worrying as soon as you showed up," as she slowly started to back up, putting additional distance between her and the gunman. His plan would work as long as the gunmen maintained their position, near the doors.

Jon was happy to see that the shooters realized that the doors were their only exit and instinctively were staying near them.

Jon smiled at this although, Morgana could not see it. He

could hear her moving and kept pace with her. Jon's hope was that by increasing the distance the angular difference in their relative positions was reduced and he would be able to more easily defend against all of the shooters at once leaving Lara free to deal with them, and possibly disarm them.

If he could keep their attention focused on him, Lara might just have a free hand.

Suddenly, Bud dashed his hopes by shouting, "Keep an eye on that miniature copy of Ultra Woman. You saw what she did to that gun. Don't let her get near you."

Indignantly, Lara replied, "The name is Ultra Woman 2, buster and I'm not a miniature copy of anyone." She decided to play a bluff, "She happens to be my role model, like a mother to me and she and Superman should be here any minute."

Jack, now weaponless and feeling very vulnerable, cried out, "Hey, she's right. They could show up any second!"

Jon sent, "Good goin', sis. They're starting to panic."/

"Yeah, but we know they aren't on the way. What can we do?"/

"I just had an idea. Watch them, closely."/

Looking off slightly to one side and up, Jon focused his heat vision on the bell on the wall. That bell was used to signal class changes during the school day. It wasn't supposed to ring on the weekend or at night. By heating up the coil he caused it to start to ring.

When it started to ring, the shooters became unnerved and in something barely less than a panic fled out the doors, slamming them closed and using poles to block the handles, effectively locking everyone in the gym.

Lara sped to the wall and pulled the fire alarm. Immediately the fire siren started and the enunciator stated "Fire, please evacuate the building!" The announcement looped.

Lara sent, "That should bring out Mom and Dad."/

"Yeah, along with the fire company. Good thinking. I'm going after them."/

"Not without me, you're not!"/

"No, you need to stay here and make sure everyone gets out safely, besides, there's an injury. You need to get him to the hospital."/

"Oh, okay, I'll take care of the injured. Go get 'em."/

Moving to the doors, Kam-El pushed and the doors flew open, almost leaving their hinges, as if an explosive charge had been used. He did the same with all of the doors.

As he started down the corridor there was a concerted rush behind him as the hostages, seeing that escape was now possible, headed for the parking lot.

Breasting the wave of humanity, Ultra Woman 2 moved to the side of her injured classmate. He was unconscious and his date was pressing a linen napkin against the wound, but he was losing a lot of blood. Lara could see the fear and panic in the girl's eyes as she knelt next to her. In a soothing tone, she said, "You can let go now. I'll take it from here. I need to get him to the hospital."

Carol was in shock about what had happened. She had had presence of mind enough to try and stop the bleeding, but she had fixated on that activity. "Oh, what? Oh, yes, yes, of course. Hospital."

As Ultra Woman 2 picked him up, the girl's hands dropped to her sides and Lara recognized her as Carol and the guy in her arms as Jed. Reassuringly, she said, "Don't worry; I'll take good care of him." As she finished speaking, she shifted into super-speed and carrying the unconscious football player she started to run toward the hospital, dodging around their classmates as she exited the building.

As the crowd in the gym started to thin, JJ could be seen looking around and calling, "Hattie? Hattie?" Frantically, he grabbed arms as people passed and asked, "Has anyone seen Hattie?"

No one answered, concerned as they all were with escape.

When there was almost no one left he heard a groan and looking toward the sound saw part of a royal blue dress sticking out from under a table only a very few feet from the pool of blood from Jed. Rushing to it, he threw up the table cloth to reveal a still somewhat stunned Hattie, starting to sit up.

Kneeling beside her he helped her to her unsteady feet.

Looping an arm around her waist, he started walking them from the scene of carnage.

They emerged from the building along with most of the rest of the attendees to see fire trucks and ambulances screaming up and Ultra Woman landing. Most of the attendees were single-mindedly scattering and heading for their cars so that they could get away.

Spotting her JJ bent their course in her direction.

\*\*\*

### Chapter 13

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

Sam and Ellen Lane had come over for the evening so that they could witness Jon and Lara in their Homecoming finery and were involved in playing board games with their grandchildren when the attack occurred. They didn't know anything was amiss until Lara pulled the fire alarm.

Within seconds sirens could be heard and the kids at the school weren't the only ones that heard them. Lois and Clark were at home with the rest of the family. Sean and Celeste heard the sirens at the same time as their parents. Four heads snapped up as one. Lois and Clark looked at one another and then at Sean and Celeste and shook his head. Clark said, "Sam, Lois and I have to go out for a bit. Can you and Ellen take care of the kids?"

Sam replied, with a wink, "Sure, Clark. We'll take care of things. Go ahead."

Clark was glad that as a result of their rescue in Afghanistan, Sam and Ellen had figured out the family secret. He knew that he could trust them to take good care of the kids in their absence.

Lois was already in motion while Clark was talking with Sam. Once she was out the back door, she spun into her Ultra Woman uniform. Clark was only a few seconds behind her, but she was impatiently tapping her foot, waiting for him when he arrived.

After a quick spin change the two of them went airborne and headed for the school. Seconds later they were over the school and could see the fire trucks and an ambulance a couple of blocks away, lights flashing and sirens wailing and the students in their party finery streaming out of the building. As they approached they could also hear the enunciator repeating "Fire, please evacuate the building!"

Using their super-vision they each zoomed in on the crowd of humanity streaming from the building. It looked like nothing more than a simple fire evacuation until a turquoise and pink flash of movement attracted their attention. Lois sent, "Looks like it's more than a fire."/

Clark replied, "I think I'll follow and see what our little girl is up to."/

"You go ahead. I'll see what's been happening."/

As Superman peeled off to follow Ultra Woman 2 on her mission of mercy, Ultra Woman descended toward the school.

When she landed she was mobbed by the kids. When she finally managed to see a familiar face, she broke away and addressed JJ, "Aren't you related to James Olsen the photojournalist?"

JJ knew just who was asking and played along, "Yeah, that's my dad."

"What has happened here?"

When JJ was addressed by Ultra Woman he was distracted and

Hattie realized that she was missing Jon. She started looking around while Ultra Woman talked to JJ.

JJ started to relate the entire story to Ultra Woman.

Not seeing Jon, Hattie decided that he must still be in the building. As seconds passed and she didn't see him, her worry increased. Finally she decided that she needed to find him and headed, unheeded, back into the building.

\*\*\*

As JJ finished telling Ultra Woman what had been happening, he looked around and saw that Hattie was missing. Not seeing her he started shouting her name, "Hattie! Hattie Kaplin! Where are you, Hattie!" Then the thought hit him, <Oh, no. I hope she didn't go back into the building.>

In a low tone, he said, "Aunt Lois, Hattie is missing. I think she went back into the building."

Hearing this, Lois nodded her head in understanding. She did a quick scan of the building with her x-ray vision. When she did, she saw Jon in pursuit of the quartet of individuals that JJ had told her about. She also saw Hattie on the other side of the building and took off in pursuit.

Just as JJ was about to head back into the building Mike Lee spotted him and approached, "JJ, have you seen Lara? In all the confusion we got separated and now I can't find her."

JJ, knowing that Lara was busy being Ultra Woman 2, knew that he needed to cover for her. "I'm sure she's okay. Lara's a smart kid. She'll get clear and stay away. I'm sure she'll turn up safe and sound. It's Hattie that I'm worried about. She runs toward trouble rather than away from it."

\*\*\*

Superman overtook Ultra Woman 2 as she neared the hospital. He flew beside her until she stopped and landed when she did. He said, "I'll take over from here," as he took Jed from her arms. Then he sent telepathically, "You need to get back and change before someone misses you."/

With a sigh of relief, she had handed over her burden and sent, "Thanks, Daddy. I feel a lot better now that you're here."/

"Go on, Pumpkin. You can relax now."/

As Superman lifted off to finish the errand of mercy, Ultra Woman 2 retraced her super-fast steps back to the school.

\*\*\*

Hattie had been looking for Jon for almost five minutes and was becoming more concerned as time went on. She knew that he was a particular object of Bud's hatred along with her. She started going through the school building looking for him. Her path led her far away from the gym. In the dark it was hard to tell just where she was, but finally as she went through a door, she recognized the open space and tables of the cafeteria. The shock and worry finally became too much for her and she just fell onto a bench seat at one of the tables. She didn't start to cry. She was made of sterner stuff than that, but she was becoming overcome by worry for her friend.

Suddenly Hattie heard a high pitched whistling which suddenly transformed into a sound like a blow torch. Her curiosity piqued, she got up off the bench, her worry about Jon forgotten in the face of this mystery, and followed the sound to its source. The sound led her to the food preparation area.

As she approached, she could see an eerie blue light visible under the door. She approached with caution. As she approached the door, rather than just throwing it open, she first placed her hand against it to see if it was hot. If it had been hot, that would have been an indication of a fire behind it, but the door was cool to her touch.

Cautiously, an inch at a time, she pushed the door open. At first she couldn't see the source of the light because the door blocked her view of it. When the door was open far enough, she slowly stuck her head around it. When she could finally see, she had a hard time believing her eyes.

What she saw made no sense. There was a Bar-B-Q gas cylinder sitting on one of the stoves and the range was on like someone was cooking the cylinder. She wasn't sure, but she thought that this could only be a problem. Not sure if her movements could cause a problem, she slowly withdrew her head and closed the door softly. She was almost frozen in place as suddenly the whistling stopped.

The whistling had reached several other pairs of ears and one of those individuals had gone to investigate. Ultra Woman used her x-ray vision to examine the area that she had heard the whistling emanate from and saw the danger. She also saw Hattie in close proximity to the door and just on the other side of the wall separating her from the gas cylinder bomb.

She put on a burst of speed and crashing through the doors to the cafeteria grabbed Hattie and wrapped her up in her arms, placing herself between Hattie and the bomb, just before it detonated.

The integrity of the cylinder wall was disrupted at a seam that couldn't handle the increased pressure and the cylinder simply came apart, flying into hundreds of pieces. When that happened the liquefied gas that had been boiling inside was instantly converted to vapor and expanded to fill the air around it. It was ignited by the gas flame of the range and turned into a very large ball of fire. Shrapnel that had been the cylinder wall was given extra speed by the explosion, penetrating the walls and doors in all directions. The force of the explosion itself was enough to blow the doors off their hinges and send pots and pans flying away from the center.

Secondary fires were started as a result of the fireball igniting other combustibles.

There hadn't been enough time to fly Hattie to safety, but after the blast wave had passed, Ultra Woman could plainly be seen, standing there with her arms protectively around Hattie. One of her hands had pulled Hattie's head into the shelter of her chest while the other had pulled her body close and her arms in close to her body. Hattie's dress was a little singed, but for the most part, Ultra Woman's aura had protected her from harm. By standing between her and the explosion, all of the shrapnel had simply bounced off of her invulnerable body.

\*\*\*

Jon had been in pursuit of the felons. Their attire had made it difficult because the lights were out and their black clothes made them almost invisible, but Kam-El's uniform being mostly black gave him a similar advantage.

It took several seconds after opening the doors because of the flood of humanity and the noise they created and then sending Lara off with Jed before he was able to use his super-hearing and listen for the quartet of footsteps that gave him their location.

They had fled down a hallway, away from the cafeteria. He realized that in order for them to escape that way they would need to open a fire door and that would have set off the alarm, if it hadn't already been blaring its warning.

Finally, he spotted them at the far end of a straight corridor. Instantly he decided on a course of action. He started to run, faster than he had before. He was happy to see that his super-senses kept up with his speed. He zeroed in on the guns in the hands of two of the group. As he passed them he grabbed the two weapons and kept going.

There were cries of anguish after he had passed his quarry. The two that he had snatched the guns from must have had good solid grasps on them because his forceful removal had injured their gun hands.

That still left one armed assailant, Bud with his revolver. He closed the distance until he could be seen by the gang. He said, "Give it up. You can't get away." To demonstrate what he could do, he held up the guns, one in each hand and clinched his fists, crushing the guns in the process.

He hadn't noticed that they were standing in front of a doorway, a doorway to a set of stairs that led down to a basement. Suddenly, they bolted through the door, slamming it behind them.

\*\*\*

Lara had made it back to the school. She found a dark corner and spun into her party dress and then merged with the crowd milling around in front of the doors.

Suddenly, her super-hearing picked up JJ and Mike talking and decided that it was time to put in an appearance. Moving slowly, she circled around groups that were milling around, talking and finally spotted JJ and Mike.

She shouted, "Mike!"

Hearing his name, Mike turned in the direction of her voice and started to smile.

JJ said, "See, I told you she'd be okay. My cousin is smart."

When she closed the distance, Mike wrapped his arms around her and said, "I was worried about you. Where did you go?"

"Well, you see, I was in the Ladies' room when they attacked so I just hid out till all the action was over."

JJ said, "I sure hope that Hattie is okay."

Just as he finished his statement they all heard the explosion.

Looking around, JJ exclaimed, "That was in the cafeteria!"

\*\*\*

The explosion happened as Superman was returning from the hospital. As he neared the building he used his super-vision. He saw Ultra Woman and Hattie in the cafeteria and that they were okay. Seeing that she had things under control on her end, he started scanning the other end of the building.

He spotted Kam-El confronting the gang and as he neared, he saw them flee down the stairwell, closing the door behind themselves. He scanned the basement area and saw some windows at ground level. Deducing that they planned to escape that way, he landed and allowed their fear of Kam-El to cause them to run right into his waiting arms.

While he waited, one of the windows opened and Jack slithered out. Grabbing him by the back of the collar, he pulled him out and upright.

Jack had gasped when he had been grabbed, but when Superman picked him up and turned him to face him, Superman put a finger to his lips in a 'silence' gesture and he quieted.

Next out was Ben. Superman repeated the process, but now he had two to deal with and didn't dare let either go. He decided to let Kam-El handle the remaining two. In order to force them to stay and be caught, he placed a foot at the window, blocking it, preventing it from opening.

Bud was the next to try and escape. He pushed on the window, but it wouldn't budge. In the dark it was hard to see, but he caught a hint of a red colored boot through the window pane. In his frustration, he brought up his gun and started firing. There was the crash of the shots and the tinkle of broken glass and then there was the metallic click as the hammer fell on a spent cartridge.

\*\*\*

Kam-El had been slightly delayed by the door, reluctant to do any more damage to the school building than was necessary, but hearing the gunshots, he redoubled his efforts. He made it through the door and to the bottom of the stairs just as Bud and Bill approached.

Bud hadn't taken the time to reload and forgetting that he had spent all of his shells, brought up his gun and pulled the trigger. When all that happened was a metallic clicking, in frustration, he threw the gun at Kam-El.

Kam-El calmly snatched the gun out of the air and crushed it. He commanded, "Give it up. You're caught."

Bill, resigned to the situation said, "Okay, I give up."

As he was saying this, Bud started to turn in another attempt to flee, but Kam-El caught the back of his collar, preventing him from going anywhere.

In a defeated tone, Bill said, "I'll go quietly."

"Okay, back up the stairs and out front, to the police."

Keeping a hand on Bud's collar, he followed Bill upstairs and through the winding corridors to the front of the school.

As they emerged from the doors, Superman met them with his two collars.

Superman and Kam-El marched their four captives over to Commissioner Henderson and turned them over.

\*\*\*

They had made quite a stir when they had brought the captives out and it had attracted a crowd. Among them was Morgana.

After Inspector Henderson had taken charge, Morgana approached Kam-El and with quite a crowd watching, she threw her arms around his neck and saying, "My hero! I think I owe you another kiss," and kissed him soundly.

Superman allowed nature to take its course, but only for so long, before he interrupted. "I think we have another emergency to deal with. You need to say goodnight."

"Goodnight, Cynthia. It was a pleasure saving you, again."

Smiling, she replied, "You can save me anytime you like."

Superman put an arm around Kam-El's waist and they took off.

After watching them take off, Morgana looked for her other friends. She spotted Lara, Mike and JJ off to one side. She headed in that direction.

\*\*\*

Under the cloak of darkness they looped around and landed in a dark area near the building. As soon as Jon's feet were on the ground he did a spin change back into his tux.

Clark said, "You did really well, now, you need to get back to where you need to be to protect the secret."

"Right, Pop. Thanks."

\*\*\*

As Superman took off again, Jon moved out from behind the building and merged with the crowd. Jon mingled as he made his way toward where Morgana, Lara, Mike and JJ were. He noted that Hattie was missing and he started to worry.

As he walked up, Morgana confronted him, "Where have you been?"

"Well, after we got separated..."

"After you shoved me under a table, you mean."

"Well, yeah, I thought you'd be safer there."

"Well, I wasn't."

"You might have been if you'd stayed there."

"Well, I couldn't, besides, how was I to know that I was one of the people they were after?"

Further discussion along that line was derailed by Ultra Woman and Hattie coming out of the building.

Seeing her, JJ exclaimed, "Hattie! And Ultra Woman!" and started rushing in their direction.

As he approached, Ultra Woman said, "Not right now, JJ. Hattie needs to talk to the police. She needs to tell them what she saw."

"Oh, yeah, right. Okay, Hattie, I'll talk to you after you give your statement to the police."

Ultra Woman took Hattie over to the police, "Commissioner Henderson, I'd like to introduce Miss. Henrietta Kaplin. Miss Kaplin has a story to tell you."

Henderson shook her hand and then asked, "Well, Miss. Kaplin, what's your story?"

"Well, Inspector, I was looking for Jon Kent and I wound up in the cafeteria. I was still shaken up from being knocked out in the initial assault so I sat down for a second. When I did, I heard a noise from the kitchen area. When I looked through the door I saw a tank like one of those used for a Bar-B-Q grill, but instead of being on the ground and supplying the flame, it was sitting on top of the stove with the fire under it. Suddenly it started to whistle. I

got scared and decided to get out of there, but before I got too far, Ultra Woman swooped in and grabbed me. Just as she did the thing exploded! If she hadn't been holding and protecting me, I might have been killed."

Ultra Woman took over, "It was a BLEVE. They used a 25 pound propane cylinder to blow up the cafeteria.

Commissioner Henderson was grimaced as he said, "That'll add to the charges that they already face. Please pardon me; I need to see to it that they were read their rights. We don't want to overlook anything. My guess is that they will be tried as adults. They could be facing significant jail time."

\*\*\*

#### Chapter 14

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

None of the partygoers were inclined to return to the gym to continue the dance. That was just as well because it was now a crime scene, so couples started filtering to their cars to return to their homes.

Jon approached Morgana and said, "I know I didn't bring you to the dance, but can I take you home, it was supposed to be our date, after all."

Morgana asked, "But what about JJ?"

Jon laughed and replied, "JJ will be just as happy to take Hattie home. They were originally a couple anyhow."

Just then, JJ and Hattie strolled up and JJ said, "Hey, Jon, Hattie and I are hungry. You guys want to go out for something to eat?"

"Sounds like a good idea. Hey, let me check with Lara and Mike." Looking around he spotted them and shouted over, "Hey, Sis, you and Mike want to go out for something to eat?"

Lara and Mike looked at each other and Lara nodded. Mike replied to Jon, "Count us in," and taking Lara's hand headed in their direction.

Since it was a favorite hangout, they all climbed into the two cars they had brought and headed for *Burger Shack*.

When they arrived they found a number of couples from the dance already there.

When they entered there were numerous shouted greetings. Almost everyone knew Jon and all did know Morgana, since she had been Homecoming Queen and although it was somewhat askew, she still wore her crown, having forgotten it in all of the activity.

They had been there just the night before, but this time the girls were not in their short skirt cheerleader uniforms, but their prom style gowns and they made three lovely couples. Still, the stares were obvious as they moved to a table with Hattie on JJ's arm, Morgana on Jon's and Lara on Mike's. When they sat down, Lara, Mike and JJ sat on one bench while Jon sat between Hattie and Morgana on the other side with JJ across from Hattie.

Hattie pulled out her notebook and pencil and started jotting down story notes. As she did, she asked her companions about their experience. She then went from table to table interviewing other students.

Once she was finished, she returned to her table and discussed with Morgana and JJ how they would write up the story.

They decided to get together at her house on Monday to write up the story since the school was going to be closed for Thanksgiving week anyway.

\*\*\*

After the meal, JJ and Hattie took off so that he could return her to her home.

After driving up to Morgana's house, Jon opened the car door for her, leaving Lara and Mike in the back seat, and escorted her to

her door.

Lara watched, interestedly as Jon escorted Morgana to her door.

On the doorstep, Jon held Morgana's hand and said, "Well, things didn't turn out the way we expected, did they?"

With a little nervous chuckle, Morgana replied, "I'll say! Who would have expected the dance to be attacked? Who were they, anyhow?"

Jon replied, "I saw who it was as they were being taken away by the police. It was Ray Kyle. His nickname is 'Bud'. He's a well known troublemaker. He was looking for me in particular because I have gotten in his way a few times. He was looking for you and Hattie because you guys caught him in that cheating scandal which got him kicked off the team."

"Why would he want to kill us? Seems a little extreme to me."

"Me too. All I know is that I actually feel sorry for him."

"How could you feel sorry for someone that wanted to kill you?"

"There had to be a reason, I mean, other than the fact that I got in his way a few times. Something deeper."

"You're an unusual guy, Jon Kent. I don't know anyone else, except maybe Superman that would feel sorry for the perpetrator of such an act." That statement made Morgana start to make some comparisons between Superman and Jon and Kam-El.

Jon said, "Well, at least I was able to deliver you home, safe and sound."

"Yeah, there is that." On impulse, Morgana threw her arms around Jon's neck and kissed him.

Lara had been watching, intently and as she saw Morgana start to move she realized that the one thing that she feared was about to happen. She thought furiously for a second before she came up with a strategy. Reaching over the front seat, she brought her palm down on the center of the steering wheel, setting off the horn.

A couple of things happened simultaneously as a result. Jon and Morgana pulled apart, Morgana dropping her hands to her sides, a satisfied smile on her lips and Mike berated Lara, "Why'd you do that? That was rude. She was thanking him for the evening."

"I ... uh, I had to. It's just something that brothers and sisters do. You understand?"

"No, I don't. You know I'm an only child. You'll have to explain."

"Okay, later." <Much later.>

Jon said, apologetically, "I guess Lara's getting impatient to get home. I guess I'll see you Monday."

"Yeah, I guess so. See you Monday."

\*\*\*

After they returned home they spent some time with their grandparents before Lois and Clark called them into the office.

Lois was the first to speak, "Well, once again Kam-El and Ultra Woman 2 save the day. You did a good job, kiddos."

Clark added, "I don't think Mom or I could have done any better."

Jon was still bothered after his talk with Morgana, "But we shouldn't have needed to do anything. Why did they do it in the first place? I know that Bud was a bully, but this was just too much."

Lois, a sad expression on her face, answered, "You're right, Jon. It shouldn't have happened at all. The problem is with Bud and his family. There are some things that I think you need to know."

"Like what, Mom?"

"Remember back around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, Bud trashed one of our pumpkins?"

Jon nodded.

"Well, when Bud came to deliver the replacement, he was walking sort of stiffly. I was curious, so I used my x-ray vision and

I was shocked. What I saw appalled me. His back was covered with welts and bruises and the skin was broken in several places, like a belt had been used and the buckle had made the bruises and broken the skin.”

In a hushed tone, both Jon and Lara said, “Wow.”

“I wanted to say something about it at the trial, but your father cautioned me against it because I saw it as Lois Lane, not Ultra Woman. How would Ultra Woman have known? It looks like Bud was a victim of abuse. I’d say that he wanted to strike back, but was too afraid of his father to strike back at him, so he became a bully at school.”

“Wow, now I really do feel sorry for him.”

Clark added, “You should, son. He is to be pitied. Because of his father, he will have to spend some time in jail. Fortunately, no one was killed although there were a couple of close calls, Hattie being one of them.”

Jon replied, “You know, Pop, if Hattie had been seriously hurt or killed, I don’t know if I could have forgiven him. I know I wouldn’t have felt sorry for him and whatever punishment he received. -There wouldn’t have been any punishment severe enough if that had happened.”

Clark put a hand on Jon’s shoulder and said, “I understand how you feel and your mother and I feel the same way. Hattie is like another daughter to us, but if something like that does happen, we have to rise above it. It will take superhuman ability, but we must forgive. If we didn’t, with what we can do, there is no telling what harm we could do. We could do worse than any twenty Buds could do.”

\*\*\*

On Monday, after they finished writing up the story, Hattie took it to Lois at The Planet.

Lois took the story and glanced over it. She started to move in the direction of her desk and indicated her visitor chair. Sitting down she picked up a blue pencil and started making corrections. After a number of “Ummms and Ahhhhs” she handed it back to Hattie and said, “Make those changes and I’ll give it to the editor. You kids might just have your first byline in a major metropolitan newspaper.”

Hattie was beside herself with joy. “We’ll get right on it.”

“E-mail it to me and I’ll send it on.”

Taking the papers, Hattie stood.

Lois put her arms around her and said, “You did good, sweetheart.”

The next day, front page, below the fold appeared the story with a Kaplin, Olsen and Winley byline.

\*\*\*

It took some time to make repairs to the school. The classrooms were undamaged so the only services affected were the cafeteria lunches so families adapted and made sure that the students had bag lunches for the two weeks that it took to complete the repairs. Other than that the remainder of the school year was uneventful.

As the school year was drawing to a close, Morgana’s father was notified that, once again, he was being transferred. This came as a blow to Morgana, but she didn’t say anything to her classmates and especially not to Jon.

She and Jon had become so close. She had been hoping to be his steady, but although they had been dating ever since that ill-fated dance and she had indicated in every way short of asking him herself, he had never asked. She wasn’t going to force herself on him. She wanted him to make the first move, but it looked more and more as if he wasn’t going to.

The Friday before the last week of school, Morgana was on one final date with Jon. They had just gone to see *Kung Fu Panda 4* and were at *Burger Shack* afterwards. After they placed their order, Morgana, hesitantly, asked, “Jon, do you like me?”

Jon was startled by her question, but replied sincerely, “Yes, of

course I like you. Why do you ask?”

“Well, you haven’t asked me to go steady, or anything.”

“I think we have been kinda going steady, anyhow, haven’t we?”

“Well, yeah, but it would have been nice if we had made it ‘official’.”

“Well, it’s just that, going steady carries certain, ‘implications’, which I didn’t think you would appreciate.”

“You’re right. I’ve seen other couples that are ‘steady’. Carol and Jed come to mind.”

“I wouldn’t want anyone to think that you and I were ... you know.”

“Yeah, I know. I appreciate it and I appreciate it that you have never even asked me to do that. You’ve ALWAYS been a perfect gentleman. But if that wasn’t the case. Would you have?”

“I’m not sure, Morgana. I like you. I like you, a lot, but do I like you enough to do that? I don’t know. I don’t know if I’m ready to settle down with a steady girlfriend yet. I really enjoy our time together, but I don’t think I’m ready to settle down yet.”

In a sad tone she said, “Well, it’s a moot point anyhow.”

Surprised, Jon asked, “Why is that?”

“My dad’s being transferred again. We leave in a few weeks for upstate New York.”

“I don’t know what to say. I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you, too and the times we’ve had together.”

“Tell me something, if I had asked you to go steady, would it have made a difference? Would you have been able to stay?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe something could have been worked out. Maybe I could have stayed with Hattie. She’s almost like a sister.”

Now, Jon was feeling the pressure. Did he want to make that commitment and ask her to stay? Did he like her that much? He thought about what he had been told by his mom and dad, about how it had been love at first sight. He’d actually seen it happen with Lara and Mike. There was no denying their feelings for one another. But did he feel that way about Morgana? He liked her, she was a very nice girl, he enjoyed being with her, she was smart and pretty, but all of that just didn’t measure up.

He decided that he needed to be honest with her. “Morgana, there is no other girl that I like better than you, but that’s all it is ... I like you, but not in a romantic way. You are a good friend, but I’m afraid that is all we ever will be ... friends.”

Morgana sighed and said, “I guess I need to start packing for the trip then. I was hoping you’d ask me to stay, but I understand.”

She thought back to their first meeting. She had asked if he had a girlfriend and he had said that he didn’t date. She had known since the kiss after the Homecoming Dance just who Jon Kent was. She couldn’t get over the fact that his kiss seemed so ... familiar, somehow. Then the memory of seeing him in his spandex workout gear came to mind and the image of Kam-El in his uniform and it all came together. Jon Kent was Kam-El. He had saved her life ... several times over.

Jon Kent was Kam-El which meant that in all probability, Lara was Ultra Woman 2 which made Clark Kent and Lois Lane, Superman and Ultra Woman. The fact that she knew the identities of what she now thought of as the Super Family staggered her. She also knew that if anyone even suspected that she knew who they were some unscrupulous fiends would stop at nothing to wring that information from her so it was best all around if no one even suspected that she knew, not even Jon. Perhaps, some day in the future she’d meet him again and tell him what she knew, but that wouldn’t be for many years.

The fact that Lois Lane and Clark Kent were married told her that the superheroes did marry and have children so maybe, in that day that they meet again, if he still was single... There might still be a chance for her.

\*\*\*

The day before Morgana and her family moved, the kids had a gathering and eventually the conversation got around to the Homecoming Dance.

Jon related the story, “We had a run in with Bud and his family around Thanksgiving and Christmas. As a result my mom has been following his family. It turns out that his father is a drunk and an abuser. His mother is an enabler which makes a bad, a very bad combination. I think that Bud’s bullying was a reflection of his home life. He wanted to strike out at his father, but didn’t dare, so he took it out on his schoolmates. I think he resorted to weapons because Hattie and I bested him and his posse in a fair fight. He didn’t know that we were both studying karate.”

“Seems a shame. His poor home life will probably now result in a criminal record.”

“Yeah, and since he probably won’t accept responsibility for his own actions, he’ll blame me and you and Hattie and the rest of the school. My guess is that if he ever returns it will be to try and ‘even’ the score.”

“At least I won’t be around to experience his wrath,” Morgana replied, “but I feel sorry for those of you that have to stay.” She looked significantly at Jon as she said, “At least you will have Kam-El,” she shifted her gaze to Lara and said, “and Ultra Woman 2 to help keep you safe.”

Jon and Lara each picked up on Morgana’s body language, but they couldn’t be sure if she was indicating the superheroes or simply emphasizing her statements to them. Frankly, they would have felt better if she had addressed her statement to Hattie or JJ.

Morgana turned to Hattie and asked, “Do you have any idea who they really are?”

This was one of Hattie’s favorite topics and she warmed to it. “No, no idea. There are a couple of schools of thought. The main one is that they are new visitors from New Krypton.”

Morgana smiled and said, “Personally, I’m of the opinion that they are Superman and Ultra Woman’s children.”

Hattie scoffed and said, “How could that be? Ultra Woman hasn’t been back from New Krypton long enough to have children that old.”

“What if she wasn’t really on New Krypton? What if she was simply here, hiding in plain sight the entire time? Then they could be their children.”

“But there were numerous emergencies that if she had been around, surely she would have helped with. She wouldn’t have left Superman alone to handle them if she had been around.”

“Okay, but she’s here now and they are living among us. If you found out who they really were, what would you do?”

“I’d keep it a secret! It would place them in danger if the secret became known.”

“I agree, but it wouldn’t only place them in danger. It would place anyone that knew in danger. If you find out, you not only need to keep the secret, you also need to keep it secret that you know. No one must suspect that you have any idea who they are or else somebody may try to make you tell.”

\*\*\*

Lara and Jon were there to see Morgana off and just before she got into the car, she put her arms around Jon’s neck and kissed him, a lingering kiss that held much promise. As she pulled back, she made a decision to let Jon know that she knew and whispered, “My hero.”

She smiled and climbed into the car. As she did, she said, “I’ll be in touch.” She waved as the car pulled away.

Jon nodded and returned the wave.

Lara sent, /”I heard that. She knows.”/

/”Yeah, but she’ll never tell anyone.”/

\*\*\*

A week later they heard that Bud and his gang had been tried. They had been found guilty of terrorism, attempted murder, arson, illegal entry and use of an IED in the commission of a felony.

They had been tried as adults and each was sentenced to a long prison term.

\*\*\*

## Chapter 15 – Epilogue pt 1

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

**Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime**

%%%

As the car pulled away, Morgana smiled and thought, “It isn’t like we won’t be able to stay in touch, we have texts, e-mail, Facebook, Facetime, Skype... We will definitely be staying in touch.”

Her father’s next assignment was in New York and the trip was done in easy stages. They left right after the moving van and would be arriving the day after. The company had a liaison person on site to open the new house and direct the unloading.

As soon as they arrived, she sent an e-mail:

**FROM:** [Morgana256@space.net](mailto:Morgana256@space.net)

**TO:** Distribution List - Metropolis

*Hi from upstate New York!*

*Well, it was an uneventful trip, just long and boring. I’m just glad I had my pad and my Kindle, between the games, music and books I had enough to entertain myself during the trip. Without them it would have been worse.*

*I really miss you guys already and it has only been a couple of days and it is a couple of months until school starts. I hope I meet some nice people, but I’m sure they won’t be as great as you guys.*

*Maybe we could get together over the holidays. Let’s plan.*

*Love,*

*Morgana*

\*\*\*

On December 28<sup>th</sup> Hattie and her father, Jack Kaplin, were at the airport, waiting for an arriving flight.

Hattie was the first to spot Morgana and the two ran together and hugged then with their arms around one another they joined Jack.

“Well, Morgana, have a good flight?” Jack asked.

Smiling, Morgana replied, “Yes, sir. It was a good flight, but I couldn’t wait for the plane to arrive. At times, I wanted to get out and push, it seemed to be going so slow.”

Hattie laughed at that imagery and said, “Well, let’s go collect your luggage.”

“Sounds like a good idea.”

“As soon as we get home, we’ll get you settled in and then we have a surprise planned.”

“Oh, what?”

Laughing, Hattie replied, “If I told you, there wouldn’t be a surprise.”

\*\*\*

When they walked in the door the lights were switched on and Jon, Lara and JJ all shouted, “Surprise!” The gang was back together.

Morgana was close to tears as she said, “Oh, you guys! I love you all!” but she was looking right at Jon as she said it.

Jon caught that look and was instantly apprehensive. Morgana obviously had more feelings for him than he had for her. He could foresee an uncomfortable discussion in the offing.

\*\*\*

A little later, Morgana managed to get Jon outside, just the two of them. She reached for his hand and said, “I’ve missed you. More than anyone else in my life, I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Morgana and it’s good to see you again.”

“Hattie’s parents have extended an invitation for me to stay. It’d be like Hattie and I were sisters.” Coyly she looked down before she asked, “Would you want me to stay and ... and be your

girlfriend?”

Here it was, the conversation that Jon had been dreading from the first day he had met her on that cruise ship. How was he going to say what needed to be said, without hurting her terribly?

“Morgana, I like you, I like you a lot, but ... but there’s something you need to understand. You know who I am, but you don’t know everything about me. I don’t know that I understand it completely myself, but my mom and dad have explained it and I’ve seen it with Lara. You know that my dad is Kryptonian ... well, there’s something about Kryptonians that nobody outside of the family knows. That is that with Kryptonians as soon as a Kryptonian meets that special someone that completes them, they fall in love. With Kryptonians ‘love at first sight’ is a fact and cannot be denied. I saw it happen with Lara. From the minute she met Mike, she knew that he was THE one. By the same token, if it isn’t love at first sight then it isn’t meant to be. Morgana, I like you a whole lot, but it wasn’t love at first sight. We are friends, good friends, very good friends ... and we will always be ... friends, but that is all we can ever be.”

Morgana’s head hung down as she repeated, “But that’s all we will ever be.”

“I’m sorry, Morgana. That’s just the way it is. Someday, I’ll find the one for me...”

She interrupted, “But what if you don’t? What if you never find your special someone?”

“Then, I guess I’ll be alone.”

“But we have something, something *special* between us. There’s an old saying ... ‘Half a loaf is better than none.’ I’d be satisfied with half a loaf.”

“Morgana, I’m convinced that someday I’ll find my special someone and that you will find your special someone also.”

“I thought I already had.”

“We’re young yet. We have plenty of time to find who we are supposed to be with. In the mean time, we can enjoy being together, can’t we?”

Morgana suggested, “I suppose so. Maybe we could be boyfriend and girlfriend. Sort of a ‘dry run’ for the future. If nothing comes of it then it wasn’t meant to be or if one of us finds our special someone, then no hard feelings, we go our separate ways. Besides, if I had a boyfriend the guys in my new school wouldn’t be bothering me.”

“That would be difficult. You’re in New York and I’m here.”

“Lara and Mike are making a long distance relationship work. I’d really like to be your girlfriend for however long we can be.” Morgana smiled at him in a very attractive way.

Jon caved. She understood as no one outside the family understood. Smiling, he said, “You present a strong case. You and Lara are like two peas in a pod. She wants to be a lawyer and you ought to be a lawyer too.” Then Jon took off his letterman’s jacket and placed it on her shoulders, helping her put her arms in. As he did he asked, “How does it feel to be the quarterback’s girlfriend?”

Smiling at him Morgana ran her hands down the sleeves of the jacket and said, “It feels great.”

“I think we need to get back. They’re gonna wonder what happened to us.”

Still smiling, Morgana said, “As soon as they see the jacket, they’ll know.”

\*\*\*

Graduation was that following summer, 2018. The school calendars were out of sync and as a result, Morgana’s graduation ceremony was two days before Metropolis High’s. The day after graduation, Morgana hopped a plane so that she could attend the graduation of her Metropolis posse.

It was going to be the last ‘free’ summer before they all started college and were scattered to the four winds.

Jack Kaplin again picked her up at the airport and took her to their home. The next day, she and Hattie helped each other to dress

and then went to the graduation together.

When Morgana walked into the graduation ceremony she was dressed in a cocktail style dress, but she carried Clark’s letterman’s jacket over her arm. She was with Mel and Jack Kaplin and when they found Lois and Clark they sat with them. Mike Lee was also there, having flown in for Lara’s graduation.

After the ceremony numerous pictures were taken. In one of the pictures of Jon, Morgana joined him and she wore Jon’s jacket.

That summer, Morgana lived with Hattie and the posse spent a lot of time together, some of it at the beach but most of it just ‘hanging out’ together. Naturally, Jon and Morgana went to see some movies and other dating activities.

\*\*\*

Morgana had been accepted as an English major at Vassar while Lara Kent and Mike Lee had been accepted in pre-Law at Stanford with full academic scholarships. Jon and Hattie were going to go to MetU. JJ was going to Temple in Philadelphia. Hattie and JJ were going into journalism while Jon was going into the sciences. Jon, JJ and Hattie each had dual scholarships, academic and sports. Jon’s and JJ’s were in football and Hattie’s was in tennis.

As soon as Jon’s flight power manifested he started making trips to Poughkeepsie, New York where Vassar was located so that he and Morgana could spend time together. They had a regular Saturday evening date.

As they were leaving the theater on one of their dates, Morgana was hanging on Jon’s arm and said, “That was a wonderful movie. Just imagine, if they hadn’t met, they would have both been lonely for the rest of their lives.”

Jon was starting to have second thoughts about their relationship. Should they keep it on the same level? Should he be waiting for someone he may never find? A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, after all. NO, he resolved. He would wait.

Looking around and seeing no one nearby, Morgana asked, “When are you going to take me flying?”

Jon smiled and replied, “Soon.”

\*\*\*

In March of 2021 Morgana received a call from Lara. “Hey, Morgana, it’s been a while.”

“It sure has, Lara. How are things?”

“Things are just fine! That’s why I’m calling. You know that with my parents’ permission, Mike and I have been living together all this last semester.”

“Yeah, I knew that. So why are you calling?”

“You’re still Jon’s girlfriend, right? How is that brother of mine?”

Lara could hear the smile in her voice so her friend replied, “He’s fine and we are, for the foreseeable future, at least.”

“Okay, I need a favor.”

“What can I do for you?”

“I need a Maid of Honor. Jon’s going to be best man so you and he will be paired up at the reception.”

“I would be honored, but what about the gowns?”

“We will need to discuss them. I think I can arrange transportation so that you can come out here for fittings.”

Morgana’s excitement was mounting, she had been flying with Jon whenever they could for a couple of years now and she loved it. As she thought about flying in Jon’s arms from Poughkeepsie to Stanford, she smiled. She knew that she had to be careful with what she said so she couched her words carefully, “Okay, I look forward to seeing you, Mike and Jon. When?”

“Saturday good for you?”

“That’ll be good.”

\*\*\*

Jon picked her up at four thirty on Saturday and they flew to Stanford. Most of the time she spent looking at the passing scenery, but some of the time, she had her arms around his neck

and her face in the angle formed between his neck and shoulder.

The four of them had a good time and the girls picked out their respective gowns. Lara chose a shop that had an outlet in Metropolis so that the rest of the bridal party could get their gown locally. Hattie and JJ as well as the rest of her sisters and brothers made up the balance of the party.

The wedding itself would be held in Metropolis. Lara had the gowns shipped by the store to the local outlet and when the time came she flew home with Mike.

\*\*\*

As they say, ‘All good things must come to an end.’ And that happened in 2024.

The Kent family was together and that included Mike. His Great Uncle Wayne Irig had passed away and left the farm to his favorite grand-nephew so he and Lara were staying there, but on the July Fourth holiday they were all at Smallville Lake when the inevitable happened.

Jon was on the beach when a strikingly beautiful blonde dove off the float and became tangled in some submerged limbs that a recent storm had washed into the lake. Without stopping to think, Jon ran and dove then flew underwater to her rescue. As soon as he had her in his arms he knew that she was the one. Her name was Jennifer Jenkins and she was a niece of Lana Lang Ross.

Over the course of the next few weeks he got to know her and became even more convinced. She was preparing to return to school at Midwest U where she was studying to be an elementary school teacher. (for the complete story see – First Love in the archives)

\*\*\*

Jon had been on vacation when he met Jen and then they had spent a lot of time together. He had made the decision to follow her to Midwest-U and had pulled together his transcripts so that he could apply for an associate professor position there. Along with that had been the decision to stay with Grandma and Grandpa Kent in Smallville.

All of this had taken several weeks and in that time, he thought about Morgana and wondered how he was going to break this news to her.

He decided that he needed some help on this one, so after making a phone call, he flew to California.

\*\*\*

He talked it over with Lara. “What do I do Sis? She’s the one; I know she is, but all these years I’ve been with Morgana.” His voice trailed off as if he couldn’t express his feelings.

“You both knew that this could happen. You were up front with her right from the start, weren’t you?”

“Of course I was and yeah, we both knew that this could happen, but that doesn’t make this any easier. She’s gonna be crushed. We’ve gotten so close over the last four years.”

“Just how close have you gotten, Bro?”

“Well, not that close ... not that way. We’re just friends.”

“It’s been four years. Have you been close enough for your aura to...?”

“No, we aren’t close that way.”

“Okay, so she can’t be pregnant. That’ll make it easier.”

“Not really. We have gotten extremely close. How could you help it in four years? What should I do?”

“My suggestion is ... be up front. Don’t beat around the bush, but don’t be harsh.”

\*\*\*

Straight out of college, Morgana had taken a job with a newspaper. She’d had some aspirations toward being a reporter; however, after almost six months as a gofer and then several months doing the obits, she had decided that the newspaper game was not for her. She had left that job and had recently taken a job that her college education had prepared her for with a book publisher as an editor.

When she had first started, as part of the check-in process, she had been set up with a computer. The IT tech that set her up was named Tim. While he set up her equipment and account, they had chatted. Morgana hadn’t been too thrilled about the interest he had displayed and had tried to dissuade him, but he persisted. Finally, she had pointed to the picture on her desk of her and Jon, it was the picture taken at his graduation where she was wearing his letterman’s jacket, and asked, “What do you think of my boyfriend?”

Noting that the picture had been taken some time previously, he commented, “If he was that good a boyfriend, you wouldn’t still be boyfriend and girlfriend, you’d be engaged.”

“Well, I never...”

“You asked. Now, if I were your boyfriend, I wouldn’t keep you hanging for that long. I’d have asked you to marry me, long ago.”

Feeling defensive, Morgana blurted out, “But we like our relationship just the way it is.”

Smugly, Tim replied, “That’s the point. You shouldn’t.”

Annoyed, Morgana challenged, “Oh, and I’d be happier ... how?”

Still somewhat smugly, Tim replied, “With someone like me.”

Aghast, Morgana blurted out, “Someone like you?”

“Yeah, someone, like, me. How about a date?”

“Why ... you insufferable ... I wouldn’t date you if you were the last man on earth.”

“Careful, I may make you eat those words.”

Angry now, Morgana stormed, “Take your tools and your attitude and get out of here.”

\*\*\*

## Chapter 16 – Epilogue pt 2

\*\*\*

%%%

Universal Locator designation

Alpha 023 x Gamma 004 x Tau -120 – Prime

%%%

It had been some weeks since Morgana had heard from Jon. She had known about the vacation, but she was beginning to wonder about the extended absence. The time passing without hearing from Jon was causing her to worry. She hadn’t heard anything about the super family being in any danger, so she wasn’t too concerned about his welfare.

She finally came to the conclusion that he had gotten a job, or was in graduate school or something that was keeping him very busy ... so busy that he hadn’t been able to contact her.

It was when she was at her lowest ebb, emotionally, because of his absence, that Tim showed up again. He was there to fix a problem with her computer, but noticed that her mood was somewhat somber. Remembering how their previous meeting had gone, he decided on a different approach. He asked, “I’ve noticed you’ve been quiet lately. Is there anything wrong?”

Defensively, she responded sharply, perhaps a bit too sharply, ““No, I’m concerned that I haven’t heard from him. He’s probably busy with his new job.

Hey, a bunch of us in the IT department are going bowling this Saturday. If Jon is back, you guys should join us. If not, come on your own.

Morgana looked at the picture and then reaching for it, laid it down on her desktop. Looking at Tim, she said, “Okay.”

\*\*\*

Jon called Morgana and set up a meeting. After talking with Lara, thinking that it would soften the blow, somewhat, Jon picked up a bouquet of flowers on his way to see Morgana. They had become extremely close over the years and he knew that this was going to come as a blow. Landing around the corner from her apartment house, he changed into his civilian clothes and walked to her door.

When he knocked on her door, he was apprehensive. He was holding the bouquet behind his back.

When she answered the door, he could hear her heartbeat. He had been with her enough to know her moods from her heartbeat and he could tell that she was upset.

Trying to put her at ease, he pulled the bouquet from behind his back and said, “These are for you.”

After going bowling with Tim and his friends, Morgana started developing a good, strong friendship with him. In time they started talking on the phone after work and then going out together on a regular basis. By the time Jon called, Morgana knew she had an important decision to make.

When he pulled the bouquet from behind his back, she almost collapsed. Had he finally given up on finding his ‘special someone’ and decided to settle down with her?

How could she tell Tim? Should she tell Jon about Tim? How would he react? Numbly, she reached forward and took the flowers. “I guess I need to get these into some water.”

As he followed her inside the apartment and closed the door, he said, “Yeah, good idea.”

Morgana was very distracted as she looked for a vase and arranged the flowers. She was thinking about Jon and just who he was and she was also thinking about Tim and the feelings she was starting to have for him. She was worrying about how this was going to turn out. She was going to be disappointing one or the other, but which one. Did she want a life with a superhero or a regular guy? She hadn’t been dating Tim for very long, but she could see the possibility of a relationship with him and he would be all hers. If she stayed with Jon, she would have to share him with the world and did she want that?

She stalled as long as she could, arranging and rearranging the flowers. Jon noticed her distraction and said, “I think you had them arranged that way before.”

She realized what she was doing and tried to cover, “I’m just not sure how they look best.”

“I think they look fine, that way. Morgana ... we have to talk.”

Morgana’s hands stopped arranging and grasping the sides of the vase and lifting it, she turned to face him. She tried to keep the apprehension out of her voice, but failed miserably when she asked, “Oh, what about?”

Jon heard her heart rate spike and knew that something was wrong, but he couldn’t tell what. <Oh, well, there’s no putting it off now.> “About ... us.”

There it was, the thing she most feared. What was she going to do? She choked out, “Us?”

Jon heard her heart skip a beat and was concerned. <This is going to hurt her terribly. But I have to think of Jen and our future.> “Yeah ... Us. You see, uh, it’s this way ... I’ve met someone...”

As he uttered that last word relief actually flooded through her system and she relaxed, her fingers released the vase and it started to fall.

Super-reflexes came into play and Jon caught the vase before it had fallen even two inches.

In her relief, Morgana started to cry.

Jon saw this and misinterpreted. <I knew I’d hurt her.> “I’m so sorry, Morgana. I never meant to hurt you.”

Suddenly her expression changed and she started to giggle.

Jon was confused.

Morgana stopped giggling, placed her hands on his and asked, “You came here to break up with me?”

“Well, yeah, it’s like I always said, there was a special someone out there and I might find her at any time. Well ... a few weeks ago, I did.”

In her relief, Morgana smiled and said, “I’m so relieved!”

Jon was stunned. “Relieved?” He set the vase on the counter.

Smiling and nodding, Morgana said, “I’ve met someone too.”

Understanding now, Jon smiled and said, “I’m happy for you. Anyone I know?”

“I don’t think so. His name is Tim and he works for the same company that I do. Who’s the girl?”

“She’s a cousin to an old family friend. Her name is Jennifer and she is studying to be an elementary school teacher.”

“I’m happy for you ... and her. Does she know about your ... part time job?”

“No, not yet. I want to be sure of our relationship before I tell her.”

“Want some advice? Don’t wait too long.”

Looking at a nearby clock, Jon realized that he needed to go, so he said, “I won’t. As soon as I’m sure, I’ll tell her. Listen, I have to go. I have an appointment.”

“With her?”

“No, I have to prepare my classroom for Monday. I start teaching at Midwest-U.”

“Why there?”

“That’s where she is going to school. I took a job there so that I would be near her.”

Morgana stepped up to him and gave him a very chaste kiss before she said, “Good luck. I hope it works out.”

He smiled and said, “So do I and I hope Tim works out for you.”

It was Morgana’s turn to smile as she replied, “I hope so too.”

\*\*\*

The relationship between Morgana and Tim grew slowly, but steadily. As he moved up in the company his duties changed and he started travelling to other sites. He wanted to be able to settle down before they married so they became engaged, but didn’t set a date.

One day Morgana received a call from Jon. “Hi, Morgana, how’re things going?”

“Tim’s away again. This is a three week trip so I’m at loose ends. What’s up?”

“As you know, my and Jen’s wedding is next weekend. I thought that Tim would be attending with you, but I guess not now. Do you have your dress yet?”

“I always have a dress to wear.”

“Okay, I’ll pick you up Thursday night. You can stay in our spare bedroom.”

“I’ll be packed and ready. See you Thursday.”

\*\*\*

Thursday night, Morgana and Jon, still dressed as Kam-El, walked into the apartment to find Hattie and Jen talking.

When he did his spin change to jeans and a top, both Morgana and Hattie looked at him aghast and blurted out, “What?”

Morgana said, “Why did you do that? Now Hattie will know!”

Hattie looked at Morgana and then at Jon and asked accusingly, “Just how long has she known?”

Morgana looked at Hattie and asked, “How long have you known?”

“Just a few weeks. Just since the night I tried to seduce Kam-El.” (See Hattie Kaplin – Reporter)

Morgana started to laugh, “You WHAT?”

“You heard me; I tried to seduce Kam-El. Don’t rub it in. I was mortified. And here I call myself an investigative reporter. All this time and I didn’t have a clue. How long have you known?”

“Since the Homecoming Dance.”

“What!!! You’ve known all that time and you never told me?”

“I couldn’t. I couldn’t even let on that I knew.”

Chagrined, Hattie admitted. As she pulled Morgana into a hug, she said, “I guess you’re right. It’s good to see you.”

“You too. And Jen. It’s nice to finally meet you.”

Jen moved over and gave her a hug. “It’s nice to meet someone who has been so close to Jon for so long.”

“I’m just glad he found his ‘special someone’ finally.”

\*\*\*

The following year it was Hattie's turn to get married.

Jon was scheduled to pick Morgana up after the rehearsal dinner, but first it was his turn to do a patrol. He was delayed in arriving.

Morgana was curious as to the delay. As they started to fly Morgana asked, "What emergency kept you from picking me up on time?"

"Hattie and JJ ... As they were leaving the rehearsal dinner ... they were gunned down." (See Hattie and Mr. X)

"**What?** Oh, NO! How are they? Why didn't you take me to the hospital? Will there still be a wedding? Will it be postponed?"

Jon smiled and said, "They're fine, actually, better than fine. They're healthier than they have ever been." His tone became conspiratorial as he continued, "They're just super ... in more ways than one."

"You'll need to explain that one."

Landing, Jon spun out of his uniform and they entered the apartment. Jen welcomed them before Morgana asked, "Okay, give, what did you mean about them being just super?"

"Okay, here's the story: They were shot down by a couple of gunmen. They were each hit by between 6 and ten bullets. They were dying. The only way to save them was to make them super."

"You mean, like you and the rest of your family?"

"Yeah, they're just like the rest of us now. Now they are really part of the family."

"Wow!"

Jen looped an arm around Morgana's shoulder and said, "We have a lot to do tomorrow. I think we need to get to bed. Jon cancelled your hotel reservation. You are staying with us, in the guest room."

"I really don't want to put you guys out. I should go to the hotel."

Jen was commanding, "No more arguments. You're staying here, with us, and that is it."

"Okay, Jen, as long as you insist."

"We insist. You know where your room is."

"Okay, goodnight, and thanks."

"Goodnight."

\*\*\*

Finally, Tim's position within the IT division of Banks Publishing had become stable once he had been made a manager. His travel was reduced and they were able to settle down.

The wedding was going to be on the modest side. A close friend of Tim's, Steve Miller, was Best Man while Hattie was Matron of Honor.

Jon and Jen could possibly have been in the wedding party, but Jen was in her third trimester with her and Jon's first child.

It was January in New York State and snow was falling. Countless tiny snowflakes swirled around in little eddies and there was a light coating on the ground with some drifting as well as an accumulation from previous snowfalls.

Morgana had lived in New York long enough to know what the weather could be like and had planned accordingly. Exiting the car in front of the hotel she made her way to the entrance. The snow swirled around her feet as she picked her way through a snow drift while wearing a white gown with a long removable train that doubled as a cape and low white leather boots. Her hair was pinned up in a chignon. The veil was fingertip length, but for the trip to the hotel it had been thrown back. Her bouquet, three White Calla Lilies done up in a blue silk ribbon a classic symbol of devotion and love cast their fragrance through the crisp winter air.

It was about twenty degrees outside, but she didn't notice the biting cold because she was absolutely thrilled to be marrying her best friend.

She changed out of the boots into the white heels she had been

carrying and attached the cape as a train once she was in the hotel where the wedding was being held. The gown was lined with silk on the outside with satin exterior. Her shoulders were only exposed slightly, in accordance with her modest ways. Her veil had been thrown back for the trip, but she now arranged it to cover her face.

She and Hattie quickly made their way to the bride's room where they waited to be called while the guests assembled in the ballroom. Tim's parents, grandparents and sisters were there and so were all of his friends from college and work.

It was the happiest day of her life. The only thing that would have made it better would have been if her parents could have been there, however they had already passed away and her brother Dave who was in the Air Force could not get leave since he was on special assignment. But fortunately, her Uncle Sam was able to walk her down the aisle and give her away.

When her uncle handed her over to Tim, the older man beamed, slapped his future nephew on the back, lifted Morgana's veil, kissed her on the cheek and then said to them softly, "Be kind and loving to each other."

They responded together just as softly, "We will!"

All during the ceremony friends and family looked on admiringly, knowing that the young couple had a strong love and deep respect for each other, the perfect foundation for a lasting and happy marriage.

When they exchanged vows, each of them made a mistake and they both started to have a fit of giggles, but soon they settled down and repeated their vows, much to the officiant's and guests relief.

"I now pronounce you Husband and Wife, Timothy, please kiss your new wife!"

Happy cheers were heard as Tim leaned his six foot four inch frame down to take Morgana in his arms and give her a sweet long kiss.

\*\*\*

At the reception the bride's dance was to "Unchained Melody" and after the first few bars others joined in.

The photographer, an old friend of her parents, did a splendid job taking formal and candid shots. One of the best was of her Uncle Sam and Aunt Flora doing the jitterbug. They were so energetic and smooth with their moves the other dancers moved off the floor and let them take over!

She had an opportunity during the reception to dance with Jon. As they danced, Morgana whispered, "I have not told Tim about you or your family and this is one secret I intend to keep from him. No one will ever learn your family's secret from me. That's a promise."

"Thanks, Morgana. You are one of my best and truest friends. If you ever need me, or Lara, or Hattie or JJ, just call. One of us or all of us will be here as quickly as we can be."

Morgana laughed quietly and then replied, "I don't think I'll be needing any super powered assistance. We will be living a quiet life unlike Hattie and JJ. I intend to leave the company in a few months and start working on designing knitting patterns for women and young children. Tim wants me to have the time to explore that interest. That investigative reporting job can be dangerous. I'm glad that they are super now. I won't be losing you guys the way I lost my parents."

"I never really told you how sorry I was that you lost them."

"There was nothing you guys could have done. Cancer does not care who it takes. I was very happy to have them for as long as I did. I'm okay with it, and now that I have Tim, I'm happy."

"Just remember that we, all of us, will be there for you if you need us."

His friend smiled, her eyes glistening with happy tears. She nodded and said, "I'll remember, but I expect that the only time I'll see you guys now would be if you were invited for a party."

Jon smiled and replied, “I’d like that. Count on us to be there.”

“You need to make sure that you bring Jen with you. She will be delivering soon. Do you know what sex yet?”

“Yes, a boy. We plan to name him Bernard after my boss and mentor, Dr. Bernard Klein. What about you? Do you and Tim plan to have any children?”

“We don’t even know if we CAN have children yet. Give us some time.”

\*\*\*

Some months after the wedding, Tim was transferred to an office in North Carolina, nearer to New Troy which made it easier for the families to get together.

About that same time, Morgana found out that she was pregnant, with twins. It was a difficult birth and as a result, she was told that she could have no more children, but they were a happy family of four. The twins were a boy and a girl. The girl was named Piper Olivia McCoy and the boy became Timothy McCoy Junior.

As the years passed there were the frequent parties when they would all get together and discuss old times and make lots of new memories with their spouses and children. Theirs was a friendship that endured. Eventually, Tim was brought in on the family secret.

Morgana and Tim’s children were almost like a set of cousins to the Kent and Olsen clans and were treated as such. In the course of time, both married into the super family. Tim junior married Sarah Olsen, Hattie’s eldest daughter and Piper married Bernard Kent, Jon and Jen’s oldest son. Eventually they both became super heroes like the rest of the spouses.

Morgana and Tim never became super themselves, but they had long lives and enjoyed spending time with their super friends, super children and their super grandchildren. Before they both had passed away they had 16 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.

Each member of the super family had an extended lifespan and as a result what would be considered a generation didn’t really exist. Each of the women remained fertile well beyond their nineties and had a generation of children every 20 to 25 years. As a result, the number of super powered individuals increased exponentially. In their 60 years of knowing the family their numbers had grown to tens of thousands which gave the world safety and security.

They had the privilege of seeing the first stirrings of Utopia as the super family spread out around the globe and knowing that they had contributed to it.

THE END