

My Own Worst Enemy

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Summary: In the conclusion to the author's [Ghost From the Past](#), Lois and Clark confront Sam Lane about his knowledge of Clark's identity. Intergang begins to move in and their latest weapon is none other than Johnny Corbin — powered by Black Kryptonite! How will Clark be able to defeat an enemy that's hidden inside himself? (2 of 2)

Story Size: 136,484 words (751Kb as text)

Previously On Ghost From the Past...

*I found a love for me
Darling, just dive right in and follow my lead
Well, I found a girl, beautiful and sweet
Oh, I never knew you were the someone waiting for me
'Cause we were just kids when we fell in love
Not knowing what it was
I will not give you up this time
But darling, just kiss me slow, your heart is all I own
And in your eyes you're holding mine*

Lois wrapped her arms around Clark's waist as they swayed to the music, sharing their first dance as husband and wife. "So, Mrs. Kent, how are you feeling?"

She smiled back at him, "Wonderful, Mr. Kent."
*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song
When you said you looked a mess, I whispered underneath my
breath
But you heard it, darling, you look perfect tonight*
She linked her arms around his neck, looking into his eyes, "I think it's time."

"What's time?" He asked, confused.
*Well I found a woman, stronger than anyone I know
She shares my dreams, I hope that someday I'll share her home
I found a love, to carry more than just my secrets
To carry love, to carry children of our own
We are still kids, but we're so in love
Fighting against all odds
I know we'll be alright this time
Darling, just hold my hand
Be my girl, I'll be your man
I see my future in your eyes*

She smiled back at him and laughed, "To tell everyone about the baby..."

"Should we just tell Pete to add it to his speech?" He teased.
*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song
When I saw you in that dress, looking so beautiful
I don't deserve this, darling, you look perfect tonight*

Lois laughed, "No, I don't think my mother or your parents

would let us live that one down."

"You're probably right," He grinned back at her. "But you want to tell everyone about the baby...now."

*Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms
Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song*

I have faith in what I see

Now I know I have met an angel in person

And she looks perfect, I don't deserve this

You look perfect tonight

The song came to an end, and she smiled up at him, "Let's go find our parents..."

Sam watched from the table as Lois danced her first dance with Clark. He'd felt every emotion known to man over the last week as he tried to wrap his head around the fact that the man his daughter was now married to was an alien. He didn't look any different from anyone else yet he had the power to break steel bars in his hands and destroy an asteroid headed for Earth to wipe out its existence. Over the past few months, he'd been forced to take a hard look at his life and his shortcomings as a father and husband. He hadn't been there. He had been a lousy father and a lousy husband. He hoped to start making amends. Both his daughters seemed willing to give him a second chance. He knew it would take more than a few kind words to get back in Ellen's good graces again.

<<"I have been in love with you for so long I don't remember what it was like not to love you, Lois, and I don't want to know.">>

Knowing this man that his daughter had fallen in love with and planned a life around was the same man that had eaten a bomb to stop the space station from exploding and caught bullets with his hand was a hard concept to grasp. What was even harder was coming to the realization that Clark Kent—alien or not—was capable of something many people had a hard time doing. Love. Seeing the way he looked at Lois and hearing the words he spoke only reaffirmed his decision. He had to protect him and Lois from Darryl no matter what the cost.

"Enjoying the party?" a familiar voice from behind him asked as he took a seat next to him.

"This is my daughter's wedding..." Sam snapped in a harsh whisper. "Leave..."

"Not until you tell me what you did with that footage." Darryl hissed angrily in a hushed whisper. "Yes, I know it was you. Imagine my surprise when I went to download the footage for the week, and every server had been wiped clean. Four years of surveillance had been cleared out. How do you suppose that happened?"

"Did you really think I was going to let you continue to violate my children like that?" Sam asked, staring straight ahead as he continued to watch his daughter dance in her husband's arms. "You have no idea who you're dealing with."

"No, you are the one that has no idea who you're dealing with..." Darryl snapped, "Where are the tapes? What did you do with them?"

"Destroyed along with all your surveillance equipment. Locks have been changed, and they'll all be moving to an unknown location..."

"You really think you can out play me?"

"I checked the file. Apparently, only you, Trask, Thompson, and Newcomb were a part of this 'Project K' of Bureau 39's. An agency the government has publicly denied any association with..."

"How did you...?"

"Don't use your company's founding date as your password, Darryl, everyone knows that." Sam retorted. "Face it. You need me more than I need you. So here's how it's going to work. You stay the hell away from my family. You stay away from Superman. You stay away from the Daily Planet."

"And if I don't?"

Sam pulled out a handheld tablet and showed an image of Metallo on the operating table, "He's operational, but you forget a small detail. I programmed him. I can reprogram him anytime I want. If you come near my daughter or son-in-law ever again Metallo's next orders will be to dismantle the organization starting with you."

"You son of a..."

"Ah, ah, ah, language. I will not have you talking that way at my daughter's wedding." Sam warned, wagging his finger at him.

"This isn't over," Darryl warned in a harsh whisper.

"Oh, I think it is." Sam said, standing up as Lois approached him, "You've overstayed your welcome. Leave."

"Daddy, have you seen mom anywhere?" Lois asked as she approached the table. Darryl stood from his seat with a scowl on his face. He looked like he was about to say something but thought better of it and left. "What was that about?"

"Old business acquaintance. I forgot to have your mother remove him from the list. We had a bad falling out a few years ago." Sam said hurriedly. "Uh, what did you ask, princess? I'm sorry my head's all over the place today."

"Mom? Have you seen her?" She repeated, eyeing him critically. Hopefully, she couldn't tell he was lying.

"Oh, right! I think she went to meet that boyfriend of your sister's. What's his name? Lenny?"

"Jimmy." Lois corrected.

"Right, Jimmy." Thankfully the object of their conversation was headed toward them with Lucy and Ellen in tow.

"Lois, it's almost time for the toasts. Where is Pete at?" Ellen asked as she approached, looking around.

"Um, I think Clark went to go grab him." Lois said hurriedly, "Listen, I know everyone is on a tight schedule, but there's something we really wanted to tell both of you...well all of you..." Lois shrugged her shoulders as he spotted Clark heading their way with the Kents and Pete Ross in tow.

"Okay, what's this about?" Martha asked as Clark wrapped his arms around Lois' waist from behind, pressing a kiss against her cheek as she turned to look at him with a smile.

"News?" Ellen asked confused. "Oh, no, you're not dying are you?" Her voice grew frantic.

"No, mom, I'm not dying." Lois reassured her.

"Not if I can help it anyway," Clark encouraged, tightening his arms around Lois as she swayed her hips against him, smiling back at their small collection of friends and family. "We're waiting on one more person."

"All right folks..." Perry said, making his way to the table, "What's going on? Your wedding coordinator..."

"Beverly." Ellen supplied.

"...Beverly." Perry corrected himself, "said you needed me over here for something?"

"Yes, apparently there is 'news.'" Jonathan explained, looking at Lois and Clark expectantly.

"Well, first of all, we wanted to let you know how grateful we are for all your help over these last few weeks. I know it's been stressful and crazy, but everything turned out amazing. We couldn't ask for anything more perfect." Lois began with a strained voice as the tears she was holding back began to become too much for her. "I'm sorry. I'm just really emotional. It's an emotional day."

Clark gave her a peck on the cheek and continued for her, "As you all know we chose to have the ceremony on Jamie's birthday to help let him be a part of everything. A reminder that he's not forgotten. You all have been ...amazingly supportive through all of this, and we wanted to thank you for your support and love. We just hope you won't let Jamie's memory be forgotten in November when we welcome the newest member of the family to the world."

Squeals of joy echoed around them as hugs and kisses were exchanged. Sam watched as Lois and Clark were both enveloped in never-ending hugs from arms all around them. He took a moment to let the news sink in.

A grandchild.

A miracle.

A medical miracle.

He could write books and documentaries about this. It would make his career. As soon as the thought crossed his mind, he quickly banished it. This wasn't a clinical study. This was his flesh and blood. His grandchild...possibly another boy, given their previous son.

Jamie.

It had broken his heart to watch Lois go through the loss of her son without a way to help her. Despite being only half-human nothing had shown up on the reports as out of the ordinary. What were the odds that this would happen again? He watched the smile that spread across his daughter's face and made a decision. He needed to tell her he knew. He needed to help them. Maybe he could help prevent anything from happening this time around? He sighed to himself, hopefully, she wouldn't try to push him away again.

Mr. Darryl followed the young blonde down the narrow pathway beneath the crypt and into the hidden lair near the Metropolis sewer lines that was rumored to house the notorious Lex Luthor. As he turned the corner, a voice from behind him stepped out of the shadows, "So we meet again...and under less desirable circumstances."

"Lex," he hissed, looking back at the bloodied shirt of the once world famous philanthropist as he staggered toward him. "How've you been?" Lex motioned for the young blonde to leave, and she nodded, heading up the steps and closing the stone door closed behind her.

Lex motioned to his surroundings, "How do you think? I've been robbed of everything thanks to your organization...and Superman." He snapped bitterly.

"How would you like to rectify that?" Darryl asked.

Lex laughed, "You? You're going to help me? After

everything you did to destroy me...”

“That was the organization.”

“That was you.” Lex clarified with a scoff.

“I don’t work for them anymore.”

“How convenient.” Lex remarked bitterly, “So what, now you expect me to help you? Why should I trust you?”

“Because I can get you something you desperately need.”

“Oh?” Lex asked, in mock interest, “What do I desperately need?”

“The destruction of Superman,” Darryl said with a smile.

“You and what army?” Lex scoffed, rubbing his neck, “He’s a temporary nuisance. I’ll deal with him in time.”

“Or you could deal with him now.” Darryl pressed.

“What do you suggest I do, show up at his house for tea?”

Lex scoffed, “Give me a break!”

“It’s an apartment. Not a house.”

“Excuse me?” Lex looked at him in confusion.

Darryl handed him a folder from his suit jacket, “Our file on Project K. What’s left of it anyway. He came to Smallville, Kansas in 1966. Found by an elderly couple who raised him as their own until we were able to make contact...around the same time we discovered his weakness. The meteorite.”

“You’re saying Superman, this alien grew up here and has been here since 1966?” Lex asked incredulously.

“Yes, the alien, also known as Superman is, in reality, the adopted son of Jonathan and Martha Kent, Clark Kent.”

Lex laughed, “Of course he is.”

“You don’t believe me?” Darryl asked in anger.

“Even if this is true you’ve still yet to prove your worth to me. You’re useless. Your power. Your contacts...All of them were with the organization.” He pulled a gun out and pointed it at Darryl, “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t shoot you on the spot for the millions you cost me over the last seven weeks.”

“Intergang.” Darryl stammered.

“What?” Lex asked in confusion.

“That’s the name of the organization. Intergang.” A shot fired and Lex smiled as he watched the body of Mr. Darryl fall to the ground. He glanced at the sewer they were standing over and kicked Darryl’s body into it. “Good help is so hard to find these days.” He muttered as he watched Darryl’s body float down the sewer pipes.

Lois watched her dad from across the room carefully. He’d been acting strange all day. She just couldn’t put her finger on it. Was it the wedding? She knew fathers sometimes got emotional at weddings, but he seemed fine at the ceremony. Who was that man he was talking to earlier? It seemed more than just a tiff between business associates.

The soft strains to her dad’s favorite song came on, and she smiled.

‘Must be time for the ‘father-daughter’ dance’ she thought to herself as she scanned the room for her missing father.

Look at the two of you dancing that way

Lost in the moment and each other’s face

So much in love, you’re alone in this place

Like there’s nobody else in the world

I was enough for her not long ago

I was her number one

She told me so

And she still means the world to me

Just so you know

So be careful when you hold my girl

Time changes everything

Life must go on

And I’m not gonna stand in your way

She didn’t see her dad anywhere. He was just there... Where did he go?

She sighed, looking around. Maybe she could steal Clark away from Perry, Pete, and Jimmy long enough for a dance. It seemed like ever since they’d announced the impending arrival of their latest Kent they both had been getting pulled in opposite directions all evening.

She stood up from her seat at the table and walked toward the buffet where most of the wedding party was huddled around. She felt a tap on her shoulder and turned to see her dad looking at her expectantly, “I think this is your mother’s international signal for ‘dance with your daughter.’”

Lois smiled back at her dad as he held a hand out for her to lead her onto the dance floor. “Thanks for coming. I know it’s not easy to get away, but I do appreciate you being a part of this.”

He smiled, holding her as they swayed to the song. “I wouldn’t miss this for the world.”

But I loved her first, and I held her first

And a place in my heart will always be hers

From the first breath, she breathed

When she first smiled at me

I knew the love of a father runs deep

And I prayed that she’d find you someday

But it’s still hard to give her away

I loved her first

“So, who was that man you were talking to earlier?” Lois

asked, looking at him with an expectant look, “I know he wasn’t a business partner.”

He sighed, “Can’t ever hide anything from you, can I?”

“Trouble with having an investigative reporter for a daughter I suppose.” Lois sighed, before softening her gaze on him, “Who was he, really?”

“A dangerous man. That’s all you need to know.”

“Why were you talking to him.”

“Nothing for you to worry about, princess.” He reassured her.

How could that beautiful woman with you

Be the same freckle-faced kid that I knew

The one that I read all those fairy tales to?

And tucked into bed all those nights?

And I knew the first time I saw you with her

It was only a matter of time

“Why don’t you let me decide what I should or shouldn’t worry about?” She prompted.

“Because I think you have enough to worry about.” He said carefully, glancing around as if he was trying to make sure no one was close enough to hear them.

“I swear you are worse than Clark sometimes. I’m fine. The baby is fine. We’re fine.” She reassured him.

“Well, he has a lot to worry about.” He pointed out, whispering in her ear, “If anyone found out you were carrying Superman’s child ...”

Her whole body stiffened as her eyes widened, looking up at him in shock, “What did you just say?”

“I know.” He said.

“Know what?”

*But I loved her first, and I held her first
And a place in my heart will always be hers
From the first breath, she breathed
When she first smiled at me
I knew the love of a father runs deep
And I prayed that she'd find you someday
But it's still hard to give her away
I loved her first*

“I know Clark is Superman.” He whispered in a hushed tone. She flinched slightly, biting her lower lip as she fought the urge to run, scream, cry. Before she could voice the thousands of questions racing through her mind, he added, “I’m not telling anyone, but I’m not the one you have to worry about.”

“What do you mean?” Lois asked.

“There is an organization out there that was backing Bureau 39. Everyone that was a part of it is gone except one man.”

“The man you were talking to earlier?” Lois asked in a harsh whisper. “Daddy? How did you get involved in this?”

*From the first breath, she breathed
When she first smiled at me
I knew the love of a father runs deep
Someday you might know what I'm going through
When a miracle smiles up at you
I loved her first*

“Let’s just say I got more than I signed up for.” He said, taking a step away from her. “I’m not going to tell anyone. I want to help.”

Lois glanced over at Clark from across the room, hoping to catch his gaze, but his head was turned away from her. Panic slowly began to rise inside her as she processed the information her father had just given her.

He knew.

How did he know?

Could she trust him?

Could Clark?

Did they have a choice?

The room began to spin. She took a shaky breath, trying to focus on her surroundings. She blinked back tears as she felt her legs give out from beneath her. “Lois!” the last thing she heard was her father’s voice before darkness overtook her.

Bill Church took a puff of his cigar as he made his way into the newly renovated office of CostMart. A ‘Grand Opening’ sign hung outside the doors, and he smiled. Things had come so far in such a short amount of time. Now with Lex Luthor out of the way his organization could reestablish the hold it had had on the city once before. Soon Intergang would control all the crime in the world, and no one would be able to stop him.

“Martin, what’s the status of Metallo? Will he be ready for testing soon?”

“Darryl was diverting from the plan for Metallo, so there will be some modifications and reprogramming required. I’ve already put a call into Dr. Lane to reprogram Metallo.” Martin Snell explained.

“Excellent!” Bill Church cheered happily. “Soon Intergang will have control of Metropolis and then the world...and there’s nothing anyone will be able to do to stop us.”

“Lois?” Clark’s voice echoed around her as she slowly came to. She looked around and noticed the unfamiliar walls. He noticed her silent question. “We’re still at the Metro Gate.” He explained. “You passed out on the dance floor, and the manager was nice enough to let you use a bed in one of the free rooms to lie down on.”

“Oh, good.” She sighed, leaning up to sit up. “I hadn’t thrown the bouquet yet. I promised Lucy I’d throw it to her.”

He smiled back at her, lying down next to her, “I think you’ve had enough excitement for tonight.”

“Party pooper. I’m fine. I just got a little overwhelmed.” She said slowly as her conversation with her dad came back to her.

“From dancing?” He looked at her confused, “Since when?”

“No, from something my dad said.” He sat up, looking at her in concern, the silent question in his eyes. “I’m going to tell you something, and you’re not allowed to panic because I’m already doing the panicking and we can’t both panic because then there’ll be no one to think and then...”

He stopped her mid-babble, pressing his lips against hers to silence her ramblings. “You’re babbling.”

“I do not babble. I was merely thinking out loud.” She corrected, offering him a smile. “No panicking.”

He held up three fingers to do his ‘boy scout’ promise, “No panicking.” He repeated.

“He knows.” She said slowly. “I don’t know how or when or why. I guess I passed out before I could ask any of the important questions. I don’t know. This is all my fault...”

His hand wrapped around hers, offering her a gentle squeeze. “Okay, slow down. Who knows what?” She let out a long sigh, sinking her head back against the mattress as she stared up at the ceiling. Clark sank down next to her, “Lois?”

“My dad said he knows your Superman.” She whispered. His arms tightened around her, and she continued, “I don’t know how or why...I don’t get it. We were so careful and...” She glanced back at him. “Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“I was ordered not to panic.” He said with a wry grin, covering his face with his right hand.

“What are we doing to do?” She asked.

“What exactly did he say?” He breathed heavily.

“He said ‘I know Clark is Superman’”

Clark hung his head, “No misunderstanding there.”

Lois nodded, “Then he mentioned something about getting more than he signed up for when I asked him about the man he was arguing with earlier. I don’t know what he got himself into, but I think he’s in trouble.”

“Do you think we can trust him?” He asked, “to keep the secret?”

“I think so. I hope so. I mean he’d never willingly do anything that would hurt me or Lucy. I don’t think.” Lois sighed, leaning against his chest, “What are we going to do?”

“I guess we need to talk to him and find out.” He said slowly, resting his hand against the small of her back. “How are you feeling?”

“Better. I think.” She said softly, sitting up. “I’m sorry,” She

whispered.

“For what?” He asked, sitting up.

“If I hadn’t pushed you, we wouldn’t be in this mess.” She began to cry.

“Hey, no one pushed anyone into anything.” He reassured her. “We made the decision for me to take on Superman. It wasn’t anyone’s decision but *ours*. You were right, there is a lot of good Superman can do for the world. I don’t regret it for a minute.”

“Are you sure?” She asked, looked at him skeptically.

“Positive.” He reassured her. “We’ll get through this the same way we got through everything else...together. You said yourself your dad might be in trouble. Let’s find out what’s going on and take it from there.”

“Okay,” She sighed, leaning in to kiss him. “I love you, Clark Kent.”

“I love you, Lois Lane.” He whispered, cupping her cheek, “babbling moments and all.”

“I do *not* babble.”

“Yes, you do.” He whispered leaning in to kiss her once more.

Five Months Later...

“You’re doing great, Lois,” the doctor called out, looking up from the edge of the exam table. “Let’s take a look.”

Lois fell back against her husband, allowing him to support her as he gently massaged her lower back. Back contractions. Painful, excruciating back contractions. If it weren’t for Clark giving her the added heat vision to her back she would have been in tears hours ago.

Three and a half weeks of on and off contractions until she’d finally been far enough to get pushed into active labor. From the time they broke her water to the time she’d received the epidural she was in hell. Her back felt like it was on fire. She felt like her insides were ripping her in half. Then finally the pain subsided and was replaced with an unbearable pressure all along her back with every contraction.

“I swear to God if you tell me I’m doing great one more time without being any further along...” Lois muttered irritably.

The doctor gave her a knowing smile and Clark brushed his lips against her temple, kneading at her lower back. She looked back at him, seeing the emotion on his face. “It’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay.”

“I love you so much, Lois,” he murmured in her ear.

“Okay, Lois, it looks like you’re just about ready to push,” the doctor said, pointing to the stirrups.

“Oh, thank God!” Lois sighed, holding her husband’s hand as she hooked her heels into the stirrups.

“How’s he doing?” Bill Church asked, looking at the equipment that was hooked up to a wall of purple and blue. The machinery showed a glowing stone in a tall cylinder. A man hooked up to wires and machinery lay on the slab. A doctor sat at his bedside, working inside the machinery in his chest.

“We’re just about there.” Rollie Vale said with a grin. “Dr. Lane did a lot of the work for us in the beginning. Too bad he had to recuse himself from this case. He would have loved to see Metallo come to life.”

“Yes, too bad,” Bill said with a slow smile. “Power him up.”

“It’s a boy!” the doctor cheered happily.

The soft cries of their son echoed in his ears as Clark held his wife against him, kissing her happily.

“Hi,” Lois looked up at their son that was wrapped in striped blankets as the doctor cleared his lungs, holding him up for them to see. He stared back at them with the most peculiar expression.

The tears fell down both of their cheeks. Clark whispered a soft, “I love you,” to Lois.

The nurses began looking their son over, and Lois turned back to him panicked, “Stay with him.” She leaned back on the hospital bed, completely spent from delivering their son.

He nodded, following the nurses to the small table where his son was patted down with several striped blankets by six different hands, reaching in. His son’s soft cries were like music to his ears. Clark took his hand, allowing it to curl around his finger. “It’s okay,” He reassured him. His pink wrinkled face turned to him. His cries stopped.

“He recognizes your voice.” One of the nurses told him.

“Hey, little guy,” He whispered hoarsely, trying to suppress the emotion that had been building up for the past nine months. He was here. He was finally here. He and Lois had read all the books. They had gone to all the classes—but nothing had prepared him for looking into his son’s eyes for the first time.

He winced as he watched the nurse apply a solution to his son’s eyes, matting them closed. A soft cry could be heard from his little lungs, and he laid a hand on his chest, “It’s okay,” He reassured him. He could feel the tears in his eyes as his son’s small hand wrapped around his finger tightly.

“Hey there little one, are you ready to see your daddy?” the nurse nodded to Clark, handing him to Clark.

He reached his hands out, allowing one hand to support his head and the other his back as he cradled him in the tiny diaper they had him in. The nurse handed him a small blanket, but he shook his head, recalling Lois’ fear of swaddling and blankets after what happened to Jamie. Even though they weren’t the cause of his death the idea that so many babies could die from being swaddled improperly or getting strangled on a blanket was enough to make Lois decide against the practice of swaddling and take extra measures to keep their son safe.

‘What’s preventable we will prevent.’

“Just support his head like this,” the nurse instructed, raising his elbow slightly which allowed his son to nestle himself against his chest.

“Clark?” Lois called out to him. He turned to see his wife who was watching the two of them with a tearful smile.

“Okay, little guy, let’s get you all bundled up,” the nurse cooed.

“No, don’t swaddle him,” Lois pleaded. “Please just let me see him.”

The nurse hesitated for a moment and then nodded, motioning for him to take him to Lois.

He took a seat on the edge of the hospital bed with her. “He’s incredible,” his voice cracked looking back at her as she reached out for their young son. As carefully as he could, he laid him across her bare chest. He seemed immediately at ease—almost knowing that this was his mother and he was safe.

“I’ve never seen anything so perfect in all my life,” He managed, wrapping an arm around her shoulder as he leaned in to

kiss her.

“I love you,” She whispered hoarsely as her voice cracked, giving away the emotion she was feeling as her hands ran up and down the pink skin of their son’s back. “Oh, Clark, he’s so beautiful.”

His little eyes blinked through the solution, trying to see the lights and sounds around him. He let out a soft whine then nestled himself back against Lois’ chest. “Hey, there bud, you’ve got your whole life to check the world out and explore,” Clark reassured, placing a tender hand on his back, covering Lois’ hand with his.

The nurse approached with a bracelet for Lois, “You all will have matching hospital bracelets to make sure everyone matches. Each nurse that comes in should check before performing any tests on either of you.”

Lois nodded her understanding and a small whimper came out of the small baby lying across her chest. “It’s okay,” she whispered, cradling him in her arms and positioning him against her breast to begin nursing.

He watched in amazement how at ease Lois seemed with something that was so foreign to him. There was a slight whimper as the small hand fisted against her chest in protest. “I know. I know. I ‘m sorry, but you’re just gonna have to be patient. It’ll come out eventually.” He gave another whimper then stopped, focusing on his task of trying to get nutrients from his mother rather than cry.

“Do you have a name picked out?”

Clark looked toward the nurse that was preparing their son’s chart, “Jon.” He smiled at the image of his wife and son, unable to wipe the grin from his face. “Jonathan Samuel Kent.”

“Welcome to the world, Jon.” The nurse smiled, printing the name on a certificate as she reached out to ink his foot to get his footprints.

The dark hallways echoed with the sound of mice, and Gretchen Kelly grimaced, looking around hesitantly, “Are you sure you should be doing this, Lex? You’re still a wanted man.”

“I’m collecting on a debt,” Lex said, straightening his tie. “To the world, Lex Luthor is a criminal, but to Mr. Church, I’m a business associate. It’s taken me months to track him down, and I’m not going to let a little inconvenience like being on the run get in the way of progress.”

“*Inconvenience???*” Gretchen echoed in half-hysteria. “Lex, you were *bleeding* to death when I found you! There is still a *manhunt* going on! If they find you, they could...”

“I’m not giving up Metropolis without a fight,” Lex growled angrily. His eyes darkened, and she took a step back. “Today is the day, darling,” He reassured her, “I will have my revenge.”

Gretchen Kelly watched in silence as Lex’s retreating figure disappeared and let out a low sigh. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Five Months Ago...

“I love you,” Clark whispered against his wife’s lips, holding her to him as he brushed his lips against hers.

“I love you too,” She whispered, running her palms up the side of his face. She let out a soft moan as his lips found the sensitive flesh behind her ear. “Oh, Clark, five years and I can finally...call you ‘husband.’” She murmured breathlessly, “God,that feels good to say.”

He chuckled against her, “‘Wife’ sounds pretty great too.” He murmured against her neck. “I can’t believe it’s taken us this long to get here.”

“We’re gonna be okay, right?” Lois asked uneasily.

He looked up at her, moving so he was lying on his side next to her. He moved his hand to cup her cheek and whispered, “Always. Nothing in this world could ever tear us apart.”

“Promise?” She leaned in to kiss him.

“Promise.” He repeated, recapturing her lips with his own.

Having squashed her fears, he allowed himself to be pulled into her arms once more, settling himself between her legs as he continued kissing her. He wanted nothing more than to kiss every fear and doubt away but he knew he couldn’t. Knowing her father had been working with people that not only knew his secret but could possibly expose his family and put them in danger scared him.

He promised he wouldn’t freak out.

He promised he wouldn’t over-react.

Holding his wife in his arms, he continued to push his fears to the back of his mind as his hands roamed dangerously high up her legs. He could still hear the music from the reception outside as his hands moved up her legs. She moved her leg against his, allowing the silk and tulle to fall to the side as his hand moved daringly up her upper thigh. He brushed against the satin garter on her leg. He looked at her curiously. “What is that?”

She giggled against him, “It’s the garter.” He poked his head down to look at it, and she moved the tulle and silk of her skirt to cover it. “No peeking.”

“Peeking? Seriously? I don’t think there’s anything there I haven’t seen before.” He grinned at her mischievously, stilling his hands as he pressed himself against her.

“You’re supposed to throw the garter later.” She giggled.

“Maybe I should practice my throw.” He wiggled his eyebrows at her, leaning in to kiss her.

She giggled against him as he slipped his hand back up her thigh. He felt the satin and beading against his hand and moved further up her leg where he felt another satin garter. “Clark!” She grabbed his wrist, stopping his hand from moving any further up her thigh.

“Why are you wearing two of those?” He asked with an impish grin.

“One to throw and one for...*you*.” She murmured against his lips with a sultry smile.

“Really?” He grinned against her lips, “I think we need to go home.” He whispered, running his hands up and down her long legs from beneath her dress, “Get you out of this incredibly complicated dress...” He wiggled his eyebrows at her, and let me kiss every inch of you until I make your toes curl.”

He smiled to himself when he heard her heart rate pick up. He knew it wouldn’t take a lot of convincing on her part. “Um, I don’t suppose we have to stay for the whole reception...” she began hesitantly.

“Nope.” He agreed, running his hands down the front of her bodice, grinning to himself when he saw the hint of white lace peeking through where her gown had slipped down during their embrace. Had she been wearing anything else but her wedding gown at the moment, he would have already ripped it off of her. He didn’t want to leave her arms. He didn’t want to do anything

that required him to think about every what-if scenario that had been nagging the back of his mind after Lois had told him about her father.

“We can talk to my dad tomorrow...” she whispered breathlessly as his lips pressed against the satin covering her chest. “...or when we get back from...” His lips moved to her throat, nibbling at the sensitive flesh. “Oh, Clark,”

A hard knock at the door followed by the knob turning jolted him back to the present. *‘The door.’* He’d forgotten to lock the door. He jumped up, rolling off of Lois and turning toward the door just as it opened.

“Hey, Lois, mom wanted me to check on...” Lucy stopped mid-sentence when she saw Lois, readjusting her gown from where he’d pulled it down. Her hair was loosely hanging from the bun it had been pinned in earlier. “Yeah, I’m going to come back in like ten minutes and pretend I was never here,” Lucy mumbled hurriedly, closing the door behind her.

Lois burst into a fit of giggles, hitting him against the chest, “Oh, my God, you didn’t lock the door?”

“I wasn’t really planning on needing to.” He chuckled back at her.

She stood up, examining herself in the mirror. “Mom’s going to kill me, but these pins keep sticking me...” Lois pulled the pins out of her hair, and he smiled, watching as her long locks fell over her shoulders.

He followed her over to the mirror, wrapping his arms around her from behind. “I don’t think we’re going to be able to escape with your sister right outside the door.”

“You’re probably right,” She looked back at him with an apologetic smile, “I’ll figure out what mom wants and try and get us out of here so we can start making a move.”

She rotated her hips against him, and he smiled, running his hands over her shoulders. “Sounds like a plan. I’ll...” He stopped for a minute. He couldn’t deny how tempting it was to not have that confrontation. Not have that conversation he knew was going to change their lives forever...But he needed to know...they needed to know. “I’ll find your dad and talk to him. Find out what we’re dealing with.”

Relief washed over her face, and he smiled back at her, “It’s going to be okay.”

“I hope so.” She whispered, leaning in to kiss him once more.

Sam Lane watched from the crowd as Lucy and Lois came down the steps leading toward the dining room where many of the guests were enjoying dinner, drinks, and dessert. Ellen had ordered everything, but the cake he served and held plates for Lois and Clark for when she was feeling up to joining everyone.

‘Never should have said anything.’ He thought to himself.

He’d felt his world come to a stop when his daughter had passed out in his arms—fearing the worst after everything she’d been through.

<<“Project K?”>>

<<“Darryl. You can call me Mr. Darryl.”>>

<<“You’ve got quite a grip there, Jamie.”>>

“He’s got his daddy’s eyes,”>>

<<“Blood sample from a subject we’re testing. I want you to run some tests and let us know if you come across anything... abnormal.”>>

<<“Get OUT!!”>>

<<“Good-bye, Jamie,”>>

A tap on the shoulder pulled Sam to the present. He turned to see his son-in-law standing behind him with a stern gaze. “We need to talk.”

Sam nodded, following the young man through the crowd of people toward the kitchen where the food was being prepped. He opened a wooden door and found himself in the hallway of the hotel and followed Clark down the narrow hallway and into one of the empty office spaces.

Sam looked behind him to make sure no one had followed them and closed the door behind him. He turned to see Clark readjusting his glasses, “I, uh, guess, Lois told you?”

“Yeah,” Clark fidgeted with his glasses once more before diving in, “So, I guess my first question is how long have you known?”

Clark nervously fidgeted with his glasses before turning to Sam Lane, “So I guess my first question is how long have you known?”

“Does it matter?” Sam asked, clearing his throat.

“Yeah, it does.” Clark continued, pacing in the hallway.

“I’d rather not say,” Sam said gruffly.

“I’d rather not have my wife—your daughter—stressing about this.” Clark countered irritably, crossing his arms over his chest.

That seemed to register. The cool demeanor that had once been on Sam Lane’s face disappeared. He looked down then met Clark’s eyes. “I never meant for that to happen,” Sam argued with a pained expression.

“Well, it did.” Clark shot back between gritted teeth. “I need to know everything you know.”

“Where do you want me to start?” Sam asked with a defeated expression.

“From the beginning,” Clark said with a raised eyebrow.

“That would be a good start.”

Sam nodded, “It wasn’t something I signed up for.”

“What wasn’t?” Clark pressed cautiously. He watched as Sam paced around the room nervously. He’d only met the man a handful of times since his return. Each time he’d presented himself as articulate, well-spoken, and professional. Seeing him like this was different and showed a new side to him he doubted even Lois had seen before.

“Four years ago, I got a call. Found out I’d been offered a job in the Applied Science Division of a Special Organization.” Sam’s voice pitched at the mention of ‘Special Organization.’

“What kind of organization?” Clark asked, uncertain if he wanted the answer. Could it have been Bureau 39? Could Lois’ father really have been working with Bureau 39? With Trask? The man he’d grown to hate over the span of five years? The man that had taken everything from him?

“Never got a name,” Sam said softly, stopping mid-pace as he turned toward the window, staring outside at the reception that was still in full swing.

“How long did you work for them?” Clark asked, taking a cautious step toward his father-in-law.

“I don’t know that there’s a way to ever really stop.” Sam began hesitantly. Clark felt his eyes widen at that remark but allowed Sam to continue. “I was working on groundbreaking

research. Uniforms for soldiers that would protect against chemical warfare. Developing plant life that would grow without water in parts of the world that didn't have the water or nourishment needed for vegetables to grow."

"You were...making a difference." Clark finished for him, realizing Sam's reasons for being involved with this organization, to begin with.

"Yes," Sam said softly, "until the day I wasn't."

"When was that?" He asked cautiously.

"I was given an abnormal blood sample to analyze. I was told it was from a ... *donor*." Sam looked down as he spoke. "The sample had the same abnormalities in it that kept Jamie in the hospital an extra week for observation."

Clark felt a lump form in his throat at the mention of his son's name but didn't say anything. The mere mention of his son's name sent a wave of grief through him. Even the idea that this organization his father-in-law spoke of could be capable of hurting a child...*his child*...shook him to the core. He wasn't sure how he was supposed to react. Remaining silent seemed the best as he eyed Sam uneasily.

Sam continued, "I thought they'd gone after him. Done something to him."

"Had they?" Clark found his voice.

"No, but at the time I didn't know that. I went over my supervisor's head. In exchange for the promise of my family's safety, I was to become the silent partner in something they called '*Project K*.'"

"What is that?" Clark asked.

"I don't know. All I know is I received tests to perform once a month, and I did them without question. I was given assignments...some of them small...some of them ethically and morally degrading...but I did them." Sam looked down at his feet once more. "Not my proudest moment."

"Whose blood was it?" Clark asked.

"As I said before, I thought it was Jamie's," Sam said shakily. "Now, I realize...it wasn't Jamie's ...it was yours...and you and Lois are in a lot of danger."

Lois looked around the room, trying to spy where Clark and her father had disappeared to. She could feel her stomach doing somersaults as she waited in anticipation. Clark had insisted she stay with everyone to prevent another fainting episode but sitting here waiting was torture. She wanted to know what was happening. She wanted to know what her father knew. She wanted to know who he had been trying to warn her about.

"How are you feeling?"

Lois turned to see her sister taking a seat next to her. She gave her her best forced smile, "Better." Lucy didn't look convinced. Lois reached out for her hand, "I'm *fine* really." She motioned toward the dance floor. "Go have fun."

"I'm not leaving till Clark gets back," Lucy said adamantly. Then lowered her voice, looking around, "By the way, next time try locking the door if you're going to fool around. I thought slutty wedding sex was for the wedding party and guests, not the *bride and groom*."

Lois blushed, letting out a light chuckle, "That was..." She couldn't suppress her smile, and Lucy rolled her eyes at her. "It just kinda happened." Lois finished.

"I'll bet it did." Lucy teased, wiggling her eyebrows at her.

Lois rolled her eyes, "You've got the wrong idea. All we were doing was..."

"Getting an early start on the Honeymoon?" Lucy guessed with a sly grin. "You do remember passing out on the dance floor earlier, right?"

"Luce, I'm fine," Lois argued.

"You were unconscious for at least ten minutes. You're not fine." Lucy looked around the room, "Where is Clark anyway?"

"He, uh, wanted to talk to daddy about something," Lois said, looking around the room once more.

"About what?" Lucy asked curiously, following her gaze to the kitchen doorway where Clark and her father had disappeared through earlier.

"Nothing, really," Lois reassured her sister. She needed to find Clark. She wasn't sure how much longer she'd be able to fend her mom off on the schedule or when she'd last eaten. She really didn't want to have dinner without Clark. She didn't want to do anything right now, to be honest. She wanted answers.

"If it's *nothing* why do you keep looking around the room for him?" Lucy pressed.

"I, uh," Lois met her sister's gaze. It was hard not telling her everything, but right now she didn't know what there was to tell. "I think I'm going to find a restroom." She got up and headed toward the hotel.

"Lois..." Lucy called after her.

"I'm fine," Lois called over her shoulder.

Gretchen Kelly moved down the dark passageway, looking for her missing patient. When she'd gone to sleep he'd been resting. Now, it seemed he'd woken up. She hoped he hadn't done anything to aggravate the wounds that were still healing. Over the course of the past month he'd found new ways to reopen the gunshot wounds. She'd had to perform surgery in the dark and dreary tunnels in order to remove the bullet he'd been shot with. Had she not found him when she did he could have easily bled to death.

"Lex?"

He turned to face her and she relaxed seeing him standing in a worn t-shirt and jeans in front of the make-shift office he'd created.

"What are you doing?" She asked, stepping toward him hesitantly. Experience told her not to touch him without permission. He was still prone to night terrors after the attack.

"Research." He said flatly, staring at the billboard in front of him with different dates written on it and names she didn't understand.

"What's '*Intergang*'?" she asked hesitantly.

"That's what I'm going to find out." He said with a confident smile.

"This organization." Clark began cautiously, "How much do they know?"

"I'm not sure." Sam sighed, "I destroyed the file they had. I destroyed everything they had. From what I could tell Trask and Darryl were the only ones assigned to this '*Project K*' but I'm not sure either of them were smart enough to actually make a copy of this file."

“How did you find it?” Clark asked.

“Darryl was trying to get me to do testing on a...a meteorite. It was...eerie. When I was doing my research I found several things I shouldn't have.” Sam said a little too quickly. “You have to believe me, I would never do anything to hurt my family.”

Clark looked at Sam, trying to make his mind up about the man. He knew Lois' relationship with Sam had been strained over the years. He also knew he seemed to be making an effort to reconnect with his daughters. If he had been working with the people that had been behind his kidnapping—and he wasn't a part of the organization anymore—it could help him and Lois bring them down.

He listened to his heartbeat.

Watched his breathing

Met his father-in-law's gaze.

“I believe you,” He said softly, “but you're going to have to do a lot more to convince Lois.”

“I know.” Sam nodded. “I've made a lot of mistakes.”

“I'll say,” Clark couldn't hold back the bitter tone in his voice. There was no love-loss between him and Sam Lane as far as he was concerned. He'd put Lois and Lucy through a lot over the years and by, extension, their mother. He'd gotten to know Ellen Lane pretty well over the course of his and Lois' relationship. He'd only met Sam recently after Ellen had forced him to participate in his daughter's wedding.

He still wasn't sure if he could trust Sam.

He had been working with an organization that had access to his blood—which meant they'd had access to him. Bureau 39. He'd been working for an organization connected to Bureau 39. How could Sam expect him and Lois to trust him after everything they'd been put through?

“Convince me about what?”

They both turned to see Lois standing in the doorway with her arms crossed over her chest. Clark crossed the room to meet her, “I thought you were supposed to be taking it easy.”

“Hard to do when you keep imagining every worst case scenario.” Lois answered softly before turning to her dad, “What's going on?”

Lois listened calmly, trying to wrap her head around what her father was telling her. She met his gaze uncertainly. She could tell from Clark's expression he believed him—whether they could trust him—that was an entirely different question. He'd been working with people that had kidnapped, tortured, and brutalized her husband for five years. He claimed he didn't know who this organization was. He claimed he didn't have any information on who was behind it.

She just didn't know if she believed that.

Years of experience had taught her that nothing was ever that simple with her father.

“How am I supposed to trust a word you say?”

Her father had the decency to look ashamed as he shrugged his shoulders, “Because it's the truth.”

“If what you're saying is true, you were working *with* these people. Creating weapons and experimenting on innocent people...” Lois fumed angrily. “Do you have *any idea* what they put Clark through? What they put *me* through? And you were... working *with* them this entire time! What is wrong with you??”

“Lois...” Clark placed his hands on her shoulders, running them down her vertebrae in an effort to calm the rage that was festering inside her.

“I didn't know!” her father argued once more. “I should have known. You're right. I should have, but I didn't. You don't know these people. You don't know what they're capable of. You don't understand how they operate. No one knows who runs it. No one knows anything. You're given a job and you do it or you're replaced...and there is no retirement package, if you know what I mean.”

Lois watched her father turn away, pain in his eyes. A small seed of doubt began to morph in her mind, poking holes in her theory of how she couldn't trust him. He had come to her and told her he knew about Clark. He didn't have to do that. He had warned her. That had to prove where his loyalties stood, right?

She glanced back at Clark, sharing a look. He believed him. The question was, did she?

“Bill, good to see you,” Perry shook his old friend's hand when he spotted him walking through the crowded dining area of the reception.

“Perry, always a pleasure.” Bill Church shook the editor's hand.

“What are you doing here? I thought you were still traveling with Barbara.” Perry commented, confused to see Bill Church in Metropolis.

“We, uh,” Bill looked away, motioning for Perry to follow him away from the crowd. Once they had moved to the front of the gazebo where the wait staff was hurriedly cleaning up from the ceremony, Bill let his defenses down.

“Something wrong?” Perry asked hesitantly.

“I, uh, Barbara left me last month, Perry.” Bill began hesitantly.

“I'm so sorry.” Perry placed a hand on his friend's shoulder.

“We, uh, just couldn't see eye-to-eye on things and it got to a point where neither of us were happy.” Bill explained with a sad expression.

“I'm sorry, Bill.” Perry squeezed his shoulder, “Uh, what are you doing here?”

“I rented a room for the night I've got a meeting with some contractors about the new store we're building on Broad and 5th.” Bill explained, a smile spread across his face at the mention of his store.

“Right,” Perry nodded, recalling the Cost Mart stores Bill owned. “Well, I better get back. It was good seeing you.”

“Beautiful wedding it looks like.” Bill commented. “Friends of yours?”

“Yes,” Perry beamed, “some of my top reporters actually.”

“Finding love is a precious gift. It should be cherished. You never know when it'll be gone.” Bill smiled warmly at Perry.

There was something about his tone...

Perry heard the squeal of laughter coming from the dance hall where the reception was being held. He turned to see Lucy Lane jumping up and down with the bouquet and a very nervous Jimmy standing behind her.

“Oh, brother...” Perry sighed, heading in to give the young man a few words of advice before he started looking for the nearest exit.

Lucy Lane watched her sister and brother-in-law on the dance floor. She wasn't sure what had transpired earlier, but something was going on. Lois had never been close with their father. After the falling out they had over her college major they'd cut off contact with one another until their mom had forced his hand a few years later. Ellen Lane was not one to sit on the sidelines when it came to the happiness of her daughters.

She'd watched poor Clark endure every grueling test when he and Lois had first started going out. She'd insisted on them both attending Sunday dinners with her and he showed up to every one of them. She'd insisted he show up to every family gathering and be forced to endure the fifty questions from the 'Joanne' side of the family. She'd put him through the ringer, determined not to let Lois repeat what she called 'her mistakes' in life. After about six months she'd finally 'approved' of him and stopped putting him through the third-degree.

Not once in all that time had there been a mention of Lois needing to introduce him to their father or of Lois even talking to Sam Lane. Now, here they were, six years later, and Lois seemed to be talking to him every few minutes. The look on her sister's face told her it wasn't a pleasant conversation she'd walked in on when she found the three of them in one of the empty offices at the hotel.

"Uh, mom wants to know if you're able to eat." Lucy recalled saying before the trio had exited the room, returning to the party. No one said a thing. Instead, their father had excused himself and pulled Ellen Lane onto the dance floor—a move she herself had been shocked to see. Lucy had asked the waiter to have the kitchen bring out the bride and groom's dinner and allowed herself to be pulled out on the dance floor with Jimmy.

A few songs later the cake was being wheeled out. She'd watched with amusement as the couple had cut the cake. Of course, neither one could go without teasing one another. Lois had taken a pinch of frosting and put it on Clark's nose. A gesture he'd returned by kissing her and allowing the frosting to get on her cheek.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary between them. They were still the loving couple they'd always been. There was just something ... different. She couldn't put her finger on it.

"I've been told to get you on the front line."

Lucy turned to see Cat Grant standing behind her, pushing her toward the crowd of women that were waiting impatiently for Lois to toss the bouquet. She caught her sister's impish grin as she gave a teasing toss, acting like she'd thrown it but still holding the bouquet. It took most of the women a few minutes to realize there was no bouquet yet. When Lois finally did toss the bouquet, there were only a few undeterred women fighting for it. Lucy grinned as she reached up for the white and red roses, allowing them to land perfectly in her hand.

Lois gave her a wink and laughed when there was an uproar of disappointed women in the crowd. Lucy let out a squeal of laughter, excited about catching the bouquet. She turned behind her to see her nervous boyfriend looking at her as if she'd grown a third eye.

"Jimmy!" She leaned over to kiss him. "Are you having fun?"

"Yeah," He gave her a good natured smile. "A...a...a blast."

"I think they're going to do the garter toss next." She

whispered to him with a wink, pushing him toward the crowd that had begun to form around her sister and Clark.

Lucy moved to the other side of the room so she could get a better view of the event. Lois was sitting in one of the dining chairs in the middle of the room with her legs crossed. Clark was kneeling in front of her. His hands moved under Lois' dress.

Someone from the crowd shouted out, "Come on, Kent, let's see some leg!"

Lucy rolled her eyes at the comment. She saw a scowl cross Clark's face for a split-second before he replaced it with an impish grin. He leaned in to kiss Lois, pulling out a white and blue garter from beneath the skirt of Lois' gown.

There were some other shouts from the crowd, "Oh, come on!"

"Break it up! Save some for the honeymoon!"

Lucy laughed at that last remark, recalling her conversation with Lois earlier and what she's walked in on in the hotel room. Lois had been 'resting' in. It wasn't something new for her. She'd found herself walking in rooms at the worst possible time. From the hospital after Lois had been attacked when she'd caught Lois kissing 'her friend' to the time she caught the two of them in Lois' bedroom. It had been a lesson in life to *always* knock on every door before entering for fear she'd get another unwanted visual of her sister's love-life.

A scuffle from the crowd caught her attention and she giggled, seeing Jimmy in the middle of the crowd holding the satin garter Clark had just tossed. Three other guys lunged toward him and Jimmy began running toward the dining hall.

She turned back toward Lois and Clark who were now standing in the corner of the dance floor laughing at Jimmy as he made his way toward her with two guys behind him. One of them she recognized as 'Ralph' and the other she wasn't familiar with.

"Here you go!" Jimmy tossed the garter toward her and she caught it just as Jimmy ducked behind her yelling, "Safe!"

Lucy leaned in to kiss Jimmy on the cheek.

Ralph and the other guy that had been chasing him stopped. "Aw, man,"

Lucy laughed and Jimmy looked at her with a scowl. "How come you didn't mention I was going to get chased?"

"I thought it'd be funnier to see what would happen. How'd you know I was 'safe'?" She asked, bumping his hip lightly.

"I figured they wouldn't dare try to take anything from the sister of the bride." Jimmy grinned, leaning in to kiss her.

"Yeah, I might have to arrest 'em." Lucy grinned back at him.

"You having a good time?" He asked, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

Lucy smiled as the band started to pick up again. She spotted her sister on the dance floor with Clark and smiled. It was so good to see her so happy again. Knowing how much she'd been through to get to this point and seeing the smiles on her sister and brother-in-law's faces made her heart soar. She hadn't seen Lois smile that big since Jamie.

"Yeah, I am." Lucy sighed happily.

"So, you caught the bouquet and..." Jimmy cleared his throat nervously. "I caught the garter." He looked away then turned his head back, peeking back at her, "So..."

"So, what?" Lucy asked.

"We've only been dating *six* months." Jimmy pointed out.

"I know." Lucy laughed. "Jimmy, relax. I'm not fishing for a proposal. That's not even what catching the garter means."

"It's not?" Jimmy asked, confused.

"No," Lucy shook her head, "It's supposed to be for good luck."

"Good luck." Jimmy said with a smile. "I like that."

"Good." Lucy looped her arm through his, guiding him toward the dance floor. "Why don't you take some of that good luck and dance with me?"

"How are you doing?" Clark asked, wrapping his arms around Lois as they swayed to the music.

"Good." Lois murmured, resting her head against his chest. "How are you?"

For the moment he felt relieved after their conversation with Sam. He wasn't entirely sure how Lois felt about the situation but he felt like her father was being genuine with them. He had come to Lois and told her what he knew. That in itself had proven to him that his motives were pure. They had agreed to begin looking into the organization when they returned.

He and Lois had gone back and forth on the issue and, despite the possibility of this organization possibly knowing his secret, they both felt there wasn't anything they could do now that would change in ten days when they returned. Robbing his pregnant wife of a well-deserved vacation and honeymoon wasn't something he looked forward to either.

He looked down at her small frame pressed against him as they swayed together. Her hand rested on his chest as he ran his hands up her back, feeling her sigh against him. Right now he wanted nothing more than to take her home and ravage her. Ever since he'd felt the lace garter under her dress his imagination continued to tease him with images of his wife in every lace garment he could imagine.

"I'm fine." He whispered, leaning in to whisper in her ear, "Very motivated for his party to die down so I can take you home and finish what we started earlier." He wiggled his eyebrows at her.

Lois laughed, "I was not referring to *that*, Mr. Kent." She lowered her voice a few octaves, "We could always rent a room for the night if you're *that* impatient."

He blanched at that thought. It was tempting but he knew it would be hard to motivate themselves to leave if they didn't fly to Italy tonight like they'd planned. "One night might turn into ten. Then we'd miss the entire trip we planned. Have to cancel hotels, tours, dinners..." He pointed out, running his palms up her back, resting on the edge of the top button to her dress. "I really don't like this dress. Looks like it is *way* too complicated to take off."

Lois laughed, "Really? I love it. Plus, it hides the pregnancy well." She looped her arms around his neck as she whispered, "I can't believe how fast I'm showing this time around. I didn't get all these curves till at least the end of the second trimester with Jamie."

"I love your curves." Clark whispered, running his hand down her side, tracing the outline of her hip to prove his point.

"You're biased." She whispered back.

"For the rest of my life." He promised, leaning in to kiss her.

Bill Church sat in the dark office, staring at the familiar

surroundings. Everything had been set. His men on the ground had been following Darryl for weeks before he disappeared without a trace. The last place he'd been seen was with Dr. Lane. Unfortunately, his investigation into the situation had proven fruitless.

"Mr. Church!" Martin Snell jumped, looking around the empty office to find Bill Church sitting at his desk. "What are you doing here?"

"We've lost contact with Darryl," Bill said grimly, pulling out a box of white pills as he spoke.

"Do you see this pill, Martin?" Martin Snell nodded and Bill Church continued. "High blood pressure. My doctor says, get it under control. Less stress in your life. Delegate." He narrowed his eyes at Snell, "I'm delegating, Martin, but my blood pressure isn't going down."

"I'll see what I can find out." Snell promised.

"You do that." Bill smiled with a sinister stare, "I don't want to have him trying to jump ship until I've had a chance to properly educate him on Intergang's retirement package."

"I'll get right on it, Mr. Church." Snell nodded.

"You do that, Martin." Bill stood up, walking toward the door, "Otherwise, the next person to *retire* will be you."

Lois sighed happily, taking a seat on the couch as she massaged her feet. She may have overdone it with the dancing tonight but she'd had a lot of fun.

"Okay, patrol has been done." Clark landed in the living room of their apartment five minutes after he'd just vacated the spot. He made his way toward the bedroom and she heard him moving at super-speed, "All packed for the Honeymoon."

"Did you remember to get extra film?" Lois asked, peeking over her shoulder at him.

"Right here." He patted the duffle bag in his hand. In his other hand were the two large suitcases. He walked toward her with a smile, "Now, you just have to get changed and then we'll be ready to go."

"No, I'll change when we get there." She responded, standing up, smoothing the sides of her dress.

"You sure?" He asked, setting the suitcases down. "You might get...uncomfortable." His eyes did a little dance as they moved up and down her body.

She grinned to herself. She knew it was driving Clark crazy not being able to pick up where they'd left off earlier. From the look on his face it didn't look like flying to Italy was at the top of his priorities either. "No cancelling reservations...remember?"

She ran a hand down the front of his spandex suit, leaning in to kiss him and he groaned against her lips, "You're doing that on purpose."

Her breath caught in her throat when she felt his lips move down the front of her throat. "Oh, Clark," she murmured, slipping her arms around his neck.

"Eight hours." He murmured against her throat as his teeth grazed against the sensitive flesh. "No more lists or caterers..."

"Or family interrupting every two seconds." Lois reminded him. Every time they'd come close to leaving someone else showed up to talk to them. Relatives from both sides of their families seemed intent on prolonging the reception and delaying the start of their honeymoon.

She was certain had she picked out a dress that was easier to take off Clark would have already had her out of it and in the bedroom. That had been the point. They wanted to take advantage of the time off and see things they hadn't seen—well, she hadn't seen. He'd already traveled all over the world in-between high school and college. It was that traveling that had gotten him in the same class as her at Met U and how they'd met in the first place.

"I think we should just skip the family reunions this year." He murmured against her lips. "We've been updated on everyone's stories and ailments for the year." He began walking her back toward the bedroom, running his hands up and down her side. "I can think of many other things I'd rather be doing this summer... and right now." His hand found the top ribbon that was wrapped around the satin buttons of her gown. "How do you get this thing off?"

"I'll tell you after we check-in." She grinned against him.

"So not fair." He groaned.

"Maybe, but it is our wedding night." She whispered, tightening her arms around his neck, "No need to do *everything* at super-speed, Superman."

He smirked at the mention of his alter-ego's name and leaned in to kiss her. "I love you, Lois," he whispered, tracing the outline of her face with his thumb.

"I love you, Clark," She sighed happily, "I can't believe we're *finally* married."

He let out a long sigh, "You're really not going to change?"

"Nope." She grinned back at him. "The sooner we get there the sooner we..." She was cut off by his mouth capturing hers mid-sentence and him scooping her up in his arms. She felt a cool breeze brush against her and she looked down to see Metropolis becoming smaller and smaller as Clark flew her into the night sky.

"Hold on." He whispered. A few minutes later they crossed over the Atlantic Ocean and were on their way to Italy to begin their honeymoon.

Eighteen minutes. It had been eighteen minutes of torture, flying himself and Lois to Italy. When they'd arrived back at the apartment he'd tried to convince her to change instead of continuing to torture him with the thoughts of lace and satin he'd felt on his blind exploration up her dress during the reception.

'*Wife*,' he couldn't help but smile as the word came to the forefront of his mind. He was carrying his wife into their hotel room. It had taken everything in him not to sneak a peek under her dress all evening. He knew if he did he'd have been a goner. Whatever she was wearing underneath the massive collection of satin and tulle someone liked to call a wedding gown he was certain it would be coming off the minute he got her out of that dress.

Married. They were finally married.

He wanted to take advantage of every second he could of uninterrupted time with his wife. There were no deadlines. There were no stories being chased. There was no Jimmy or Perry or Lucy to interrupt them. It was just him and Lois—finally together as man and wife—just as it should have been years ago.

The bellboy followed them into the spacious hotel room with a cart with their luggage. Clark set Lois down, wrapping his arms around her from behind as he looked around. She walked him toward the wall to wall windows in the bedroom, looking out at

the breathtaking view of the city. The light grey curtains were pulled apart on both sides, letting the light in. Closing those would be first on the agenda. The bathroom was right across from the bedroom with a large garden tub and double sinks. It was perfect.

"It's beautiful." Lois breathed, leaning back against him.

"You're beautiful." He whispered in her ear, his hands reached down to cover hers as they rested against her growing abdomen.

"Milan has the most beautiful city." The bellboy explained in a thick Italian accent. He reached for their bags to help them unpack.

"No, no," Clark stopped him, moving toward the bags the bellboy had brought it. "We'll take it from here."

"*Non vuoi che mi sfogo?*" He asked confused.

"No," Clark shook his head, pulling out a few bills from the money he'd had converted to lira. "We're fine," He grabbed the bags from the man before he could argue.

"*Io vedo.*" He nodded his recognition. "I see." He repeated in English.

He heard Lois laugh from behind him when the bellboy rushed out of the room, closing the door behind him. Clark followed, making sure to lock the door and put a '*Non disturbare*' sign on the door. He wasn't taking any chances tonight.

He turned around to see Lois, pulling the curtains closed. "You read my mind." He said, closing the distance between them. His hands rested on her shoulders and he placed a kiss on her neck. "Now, where were we?" He turned her in his arms to face him.

She grinned up at him, fingering the collar of his dress shirt, "I think we were right..."

Two Weeks Later...

"An LNN Special Report..." The announcer's voice filled the newsroom as Brock Thomas began speaking, "This is Brock Thomas with LNN. Officials found an unidentified body in Hobb's Bay. The identity of this man is still unknown but—"

Sam Lane clicked the television off, looking back at his office filled with files on everything he'd been able to obtain from the 'organization' before ghosting himself out completely. It appeared Mr. Darryl had been taken care of. Would he be next?

Lois tugged at her blazer for the umpteenth time, looking around the crowded elevator and noting the familiar faces of the Daily Planet staff. Ten days. It had been ten days of nothing but her and Clark in the beautiful city of Milan. They'd actually managed to get out and see some of the city. Though admittedly most of their honeymoon was spent in their hotel room.

She moved her right hand over her left, fidgeting with her wedding band as she rested her hands over the small bump that had begun to form. She was starting to show more and more lately. So much so that she'd had to pull out a few of the maternity suits she'd had with Jamie in order to find something to wear this morning. She'd have to make time this week to get a few things. She hated having to spend so much on clothing she was only going to wear when pregnant. Why the maternity clothing lines thought it was okay to charge so much she didn't know.

The elevator chimed, and the crowd of people stepped off. She sighed in relief, seeing the doors close behind them as her husband's arms encircled her expanding waist from behind.

"I thought they'd never leave." He murmured, pressing his lips to her collarbone as his other hand moved up the front of her blazer, tugging the fabric open with the flick of the button.

"Clark, it took me half an hour to..." She moaned in approval as his lips moved up the side of her neck, turning her to face him. She gasped in surprise, feeling the corner of the elevator walls against her back as his hands moved up and down her sides. "Ten days..."

"Not nearly enough time." He murmured in her ear.

"I know." She sighed as she felt his hands slip up the back of her thighs, fingering the sheer material of her stockings.

"I think we should go home for lunch." He whispered in her ear.

"If we can make it that long." She gasped feeling him lift her in his arms. He nibbled at her throat, grazing the edge of his teeth against the sensitive flesh. She could feel her body responding to him. It wouldn't take a lot of convincing after spending the last ten days doing nothing but what his body was suggesting. It was so tempting. So very, *very* tempting....

The ding of the elevator indicated another floor had been passed. She looked up toward the light above the elevator doors that indicated the floor number they were on. Two more floors and they would be on the newsroom floor. "Oh, God, we've got to stop before we get caught..."

He nodded mutely, setting her back down on her feet but keeping his arms wrapped securely around her as he leaned in to kiss her, "Something tells me it wouldn't surprise anyone." His right hand rested on her growing abdomen.

She linked her arms around his neck and grinned, "Maybe, but I don't think giving the newsroom a preview of our honeymoon is the best idea."

The elevator chimed once more in the background. "No, but I'm going to take advantage of every second I have you alone in this elevator." He murmured leaning down to recapture her lips.

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Lucy let her service weapon down, removing the ear muffs and protective gear as the target moved toward her for her to look over.

"Nice shot, Lane."

Lucy turned around and saw Bill Henderson standing in the corner behind her. "Bill!" She smiled at him, "What are you doing here?"

"Can't have your first day on the force without a proper welcome." He shrugged, walking toward her. "Almost all of them dead center. You're dangerous."

"Not that I'd be needing to use it. My job's in Criminal Science, remember?"

"Yeah, but you couldn't resist the urge to come down to the firing range and let loose." He teased, "Admit it. You know you want to investigate more than a test tube."

"That's not all I'm doing, and you know it." Lucy countered with a teasing smile. "Watch, I'll be your new best friend six months from now. You better be nice to me."

Oh, I see you've got that same cocky attitude as your sister. I guess I'll have to invest in those Double Fudge Crunch stocks with how much I'll be buying to push my lab work through." Bill said, walking with her out of the firing range.

"I prefer Nutter Butter bars," Lucy said with a grin.

"Noted," Bill said with a smile, "So, all joking aside, how do you like it here?"

Lucy grinned ear-to-ear, "I love it. I'm helping families and solving cases. It's exhilarating."

"Everyone treating you all right?"

"Yeah," she nodded, "Still my first day so haven't really given anyone a chance to hate me yet."

"You're not doing your job right unless you're making someone mad," Bill said with a smirk.

"I'll try to remember that."

Perry did his best not to react when he saw Lois and Clark separate from a very heated embrace. Recalling his own Honeymoon in Graceland with Alice he couldn't suppress a smile. The couple stepped out on the newsroom floor, walking into the pit when he met them at the staircase, "Lois, Clark, welcome back!"

"It's good to be back, Perry," Lois beamed, looking around. "I see the place didn't fall apart without us."

"Hey, guys!" Jimmy approached with a grin, "How was Milan?"

"Beautiful," Clark said, sharing a glance with Lois.

"Yes, the water was..." Lois couldn't seem to find the right word. "The art... I mean..." She glanced back at Clark and then to Jimmy, "But the food wasIt was *beautiful*." She finally finished.

"Sounds like you had a great time." Jimmy chuckled, "Welcome back."

"Thanks, Jimmy," Clark said.

Lois looked around the newsroom as they walked toward their desks, "So, no major disasters while we were gone?"

"Perry almost killed Ralph," Cat said, walking up to them.

"Cat, I told you not to bring that up." Perry admonished.

"He did." Cat continued, ignoring Perry.

"What happened?" Lois asked, her eyes lighting up with curiosity.

"We had a disagreement over his story. Words were said. *Regrettable* things were done." Perry continued carefully.

"Ralph's suspended for another week." Cat supplied.

"Yes, which means I'll need you two to help pick up the slack now that you're back," Perry said, reaching for the file he'd placed on Lois' desk earlier.

"Great." Lois grinned, "What have you got for us? Corruption? Scandals?"

"Ribbon cutting." He said handing her the file.

"*Ribbon cutting*?" Lois and Clark asked in unison.

"Starts in forty-five minutes. Read up on it and get going." Perry instructed.

Lois looked down at the folder in confusion then back at Perry, "Cost Mart? How many of these things are they going to

build?”

“I don’t know.” Perry shrugged, “Maybe you can ask Mr. Church when you go to the ribbon ceremony.”

Lois glared at him, grabbing her purse and hooking her arm into Clark’s as they turned back toward the elevator to leave.

Lucy Lane made her way through the crowd of police officers and detectives on Hobb’s Street.

“Lane?”

She looked up and saw the red-headed Jack Warren motioning for her to follow. She readjusted the bag on her shoulder before she crossed the street, seeing Warren crouched over a blue tarp. Jack Warren was the Senior Criminal Science Investigator at Metropolis P.D. and her current supervisor. She’d covered two crime scenes with him this morning, but this was her first homicide.

She put on a brave face and asked, “What do we have here?”

“Gunshot victim,” Warren said, pointing at the yellow markers around the blue tarp. “No witnesses.”

Lucy pulled out her collection kit, “Well, let’s see if our victim took anything from his killer with him.” She said, pulling out a sterile swab and reached for the right palm of the victim.

“Who says dead men tell no tales?” Warren chuckled, opening his own collection kit.

Lois and Clark made their way through the crowd of reporters at the Grand Opening of Cost Mart’s third store in Metropolis.

“Pretty big turnout,” Lois said, looking around. “I still can’t believe Perry’s big story for us was a stupid ribbon cutting.”

“Well, look at it this way, you don’t have to worry about any crazy criminals or secret government agencies popping up here.” Clark grinned, tightening his arms around her. “Just a nice boring ribbon cutting.”

“Don’t remind me.” Lois groaned. “This past year has been one thing after another.”

“I know,” he nodded, “We need to start digging into this mysterious organization.”

“I don’t even know where to start,” Lois said, shaking her head. “Daddy said they didn’t even tell the employees the name of the organization.”

A soft whining from the feedback on the microphone that had been set up on the podium rang. Lois looked up at the stage and grabbed Clark’s arm in a panic when she recognized the man standing there. “Clark! Look!”

“What?” He looked up and frowned when he saw who she was pointing to. “Isn’t that...?”

“Lex Luthor’s manservant. Asabi.” Lois whispered.

“What’s he doing here?” Clark asked.

“Good morning people of Metropolis. It is with great honor that I introduce you to the esteemed Bill Church, founder, and chairman of the Cost Mart stores. Please...” He stood back and began to clap. The crowd began to applaud as well.

A man in his late 50’s with thinning hair hair approached. To look at him, you wouldn’t think he was a billionaire. He wore a conservative button-down shirt with a green cardigan sweater and dark grey slacks. He reached out to shake Asabi’s hand and approached the podium.

“Thank you. Thank you, everyone.” He smiled at the crowd,

“I just want to say how glad I am to be a part of this great city. We’re not just here to do business—we’re here to be a part of your lives. Thank you.”

Lois stole a glance at Clark as Bill Church backed away from the podium and Asabi resumed the announcements. “Mr. Church would like to invite all the members of the press to follow us.” He motioned for everyone to follow.

A few feet away a large red ribbon hung in front of the doors of Cost Mart with a sign that read ‘*Grand Opening.*’ Bill Church posed in front of the ribbon with a large pair of scissors with a smile, shaking hands with the mayor as cameras went off in all directions. After the ribbon was cut Bill Church walked to the front doors and turned the sign to mark ‘Open.’ He smiled at the crowd and announced, “Open for business!”

Lois crossed her arms over her chest, clapping with a weak smile, “He seems nice enough I guess.”

“Perry said he and Bill Church were golfing buddies,” Clark reminded her. “But I wonder if he knows he’s working with Asabi.”

“One way to find out,” Lois said, pulling him through the crowd that was lining up to enter the doors that had just been unlocked. “Let’s see if he’ll agree to an interview.”

News coverage of the Cost Mart grand opening echoed in the background. Lex Luthor paced among the questionable looking men standing in front of him. Lex carried an aluminum baseball bat in his hand as he spoke.

“We are at war gentlemen. A war for our city.” He pointed toward the television, “You see this? Betrayal. Ten years of loyalty down the drain.” He was silent a moment before continuing, “You are the most ruthless, vile thugs this city has ever seen...and you’ve proven your loyalty by standing with me during these times of hardship.”

“Yeah, but we still got bills to pay, Luthor. You ain’t exactly building up our confidence with articles like these showing up.” One of the men said, holding up the front page of the Daily Planet that read, ‘*Luthor Estate Auction Success!*’

“Yes, well things aren’t always what they seem,” Lex said smugly.

“We do this for you; you better be good for it.” Another man spoke up.

Lex pulled up a large briefcase, unlocking it as he spoke, “Oh believe me you’ll be taken care of handsomely.” He stepped aside to show the large bills inside the briefcase. “Any other questions?”

“Who’s the target?” one of the thugs sneered.

Lois and Clark sat across from Bill Church in the Cost Mart café while they finished up their interview. For the most part, the man had been more than cooperative during the interview as Lois started out with feeler questions, leading into his connection to Asabi. How long had Cost Mart been in business? Did he personally look into everyone that managed the stores?

“I hope that answers all of your questions.” Bill Church stood up from the table, looking around the Cost Mart café with a smile.

“Mr. Church,” Lois interrupted. “Just one more question.”

“Certainly.” He smiled back at her.

“What is your connection to Asabi?”

“Asabi?”

Lois noticed the friendly demeanor fall for a split-second before he quickly recovered. Bill Church seemed to have an art at playing the part of well-known billionaire—much like Lex Luthor. Whether the slip was from being caught off guard or something more sinister she wasn't sure yet.

“Yes, the man that introduced you this morning.” Clark prompted.

“Oh, yes!” Church chuckled, “I came across him at one of our offices. He seemed to have an enormous talent for management, so I offered him a job as my personal assistant. Do you know him?”

“We've come across him from time to time is all,” Lois said, unsure how to respond.

“I'll give him your regards.” Church offered.

“Yes, well, um, I think we have enough for our article,” Lois said, putting her pad and pen back in her purse.

“Thank you for your time, Mr. Church,” Clark said, standing to help Lois with her coat.

Church smiled at them as he finished signing the receipt the waitress had just brought him, “Bill, please.” He pulled out two tickets from his pocket, “Perry's agreed to have the Planet co-host a Charity Ball this week. I do hope you two will come.”

Lois cast Clark an uneasy look before offering Bill Church a forced smile, “We'll see what we can do.”

“Excellent!” he beamed, “So good to meet both of you. Perry's told me so much about you.”

“How...fortunate,” Lois said uncertainly. “If you'll excuse us. We have a deadline.”

“Of course.” He nodded, “Thank you for coming.”

“So, what are you thinking?” Clark asked, looking back at Bill Church who was standing at the front entrance greeting patrons.

Lois rummaged through her purse, searching for her keys as she muttered, “I think he seems to have an answer for everything. He seems nice enough.”

“But...?” Clark prompted, recognizing that tone in Lois' voice.

“But he's working with someone we know is responsible for a lot of the blood on Lex Luthor's hands. How the police haven't pinned anything on him yet...” she stopped mid-sentence and cheered, pulling the keys out, “Ah-ha! Found 'em.”

“Just means he hasn't been caught,” Clark said, opening the door for Lois as they walked to the driver's side of the Jeep. She climbed in, taking a deep breath as she settled herself comfortably in the drivers' seat. “Where to next?” He asked.

Lois glanced toward the rural neighborhood around them, “Let's check with some of the other shop owners. See what they think about Cost Mart moving in. Uncle Mike's restaurant isn't too far from here. We can check in with him while we grab an early lunch.” She placed a hand on her growing abdomen. “Someone's getting hungry.”

“Okay,” he leaned in to kiss her. “You sure you don't want me to just grab you something to eat real quick? It'll only take a second.”

“No, we need to talk to Uncle Mike. He's pretty connected around here.” She sighed, “He'll know if there's any information

to be had about Cost Mart or Bill Church. Besides if we don't stop by I won't have an excuse to try some of that chocolate raspberry torte of his.”

“Ah, the secret motive exposed.” He grinned at her.

“You haven't tried it before. You don't understand.” She grinned at him with a sigh.

“All right, let's get going.” He leaned in to kiss her before closing the driver's side door for her and walking to the passenger side.

“Any idea what it does?” Martin Snell asked, looking at the black glowing stone in front of him.

“No,” Sam Lane said cautiously. “This power source Darryl provided us with is powering Metallo but it isn't stabilized yet. Until we can stabilize him, we won't know the effect this has on Superman.”

“Soon to be Super-History-Man if the organization has anything to say about it.” Snell sneered.

“Of course,” Sam Lane forced a smile, waiting until Snell left the lab before he unlocked his computer once more, resuming his task of copying everything he could to an external flash drive.

Lois and Clark approached the small bistro with a painted sign of ‘Mike's’ in white lettering against the green signage. Three middle-aged men stood on the outside of the gate that surrounded Mike's outdoor eating area.

“I'm telling you it's trouble.”

“It could be good for business.”

“It could put us out of business.”

“Lois, Clark, good to see you!” Mike pulled himself from the conversation that was becoming more and more heated to greet them.

“Hi, Uncle Mike,” Lois gave him a peck on the cheek as he greeted her with a hug.

“Starting to make his presence known now, huh?” he teased, looking down at the bump that was becoming more and more prominent.

“Or her.” Lois grinned, placing a protective hand over her abdomen.

“We won't know for a few more weeks,” Clark added, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

“Hey, Mike?” a middle-aged man with thinning blonde hair waved at him to return to the heated argument the trio had been involved in.

“I'll be right there,” He shook his head, turning back to Lois, “Sorry, kiddo, these guys are trying to stir up trouble. Everyone's got an opinion about these Cost Mart stores.”

“Really?” Lois asked, happily, “What a coincidence that's actually what we came to talk to you about.”

“Well, pull up a few chairs.” He pointed to the outdoor chairs on the outdoor eating area. “You may be here awhile. These guys don't know when to shut up about it.”

A long corridor in a dimly lit high-tech facility lit up in sensor lights as Bill Church made his way toward a set of large metal double doors. A touch screen pocketed out as he placed his hand on the screen. A green light blinked from the screen and the doors slid open, revealing a high-tech office, filled with a monitoring

system for the entire city of Metropolis. In the middle of the room was a long conference table with a jet-black projector in the middle of it. A red light blinked in the center.

Bill pulled out a remote from his pocket and clicked it. A high-tech 3-D hologram projected off the table, showing a smartly dressed woman in her late 20's. The ticker on the bottom of the hologram identified her as 'Minaru – Japan.'

"Good morning, Mr. Church,"

"Minaru, what's the latest on the election?" Church asked, getting down to business.

"The candidate wants five hundred thousand for the endorsement." She spoke with a frown.

Church sighed, taking a seat at the table, "That's a lot of money for a speech and a handshake. What are his vulnerabilities?"

"A twelve-year-old daughter." She said with a smirk.

Church smiled, "Offer him one-fifty. If he doesn't take it, get a picture of the daughter walking to school. Show it to him... then offer him nothing."

"Done. How is the Metropolis franchise coming?" she asked.

"I'll know more in a few weeks. Most of the operatives are at work in neutralizing our biggest threat. You were right about Asabi. His knowledge on how Lex Luthor was caught has come in handy." Church noted as he pressed another button on the table, pulling up a 3-D hologram of Metropolis. "Once we've neutralized Superman we can begin work on taking over Metropolis just as we have every other city. Fifteen hundred cities around the world. Over half a million employees. None of whom know who they work for."

"The perfect crime," Minaru said with a smile. "Keep me posted on your progress. We're looking at moving forward with the Chen assassination next week."

"Excellent." Bill grinned, pressing a button to end the call.

Mike laid out two massive portions of dessert for Lois and Clark, "Chocolate torte in raspberry sauce."

Lois' eyes widened, "Oh, Uncle Mike, no. This is too much..."

"You said you were hungry." Mike reminded her. "Besides, you're eating for two."

Clark returned to the table, taking a seat next to Lois, "Jimmy's going to run another background check on Asabi and let us know."

"Good." Lois nodded, taking a bite of her torte before pushing Clark's plate to him. "It's to die for. Eat."

"Mmm, this is great." Clark complimented.

"He does all the baking himself," Lois added.

"Really?" Clark asked, impressed.

"Been in business thirty-five years. This one," he pointed to Lois. "Used to wait tables for me in high school to earn extra money."

"It didn't last long." Lois shrugged, catching Clark's amused expression.

"I can't imagine it would with how impatient you are." Clark teased.

"Oh, she's mellowed out some over the years." Mike winked at her. "She only loses her temper every three seconds instead of two."

"Very funny," Lois said sarcastically, taking another bite of the divine torte.

"So, you think you two have what you need on this Cost Mart guy?" Mike asked, tidying up the table next to them as he spoke.

"Possibly," Clark said, picking up his fork to take a bite of his own dessert. "We still need to talk to a few other people to tie everything together." As he spoke a few drops of the raspberry sauce dripped on his tie.

"Oh!" Mike winced, handing him a washcloth, "Dab, don't wipe. That'll prevent staining."

"I'll be right back." Clark leaned in to kiss her on the cheek.

"No getting into trouble while I'm gone."

Mike chuckled. "Bathroom's in the back."

"Thanks," Clark disappeared inside the restaurant.

"So," Mike took a seat at the table across from her.

"So?" Lois repeated, not sure why he was looking at her with that fatherly expression.

"How you doing, kid?" Mike asked, "Really?"

"I'm great." Lois beamed happily. "Couldn't be happier." She rested her hand on her abdomen for emphasis.

"You know I'm always here for you if you need to talk." Mike continued, unfazed by her reassurance that she was fine. "I know losing Marie isn't the same as what happened to you two with Jamie, but if you need to talk..."

"I'm *really* okay, Uncle Mike," Lois reassured, squeezing his hand. "Clark and I have both agreed not to let what happened to Jamie taint the future. I'm married to the man I love and having a baby...and from the sound of it, I'm getting the sense that there's *a lot* more going on at Cost Mart than what meets the eye. Which could bring in a big story for mine and Clark's career." She took a bite of her torte. "And this torte goes a long way at putting a smile on my face. I'm perfect."

"If you say so," Mike chuckled.

In the bathroom, Clark dabbed at his tie, checking that the stain was gone before he turned to leave. As he turned, he noticed a man in a dark hoodie and black beanie on his head placing a black box against the back door of Mike's kitchen. Suspicious, he frowned, lowering his glasses to get a better look at what the man was doing. He typed in a code and walked away. X-raying the box, he saw the bomb ticking away inside.

At super-speed, he changed into the suit and grabbed the black box, throwing it into the air where it exploded mid-air, preventing any damage to the property or any pedestrians. The man he had seen leaving the box on the door was watching from around the corner. He turned toward him and met his gaze. The man panicked and began to run.

"Oh, no you don't!" Clark grabbed the man by the collar, restraining him with a metal crowbar in the alley

"Man, you just stepped over a line! You're going down!" the man yelled angrily as Clark flew the man to where Mike and Lois were seated.

"You're the only one that's going anywhere." Clark retorted, "And for your sake, I hope you don't mind showering in groups."

"Superman!" Mike stood up in surprise.

"Sorry to drop in on you like this, but it seems you had an unexpected visitor that enjoys playing with bombs." He looked pointedly at the man that was still struggling in his metal binds.

“A *bomb*?” Mike asked aghast, “Little punk, you tried to burn me out!” he accused, stepping toward the captive thug. Realization dawned on him, and he turned to Clark, “Clark. Superman, there was a man...”

“I’ll check to make sure he’s okay,” Clark said hurriedly, leaving before Mike could argue.

“Can’t prove nothin’.” The thug taunted as Clark came out of Mike’s restaurant, “Nobody saw a thing!”

“I did,” Clark said, walking up to where Lois was dialing her phone.

“Yes, I’m reporting an attempted arson. My name is Lois Lane and...” She stopped short, looking up at Clark. “They put me on hold.”

The thug sneered at her with a chuckle, “Lois Lane? You’re Lois Lane?”

“Watch it, pal,” Mike warned as Clark took a protective step in front of her.

“I’m sorry, have we met?” Lois asked, peering over Clark’s shoulder.

“No, we ain’t met. It’s just funny to me ‘cuz you *dead*.” He sneered with a laugh. “I know you’re walkin’ around but trust me, lady, go pick out a nice grave. And from what I hear, pick it out fast.”

“You okay?” Clark asked, handing Lois a cup of hot tea from the drink machine. The police station was littered with police officers, standing around, shooting the breeze. It had taken them three hours to show up at Mike’s restaurant. Three hours of ignoring calls for help because he was afraid that thug would get loose and make good on his threat against Lois.

True, he could have left her with Mike, but the way he’d threatened her... He didn’t feel safe leaving her until they’d arrived at the station. Even then he’d been apprehensive about helping out with the out of control fire even though it was only a few blocks away. The way the thug had thrown around the threat... It was almost as if it was a game to him.

Lois had finally talked him into going, and he was glad he did. He was able to rescue three rescue workers that were trapped in the top floor of the apartment complex that had been set on fire. A young mother and her three children were also saved. It was a good rescue. The fire was contained, and the Metropolis firefighters were able to put the rest of the fire out. No one was seriously injured. No fatalities. Everyone was okay. All in all, it was a successful rescue.

Superman’s presence was becoming welcomed more and more among Metropolis’ public service teams. Firefighters, EMT workers, and police officers often called for his help when situations became too much for them to handle. It was thrilling to finally be able to use his abilities in the open, but he still harbored many fears and doubts about how long he’d be able to do this. Especially after what they’d learned from Sam Lane. It was hard not to focus on who or what could be out there, plotting and waiting... He knew there wasn’t much they could do until they learned the name of the organization. When they did, they’d finally know who was responsible for the living hell he and Lois had been put through for so many years and hopefully get the justice they’d been robbed of with Trask’s murder.

“I’m fine,” Lois said, taking the paper cup from him

gratefully. “Thanks.” She looked toward a group of officers that were huddled around a box of doughnuts, “All that crime out there and look what we’ve got in here—a doughnut commercial.”

Clark chuckled, tightening his arm around her shoulders, “They do seem to be taking it easy in here.”

“Too easy,” Lois said, throwing a concerned look at Mike who was pacing in the corridor in front of them. “Everything go okay?” she asked gently.

He nodded, throwing a cautious look toward the police nearby. “Everyone’s fine. No major injuries.”

“Good.” She smiled, placing a hand on his arm.

“Excuse me?”

A voice caught their attention, and they looked to see a blonde woman in her late twenties standing in the doorway of an office marked ‘Interrogation Number 3.’

“Is one of you Clark Kent?”

Clark turned and nodded, “I am.” He waved a hand at her.

“Mayson Drake, Deputy DA.” She held out her hand to shake his. “I’d like to see if you’re willing to testify against Baby Rage.”

Before he or Lois could even respond the sound of the thug in question kicking, yelling and screaming as the officers began searching him, patting him down and fingerprinting him could be heard.

“*Baby Rage*?” Clark observed with a smirk, “Gee, I wonder why they call him that.”

“Maybe someone else can bully *him* for a change,” Mike commented, shaking his head in disgust.

“You must be Mike Lane?” Mayson asked, looking down at her report. “I’m sorry about what happened to your restaurant. We’re going to do what we can to make sure he pays for what he tried to do. If you’d like we can put a protection unit on your block to make sure the Skins don’t try and...”

Mike smiled, “Thanks, but they’re gonna have to do a lot better than that to scare me. I’ve been in business

“Skins?” Lois echoed, suppressing a chuckle.

“It’s the name of the gang *Baby Rage* is connected to.”

Mayson explained, frowning at Lois, “I’m sorry. You are...?”

“That’s my niece, Lois Lane. She was with me when all this happened.” Mike explained. “She’s a little on the over-protective side.”

“I see,” Mayson said, looking over at Lois uncertainly.

“Yes, I’m the one who called the police and was placed on hold.” Lois glared around the police station filled with officers shooting the breeze, “But I can see they were slammed with their doughnut eating contest. I’ve seen maple drip faster than the police responded to my uncle’s restaurant. I mean...”

Feeling Lois was getting off-track, Clark added, “Also, that kid threatened Lois.”

Mayson looked back at Lois concerned, and Lois shrugged it off, “I’m sure he was just trying to scare me.”

“Well, now it’s my turn to scare him.” Mayson threw a stern look toward where *Baby Rage* was being escorted into a holding cell. She then turned back to Clark, “With your help?”

“Whatever I saw, I’ll tell in court, Ms. Drake,” Clark reassured her.

“Mayson,” she corrected.

The loud bang across the room caused them to turn and see the officers slam the door to the holding cell for *Baby Rage*. “If

only they'd showed that much enthusiasm in getting to Uncle Mike's restaurant earlier," Lois muttered in disgust.

"There have been *budget cuts*," Mayson explained weakly. She looked like she wanted to say more, but held back. She pulled out a card, and jotted something down on the back, turning back to Clark, "Call my office in the morning so we can arrange a deposition. And if you need to reach me during off hours, my home phone's on the back."

Before he could respond Lois cut in, taking the card from Mayson, "That won't be necessary, *Ms. Drake*."

Mayson frowned at her but didn't say anything. Clark cleared his throat, "I'll have Superman get in touch with you too."

"Oh, Superman, right." A pensive expression crossed Mayson's face, "I guess I have to talk to him too, won't I?"

"Something *wrong* with that?" Lois asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Most people I know would consider that an honor." Mike chimed in. "He's done a lot in turning this city around. Helps a lot of people feel safe in neighborhoods that used to be littered in crime."

"I'm not most people." Mayson smiled, moving past him. "Clark, we'll talk soon?"

He nodded, and she smiled back at him before heading into the station toward the holding cell Baby Rage had just been escorted into.

"Unbelievable," Lois rolled her eyes, "What is her problem?"

"It takes all kinds, sweetie," Mike reassured her with a shrug, "As long as she gets that punk off the streets I don't really care about her opinions on Superman. One nay-sayer ain't gonna stop him from protecting our city."

Clark smiled at the compliment from Mike as Lois looked around, "All these cops in here. How many calls for help do you think they're ignoring to sit around and do nothing?" She wondered aloud.

"They're not doing anything." Mike pointed out. "That one did take some fingerprints...after he cleaned out the doughnut box over there."

Lois shook her head, grabbing Clark by the arm, "C'mon, we're going to find out why these cops are so slow all of a sudden." She leaned in to give Mike a peck on the cheek, "Bye, Uncle Mike. If you need anything give me a call."

"I will. Go get 'em." Mike cheered her on. "Clark, take care of her."

"Thanks for lunch, Mike. I'll talk to Superman and make sure he checks your block on his patrols just to be safe." Clark added.

"I don't want to be a bother," Mike argued.

"You're not a bother." Clark corrected.

"He's got more to worry about than an old vet like me. I can take care of myself." Mike reminded her, slapping his fist against his chest for emphasis.

"I know you can, Uncle Mike," Lois began carefully, "but it can't be a coincidence that this all starts at the same time the Southside neighborhood is up in arms about the arrival of Cost Mart."

"You think they're connected," Mike observed.

"I don't know," Lois shrugged. "But we're going to find out."

"Gunshot to the back of the head. No identification on the

body. No sign of a struggle. Nothing remarkable on the persons or body." Warren read off, setting his tape recorder down. He turned toward his newest hire, "That's the fourth one in the last month. All around the same area. Tell me, Lane, what does that tell you?"

Lucy Lane, bit her lower lip, uncertainly as she seemed to ponder his question. "Well, given that all the victims were shot in the back of the head with no sign of a struggle I'd say all victims were walking away from the assailant. Which tells me, they knew their attacker."

"Very good," Warren smiled, "They do teach you more than book smarts at the academy." He paused a beat as he thought of how to get her to figure out her next step in preparing the report. "Part of our job as Criminal Science Investigation is to look beyond the crime scene and the pressure that comes from the detectives and go with what the science tells us. Where do you think you should start?"

"Well, given that the victim probably was leaving the scene—given the location of the body—I'd assume he probably made contact with the assailant. Maybe by shaking his or her hand?" Lucy suggested.

"Bingo." Warren smiled, motioning for her to take the test tube in front of him. "This is the DNA swab we took from our victim today. We're going to compare it to the DNA samples on the previous victims and see if we have a match."

"Then what?" Lucy asked, her tone curious.

"Then we send our report to the lead detective on the case, and he'll take it from there," Warren explained.

"Do you think they'll catch this guy?" Lucy asked.

"All I know right now is the assailant isn't in the system, and it's a man," Warren said sadly. "But I hope when they do find him, they nail him to the wall."

"Asabi?" Perry grabbed the picture Lois laid on his desk.

"He used to work for Lex Luthor as everything from a bodyguard to his personal assistant." Lois reminded him, pacing around her editor's office. After leaving the police station, Clark had gotten a call for help across town. She had headed back to the Planet to catch Perry up on everything they'd learned.

"And any idea how Bill knows him?" Perry asked, tapping his fingers on his desk.

"Not really. He alluded to the fact that he'd hired and promoted him because he saw something in him." Lois said, rolling her eyes. She knew there was something here.

"That sounds like Bill," Perry said reasonably.

"Does it?" Lois pressed, arching her eyebrow at him, "How well do you know him?"

"I've known him going on thirty years," Perry recalled with a smile. "I was there when his son was born."

"The police never could prove it, but I know Asabi was responsible for cleaning up after Lex Luthor's business—legitimate and illegal. The problem is, we can't prove it and neither can the police." Lois said with a discouraged sigh.

"Just because this Asabi did illegal jobs with Lex Luthor doesn't mean he's doing that for Bill." Perry reminded her.

"But what if he is?" She asked.

Perry gave her a pained expression, "I don't want to think about that."

"No one ever does." Lois countered.

“Just...let me know what you find. If Bill is doing anything... unethical. I want to know about it.” Perry began cautiously. Lois nodded, and Perry continued, clearing his throat, “So, where is that husband of yours? First day back and he’s already—”

“He’s covering Superman’s, uh, numerous rescues this afternoon. It seems Superman’s been picking up the slack with Law and Order today.” Lois said with a frown.

“Speaking of which, what have you got on this police scandal?”

“I don’t know.” She said with a heavy breath. “All we do know is for some reason all the police are taking their time to respond to calls for help.”

“Everywhere?” Perry asked, intrigued.

“No, not everywhere.” Lois frowned, “Just the neighborhoods in the Lower East Side.”

“Low-income housing,” Perry observed.

Lois took a seat across from Perry with a concerned expression on her face. “People that need the help the most and aren’t getting it.”

“Any theories?” Perry pressed.

“Nothing we can prove.”

Lois looked up to see Clark in the doorway of Perry’s office and smiled. Perry cleared his throat and gave a gruff nod, “Kent, I thought you were covering Superman’s rescues.”

“I was. Superman’s been pretty busy this afternoon.” Clark walked into the office, standing behind Lois. “Everything from muggings, gang shoot-outs, and armed robberies. Every single time the police didn’t show up for hours.”

“Just like Uncle Mike’s restaurant?” Lois asked.

Clark nodded. “Luckily Superman was able to fly the people that needed immediate care to the hospital, but the ambulance and police didn’t show up until two hours after the shootout.”

“All right, Lois, forget Cost Mart and Asabi. I want you two on this. Find out what’s going on.” Perry ordered.

“But—” Lois began to argue.

“We’re on it, Chief,” Clark said, cutting her off and helping her to her feet.

“On it?” she echoed, mildly irritated at Clark as he guided her out of Perry’s office. Once they were out of Perry’s earshot, she turned on Clark. “What do you mean we’re on it? I’m not letting this thing with Asabi go, and I’m not going to agree to—”

“Of course we’re not dropping it, but we are going to focus on more pressing matters for the moment.” He said, holding up a notepad.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Names of all the officers that have shown up late today. I thought we could do some digging.” He said.

Present Day...

“It’s been three days since the subway collapse. Superman and construction crews have worked tirelessly to rebuild the underground subway system that many depended upon for transportation. Bill Church has generously donated funds to go toward a new transit system that would remove the need for all other forms of public transportation. Some call this transit system a curse while others praise Mr. Church for his generosity.”

The screen filled with images from the last few days. The subway collapse. The hundreds of people that had been rescued.

The pained expressions of passersby watching and waiting to hear everyone was okay.

Clark reached for the remote, clicking the television off. “I think that’s enough of that, don’t you, buddy?” he turned to the sleeping figure of his son that was nestled in the crook of his arm. He smiled down at him, brushing his finger against his cheek. It was moments like this that made him count his blessings.

Jon was eight weeks old today. He’d officially be two months in two days, but he was pretty close to meeting most of his two-month milestone already. A point Lois reminded everyone when they tried to argue with her about the nursery that remained vacant. Her parents and his had both been more than understanding, but the aunts and uncles on the Joanne side of Lois’ family seemed to have opinions on everything from bottle feeding to sleeping arrangements and the connections to IQ scores. A point he and Lois didn’t entertain. Keeping Jon safe and happy was all either of them cared about.

The last few months had been hard on both of them. Jon’s sleeping schedule seemed to work against theirs, making it a struggle at the beginning for any of them to get any rest. That, combined with Lois’ apprehension about going to sleep and not being able to hear Jon, made the first month almost unbearable. She was tired, irritable and hormonal. It wasn’t easy for either of them. He’d done his best to help where he could all while juggling both his job at the Planet and his duties as Superman.

It wasn’t until Lois had gone on maternity leave that he could really appreciate how much she worked to keep his alter-ego under wraps. Simple questions about where he’d been or what story he was working on or why something wasn’t turned in were hard to keep up with on the three to four hours he’d been awarded the last few months. Thankfully Perry had been understanding and not pressed the issue, but he knew it would only be a matter of time if he didn’t do something.

After Lois had Jon, he’d been grateful for the two weeks he had off. Granted he had to use every bit of his vacation time for it to happen but it had been worth it. He’d cut back on Superman’s public appearances during Lois’ pregnancy so as not to arouse any suspicion when Jon arrived. He couldn’t have anyone connecting his son’s arrival with Superman’s disappearance.

Thankfully Perry was being lenient with both him and Lois on their schedules until Jon turned six months old. They’d gone back and forth on what to do. Neither of them were comfortable with the idea of someone else watching him when he was still so little.

The past three weeks Lois was finally allowing herself to get the rest she needed. The first month both of them had been a basket case, checking on him every two minutes to make sure he was breathing. Now, they seemed more at ease and reassured that he was okay. They’d bought every monitor out there and tried everything, but Jon was stubborn and refused to sleep with the monitors on him. They’d put the sensor on him, and he’d find a way to pull it off. Finally, they gave up, and he opted to keep his super-hearing tuned into Jon and only Jon at night. Any change in breathing or heart rate made him wake up and check on him.

The soft gurgling of his son brought him back to the present. Clark looked down to see the sweet smile spread across Jon’s face. He couldn’t help but smile back. “You are so lucky, little man.” He patted him on the back, “You’ve got so many people that love you more than life itself. Grandparents that think you

hang the moon. And an incredible mother that would do anything for you.”

“Don’t forget his *super* daddy,” Lois whispered from behind him, leaning in to kiss him on the cheek.

“Hey,” He grinned back at her. “How was your shower?”

“Rewarding.” She sighed, walking around the couch to take a seat next to him. “Someone thought spitting up in my hair earlier was hilarious.”

“He does have a cute grin though.” Clark chuckled.

“I know. He’s already perfected that ‘*you-can’t-be-mad-at-me*’ look.” She said with a wry grin. She held her hands out, “You want me to take him?”

“No, we’re bonding.” He shook his head. “I don’t get to watch him sleep like this much.”

“Okay,” she curled up on the couch next to him, resting her head against his shoulder. He smiled wrapping his arm around her. “How long has he been asleep?” Lois asked.

“Maybe ten minutes.” Clark shrugged, leaning down to press his lips against hers. “What do you want for dinner?”

“Shhh,” she whispered, throwing a grin at him. “We’re bonding.”

He heard her stomach growl, and she blushed. “You were saying?”

“Dinner sounds great.” She said, taking Jon from the crook in his arms, holding him against her chest. He let out a soft cry and then fell back asleep.

“Honey, I think we should probably put him to bed so he can take his nap in peace.” He said, pointing to the bassinet in the corner of the room that had been set up for Jon’s naps.

“I guess you’re right. He’s just so cute when he’s sleeping.” She hummed lightly as she carried him to the bassinet. He watched her with amusement as she laid him down, running her hand over his chest for a moment before leaning in for one last peck on the cheek. It was the same thing with him for every nap and every bedtime routine. A soft peck on the cheek and a pat on the chest to make sure he was okay.

He walked up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist. “He’s fine. I promise.” He whispered in her ear.

“I know.” She grinned back at him. “Now about dinner...” She turned in his arms to face him, running her hands over his shoulders as she spoke.

“Anything you want.” He leaned in to kiss her, reveling in the few quiet moments he had with his wife.

It seemed everything was working against them having any time alone. Her last month of pregnancy had been a challenge for both of them. The very active love life they both enjoyed had been put to a halt when the doctor voiced his concerns about the baby coming early. As a precaution, she’d been put on pelvic rest which meant a very frustrating last month of pregnancy for both of them. Then, when she’d finally been given the green light to resume sexual activity by the doctor, everything seemed to get in the way. Perry, Lucy, Superman, and of course Jimmy. The boy seemed to have picked up on his girlfriend’s habit of calling or showing up at the most inopportune times.

“Anything?” She grinned against his lips, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“Anything.” He could feel the heat from her breath tickle his lips. He moved his hands to cup both sides of her face as he lost

himself in the art of kissing her. Knowing all too well everything would come to a halt if Jon woke up, his desire to take advantage of the rare quiet time he had with Lois outweighed the disappointment he knew could occur if they were interrupted again.

Her hands roamed up and down his chest as she nibbled at the sensitive skin on his collarbone. He let out a soft moan, walking them back toward the couch. Twelve long weeks of bad timing, sleep-deprived nights and missed opportunities. His hands roamed up and down her back as they sank down to the couch. He rolled them over, so she was hovering over him as his hands began an exploration up the back of her robe.

He let out a soft moan as she began moving down his chest, feathering each layer of exposed skin with heated kisses as she worked her way down his cotton dress shirt. “Lois...”

“Take this off.” She ordered in between heated kisses, tugging at the shirt that now hung off his shoulders as she undid the last button. He obliged, lifting himself up just enough to throw the garment to the ground.

He pulled on the knot to her robe, allowing it to fall off her shoulders. He groaned in approval when he saw the cotton grey shorts and white tank top she wore.

She leaned down, moving to straddle him as she layered his chest in heated kisses. His hands moved up and down the front of her chest, feeling the sensitive flesh pressed against his palms.

“Oh, don’t stop.” She pleaded with him.

“Baby,” he groaned as he felt her hips grind against him. She hooked her hands into the edge of her tank top, pulling it over her head and tossing it to the floor. He pulled her to him, running his hands up and down the smoothness of her naked torso.

“Oh, yes,” she sighed against him, reaching between their bodies to unfasten his belt buckle.

Twelve weeks.

God, he’d missed this.

He’d missed her.

Twelve weeks.

He let out a soft moan of approval as she pressed her small frame against him. He suppressed a groan as he felt the constricting length of the couch arms against his feet. They needed more room. So much more room for him to do the things he wanted to do to her. But that would require moving.

If they moved then, Jon would have to be moved. Then he’d possibly wake up, and the incredible things his wife was doing to him would stop. He let out a frustrated growl, pulling her to him, recapturing her mouth with his. His hands moved up her bare back, savoring the feeling of her soft skin against his palms as he floated a few inches off the couch, allowing him the room he needed.

A soft cry from across the room reached his ears, and he stilled his motions, floating them back down to the couch. He felt Lois tense up in his arms, muttering under her breath. “No, no, no, no...Not *now*.” Jon let out another cry, and Clark sighed, leaning over to grab her tank top from the floor. “I’m sorry.” She gave him an apologetic look.

“Don’t apologize. I was *thoroughly* enjoying myself.” He whispered, watching as she slipped her top back on climbed off of him.

He suppressed a groan as she gave him a flirtatious grin. “So

was I.” Jon let out another cry, and she quickly scooped him up, “Hey, sweetie. What’s wrong?”

“It’s been three days since the subway collapse. Superman and construction crews have worked tirelessly to rebuild the underground subway system that many depended upon for transportation. Bill Church has generously donated funds to go toward a new transit system that would remove the need for—”

Lex Luthor clicked the remote, turning the television off. “Destruction and mayhem in the city. A billionaire steps in to save it and no one asks why.”

“Well, dad never was one to be discreet.” Bill Church Jr. took a long puff from his cigar.

“A trait that will become a weakness in the end.” Lex mused. “Is everything set?”

“My contact at EPRAD said the satellite platform for the annihilator was put into orbit without anyone in the country knowing about it.” Bill Jr. said tapping his hand on the side table as he spoke.

“It’s a shame Congress pulled the plug on such an inspirational project. Imagine being able to take out your enemy from outer space.” Lex chuckled, “We’d have a whole lot less wars that’s for sure.”

“How long before your team will have the pulse converter commissioned?” Bill Jr. asked.

“We should have the prototype ready for installation by the end of the week,” Lex said, lifting his glass of scotch, breathing in the aroma from the expensive liquor he’d been denied for so long. “It’s the little things that count, don’t you agree?”

Bill Jr. chuckled and took a sip of his own drink. “Little things like world conquest?”

“And being able to pin everything on your father while we reap the rewards.” Lex smiled.

“The perfect plan.” Bill agreed.

Five Months Earlier...

“So, what have we got?” Lois asked, taking a seat next to Clark as she took a bite of the frozen yogurt in her hand. It had been a long first week back. She and Clark had reached out to all their sources and everyone they could talk to that might know what was going on with the Metropolis P.D. No one wanted to talk. No one knew anything. At least that’s what they claimed.

“Not much. No one I spoke with in Cost Mart knows how or why Church hired Asabi. He just showed up one day suddenly in charge of...everything.” Clark explained, wrapping a protective arm around her shoulders.

“Everything I’ve found on Bill Church says the same thing. Everyone loves him. He’s the most modest billionaire you’ll ever meet. Lives well below what he earns and donates to a different charity a month.” Lois explained, taking another bite from her frozen yogurt. “And don’t even get me started on the police and the Lower East Side. No one is talking.”

“Well, they didn’t just decide out of the blue not to respond to calls for help.” Clark reasoned. “Something had to trigger the sudden slowdown.”

“Yeah, but what?” Lois asked, setting her frozen yogurt on the coffee table. “We’ve got to get to the bottom of this fast before someone gets hurt. You can’t continue being the only one keeping

law and order over there.”

Clark had been busy off and on all day with rescues in the Lower East Side neighborhoods. It was always the same. No police response or a delayed response to all calls for help. When confronted about the delay the police never had an excuse.

“I know.” He wrapped his other arm around her, pulling her to him. “But there’s not a lot we can do about this tonight. We’ve put the feelers out there, but I doubt anyone’s going to be calling back at nine o’clock at night.” He leaned in to kiss her. “There are no more rescues.” He gave her a peck on the cheek. “Or cries for help.” He pressed his lips against her jawline.

“You do have a very good point.” She relented, turning in his arms to face him, fingering the top button of his cotton dress shirt. “Not much can be done at...” She glanced at the red digits blinking on the clock across the room. “...nine fifteen at night.” She sighed against him, working on unbuttoning his shirt while he continued his teasing.

“Uh-huh.” He murmured against her neck, leaning into her as his hands roamed up and down her sides. “No working after nine.”

She giggled as his teeth grazed against the side of her neck, finally freeing the last button to his shirt. “You won’t hear any arguments from me.” She helped tug his arms out of his shirt and tossed it to the ground.

“God, you’re beautiful.” He whispered, lifting her blouse up and pressing his lips against her swollen abdomen.

“I love you.” She sighed against him, unbuttoning her blouse as he inched his way up her body. “Oh, Clark,”

A soft knock echoed through the living room.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Lois muttered as Clark lifted his head to look toward the door. “Is it someone in peril or severely injured because that’s the only excuse I’d accept for us to stop...”

Clark groaned, “It’s that district attorney from your uncle’s case.” He sat up, propping himself up and pulling himself out of her arms.

“At nine o’clock at night.” Lois fumed irritably, working frantically to refasten the buttons. She looked down and noticed she’d missed a button, making the bottom half of her blouse askew. Another knock at the door echoed in the room. “Just forget it.” She saw Clark reaching for his shirt and shook her head. “Nope. Don’t move. I’ll get rid of her and then I plan on picking up exactly where we left off.” She gave him a lingering gaze before dashing across the room to answer the door.

On the other side of the door, Mayson Drake stared back at her in surprise, “Uh, hi, I...” she looked down at the papers in her hand.

“Can I help you with something?” Lois asked, noting the way Mayson was staring at her obviously disheveled appearance.

“I’m sorry. I was looking for, uh, Clark Kent.” Mayson said, clearing her throat.

“He’s busy,” Lois said hurriedly. “What do you need?”

“Well, since we had to reschedule the deposition this afternoon I thought we could, uh...” Mayson looked over her shoulder, “It would probably be easier to just explain it to him myself. Isn’t this Mr. Kent’s apartment?”

Lois fought back the urge to throw the obviously clueless woman a sarcastic comment and instead forced a smile, “Well, it

was until a few weeks ago. Now it's *ours*."

"Oh!" Realization seemed to dawn on Mayson's face as she stared at the wedding band on Lois' hand. "I didn't realize. I thought you were just, um, colleagues."

"Uh-huh," Lois gave her a disapproving look. "What do you want? We're kinda busy."

"So, I see," Mayson said, clearing her throat and staring at the ground for a moment.

"You do realize how late it is, right?" Lois asked, giving Mayson a pointed look.

"Yes, I'm well aware, but I just thought..."

"What?" Lois asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

Mayson took a deep breath, "I'm sorry. I thought I could squeeze in the deposition and..."

"Lois?" Clark walked up behind her, pulling the door open. "Just let her in."

"Clark, hi," Mayson beamed at him happily.

Lois turned to see him back in the dress shirt he'd been wearing earlier. She mouthed to him, '*You weren't supposed to get dressed.*'

He leaned in to whisper, "It's for your Uncle Mike's case."

After toying for half a second on whether she wanted to allow Mayson into her and Clark's apartment or not she finally relented and opened the door the rest of the way. "Fine. Come in."

"Great." Mayson nodded her thanks and walked toward the living room. "Again, I'm sorry about the late hour."

"Uh-huh," Lois grumbled irritably before throwing a look at Clark, "She better be gone in an hour, or I'm kicking her out."

Martin Snell walked down the long corridor and into the office across the hall from Bill Church's office. He knocked on the door frame before entering. Inside, he found the young Bill Church Jr. on the phone.

"I see. Well, how about this? How about I give you nothing, and you hand over your company? No, you forget I know where you live. I know where your kids go to school. I know where your wife gets the car worked on. It'd be a shame if something happened to her...Oh, you do. That's very wise." Bill Church Jr. grinned as he lit his cigar. "I'll send my attorney over to finalize the deal."

With that, he hung up the phone. "Martin, we ready to move forward with our testing on Superman?"

"Ready when you are, Mr. Church," Snell said with an evil grin.

"Good. Make sure the guys are in place and have it all on video for analysis." Bill Jr. ordered.

"Anything you say, Mr. Church."

Mayson sat across from Clark, finishing up her notes. "You're going to make a great witness, and I appreciate it. In my line of work, you don't see much bravery."

"I'm just telling the truth." Clark shrugged, getting up from the couch to carry the coffee mugs back to the kitchen.

Lois watched Mayson's gaze linger on Clark as he left the room and gave the woman a disapproving look. Mayson forced a smile and continued as Clark came back to the couch, "Well, true, but you're also not flying around with a big 'S' on your chest, bragging about what a hero you are."

"I'm sorry, *brag*?" Lois echoed, zeroing in on the word with a critical tone at the same time Clark interjected with his own comment.

"You heard Superman *brag*?" Clark glanced back toward Lois, seeming to question if he'd heard Mayson right.

"Well, not in so many words..." Mayson began carefully.

"How about not *ever*." Lois shot back irritably.

Mayson sighed, putting the last of her things in her briefcase. "Look, I know he's a ... friend of yours. I get it. He saved your wife's life." She looked toward Lois then back at Clark, "But you're ten times the man he is. An ordinary guy, about to stand up in a courtroom and help put a known gang member behind bars. That takes guts. I'd like to see Superman try that without his cape."

Clark chuckled, sharing a look with Lois before smiling, "Well, maybe you will."

"You seem to have a lot of resentment toward Superman." Lois observed. "Yet he was the one showing up to help everyone today when your police officers didn't. He was the one stopping muggings, and assaults, and providing backup on shootouts and apartment fires. He showed up! That's a lot more than I can say for any of your officers at the Metropolis P.D."

Mayson grew thoughtful for a moment then spoke, "You're right. He *did* show up. A lot of people could have been hurt or worse if he *hadn't*."

"So why the hostility?" Lois asked. "He's doing what needs to be done to protect the people of this city when the police can't."

"I guess I don't like dealing with someone I don't know anything about," Mayson said uncertainly.

"There was a pretty in-depth interview done with him when he first arrived on the scene." Clark reminded her.

"Yeah, right after he you know...saved everyone from annihilation after the Nightfall asteroid?" Lois quipped irritably. "And the bombing of the Messenger."

"Like I said before there are things about him that still remain a mystery and that worries me." Mayson said haughtily.

"Such as?" Clark pressed, curiously.

"Such as why does he do what he does? Where does he go when he's not rescuing someone?" Mayson began to list off the questions one by one on her hand.

"Those are pretty *personal* questions." Clark began uncertainly.

"He goes around catching criminals with this immense power and no way to control him. What happens if he loses control? What if he hurts someone?" Mayson continued. "Doesn't that worry you in the slightest?"

"Well, I..." Clark began, but Lois cut him off.

"It would if we thought Superman was capable of hurting someone, but we both have met him on numerous occasions and know..." she met Clark's gaze, giving his hand a gentle squeeze. "...he'd never do anything to hurt anyone."

"How can you be so sure?" Mayson asked.

"How can we be sure you won't turn around and do the same things you're accusing Superman of being?" Lois pointed out.

Mayson appeared to be taken aback by her statement before pointing out. "I'm licensed and insured by the state bar."

"He's a guy in a cape that wants to help. It seems to me you both are trying to make the world a better place. You with the

criminals you lock up—largely in part to Superman who helps catch them.” Lois crossed her arms over her chest.

“But he can’t go around acting as judge and jury either.” Mayson pointed out. “There are rules. Protocol that needs to be followed.”

“He isn’t placing anyone under arrest.” Clark pointed out. “Superman is just there to help when the problem is bigger than the police can handle.”

“Speaking of which,” Lois cut in, trying to steer the subject away from her husband’s alter-ego. This conversation had taken a dangerous turn that was getting too close to home for her own comfort. “What’s really going on with the Lower East Side?”

“Pardon?” Mayson asked. The apprehension in her eyes told Lois she had heard her perfectly.

“You heard me,” Lois continued. “Cops looking the other way. Families and businesses put in danger. What’s going on? And don’t tell me it’s from budget cuts.”

“Thank you for taking the time to go over your deposition, Clark.” Mayson cleared her throat as she grabbed her bag, “I should get going.” She walked toward the door then seemed to hesitate, looking back, “I should warn you, it’s not going to be easy. This whole thing happening on the Southside isn’t just about gang turf. There’s big money and big players in the shadows. I think Baby Rage knows a lot and I might just find out how much...”

“You think he could be connected to the police suddenly disappearing?” Clark guessed.

“I should get going,” Mayson repeated, neither confirming nor denying what he said.

Clark looked back at Lois, “What do you think that was about?”

“I don’t know, but we can worry about that tomorrow,” Lois said, tugging his shirt out of his trousers. “We have more pressing matters to attend to.” He groaned his approval as she pulled him to her, capturing his lips with hers.

Present Day ...

“Goodnight sweetie,” Lois whispered, peering over her son’s bassinet. She ran her hand over his dark silky hair, watching as he gave in and finally drifted off to sleep. She walked toward her closet, keeping the door open as she changed into something more comfortable for the evening. Clark would probably be back from his patrol soon.

It was hard to believe Jon was already eight weeks old. Time had gone by so fast. Everything was so different this time around. While she felt comfortable and sure of herself in some aspects of motherhood she still felt apprehensive in others. He was still sharing a room with her and Clark.

Clark had been wonderful with making sure he was around as much as possible. Unfortunately, the Planet didn’t provide paternity leave so he’d had to dip into his vacation time and negotiated a working from home schedule with Perry while Lois was on leave so he could be there if she needed help. He’d cut back on the Superman rescues—only going when it was absolutely necessary.

There were, of course, some things he couldn’t ignore. Now that Intergang had been exposed, each move they made seemed to be more and more bold. Their last attack on Metropolis had

caused the Metropolis Subway tunnel to collapse. It aggravated her to no end knowing so much was going on and she couldn’t be the one pounding the pavement and getting the story.

She wouldn’t be returning to the office for another few weeks. It was supposed to be a slow transition. Working part-time in the office and part-time at home until Jon was six months old. After everything that had happened with Jamie, they were taking every precaution to ensure Jon’s safety and well-being. After checking around with different daycare centers and possible nannies, they had decided to go with the child care at the Planet. At least with Jon in the same building with them, they could visit him when they needed without going across town. The teachers there were wonderful and having Jon so close was reassuring to both of them.

Lois slipped the sheer red robe over the red and black silk negligee she changed into. Today marked her son’s eighth week of life, and it also drummed the reminder of something else. Twelve weeks since she and Clark had made love. Her last month of pregnancy she’d been placed on pelvic rest. Despite being cleared by the doctor to return to business, as usual, another hurdle she and Clark seemed to be facing was finding the time and energy to make love. Everything seemed to interrupt them lately when they came close. Jon, the Planet, Superman... That was about to change.

She heard the familiar sonic-boom outside and smiled to herself. Clark was home. She reached for the portable baby monitor and turned the volume up as she left the bedroom, heading downstairs and into the living room where she found Clark leaning over the desk as he finished up his phone call.

“Hey, Jimmy. No, you’re fine...How many?” Clark jotted down notes from whatever Jimmy had found. His forehead wrinkled once more as he pinched the bridge to his nose, jotting down more notes at super-speed. Whatever news Jimmy had was obviously bad.

“What are their names?” Clark asked.

Lois sighed, taking a seat on the couch while she waited for Clark to finish up his phone call. She leaned back on the couch, crossing her legs as she set the baby monitor on the coffee table.

“How long ago was that?” Clark had his back to her, jotting down more notes at the desk in the corner of the living room.

She was growing impatient, waiting on Clark to finish his phone call and knowing Jimmy he’d probably start rambling on about some video game or movie that somehow related to the research he was doing.

“Uh-huh,” she heard her husband sign.

She knew that tone all too well. The humoring tone Clark gave her when she pitched an idea to him he thought was ridiculous. Obviously, the important part of the conversation was over. Growing tired of waiting for him to hang up the phone on his own she walked up to him, wrapping her arms around his waist from behind. “I thought we had a rule about no work after nine.” She whispered in his ear.

“I know honey, I’m sorry I...” He turned away from the phone, seeming to finally get a good look at her in the red and black negligee. His eyes moved up and down her body for a split-second before he hurriedly mumbled, “I’ll talk to you tomorrow, Jimmy.” At super-speed, he scooped her in his arms and whisked them to the bedroom.

After finishing up his patrol, Clark changed out of the suit and back into the grey dress shirt and black slacks from earlier in the day. It had been a long and tiresome day. The attacks on Metropolis from Intergang were growing more and more over the past few months. Ever since the article giving the mysterious organization that had been wreaking havoc on the city over the past few years was unveiled and connected to the international crime organization, Intergang, they seemed determined to cause as much mayhem as possible.

He smiled to himself, hearing the soft snores upstairs. Had it not been for the subway collapse earlier this week he would have been home a lot sooner. Superman had been helping the emergency crews dig out the tunnel each day. He couldn't do it at super-speed because there was still several unstable beams the city was working on stabilizing as they continued to clean up the wreckage. So each day, Superman would go by and help out for an hour or two then he'd come home. By the time he got home, Lois was usually asleep with Jon.

The sharp chirp of his cell phone rang, and he groaned, looking down at the caller id on the phone. It was Jimmy. Hopefully, he had more information on the subway bombers. Three days and he still hadn't gotten anywhere on the individuals behind the subway bombing other than the message sent to the Metropolis P.D. The author of the letter claimed ownership of the bombing and named Intergang as the power behind the attack.

"Hey, Jimmy," Clark answered the phone, walking toward the desk to grab a notepad and a pen.

"Hey, I'm not calling too late, am I?" Jimmy asked.

"No, you're fine," Clark said, trying to hide the weariness from his voice. He was exhausted, and all he really wanted to do right now was crawl under the covers of his bed and hold his wife. He knew from experience, trying to sneak a hug or kiss to Jon would only wake him.

"I've got some information on those bombers. Possible names for the guys that were responsible for the subway collapse." Jimmy said excitedly on the other end of the phone.

"How many? What are their names?" Clark asked, listening as Jimmy began listing off the names. First thing in the morning he'd have to check into them.

"My guy down at Luke's said some of them were bragging about the job they pulled," Jimmy explained.

"How long ago was that?" Clark asked.

"About a day and a half ago," Jimmy said flatly.

"Uh-huh," Clark sighed.

"You may want to have Lois talk to Lucy though. She's been involved in like five of the attacks that have taken place. She doesn't seem to see the issue with her job—" Jimmy began to ramble.

"I thought we had a rule about no work after nine." He heard his wife whisper in his ear. He suppressed a groan as he felt her small frame press against his back.

"I know honey, I'm sorry I..." He turned away from the phone, seeing the silky red negligee that just barely covered everything. He felt his mouth go dry, trying to get his brain to function long enough to form the words he was looking for.

"CK? You there?" Jimmy's voice echoed from the phone.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow, Jimmy." He said hurriedly,

hanging the phone up and turning his attention back to Lois who was watching him with an amused expression. Without a word, he scooped her up into his arms and carried her to their bedroom at super-speed.

She giggled as he readjusted her in his arms, allowing her legs to wrap around his torso. "I love you." He whispered, capturing her lips with his.

"I love you too," she murmured against his lips as he leaned them back on the bed, hovering over her. He ran his hands through her hair, nibbling at the sensitive flesh of her throat as she sighed against him. "Twelve weeks..."

"Too long." He groaned.

"God, I've missed this," Lois whispered, running her palm against his cheek, smiling as he pulled the covers back over them.

"I know," he chuckled, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Now, that Jon's sleeping through the night and we're both functioning on a somewhat average amount of sleep we can try to and get everyone on a normal routine."

She gave him a half-smile, "It's been a crazy few months."

"For the both of us." He leaned in to kiss her. "But I wouldn't trade a second of it." His hands ran through her hair, resting his head against hers.

"Me neither." She grinned at him. A small whimper came from the other side of the bed where Jon's bassinet was. She lifted her head up, preparing to make a dash for Jon.

Clark placed a hand on her shoulder and squeezed it, "He's fine. Just making noise in his sleep."

She rested her head back on his chest. "How'd everything go tonight?"

"Good." He nodded with a sigh, rolling them over, so they were on their sides, facing one another. "The foreman I spoke with said he thought the site would be secure to clear the tunnels out by the end of the month."

"These attacks are getting worse." She commented softly.

He pressed his lips against her forehead, "I know, but we're getting close to finding them."

"We still don't know who's behind Intergang though." Lois reminded him.

"Not yet," Clark said, running his hands over her jawline. "But we will, and then we'll stop them."

"Billy?" Bill Church called through the intercom of his expansive home.

"Right here, dad," Bill Jr. stood in the doorway of his dad's study.

Church frowned, "Where are the schematics for the Queensland project?"

"The engineer is looking them over." Bill Jr. reminded him. At his father's confused expression, he rolled his eyes, "You gave him the plans, dad, remember?"

"Oh, that's right." Church nodded with a hesitant smile. "When we get them back I need to see them."

"Of course," Bill Jr. nodded. "Now about these changes to Division 23."

"There's no need to continue to pay that exorbitant amount of money for a department that is serving no purpose anymore. Robotics is the way of the future, Billy." Church sniffed.

“I’m not shutting it down.” Bill Jr. countered. “I’ve got a lot of projects in the mix.”

“Like what?” Church scoffed. “We haven’t contracted anything out of that division since Sam Lane went missing.”

“Nothing you need to worry about, dad.” Bill Jr. said with a long sigh. “I’m working on something that’ll make us insanely rich and powerful. And you don’t have to do a thing.”

“I...I...I...”

Rollie Vale punched the large chest of Metallo.

“...feel tired.”

Rollie smiled to himself. He’d done it. He’d finally done it.

“Do you know who you are? Where you are?” Rollie asked, looking around the white laboratory.

“Corbin. Johnny Corbin.” He said with an uneasy expression, looking around the lab. “Where am I?”

“You’re in a place called Division 23,” Rollie explained.

“Division 23?” his brow crinkled and sat up, patting his chest with a confused expression. “I can’t feel anything.”

“Well, you see...about that. You were shot in a drive-by shooting. Your friend brought you to us, and we were able to save you. Most of you anyway.”

“What do you mean by most of me?” Corbin asked angrily.

“It’s better if I show you.” Rollie rolled up the sweatshirt Corbin was wearing and revealed the metal chest plate on his chest.

“Hey! What is this??” Corbin stared at the metal plate in anger.

“As I said, we saved what we could, but the old body was... well, frankly full of holes. I saved your life.” Rollie said, backing away from Corbin as he advanced toward him, grabbing him by the collar.

“What *am* I!?” Corbin spat angrily.

“Well, actually you’re a ...”

“A *what*!?” Corbin spat angrily.

“Cyborg.” Rollie stammered out. “You’re a cyborg.”

Seven Months Ago...

Lois stared up at the ceiling in a daze, feeling her mind slowly come back into focus after their recent lovemaking. She glanced over at Clark who had a sloppy grin on his face as he stared back at her.

“I’m really starting to like second-trimester sex.” She grinned as his arms tightened around her.

“Uh-huh,” He grunted his approval, holding her close as he rolled them over, so he was on his back, “*You* are...incredible.” He whispered, leaning up to kiss her.

She sighed against him, “That was even better than that time in the back of your pickup.”

He chuckled, tightening his arms around her, “Really?” His fingertips made a walking motion on her shoulder blades, sending a shiver down her spine. “*That* good, huh?”

Her left leg glided up his side, and she whispered, “Better. Much, *much* better. The only thing I’d like more would be...”

“More?” he murmured in her ear, running his palms up and down her sides.

“Encore, encore.” She giggled against him. He leaned into her and recaptured her lips, flipping them over, so he was on top of

her as he prepared to repeat their activities well into the night.

Bill Church walked with Martin Snell toward his awaiting limo. “I want the first phase of the Southside project completed by the end of business today, Martin. I’m not a patient man.”

Snell nodded, looking around them uneasily as they approached the limo. He still wasn’t sure why Asabi had been given the responsibility of driving Mr. Church around. The organization had been in business for years and never before had Bill Church agreed to be driven around anywhere. He wasn’t sure what to make of the Middle Eastern chauffeur and part-time personal assistant, but he knew given time Asabi would show his cards. They always did. He would be there to catch him when Asabi did—just as *he* always did.

“It will be handled, Mr. Church,” Martin reassured him, opening the door to the limo for him. “Asabi,” he nodded to the gentleman as he stepped out of the limo for Church to enter.

“Mr. Church, you really shouldn’t burden yourself with trips to the East Side without proper protection,” Asabi warned, throwing a glare at Martin.

“I like to have a hands-on approach to all my projects, Asabi.” Church sighed, leaning into the limo to take a seat.

“Of course, Mr. Church,” Asabi bowed his head, and Martin looked back at him suspiciously.

“I still don’t understand what exactly you do around here. I mean, Mr. Church was doing fine driving himself...” Martin began.

“Mr. Church needs to have his mind clear to deal with more pressing matters. I do what needs to be done to ensure that.” Asabi responded with a cold stare.

“Martin, leave him be. Worry about your own problems and quit—”

“Hey, Church!!”

Bill turned to see an armored car approaching with only the barrels of four guns poking out. The tint to the windows hid the passengers’ faces well, but the rain of gunfire wasn’t hard to miss.

“Get down!!” Snell lunged toward Church, pushing him and himself back into the limousine. The door closed behind them, and the sound of return fire could be heard around them.

“You were saying something about not needing him around?” Church looked to Snell with a smug grin as Asabi opened the door.

“The coast is clear, Mr. Church.”

<< “*It wasn’t Jamie’s blood. It was yours.*” >>

A long sharp needle with a glowing green tip came toward him. He fought against the restraints, but they were too tight. He was too weak.

“No!”

“Hold him down!” Trask ordered.

“No!”

He felt a piercing pain in his neck as four agents held him in place. He fought against them with everything he had, but it was no use. It was always no use.

<< “*It wasn’t Jamie’s blood. It was yours.*” >>

“No!!”

Clark sat up, looking around in a panic.

'Just a dream.' He told himself. *'Just a dream.'*

He looked behind him, letting out a sigh of relief when he saw Lois curled up on the bed next to him. He leaned back, wrapping his arms around her, resting his hands over the small bump that had begun to form.

The rapid thumping of his unborn child's heartbeat reached his ears, and he felt his body relax, listening to the soft beats one by one. It amazed him to watch the changes take place throughout Lois' pregnancy. He missed so much with Jamie. Seeing his wife's body change as it grew this new precious life that held so much promise thrilled him. Every mood swing, back pain, and craving she had reminded him of how much he'd gained over the last year. He loved watching her once tiny waist and flat abdomen grow. Every new curve made her even more beautiful to him.

"Clar..." she mumbled incoherently in her sleep.

He smiled, looking down at her, pulling her to him, so her head rested on his chest as he willed his recent nightmare to part from his mind. He'd come a long way since his escape from Bureau 39 but he still had nightmares from his time in captivity that would bring the painful memories back. He hated that he still struggled with so much trauma. Here he was the most powerful man in the world crippled in fear at the thought of this organization setting its sights on him and his family.

"I love you, Lois," He whispered, running his fingers through her hair as she slept. "I won't let anyone hurt you again."

"Everything went according to plan," Gretchen said, adjusting Lex's tie as she spoke. "The assailants were taken care of by Asabi and Bill Church is pulling him closer and closer into his inner circle."

"Yes, and once I've found out what exactly Intergang's plan is for Metropolis, I'll stop it and destroy it piece by piece," Lex said, stepping away from Gretchen. He scanned the collection of newspapers on the table, "What's this?"

He picked up a tabloid cover with an image of Lois Lane and Clark Kent on the cover.

Lane And Kent Hitched! Exclusive Photos Inside!

Another cover had a picture of Lois Lane with a red circle around her waist with a headline in bold yellow letters.

Is She Or Isn't She?

Lex scowled when he saw the image of the happy couple on the cover. It still angered him to know Lois Lane had been so influential in his takedown. She was one of the few women that had been immune to his charms.

He sneered at the image of the mild-mannered reporter, Clark Kent that held Lois Lane in his arms. How Darryl could think an insignificant man like Kent was Superman he would never know. He'd read the articles and stories that had come out after Kent's return from the dead. He'd been held captive and tortured. Not something that was possible when dealing with the man of steel.

But he would soon find Superman's weakness, and then he would exploit it and make the man of steel rue the day he crossed Lex Luthor.

"Lane!" Warren called, waving his hand in front of her face.

"What's up?" Lucy looked up from the sample she was examining under the microscope.

"Got a new assignment for you." He handed her a file.

"What is it?" She asked, opening the file. She frowned when she saw the case she was being handed. "A fingerprint analysis?"

"Real hot issue. The police commissioner wants this made priority." Warren said, avoiding eye contact with her.

"And our John Doe?" She asked, looking toward the microscope where she'd been examining the tissue sample collected at the crime scene.

"He's not going anywhere." Warren shrugged, pulling out a large packet of folders and handing them to her. "Also, we need to have the detectives sign off on these cases."

Lucy sighed, taking the stack of folders from him and flipping the first one open, "I don't understand. These are orders to have tissue samples destroyed..." She looked up at Warren in surprise.

"We can't store samples forever, Lane." Warren shrugged.

"This case isn't even closed!" Lucy scoffed, pointing to the file in her hand.

"I don't ask questions. I just do what I'm told." He retorted irritably. "Just get with the detectives on the case and get them to sign off on it."

"Fine," Lucy said, unable to hide her distaste for the task she'd been given.

The sound of sirens from the television echoed behind her as Lois finished up her article on Cost Mart. It wasn't the best piece she and Clark had written, but it wasn't fluff either. It showed how the large store's presence affected the smaller businesses that had been there prior to Cost Mart moving to Metropolis.

It had been a long and tiring morning. She finally had a possible lead on the corruption with the Metropolis P.D. and possibly City Hall. Unfortunately she couldn't start working on it until she sent the Cost Mart story in. They'd been late...again and Perry hadn't been amused this morning with their excuse of being caught in traffic. She felt a shiver of delight run down her spine, recalling the reason for their tardiness. After Mayson left last night, Clark had disconnected the phone lines and placed a 'do not disturb' sign on the front door to prevent any other interruptions. She grinned to herself, recalling every pleasurable moment in his arms. The morning sickness had long since faded and in its place was an insatiable appetite for her husband. Something neither of them could find a downside to. They were, after all, newlyweds.

After this last week, she needed the ego boost. Though, it was thrilling to watch her body change and feel their child move inside her for the first time it frightened her as well. There were so many new things that came with this pregnancy. Things she had forgotten and things that were new all around. With Jamie, she'd been too distraught to focus too hard on her changing body.

Now here she was, almost six years later and carrying her second child with Clark. Unlike the first time around, she didn't have to go through this alone. It was reassuring and terrifying at the same time. Though she was ecstatic about impending motherhood and finally filling that hole in her heart, that she knew only a child could fill she was apprehensive too.

There were little things over the last week that seemed to rub her the wrong way. The change in the way she was treated by her colleagues once her pregnancy was announced. The pats on the back Clark received from the likes of Ralph and Steve. Then there were the looks she got from Carol and the other city beat reporters as well as a certain conversation she'd overheard in the women's

restroom a few days ago.

<< “Lois Lane finally tamed?”

“Well, at least we don’t have to worry about competing with her for Kerths next year.”

“Yeah, she’s definitely lost her edge.”

“I guess now we know why the need to tie the knot so quickly.”

“Think she got pregnant on purpose?”

“Five years of him being gone and she didn’t take any more than a few months to drag him down the aisle. I give it a year tops.”

“So much for the eye-candy around here. What a waste.”

“I dunno. If you ask me, I think he looks even better now than he did five years ago. Definitely filled out in all the right places.”>>

Lois shook her head, pushing the memory of the conversation she’d overheard out of her mind. She found it harder and harder to remain in control these days. Overhearing conversations from her colleagues about how they didn’t find her a threat professionally hurt, but hearing them dissect her and Clark’s marriage hit a nerve.

Upon seeing the positive pregnancy test, she had been apprehensive. Having another baby scared her and thrilled her all at the same time. Clark’s request to finally be married came shortly after the positive test result and after months of intense therapy for both of them. It didn’t seem to matter to any of these busy-bodies that she and Clark had been engaged prior to his disappearance and her pregnancy with Jamie. It also didn’t seem to matter to them that she received her first Kerth nod on a story she worked on while pregnant with Jamie. No, none of that seemed to matter.

“What’s got your feathers in a bunch?”

Lois looked up and saw Cat Grant taking a seat in the chair at her desk. “Oh, nothing.” She lied, not meeting the older woman’s eyes. “Just trying to figure out this angle.”

“Uh-huh,” Cat noted with a knowing look.

Lois turned her attention back to her screen, unwilling to divulge anything more. While she and Cat had grown close over the years, there were some things she didn’t feel comfortable sharing with her. The comments that had been made brought out many self-doubts in her that she didn’t know existed.

She wasn’t an idiot. She knew her husband was attractive... more than attractive. It was one of the many things that had caught her attention when they’d first met. She’d spent months working side by side with him both at the Planet and the Met U paper and found herself falling hard for him despite the pep talks she gave herself on a daily basis about not getting distracted. She was used to seeing other women stare. It didn’t use to bother her, but now with her body changing the way it was she didn’t feel the same confidence in herself that she had before.

Inner doubts plagued the back of her mind as she watched her body continue to change at what she felt was an insanely fast rate. Here she was the size of a house and Clark was still as gorgeous as ever with women continuing to eye him like he was a piece of meat. It had been annoying when they’d been dating. It had been irritating when they were engaged. Now, it was downright disrespectful and grating on her nerves.

“Well, I have to say this is the first time I’ve seen you act

like...yourself.” Cat began cautiously, looking over her shoulder at the screen Lois was finishing her story on.

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” Lois asked defensively.

“Just that you’ve been a little on the moody side since Perry printed that pregnancy announcement in the Lifestyle section two days ago.” Cat gave her a knowing look.

“That’s not it.” Lois sniffed irritably. “I’ve been a little sidetracked.”

“Yeah, I noticed. Six foot tall. Dark hair and brown eyes...by-line right next to yours?” Cat teased.

“I have work to do,” Lois said, fighting the smile that was threatening to spread across her face.

“Yeah that’s right you two were ‘*caught in traffic*’ this morning.” Cat winked at her.

“Hey, Lois,” Jimmy approached with a message in his hand. “Where’s Clark? I got a message for him—” He waved the white slip of paper in his hand.

“I’ll take it, Jimmy.” Lois pointed to the television that showed a family distraught as Superman carried a young child toward the ambulance. “He’s, uh, covering the drive-by shooting. He should be back soon.” She did her best to hide the strain in her voice as she saw the camera zero in on her husband’s forlorn face.

Jimmy nodded and handed the paper to her then turned to head back to his desk. Cat sighed, standing up, “I’ve gotta get going. The verdict on the Mandelin case is supposed to come in in an hour, and I want to get a good seat.”

“Good luck.” She smiled, watching Cat leave and head to the elevator. Cat always found a way to tease a smile out of her. She was one of the few people Lois had let in after Clark’s disappearance and had become a good friend over the years.

Lois placed the message Jimmy had given her down on her desk, frowning when she saw who it was from. Mayson Drake.

“What? She didn’t disturb us enough last night?” Lois grumbled to herself. She was trying to be polite. She was trying to not over-react, but it was really hard when she had a blonde, size two bimbo of a district attorney showing up everywhere. It was obvious Mayson hadn’t shown up at the apartment for just a deposition last night. Her hair and makeup had been too perfect for just coming from the office.

She had gone over everything that had happened at the police station when they first met Mayson a few days ago, trying to figure out where she could have gotten the idea that Clark was available but nothing popped in her mind. He certainly wasn’t sending off any signals that he was interested in anything other than helping her Uncle Mike. She snorted to herself, recalling the look of surprise on Mayson’s face when she’d answered the door.

Had Clark not been in the next room she probably would have said a lot more to the ADA. Had he not stopped her she would have slammed the door in her face and let her stew on the front porch. It was petty, but being able to knock Mayson down a few pegs would have felt good. She had come to *her* home last night with the intent to do God-knows-what with *her* husband. Even after she knew he was married Mayson couldn’t seem to keep her eyes inside her eye sockets.

‘Court date is scheduled. Call me. — Mayson’

Lois stared down at the note again. If it was just the court date she was calling about there’s no reason Clark had to be the one to call, right? She reached for the phone, dialing the number that had

been left with Jimmy. “Returning a call from Mayson Drake’s office,” she told the secretary. She turned in her chair, to see the coverage on Superman’s rescues in the Lower East Side. It was getting worse and worse each day. The camera lingered on her husband’s face, filled with pain and guilt as he carried a young child toward an awaiting ambulance.

“Mayson Drake,” the voice rang on the other end of the phone.

“Mayson? Hi, Lois Lane...*Kent*.” she emphasized her married name with an icy tone before returning to her normal tone of voice. “I got your message. There’s a court date?”

“Lois, hi,” Mayson cleared her throat before responding, “Yes, next Tuesday at nine am.”

“Anything else I need to pass along to my husband when he gets back?” Lois asked, suppressing the urge to ask why Mayson couldn’t have just left the information with Jimmy when she’d called earlier. She knew given the emotional state she was in getting into a pissing match with the ADA right before her uncle’s trial wasn’t the smartest move.

“No,” Mayson cleared her throat again and added. “Just be there by eight-thirty.”

“Okay, *we’ll* see you then,” Lois said hanging up the phone with a hard click. She jotted down the court date time.

“Hey,” She felt two familiar lips press against her cheek.

She smiled, looking up as she handed him the note. “Court is next week.”

“Does your uncle know?” Clark asked, setting a cup of hot chocolate in front of her.

“I’m not sure. I haven’t called him yet.” She smiled, seeing the Dutch writing on the outside of the paper cup. “Where did you get this from?”

“Just a little out of the way place I know.” He grinned at her.

“You know, you don’t have to go all over the world to satisfy my pregnancy cravings.” She pointed out. “I would have been happy with a cup from Marge’s cart downstairs.”

“I know, but I needed to clear my head after the last rescue.” He said, taking a seat next to her.

“Bad?” she asked, knowing the answer already from the expression on his face.

“Yeah,” he began sadly. “Superman didn’t get there in time.”

“Oh, Clark,” she reached out to place a hand on his arm.

He began reciting the facts from the scene as he placed a hand over hers, fingering the gold band on her hand. “A fifteen-year-old boy is in critical condition. His mother is in shock, and his little sister can’t stop crying. There were witnesses of course, but no one wanted to talk. The police didn’t show until after the ambulance had already left.” He let out a long breath, pinching the bridge of his nose, “I don’t know how much longer I can keep doing this.”

“Doing what?” Lois asked gingerly.

“This.” He gestured toward the television. “Deciding which calls for help to go to first. Determining who lives and who doesn’t.”

“That is not your fault.” She hissed at him adamantly. “You cannot put this all on yourself. You are not responsible.”

“Then who is?” he asked with a shrug. “The police seem to have decided they’re no longer responsible for protecting these neighborhoods. The gang violence is getting worse.”

“I know.” Lois said, tightening her hand in his. “I actually have some information on that front.”

“You found someone willing to talk?” Clark asked, raising his eyebrows in awe. “How’d you manage that?”

“Well, not exactly. No one is talking about the police slow down, but I did find some information out about the Skins.” Lois explained.

“Such as?” Clark asked, leaning in closer.

Lois smiled, pulling out her notepad. “I talked to Louie—You remember Louie, right?”

“Jenna’s dad, right?” Clark asked, recalling their former classmate at Met U.

“Yeah,” Lois nodded.

“Isn’t he the guy that owns that dive out in Hobb’s Bay?” Clark asked, wrinkling his nose.

“He likes to think of it as a club.” She corrected.

“It’s a *dive*.” Clark corrected, giving her a look.

She sighed, “It’s whatever he wants it to be when he’s got information for us. Anyway, he said there were some guys in his club talking about how some lawyer was going to be getting Baby Rage off.”

“Guys? You think they might have been the Skins?” Clark asked, taking a look at her notes.

“It’s possible. I think we should take a look at this lawyer though. Could lead us to whoever is causing the slowdown in the Lower East Side.” Lois said, leaning back in her chair, reaching back to massage her lower back.

“You okay?” He asked in concern.

“Yeah, I think I’ve just been sitting too long.” She cringed, twisting her back to try and relieve the pressure.

“Here, let me see it.” He turned her chair, so she was facing away from him. She felt him press his knuckles against her vertebrae.

“Just one of the downsides of being, further along, I suppose she said.” She felt a blast of warmth spread down her back where she could feel him kneading his knuckles against her vertebrae. She felt a stretching sensation against her back and a pop. “Oh!”

“Did I hurt you?” He asked, looking at her in concern.

“No, no, just surprised me is all.” She smiled back at him. She twisted in her chair, feeling the relief from where the knot in her back seemed to have disappeared. “Thanks.”

“Anytime.” He leaned in to kiss her. “Let’s get out of here. See if we can find what lawyer is going to get Baby Rage off.”

“Sounds like a...” she stopped mid-sentence seeing the expression on his face. “What’s wrong?”

“A voice.” He held up his hand as he listened then whispered. “I’ve got to go. Don’t leave. Don’t go anywhere until I get back.”

Any other time she would have argued about him treating her like an invalid because of the pregnancy, but something in the tone of his voice and the look on his face stopped her. He leaned in to kiss her then disappeared down the corridor that led to the stairwell.

“Be careful.” She whispered.

Clark leaned in to kiss Lois, feeling the troubles from the day lifted after discovering their latest lead. If the Skins were in contact with a lawyer that was promising the charges against Baby Rage would be dismissed, it might lead them to who was

behind this sudden drop in response time from the police. He didn't want to bring it up with Lois right now, but if this was true and there was a lawyer working the system to get the gangster that had tried to burn down Mike Lane's restaurant, then her uncle could be in danger. He'd have to make a stop by Mike's place during his patrol and make sure he was okay.

"Let's get out of here. See if we can find what lawyer is going to get Baby Rage off." He said, helping Lois to her feet. Just as soon as the words escaped his lips he heard a man's voice echo on a frequency he knew only he was privy to.

// "Superman," //

"Sounds like a..." she stopped mid-sentence, looking back at him in concern. "What's wrong?"

"A voice." He held up his hand to listen.

// "I'm contacting you on a hypersonic frequency that only you and a few bats can hear. I don't know where you spend your off hours, but if I were you, I'd be at the Metropolis Park, east gate, inside of three minutes... or someone is going to die... I believe you know her. Lois Lane." //

He tensed up, hearing the threat and looked back at Lois. Afraid to cause her any more stress than she was already under, he leaned in to kiss her and whispered. "I've got to go. Don't leave. Don't go anywhere until I get back."

A few minutes later he was in the air, ready to confront the voice that dared threaten his family. He came into land outside the Metropolis Park where he saw a man sitting on a park bench, feeding the pigeons. Not seeing anyone around, he determined the voice had to come from the man.

"Hey, there," the man smiled, standing to his feet.

Clark didn't even give him a chance to finish the last syllable. He grabbed him by the neck, hoisting him up off the ground as he growled, "You no good piece of garbage. Who do you think you are?!" He did his best to control his anger and not give too much away regarding his relationship with Lois while in the suit. A task that proved difficult when his wife and child's life were being threatened.

The man seemed unaffected by Clark's anger and simply smiled back at him, extending his hand, "Martin Snell, good to meet you."

Clark kept his grip on him, narrowing his eyes at him as Snell continued. "Not into the whole talking thing I see. You're probably wondering how I did that, huh?" He pulled a small radio out of his pocket and spoke into it.

// "Superman, let's talk." //

Snell laughed, "Neat, huh?"

"If this is your idea of a joke, you're going to need a lawyer." He snarled angrily.

"No, I won't. Because A, I am a lawyer and B, this is no joke." Snell glanced at his watch. "I'd say Ms. Lane's got about, ohhhhh, ten maybe fifteen seconds? Think you can get there in time?"

Clark threw Snell to the ground and moved at super-speed back toward the Planet. The glass shattered around him as he flew toward Lois who was sipping her hot chocolate. He didn't give her a chance to respond. He didn't have time. He grabbed her at super-speed, flying her out of the Planet and into the sky.

"Clark, what...?!" Lois looked down at the street below them as he landed her on the roof.

"Stay here." He instructed and flew back into the newsroom where he found Lois' chair covered in yellow paint.

"Superman! What are you—"

Clark looked up to see Perry covered in yellow paint.

"What in the Sam Hill?" Perry looked down at his soiled shirt.

Clark shook his head, examining the silver casing that had shattered on Lois' chair, "Somebody's idea of a sick joke. Don't worry, Mr. White, they won't bother you again."

He flew back to the roof to check on Lois, "Are you all right?"

"Fine," Lois said looking at him in concern. "Are you?"

"I will be in a minute." He said, gesturing toward the door to the stairwell. "It's safe for you to go back down now. It was a false alarm."

Before she could voice her response, he flew back toward the Metropolis Park. Just as Martin Snell was about to leave he grabbed him by the jacket, flying him toward City Hall. "Hey, easy, easy. I was just trying to get your attention so we could talk."

"Well, you've got it and not in a *good* way." He landed on the steps of City Hall, smiling to himself when he saw Mayson Drake approaching. He lifted his arm to get her attention.

"You don't want to do that, Superman." Snell warned.

"Give me one good reason why I should listen to a word you say." Clark snapped back, leaning in so his face was a few inches away from Snell.

"I think I've already given you *one* very good reason." He said as Mayson walked up to them.

"Martin, what are you doing here?" Mayson asked.

"I dunno," He looked at Clark with a sinister glare. "I thought I'd catch up with Superman here. Enjoy the fresh air..." He elbowed Mayson, "You know he gets that look on his face and he reminds me of Judge O'Neil."

Clark narrowed his eyes at Snell, still unsure what game he was playing. "Mr. Snell and I were just having a little chat about *ethics*."

"Really?" Mayson asked, looking at Snell in disgust. "You might want to write a textbook. This one's been skirting the line for the last decade." She glared at Snell.

"Now, now, Mayson I resent that." Snell sniffed.

"What are you really doing here Martin? I told you before you're not going to get Baby Rage out on bail. No judge in their right mind is going to allow it." Mayson narrowed her eyes at Snell.

'Baby Rage?'

Realization dawned on Clark as the pieces began to fit. Snell was the lawyer the Skins were talking about.

"Well, we'll just see about that. You know the organization has pull. My guy is guaranteed his day in court." Snell sneered.

"Uh-huh," Mayson looked at him in disbelief. "We'll see about that." She finished walking down the steps toward her awaiting car.

Snell turned back toward Clark and smiled, "You learn fast. Good."

"This is a warning." Clark hissed, getting in Snell's face once more. "You come anywhere near the Kents or anyone at the Planet again and I'll make it my mission to destroy you and whatever organization it is you're working for."

“Oh, I’m shaking in my boots.” Snell grinned back. “No, no, that’s not how this works. You do what I say or someone you care about dies, remember?”

“I don’t take orders!” Clark snapped.

“Fine, call it a suggestion.” Snell shrugged. “A very *strong* suggestion.” His eyes narrowed as he pulled himself out of Clark’s grip. “The organization I work for is very impressed with you, Superman. I myself am a huge fan. You’ve got me dazzled. I’m a huge fan. We don’t want you to stop being the Man of Steel. It’s a beautiful thing.”

“But?” Clark narrowed his eyes at him, knowing there was more coming. He did his best not to react but he could feel the apprehension creeping into his voice. Snell was with the organization. The mysterious organization that Lois’ father had been working with. The organization that had been in charge of Trask and responsible for his torture for five years. It took everything in him not to throttle the man in front of him.

“Ah, the chase,” Snell smiled, straightening his suit as he spoke. “What my partners and I do want is for you to stay out of our business.” He took a step toward Clark, “Face it. As our little demonstration proved, even you can’t be in two places at once—but our bullets can.”

“Let’s see how fast you can give your orders from a jail cell.” Clark said, pulling on his arm.

“Sure!” Snell grinned, “You could take me in. You’re Superman and I’m just a guy from the Bronx. But do that two things happen: A, someone you care about dies—and B, a replacement for me steps right in. Now you don’t want A and I don’t want B so I think what you need is a little attitude adjustment.”

Snell peeled Clark’s arm off of him and pointed his index finger against Clark’s chest. “By that I mean, be the best Superman you can be. Street crime? Wipe it out. Terrorists? Kick their butts. Carjackers? Hey, I drive a Ferrari, put those guys in orbit.”

He took another step toward him and in a low menacing voice Snell added, “But you stay out of the Lower East Side. I don’t care if it’s a cat chasing a mouse. You flash that cape in that part of town and you’re looking at an all-expenses-paid education in bereavement. Are we clear?”

“On one thing,” Clark hissed back angrily. “This is not over.”

“The organization?” Lois echoed, watching as Clark paced around the conference room in front of her. After Superman had flown into the newsroom and shattered glass everywhere, she’d moved her laptop and notes into the conference room while the maintenance crew worked on cleaning up the glass and paint.

“That’s what he said,” Clark said, running a hand through his hair. “Lois, I don’t know what to do. I got here in time this time, but what if…”

“We’ll figure it out,” Lois reassured, taking a step toward him, wrapping her arms around his waist. “You can’t just stop being Superman because some bully in a suit says so.”

“But the bullets…” he reminded her.

“I know.” She let out a long breath, resting her head against his chest, reminded of the warning that had been sent to them.

Try as they might it seemed an impossible task to separate herself from Clark’s alter-ego in the public eye. His rescue of her

with the Messenger bombing and her landing the first exclusive with Superman seemed to forever tie her to Superman. It didn’t matter how many interviews he gave to other reporters or how many unrelated stories she and Clark covered. The world associated her, Lois Lane with Superman. And now it seemed the organization had her associated with him too.

“You know, Perry said he ducked.” Lois began, recalling her conversation with her editor earlier.

“What?” He asked, confused.

“He said he ducked and the bullet still found him,” Lois said. “Almost like it knew where he was.”

Clark frowned, “Like some sort of tracking system?” he looked at her in concern, “*You* didn’t get hit though.”

“Maybe they sent it to where they thought I’d be?” Lois guessed.

“If that’s true then they’d have to track everyone without anyone knowing.” Clark pointed out.

An idea popped in her head, “I’m going to call Dr. Klein.”

“Dr. Klein?” Clark asked skeptically.

“I did a story a few years ago on something S.T.A.R. Labs was developing for the military. A genetic tagging system. Dr. Klein was the lead scientist on the project.” Lois pointed out, reaching for the phone.

“Genetic tagging?” Clark asked, skeptically. “Sounds like something out of a bad sci-fi movie.”

“Well, unfortunately, they’ve come a long way in the technology they’re using to annihilate other countries. S.T.A.R. Labs is just one of the many companies that gets contracted to build stuff like this.” She stopped when she heard the voice on the other end of the phone. “Yes, hello? Advanced Science Division. Dr. Klein, please.”

“May I tell him whose calling?” the receptionist asked.

“Lois Lane.” She said, sighing when she heard the holding message on the other end of the phone.

“You really think this organization has that kind of pull?”

Clark asked uncertainly. “What you’re talking about is military weaponry being used—”

“By criminals?” Lois finished for him. “It happens. A lot more often than anyone would like to admit, but it does happen.”

“Okay, well let’s say your theory is correct. How do they even know who to tag and how do they even get access to—”

“I don’t remember everything, but I’m sure if we take that test bullet they sent and brought it to Dr. Klein—”

“—he might be able to trace it.” Clark finished her thought for her.

“Exactly!” Lois cheered happily, turning her attention to the phone, “Yes, Dr. Klein?”

Lucy Lane made her way through the crowded restaurant, scanning for the familiar face. Finally, she found him, standing by the entrance to the bar. “Right here, Luce!”

“Hi, Uncle Mike,” she beamed, giving him a halfway hug as he guided her toward the door that led them to the outdoor patio. “Any reason you wanted to meet here instead of your restaurant? I was kinda looking forward to some chocolate mousse when you invited me to lunch.”

“Luigi makes it almost as good as me.” He winked at her, pulling out the chair for her.

Lucy frowned, looking around the crowded patio before taking a seat. “But it’s not the same.”

“I know, kiddo.” He sighed, taking a seat across from her. “I’ll make you a batch for you to take home this weekend.” He pulled up his menu before adding, “I just didn’t want to take any chances. If anything happened to you or your sister—your mother would kill me.”

“I thought the police caught the guy that tried to burn down your place,” Lucy said, setting her menu down.

“They did, but he has friends and let’s just say Southside ain’t the safest place to be right now,” Mike explained gently.

“I heard,” Lucy said with a sigh, looking away.

“What’s wrong?” Mike pressed, recognizing the expression on her face.

She toyed with whether she wanted to bring up her latest dilemma with him and finally decided to bring it up. “Have you ever been asked to do something you think is wrong?”

“Like against the law wrong or morally wrong?” Mike asked.

“Both,” Lucy said shakily.

“Well, you know I spent two tours in Vietnam. I saw things and did things I wasn’t proud of in order to survive...but it was a kill or be killed situation.” Mike began gently.

“This is definitely not that.” Lucy sighed. “My boss wants me to destroy evidence. He pulled me off of a real case to deal with paperwork and—”

“And you think he’s trying to hide something?” Mike guessed.

“See, that’s just it. I don’t know.” Lucy ran a hand through her hair. “It’s not like I know a whole lot about the Criminal Science division, but I do know we’re not supposed to destroy samples when the case is still open.”

“Sounds like a dilemma,” Mike observed carefully.

“I don’t know what to do.” Lucy hung her head hopelessly.

“What do you think you should do?” Mike asked.

“Something that could get me fired,” Lucy said bitterly.

“Or something that could make a difference,” Mike said.

“You think?” Lucy looked back at him with a half-smile.

“You do what your gut tells you. No job is worth a guilty conscience.”

“Yes, yes,” Dr. Klein looked at the remnants of what he called a ‘smart-bullet’ under his microscope, “Definitely genetic marking.” He looked up at Lois and Clark. “Where did you say you found these?”

“At the Daily Planet,” Clark explained, wrapping a protective arm around Lois. “Superman...was able to get Lois out of there in time but another smart-bullet hit our editor.”

Dr. Klein frowned, “He got her out of there? It didn’t follow her?”

“No,” Lois said. “We were thinking they just sent these bullets to where they thought I was at. Luckily it was just a warning.”

“This time,” Clark corrected.

“Yes, it is possible but with the genetic marking system that was developed these smart-bullets are programmed to lock onto a target. It’s the beauty of the system.” Dr. Klein explained, pulling up his notes on the program. A few minutes later a 3-D model of a motorized fly appeared on the screen. “We disguised the genetic

tag in an everyday house fly and injected unsuspecting targets making the weapon the tag was linked with zero in precisely on the victim without harming anyone else. If this is the same system then more than likely it was your chair that was injected with by the homing device.”

“They injected my chair?” Lois asked in surprise. “Why?”

“Maybe they just couldn’t get close enough to you.” Dr. Klein shrugged. “Either way, I’m more concerned with how they got access to this system in the first place. It’s still under lock and key here at STAR Labs. If someone has stolen this technology...”

“If?” Clark pressed skeptically. “I think the threat today answered that question.”

“S.T.A.R. Labs is supposed to be the most secure facility in the world. Breaking through our firewalls would require inside access.” Dr. Klein mused aloud. “I’ll have to bring this up with the board so we can figure out who’s behind this. In the meantime, be wary of any house flies or mosquitos.”

“Dr. Klein, is there any way we can track who sent these?” Lois pointed to the casing under his microscope.

“Not from this.” Dr. Klein sighed, “But if I can get ahold of the tagging device I can track it back to its source. Each of them was programmed with a homing device.”

“Homing device?” Clark asked intrigued. “Like a tracking system.”

“Precisely.”

Clark glanced at Lois then back to Dr. Klein, “Any way you might be able to bring that system up, maybe check and see if any of the tagging devices are missing?”

“What is this?” Sam asked apprehensively, eyeing the small silver space craft in front of him. He knew all too well what it was.

“Oh, something we came across during the disassembly of a certain government agency.” Bill Church Jr. said with a smug grin.

Sam forced a smile back, knowing full well that if he gave himself away, he could be putting his family at risk. He had to play along and help gain as much information as he could from the inside. Once he had what he needed he would disappear.

“Oh?” Sam feigned surprise.

“I’ll be taking over the projects in District 26. I want to begin testing. See if this can tell us anything about where it came from.” Bill Jr. said, tapping the left wing of the ship. “I trust we can count on you, Dr. Lane.”

“Of course.”

Lois held up two different outfits as she stood in front of the bathroom mirror in the new lingerie she’d picked up from her latest shopping trip. Unlike most of the maternity bras, it didn’t make her feel like an old lady. It provided her with the support she needed while still making her feel desirable. These days it was the little things that helped boost her confidence. The more her body changed, the more she found herself battling self-doubt.

Her choices were becoming slimmer and slimmer when it came to work attire as her waist continued to expand. It frustrated her to no end. She’d been able to slide by with stretch pants and longer tops with Jamie until almost seven months. Now here she was at seventeen weeks pregnant and already dipping into the

maternity clothing she'd packed away. Unfortunately, most of it was geared toward the cooler months. It was June and wearing long heavy maternity pants didn't appeal to her in the slightest.

"We're going to be late." Clark reminded her, wrapping an arm around her from behind.

"Red or green?" she asked, holding the two outfits up for him to help her decide.

He gave her a once-over, and she smiled watching as his eyes lingered over her. Despite the obvious change to her midsection he still had a hard time controlling himself when he saw her like this. He wiggled his eyebrows at her and gave her a wicked grin, "How about we call in and then you don't have to wear either?"

"Be serious!" she retorted, unable to hide the smile on her face as he pulled her to him.

"I am...*very* serious." He whispered in her ear. "You're gorgeous."

"You're biased. I'm getting fat." She retorted as his hands roamed up and down her sides, resting on her growing abdomen.

"You're pregnant. Not fat." He ran his hands up her body. She'd had to change two bra sizes in the last month. "You're beautiful." He murmured in her ear, placing a kiss on her shoulder blade. "And incredibly sexy." He whispered.

She frowned, staring at her reflection in the mirror. How Clark could look at her and not see the flaws she knew were growing more and more evident with each passing day was beyond her. He seemed oblivious to the fact that she was showing at what she felt was a rapid pace. Part of her wondered if it was connected with his alien genes or if it was just another thing to chalk up to it being her second pregnancy. She'd begun to feel the baby move a week ago—much earlier than she had with Jamie.

"I don't feel that way." She hung the outfits on the door to her closet. "I'm blowing up into a balloon. None of my suits hardly fit anymore. I've hardly got any maternity clothes I can wear. Most of them are for winter, and a lot of them are too big."

"You're not blowing up into anything." He soothed. "We'll go get some more maternity clothes this week."

"I hate having to spend money on clothes I'm only going to be wearing for a few months. We haven't even started getting furniture for the nursery or looking for a new place to live. What are we going to do when we move? I'm already the size of a house and..." She pointed to her chest. "...these things have already gone up a size and a half."

"I've noticed." He wiggled his eyebrows at her with an impish grin. "I prefer to think of these as another perk."

"Me being the size of a whale is *not* a perk." She retorted irritably, crossing her arms over her chest defiantly.

"You're not the size of a whale, honey," He ran his hands up and down her growing abdomen, leaning in to kiss her. "You're pregnant with our child. You could be wearing a paper bag, and I'd still think you're the most stunning woman in the room." He tightened his arms around her, and she found herself smiling back at him. He always found a way to make her smile even when she was in the foulest of moods. He leaned in to kiss her once more, "Now, if you don't get dressed we're going to be extremely late and have to explain to Perry why I had to ravish you."

She giggled at the mental image, pulling away from him, reaching for the red and black suit hanging on the closet door. She couldn't suppress the smile on her face as she watched him turn

away to finish getting dressed. "Ravish, huh?"

"Not helping." He retorted from behind her. "You're supposed to be getting dressed."

"I am." She said, half-heartedly, unable to wipe the mental image he'd planted in her mind.

"No, you're not." He whispered, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind. "You're going to make us both very late."

"How late?" she asked curiously as his hands wandered up her body, resting beneath her ribcage.

"*Inexcusably* late." He whispered leaning in to kiss her.

Present Day...

Rollie Vale smiled as he opened the chest cavity for Johnny Corbin to see a purple and grey glow coming from inside him. "You're going to have to go slow, John," Vale warned. "You were unconscious for six months."

"Superman," Corbin growled angrily.

"John, what did I just say?" Vale tried to steer Corbin's focus back to the present and away from his rival. "We still don't know if the testing Dr. Lane did on you is accurate. I wouldn't recommend going against Superman again until we've had time to —"

"Dr. Lane?" Corbin crinkled his nose. "Yes, Dr. Lane..." he seemed to recall something as he began taking practice swings in the air each one growing stronger and stronger. "You go slow, doc. I'm gonna get me some answers."

"Answers?" Vale called after him, reaching for a remote on the table that had been programmed to control Corbin. "What kind of answers?"

"I got a score to settle..." His voice grew weary as Vale pressed a button on the remote.

"Not yet you don't, Corbin. We've got more testing to do." Vale smiled to himself. "After the last time, we took some precautions to make sure you were more controlled."

"I...I...I..." John stammered as his body slowed down, keeping him in a statuesque pose as he glared back at Vale.

"You won't be running off this time. The organization has big plans for you."

He listened in as he heard the familiar footsteps and heartbeat from the other side of the door. Images continued to plague his mind as he wrestled with the chains. They'd be back in there soon.

Another needle.

Another dose of that poisonous liquid.

He shuddered at the memory, staring at his arm, seeing the bruising that had been left from the previous punctures. He had to get out of there. He had to escape.

Seven Months Ago...

"Just under the wire," Lois commented taking a seat at her desk and booting up her computer.

"Well, we did have some super help with that," Clark commented, whispering in her ear before leaning in to give her a peck on the cheek.

"You're late." Cat teased, walking up to Lois' desk. Lois exchanged a look with Clark, smiling as she recalled the reason for their tardiness. "Traffic problems again?" Cat gave a teasing

grin. “You two should really find a different route.”

Lois didn’t say anything, watching as her husband’s neck began to change to a dark shade of red as he tried to change the subject. “So, Cat, I heard you finally got a verdict on the Mandelin case.”

“Yeah, a lot of good it did me.” Cat snorted, rolling her eyes. “All those weeks sitting around listening to testimony after testimony on this hired gun and then I find out the case is going to get tossed because someone lost the evidence.”

“Lost it?” Lois echoed, looking at her in surprise. “Didn’t they find the guy standing over his victim’s body with the murder weapon?”

“Yes, but apparently the forensic evidence was destroyed,” Cat growled angrily. “The defense attorney filed a motion last minute to have the evidence reexamined, and when the prosecution couldn’t produce it, the judge threw the book at him. He’s trying to toss the entire case out.”

“How is that even possible?” Clark asked, dumbfounded.

“Beats me.” Cat shook her head, “But I plan to find out.”

“CK, call on line two!” Jimmy called from his cubicle.

Clark nodded, heading to his desk to take the call. The news coverage on the Mandelin case caught her eye. “This shocking case that has continued to grip this city on Maxwell Mandelin. The hired hitman that was rumored to have been employed by everyone from the Metros to Lex Luthor and responsible for hundreds of deaths in the past four years has been released pending the DA’s ability to provide any solid evidence linking him to his crimes. The District Attorney’s office and Metropolis P.D. are under investigation for their part in this. The mayor is calling for an increase in patrols around Metropolis.”

A protective hand moved to her abdomen as the image of Maxwell Mandelin’s mugshot flashed on the screen. Memories from her undercover assignment at the Metro Club came to her mind. Mandelin was one of Johnny Taylor’s top lieutenants. There was always something so creepy about the man. She and Cat had been among the first journalists to break the story when he’d finally been caught three months before Clark’s return.

“They’ll get him,” Clark reassured, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder and giving it a gentle squeeze.

“How?” she whispered, looking back at him. “You heard them. The case is as good as dismissed.”

“This shocking case that has continued to grip this city on Maxwell Mandelin. The hired hitman that was rumored to have been employed by everyone from the Metros to Lex Luthor and responsible for hundreds of deaths in the past four years has been released pending the DA’s ability to provide any solid evidence linking him to his crimes. The District Attorney’s office and Metropolis P.D. are under investigation for—”

The image disappeared into darkness as Bill Church turned around in his chair to face his lead counsel, Martin Snell with a smile. “Excellent work on the Mandelin case, Martin,” Bill Church congratulated as he took a long puff from his cigar. “Paying off the Metropolis P.D. to destroy their evidence will help us move onto phase two.”

“Well, it’s certainly cheaper than owning the judges.” Martin Snell laughed, handing him the file in his hand.

“How are we with the Superman problem?” Church asked,

looking over the numbers Snell had given him.

“No sign of him, but that doesn’t mean he won’t show.” Snell began cautiously, “He wasn’t too keen on our threat against Lois Lane.”

“He doesn’t have a choice,” Church remarked with a smug grin. “How is the buyout of Southside coming along?”

“There’s a lot of resistance to this one block.” Snell pointed on the map to a small red square. “Everyone around the area is ready to sell but this one.” He tapped the square again, “I don’t know. It’s like they’re not afraid or something.”

“Well, let’s give them something to be afraid of,” Church said. “It’s time to test out Superman.”

“Where, exactly, did you meet this guy?” Clark asked, looking around the parking garage suspiciously.

“He’s one of Perry’s contacts at the Police Commissioner’s office,” Lois said, tugging the hem of her coat as she looked around.

Clark looked at his watch, “Are you sure we’re in the right place? Maybe he didn’t get your message.”

“He got it.” Lois retorted.

“Maybe he ignored it?” Clark suggested, glancing at his watch. “It’s been almost an hour.”

“He’ll be here,” Lois reassured him.

Clark glanced at his watch, still not convinced.

“I may be late, but I always show up.” A voice behind them said. Clark turned to see a man in a trench coat, mid-thirties with thinning hair and sunglasses on. “You must be Kent.” He said, nodding in Clark’s direction.

“Thanks for coming,” Lois said.

“You said you wanted to know what was going on in the Lower East Side.” The man said, looking around the parking garage uncertainly.

“What can you tell me?” Lois asked.

“You’d better be sure you want to know. Once you cross into this, there’s no going back.” The man warned.

Clark looked to Lois who nodded, and he responded firmly, “We’re sure.”

“Right now, it’s all focused on the Southside. Precincts having their funding cut. Men transferred. Equipment sabotaged. Cops paid to look the other way.”

“Why?” Lois asked, not following where this was going.

“Think about it. What happens when a good neighborhood goes bad?” her source said.

“People want to move,” Clark said, following.

“Prices go down. Whole blocks go on the market for pennies on the dollar.” Lois reasoned.

“Very good.” He nodded.

“What can you tell us?” Lois asked, realizing this was bigger than she or Clark realized.

“I want to help, bad cops make a bad city, but my neck’s a little too far out as it is.” He explained.

“You’ve got to give us something,” Lois said. “People are in danger.”

He tossed her a flash drive and nodded, “See if that leads you anywhere. Don’t call me again.”

Lucy Lane went into the system checking case after case. All

of the cases she had requests for had witness statements about an organization.

She opened up the Metropolis P.D. database and typed ‘the organization’ into the search queue. Thousands of cases came back. Kidnapping. Gun smuggling. Terrorism. Murder.

“The organization has no name. It has no face, but it’s everywhere.”

“The organization threatened to kill my daughter if I didn’t change my testimony.”

“The organization kidnapped my family and made me create a pipe bomb.”

Lucy frowned, seeing the first few cases and witness statements on this mysterious organization. The newscaster on the television caught her attention. She looked over and saw the tall brunette addressing the camera in front of City Hall.

“This shocking case that has continued to grip this city on Maxwell Mandelin. The hired hitman that was rumored to have been employed by everyone from the Metros to Lex Luthor and responsible for hundreds of deaths in the past four years has been released pending the DA’s ability to provide any solid evidence linking him to his crimes. The District Attorney’s office and Metropolis P.D. are under investigation for—”

‘Maxwell Mandelin.’

Lucy looked at the list of names for the cases that Warren wanted her to get signed off on. Sure enough, Maxwell Mandelin’s case was one of the top five on the list. She opened the forensic log used to catalog the status of evidence collected at the crime scenes and typed in ‘Mandelin’ in the queue.

Hundreds of results came up, and she went in to check the status of each sample.

Analysis Complete. Date of Expiration April 2020

She smiled to herself. The sample was still in the system somewhere. Which meant the person that told the judge it was destroyed had to be in collusion with whoever was making Jack Warren destroy the evidence in these fifteen cases.

Right now she didn’t know who to trust. Her boss was obviously involved in the corruption. She couldn’t trust him. She didn’t know who in the department could be involved. There was one person she knew wouldn’t be involved. She needed to talk to him. More importantly, she needed to let the people know what was going on.

Lucy tapped her hand on the stack of folders in front of her. She knew what she needed to do.

“Dr. Klein said there was no sign of the radioisotope from the blood sample he tested yesterday,” Clark said, taking a seat next to Lois.

“Well, there’s some good news.” Lois shrugged, “I haven’t been able to find much of a connection with this Martin Snell. Five years ago he was staff council for Bill Church—”

“The Cost Mart guy?” Clark asked.

Lois nodded, “Worked in corporate acquisitions. Responsible for buying up overseas companies.”

“Hmm,” Clark tapped his thumb on his chin.

“What?” she asked.

“Remember what your dad said about the organization buying up companies all over the world and running their criminal elements through them?”

“Yeah?” Lois began uncertainly.

“What if Snell is how they did it?” Clark shrugged, “He did say he represented the organization.”

“It is a bit of a stretch, but it wouldn’t surprise me.” Lois looked at her screen, “Looking at some of these acquisitions—If we compare them with all the major acts of terrorism—”

“They line up, don’t they?” Clark asked.

“To a ‘T.’” Lois pointed at the two windows she had open of a list of places Snell had been involved in the corporate takeovers and the list of companies that had been connected to terrorism over the past five years. “Pretty scary, huh?” He nodded, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek.

“What about that flash drive? Were you able to find anything on it?” He asked.

Lois sighed, pulling up the files she’d saved to her desktop. “He wasn’t kidding when he said it was big. If these reports are true, then half the major cities in the world have been infiltrated by this organization.”

“What’s that?” Clark asked, pointing to a folder titled ‘Intergang’ on her directory.

“Intergang?” Lois shrugged, clicking on the folder. Article after article came up from all around the world on the mysterious organization connected with crime after crime around the world.

“European Press. Hong Kong Times. Australian Press.” Clark read off. “These guys really do get around, don’t they?”

“Mass criminal organization that knows no bounds continues to grip fear into cities around the world. Intergang is the most deadly and ruthless organization Australia has come across and —” Lois read the article aloud.

“Intergang?” Clark shook his head, “There it is again.”

“Look what happened to the reporter.” Lois pointed out. “Fatal car accident.”

He took a deep breath and leaned against her. “We’ll stop them.”

“Clark if half the stuff in here is true...” she placed a hand on her abdomen and sighed in relief when she felt his hand already there. “Maybe if I just stay out of the newsroom, they won’t be able to find me and you can —”

“You’re not the only one they threatened.” Clark reminded her. “He said if Superman showed up in —” Something seemed to click in Lois’ mind at his statement. He recognized that ‘I’ve got a plan’ look on her face. “What?”

“He said Superman couldn’t stop them.” Lois said with a grin, “You and I both know that’s just a suit.” She whispered. “What if it wasn’t Superman helping?”

“You get that look in your eyes, and it really makes me nervous.” He said with a sigh.

“What?” she shrugged. “It could work...until we can track where those smart bullets are coming from, Superman could go undercover.”

“Undercover?” he gave her a skeptical look.

A match.

Lucy smiled to herself as she held up the samples from the John Doe. She had a match and a possible lead for the detective on the case. She looked at the case file and smiled when she saw the familiar name listed as the lead contact for the case.

Bill Henderson.

“Lane!”

She jumped, hearing Jack Warren’s voice from behind her. “Here we go.” She muttered under her breath.

“You want to tell me why none of these reports aren’t signed off on?” he asked, waving the stack of folders in his hand before slamming them down on her desk.

“I was going to, but then I thought I should give you some time to think over whether you really want to do this.” She said not looking up as she typed in her final notes on her findings.

“You wanna run that by me again?” he scoffed.

“Well, it’s against the law to destroy evidence in an active investigation.” She began pulling out the cases she’d memorized as pending from the stack. “I cannot in good conscience put criminals back on the street because the department doesn’t have room to store the evidence.”

“It wasn’t a request.” He said between gritted teeth.

“You really want to do this?” she asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Just do as you’re told, and there won’t be any issues.” He said, sliding the stack of folders to her.

“Clark?” Lois called as she entered the apartment that was littered with boxes everywhere. He’d gotten called away on a rescue a few hours ago. After filing what they had on their investigation into the police corruption with Perry she’d headed home, hoping to find Clark there. It seemed he’d been busy.

“Hey, honey,”

She looked toward the backdoor that led to the balcony and saw him in a pair of jeans and green button-down shirt closing the doors behind him.

“More boxes?” she asked, looking around the crowded apartment. “Clark, it’s hard enough to move around here as it is.”

“I know, but I thought it would do us some good to go through some of the baby stuff and figure out what we’re going to use for this little one and what we need to buy.” He said, looking around sheepishly. “I guess it is kinda crowded in here.”

“Babies do require a lot of stuff.” She reminded him with a smile, making her way toward him.

“Which is why we should seriously start talking about looking for a new place.” He said, pulling her to him. “Something that isn’t my place or your place, but our place.” He whispered, nuzzling her ear.

“Our place does have a nice ring to it.” She reasoned aloud.

“We’ve only got another month left on the lease here anyway.” He pointed out, pulling out a real estate brochure. “We need to make a decision.”

She smirked at him when she saw the red, blue and green flags from where he’d marked pages in the brochure. “I see you’ve been busy.”

“Uh-huh,” he grinned at her pulling out a white clothing box from the table, “And I even had an idea about that whole undercover idea of yours.”

“So my idea wasn’t as ridiculous as you thought, huh?” she teased.

“I still think we need to be careful, but, no, definitely not ridiculous.” He said, holding up the police uniform he’d picked up. “This is about as close to genuine as I could find but it’ll get the job done.”

She grinned at the uniform, “Sticking with the whole Law and Order theme I see?” She ran a hand over his chest admiring how the navy blue uniform looked up against him. She could definitely have fun with this undercover business.

“I figured it’d at least help remind people that police are there to help them.” Clark moved to cup her cheek.

She leaned in to kiss him only to stop a few millimeters away from his lips when the insistent tapping on their front door broke the moment. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” Lois muttered to herself. Clark turned to put the uniform back in the box while she made her way through the maze of boxes.

“I’m coming I’m coming.” She called hearing the knocking growing more and more insistent.

“Lucy?” she opened the door and found her sister on the other side, carrying a large stack of files in her arms.

“Can I come in?” Lucy asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Sure, just have a seat if you can find one,” Lois said wryly, motioning to the boxes Clark had piled near the couch.

“Spring cleaning a bit early aren’t ya?” Lucy teased. “Hi Clark,” she smiled toward Clark who was giving a good performance of struggling to move the five boxes blocking the couch to the other side of the room.

He set the boxes down and smiled at her, “Hi Luce,” He motioned to the now cleared off couch, “Have a seat.”

“Thanks,” Lucy took a seat and set the large stack of folders on her lap.

“What’s up?” Lois asked, taking a seat next to her, noticing the distracted look on her sister’s face.

Lucy grinned when she zeroed in on Lois’ midsection. “Aww, you’re getting the baby bump.” She placed a hand over the small bump and smiled. “Hello, in there little one...”

“You are being ridiculous.” Lois retorted, pushing her away from her stomach.

“Hey, the kid’s gotta recognize Aunt Lucy’s voice somehow.” She shrugged with a grin.

“Don’t take it personally, Luce, she won’t let me do it either.” Clark retorted, giving Lois an amused expression as she took a seat on the other side of the couch.

“She was like that last time too,” Lucy said, shaking her head. “She’ll loosen up in a few weeks.”

“I’m right here.” Lois gave her sister a nudge with her elbow. “And as much as I would love to get into a deep conversation about both of your needs to talk to my stomach that is ballooning into the size of a house every second we sit here mind you—”

Lucy rolled her eyes and snorted, “Yeah and I’m the Queen of England.”

“Don’t get her started,” Clark muttered shaking his head.

“Right here.” Lois held up her hand, and he chuckled. She turned back to Lucy, “Somehow I don’t think you came all this way to argue about the size of this.” She patted her growing abdomen. “What’s up?”

Lucy leaned forward, taking a deep breath. “If I have information on something that’s newsworthy...something that needs to be public knowledge...could you print it without using my name?”

Lois exchanged a look with Clark then turned back to Lucy, “Of course.”

Lucy handed her the stack of folders in her hands. “I was

asked to get these signed off on by the detectives on these cases. Almost every one of them are currently pending cases.”

Lois’ brow furrowed when she read the names on a few of these cases. “More corruption.”

“More?” Lucy asked, confused.

“We’ve been looking into the slow down at the Metropolis P.D. in response to calls for help in the Lower East Side,” Clark explained.

“You think it’s connected?” Lucy asked.

“More than likely,” Lois said, looking through the files. “Can we keep these or do you need copies?”

“Those are yours to keep. Copies of the originals.” Lucy said shakily.

“What are you going to do?” Lois asked.

“I think there’s at least one officer on the force I can trust to do the right thing. I’m going to see if he can help.” Lucy said.

“Luce, this case with Mandelin—” Lois began to ask.

Lucy shook her head, pulling out a file from the stack. “It hasn’t been destroyed, but they’re trying to cover their bases.”

“Any idea who *they* is?” Clark asked.

“I wish I knew.” Lucy sighed.

Lois reached over to squeeze her sister’s hand. “We’ll figure this all out. You’ll see.”

“I hope so.” Lucy leaned her head on her shoulder. “I just don’t understand any of this.” She looked toward Clark who had a faraway look on his face.

“I, uh—” he looked to Lois, and she sighed.

“You know what I would kill for right now? Some of those Thai beef rolls with the red sauce...” Lois said, trying to think of a believable excuse for him to leave. Who said pregnancy cravings didn’t have a good use?

“Right!” Clark grinned, leaning in to kiss her as she stood up and grabbed the box he’d put his undercover uniform in. “I’ll go pick some up while I take this back to storage. Luce? You wanna stay for dinner?”

“Sure,” Lucy grinned happily. “I’ll keep this one company while you get food.”

“Right,” he nodded, trying not to be too obvious as he made a dash for the front door. A few seconds later they heard a sonic boom outside.

Lucy gave her an amused look, “Still on that Asian kick I see.”

“What can I say?” Lois shrugged, “The baby loves it.” Her phone began to ring, and she looked at it with a frown.

“What is it?” Lucy asked.

“It’s Uncle Mike.” She said, answering the phone, “Hello?”

The street lamps that were normally lit were off when Clark arrived outside of Mike’s restaurant. It had been hard to make out, but his muffled cry for help had been unmistakable. “Get out of here you, punks!”

Mike Lane stood in the middle of his store with a broom surrounded by kids that couldn’t be older than sixteen or seventeen. Unfortunately, they were all armed with baseball bats, knives, and chains.

“We just wanna talk,” one of the gang members taunted, knocking the phone out of his hand and crushing it with his foot.

Another thug swung toward Mike with a knife in his hand

coming inches away from his face when Clark fully dressed in the police uniform intervened, grabbing the thug’s hand back.

“You have the right to remain silent.” He said, ducking as the thugs began to try and turn on him.

One of the thugs began swinging the chains toward him, and Clark ducked again, “Anything you say can and will be used against you.”

As Clark ducked, the thug swinging the chains hit one of the thugs that was holding a baseball bat. The thug with the baseball bat struck the guy with the chains in the ribs causing his to groan in pain.

“...in a court of law.” Clark saw the baseball bat coming toward him and ducked, reaching for the bat in mid-air, jerking it and the thug that still held it toward him. With a healthy use of super strength, he jerked the bat toward the awaiting tin trash cans in the corner.

“You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.” Clark said, advancing toward the thug that had tried to assault Mike with the knife earlier.

The thug screamed and went into a karate stance running toward Clark. He smirked to himself, holding his hand out and allowing the thug to run into his palm. The thug fell to the ground, and Clark looked down at the now unconscious thugs, “Do you understand these rights as I have explained them to you?”

A low moan escaped from the thug he’d just dropped, and Mike chuckled, placing a hand on Clark’s shoulder, “Officer, I think that’s a ‘yes.’”

Clark smiled, readjusting his police cap to assure himself his face was covered, “I better call for a, uh...”

“Backup?” Mike guessed.

“Right.” Clark nodded, disappearing as he heard sirens approaching.

Present Day...

“Hey, hey, hey, little guy,” Clark soothed, holding Jon against his chest as he rocked him back and forth. “You need to let your mom sleep.” He looked back at the sleeping figure of his wife. Jon let out a half-hearted whimper, and Clark smiled at him, “You hungry, buddy?”

Jon seemed to understand what he was saying, reaching out to grab his glasses as he closed the bedroom door behind him. He carried him downstairs and pulled out a packet of breast milk from the fridge, pouring it into the bottle and tightening the lid. He warmed the milk with his heat vision before offering it to his son.

They’d gone back and forth on the issues that came with feeding Jon. Lois had tried to keep nursing him but found herself unable to keep Jon full while nursing. At least with pumping, he was able to help with feedings and allow her a chance to rest when she could.

He bounced Jon in his arms as he walked toward the rocking chair by the window. He loved moments like this where he could just enjoy the peace that came with holding his son in his arms. It’d been almost a year since his return from the dead. A year since Nightfall and the nightmare with Trask had finally ended. A year since he was finally reunited with the woman he loved.

He smiled to himself, recalling every tear he’d kissed away

that morning when he and Lois had made love for the first time since his return. So much heartache plagued both of them during that time, but out of all of it, something perfect was created: Their son.

Lex took a long puff from his cigar. Everything was going according to plan. Soon his Annihilator satellite would be in commission and installed on the platform as he had originally planned with Space Station Luthor. His plans to turn the intergalactic laboratory into a weapon of mass destruction were destroyed by the council's good will and Superman.

He had spent months planning his takeover of the Space Station only for his plans to be thwarted. It had taken him almost three years to track down the plans, and now that he had them he wasn't going to let the opportunity pass him again.

He listened in as he heard the familiar footsteps and heartbeat from the other side of the door. Church. That's what the other man called him. Images continued to plague his mind as he wrestled with the chains. They'd be back in there soon.

Another needle.

Another dose of that poisonous liquid.

He shuddered at the memory as the voices from down the hall reached his impossible hearing.

"Mr. Vale, I'm growing more and more impatient with District 26's progress."

District 26. That's what they called this hell hole. He grimaced, tightening his grasp on the chains. He had to escape. He had to. It had been four months of experimentation and poisonous needles. After spending so long in a fog, he was finally starting to remember.

Images of a brunette and flying haunted his dreams.

He didn't belong here.

"You said this drug would make my father go crazy. It's been three months, and all he's doing is forgetting things. How do you expect me to have him committed and take over Intergang with results like this?"

He jerked on the chain and smiled to himself when he felt the metal begin to giveaway. The flash of light filled the room, and three men in white overcoats holding a large metal box opened the door.

"No!!!"

"Hey Jimmy," Clark said tapping the young researcher on the shoulder. "I need you to do some research for me."

"Get in line." Jimmy gave him a wry expression, pointing to the stack of pending stories he was working on.

"This is *really* important, Jimmy," Clark said, trying to hold in his annoyance with the cold shoulder Jimmy was treating him with. Ever since their falling out a few months ago, it had been like pulling teeth working with him.

"Everything's an emergency." Jimmy shot back, handing him a research request form. "Fill it out like everyone else. I'll get it to you when I get it to you."

Clark gave the young man an annoyed look and shook his head, "Fine."

He took the paper from him and filled it out then handed it to Jimmy before moving back to his desk. While he needed Jimmy's

help to get the research he needed, it didn't appear that help was going to be coming anytime soon.

He walked to Lois' desk and sifted through her Rolodex until he found the card he was looking for. One of Lois' sources from the Police Commissioner's office was pretty well connected in Washington. Hopefully, he could shed some light on what was going on with the attacks on Metropolis.

Right before his and Lois' Kerth nomination they had cracked open the police corruption story and connected it to Intergang. They still weren't sure who was behind Intergang but now that they had a name for the organization that had been pulling the strings they were finally getting somewhere in bringing it down.

"Where's Mommy?" Lois teased, hiding her face behind her hands. "There she is!" Jon gurgled with a soft laugh, and she leaned in to kiss him. "You are such a sweetie." She touched his cheek with her thumb, looking at him as he tried to prop his head up, wiggling on his arms as he tested the waters with holding himself up.

"Look at you!" she grinned at him as he wobbled his head down to the floor once more. "Getting to be a big boy." She smiled at him as he reached for his blue blanket. It was bittersweet to watch Jon grow and learn new things every day. The more he learned and developed the more she missed Jamie.

"I've never seen anything more perfect in all my life."

She looked up in surprise and saw Clark kneeling behind her. "Hi, when did you get home?"

"A little while ago." He shrugged, lying down on the floor with her, wrapping an arm around her. "How are you doing?"

"This is our last day of being home together before I start half days back in the office." She said sadly. "Trying to make the most of it."

"He'll be right downstairs in the same building as us." He murmured in her ear.

"I know," she leaned her back against him as he tightened his arms around her. "I'm just going to miss this." She motioned to Jon's smiling face as he tried to roll to his side and look at her.

"He's quite the ham, isn't he?" Clark chuckled.

"Tell me about it," Lois said with a long sigh.

Clark nuzzled her ear as he held her close, "I've missed having you there at the office with me. It'll be nice to have you both nearby." He nibbled on her throat, running his upper lip against the curve leading to her shoulder. "Even if it is only part-time."

"I know. I've missed being at the Planet too." She whispered, moving her hands to cover his as they moved up and down her ribcage. She traced the outline of his wedding band, smiling to herself when she noticed Jon's sleepy face. "I think someone's getting sleepy."

"What impeccable timing that I just happened to come home right at naptime." He teased nuzzling her ear as she let out a soft giggle.

"That is incredibly good timing. I'd almost think you planned it that way." She leaned her head back against him, concentrating on the feeling of his palms as they moved up and down her sides, moving her knit top further and further up as he did so.

"Have I told you how much I love you?" he whispered in her ear, tugging on her earlobe with his lips as he continued moving

his hands up the front of her top.

“Not since this morning.” She breathed heavily, feeling a pleasurable jolt run down her spine when he pulled her to him. “Oh, Clark,” She sighed happily against him when he began teasing the sensitive flesh of her throat.

“I am hopelessly in love with you, Lois Lane Kent.” He murmured, against her neck.

“We need to put him in his bed.” She whispered, finding it harder and harder to concentrate on anything but the heat that ran through her body as Clark continued his teasing.

“Don’t move.” He whispered, running his hand down her cheek as he got up and carried Jon to his playpen. Before she could finish rolling onto her back, he was behind her, whispering in her ear, “I told you not to move.”

She let out a low moan as he rolled her on her back and moved between her legs, running his lips up and down her neck and moved her arms up over her head, intertwining his fingers with hers. “Oh, God, please, please don’t let him wake up...”

Seven Months Ago...

CORRUPTION IN CITY HALL

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

MANDELIN GETS LIFE

By Cat Grant

“I want the entire floor swept,” Mayson ordered as she walked through the Criminal Science division of the Metropolis P.D. “Check everyone’s hard drives. I want to know who was responsible for the false information that nearly got the Mandelin case thrown out.”

“Ms. Drake, is this really necessary?” Jack Warren asked, looking around the lab stations that were currently being torn apart by the ADA’s Strike Force.

“I’ve got a warrant that says it is.” She said smugly, handing it to him. “Any other questions?”

“No, Ms. Drake.” Warren seethed.

Lois opened the double doors of the cafe, scanning the crowd until she found the familiar face of her father in the corner. He saw her and stood up, waving her over. She pushed her way through the crowded tables and chairs until she’d finally was able to take a seat at the table with her father.

He smiled at her, noting the bump that had begun to make its presence known. “You look good. Motherhood suits you.”

“Thanks,” she gave him an uneasy half-smile.

“How’s Clark?” Sam asked, making conversation.

“He’s good.” She replied warmly. “Staying busy.”

“I know. I saw those articles you two wrote.” Sam said grimly, shaking his head. “You’ve got to be more careful. You could push the wrong button and—”

“You said you had some news?” Lois interrupted, not wanting to get into another argument about how dangerous her father thought her job was. It seemed ironic when he was literally still working for the enemy. A choice she had not supported, but he seemed adamant in continuing his work so as not to arouse any suspicion within the organization.

“I’ve been doing some digging where I can—trying not to draw too much attention, and I found some information that might

help with your investigation.” He said, sliding a flash drive across the table to her.

“What is this?” Lois asked as she examined the flash drive in her hand.

“Everything I have access to within the organization.” Her father explained, taking a sip from his coffee. “Projects the organization is currently working on and their network around the world.”

Lois tightened her hand over the flash drive, drumming her thumb over the plastic cap. “You shouldn’t have done this. What if you’d been caught?”

“We agreed that me continuing to work there would keep them from getting suspicious.” He reminded her. “I never said I wouldn’t do anything to help bring them down.”

“This is dangerous.” She reminded him. “You said yourself they had that Darryl character killed. What if they try and do the same thing to you?”

“I have a plan.” He reassured her, pulling out a 4x6 photo from his pocket and sliding it to her.

“What is this?” she asked, looking at the photo. It was a small silver, gray and blue ship of some sort.

“My latest assignment.” He breathed heavily.

“Are you out of your mind?!” Jimmy hissed angrily.

“A little louder I don’t think they heard you in Hong Kong.” Lucy spat back irritably, taking a bite of her salad.

“You turned over classified information, Luce. What if they catch you?” Jimmy asked angrily.

“They won’t.” Lucy retorted taking a deep breath. “No one knows it was me and it’s going to stay that way.”

“You don’t think anyone’s going to connect the dots that Lois Lane, star reporter for the Planet got a scoop on corruption at the Metropolis P.D. at the same time her little sister started working there?”

“What they were doing was wrong,” Lucy said irritably.

“What is the big deal? You work for the Planet!! I thought you’d be happy about this.”

“Well, it’s hard to get excited about something that could put your life and career in jeopardy.” Jimmy snapped angrily.

“She and Clark were very careful,” Lucy responded calmly.

“You shouldn’t have done something like this without talking to me first,” Jimmy said, shaking his head.

“I wasn’t going to become an accessory to a crime, and I wasn’t going to get fired for doing the right thing. This was the only way I could think of to stop it.” Lucy explained, trying to portray a calm she didn’t feel at the moment.

“And now you’ve put a target on your back, and your sister’s,” Jimmy said, narrowing his eyes at her. “You really think it’s all going to just go away because someone printed a few articles?”

“You ready?” Lois asked, walking up the steps to the courthouse with Clark.

“As I’ll ever be.” He nodded, taking her hand in his. “You okay?” he asked, nudging her chin to look at him.

“Just a little tired.” She gave him a weak smile. He nodded and placed a supportive hand on her back. She took a deep breath, concentrating on the feeling of being near him.

She was still reeling from the information she'd found out from her father. Clark's ship. The organization had his ship. What if they were right? What if they could use it to hurt him? A protective hand moved instinctually over her growing abdomen as another thought occurred to her. What if they found a way to harm their child?

"Hey, reporter man! Got a match?"

Lois and Clark looked over to see Baby Rage being led into the courthouse in chains with a greasy looking lawyer. Her eyes narrowed as she recalled the photos she'd seen of Martin Snell. She'd done her research on him after Superman's run-in with him.

"Just ignore him," Clark said, tightening his grip on Lois as Baby Rage walked by with Martin Snell in tow.

"Tick Tock. Tick Tock." Baby Rage called, laughing to himself as he was escorted through another entrance of the courthouse.

"Snell is Baby Rage's attorney too?" Lois echoed in disbelief.

"Come on," Clark said, holding her close as they walked through the courthouse doors. Sections had been closed off by security to check each person for any weapons. After making their way through security, they found the waiting area outside courtroom 2B.

Lois looked around, noting the absence of Mayson Drake. "She's late." Lois glanced at her watch. "It's eight-thirty-five."

"You *really* don't like her, do you?" Clark commented with an amused expression, taking a seat next to her in the waiting area.

"Let's just say she hasn't given me any reason to," Lois said as if that explained everything.

"She is helping put your uncle's arsonist away." Clark reminded her.

"That is her job." Lois sniffed, not willing to give Mayson any points for something that was required of her.

"There's your Uncle Mike." Clark pointed across the aisle where Mike was making his way through the security checkpoint.

"And *Mayson*," Lois said unenthusiastically.

"Lois, you're getting that tone in your voice." He warned.

"What tone?" she asked innocently.

"That any second claws are gonna pop out of your paws." He grinned at her, leaning in to whisper. "I'm gonna have to get you a saucer of milk."

"Meow." She teased, offering him a playful grin.

Outside the courthouse, a tall, slender man in an officer's uniform adjusted his uniform as he stepped out of the limo. He carried a black briefcase with him as he walked toward the courthouse steps, timing each step with precision.

"Officer, this way," one of the guards motioned for him to enter through a different entrance that didn't require a security check.

"Thank you," he said in a Hindi accent as he made his way toward courtroom 2B.

Through the transmitting device he had in his ear, the voice of Lex Luthor could be heard, "Are you with me Asabi? On my orders, leave the briefcase outside the main waiting area."

"Yes, Mr. Luthor." He spoke with a grin as he watched the waiting area emptied of witnesses as they entered their prospective courtrooms.

"All rise!"

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

The distinct ticking could be heard as the judge made his way into the courtroom.

Clark looked around, trying to zero in on the sound. He looked to the defense table and noticed Martin Snell sitting with Baby Rage. There were two bailiffs behind him.

<<"*Alien. Destroy. Alien.*">>

He tensed when he heard the voice echo in his mind. Where had it come from?

<<"*Alien.*">>

There it was again. He tensed, recalling the last time he'd heard that voice in his head. 'Mind over matter.' He reminded himself.

He looked to Lois, her uncle, and Mayson, trying to find where the ticking was coming from. Then it hit him. It wasn't inside the courtroom. He lowered his glasses and began examining the hallways around the courtroom. A small briefcase sat below one of the benches in the main waiting area he and Lois had just been in.

"Are the people ready to call their first witness?" was all he heard as he disappeared from the courtroom and barely had a chance to change into his Superman suit before grabbing the briefcase sitting outside the courtroom. All he had time to do was throw himself over the bomb as it exploded to protect the everyone around him.

<<"*Alien. Destroy. Alien.*">>

There was a rumble below him. He felt the pressure from the explosion and the sound of plaster crackling. Debris began to fall around him. He looked down at the burnt tile then up at the white column that was cracking at the base.

The door to the courtroom opened, and he saw the bailiff, Mayson, and Lois with a crowd of people behind them.

"Superman!" the bailiff stammered, surprised to see him outside the courtroom.

<<"*Alien.*">>

"Look out!" He shouted, flying up toward the column, grabbing it as it began to fall.

<<"*Alien.*">>

Alarms began blaring around him as the intercom instructed everyone to evacuate the courtroom. He looked to Lois, meeting her gaze as he flew the column back into place. 'Go.'

"Hundreds of lives saved thanks to Superman's impeccable timing. Just seconds before the bomb went off Superman arrived at the scene and was able to prevent—"

"Billy!" Bill Church stormed into his son's office. Someone dared make a move without his say-so. Someone dared to try and cross Intergang. Someone...

He stopped when he saw the man sitting behind his son's desk.

"Billy's a bit preoccupied at the moment." He held up a portable screen that showed his son blindfolded and tied to a chair.

"Luthor." Church let out a low chuckle, "I was wondering when you'd get the guts to show your face."

"I've been watching you—studying you, Mr. Church." Lex shook his head in disapproval, "Tsk tsk tsk. What is your top

lieutenant going to think when he's made to believe you tried to have him killed today?"

"This was you." Church breathed, narrowing his eyes as Luthor stood, and walked toward him.

"Intergang. It's got a nice ring to it. I never would have connected the two organizations. You with your small-time crime ring in Metropolis."

"We're anything but small, Mr. Luthor." Church scoffed, giving Luthor a menacing look.

"No doubt. You've been a busy little bee while I've been away. Paying off the police, the mayor, and even some of our favorite judges." Luthor began to give a slow clap. "Superb."

"Why do I get a feeling you didn't drop by for just a pat on the back?" Church asked, noting the dark stare coming from Luthor.

"Ah, and right you are again," Lex snapped his fingers. "I've come to make you a deal. A bargain if you will."

"Bargain?" Church scoffed, "I don't make deals."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll want to hear this one." He said in a sinister hiss. "As I've said I've been doing my research on you. Very thorough and in-depth research. I know all about Bureau 39 and Project K, and I know you've got a mole."

"No one would dare cross me!" Church snarled angrily.

"Wouldn't they?" Luthor chuckled to himself. "It can be hard being number one. Number two, three and four are always trying to claw their way up ..."

"What do you want?" Church asked, cutting to the chase.

"Metropolis." Lex snarled.

"Excuse me?" Church scoffed.

"I want you and your organization out of Metropolis." Luthor took a step toward him. "There's only room for one criminal mastermind in this city...and you're looking at him."

"You think I'm just going to walk away because you have supposed information on a mole in my organization?" Church chuckled. "You're out of your mind."

"I take that as a 'no'?" Luthor took another step toward him so that he was only a few inches from his face.

"Get out." Church snapped.

Lois took a deep breath as she watched Clark in his Superman persona come out of the courthouse, talking to the Fire Chief. A bomb. There had been a bomb right outside the courtroom. She placed a protective hand over her growing abdomen.

"Where's Clark?"

Thankfully she hadn't had to answer that question because of the commotion they'd heard outside the courtroom. When they'd opened the door and seen Superman, she knew something was wrong.

A bomb.

"Are you listening to me? Hello, Earth to Lois?" Mayson waved her hand in front of her face.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" Lois said, forcing herself to focus on the present.

"I said where did your husband disappear to?" Mayson said in an irritated tone.

"Lois?" Lois sighed in relief when she saw Clark making his way through the crowd toward her.

"Speak of the devil." Mayson sighed.

"Are you all right?" He asked, wrapping his arms protectively around her before pulling back to look at her expanding midsection. "Is the baby—?"

"We're fine." She reassured him, placing a hand on his chest. "Everything's fine." Before she could finish saying 'fine', he leaned in to capture her lips with his, running his hands through her hair.

"Your honor, this is a gross miscarriage of justice!" Martin Snell's voice carried over to where she and Clark were standing as the weasel of a defense attorney argued with the judge.

She and Clark reluctantly pulled apart and turned toward Martin Snell who was up in arms as the bailiff slapped handcuffs on Baby Rage. "He tried to run, Counselor."

"He was in fear for his life!" Snell shot back. "If I had a building almost cave in on me I'd try to run too!"

"Excuse me," Mayson excused herself to intervene between Snell and the judge.

"What happened?" Lois whispered in a low whisper, making sure Mayson was out of earshot.

"I heard a ticking sound and finally found the source in a briefcase right outside the courtroom." He whispered. "All I could do was contain the blast. It went off right when I got to it." He whispered in her ear, holding her close. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine." She reassured him, leaning in to kiss him.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your patience." A voice from the front of the courthouse steps spoke. "As you all know we've had a bit of a situation. All probation hearings will be moved to the detention center. All court appearances and preliminary hearings will be postponed until tomorrow. The Fire Marshall has assured us the building is safe, but we need time to repair the damage done to the Left Wing of the courthouse. We'll have more information for everyone on courtroom assignments this afternoon. That is all."

There was a murmur of disapproval from the crowd, but for the most part, everyone remained quiet as they began moving away from the courthouse steps.

"Your honor! This is outrageous! My client shouldn't be made to sit in jail another minute longer due to this court's inability to protect—"

"Martin, shut up!" Mayson yelled.

"Counselor, unless you want to share a jail cell with your client I suggest you stop talking." The judge urged angrily.

Two bailiffs escorted Baby Rage toward the awaiting prison van. Lois felt her skin crawl as she watched him give a cocky laugh to Clark, "Tick tock tick tock."

"Let's get out of here," Clark whispered.

Present Day...

"Satellite images show a flash of light coming from the sky over a group of small islands in the Gulf of Mexico then just as quickly everything from the island has vanished. No trees. No wildlife. Almost as if someone or something has snuffed them out. President Garner remains silent on the matter as—"

Bill Church Jr. turned to face Lex Luthor with a pleased expression. "So our first test run was a success."

"Yes, but the prototype was much smaller than the original plans. We won't be able to hide the real thing on the back of your

private helicopter.” Lex took a long puff from his cigar.

“How do you plan to get the Annihilator on its platform?” Bill Jr. asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m going to make Superman do it for me,” Lex said with a smile.

“Mr. Church, he’s not ready. I still have to perform tests to stabilize him.” Rollie Vale urged as Bill Church reached for the remote.

“I’m through waiting, Vale. You promised me a fighting machine I could use to enforce the organization’s power. Metallo will destroy Superman and snuff out that little bug, Luthor before he can do any more damage!” Church growled angrily.

“If we lose control of him he could turn on you and—” Vale stopped when he saw Church pick up the remote.

Church pressed a small green button the remote and smiled to himself, “Time to wake up, John. It’s time to play.”

Seven Months Ago...

Lois fingered her husband’s hand as she leaned back against the thin sheet covering the exam table. Clark had insisted on her getting checked out by the doctor before he’d consider looking into the arson at the courthouse.

“You’re about seventeen and a half weeks now?” the technician asked as she squeezed the warm gel on her small bump and rolled the ultrasound wand over her bump.

“Yes,” Lois said nervously, gripping Clark’s hand as she waited for the familiar thumping of their unborn child’s heartbeat to fill the room.

“Having a little trouble—” the technician frowned, moving the wand to the side.

Lois felt dread run down her spine. What if something was wrong? So many things could still go wrong this early in the pregnancy. What if the stress from the bombing had—

“There we go.” The loud thumping filled the room, and Lois let out a sigh of relief, brushing away the tears that had begun to form in the corner of her eyes. “Someone’s a little stubborn today.”

“Probably hereditary,” Clark remarked with a teasing smile. He leaned in to kiss her cheek, offering a reassuring smile. “It’s okay. The baby’s fine.” He whispered to her.

“Heartbeat and placenta all look normal.” The technician smiled as she continued rolling the wand over Lois’ belly. “Oh! It looks like we can even see what the baby is –unless you want to wait?”

Clark looked at Lois, “It’s up to you.”

“We want to know,” Lois said letting out a long breath as Clark wrapped an arm around her.

The technician smiled warmly, “Looks like we have a healthy baby boy. Congratulations.”

“A boy?” Lois’ voice cracked when she heard the gender. She could see the technician saying something to her, but she couldn’t quite make it out. Her mind began to race. A boy. She was having a boy.

Another boy.

Jamie’s brother.

Another son.

Could she do this? Could she really do this? It was hard

enough to bring a child into the world after a loss, but it was harder to picture going through everything she went through with Jamie and hold onto the hope that she wouldn’t end up with the same result.

A boy.

“Honey?”

She looked to Clark who was looking at her in concern.

“What?”

“Are you okay?” he asked, taking her hand in his.

She noticed the technician had already left the room and sat up, trying to clean the gel off. “Fine.” She forced a smile, suppressing the tears she knew were threatening to overtake her. She wasn’t going to cry. Everything was going to be okay. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because you’re terrified out of your mind right now. I can see it on your face.” He ran a hand across her cheek. “He’s going to be okay.”

“What if he isn’t?” she asked tearfully.

“Everything we can prevent we’ll prevent.” He reminded her, wrapping a protective arm around her. “Isn’t that what you keep saying?”

“A boy.” She whispered in a half-laugh and half-cry as he held her close.

“A *healthy* boy.” He reminded her of what the technician had said.

“I love you.” She whispered, leaning back against him.

“I love you too, sweetheart.” He kissed her one more time before whispering, “Come on, you need to get dressed before they send a search party in here.”

“It was a pipe bomb,” Lucy said, shaking her head as she carried her briefcase with her and walked with Bill Henderson and Mark Richter, the Metropolis Fire Chief and explosives expert to the other side of the courthouse.

Richter nodded, “Superman caught most of the blast, but you can tell from the burning residue here this was the target.” He pointed to the closed-off courtroom that was now in shambles from where the marble column had crumbled around the Man of Steel. “Superman was able to hold it up long enough for everyone to get out and then it just started to crumble around him.”

“What about the security cameras?” Henderson asked, looking toward the ceiling where the dark bulbs of the camera lenses were cracked.

“Nah,” Richter shook his head. “Whoever he or she was. They knew what they were doing. All the cameras went out at the same time around the courthouse.”

“Someone had to see something,” Henderson argued.

“See?” Clark pressed his lips against Lois’ cheek, wrapping his arms around her from behind as they stepped onto the elevator. “Aren’t you glad I made you go to the doctor now?”

“Yes,” she grinned back at him, enjoying the warmth that enveloped her as Clark held her in his arms. Despite her annoyance with him acting like a mother hen, she was glad she’d been given the reassurance that the baby was okay.

“A little boy,” Clark whispered in her ear. His voice was filled with wonder as he rested his hands on her expanding midsection. “I love you.”

The soft ping of the elevator announced their arrival on the newsroom floor. Grudgingly, Clark released her from his embrace and took her hand in his, stepping out of the elevator.

“Well, look who finally decided to make an appearance.” Ralph teased as they made their way toward their desks. Ralph sauntered toward them, taking a bite of his apple as he spoke, “You know, Perry’s looking for you.”

Lois rolled her eyes, ignoring Ralph as he continued to grate on her nerves, “You heard there was a big explosion down at the courthouse, right?”

“Yes, we heard.” Clark gave him an irritated expression while she finished unpacking her laptop and dug her notes from the people she and Clark had spoken with outside the courthouse.

“Must be nice being able to come and go as you please,” Ralph commented with a disapproving look.

“Good Lord! Can’t you two go anywhere without something trying to blow up?” Perry hollered as he came out into the newsroom.

“I take it you got the rough copy we sent you?” Lois asked, noticing the surprised expression on Ralph’s face.

“Rough copy?” Ralph interjected, trying to follow where the conversation had steered off.

“Please, please tell me you’ve got enough for a few follow-ups.” Perry held his hands up, looking to her and Clark.

Lois held up her notebook. “Please, remember who you’re talking to, Chief.”

“The police aren’t saying much right now, but I’m sure we’ll get more information as the investigation into the bombing unfolds,” Clark added with a weary expression.

“Unbelievable,” Perry frowned, turning to Clark. “You two will take point on this. I want everything you’ve got ready for the evening edition.” He turned to Ralph, “Ralph, I still want you working the streets on this. How did a bomb make it past security? Who was the target?”

Ralph gave her and Clark a begrudging look but nodded, “On it, Chief.”

Bill Church Jr. heard a door creak as he was escorted down a long hallway still blindfolded. He was being moved. After being kidnapped and tied up with no idea who had taken him or what they wanted, he was finally being moved. This was usually the part where he’d either be set free or meet his demise. He braced himself, preparing for the worst. He wouldn’t go down without a fight.

A door opened, and he found himself pushed to the ground. He listened to the soft tapping around him. He moved his hands to his blindfold and jerked it off his head. “You’ve made your last mistake!” He stopped when he saw who was standing in front of him. “Luthor?”

“I prefer Lex when dealing with potential business partners.” Lex corrected, handing him a drink. “Bourbon?”

“Thanks.” Bill Jr. looked down at the drink suspiciously. “Quite a way to arrange a meeting, don’t you think?”

“I always prefer a certain pizzazz.” Lex smiled back at him, taking a sip from his drink. “Shall we get down to business?”

“Business?” Bill Jr. scoffed. “You kidnapped me.”

“Kidnapping is such a strong word. Can’t we call it a negotiation? I negotiated for you to come here so we could

discuss your future with Intergang.”

“You want to discuss my future with Intergang?” Bill Jr. chuckled. “Boy, that must have been some blow to the head you took there.”

“Ah, the disbelief.” Lex sighed, “I’d expect nothing less from the man that’s secured control over seventy-five percent of the world’s major cities throughout the world since joining the organization.”

“How did you know that?” Bill Jr. asked in surprise.

“Oh, I know a lot of things.” Lex continued. “I know you’ve been itching to takeover Intergang but haven’t found a way to get rid of your competition in dear old dad that just can’t let go of the reigns. I know you hunger for power and have organized the takeover of cities across the globe without even a ‘thank you.’”

“I see you’ve done your homework.” Bill Jr. commented uncertainly.

“I like to be thorough.” Lex smiled. “So, knowing all of this I’ve decided to make you a deal.”

“I’m listening.” Bill Jr. said, taking a sniff of his drink to make sure it was indeed only Bourbon before risking it and taking a drink.

“I know your organization’s weaknesses. I know how to bring it crumbling down around you. You have a mole inside your organization. You help me rebuild my empire and move Intergang out of Metropolis. I’ll help you takeover.”

“Even if I was tempted to entertain a deal with you what makes you think I’d agree? Metropolis has a special place in my father’s heart. He’s not just going to pick up and leave.”

“Oh, I don’t expect him to.” Lex chuckled. “Such a sad state we live in isn’t it? You can’t even grow old with dignity. Imagine what would happen if he weren’t able to run Intergang anymore. Imagine what would happen if his son had to step up and takeover?”

“Keep talking.” Bill Jr. grinned.

COURTHOUSE EXPLOSION! ARSONIST AT LARGE!

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

“Where is this at?” Clark asked, lowering his glasses to look at the photo Lois had handed him. She’d been waiting until they’d finally had a moment alone to show him the photo her father had given her earlier.

“I’m not sure. He said the organization gave him a new assignment.” She placed a hand protectively over her abdomen.

“It’s definitely my ship.” He said hoarsely, leaning back against the counter she had perched herself on. “It’s got the ‘S’ right there.” He handed the picture back to her. “How did they get this?”

“I don’t know,” Lois said, looking over at the stir-fry that was losing liquid quickly. “Is it supposed to smell like that?”

“Oh!” He jumped up and pulled the wok off the stove, adding some water to keep the vegetables from burning.

“Maybe we should just order a pizza?” she suggested with a soft giggle watching as he picked out the seared vegetables.

“I think I can save it.” He smiled back at her. “Just give me a sec.”

Lois shook her head, watching as Clark tried to finish saving their dinner. She picked up the copy of the Planet she’d been reading earlier, smiling when she saw her and Clark’s story on the

arson on the front page.

“What are you smiling about?” He asked, pouring a bottle of soy sauce.

“No matter how many times I see it, it never gets old.” She grinned, showing him the front page.

“What?” He asked, looking over her shoulder.

“Your name next to mine on the front page of the Daily Planet.” She set the paper down. “You think they’ll find the guy that did it?”

Clark shrugged, reaching for the bottle of Soy Sauce on the counter. “I don’t know. Everything they’ve got for evidence is pretty much a charcoal briquette right now. They did pull in Mark Richter—the explosives expert—but from what I’ve heard there aren’t any solid leads.”

“I know, I’ve been going through the list of cases that were being heard that morning. Everything from petty crimes to probation violations. No real connection there.” She said, recalling what she and Clark had dug up that afternoon.

“Here, taste.” He handed her a fork of rice with stir-fried vegetables, and she took a bite. She nodded her approval, and he turned the stove off. “Well, that’s just the list of defendants.” He reasoned. “There was the judge, defense attorneys, prosecutors, witnesses, and even the bailiffs that could have been targeted.”

“You saved dinner. God, that’s good.” She said, savoring the taste of the homemade stir-fry. They’d been hitting the pavement pretty hard, leaving very little time for anything decent to put in her stomach.

“Better?” he asked, placing a hand on her abdomen.

“Much.” She agreed, pulling him to her by his collar. “My hero.” She whispered, running her hands through his hair on the back of his head.

He chuckled, leaning in to kiss her. “Come on, let’s get you and the boy fed.” He said, running a hand over her abdomen once more.

“There’s nowhere to sit.” She pointed at the dining table that was still covered in boxes.

“I’m illustrating a point.” He said, handing her the real estate brochure from the other day.

“If I promise to look at houses this weekend will you put the boxes back in storage?” she asked.

“I thought you wanted to go to Smallville this weekend?” he asked, handing her a bowl of rice and stir fry.

“I want to sit and eat without the company of moving boxes more.” She said, giving him an annoyed look.

“You just hate it when I’m right, don’t you?” he said with a teasing smile.

“I just don’t see what the rush is.” She argued taking a bite of her dinner. “We’ve already got so much going on. Why make it worse by adding house hunting to it?”

“I’m not renewing a lease on a place that’s not big enough for the three of us.” He pointed out.

“You’ve still got another month before you have to give Floyd notice.” She pointed out.

“True, but wouldn’t it be nice to go ahead and find a place so we can start getting everything ready for this one’s arrival?” He asked, placing a hand on her abdomen. “Someone made a very good argument about needing more room the other day...” he wiggled his eyebrows at her. “Something about needing clothes

that fit, a plan for the nursery, and more room.”

“I didn’t mean right now.” Lois retorted. “We don’t have time to house hunt. We’re in the middle of a big investigation. This could be Pulitzer material.”

“Here we go with the Pulitzer again.” He sighed. “You know they haven’t even announced the Kerth nominees yet. I’m sure the series on Luthor’s downfall will be right at the top of the list along with your series on the Southside scandal.” He leaned in to kiss her. “You don’t need to worry about your Pulitzer right now.”

“But Clark,” she began to argue uncertain of how to voice the insecurities she’d been feeling over the last week. It wasn’t just the Pulitzer. It was everything. Her reputation as a reporter. The respect she had among her colleagues in her profession. She felt like she was losing her edge and had to work five times as hard to keep ahead of everyone.

“We’re always in the middle of an investigation.” He pointed out. “The longer we wait, the harder it’s going to be on you when we move.”

“Isn’t that what I’ve got you for?” she teased.

“Yes,” He wrapped his arms around her as she took another bite. “But moving is stressful. I’d like to get us moved in and unpacked before the pregnancy starts taking too big of a toll on your body.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” she asked, unsure if she should be offended by his statement.

“The further along you get, the harder it’s going to be.” He pointed out gently. “Do you really want to be packing boxes while dealing with hot flashes from the pregnancy hormones?”

“No,” she sighed, “I just don’t know how we’re going to find the time for all of this. The investigation into the organization or Intergang or whatever the heck they want to call themselves; then the stuff with my dad and all this corruption everywhere. There are bombs going off and criminals running the city. Not to mention the fact that Lex Luthor is still at large and no one has a clue where he is. All this on top of trying to keep up with these snarky twenty-somethings that are half my size and trying to —”

She found her ramblings cut off when Clark’s lips found hers. He pulled away, resting his head against hers, “You need to calm down.”

“It’s a lot.” She whispered.

“Come here,” He pulled her to her feet, holding her to him. She let out a long breath against his chest as he ran his hands up and down her sides. “We’ll get to the bottom of who’s behind Intergang, and we’ll keep bringing in the stories.” He leaned in to kiss her.

“I just don’t want to lose my edge. It took me forever to claw my way back after I had Jamie. It took me six months to get an assignment for the City section after I came back from leave.” She said softly. “It hasn’t exactly been my best year career-wise.”

“I don’t know.” He grinned leaning against her. “The series you did with Cat on the Southside corruption earlier this past year was pretty good stuff. Then the article you wrote on Nightfall. Pretty powerful stuff.” He brushed a stray lock out of her face. “That’s not even counting the recent series on Lex Luthor’s downfall and Superman’s arrival.”

“I love you, you know that?” she whispered, linking her arms around his neck.

“Yeah,” He leaned in to kiss her. “I’m quite fond of you

myself.” He chuckled when she smacked him on the chest.

“You’re not losing your edge, Lois. You’ve got five Kerths and a Pulitzer nomination to prove it. You’ll probably have at least one more Kerth to add to the list this year.”

“You’re really good for my ego, you know that?” she grinned back at him.

“I guess that means you’ll keep me around then?” He murmured against her lips.

“For the rest of my life.” She pulled him to her by the collar of his shirt, closing the distance between them. He moaned against her lips as his hands moved through her hair and fingered her silky strands until they found themselves on each side of her face.

Present Day...

“It’s just for half the day,” Clark whispered in his wife’s ear as he wrapped her in his arms. She took a deep breath, resting her head against his chest and allowed him to guide her toward the elevator.

“I know.” She gave him a watery smile, “I just miss him already.”

The elevator pinged, announcing the car’s arrival. “He’s right downstairs, and you can log in and check on him anytime you want.” He reminded her. He wrapped a protective arm around her waist as they stepped on the elevator together.

“You think I’m being ridiculous?” she asked.

“No, I think you’re an incredible mother that wants the best for our son.” He leaned in to kiss her, ignoring the other two passengers in the elevator car with them. He smiled to himself when he felt her begin to respond, running her hands up the length of his tie and hooking her index finger into the perfectly tied silk knot.

The elevator doors opened, and he heard the other two passengers step off. The doors closed behind them, and he moved both hands to cup her face, burying themselves in her hair. “What floor was that?” she murmured breathlessly against him.

“Mailroom.” He whispered, moving his attention to her jawline as she let out a soft moan.

“Two more floors.” She breathed against him happily. “We’re going to be in so much trouble if we get caught.”

“It’ll be worth the lecture.” He murmured against her lips. “I haven’t been able to enjoy the ride up to the newsroom in four very long months. I’m going to savor every last second.”

She giggled against him, “Is that your way of saying you’ve missed me?”

“Desperately.” He whispered. He let his lips linger on hers, hearing the elevator ping behind him, announcing their arrival to the newsroom floor.

The very distinct sound of whistling from their colleagues in the newsroom forced him to pull away. “I think that’s our cue to get to work.” She whispered, taking his hand as they stepped off the elevator.

“Geez! She just got back, Kent. What are you trying to do, go for a record?” Ralph joked, walking up to them.

“It must be so depressing in the Classifieds.” Lois shot back with a glare. “What do you put in your personal ad? Single female able to ignore insults in a single bound. Plastic ones need not apply.”

“For your information, blow-up dolls are not plastic.

They’re...” Ralph stopped himself mid-sentence.

“Lois! Good to have you back!” Jimmy cheered, walking up to them.

Clark was mildly surprised Jimmy had approached them given his recent behavior over the past month. One minute he’d be his normal jovial self, then the next he was giving Clark the cold shoulder, acting like he’d kicked his puppy. He still wasn’t sure what Jimmy’s problem was with him, but he was growing more and more tired with the behavior.

“Thanks, Jimmy,” Lois smiled at him as she took her seat at her desk.

“Yeah well, not for long if you keep treating the elevator like your own personal kissing booth. You do remember how you got knocked up in the first place, don’t you?”

Clark threw him a dirty look, but kept his temper in check. Lois narrowed her eyes at Ralph and added very smugly, “What’s the matter, Ralph? *Jealous?*”

“Not in the slightest!” He scoffed with a fake chuckle.

“Shouldn’t you get back to digging up dirt on the celebrity of the week?” Clark asked, annoyed at Ralph’s continued presence. He really wanted to catch Lois up on his investigation into the terrorist attacks that had been going on over the last few months while she’d been out.

“Hey, what’s that?”

He looked toward the source of the voice and stopped cold when he saw the face on the television. “Luthor.”

Seven Months Ago...

“Such a tragedy,” Lex commented, setting the evening edition of the Daily Planet on the desk in front of him. “Who would have thought the security within our courts was so poor.”

“I don’t see what this has to do with me.” Martin Snell said, eying Asabi with an uneasy gaze as he looked between the two men.

Lex followed Snell’s gaze to Asabi who was standing behind him. “He’s not much of a people person. Never has been.”

“I knew something wasn’t right with you,” Snell said to Asabi.

“Suspicious man. As you should be.” Lex complemented. “I mean, one can understand after narrowly escaping a life or death situation and knowing it was your own mentor that pulled the trigger. Tsk tsk tsk. Loyalty gets you nowhere these days.”

“What are you talking about?” Snell scoffed.

“It was, after all, Bill Church who ordered the hit on you,” Lex said, leaning back in his chair.

Lois felt a chill in the room and began to stir. She reached out for her husband’s arms and found his side of the bed empty. She frowned as her mind slowly began to focus on the sounds around her, and she heard his voice a few feet away. She looked down and found him cradled next to her stomach, whispering to their unborn child.

“Your mommy and I love you so much, little guy. There are so many things we want to teach you and show you and...”

She glanced at the clock and saw the red digits blinking back at her. “Clark, it’s three-thirty in the morning.”

“I know. I couldn’t sleep.” He said, placing a kiss on her

abdomen.

“What are you doing?” she asked sleepily.

“Talking to my boy.” He said with a grin.

“You’re going to teach him bad habits of staying up late and then we’ll never get him to sleep.” She whispered sleepily.

“I think he’s still sleeping.” He said, crawling back up the bed and laying down next to her. “Hi.” He stroked her cheek with his palm.

“Hi.” She whispered, rolling on her side to face him. “Still thinking about it?”

“Yeah,” He frowned, pulling her into his arms.

“You want to talk about it?” she asked, running a hand over his chest.

“No, just want to keep doing this.” He sighed, holding her close.

“It’s going to be fine.” She soothed, tapping her hand on his chest. He smiled at her, tracing the frame of her face with his palm. “What?” she asked suddenly self-conscious under his gaze.

“Nothing. Just thinking about how much I love you.” He whispered, leaning in to kiss her. She smiled against his lips, feeling his other hand move to her abdomen. “Both of you.”

“Yeah?” she whispered, moving her hand to cover his. “Maybe instead of obsessing about that picture we should find a way to relax you so you can get some sleep tonight.” She leaned in and recaptured his lips, smiling to herself when she felt both his arms encircle her waist.

“And just how did you plan on doing that?” he murmured as she leaned into him, smiling to herself when she felt his arms slip up her back. His hands roamed up and down her back, pushing the silk nightgown further and further up as he focused on recapturing her lips again and again.

“I have a few ideas.” She murmured in between heated kisses, moving to straddle him as her hands began an exploration up his bare chest.

“Me too.” He murmured as he nibbled on the sensitive skin of her throat, tugging the strap to her nightgown off her shoulder.

“Oh, Clark,” she sighed against him.

“We’ve got a snake in our midst, gentlemen,” Bill Church eyed his top lieutenants with a wary eye as he looked for any sign of uneasiness from them. Just because he didn’t take Lex Luthor up on his deal didn’t mean he wouldn’t benefit from his rival’s information. If he did have someone betraying the organization, he would find them and make them rue the day they ever crossed Bill Church.

Lois tapped her pen on her desk as she and Clark looked over the list of people that were in the courtroom the day before. “Probation. Arson. Assault. Trespassing.” Clark listed off the charges of the cases being heard that morning.

Lois looked at the copy of the docket she’d been able to finagle from one of the bailiffs in exchange for crappy seats at the Metros game. “Mayson was the prosecuting attorney for three of those. Nathan Taylor was the prosecutor on the assault case.”

“What about the defense?” Clark asked. “How many of those cases was Snell on?”

Lois scanned the list, “All of them.”

“Really?” Clark’s eyebrows shot up.

“Maybe Mr. Snell has some enemies he doesn’t know about?” Lois suggested.

“Think the bomb might have been targeted at Snell?” Clark asked, peering over her shoulder as she pulled up what they’d been given by her source with the Police Commissioner’s office.

“Right now, he’s looking like our target.” She pulled up the maps of all known Intergang activity.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Checking something.” She said, searching for ‘Cost Mart locations’ in the search bar.

“Cost Mart stores?” He asked, wrinkling his forehead.

“Snell worked for Church.” She reminded him.

“You think the Cost Mart stores are a front?” He asked, following her line of thinking.

“Yep,” she pulled up the map of the CostMart store locations and took a screenshot. On her other screen, she pulled up the map of Intergang activity and compared the two side by side. “Now, this is just a wild guess, but something tells me these two maps lining up like this is not a coincidence.”

“Jimmy!” they both called in unison.

“We need to get everything we can on Church,” Clark said as Jimmy walked up to them.

“And Snell.” Lois reminded him.

“Snell who?” Jimmy looked at them perplexed.

“Jimmy, we need you to dig up everything you can find on Cost Mart stores, Bill Church and anything related to an organization or Intergang...” Clark began reciting off as Jimmy frantically began jotting down notes.

“And see what you can find out about Martin Snell. Something tells me he’s not just a private counsel. Check bank records. Check employment records. Anything and everything you can find.” Lois added.

“You got it.” Jimmy nodded.

“Great, hopefully, we can nip this in the bud soon,” Lois said, glancing at Jimmy’s retreating figure. “As much as I do enjoy seeing you in that uniform I really miss the tights and the cape.” She whispered at a volume she knew only he could hear.

“Well, it would help if Dr. Klein was able to locate the homing devices that are being used.” He smiled, looking down at her, “You know, it was a pretty good idea to go undercover. I never would have thought about—” A look crossed his face and he frowned.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Maybe we’re going about this the wrong way.” He whispered to her.

“Going about what?” she asked.

“We’re looking for something they could have affected everyone here with. We’re looking for technology that was developed at STAR Labs, right?” he stood up and reached for her phone to dial.

“Yes, but I’m still not following.” Lois sighed.

“How many scientists do you think worked on that team to develop that technology?” Clark asked.

“You think one of the scientists works for Intergang?” Lois guessed.

“Bingo.” He grinned at her.

Present Day...

Bill Church did his best to control his emotions as Corbin's grasp on him tightened. He stared at the unconscious body of Rollie Vale a few feet away. Corbin was strong. This was good.

"Who are you?!" Corbin held Bill Church against the wall, hoisting him in the air.

"I'm a...a...friend, John. I want what you want. Revenge." He managed to squeak out.

"By controlling me?" He held up the remote Vale had used on him earlier.

"No, no, I would never..."

"Liar!!" Corbin fumed angrily.

"If I wanted to I could have left you how Vale did. Powered down with no hope of returning to life, but I didn't." Church spat back at him. "I'm your friend, John. All I want to do is help you."

"Why?" Corbin stared at him icily.

"You want revenge on the guys that did this to you, right?" Church asked.

"Yeah?" Corbin conceded suspiciously.

"I want revenge on the doctor that did this to you." Church spat back. "Together we can get what we want, and there's not a thing anyone can do about it."

Corbin set him down carefully, keeping his eyes trained on him. He took the remote and crushed it. "Let's talk."

He listened in as he heard the familiar footsteps from the other side of the door. It was almost time. Another needle. Another battle with those white-coated demons. Images continued to plague his mind as he wrestled with the chains. They'd be back soon.

Another needle.

Another dose of that poisonous liquid.

He shuddered at the memory, staring at his arm where the bruising that had been left from the previous punctures. Bruising. He wasn't supposed to bruise. He wasn't supposed to bleed.

"How soon before the programming will be complete?"

He grimaced, tightening his grasp on the chains and began to pull. All he needed was just a little of his superhuman strength. Just enough to break these chains.

"He seems to have all the powers of Superman, but there is something very different about him. Something darker."

He had to escape. He had to get to her. He had to...

"A darker Superman under our control? Yes, I like that. Have you tested him to be sure he won't try anything? We can't afford another screw-up."

He jerked on the chain and smiled to himself when he felt the metal begin to give away. He stared at the clock on the wall with a smile. One minute. He was one minute late.

"Mr. Church, I don't have time for this. I'm late."

The metal chains began to give away. He smiled to himself, "You bet you are."

Alarms blared uncontrollably. The dark corridors filled with red and yellow lights as guards raced toward the steel door that had been ripped from its hinges. "The prisoner's escaped!"

"All units respond!"

Unnoticed by anyone was a man crouching down behind one of the open doors. He waited, counting one by one as the guards made their way toward the wing where he'd escaped. Three long

months and he'd finally escaped.

'Lois...'

Seven Months Ago...

"As the corruption scandal inside Metropolis's Police Department grows, demands for the resignation of the Police Chief and Commissioner have been made. Allegations were made after one of the biggest screw-ups in history made the news. A whistleblower came forward and revealed how our city's finest were actively working with the criminals to let them back on the street. We can't feel safe if there isn't a change." Bill Church Jr. said smugly into the camera. "Which is why I'm throwing my hat into the ring and running for governor."

"That is a scary thought," Lois said, staring at the television while she and Clark waited to be seen by Dr. Klein.

"So that's Bill Church's son, huh?" Clark asked, looking up at the screen where the dark-haired man stood in his Armani suit and slicked back hair. "He certainly has the political talk down."

"Clark, what if we're wrong?" she asked, tightening her hand on his arm.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"All of this. Intergang. The organization. What if we're wrong? What if they're not connected? What if there are two organizations out there trying to destroy Metropolis and targeting you and-and..."

"Honey, honey, calm down," He soothed, running his hands up and down her arms. "You're starting to do that manic thing—"

"Sorry." She relented, trying to reel her emotions in. "It's just how I deal with stress."

"I know," He sighed, wrapping an arm around her, "but it's just making it worse for both of us. Just calm down. Breathe."

"Breathe." She repeated, taking a deep breath. "I can do that."

"Now, once we get everything back on Intergang, we'll compare it with the information your dad gave us and then we'll know for sure." He soothed. "It's going to be okay."

"Ms. Lane? Mr. Kent? You can go on back now." The security guard said, motioning toward the double paneled doors that were now open.

"Project K." Sam Lane opened up the folder and began to read. Everything he had found on the surveillance of his daughter and son-in-law he'd destroyed. Everything that is but the information found in this folder. He'd gone back and forth on whether to destroy it but found himself unable to go through with it after seeing just how demented his superiors were.

Test after test had been performed.

Each test referred to Clark as 'it' or 'the subject' as if he was some lab rat they were performing tests on. He hated to dig into this information, but with what the organization was looking to do with Clark's ship he needed to know what lengths they were capable of. He needed to have all the information.

'Identified offspring of subject. Surveillance installed to monitor.'

"Jamie." He breathed, looking at the date of the report. They knew about Jamie.

Unable to read any further, he slammed the folder closed. He felt his throat tightening as tears began to fall. The reminder of what was lost weighed heavily on his mind.

“You think someone here did this?” Dr. Klein admonished, looking at Lois and Clark in surprise.

“Well, Dr. Klein you’ve got to admit it is possible.” Lois reasoned, crossing her arms over her chest.

“You said yourself the project was under lock and key. You can’t find any probes outside of STAR Labs’ project because it was someone working on the project that did this.” Clark added.

“So you’re suggesting that STAR Labs has a mole?” Dr. Klein hissed, his brow furrowed as he spoke.

“Dr. Klein, a lot of people are in danger. Superman can’t help people that desperately need our help. Now, I know you’ve worked with these people day in and day out. You trust them, and you think you know them. What’s being done here is wrong.” Clark pleaded. “Just let us look into them. “If we’re wrong, we’ll apologize, but if we’re not, we could save a life.”

Dr. Klein seemed to be toying with the idea in his head for a moment before finally agreeing. “I’ll get you the files on everyone that knew or was involved with the project. I can’t do anything more than that though.”

“Thank you, Dr. Klein,” Lois said with a sigh of relief.

Present Day...

“Good morning Metropolis.” Lex Luthor addressed the cameras with a smug smile. “I’m sure you’re all wondering why every channel on your television is showing this footage but rather than bore you with the details, how about I just cut to the chase, hmmm?”

The screen changed, showing the image of a small island being struck by a beam of light and the foliage disappearing into ashes before everyone’s eyes.

“Clark...” Lois gasped, covering her mouth with both hands.

He placed an arm around her shoulders and squeezed her right shoulder, “Breathe.” He whispered in her ear.

“In an instant, all life as you know it is gone. Amazing what modern technology can do, hmmm? I’m sure you’re all panicking...wondering what this former billionaire...this man that built Metropolis into what it is today is doing with this very powerful and very deadly satellite capable of destroying everything you hold dear.” Lex Luthor’s eyes darkened as he spoke.

“Murderous sociopathic ...” Lois began to mutter.

“Calm down,” Clark urged.

“I will start taking out city by city, block by block until I get what I want. And what I want is Superman.” Lex finished with a sinister smile. “Seven p.m. LexCorp towers. Oh, and if any of you brave souls at the Metropolis P.D. get any ideas about staking out LexCorp, think again. I see anyone, but Superman near those towers and Hobb’s Bay and the people that call it home will become a distant memory. Am I clear?”

The image on the television went black.

“Clark,” Lois breathed, letting out a long breath as she felt her panic levels begin to rise.

“It’s okay. It’s going to be okay.” He whispered in her ear.

“All right, people! I want everyone that’s not already assigned to start working on this. Lois, Clark, my office now!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom.

The black glowing meteorite reflected off his face as Lex picked up the mysterious stone. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Gretchen Kelly stared at the stone in awe. “I thought you said this meteorite was green.”

“Yes, that’s what Jason Trask thought too, but more and more different variations were discovered over the years.” Lex mused.

“What do you think it does?” Gretchen asked.

Lex held up a folder with the letter ‘K’ printed on the cover. “According to this, it makes our flying friend vulnerable to suggestions.”

“You really think you can get Superman to install the Annihilator for you?” Gretchen asked.

“Well, as you can see, I’m giving it my best shot.” He smiled, setting the meteorite back inside the lead box.

Seven Months Ago...

“Five scientists. Three researchers. Two interns.” Lois sifted through the files, laying them out on the conference room table.

“Gretchen Kelly.” Clark pointed to the first file. “Used to work for LexLabs before they went under. Specialized in Biochemistry and created the formula used to track the victims.”

“Rollie Vale. Expert in robotics only second to my dad.” Lois sighed, “Developed the robotic probe used to inject victims and program—”

“Okay, guys, you want dirt. I’ve got dirt.” Jimmy opened the conference room door waving a large stack of files in his hand.

Lois sighed, looking to the files she already had laid out. As much as she wanted to know what he’d found out, she hated to interrupt when she and Clark were just now digging into the scientists at STAR Labs.

“What’d you find out?” Clark asked, leaning back in his chair.

“So, Martin Snell goes way-way back with Bill Church. He was one of Church’s first partners when he started the first Cost Mart in Denver back in 1975.” Jimmy explained, setting down what he’d found except one lone folder he kept in his hands.

“Were you able to find anything on Church?” Lois asked, curious.

“It’s what I didn’t find that was interesting. Criminal record is clean. Not even a parking ticket.” Jimmy said, pushing one of the files to her. “Now, I don’t know how often you’ve been to Detroit, but it is impossible to go without a parking ticket up there.”

“You think his record’s been wiped?” Clark asked.

“Clean as a baby’s bottom.” Jimmy grinned. “I called my dad at the NIA and had him run the prints. We got a few hits. Mostly small stuff but the really weird thing is it was all connected to something the police started calling ‘The organization.’”

“Any idea who this organization is?” Lois asked, trying not to react too openly to the information Jimmy had just given them.

“There are rumors back and forth but from what I’ve been able to gather, this organization moves into a city and takes over. The government. The crime. Everything. They drain it dry until they can’t get anything more. Then they destroy it.” Jimmy said solemnly.

“Kinda like how Intergang is right now?” Lois asked.

“The difference there is Intergang has a face. It has a name. This organization doesn’t have any name or face. It’s just something people fear. The people that work for it don’t even know who they’re working for.” Jimmy continued.

“So we’ve got two mysteries to solve.” Lois sighed, tapping her fingers on her desk. “Okay so let’s assume Bill Church is running Intergang under the guise of his Cost Mart stores. How do we prove it?”

“If he is running Intergang he’s gone out of his way to prove otherwise. He’s the nicest billionaire in the world according to the press. He’s the most generous man you’ll ever meet according to the charities around the world.” Jimmy pointed out.

“That may be true, but even Lex Luthor had a clean background before he was caught.” Clark pointed out. “So, Snell worked for Church from the beginning. Maybe let’s track who all worked for Snell and see if we can identify anyone that might have fallen in with him.”

“Already done.” Jimmy handed over a photograph.

Lois peered at the photograph with Clark. “Mayson Drake?!”

“She worked under Snell until about three years ago when she left his practice to begin her career with the District Attorney’s office. She’s been climbing the ladder ever since.” Jimmy said proudly.

“So, she could have been placed there to make sure the right people went to jail, and the right ones stayed off the streets.” Lois reasoned aloud.

“I don’t know.” Clark shook his head. “She doesn’t seem the type to do something like that.”

“Type?” Lois asked, turning to look at him with a critical eye.

“I just mean she seems trustworthy, honest,” Clark interjected.

“Uh-huh,” Lois nodded, not willing to give Mayson the same benefit of the doubt Clark seemed to be entertaining. “Well, either way, it wouldn’t hurt for us to look into her background. Maybe we can ask her after court this afternoon?”

“Maybe,” Clark smiled at her.

“I’m gonna leave and let you two fight this one out.”

Jimmy said, waving his hand in the air.

Lois frowned when she saw the band-aid on his index finger. “Jimmy, what happened to your hand?”

Jimmy stopped and looked at it. “Oh, it’s nothing. I pricked myself on the cabinet in the break room.”

“When was this?” Clark asked, standing to his feet.

“An hour ago. Guys, it’s no big deal. Same thing happened a few weeks ago. Got almost everyone in the newsroom.” Jimmy shrugged.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look, and he headed for the break room.

“As the corruption scandal inside Metropolis’s Police Department grows demands for the resignation of the Police Chief and Commissioner have been made. Allegations were made after one of the biggest screw-ups in history made the news. A whistleblower came forward and revealed how our city’s finest were actively working with the criminals to let them back on the street. We can’t feel safe if there isn’t a change.” Bill Church Jr. said smugly into the camera. “Which is why I’m throwing my hat into the ring and running for governor.”

Pete Ross let out a low whistle, “Billionaire’s son getting in the trenches. You don’t see that every day.”

“Stranger things have happened.” Rachel reminded him, primping her hair for the umpteenth time in the mirror. “My hair is flat. Maybe we can do this introduction on the radio? You know

where I don’t have to stand in front of a bunch of cameras?”

Pete snickered, walking over to her. “Rach, this is a huge opportunity for you.”

“I still don’t understand it.” She said with a sigh. “I’ve never been in politics. I don’t know the first thing about being a captain.”

“You’ve been a pretty darn good sheriff the last few years.” He reminded her with a nudge.

“In Smallville where the biggest crime is who tipped the Irig’s cow.” She glared at Pete.

“Hey, I was not the only one in that field. You and Clark were right there with me.” He grinned good-naturedly at her.

“Yes, but Clark and I stopped doing that at twelve.” She reminded him.

“I was a bored teenager.” He shrugged. “Can’t fault a guy for needing a creative outlet.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with this?” she asked, “Moving to Metropolis?”

“I’m sure.” He gave her a hug from behind. “It’ll be good to settle down somewhere with indoor plumbing for a change.”

“If this works out it could be longer than six months.” She reminded him.

“I know.” He leaned in to give her a peck. “I hear they have these things called magazines and newspapers that are always looking for an award-winning freelance photographer.”

“Nah, really?” she laughed at his teasing.

“I even happen to know two or three people in the business that could give me a recommendation.” He added with a teasing smile. “Come on Rach, relax. Everything’s going to be fine.”

“I’ve never lived in a big city before.” She said taking a deep breath.

“They sought you out because you’re honest and good at your job.” Pete reminded her. “You’ll do great.”

“I hope so.” She whispered. “Have you heard anything back from Lois or Clark?”

Pete shook his head, “Nah, just got their voicemails. I’ll try them again later.”

“I was really hoping to talk to them before this press conference.” Rachel frowned.

“They’re probably busy with work or *busy*...” He wiggled his eyebrows at her to illustrate his point.

“You are terrible.” She admonished, smacking him playfully on the chest.

“I’m just saying...” Pete shrugged. “They *are* newlyweds.”

“What is it?” Lois asked, watching as Clark removed a small device that looked to be no bigger than a needle from the cupboard.

“It’s the homing device Dr. Klein was looking for,” Clark said with a grim face. “I’m going to see if he can track it. Find out where these are coming from.” He leaned in to kiss her. “If I don’t make it back to court in time cover for me.”

“Be careful.” She nodded, watching him leave.

Bill Church Jr. took a seat at his desk and began pulling up file after file on the officers that had been bought and paid for by Intergang. Intergang’s plan had been perfect. Get one of the most notorious criminals out on the streets and blame the governor,

then the public would grow to hate him making room for him – Bill Church Jr.—to step in. He'd clean up the streets, take over and then infiltrate himself into every part of Metropolis' government, ensuring nothing would happen without him knowing about it. It had been a perfect plan, but some goody-two-shoes whistleblower had ruined that plan. He was going to find out who was behind it and, when he did, that person would regret the day they ever crossed Intergang.

"Well, Superman, this is definitely one of ours." Dr. Klein frowned, looking at the probe under the microscope.

"Can you tell where the probe is programmed to return to?" Clark asked.

"Let's see here." Dr. Klein pulled out a micro USB the size of a pin needle and plugged the device into his computer with the cord. "Just give me a minute. All of the probes were programmed to return here at STAR Labs..." He stopped when he saw the map load onto the screen. "That's odd."

"What is it?" Clark asked.

"It's programmed to return to the Metropolis Park." Dr. Klein said, pointing to his screen. "Superman?" He looked around and saw the Man of Steel had already left.

Mayson Drake leaned back in her chair, staring at the Middle Eastern man sitting in front of her. "Martin Snell?" She repeated the name aloud, waiting for the pieces to fit. "You're telling me Martin Snell is a lieutenant for Intergang?"

"Very connected, my dear," the man said, handing her a large folder. "I represent a partner with a vested interest in stopping this criminal mastermind from destroying this city."

"What is this?" she asked.

"Bank records of all the public officials Mr. Snell currently owns and has doing Intergang's dirty work. I've taken the liberty of highlighting the more prominent members for you." He said with a smile.

"And how do I know these records are genuine?" she asked, tapping her fingers against the file he'd just pushed to her.

"I assure you those records are accurate. You're more than welcome to call the Swiss Bank yourself and check." He said with a sly smile. "Which I have no doubt you'll do upon my departure."

He stood up to leave, and Mayson stared at the file in front of her.

Inside the secluded underground operation room, two techs sat at their computers, "I've lost contact with the probe." One of the techs said.

"Try resetting it?" the other asked.

The tech frowned, "That's weird. It says the probe is heading back here..."

The room filled with dust and concrete as the wall behind them shattered to pieces. The two techs looked to one another before ducking behind their desks. Superman approached them, holding a familiar looking red and yellow blinking probe with a long needle. He held the probe between his fingers, snuffing the light out before advancing toward them.

"So, that's how your bullets find their targets, right? Injection of radioisotope giving the bullets a genetic tag for their victims?"

Unable to speak, the two techs nodded as one of them reached for the panic button beneath the table.

"I don't think so!" Superman hoisted him up, grabbing him by the collar and lifting him a few feet off the ground. "Who are you working for?"

"The or-organi-zation." He stammered out.

"What organization?" Superman asked, narrowing his eyes at him.

"I-Intergang." He stammered out.

Bill Church walked with Martin Snell into the conference room. "Are you sure we have everything we need to get this case tossed?"

"Everything's in place, Mr. Church," Snell said uneasily, not meeting Bill Church's eyes. He still didn't know what to think of the attack yesterday. Lex Luthor said his boss had tried to have him killed. What if that was true?

"Good." Church sighed, "I still don't understand what they were doing setting fires in the middle of the day! With witnesses around?"

"I'll be honest... the Skins are a little hard to control." Snell admitted sheepishly.

"From all the humanity on the planet, you picked them. Make it work or cut them loose but don't walk in here with any more excuses." Church pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Yes, sir." Snell nodded.

"I don't have to tell you we're at a crucial point in the Metropolis franchise. We can't afford to be out in the open until Superman is taken care of." Church's eyes narrowed, "Tell the Skins they try anything like this again they'll be enjoying an early retirement from Intergang and playing with the Angels."

"I'll be sure to reel them in, Mr. Church," Snell promised.

"Now any word on this Southside cop who came out of nowhere and stopped the Skins? You said you were going to look into it if I recall correctly." Church asked.

Snell began to respond but stopped when he saw the blinking lights on the monitor. "What is that?"

Church turned toward the screen, pulling a remote out to open the monitors. The monitors showed Superman putting his fist through one of the computers. Church turned back to Snell, "Hmm, looks like your plan's not going too well, Martin."

"Where is it?" Superman's voice echoed from the monitor.

Snell pulled out his phone and began to dial, "He wants to butt heads here comes the headache." He waited for the long beep. "Fire."

Clark heard it. The sound of the rifle being fired. After ensuring the technicians were secured. He moved at super-speed, finding the rifles that had just fired and melted them with his heat vision. He felt the wind against his face as he raced toward the Planet. He had to get there in time...

Perry White stepped out onto the crosswalk in front of the Daily Planet, clutching his newspaper. Clark grabbed him at super-speed flying up into the air. "Superman... What?" The missile was close to follow. He wrapped his cape around his editor, protecting him from the impact. The missile exploded against him. He looked cautiously at Perry who seemed unharmed. "Uh, Superman, did you just save me from

something?”

“Uh-huh,” Clark nodded, floating him back down to the cross walk.

“Do I wanna know what it was?” Perry asked.

“Nah,” Clark shook his head.

Lois waited outside the courtroom pacing back and forth, “Come on, Clark, where are you?”

“Lois?” Mayson walked up to her, looking around, “Where’s Clark?”

“He, um...” Lois wracked her brain, trying to find an acceptable answer but nothing came to her. “He’ll be here in a few.”

Mayson looked at her watch, “He better get here soon. He’s my first witness.”

“I’m sure he’ll be just a minute,” Lois said, looking around the empty waiting area. Seeing that they were alone, she decided to go ahead and dive in on the questions she had about Mayson’s relationship with Bill Church. “You used to work for Bill Church and Martin Snell, correct?”

Mayson turned to look at her in surprise, “How’d you know that?”

“Is it a secret?” Lois asked, narrowing her eyes at her.

“No, I just don’t recall mentioning it,” Mayson said, tilting her head as she readjusted her coat.

“Clark and I have been following a series of leads... from Baby Rage and the Skins to Martin Snell to Bill Church...and from Bill Church to Intergang.” Lois narrowed her eyes as she spoke.

“Bill...?” Mayson scoffed in light chuckle then looked at Lois suspiciously, “Where did you hear about Intergang?”

“We have our sources,” Lois said then tilted on her heels and turned back toward Mayson. “Organized crime ring swoops into city after city, taking it over. No one knows who runs it. No one knows who they’re working for.”

“And you think Bill might be connected to this how exactly?” Mayson asked defensively, taking a step toward her.

“I’m a reporter. I’m just following the facts.” Lois said.

“Are you sure that’s all this is?” Mayson asked.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Lois scoffed.

“Don’t insult me. You and I both know you are looking for a way to make me the bad guy here.” Mayson said narrowing her eyes at her. “You’ve had a chip on your shoulder from the first time we met.”

“Chip?” Lois sneered, “I am not losing any sleep over you.”

“Just because you can’t control your insecurities doesn’t give you the right to sling mud at me and my professional acquaintances,” Mayson growled angrily.

“I notice you’re deflecting,” Lois said, not giving Mayson’s comment about her insecurities a second thought. “What are you trying to hide?”

“Bill Church is my friend. Martin Snell is a professional acquaintance.” Mayson snapped angrily.

“Friend?” Lois echoed, “Friend as in you have lunch every Tuesday or friend as in you’d do him a favor if he called and asked you?”

“What exactly are you implying?” Mayson asked, narrowing her eyes at Lois.

“I have really good instincts when it comes to people.” Lois said, “And right now my instincts tell me you’re hiding something. I don’t trust you.”

“Careful, those pesky insecurities of yours are showing again.” Mayson snipped airily.

Lois did her best not to react. She’d made her point. Mayson’s annoying tendency to call her insecure and throw her off her line of questioning only solidified the point she was trying to make. Mayson was hiding something.

Clark walked up to them, readjusting his tie. “Hi, sorry that took so long.” He gave Lois an apologetic smile before turning back to Mayson, “Did I miss anything?”

“Nope,” Mayson said a bit too quickly, pasting on a smile.

“We should find our seats,” Lois said. “Uncle Mike’s waiting.”

Clark sat on the stand, finishing his testimony and going over everything he’d seen at Mike’s restaurant when Baby Rage had tried to burn the place down.

<< “I have really good instincts when it comes to people. And right now, my instincts tell me you’re hiding something. I don’t trust you.”

“Careful those pesky insecurities of yours are showing again.” >>

Lois had questioned Mayson without him. When he’d arrived, both women were seething. He’d heard the tail end of the conversation. Lois’ comment about not trusting Mayson and Mayson’s comment about Lois’ insecurities.

Why Lois hadn’t waited until he got back to question Mayson, he wasn’t sure. Ever since he arrived, Mayson was treating him like the enemy which was making him more and more uncomfortable.

“And after you saw the defendant start the fire...?” Mayson prompted, pacing in front of him.

Clark took a deep breath, relaying what had happened as if he had been watching the scene unfold. He couldn’t lie under oath. “Superman flew down, apprehended him and put it out.”

“Thank you, Mr. Kent.” Mayson finished coolly, moving to the prosecution table and nodding to Martin Snell. “Your witness.”

Snell wore a smug smile and waved, “No questions at this time.”

“You’re excused, Mr. Kent.” The judge nodded.

Clark stood up and walked back toward the gallery where Lois was sitting with Mike. He took his seat next to Lois, smiling as she took his hand in hers, leaning her head against his shoulder.

“You did good, Clark,” Mike whispered to him, giving him a thumbs up.

“Thanks,” He smiled back, noticing a man in a grey suit approaching the defense table and whispering to Snell. “What is he up to?”

“Look!” Lois pointed to where Snell and Mayson had moved to the judge’s bench and were in a heated discussion.

The two attorneys turned around, and Mayson had a defeated look on her face. “I’ve got a bad feeling,” Clark muttered.

“New evidence seems to indicate that the officers who arrested the defendant did not properly apprise him of his Miranda rights. And the warrant issued to search his house had the

incorrect address on it.” The judge began carefully.

Lois exchanged a look with Clark, “Of course it was.”

“Ms. Drake, your office personally issued the warrant.” The judge scolded.

“There must be some mistake...” Mayson began to plead.

“I’ll grant you twenty-four hours to investigate this matter internally and refute the charges. Otherwise, I’ll have no choice but to declare the arrest invalid and set the defendant free.” The judge banged his gavel.

Clark narrowed his eyes as Baby Rage turned around to give him and Mike a look and mouthed ‘*Tick Tock*’ to them.

“Sorry, Mayson. Better luck next time.” Snell said smugly.

Lois glared at Mayson as she spat out venomously, “It was her. She set it all up. She’s dirty, Clark.”

Clark still wasn’t sure. Lois had her gut instincts about people, but so did he. He felt there was something they were missing. Mayson seemed trustworthy. She seemed like a decent person. Could she really have tanked the case on purpose?

“I can’t believe you started questioning her without me.”

Clark gave Lois an irritated look as he followed Lois to the café they were meeting Sam Lane at.

“I was trying to get some information. Since when do you get so bent out of shape about me doing my job?” she asked, throwing him an annoyed look.

“That didn’t sound like a conversation between a reporter and a potential source. It sounded like you were both...”

“She was making digs to throw me off my game because she didn’t like the questions I was asking her. End of story.” She said, cutting him off as they turned the corner.

“Are you sure that’s all it was?” he asked gently.

“What else could it be?” she asked, giving him a pointed look.

“I just mean, you’ve been a bit...defensive when anyone brings her name up.” Clark edged cautiously. “That and your already heightened hormones...”

“What a load of...” she growled angrily, turning to face him. She was furious.

He’d noticed her tendency to let her emotions get the better of her whenever Mayson’s name came up. He’d tried to ignore it and just reassure her whenever he could because he knew a lot of it was coming from her hormones, but it just seemed to be getting worse. After the tail end of the conversation he’d overheard this afternoon, he thought it was time he addressed it. Obviously, talking about it wasn’t going so well.

“Don’t you dare! Okay, yes, I might be a little more... sensitive to certain things but I am still a professional. And I kept my cool the entire time. I could have told her exactly what I thought about her, but I didn’t.” She hissed angrily.

“Lois, you were both being ridiculous.” He corrected. “Come on, you never lose your cool no matter how hard a witness or source pushes you. You can’t go around telling people you don’t trust them if you want them to work with you.”

“She’s hiding something!” Lois shot back irritably.

“Maybe, but you don’t go around telling her. Now, whatever she may or may not be hiding is going to be even harder to get out of her.” He pointed out gently. “Honey, come on, what’s going on? Talk to me.”

“I really don’t want to talk about it.” She said quietly. “Here

we are.” She pointed to the window in front of them.

He let out a long breath, “Lois. You can’t...”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it.” She cut him off, opening the door to the café. Inside at a table for four against the back wall away from the other guests, Sam Lane stood waving to them.

Clark sighed, realizing she wasn’t going to talk about what was bothering her. Refusing to back off would just make her even angrier. The conversation wasn’t over by a long shot, but for the moment he would table it so they could address a more pressing issue. “Fine. Maybe your dad will be more forthcoming.”

Cat Grant stood in front of City Hall watching as Governor Barnes addressed the press. Every news station had a cameraman and at least three reporters to cover the press conference. The Daily Planet had sent her and George. She cringed looking over at the balding man with Coke bottle cap glasses.

“This morning I requested the resignation of three lieutenants, five captains, and our police chief and commissioner. I have entrusted my office with the task of finding replacements for all nine of these roles. All positions have been filled with people outside of New Troy to ensure their loyalties are not compromised. A thorough investigation within the department will be led by our new Commissioner, Frank Martin. I entrust the safety of this city in his capable hands.”

The governor stepped back, and a tall black man with a balding spot on the top of his head and navy-blue suit stepped forward. “Good afternoon. Thank you, Governor Barnes, for those kind words. I hope to live up to the standards you have set forth for me, and I serve at your pleasure.” He turned to the crowd. “I’m sure you’re all just dying to know who all is going to fill the shoes of all these men and women that Governor Barnes has forced to step down?”

There was a murmur of agreement among the press, and the commissioner smiled, “Well, it just so happens we’ve got them all here today.” He pointed to the row of officers behind him. “Coming from New Mexico, we have Police Chief Maria Gomez.” There was a light applause as she stood. “Captains Carlos Friez and Julia Summers.” He motioned to the two captains as they stood. “From California, we have Captain Daniel Raymond and Lieutenant Paul Raegan.” The two stood as a scatter of applause echoed through the crowd.

“From Kansas, we have Lieutenant Rachel Harris and Captain Michael Herman.” He continued. “From Maine, we have Captain Kelly Wilder and Lieutenant Charlie Jones.” The last officer stood for applause, and the commissioner motioned to the long line of officers. “Each one of these fine men and women has proven their ability to protect and serve with integrity. Together we will rid Metropolis of corruption and restore it to the great city it once was.”

“So, what do you think?” Lois asked as she and Clark stepped into the newsroom.

“I think it’s risky, but your dad’s right. The quicker it’s removed from their possession, the better.” He reasoned aloud, walking toward their desks.

“What if you get caught?” she asked, looking at him in concern.

“What if who gets caught?” Jimmy asked, walking up to

them.

“Uh, nothing,” Clark said hurriedly. “What are those?” He pointed to the large stack of files in Jimmy’s arms.

“Everything I could find that linked to the organization like you asked,” Jimmy said proudly.

“All of that’s the organization research?” Lois asked skeptically. “It’s not as big as I thought it would be.”

“What were you expecting?” Jimmy asked with a perplexed expression.

“Oh, um,” she looked back at Clark who shrugged.

“All right everyone gather around!” Perry bellowed, waving a slip of paper in his hand as he corralled the staff around him. “As you know it’s that time of year again. The nominations for the Kerth Investigative Journalism have been announced and I’m proud to announce two of our very own have received a nod.”

“Two?” Lois squeaked out, looking around the room uncomfortably. She wondered for a moment who her competition would be.

“That’s right,” Perry said. “I want everyone to give a big round of applause for ...”

“Fifty bucks it’s for the Southside scandal,” Cat said to Jimmy.

“No, no, the Nightfall series. We are not alone.” Jimmy argued.

“Can I help you two?” Perry interrupted, throwing them an irritated expression.

“No, no, you were saying,” Cat said, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Thank you,” Perry looked around the room. “Any other comments before I finish my speech?”

“No, sir,” the crowd grumbled amongst themselves.

“As I was saying, please put your hands together for our reporting team of Lane and Kent nominated for their series on political corruption in the White House,” Perry said gesturing to Lois and Clark.

“Both of us?” Lois asked, hearing Clark echo the same thing in unison with her. Lois looked back at Clark then to Perry in surprise. They hadn’t even known any of the articles she and Clark had written together were even eligible.

“Made it just under the wire to qualify this year. Congratulations. Hell of a way to make your return back to journalism.” Perry congratulated, offering her very stunned husband a hand to shake.

“Uh, thanks, Perry,” Clark said shaking his hand.

“Man, CK, you’re the man!” Jimmy slapped him on the back. Lois threw Jimmy a look, and he corrected himself. “And you are the *Wo-man*.”

“Congratulations, Lois. I’m sure you two will bring another one home.” Perry congratulated her.

“Thanks, Perry,” Lois said with a smile, watching as the staff began to disperse and head back to their desks.

“Jimmy!” Perry called, “Where are those photos of the new commissioner?”

“Coming right up, Chief!” Jimmy called, heading for his desk to grab the prints.

“I guess that’s our cue to get back to work,” Lois said, following Clark back to their desks.

Later that evening Lois and Clark sat at their desks going through everything they had on Martin Snell and Intergang. Lois sat on the phone arguing with her source from the Metropolis P.D. “Look, you’re the best police source I have. I need names, or the whole case is going to get tossed and my uncle—No, don’t hang up, just listen to...” She let out a growl of frustration. “He hung up.”

“Face it, Lois. We’re at a dead end.” Clark said, rolling his chair up to her desk.

“We’ve got sixteen hours before the judge tosses this case.” Lois shook her head in exhaustion. “Where are those files Jimmy gave you on Intergang?”

“Right here.” He said, picking up the files and sifting through them at super-speed. “Nothing on Snell that links back to the organization or to Intergang.”

She pulled out the flash drive Sam had given her. “Well, let’s settle this once and for all.” She plugged the flash drive into her computer.

Clark looked around the newsroom, checking to make sure no one was paying attention to what she had on her computer screen.

“Okay, let’s see what we’ve got here. Something called ‘Project Metallo’ is in the files. Can you look and see if there’s anything on Intergang with a cyborg or ‘Metallo’ in the files?”

He flipped through the files at super-speed and looked up, shaking his head. “There’s something about a guy named Darryl that is suspected to have a connection with Intergang, but nothing about Metallo. Any other project names?” He asked.

“Project K which was...” her voice dropped a few octaves as she whispered. “The testing on Superman.” He reached out to squeeze her hand, and she continued. “Then there’s a project here about genetic tagging.”

“Genetic tagging.” Clark snapped his fingers, “Like what they took from STAR Labs?”

Lois pulled up the file with the report, and he began to read over her shoulder. “Who is this Darryl character?” He pointed at the name on the report.

“Marcus Darryl.” Lois read off, “He’s the Head of the Science Division according to this.”

Clark pulled up the list of suspected lieutenants in Intergang. “Darryl, Preston Carpenter, and Nigel St. John.”

“Lex Luthor’s Nigel St. John?” Lois asked, grabbing the file from him.

“One and the same.” Clark sighed.

“I thought they caught him. This says he’s still missing.” Lois said with a concerned look.

“According to this, he escaped during his transfer from state to Federal prison. No leads on his whereabouts.” Clark said with a concerned look.

“So this Darryl character. Do we have a photo of him?” Lois asked. “Maybe we can have Jimmy run him through the system and see if we can... Oh, God...” She stopped when he pulled out the 8x10 glossy photo of the man.

“According to this, he was killed a few weeks ago. Gunshot wound in the back of the head.” Clark said solemnly.

“That man.” Lois shook her head, and a frantic look crossed her face. “He was at our wedding.”

“*What?!*” Clark did a double take.

“I saw him and daddy talking just before he told me about...”

you know.” She whimpered, burying her face in her hands. “Oh, God it’s them. It’s really them.”

“Honey, calm down,” He soothed, running his hand up and down her back.

“How am I supposed to calm down? They’ve obviously bought and paid for this trial. You’ve got a crooked defense attorney, crooked cops and probably a crooked DA...”

“Nice to know you think so much of me.” Mayson’s voice echoed behind them.

They both turned to see Mayson Drake standing behind Lois’ desk with a box in her hands. Lois minimized her files on her computer, pursing her lips as she turned to face Mayson. “Just calling things how I see them.”

“I am not your enemy,” Mayson said with an annoyed look.

“Your office issued the warrant. The judge made that very clear.” Lois narrowed her eyes at Mayson. “What exactly am I supposed to think?”

“I’d like for you to trust me,” Mayson said meeting her gaze sincerely.

“It’s hard to trust someone we don’t know that much about,” Clark interjected. “It’s even harder when that same person tries to deflect questioning by making personal digs.” He narrowed his eyes at Mayson as he placed a hand on Lois’ shoulders. Even though he didn’t like how Lois handled the situation he wasn’t about to make Mayson think he approved of how she’d been talking to his wife.

“Fair enough.” Mayson acknowledged, “So all cards on the table?” He looked to Lois, and she nodded. “If this case gets thrown out and my office is implicated I can kiss my career goodbye. I want to get to the bottom of this as much as you do, but I don’t know who I can trust anymore.”

“Seems to be going around,” Lois said, sharing a look with him.

“I guess if you want trust, you have to start by giving it,” Mayson said, opening up the file box and handing over a large stack of files. “This is everything my office has on Intergang... and my personal files on Martin Snell.”

“Your professional acquaintance?” Lois asked, recalling Mayson’s choice of words.

“I’d never do anything to jeopardize a case.” Mayson said, “I’ve known Martin a long time, he’s always danced close to the line.”

“Seems to me he stepped over it a long time ago,” Lois commented. “If you were so suspicious of him then why were you defending him?”

“I wasn’t defending him,” Mayson argued half-heartedly. “I was...” she stopped herself mid-sentence. “Look, that’s not the point. I think if we work together we might be able to prove a connection to Intergang.”

“Why us?” Clark asked suspiciously.

“The Metropolis P.D. doesn’t necessarily erect a lot of confidence from me these days.” She said carefully. “And considering you were the ones to break the corruption story I figure it couldn’t hurt to put our heads together. You want Intergang gone as much as I do.”

Lois exchanged a look with Clark, and he nodded. “What have you got?”

“What do you?” Mayson asked.

Sam Lane watched out of the corner of his eye as a tall man in a *panche* talking to another man on the other side of the room. He hit a button on the device he was working on and plugged an earbud into his ear to allow better range of his hearing.

“Mr. Snell has made his bed. He shall now lie in it. I do not have to remind you Mr. Vale of what the consequences are for crossing the organization, do I?”

“No, Asabi, I’m perfectly aware of those consequences. Let’s not bring Emmet into this, shall we?”

“All projects Mr. Snell was overseeing will not be under your care. The organization wants Metallo up and running without delay. Are we clear?”

“Yes, Asabi. Crystal.”

Sam noticed the men approaching and quickly disconnected the feed. “Dr. Lane, I see you’re working on a new project?” Asabi frowned looking down at the scans in front of Sam.

“New assignment.” Sam stammered hurriedly.

“That’ll have to go on hold.” The man identified as Vale said, extending his hand to shake his. “I’m Rollie Vale. I’ll be taking over for Mr. Snell.”

“Taking over?” Sam asked.

“Martin Snell has retired from the organization.” Asabi supplied. “Mr. Vale will handle all projects from here on out.”

“I see.” Sam nodded.

“Whatever this is, it can wait.” Rollie Vale said pushing the scans to the side. “Metallo needs to be your top priority.”

“Of course.” Sam forced a smile.

Martin Snell stared at his phone in dismay as the familiar number appeared on the caller id once more. “Do you need to get that, Mr. Snell?” Agent Rollins, a young petite blonde sat across the table from him.

“No, it’s best if I didn’t,” Snell said wringing his hands.

“Shall we begin?” she asked, setting the tape recorder down on the desk in front of her.

“My name is Martin Snell. I have secretly been working for an organization known as Intergang for the past fifteen years and...”

Lois, Clark and Mayson Drake sat in the conference room combing through their files and connecting the pieces. “So, Superman stopped showing up to rescues because of Intergang?” Mayson asked, taking a bite of the popcorn in front of her.

Lois sighed, taking a deep breath, “We suspect Intergang stole a genetic tagging system from STAR Labs and is using radioisotope to track its victims in order to control Superman and keep him out of the Lower East Side.”

“Making it so they can instill fear in its residents.” Mayson nodded. “Smart.”

“We also suspect one of the scientists on the project works for Intergang,” Clark added.

“Most of Intergang’s employees are hired through a shell corporation. No way of tracking the money back to the organization.” Mayson said, sifting through her files. “One of the main ones they tend to work with.” She held up a photo, “Rollie Vale. I can never prove his connection, but he’s always around.”

“That’s one of the scientists that worked on Dr. Klein’s

genetic tagging system,” Lois observed.

“The guy’s a real whiz kid. He can do anything with robotics.” Mayson added. “We’ve had people looking for him for the past three months, but no one can agree where he is.”

Lois looked to Clark and noticed a familiar expression on his face. She looked back to Mayson then to Clark as he stood up.

“I-I’ve got to go.” He said simply.

“Where?” Mayson asked.

“I’ll be right back. It won’t take long.” He said, not giving her a chance to press the issue.

“Does he do that a lot?” Mayson asked, looking at Lois with a perplexed expression.

“Constantly.” She said with a shrug, ignoring Mayson’s dubious gaze.

Clark moved at super-speed, soaring through the air until he found it. The Federal Building on Tilton Avenue. The entire building was engulfed in flames.

“Everyone move back!”

“Does anyone know where Agent Rollins is?”

“We can’t get the hose up there!”

Chaos was everywhere as federal agents, police, and firefighters scrambled in different directions. Three ambulances approached with roaring sirens. He assessed the building, scanning for any more occupants. Trapped on the top floor were a man and woman. He frowned when he didn’t see any movement from them.

He couldn’t get to them through the window because the oxygen would cause the fire to spread further. He noticed the double doors below that led inside the building. He moved at super-speed, flying up the stairs and dousing any flames that got in his way with his freezing breath. Finally, he arrived on the top floor. He could smell the c-4 and accelerant in the air. This was where it had started. He put out the remainder of the flames with his freezing breath and frowned when he saw what was left.

Amidst the chaos and smoke-filled air, one man watched the scene unfold with a smile on his face. He moved away from the crowd, pulling out his phone as he began to dial. The phone began to ring. “Mr. Church?” Asabi spoke into his phone as he watched the flames in the Federal Building go out. “Martin Snell won’t be a problem anymore.”

With that, he hung up the phone and headed for the black sedan that awaited him around the corner.

“Tonight at approximately seven pm an explosion was heard in the right quadrant of the New Troy Federal Building. The entire top floor was engulfed in flames within minutes. Our people worked tirelessly to evacuate the building, but not everyone made it out. Fifteen witnesses, twenty-three agents, and our chief of security all lost their lives tonight.”

“Unbelievable.” Jimmy breathed, looking at the scene on the television.

“Sure you don’t need to go?” Lucy asked, looking down at her dinner that was now luke-warm.

“It looks like a big story.”

“Nah,” Jimmy shrugged taking a drink of his soda. “I’m sure the Chief’s already got people down there.” He reached over to

turn the television off. “Enough of that.” He took her hand in his, “You want to tell me what’s been bothering you?”

“I’m fine,” Lucy said, pasting a smile on her face. “It’s just been an intense few weeks is all.”

“How do you like your new boss? I heard he’s one of the best CSI’s in the country.” Jimmy grinned at her.

“He’s a bit eccentric but smart, and more importantly he knows where the line of right and wrong is.” Lucy smiled back at him.

“I still can’t believe you did that,” Jimmy said with a bitter scowl.

“I thought we were done arguing about this.” Lucy sighed, pulling her hand back.

“No, *you* were done.” He said shaking his head. “I don’t get it, Luce. You did something reckless, and you didn’t talk to me about it first.”

“How is it dangerous? I went to two people I would trust with my life. I didn’t go to some random journalist, Jimmy. I went to my *sister* and my *brother-in-law*. I’ve known them both a long time. They would never do anything to put me in danger.” Lucy snapped angrily.

“You didn’t tell *me*!” Jimmy shot back. “You did something incredibly dangerous, and you didn’t tell me. I had to find out the next morning when the story hit the newsstands.”

“I didn’t want you talking me out of it,” Lucy said quietly.

“What happens when someone figures out it was you that leaked the story?” Jimmy asked.

“They won’t,” Lucy argued.

“What if they do? What is your big plan? Lois can’t protect you and herself. Your loyalties are in different places.” Jimmy pressed.

“She’s my *sister*!” Lucy snapped angrily. “She would never betray me like that.”

“How can you be so sure?” Jimmy asked. “If push comes to shove and she has to reveal her source...”

“Get out!” Lucy pointed to the door.

“Excuse me?” Jimmy scoffed.

“You heard me. Get out! I’m done with this conversation!”

Lucy got up and swung the door open for him to leave only to find Pete Ross standing there with Rachel Harris. “Pete?”

“Hey, Luce!” Pete grinned back at her.

“Oh, my God, Pete!” Lucy grinned, reaching up to hug him happily.

“Too tight. Too tight.” Pete wheezed out jokingly, and she released him and turned to Jimmy. “Jimmy, how ya doing?”

“Luce, you look good.” Rachel said, reaching over to hug her.

Pete frowned when he saw the expression on Jimmy’s face. “Did I catch you guys at a bad time?”

“No, I was just leaving,” Jimmy said, grabbing his coat.

“Good to see you.” He patted Pete on the shoulder and left.

“Funny, I thought he’d be more friendly,” Rachel commented, watching Jimmy leave.

“He’s got a story to go cover,” Lucy said, closing the door. She turned to Pete and Rachel, “What brings you two by?”

“Well, it’s our first night in town, and we thought you might be able to recommend a good place to eat. If I remember right, you always knew the best places in town.” Pete said with a grin.

“And we wanted to catch up with you and, hopefully, Lois

and Clark if those two ever answer their phones,” Rachel added.

“They’ve been really swamped with this corruption scandal and our Uncle Mike’s case,” Lucy explained. “You can probably catch them at the Planet.”

“I don’t want to bother them at work. We can try and catch up with them tomorrow.” Rachel said, shaking her head. “How about you? You feel like some company?” She bumped her hip with Lucy.

Lucy stared at the front door that Jimmy had just walked out of and gave Rachel a half-smile, “You know actually that sounds like a great idea.”

“Great. Where are we going?” Pete asked.

“Someplace loud that serves alcohol,” Lucy said grabbing her purse. “Did you drive or take a cab?”

Martin Snell was dead.

Martin Snell had come to the feds and sought help from the organization, and now he was dead. The fire inspector on the scene said the deaths had been instantaneous. He said there would have been no way to stop the explosion after the bomb went off.

That should have made him feel a little better, knowing that there was nothing he could have done to stop it; but it didn’t. He couldn’t help but wonder what would have happened if he’d heard the explosion. If he’d...

“Ah...” he winced when he heard a sharp whining in his ears. “What is that?”

No matter what he did, the sharp whine persisted. He followed the sound until he was outside one of the abandoned warehouses in Hobb’s Bay. Down below he saw Sam Lane, holding up a small metal object with a concerned look on his face.

“You know ‘*Help Superman*’ works too.” He said, landing in front of him.

Sam pressed a button on the side of the device. “I needed a less conspicuous way of calling you.”

“Phone?” He suggested, rubbing his ear.

“I didn’t want to leave a trail,” Sam said carefully.

“What is it?” Clark asked.

“I’m being reassigned to another project. They’re changing management. If there were ever a time to make that space craft disappear, it’s now.” Sam said, motioning for him to follow him toward the docks.

“Okay, but that would require knowing how to get to it and having a way of getting it out of there.” Clark reminded him.

“His code was ‘5434’ and from what I overheard this afternoon he probably won’t be needing it again,” Sam said wearily.

“Code?” Clark asked.

Sam pointed to the water below the docks. “You see that paddle boat?”

“Yeah?” Clark looked at the old white and yellow paddle boat floating in the water.

He pointed to the docks on the other side of the bay, “Beautiful view here, isn’t it? It is exactly five hundred feet from here to Queensland Bridge. Did you know that?”

“I heard that.” He said cautiously, not sure where Sam was going with this.

“On the bridge, fifteen feet in there is a red and black metal plate that opens up into a hidden elevator that takes you down into

a hidden room. On the wall is a keypad that opens to the science lab. You’ll see three doors after the wall opens. Inside the third door is the spacecraft hidden under a brown tarp. At exactly midnight there is a three-minute delay in their security cameras. Three minutes.”

Clark nodded, watching as Sam looked at the time. It was just after nine. He still had a few hours, but he needed to talk to Lois first.

“So it looks like Intergang was trying to do what it had done in the past. Take control by force.” Mayson said, looking up from her notes.

“Only difference is Metropolis has Superman to protect them,” Lois added with a bite in her tongue.

“Yeah, but for how long?” Mayson wondered aloud.

“Why can’t you just acknowledge he’s doing a good thing?” Lois asked.

“Because he’s going about it in the wrong way.” Mayson countered, letting out a long sigh. “I don’t want to fight with you.”

“How about we stick to the reason you’re here?” Lois said, pushing another stack of folders toward Mayson. “Intergang? Martin Snell?”

“Sounds good to me,” Mayson said, all too eager to grab the stack of files from Lois.

Lois did her best not to react. She knew working with Mayson was the best shot they had at finding the needle in the haystack but working side by side with her was trying her patience. She didn’t like Superman and constantly made that painfully apparent. The digs at her husband’s alter-ego were hard not to take personally.

“Five different officers were there when Baby Rage was processed, and unfortunately all of them were having money problems,” Mayson said, setting another copy of bank records down on the table.

“Sometimes it’s not about what’s in the bank account but what isn’t there,” Lois said grabbing the stack Mayson had just laid down.

“What do you mean?” Mayson asked, confused.

Lois peered at the records in front of her and smiled, pushing it to Mayson. “Look here. What do you see?”

“Deposits and withdrawals?” Mayson guessed, not following her.

“No checks? No bills?” Lois pressed. “Nothing like what you see on these other three.” She pushed the other officers’ bank records to Mayson to compare.

“This doesn’t prove anything.” Mayson pointed out.

“Maybe not, but it is awfully suspicious, wouldn’t you agree?” She flipped through the records. “Go back two months.”

“Gas bill, electric bill, groceries, rent...” Mayson read off the records. She met Lois’ gaze. “So, Sanders either stopped getting bills or the need for groceries every month or...”

“Or he started paying his bills in cash.” Lois reasoned aloud.

“Who started paying bills in cash?” Clark asked, walking into the conference room with three bags of Korean food.

“Have fun on your errand?” Mayson asked, not looking up from her paperwork.

“I did. I thought everyone would enjoy a working dinner.”

Clark said, pulling the containers out of the bags.

Lois' eyes widened when she saw the familiar bamboo containers being pulled out of the bags. "Is that...?"

"Bibimbap, Japchae and Kimchi." He said with a smile. "I brought an assortment."

"Smells great. Thanks Clark." Mayson flashed him a quick smile, setting her paperwork down. She reached over to grab a plate as Clark took a seat next to Lois.

He wrapped his arms around her, tightening his grip around her waist for a moment, resting his chin against her shoulder as he let out a long breath. She looked back at him and saw the worry lines on his forehead. Something was wrong. He met her gaze. "I'll tell you later." He whispered.

She nodded, reaching for her plate and grabbing a fork to eat.

"She's out of her mind," Jimmy muttered to himself as he stormed through the doors of his favorite bar.

"Hey kid, what'll it be?" Bibbo, the bartender asked.

"Beer," Jimmy said, shaking his head.

Why couldn't Lucy see how dangerous her situation was? Why couldn't she have come to him and talked to him before agreeing to be a whistleblower on this corruption scandal? If Lois really cared about her sister she never would have put Lucy in that situation. She would have found another way.

"Here you go, kid." Bibbo passed him a beer. After a long pause, he looked at him. "You gonna talk or am I gonna have to resort to desperate measures?"

"Talk?" Jimmy looked around, uncertain if Bibbo was talking to him.

"You come in here carrying the cloud of gloom over your head. What gives?" Bibbo asked.

"You don't want to hear about it," Jimmy said.

"Try me." Bibbo pressed.

"Okay, I've got this girl."

"Girlfriend?"

"Yeah," Jimmy grinned. "Anyway, she did something pretty dumb and reckless and dangerous and ..."

"And you got a beef with her about it?"

"You bet I do!" Jimmy snapped. "She should have come to me. I'm her boyfriend. Why couldn't she come to me?"

"Maybe she didn't know how you'd react?" Bibbo guessed.

"She went to her sister. She trusted her sister, but not me."

Jimmy said sadly.

"Don't go sticking your nose in between sisters, ya here?"

Bibbo chastised. "Ain't no man's place to try and come between sisters."

"I guess." Jimmy shrugged. "I just don't get why she couldn't trust me? Why couldn't she come to me?"

"Sometimes the ones we love do things we don't like," Bibbo said. "Maybe instead of talking to me about it, you should talk to her and ask her."

"She kicked me out," Jimmy said matter-of-factly.

"Why?" Bibbo asked.

"I might have said something I shouldn't have," Jimmy said weakly.

"Uh-huh," Bibbo gave him a look. "You ain't gonna get anywhere by harping on what you think she should have done. Take it from the guy that's got three ex-wives. It won't do you any

good to focus on the past. You like this girl?"

"Yeah," Jimmy smiled.

"Good. Then quit your bellyaching and get your butt over there and talk to her." Bibbo said, pointing to the door. "Beer's on the house. Get out of here, kid."

Mayson gathered her things, "I'll have Officer Sanders picked up, and we'll start questioning him. Hopefully, we can get him to crack." She flashed Clark a smile as she readjusted her bag on her shoulder. "This was fun. We should do it again sometime."

Clark looked to Lois who was watching Mayson carefully as she walked toward the door to leave. He still wasn't sure what Lois' issue was with Mayson but given everything else he was dealing with tonight he decided not to press it.

"Good night, Mayson." He called with a polite wave.

Lois nodded and gave a quick wave as she continued to sift through the files in front of her. "Night."

Clark watched Mayson leave and then turned to Lois. "What have you got there?"

"This Darryl character keeps showing up everywhere." She said with a frown.

"What do you mean?" He asked, tapping his fingers against the back of her chair.

"I mean there are notes here about a connection to different crimes over the years but nothing solid. Blackmail, collusion, and a few murders..." She handed him the notes she was reading.

His lips tightened when he saw the man's photo pinned to the case file. This man had shown up to his and Lois' wedding. Why? Lois said he'd been talking to Sam. Why? Several questions raced through his mind, and he could feel his anxiety levels begin to rise. He let out a long breath, wrapping his arms around her as he spoke. "It's getting late. We can finish this up tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" her voice faltered slightly as he ran his lips against the nape of her neck. "You're not playing fair."

"I never do." He whispered, nibbling at the sensitive flesh of her throat as she let out a soft moan.

"You're trying to distract me." She grinned back at him.

"Impossible. Lois Lane can't be distracted, remember?" he teased, running his hands through her hair.

"Clark," she let out a soft sigh as she fought valiantly to stay focused on the conversation.

"Huh?" he murmured in her ear.

"It's really not fair that you can do that to me." She breathed softly as he tugged on her earlobe with his teeth.

"Do what?" he asked, moving his attention to her jawline.

"What were we talking about?" she asked, letting out a shuddered breath as he nibbled on her jawline.

"Me taking you home so we can celebrate our first joint Kerth nomination properly." He whispered with a grin.

"Wait, no, you were gonna tell me something earlier." She shook her head as he let out a soft groan.

"I'd much rather do this." He whispered, leaning in to kiss her lips.

"I know you would, but..." she let out a soft moan. "Stop trying to distract me."

"Why? It's fun." He grinned at her, pulling back.

"What happened?" she pressed, placing a hand on his chest.

He sighed, hanging his head momentarily before looking back

up at her. He moved his hand to cup her cheek as he forced himself to find the words. “There was a fire tonight. A bombing really. Martin Snell was killed in the explosion.”

“*What?!*” Lois’ eyes widened as he continued.

“It was at the Federal building. He was trying to turn on the organization is my guess.” He let out a long breath, leaning in to kiss her. “I didn’t get there in time. I didn’t even hear it until it was too late.”

“Oh, Clark,” she whispered, fingering his jawline. “This is not your fault.”

“I know that in my head, but I still can’t help but wonder what would have happened if I’d heard the blast sooner. If I’d...”

“Look at me.” She tilted his head, forcing him to meet her eyes. “You can’t be everywhere at once. You help where you can, when you can. Isn’t that what you said when you started this?”

“Knowing it and believing it are two completely different things.” He whispered. “Lois, I saw the bodies. They were burned alive. That entire floor had been covered in an accelerant. It was a deliberate attack on him, and three different agents lost their lives tonight because of it.”

She leaned into him, resting her head beneath his chin and running her hands up and down his chest as he spoke. She’d done it countless times before, held him while he vented about a bad day or rescue, calming him with her gentle touch. He let out a slow breath, listening to the dual heartbeats of his wife and son as he held her in his arms.

“I love you,” He whispered, pressing his lips to her temple.

“We’ll get to the bottom of this.” She said, tapping her hand on his shoulder. “We’ve got the information Jimmy found, Mayson’s files, and the stuff daddy was able to copy to that flash drive...”

“And the ship.” He said with a frown.

“What?” she looked up at him with a questioning gaze.

“There’s apparently been some shift in power inside the organization. Your dad called me with a really annoying device and told me how to get to the ship.” He said, looking at where his hands rested on her abdomen. “The only thing is I don’t know how much I should trust him. Going in there and stealing the ship back...”

“They stole it first. You’re reclaiming it.” Lois corrected.

“Where am I going to put it? I can’t take it to Smallville. That’d be the first place they’d look.” He pointed out.

“What about STAR Labs?” Lois suggested.

“Taking it from one laboratory to another doesn’t manifest a lot of confidence from me. Plus, I don’t know Dr. Klein all that well.” He pointed out.

“He’s trustworthy,” Lois said, leaning in to kiss him. “Where did you plan on putting it? Our already crowded Living Room?”

“Maybe,” He shrugged.

“You can’t be serious.” She looked back at him in disbelief.

He glanced at the clock. “I’ve got an hour before I need to go if we’re going to do this.”

“Do you want to?” She asked.

“That ship is my only link to where I came from. I don’t want that in anyone’s hands but yours and mine.” He said, running his hand over the small bump on her abdomen where their child was growing.

“We’re going to have to start looking for a bigger place.” Lois

sighed. “So, how are you going to do this? You can’t go in there as Superman.”

“I know that.” He nodded. “I figured I could just go in disguise then fly it out of there.”

“So then they can send thugs after Clark Kent?” Lois scoffed. “I don’t think so.”

“Not me, Clark Kent. Just *me*. Without the glasses.” He smirked at her. “You said yourself I look very different without the glasses. So, no Superman suit and no glasses.”

“What if something happens?” she asked, running a hand across his cheek.

“If I tell you where I’m going you have to promise you won’t follow me in.” He said, running his hand through her hair.

“I’m not sending you into the lion’s den without a backup plan.” She argued.

“I don’t want anything happening to you.” He said. “Promise me. You can send your sister, or you can call Henderson, but I don’t want you anywhere near this place.”

“Clark,” she gave him an irritated glare.

“Promise me,” He repeated.

“What about daddy?” she asked.

He smirked, noting how she was avoiding the request by changing the subject. “I still don’t know how much we can trust him.” He said carefully, “And don’t think I didn’t notice you trying to change the subject.”

“Fine.” She blew at the stray strand of hair that fell in her face. “I won’t come in after you, but I will send someone if I think you’re in trouble.”

“It should only take three minutes, but I’d guess it’ll take me about twenty to get there and back.” He said cautiously.

He let out a soft groan as she pulled herself into his lap and whispered, “You start to feel any of those effects from that meteorite you get out of there.”

“I know.” He leaned in to kiss her.

“I don’t like this.” She murmured against his lips.

“I know.” He sighed, resting his forehead against hers. “But leaving the ship in their possession isn’t an option.”

“I know.” She gave him a weak smile. “I don’t have to like it though.”

Lucy let out a long breath as she set her drink down. “So when did you two start seeing one another?”

Pete looked surprised, and Rachel grinned, bumping his hip. “I told you we wouldn’t be able to keep it under wraps long.”

Pete grinned back at Lucy “A few weeks ago. I needed someone to go with me to the opening at one of my shows and Rachel offered to be my date for the night. Then one thing led to another, and the rest is history.” He shared a look with Rachel.

“I’m happy for you.” Lucy smiled, looking around the crowded room. “You know Lois and I were taking bets a few years ago on when you would finally take the plunge and ask Rachel out.” Pete and Rachel looked back at her in surprise, and she shrugged. “It was pretty obvious that you liked her.”

“It was not!” Pete shook his head.

“Aw, look he’s turning red.” Lucy teased giving him a playful shove.

Rachel giggled, “Oh come on, let her have some fun Pete.”

“At my expense?” Pete asked.

“Oh, poor baby.” Rachel leaned in to kiss him.

“Lieutenant Harris,” a voice behind them spoke.

Lucy turned to see a tall man in a black polo shirt and jeans with a military-style haircut and glasses standing behind them. He was attractive. More than attractive. “Captain Daniel Raymond.” He extended his hand to Rachel, and she took it with a smile.

“Yes, Captain Raymond.” Rachel nodded. “Lucy, Pete, this is one of the new recruits.” She pointed to Pete, “My, uh...Pete.”

“Her boyfriend.” Lucy supplied for her.

Daniel chuckled. “And you are?”

“Just a friend.” Lucy grinned.

“She thinks she’s funny.” Rachel gave her a smirk. “What can I do for you Captain?”

“I just wanted to introduce myself. Seems we’ll be working the Special Crimes unit together. Orders just came down.” He gave her a shrug. “Anyway, I thought it’d be polite to reintroduce ourselves away from the press.”

“That’s very...” Rachel seemed to be searching for the right word.

“Polite.” Pete supplied for her.

“I think it’s nice. Shows good character.” Lucy cheered with a grin.

“You certainly do have a lot of opinions, Ms. Just a Friend Lucy.” He flashed her a smile. “Do you have a last name?”

Lucy shook her head, “I don’t know you well enough.”

“Maybe you should dance with me and change that.” He suggested, pointing to the dance floor.

Lucy met his dark hazel eyes for a moment then turned away, seeing where Rachel and Pete had already disappeared on the dance floor together, oblivious to her current predicament. “I don’t think that’s such a good idea.” She let out a shaky breath. “I don’t know you well enough to dance with you.”

“Okay, what do you want to know?” He asked, pulling up a stool and perching himself on the edge and pivoting himself toward her. “I’d *really* like to dance with you.”

“I have a boyfriend.” She said, turning away.

“Lucky guy.” He grinned, staring back at her intently. “Now about that dance...”

“You’re impossible.” She rolled her eyes at him.

“Hey, I’m just a nice guy looking to have one dance with you. I’m not trying to ask you out or propose. Just one dance.” He gave her megawatt smile. “What do you say?”

“I don’t think so.” She said softly, getting up and heading to where Rachel and Pete were walking back toward her. “It was nice to meet you Daniel.”

“Please, call me Danny.” He winked at her.

Dressed in all black with a plain black baseball cap used to cover his face, Clark walked to the middle of Queensland Bridge where he found the door as described by Sam Lane. “So far so good.” He muttered to himself. On the door was a keypad. He typed in the code he’d been given and took a deep breath when he saw the elevator doors open.

“Here goes nothing.” He stepped on the elevator and glanced at the watch on his arm as he stared down at the ground, careful to avoid detection by any cameras.

Across the room, in the crowded club, he knew Lucy always

went to when she was upset Jimmy watched as Pete and Rachel laughed with his girlfriend. He felt a nauseating feeling wash over him as he watched a mysterious man approach them. The man seemed to have taken an immediate interest in Lucy.

He scowled when he watched the man lean towards Lucy. She wasn’t encouraging the behavior, but she wasn’t rebuffing them either. He’d seen enough. He got up and left. Obviously, he’d done more damage to his relationship with Lucy than he originally thought.

Present Day...

Lois watched as Clark left to check the city for any sign of Lex Luthor. Perry had cleared their current schedules to put them both on the Luthor story and figure out what the mayor planned to do if Superman didn’t show. They both knew that wasn’t an option or a possibility, but it would be good to cover.

“Figures.” Jimmy snorted, turning back to his desk as he watched Clark head for the elevator. “Never around when you need him.”

Lois’ ears perked up and turned toward Jimmy. “Hey, Jimmy?” Lois called the young man over to her desk.

“What’s up?” Jimmy asked, walking toward her. He took a second glance to Clark’s empty desk then back at Lois.

“Is something going on with you and Clark I should know about?” she asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Nope.” He shook his head, not meeting her gaze.

“Okay, let me rephrase,” she leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms over her chest. “What is up with you and Clark?”

“Nothing. I just realized that he’s not the person I thought he was. End of story.” He said, still avoiding eye contact with her.

“*Excuse me?*” she practically spat out. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means, you may not know him as well as you think you do.” He snapped irritably. “Now is there another reason you dragged me over here or is this just a grill session?”

“Yeah,” She handed him her notes. “I want you to find out everything you can on LexCorp’s financials after they went bankrupt last year.”

“Anything else?” Jimmy asked.

“Yeah, lose the attitude. I get enough from my three-month-old. I don’t need it from you too.” She snapped irritably.

“Sorry.” Jimmy apologized. Part of her thought he was almost genuine.

“What are you doing?” Corbin asked as Bill Church Jr. replaced the glowing stone inside him with a green glowing rock.

“We’re taking safety precautions this time to make sure our investment gets the return we’re hoping for.” Bill Jr. said.

“What about Superman?” Corbin asked, his eyes glowed a neon green as he spoke.

“This is going to help with that, John. But you’ve got to trust me.” Bill Jr. said with a satisfied smile. “You can’t go around tearing the city apart looking for him. You’ve got to be smart. Cold. Calculating.” He looked to Corbin. “Can you do that, John?”

“As long as I have my revenge and you don’t pull any funny business,” Corbin warned.

“What do you want Luthor?” His voice boomed as he landed on the roof of the Luthor Towers. It had been almost a year since he’d last faced Luthor. He hadn’t been in control that night. He’d almost killed him due to the subliminal suggestions that were plaguing his mind.

This time would be different.

This time he was in control.

He looked around but saw no sign of the man. He had to be around here somewhere.

Seven Months Ago...

Once Clark arrived on the main level, he moved at super-speed toward the room Sam Lane had said the ship was in. He didn’t waste any time. Once he was inside, he grabbed the ship still covered in the tarp and got out of there as fast as he could. Surprisingly he wasn’t forced to re-enter the code upon exiting. The elevator moved at an excruciatingly slow pace compared to the speed with which he’d been moving below ground. Finally, he arrived on the bridge. As soon as the doors opened wide enough, he plunged himself and the ship into the sky, flying as high as he could to avoid detection.

He was carrying his ship. The ship he’d arrived on Earth in. The ship his parents had found him in. The ship that would hopefully hold some answers for him about who he was and why he’d been sent here.

Lois took a deep breath, running her hands over the heavy red fabric of Clark’s Superman cape she had wrapped around her. After he’d left, she couldn’t seem to push the panic out of her mind. Needing to feel him close to her after her shower, she’d opted to wait for him in the cape he’d wrapped her in countless times before when trying to keep her warm.

She looked around the space she and Clark had cleared in the living room. The idea was to cover the ship in boxes and keep it camouflaged while they looked for another place. Hopefully, they could find a place with a large enough basement to house the spaceship. What if it didn’t fit in the apartment? How big could a spacecraft that carried an infant be?

She glanced at the clock on the wall as she rolled on her side, staring at his side of the bed and mentally counted down the seconds. She remembered every direction with precision, praying she wouldn’t have to use them. *‘Twenty minutes.’*

“He’s fine.” She told herself. “He’s *fine*.”

The turning of the locks on the front door reached her ears. She sat up and heard a loud thud and a gust of wind through the living room.

“Hey,” she heard him whisper behind her.

She turned to see him in his sleeping shorts as he climbed into bed with her. “Hey,” she gave him a watery smile.

“Interesting choice of attire.” He grinned, wrapping his arms around her, pulling her to him. “You know mom only made three of those.”

“So you’ve got two others.” She teased, rolling on her side to face him.

“Uh-huh,” He leaned in to kiss her, running his hands through her hair.

“Are you okay?” she asked, running a hand across his cheek.

“I am now.” He whispered, brushing his lips against hers. She sighed against him as his arms tightened around her waist. He moved his attention to her jaw and throat as his hands began a blind exploration up her legs. “How do you take something so boring like a cape and turn it into something so *sexy*?”

“You like it when I wear your cape?” she asked breathlessly, letting out a soft moan as he inched his way to her collarbone as he tugged at the knot she’d tied on the front of her chest with his cape.

“I like what you’ve got on underneath even more.” He said, running his palm up and down the smoothness of her legs as he nibbled at the sensitive skin on her throat.

“I’m not wearing anything underneath.” She whispered.

“I know.” He growled, rolling them over, so she was hovering over him.

“I love you,” She whimpered against him

“I love you, Lois,” He whispered leaning up to capture her mouth with his.

Present Day...

‘Fight it.’

It hurt. He felt like his insides were being torn in two. His mind was attacking itself just as it had during his fight with Metallo.

<< “*Alien. Destroy. Alien.* ”>>

‘No!’

Images of the green glowing needle plagued his mind as he pushed through the pain.

“Ah, Superman, tsk tsk tsk you arrived a bit early.” Luthor’s voice echoed in the back of his mind.

He felt a hard rage flow through his body as Luthor taunted him.

<< “*Destroy.* ”>>

“Luthor.” He snarled angrily, trying to gain control of his mind as he fought against the suggestions.

“You can fight it all you want Superman, but we both know you’re going to give in.” Luthor hissed in his ear.

“Go to hell!” he growled, fistng the concrete below him.

<< “*Destroy Metropolis.* ”>>

‘No!’ he fought against the messages.

“How long do you think you can resist that animal rage that’s boiling inside you? How long do you think you can keep up the façade that you are one of them? Their protector?” Luthor hissed in his ear. “You’re nothing! An alien!”

The black glowing stone flashed in his eyes once more, and everything went dark.

Clark reentered the newsroom after searching high and low for Luthor. Nothing. No sign of him anywhere. He’d finally given up and headed back to the Planet. He took a few minutes to stop by the daycare and check on Jon who was sleeping soundly with Ms. Rachel.

He knew it was hard for Lois to transition to not having Jon with her all day but he couldn’t help but be thrilled at having Jon here at the Planet with him. He loved having the luxury of being able to stop in and check on him. Just seeing his face helped brighten his day. Today was definitely a day he needed to see him.

He scanned the newsroom for Lois and sighed when he saw

Lois in the conference room with Jimmy. He shook his head, unsure which version of the young man he'd be dealing with. The happy-go-lucky young man he'd come to know or the cold and hostile one that seemed to enjoy making his workday hell.

"Hey," He flashed Lois a smile as he closed the conference room door behind him.

"Hey," She smiled back at him. "Were you able to find Superman?"

"Eventually," He looked to Jimmy who seemed to be avoiding eye contact with him at the moment. *'Cold and hostile. Great.'* He pulled up a chair next to Lois, choosing to ignore Jimmy's silent treatment for the moment. He still had no idea what the young man's problem was, but he was growing tired of it. "I spoke with Superman briefly. He's scanned the old LexCorp building but can't find anything that would explain why he wants him there. He's also scanned the city looking for Luthor and came up empty."

"I'm going to go check on those prints," Jimmy said, getting up. "Let me know if you need anything else."

Clark watched the young man leave and shook his head. "You know I really wish he'd tell me what supposed offense I've done to warrant this Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde act from him."

Lois twisted her face, looking back at him. "Yeah, he doesn't seem himself." She shook her head, "How long has he been acting like that?"

He frowned, "I guess the first time I noticed it was a few weeks before you had Jon." A scowl crossed her face, and he added. "I know. It doesn't make sense."

"You didn't get into a fight or argument? He just started acting like this for no reason." She seemed to be trying to wrap her mind around what he'd told her.

"I don't know. I have tried talking with him and come up with even more hostility, so I just avoid him. He'll have his moments when he's the same old Jimmy then the next he's ignoring me again." Clark sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"This doesn't make any sense," Lois said, getting up from her seat.

"Nope." Clark sighed, reaching for the papers she'd been reading earlier. "What's this?"

"Research LexLabs was involved in. I thought we could compare it with the stuff we have on the organizations' tests on that meteorite."

"Luthor had access to the meteorite?" Clark asked in shock.

"Apparently they did some testing on both a green and red variation and came up with something new," Lois said with a frown as she paced in front of him.

"What?" He asked.

"Black." She whispered.

"Like Metallo?" Clark asked, standing up.

Seven Months Ago...

Clark couldn't sleep. He stared up at the ceiling unable to push the thoughts that had been weighing heavily on his mind away. He glanced over at Lois who was curled tightly up against him and sighed watching her smile in her sleep. He wanted nothing more than to keep that smile on her face forever.

His ship. The ship he'd arrived to Earth in was sitting in the middle of his living room covered in boxes. So many things could

have gone wrong tonight, but they hadn't. He sighed in relief, focusing on his wife's breathing. What had Intergang been trying to do with his ship? Sam thought it could be used as a weapon. Could it?

He had so many questions. So many unanswered questions that had plagued him for years. Why was he here? Where did he come from? Were there others like him?

It had his emblem. The emblem that had been on the blanket his mom and dad had found him in. What did that symbol mean?

Unable to fight the urge any longer, he sat up, looking back at the sleeping figure of his wife before reaching for his shorts that had been tossed on the floor earlier. Being careful not to disturb her, he stood up and made his way into the living room. There, behind the piles of boxes he'd placed in the corner was the brown tarp that covered the blue and silver ship. He still hadn't removed it.

He lifted one of the boxes and moved it to the floor then pushed the tarp back. A mix of emotions filled his mind as he stared at the familiar 'S' emblem carved into the nose of the ship. He ran his hand over the clay and dirt that was wedged between the red 'S' and frowned. When had they taken it? Was it right before they attacked his parents? After his dad had buried the ship? How long had they been studying it? What had they learned?

A brown bag sat in the ship with a tag that said, *'Bureau 39. Smallville, KS 1988.'*

'The year all this started.' He frowned to himself, uncertain if he wanted to know what was inside that bag. Finally, he decided to just open the bag and see what was in it. He frowned when he saw the round globe shaped like Earth inside it. It looked exactly like the globe his father had described.

'They must have taken it when they attacked mom and dad.' Clark reasoned to himself.

A soft glow began to resonate from the globe, and he watched in awe as the image began to change. A name popped into his head and he mumbled out, "Krypton."

The brightness in the room began to grow. He stared intently at the globe as images flowed through his mind. A man wearing a white suit with his emblem on it and a woman dressed in a similar attire hovered over a baby.

"Kal-El." The name popped into his head just as the planet name had before.

He dropped the globe, unable to handle any more of the images that continued to flow through his mind. He stared at the glowing object in shock as it floated above the ground almost as if it were calling to him.

"Do not be afraid, Kal-El." The voice in his head said again.

He watched in awe as his arm reached out to touch the globe once more. The image of the man he'd seen before reflected from the globe and spoke to him. "My name is Jor-El. And you are Kal-El, my son. The object you hold has been attuned to you. That you now hear these words is proof that you survived the journey in space and have reached your full maturity. Now it is time for you to learn our heritage. To that end, I will appear to you five times. Watch for the light, listen, and learn."

He wanted to block out the images he was seeing. War. Famine. Women and children desperately seeking help as the very ground around them swallowed them whole. They were memories

of a life... a planet that had long since died off. Finally, the images changed to that of the man who identified himself as Jor-El—his father. No, his birth father.

The images changed to the couple holding one another as the walls around them trembled. Jor-El's voice resonated around him as the images came into focus.

"Time grows short, and we continue to search. The immensity of space is both a blessing and a curse. In that near infinite variety, there must be someplace suitable. Hope and desperation drive us in equal measure. Lara works by my side. She is tireless and endlessly patient. Considering what is soon to come, this is my greatest consolation: that we are together."

The woman beside Jor-El smiled down at the sleeping baby in his arms. "He's just a baby, Jor-El." He could feel the pain in her eyes as the images unfolded.

"It's his only chance, Lara," Jor-El soothed. "If he remains here he will surely die as... we will."

"But why Earth, Jor-El?" Lara asked, "They're thousands of years behind us."

"He will need that advantage to survive. Their atmosphere will sustain him."

"He will defy their gravity," Lara said.

"He will look like one of them." Jor-El countered, stroking the baby's cheek with a pained expression of his own.

"But he won't *be* one of them."

"His dense molecular structure will make him strong," Jor-El added, ignoring Lara's comment. "He'll be fast and virtually invulnerable."

"Isolated and alone." Lara finished with tears as she leaned in to kiss the baby in her arms.

"He will never be alone." Jor-El's voice echoed.

The light from the globe diminished and the warmth in his hand went cold as it fell into his palm. Clark stared at the object in his hand, unable to wrap his head around the raw images he'd just seen. "Kal-El." He spoke the foreign name that seemed to fit a missing piece he didn't know he had inside him.

He looked around the living room, ensuring everything was still in its place. He let out a shaky breath, returning the globe to the small bag inside the spacecraft and pulling the tarp back over it. He returned to the bedroom, finding Lois curled up on his side of the bed, hugging his pillow.

He smirked, crawling into bed as he wrapped his arms around her. He briefly wondered what the man and woman he'd seen in the hologram images would think if they could have met Lois—or Jamie. He felt a pang in his chest as his son's name weighed heavily on his thoughts.

For so long he wondered where he came from and why he was sent here. Now it seemed he was finally going to find out why. 'Lara and Jor-El.' Those were the names of his birth parents.

The rapid thumping of his unborn child's heartbeat reached his ears, and he felt his body relax, listening to the soft beats one by one. 'Everything's fine.' He told himself, tightening his arms around his wife's waist as she slept, unaware of the inner battle that continued to plague him.

"I love you." He whispered in her ear, running his hand over her growing abdomen.

"Clar..." she mumbled incoherently as her chin nestled itself in between his shoulder blade and neck. He ran his hands up and

down her growing abdomen once more and then he felt it.

A soft jab beneath the smoothness of her abdomen. He stilled his motions, waiting to feel it again. Then another jab hit his palm again.

A smile spread across his face. He looked to Lois who was blissfully ignorant of what he considered to be a milestone in their child's development. He felt him. He felt him move. Lois had been feeling him move for the last few weeks, but he'd finally felt his son move.

"Lois," He whispered, running his hand against her cheek.

"Hmm?" she mumbled sleepily.

"Our son just moved." He couldn't suppress the grin on his face.

"He's always moving." She whispered, running her palm over his chest in her sleep.

He glanced down at her sleeping figure and sighed, listening to the dual heartbeats of mother and son as they pounded in unison together. He smiled to himself, holding her close. "I love you, Lois,"

Mayson Drake wore a smug expression as the judge questioned Officer Sanders on the stand. She'd done it. She'd found the skunk in the rose garden.

"Officer Sanders, please state your name for the record." The judge ordered.

"Michael Sanders." The officer said firmly.

"You have been on the force for how long Officer Sanders?" the judge asked.

"Fi-Fifteen years." He stammered, looking down at his lap.

"Is this your signature?" the judge asked, pointing to the statement in his hand.

"Yes, sir." Officer Sanders said heavily.

"It is your testimony today that your statement here is false?" the judge pressed.

"Yes," Sanders said glumly.

"You understand the penalty for perjury?"

"Yes,"

The judge banged his gavel, "Bailiff, please take Officer Sanders into custody where he'll be arraigned." The Bailiff nodded, taking the officer into custody. The judge then turned to Baby Rage who was sitting at the defendant table with his newly appointed counsel. "As for the defendant, Daniel Anthony Bell AKA, Baby Rage —You're going to trial."

POLICE CORRUPTION EXPOSED: SKINS GET SKINNED

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

"Great work you two!" Perry cheered, holding up the front page of the Daily Planet that afternoon.

"Now that Officer Sanders has agreed to turn evidence for the DA the cases he and the other officers tanked will be reopened, and justice will be served for the victims," Lois said, sharing a look with her husband.

The last three days had been filled with court hearings, and press conferences as the names of the corrupt officers were revealed. The Skins were all picked up and charged, but the name of the one calling the shots seemed to still elude them. The head of the Skins named Martin Snell as their contact in Intergang. He

had been able to confirm a contract existed between Intergang and the Skins to incite fear among residents and businesses in the Lower East Side. That was a big win.

They still didn't have a name for the one running things, but they had a link between Intergang and the violence that had been taking place in Metropolis over the last month. That was a step in the right direction. Thankfully, after the first article had been published, the slow-down with the police became nonexistent. It seemed whoever had been behind Intergang didn't like the spotlight.

"STAR Labs found fifteen employees on staff linked with Intergang. One of whom has disappeared. No one knows what happened to Rollie Vale." Clark explained, wrapping a protective arm around Lois' waist.

"Sounds like some following up will be needed. Hopefully, they can find him." Perry said, tapping his fingers on his chin. "Oh! Before I forget," He held up two tickets for them. "I expect the both of you to be at the Charity Ball tonight. Bill Church is going to be making an announcement and..." Lois did her best to suppress her distaste for the event Perry was trying to force her and Clark to attend, but he caught it anyway. "I don't want to hear it. You may not agree with his business practices, but he's a good guy. I've yet to see otherwise."

"A good guy that just happens to have a hired hitman as his personal assistant." Lois pointed out.

"I've yet to see any evidence from either of you to prove otherwise." Perry pointed out.

1994 Annual Charity Ball, the signage in front of the Embassy read. Two men stood outside, watching as the maintenance crew worked on cleaning the front walkway. Another man watched the scene unfold from afar, grinning to himself as he held a mobile phone to his ear, listening for instructions.

"Everything's set, sir." He watched as the two men walked away. "We're clear."

"Do it." The voice from the other end of the phone instructed.

An eruption of fire filled the front of the Embassy. Screams and cries for help echoed through the streets.

Clark felt a bile in his throat as he sped across town trying to reach the cries for help as fast as possible. 'No.' The Embassy was engulfed in flames.

<<"Destroy. Alien. Destroy.">>

'Not now.' He thought to himself, pushing the thoughts out of his mind. He hovered outside the flames, mustering up as deep of a breath as he could before releasing the freezing breath onto the flames.

<<"Destroy. Alien. Destroy.">>

'Stop it.' He pushed the thoughts out once more, taking a deep breath before releasing another blast of freezing breath onto the remainder of the flames. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw the flames were gone and all that remained was smoke and frozen brick and windows.

The cries for help had stopped. A light applause scattered around on the ground and he flew down to where the hotel manager was standing with the firefighters.

"Thank you, Superman!"

Clark forced a smile as he moved on autopilot through the

crowd that had formed around the hotel. Emergency crews worked tirelessly to ensure everyone was treated. The Fire Marshall checked the building for structural damage and closed it off until further notice. All of this continued to happen around him, but all he could focus on was the voice that kept echoing inside his mind.

Something was wrong.

The voices he'd thought were gone kept coming back. The voices that had almost made him kill a man were haunting him. He needed help. Unfortunately, his choices were limited to a man he didn't trust and was connected to the organization that did this to him and a man he'd just recently met but still didn't entirely trust.

<<"Destroy. Alien. Destroy.">>

Images from his time in captivity pushed their way to the forefront of his mind. The glowing green rock and the needles as he'd been subjected to test after test after test by Trask. He'd been robbed of five years of his life because of this organization. He'd been robbed of his son...Lois. He couldn't let them continue to control his life. He had to do something.

'Lois trusts Dr. Klein.' He reminded himself.

Bill Church kicked the door open to his son's office, finding him leaning against a young blonde on his desk in a very compromising position. "Leave us!" he ordered, looking toward the clothing that had been thrown on the floor.

She looked to his son who sighed, straightening up and nodded. "Go."

"Call me." She called over her shoulder, grabbing her things as she headed for the door.

Church waited for her to exit before slamming the door behind her. "That's the third secretary in the last month, Billy. You're going to get yourself a reputation."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Bill Church Jr. muttered under his breath. "More of getting to the point and less with the lecture."

"Don't you take that tone with me." Church snarled at him. "I'm still in charge here."

"Of course, dad," Bill Jr. rolled his eyes. "What do you need? In case you didn't notice I was in the middle of something when you barged in here."

Church slammed a copy of the Daily Planet on the desk for his son to read. "You want to tell me why the building I was hosting an event for ended up in flames this afternoon?"

"Bad wiring?" Bill Jr. guessed.

"Don't get smart with me. This has your handiwork all over it." Church snapped.

"Well, I don't know what to tell you, dad. It wasn't me." Bill Jr. spat angrily.

"Then who was it?" Church asked, narrowing his eyes at him.

"Still nothing?" Lex asked as he spoke into the phone.

"Not even a hesitation. Superman arrived and doused the flames then helped get everyone out. No pause." The man said.

"Very well, Mr. Bermuda, thank you for your time. I'll contact you for the next assignment when I'm ready." Lex instructed with a sigh, staring at the red glowing device in his hand.

"Just make sure the check clears," Bermuda instructed.

"Always," Lex said hitting the end button with a click and

turning his attention back to the red glowing device in his hand. “What am I missing?”

“I’m not crazy,” Clark said, folding his arms over his chest as Dr. Klein gave him an incredulous expression.

“I didn’t say you were.” Dr. Klein said cautiously. “It’s just an...unbelievable tale.”

“I know,” Clark said hesitantly, looking down at his feet before steering the conversation back to the problem at hand. “And that’s why I need your help. You’ve already proven yourself a trusted ally to a friend of mine. I need someone I can trust. I can’t continue going on rescues and having these...messages or whatever they are popping in my head constantly. It’s not safe.”

“Superman, you said you were subjected to tests by this mysterious organization, correct?” Dr. Klein began to ponder aloud.

“Yeah?” Clark nodded.

“Do you remember any of them?” he asked cautiously.

“Vividly,” Clark noted the frown on Dr. Klein’s face.

“Would you be willing to let me take a look? Maybe we can find something that could help explain what’s causing these messages you keep hearing.” Dr. Klein asked cautiously.

“The last time someone wanted to perform tests I ended up losing five years of my life,” Clark said hesitantly.

“I understand, but I can’t help you unless you let me.” Dr. Klein pointed out. “I promise no needles. They wouldn’t do me any good anyway.”

That’s what you think. Clark couldn’t help but think to himself before he nodded, “Let’s do this.”

Lois stared up at the moonlit sky, seeing the crowd of people coming and going from the entrance of her uncle’s restaurant. A banner hung on the wrought iron gate that enclosed the outdoor seating area, “1994 Annual Charity Ball.” Lighting with greenery was wrapped around the top of the gate and lanterns were lit on the back patio, illuminating the dining area. When she entered the restaurant, she saw that the area around the stage where a live band was playing had been converted into a makeshift dance floor.

It was amazing how quickly Perry and Mike had been able to make this happen. After the bombing this afternoon they needed a new venue and Mike had offered his place up. Perry had jumped all over it. She moved through the crowd of people, searching for her missing husband. He hadn’t seen him since this morning at the Planet. Superman’s presence seemed almost non-existent after the Embassy bombing. She wasn’t sure what could have prompted the sudden disappearance but the more time passed, the more anxious she became about his disappearance.

She smiled, seeing her husband in his tux entering the restaurant from the other side of the room. “It is really not fair that you look that good in a tux.” She whispered under her breath, knowing full well he could hear her.

He caught her gaze, moving past the crowd until he was standing in front of her once again. “Hi,” He murmured, leaning in to kiss her.

“Hi yourself.” She grinned at him happily.

“You look...stunning.” He whispered, running his hands down her sides suggestively.

“Hey you two,” Perry walked up to them, reminding them they were in public. “Great work today. Any word on who might be behind the bombing?” The tone in Perry’s voice told her he was asking more for personal reasons than professional.

“Thanks, Chief,” Lois smiled as Clark slipped his arm around her waist and turned to their editor. “They haven’t released any information.”

“We probably won’t know anything until they have a suspect in custody,” Clark added bitterly.

“Let’s hope they catch him fast. Have you tried these little rolls?” Perry asked, holding up a pinwheel roll on a stick. “Out of this world!”

“Hey, kids, how is everything?” Mike asked, patting them both on the shoulders as he walked up behind them.

Lois turned to him and smiled, “Uncle Mike, everybody’s raving about the food.”

“Good to hear.” Mike beamed happily. “Perry thanks again for letting me help host this event. It’s good to feel useful again.”

“You keep cooking food like this, you can host every event at the Planet too,” Perry said, taking a bite off his plate. “Amazing.”

“Thank you,” Mike looked to Lois and Clark, “It’s pretty amazing how fast things are turning around. No more gangs, no more slow cops, thanks to those articles you two wrote...”

“And the DA’s new Special Crimes Unit,” Clark added. Lois forced a smile at Clark’s comment. She still wasn’t sure what to think of Mayson, but she had to admit Mayson had really stepped up to the job of cleaning up City Hall. It seemed Clark’s instincts had been right about her after all.

“I guess whoever’s behind Intergang doesn’t like the spotlight much,” Lois said, smiling when she saw Lucy enter from the balcony with Pete and Rachel. “Luce!” she waved her hand to get her sister’s attention.

“Hey pumpkin,” Mike reached over to give Lucy a hug as she approached.

“Hello in there,” Lucy ducked down to talk to her abdomen.

Lois rolled her eyes. “Luce, do you have to do that every time you see me?”

“You betcha!” Lucy grinned up at her.

“Hey Lois, Clark,” Rachel said, reaching over Lucy’s squatted profile to give her a hug. “You look great.”

“Thanks,” Lois said. “Congratulations again on your new job. It’s going to be so great having you and Pete here in Metropolis.” She looked over to Pete who was talking with Clark about the latest football game.

“I think we lost them.” Rachel joked.

“I think you’re right.” Lois sighed, looking around. “Has anyone seen Jimmy?”

“Nope.” Lucy frowned, standing to her feet.

“Something happen?” Lois asked.

“Don’t ask,” Rachel whispered to her.

“Nope. We got into a fight and when I tried to call him the next day he ignored me. He still hasn’t called me back, and you know what?” Lucy snorted, “I don’t know why I’m wasting my time with someone that can’t respect me and my decisions. He doesn’t want to talk to me then fine, I don’t want to talk to him.”

“Luce, you don’t mean that.” Lois tried to reason with her, knowing full well Lucy was putting on a show to hide how she was really feeling.

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I’m done talking about him and his irrational anxiety over things that are my decision to make.” Lucy cut her off. Lois glanced at Rachel who was doing her best to avoid eye contact with Lucy. Lucy took a deep breath and changed the subject. “So, I heard you guys started house hunting.”

“Yes, we’ve looked at a few places.” Lois acknowledged. “Nothing that feels like home yet, but we’re looking.”

“You know there’s a place for sale a few blocks from where we’re renting on Hyperion Drive.” Rachel said. “Maybe you can check it out. Real nice townhomes. We’re renting a two bedroom over there.”

“Maybe we’ll check it out,” Clark said, wrapping his arms around Lois’ waist possessively as a familiar song filled the air.

*I found a love for me
Darling just dive right in
And follow my lead*

*Well I found a girl beautiful and sweet
I never knew you were the someone waiting for me*

‘Cause we were just kids when we fell in love
“If you’ll excuse us?” He took her hand and led her out onto the dance floor.

“I love this song.” She whispered, wrapping her arms around him as they swayed to the music together.

“I know.” He leaned in to kiss her.

Bill Church stood by the door, and Mayson walked up to him, taking a deep breath to confront him. She could do this. She could ask the hard questions. “Bill?”

He turned to greet her, “Mayson,”

“There’s something I need to know,” she began hesitantly.

“This sounds like it’s going to be a professional question.” He observed.

“We’re investigating all of Martin Snell’s business dealings. I thought I’d ask you first off the record if there’s anything I should know about your history with him.” Mayson tightened her jaw as she spoke, sending the signal that she meant business.

“I’ll tell you on the record. No. I haven’t done any business with Martin since he left to start his own practice.”

“Sorry. I had to ask.” She apologized.

“Of course, you did, dear.” He gave her a pat on the shoulder. “Now go enjoy the party.”

She nodded, watching him leave before turning back toward the crowded restaurant. On the dance floor were several couples. One of them she’d come to know fairly well. She let out a soft sigh, watching as Clark Kent and Lois Lane swayed on the dance floor together.

“Would you care to dance?” a voice behind her caught her by surprise.

“Billy?” she smiled, “I didn’t know you were in town.”

“You look like you could use a friend.” He held his hand out to escort her on the dance floor.

“Thanks.” She took his hand and allowed him to walk her to the dance floor.

Lucy Lane stood on the sidelines, watching her sister move across the dance floor with her brother-in-law gracefully. She couldn’t help but smile as she watched them. They’d been through

so much to get to where they were.

Part of her longed for a relationship like that. She wanted someone that knew her that well. Someone, she could share everything with and be her best friend. She and Jimmy had been dating for almost nine months now. While he was understanding in some aspects of their relationship, he wasn’t in others.

He didn’t understand why she had turned the story about the police corruption over to Lois and Clark. He didn’t seem to think she could make her own decisions without consulting him. He didn’t understand that her standing by and doing nothing wasn’t an option for her.

Now, it had been three days since their fight, and here she was on a Saturday night alone at a party with no one to dance with. She should be having fun, dancing and enjoying herself. It was a party after all, but she couldn’t. Why? Because she was still mulling over her fight with her absentee boyfriend that didn’t even have the decency to pick up the phone and call her back.

“You know, if you keep your face like that, it’s gonna stay that way.” A familiar voice said from behind her.

Lucy turned to see Captain Raymond with a drink in his hand, dressed in his uniform. He looked good in navy. “Captain Raymond, what are you doing here?”

“I thought we went over this.” He smiled back at her. “It’s Danny.”

“I don’t feel that we’re quite on the first name basis just yet.” She crinkled her nose at him.

“Are you kidding? We go all the way back to the Metro Bar. I asked you to dance. You said no. I asked you again, and you said no again.” He teased her with a happy grin before taking a sip of his drink.

“You have a thing for rejection, do you?” Lucy quipped with a raised eyebrow.

“I have a thing for not taking ‘no’ for an answer.” He replied. “Seems to have worked for me in the past.”

“Some might call that harassment.” She shot back with a teasing glare.

“Only if the attention is unwanted.” He replied. “I failed my entrance exam the first time I took it. If I hadn’t retaken the test, we might never have met.”

“What would the world have come to?” Lucy rolled her eyes.

“So where’s your boyfriend? The lucky one that gets to dance with the beautiful Lucy.” He asked, looking toward the dance floor. Lucy looked down at her feet, not wanting to discuss her absentee boyfriend at the moment. “Let me guess, he had to work?”

Lucy shook her head, “Who knows?”

“Fight?” Captain Raymond asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Lucy sighed.

“Fair enough.” Captain Raymond countered, following her gaze toward her sister on the dance floor. “Who’s the brunette?”

“My sister,” Lucy said with a long breath.

“She looks like she’s having a good time with...uh...” he hesitated uncertainly how to finish his sentence and Lucy laughed.

“That’s Clark—her husband.” Lucy supplied.

“Well, they look like they’re having a good time.” He said.

“Yeah, they do.” Lucy smiled.

“You two close?”

“You a little nosy?” she shot him a look.

“Hey, you’re the one that said you didn’t know me well enough to go by first names.” Captain Raymond shrugged.

“You never give up.” She muttered under her breath.

“Hey, I am just trying to make friends. I have not once asked you to dance.” He retorted with a smile.

“You act like that’s such a sacrifice.” She laughed.

“It is.” He said, poking his chest out and painting on a hurt expression behind his laughing eyes.

“You’re impossible.”

“Oh come on, one dance won’t kill you.” Captain Raymond retorted.

Lucy smiled as he shot her a wide grin, “You never give up, do you?”

“Nope.” His grin widened.

She toyed with the idea for a moment then surprised herself by relenting and offering him a half-smile. “One dance.”

The song came to an end, and Clark leaned in to kiss Lois, resting his hands on her waist. “You know what I was thinking?” he murmured against her lips.

“That the baby needs to quit doing somersaults on your bladder?” Lois teased, placing a hand on her abdomen. “He’s getting very active.” Clark placed his hand next to hers and felt the soft jab against his palm. Lois leaned up to kiss him. “Amazing, isn’t it?”

“It still amazes me to see how many things change from this tiny little guy.” He smiled, running his hand over hers.

“I know.” She grinned. “Feels like it’s all happening so fast this time around.” She let out a low groan and frowned. “I’m going to run to the restroom. The baby’s pressing on my bladder.”

He nodded, releasing his arms around her and watching her leave. He spotted Pete and Jimmy by the door to the patio and headed toward them.

“Yeah, there’s gonna be a show at the Art Museum next month. You should check it out. I’ll get you guys some tickets.” Pete was saying as he walked up to them. “Hey, CK, Lois get tired of dancing with you already?”

“Very funny,” Clark said sarcastically, nudging him in the ribs with his elbow. “Where’s Rachel?”

Pete pointed to the crowd of officers that were huddled around the governor and, of all people, Bill Church. “Working the crowd.”

Clark frowned, watching as the governor and mayor laughed with Bill Church. Though they hadn’t found anything that outright screamed criminal in the man’s past, there was something artificial about him that set Clark on edge. That coupled with his history with Martin Snell made him very wary of the man. Was he behind Intergang or was there someone higher up pulling the strings? Only time would tell.

“So, I was telling Jimmy here about the exhibit my agent set up for my work in Malaysia last year. Free food and drinks while you walk around the museum of art. Should be fun.” Pete grinned.

“Barring any disasters.” Clark nodded, “You can count Lois and me in.”

“I’d love to be able to do that someday. Just pick up and go anywhere the wind takes me.” Jimmy said in awe. “The rate I’m going, I’ll be picking up Perry White’s dry cleaning the rest of my life.”

“He treats you how you allow him to treat you. Talk to him. Tell him how you feel.” Clark said, placing a hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Perry White doesn’t care how I feel. To him, I’m Mr. Fix-It and Mr. Go-Get-It.” Jimmy said with a sigh.

“If you want him to treat you like a journalist then act like one. Bring him the stories, photos, and leads.” Clark instructed.

“As long as you let him treat you like an errand boy you’re not going to get anywhere.” Pete piped in, patting Clark on the shoulder. “Now take Clark here. Nicest guy you’ll meet. Some might even say too nice.” He shared a grin with Clark. “Senior year of high school we were both on the paper. Had the rudest and crudest editor you can imagine. Scott Roe.”

“Oh God, don’t remind me.” Clark groaned, recalling the know-it-all Pete was referring to.

“He thought he could turn everyone into his personal assistant and get by with it. After all, he was the editor, and we were the lowly reporters.” Pete shared a look with Jimmy, “Sound familiar?”

“The Chief isn’t crude,” Jimmy argued. “He just doesn’t see me as a journalist.”

“You have to change the way he sees you.” Pete implored. “So, Homecoming week, a huge scandal broke out about how one of the students got caught selling test answers to some of the intelligently challenged players on the football team.” He shared a look with Clark, then went back to his story. “I don’t know if you’ve been to some of the smaller towns, but you’ll find football season is life out there. Everyone cheers for their team and they cheer hard.”

“I’m familiar.” Jimmy grinned.

“Anyway, our editor thought he could just take the big story and give everyone else the fluff pieces on the Corn Festival and —”

“Corn Festival?” Jimmy asked incredulously.

“It’s a lot of fun. Trust me. Ask Lois.” Pete grinned. “Anyway, this had been the fifth or sixth time of this happening, so we were getting tired of it. Unfortunately for Mr. Roe, he didn’t have a lot of friends because of his sparkling personality, so he was trying to cover a story—a big story—and he was failing—miserably.”

“Pete and I decided to go after the story ourselves and prove we could handle it,” Clark explained. “Needless to say some words were exchanged, but the article did make it on the front page.”

“He published it?” Jimmy asked.

“He had to. It was the only article he had with interviews from everyone. He certainly wasn’t going to get anyone on the football team to talk to him.” Pete chuckled. “The point I’m trying to make here is you want the big story, you go after it. Don’t wait for it to be handed to you.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Jimmy reasoned aloud. “There’s still so much I don’t know. I mean I wouldn’t even know how to start making contacts like you and Lois do. Where do you even begin?”

“You start by doing,” Pete said, smiling when something across the room caught his attention. “Looks like Lucy’s finally getting off the sidelines and enjoying herself.”

Clark followed Pete’s gaze with a solemn look. He knew things had been rocky between Lucy and Jimmy lately, but he also

knew they still cared for one another. Jimmy glanced toward the dance floor and frowned. "I'm gonna grab a drink." He said hurriedly walking toward the bar that had been set up.

Clark frowned, watching the young man walk away. He didn't know Jimmy that well, but he could tell he was hurting. He wanted to say something—do something to help, but interfering would only stir things up even more between Lucy and Jimmy. Hopefully, the two of them could work things out. He watched Lucy dancing with the young man. It seemed innocent enough but whether that's how Jimmy saw it was another story.

Perry walked through the crowd noting the couples on the dance floor. A familiar voice from behind him spoke up, "Pretty good turnout considering the change of venue at the last minute."

Perry turned and saw his friend, Bill Church, "Bill, good to see you." He extended his hand to shake his friend's.

"Two hours left and we've already surpassed the goal. Great job, Perry." Church patted him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Church, pardon me, but the mayor would like a word." A Middle Eastern man said, interrupting them.

"Oh yes, thank you Asabi." Church patted him on the shoulder then turned back to Perry, "We'll catch up soon, Perry. Business to attend to. You understand?"

"Of course." Perry watched his friend move through the crowd to where the mayor was waiting with a beautiful brunette on his arm then turned his attention back to Asabi. "I don't believe we've been properly introduced...Perry White."

"I know who you are, Mr. White," Asabi said mysteriously before stepping away.

Perry frowned, watching the man walk away from him before he saw a familiar face at the bar. "Jimmy, what are you doing over here? Why aren't you dancing with that girlfriend of yours?"

"She's dancing with some other guy," Jimmy said bitterly, looking toward the dance floor.

"And you're sitting over here doing nothing about it because?" Perry gave him a sharp look.

"What's there to do?" Jimmy scoffed. "Obviously she's moved on."

"Did she say that?" Perry asked.

"Well, no..." Jimmy admitted sheepishly, "but..."

"No buts." Perry cut him off. "It seems to me you've been doing a lot of sulking lately and not enough doing. Why don't you put that drink down and go talk to her?"

Jimmy glanced at the drink in his hand then set it on the bar, pushing it back and getting up from the stool he was seated at. He pulled out his wallet to pay for his drink and Perry waved him off. "I've got it, son. Go take care of business."

"Thanks, Chief," Jimmy said, headed toward the dancing figure of Lucy Lane.

"Go get her, kid." Perry chuckled to himself.

Thankfully the song had been upbeat, so there hadn't been a need to get close to Danny—Captain Raymond. She had to admit, he wasn't bad looking. He definitely was cute enough and had a fun personality, but given that her relationship with Jimmy was still up in the air she didn't feel comfortable around him. He liked her—that much was obvious, but she had a boyfriend. Despite everything, she still loved Jimmy. As the song came to an end, she

scanned the crowd for her sister.

"How about another dance?" he asked as the slow chords to the next song started to play. The lead singer began to pour out the familiar lyrics, and Lucy turned away.

It still feels like our first night together

Feels like the first kiss

It's getting better baby

No one can better this

Still holding on

You're still the one

First time our eyes met

Same feeling I get

Only feels much stronger

I want to love you longer

Do you still turn the fire on?

"That was fun, Danny, but I really need to find Lois," Lucy said, spotting Clark talking with Pete by the door to the patio.

Wherever Clark was, usually her sister wasn't too far away. She really needed to talk to her.

"I'll come with you." He offered, "Help you find her."

"That's very sweet, but I really..." She stopped when she saw Lois on the other side of the room talking with a familiar looking man. She couldn't place him, but she could tell from the expression on her sister's face that he was bad news.

So if you're feeling lonely, don't

You're the only one I'll ever want

I only want to make it good

So if I love you, a little more than I should

"Lucy..." she heard Danny call her name, but she didn't hear the rest as she moved across the room and toward her sister.

"I don't think you know who you're dealing with, Ms. Lane. Idle threats are taken very seriously in my line of work." The man said as Lucy approached.

"Are you threatening me?" Lois challenged, daring the man to say the wrong thing.

"You're quite a spirited young woman, Ms. Lane. I can understand Mr. Luthor's enchantment with you."

"Excuse me?" Lois' tone was on edge and Lucy could tell she was putting on a front, but her eyes told a different story.

"Lois! There you are." Lucy said, walking up to her and placing a protective arm around her. "I've been looking everywhere for you."

The man looked spooked for a moment with her presence, and Lucy smiled inwardly before the man found his words. "I think you'll find yourself in a less than forgiving situation should you continue this fruitless cause of yours, Ms. Lane. Make no mistake, you are not invincible and if you cross that line with our organization, measures will be taken to ensure punishment is delivered swiftly and accurately." He looked down at her growing abdomen, "You've already lost one child, do you really want to tempt fate?"

It happened faster than Lucy could process. Lois' arm moved back, and she delivered a hard punch to the man's jaw, knocking him on the floor. A second later Clark was by their side, pulling a raging Lois Lane back from delivering another blow.

"Get her out of here," Lucy instructed. Clark moved Lois away from the mysterious man and out onto the patio at record-breaking speed. Lucy watched as the man stood up, rubbing his

jaw. The look in his eyes frightened her.

“Luce?”

Lucy turned and saw Jimmy standing in front of her in a tux. “Hi,” she said, trying to gather her emotions after the encounter she’d just witnessed. That man had just threatened her sister and her unborn child’s life in the middle of a charity event with every politician and high ranking officer in attendance. He acted as if he was untouchable as he walked toward Bill Church who was currently talking with the mayor and governor.

“You okay?” Jimmy asked.

“I’ve been better,” Lucy admitted, looking toward the menacing man again. “Jimmy, have you ever seen that man before?”

Jimmy followed her gaze, “That used to be Lex Luthor’s man servant.” He looked at her with concern, “Why?”

She could feel the tears threatening to escape and a lump in her throat form. “I need to get out of here.” She scanned the room for the nearest exit.

“I’ll walk with you.” He said following her to the door. “We need to talk.” He opened the door for her, and she took a deep breath, sighing in relief when she saw the familiar wrought iron fence outside the front of her uncle’s restaurant. The last chorus of the song echoed on the speakers, and he turned to her, “Luce, are you okay?”

*Please forgive me, I know not what I do
Please forgive me, I can't stop loving you
Don't deny me, this pain I'm going through
Please forgive me, if I need you like I do
Please believe me, every word I say is true
Please forgive me, I can't stop loving you*

“No, I’m not okay.” She whispered bitterly. “I’m anything but okay right now.”

“You seemed to be enjoying yourself earlier.” He pointed out.

“Well, I wasn’t going to sit here and sulk about my MIA boyfriend the whole night.” She shot him a glare.

“I’m still your boyfriend?” He asked weakly.

“Barely.” She shot him a disapproving look.

“You kicked me out.” He pointed out.

“You were being a jerk.” She snapped back. “It was a fight, not a break-up. I tried calling you, and you never called me back.”

“I’m sorry.” He said, looking down at his feet. “I guess I don’t react how I should.”

“You completely shut me out.” She snapped at him.

“I know.” He said, looking back up at her. “I shouldn’t have done that.”

“No, you shouldn’t have.”

“Luce, I’m sorry.” He said softly, “I guess I’m not that good at relationships as I should be.”

“You really made me mad.” She scowled at him. “If this is going to work you have to understand something: Lois is my family. I will do anything and everything to protect her, and she’ll do the same thing for me. I know you’ve only known her for a few months, but you can’t go around insinuating that she’d do anything to hurt me like that. For the longest time, she was my only family.”

Jimmy took a step closer to her and nodded, “I know. I shouldn’t have said that. I guess I was just so afraid that something was going to happen to you. I love you, Lucy. When

you told me what you did it scared me. It still scares me.”

“Lois would never let anything happen to me,” Lucy said softly. “I’m scared too. I was scared when I came forward but Jimmy, that’s why I went to Lois. She and Clark deal with this kind of stuff all the time.”

“They are the best,” Jimmy admitted with a smile. “I just wish you’d come to me with this and not blindside me like that. You didn’t come to me.”

“I didn’t want to mix you up in all of this,” Lucy said with a sigh. “From what I hear, the people responsible for all this are pretty dangerous. Plus I didn’t want you talking me out of it after I’d decided to come forward.”

“If I promise not to overreact will you promise to come to me when you’ve got a problem? We should be able to turn to one another.” He gave her a pleading look. She smiled leaning in to kiss him. He grinned against her lips. “Does this mean we’ve made up?”

“What do you think?” She giggled, leaning in to kiss him once more.

Present Day...

“We still don’t know where the black kryptonite came from.” Lois pointed out. “What if it came from Lex Luthor?”

“It’s a bit of a stretch.” Clark reasoned aloud.

“Is it?” Lois pressed. “He’s been testing you for months.”

“Superman.” He corrected. “He’s been testing Superman.”

“Same difference.” She said, “Black is the only variation there weren’t notes on from Intergang’s files, yet it showed up inside Metallo. Coincidence?”

“So now you think your dad was working with Luthor?” Clark gave her a dubious look.

“I don’t know.” She cut him off. “I guess we could ask him.”

“It’s too dangerous.” He shook his head.

“Well, we need to think of something,” Lois said, looking at the clock. “You’re running out of time.”

He sighed, seeing the minute hand hit twelve. It was noon. “Come on, I’ll take you and Jon home and fly back.”

“Are you sure you want to do that with the media looking for Superman everywhere?” Lois asked, glancing toward the television that was turned to LNN.

“I’ll be fine.” He said, leaning in to kiss her.

“Clark?” Clark’s face scrunched up in pain, and he fell to the floor. “Clark!” Lois knelt down next to him, placing her hand on his shoulder.

Lucy looked up from her microscope, surprised to see her boss standing over her, “Professor Hamilton,” she smiled at him. “What are you doing here?”

“I’ve got a special project, and I thought you might want to help.” He said, holding up a small tube of grey ashy residue in his hand.

“Okay, sure.” She set down her notes and moved to follow him to his office.

<< “*Destroy Metropolis.* ”>>

The voice echoed in his head.

‘*No, you’re stronger than this.*’ He told himself as he held the satellite in his arms. ‘*Go back.*’

<<“*Destroy Metropolis.*”>>

‘It’s the programming. Stop it.’ He told himself.

“Clark?” Lois knelt down on the floor next to her husband, placing a tentative hand on his shoulder. One minute they’d been discussing the possibility of Lex Luthor having black kryptonite and the next he’d been on the floor cradling his head.

He took a shallow breath, holding her hand in his. “I’m okay.” He reassured her.

“What happened?” She asked.

“I..I don’t know.” He frowned.

“You need to see Dr. Klein.” She whispered helping him to his feet.

Six Months Ago...

“All right, a little to the left.” Lois pointed as Clark and Pete held the couch in their arms, arranging the furniture for the tenth time that afternoon. Pete was giving her an annoyed look while Clark smirked at her.

“Here?” Pete asked.

“Right there.” Lois said and motioned for them to set the couch down.

Pete sighed in relief and turned to Clark, “I think that’s the last of it.”

“Thank you, Pete.” Lois gave him a smile, wrapping her arms around Clark’s waist. She felt his hand move to rest on her growing abdomen and shared a look with him.

“We really do appreciate your help, Pete.” Clark said, placing an arm over Pete’s shoulders.

“No prob.” Pete grinned back at them. “What time are your folks coming in? Maybe I can catch them before my show starts?”

“Um...” Lois exchanged a look with Clark. Jonathan and Martha were flying in Superman Express. It would be their first trip to Metropolis since the wedding. She and Clark had tried to make a few trips out to see them but Superman and Intergang kept getting in the way.

Now that the corruption in the Metropolis P.D. had been exposed more and more, witnesses were coming forward to help build a case for the FBI. Still, the head of the organization remained a mystery. Darryl and Martin Snell were among many of the lieutenants named.

After the capture of the latest ringleader, Gene Newtrich, a soil engineer caught trying to smuggle drugs through his construction company and thought to be connected to both Bill Church Sr. and Martin Snell, she and Clark had hardly had any time to focus on the tedious task of moving into the new townhome they’d bought.

“I think mom and dad said their flight was getting in pretty late. Maybe you can come by this weekend with Rachel?” Clark suggested. Lois smiled to herself. He was getting better at the excuses.

“Yeah, that’d be good.” Pete acknowledged, looking around. “What do you want me to do with the extra boxes here? I can toss them in the basement if you want.”

“Uh, no!” Lois said a bit too hurriedly. “Lucy’s going to come by to pick them up. She asked us to hold them for her.”

‘*Liar.*’ She thought to herself.

“Oh, okay,” Pete shrugged. “Well, if there’s nothing else, I’m

going to head home and get changed. See you guys tonight?”

“Wouldn’t miss it.” Lois flashed him a quick smile. “Thanks again.”

“No prob. Congrats on moving in finally.” He called over his shoulder.

“Guess what?” Clark whispered in her ear, pulling her to him.

“What?” she gasped when he scooped her off her feet, carrying her to the double doors that led to the foyer. “Clark!”

“We’re officially moved in, Mrs. Kent,” He leaned in to kiss her, still cradling her in his arms.

Sam Lane watched as the black stone lit up and the power began to equalize on Metallo’s charts. Careful to watch the power levels, he removed the plug that he had been using to maintain him. Nothing changed. He let out a low sigh. He’d done it. He’d actually done it.

“He’s stabilized.” He said, looking up at Rollie Vale who was watching him in suspense.

“Great, now we can begin waking him up.” Vale instructed.

Present Day...

Clark set the infant carrier down on the coffee table, turning Jon to him as he unbuckled the five-point harness that held him in the seat securely. “Hey, little man,” Jon gave him a half-smile and gurgled as Clark reached for him.

“Do you have a few minutes to watch him while I get changed?” Lois called over her shoulder, kicking off her shoes and shedding her jacket.

“Of course.” He said, cradling Jon in his arms as he watched Lois’ retreating figure head up the stairs. “Why don’t we play airplane?” he looked at Jon with a grin. He leaned back, lifting him up over his head as he floated them up in the air. He did a soft motor noise moving Jon from side to side as he let out a light laugh and wide toothless grin.

“Do you like that, bud?” he asked with a smile.

The red and blue blur disappeared from the monitor. Gretchen Kelly hit a button, then another and another. “Something’s wrong.” She said, looking at the monitors. “He’s turning around, Lex!”

“That’s impossible!” Lex pressed the button on the device once more and spoke. “Destroy Metropolis!”

“It’s not working.” Gretchen said, shaking her head, “We need to get out of here.” A loud white flash appeared behind them. “Run!”

The image of Luthor Towers disappearing into thin air replayed over and over again. Clark buried his head in his hands, uncertain of what to do. A bright blinding light filled the air, and then the building was gone.

Jon’s cries reached his ears, and he looked down and saw he’d wriggled himself out of his receiving blanket. “Hey there buddy. It’s okay. It’s okay.” He reassured him, bouncing him on his knee.

“Oh my God!” Lois gasped behind him.

He turned to see her standing behind him and stood up, cradling Jon in his arms. “I need to go see what’s going on.”

“But what about Dr. Klein?” Lois asked, placing a hand on his chest.

“It’ll have to wait.” He said, gesturing to the television. “That can’t wait.”

“Be careful.” She pleaded with him, taking Jon in her arms.

He ran his hand against her cheek. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.” He looked down at Jon who was gnawing on his little fist and leaned in to kiss him on the cheek before disappearing in a blur of red and blue.

Six Months Ago...

Lois looked around the living room, putting the last of the empty boxes in the corner of the room. After Pete had left, Clark had started unloading boxes and moving furniture at super-speed. Tonight was Pete’s gallery opening. Her mom had helped him put it together to help introduce him to some of the big names in the city and help him establish himself as a serious freelance photographer. Clark was supposed to pick the Kents up and bring them here.

She let out a long sigh, glancing at the black and blue blur that continued to sprint around the room. She hadn’t seen her in-laws since the wedding. Every weekend they had the intention of going to Smallville, then something would come up. She was beginning to get the impression that Clark didn’t want to go to Smallville.

So far he’d gotten away with not going back to his hometown—until Pete had announced his gallery opening. Of course, the Kents wanted to attend as well. They’d offered to take a flight but she and Clark had both insisted they let Superman give them a lift.

It had been a whirlwind of a few weeks. Three days after they put in an offer on the place, they had closed thanks to Clark insisting on a quick turnaround on the closing. He probably wasn’t expecting that fast of a closing date, but thankfully, the lease at his apartment would be up at the end of next month so they’d only be paying rent and mortgage for two months. She had to admit it felt good to put her name on something permanent. After everything they’d gone through these past few years, having that permanence in her life felt reassuring.

“Clark?” she called, watching as the black and blue blur came to a stop, and Clark appeared in front of her with a large stack of flattened boxes in hand.

He threw the boxes in the corner. “We are officially moved in.” He said, pulling her to him.

“Everything’s unpacked, huh?” She asked, fingering the lint on his shoulder as she picked it off of him.

“Boxes have been unloaded. Beds have all been made, and bathrooms are set up with towels and toiletries.” He listed off each item, wrapping his arms around her.

“Well, the kitchen and living room are all done.” She sighed, “Not that the kitchen is getting much use these days.”

“Now that we’re not living in a shoe box maybe we can actually try and eat at home.” He grinned at her.

“That would be nice.” She smoothed her hand over his chest. “Now that I’m not as nauseous, I may even give cooking a meal or two a try.” She laughed when he visibly cringed. “I can cook.”

“Following the directions on the box and cooking are two very different things.” He grinned back at her mischievously.

“You can do your elaborate meals, and I’ll stick with the box dinners.” She laughed, leaning in to kiss him. “This is nice.”

He let out a grunt of approval, cupping her face with his palm,

“I’ve missed you.”

She let out a long sigh. It had been a crazy few weeks trying to get the paperwork on the townhome done and then packing and unpacking and painting and cleaning before they could move in. Between that and his responsibilities as Superman, they’d hardly seen each other.

“I’ve missed you too. Been a long few weeks.” She leaned in to kiss him once more. “We’ve got some time to kill until Pete’s showing.” She reasoned aloud. “When did you want to go pick your parents up?”

He let out a long sigh as he ran his hands over the small of her back. “Maybe in a few hours,” His hands slipped to the edge of her blouse as he spoke. “We don’t have to be there till seven. It only takes a few minutes to fly from here to Smallville, and we’ve still got plenty of time.” He leaned in to kiss her, tightening his arms around her waist. “I just want to enjoy this for a bit.” He moved his hands up her ribcage, and she felt a vibration go down her vertebrae.

“Clark,” she called out his name in a throaty whisper, feeling his hands move up and down her sides.

“Do you realize this is the first time we’ve been alone and awake in the last seven days?” he murmured against the nape of her neck.

“Well, you’re the one that was pushing for a quick closing on this place.” She giggled as he walked them back toward the dining room.

“I wasn’t expecting them to get everything done in three days.” He murmured against her lips.

“Well, now we have the rent at your apartment and the mortgage for the next two months.” She gasped when she felt the edge of the dining table against the back of her thighs as he leaned against her.

“And we’re homeowners.” He grinned against her jaw, nipping at the sensitive skin with his teeth.

“Oh God,” she moaned as she felt his solid frame press against her. “Do we have time to...”

“There’s always time.” He assured her, capturing her mouth with his in a soul-shattering kiss.

“Clark,” she gasped as he lowered her back on the table.

“He’s waking up.” Sam Lane said, checking the vitals on Metallo as his eyes fluttered open. A soft groan escaped his lips and Sam looked up.

“Burn.” He said softly.

“Burn?” Sam crinkled his nose, moving to check that nothing was out of place. “What burn?”

“It’s... gone.” He said.

“Mr. Corbin your body has been through a tremendous ordeal. It will take you some time to adjust.” Sam instructed slowly. “You were in a car wreck. Your friend brought you into the hospital for help. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to save —”

Corbin’s face scowled as he felt his chest, “What is this?”

“There was too much damage, Mr. Corbin. The only way to save you was to build a new body.” Sam explained, keeping his tone calm.

“I’m a robot.” Corbin shrieked in dismay.

“Technically, you’re a cyborg. Your mind is still your own, and your body is machine—controlled by your mind.”

"I'm a freak!" Corbin glared at him angrily.

"You're alive." Sam implored.

Corbin frowned at that and looked to Sam in dismay, "I can't feel anything."

"I can work to fix that," Sam reassured.

"Good. I trust phase one is complete, Dr. Lane?" Rollie Vale asked from behind Sam and Corbin.

Clark took a deep breath as he flew to Smallville, mentally preparing himself. It should feel like the most natural thing in the world, but it didn't. Every trip to Smallville was met with dread and anxiety after Nightfall. The memories that plagued him from his time in captivity all led back to his home—Smallville, Kansas.

He landed outside the barn and quickly changed into the t-shirt and jeans he'd been wearing earlier, eying the fields behind him warily before super-speeding inside to see his parents. The sooner he got them back to Metropolis, the better.

Lois took a sip of her hot tea, leaning back in the rocking chair as she stared out the window of her master bedroom. Something was bothering Clark. For the last few weeks, he seemed guarded, and she couldn't put her finger on what it was.

She was grateful Martha had suggested her and Jonathan coming up to Metropolis for the week otherwise she probably wouldn't have seen them until the baby was born. They still hadn't told the grandparents about the baby's gender yet. There was so much they still needed to do to get ready for this baby and so much to catch the Kents up on.

"Lois?" Clark called from downstairs.

She stood up, setting her mug down on the nightstand and heading downstairs. Pete's exhibit opened up tonight, and he'd invited everyone to it. It had been the perfect excuse for the Kents to come to Metropolis.

"Jonathan, Martha," Lois wrapped them both in a warm hug when she saw them. "Feels like it's been ages."

"Lois, good to see you," Jonathan said warmly, looking down at her midsection where their grandchild was growing.

"You're positively glowing," Martha complimented, placing a hand on the bump that was slowly becoming more prominent. She felt a soft ripple against her stomach, and Martha smiled, feeling the baby move. "Oh!"

"Careful, you got a kicker in there," Clark warned, walking up behind her and placing his own hand on her expanding midsection. She felt a ripple and jab against her stomach once more and laughed when Clark added. "See what I mean?"

"A miracle," Jonathan spoke softly. She caught the emotional exchange between him and Martha. No matter how much they tried to tell themselves that they wouldn't let Jamie's death taint this child's life, it was still hard. Jonathan and Martha had been there helping her through the pregnancy and the early weeks with Jamie as well as helping her mourn his death. She knew it had to be hard for them to see her pregnant again.

"Always." Clark's arms wrapped around her securely.

She looked to the emotional Jonathan and Martha and wracked her brain for a way to change the subject. "Uh, Pete and Rachel said they'd meet us at the gallery."

"Right," Martha nodded, "It's amazing how much work he's collected over the years. The places and photos he's taken—"

"Yeah, we're really proud of him," Lois said in agreement, leaning her head back against Clark's broad shoulders.

"He's certainly come a long way." Clark agreed.

"The place looks great," Jonathan said, looking around the living room. "Lots of room."

"Yes, plenty of room to grow." Lois acknowledged, placing a hand on her abdomen for emphasis, "but that wasn't why we decided to go with it." She pointed to the bookcase. "There's a secret compartment behind the fireplace there for Clark to keep his suits. Finding that in a structure this style is so rare, we knew we couldn't pass it up."

"Plus, Lois liked the idea of having room for everyone when they come to visit," Clark added, tightening his arms around her.

"And I really love the place," Lois added with a grin.

Gretchen Kelly watched from the north wing of the Metropolis Museum of Art as a man in a black suit and tie stepped into the lobby and nodded to her. She looked to the handheld device in her hand and smiled when she read the words 'armed' off the screen. She picked up her phone and dialed, watching as people began to gather near the entrance.

"Everything is set." She said, "Are you ready on your end?"

"Nine o' clock and we'll have the test results we need on Superman," Lex said.

Pete Ross looked around the gallery with a nervous smile, "If I start babbling like an idiot, hit me." He instructed to Rachel.

"I'm sure you'll be fine." She reassured him, readjusting his tie. "You look kinda cute all dolled up in a tux."

"I feel like a monkey in this thing." He said, looking down at this tuxedo. He would have been much more comfortable in his jeans and t-shirt, but he knew this wasn't that type of crowd.

Making it as a freelance photographer meant rubbing elbows with the elite and making connections. Even though a lot of his work had already been featured with many prize-winning articles and magazines over the years, he still wasn't as well-known in Metropolis as he had been on the West Coast. His and Rachel's decision to move here and put down roots had been a tough decision, but after she received the call from Metropolis P.D. they knew it was the right call. This move would help open doors for him and allow Rachel to move up in her career in law enforcement. It didn't hurt that his best friend lived here too.

"You want me to get you a banana?" Rachel teased.

"Always with the jokes." Pete grinned.

"Mr. Ross?" the museum coordinator approached. "The gallery is ready for your approval."

She gestured to the corridor that had a bronze sign with his name on it. He couldn't help but feel a burst of pride in seeing his name engraved for all to see. This was his night.

"Thank you." He nodded to the coordinator and headed inside and up the stairs where a dining area had been set up, and the roof turned into an exquisite dining experience. Each table had a slideshow of his work playing on the table. He looked around in awe, still amazed that it was his work on display. Ellen Lane had certainly outdone herself in putting this event together.

"Oh, Pete, it's gorgeous," Rachel whispered, looking up at the moonlit sky that lit the dining area.

"It's out of this world." Pete agreed, struggling to find the

words. Ellen had certainly outdone herself.

"It's how we make a statement here in Metropolis," Ellen said, walking up behind them. She motioned to one of the waiters, "Can you get Mr. Ross and Ms. Harris something to drink?" The waiter nodded and headed toward the outdoor kitchen that had been setup. A fire pit stood in the corner with seating around it for socializing.

"This is amazing, Ellen. I couldn't have done any of this without you. Thank you." He said, following her gaze to the photos that reflected off the makeshift walls to display his photos one by one. Each one brought back a memory of his time overseas and across the globe. While he'd loved every minute of it, he yearned to find a place to call home and hang his hat at. Whether Metropolis would be his forever home, he didn't know but was willing to try it out for a little while.

"You're very welcome," Ellen gave him a smile that reminded him of Lois before adding, "Truth be told, it was a lot of fun."

"Opening starts in five." The coordinator called out, holding her hand up.

"Here you are, sir," the waiter handed Pete a glass of champagne.

"You ready?" Rachel asked.

"I better be," Pete said, taking a deep breath.

"Very good." Sam congratulated Corbin on a job well done after the tenth board of metal fell to the ground in a crumpled ball. "Your strength is impressive."

Corbin began throwing punches in the air, bouncing on his toes and taking a fighting stance. "I'm stronger than I ever was."

"More powerful too." Sam said, "But we need to go slow so we can make sure you don't overdo it. You may have limitations we don't know about."

"I don't think that'll be necessary, Dr. Lane." He turned and saw Bill Church Jr. and Rollie Vale standing behind him.

"What is this?" Sam asked, seeing the gun Bill Jr. had trained on him. He held the radio device used to control Corbin in his hand. If they tried anything, he'd have to use him to escape.

"Let's call it an early retirement." Bill Jr. said, waving the pistol in the air. "Seems you've been busy playing both sides, Dr. Lane. Those days are over."

A shot fired and he hit the button on the remote, "Get out of here now!" He shouted before everything went dark.

Lois looked around the rooftop that had been transformed into an exquisite dining experience for the elite. "This is amazing."

"Your mom really came through for him." Clark nodded, placing a hand on her shoulder as he handed the usher their tickets.

"What in the world?" Martha looked up at the sky where a hologram of Pete's work was on display.

"That's one way to wow the crowd." Jonathan chuckled, "I'm gonna go tell Pete we're here. Why don't you all go grab us a table?"

"Lois, Clark, over here!" her mother waved them over to the main table where she was seated with an older woman she wasn't familiar with.

They made their way to her table, and her mother excused herself and stood up to greet them. Martha looked around and

complimented, "Ellen this is absolutely gorgeous."

"I'm glad you and Jonathan were able to make it." Her mother gestured to the crowd that filled the room. "I'm sure Pete really appreciates your being here."

"We wouldn't miss it." Martha smiled back at Ellen. "Gives us an excuse to catch up with everyone."

Her mother let out a long sigh, "I know, we live in the same city and it feels like it's been forever since I've seen either of them." She gave Lois and Clark a pointed look.

"It's been a busy month." Lois offered weakly.

Her mother's facial expression softened as her focus changed from their lack of visits to the more prominent bump Clark had a protective hand on. "I told you things would start changing sooner with this one." She beamed, placing a hand on her abdomen. "The human body is a remarkable thing."

The feedback of the microphone on stage pulled their attention to the museum coordinator who stood in front of the crowd, addressing everyone. "If everyone will please take their seats the first course is about to be served."

"Come out, come out wherever you are!" Bill Jr. called in the dark.

Sam took in a shallow breath, calming his breathing as he listened around him. In the darkness, he could make out the shadows around him.

"Did you really think we wouldn't notice Superman's spaceship was missing!?"

A shot fired behind him and Sam did his best not to react for fear he'd give his location away. Corbin had gotten away—or at least he thought he had. He'd heard the gunfire and the sound of the bullet's ricocheting off of Corbin's metal body before the room had gone quiet. Now all he could hear was the footsteps of Bill Jr. as he lay on the floor trying to inch his way to the nearest exit.

"How long have you been working with him, Dr. Lane?"

Sam let out a slow breath as he crawled toward the exit. He could see the red letters blinking on the doorway a few feet ahead. He just had to get there.

"You know who he is, don't you?" Bill Jr. taunted. "We'll find out. We always find out." Bill Jr. sneered. "You think you can protect him from us, but you can't. No one crosses Intergang and lives to tell about it. No one."

'*Just a few more feet.*' Sam continued to crawl. He could feel the air from the vents across his face, and he smiled. He was almost there. He was nearly home free.

Another shot fired. He felt a sharp burning sensation graze against his side as he crawled to the doorway. He muffled his cries against his arm and bit down on the fabric to keep himself from making a sound. When the pain had subsided enough that he could take a breath, he lifted his head up and felt the cold air from the vent against his face. He was shot. He needed to get out of here. He needed to get help. He needed to warn Clark.

He reached his arm out and felt for the metal door but was surprised to find an open space with shards of metal wedged together against the opening.

'*Corbin.*' He thought to himself. He must have forced it open.

He crawled through the doorway, careful not to make a sound as he heard Rollie Vale call out. "Is he still in here?"

"I don't know." Bill Jr. muttered.

Lex Luthor stood on the roof of Luthor Towers, staring out at the cityscape. The lights from the party lit up the sky. He smiled to himself as he pulled out his phone to give the order. He would put Superman to the test tonight and discover just how fast he could really move and just how indestructible he was.

"Now."

"Thank you, everyone, for this warm reception..." Pete began to address the crowd.

"Help!!"

Clark stiffened when he heard a cry for help from across town. He quickly motioned to Lois and made his way to the nearest exit, not stopping to check on the usher he'd just bumped into on the way down the stairs. Once he was out of sight, he ripped his shirt open to reveal the Superman suit and took off into the night sky.

Lucy took another look in the mirror to check that everything was in place before walking out into the living room. She searched the couch cushions, trying to find her purse. Finally, she found the black and white clutch in between the last two cushions. Grumbling under her breath as she grabbed her things she headed for the door. She was late. Extremely late but it was better to be late than not show up at all, right?

She opened the door and was surprised to find her father holding his side and his lab coat soaked in blood. "Daddy?"

"Please, let me in." He pleaded with her. "I'll explain everything."

"Cameras are ready?" Lex asked, turning to look at Asabi who nodded.

He pulled up the screen to show a man falling from Luthor Towers at a harrowing speed. Just before he reached the ground, Superman arrived and grabbed him mid-air, floating him down to the street below.

"Target two is in position?" Lex asked. The cameras showed the rooftop party on the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They zeroed in on their target, showing the image of Lois Lane with Martha Kent and Rachel Harris.

"Ready when you are, Mr. Luthor." A voice came over the radio.

"Now." He ordered.

Pete looked to the corner of the crowd, watching as his friend made his way to the exit. He frowned, uncertain what had just happened. "I want to thank everyone for coming tonight. This event wouldn't be possible without the work of Ellen Lane and the Marketing coordinator, Margot Kline. I hope everyone enjoys the dinner and the photography. Thank you."

He took a step down from the podium and heard the sonic boom in the sky and what sounded like screaming.

"Someone fell off a building!"

"No, he was pushed!"

"No, he jumped!"

"Did you see that?"

"Superman caught him!"

The crowd began to murmur back and forth, and Pete looked to Rachel who was standing with Lois and Martha. Something seemed off. He couldn't shake the feeling in the back of his mind that gave him a sense of dread.

Where had Clark gone?

That guy was getting awfully close to Lois and Rachel. His eyes narrowed as he watched a man in a black suit move toward the women, pushing his way through the crowd to get to them. He had something in his hand.

"Hey!" Lois shouted as the man pushed her toward the ledge of the balcony.

"Back off!" Rachel shoved the man, and he pushed her to the ground.

"Rach!" Pete shouted, making his way toward her as the man grabbed Lois. He saw something on Lois' face he didn't often see. Fear. The attacker leaned in and whispered something in her ear. Panic was written on her face as she struggled against him.

Pete looked back at the crowd that was still staring at the skyline on the other side of the rooftop. No one seemed to notice what was going on. No one seemed to register the screams for help over the loud music and sirens from the streets.

"Get away from her!" Pete called out angrily, jerking the attacker's arm toward him. The motion went unnoticed as the man sneered back at him with a menacing stare.

Where was Clark when you needed him? Clark may not fight much, but he was at least bigger than Pete's slender profile and able to make someone think twice about messing with him.

"Let go of me!" Lois screamed angrily as Pete began to form a plan, seeing how close the mysterious man was to pushing Lois over the ledge as she fought against him. With all his might Pete threw himself forward and lunged on top of the assailant, knocking Lois to the ground and freeing her from the man's grasp. He noticed a small blinking red light coming from the device that fell to the ground. Pete reached for it only to have his hand crushed by the attacker's foot as he grabbed it.

"Pete!!" Lois screamed as he was lifted off the ground over the man's head.

"You want to play hero pretty boy? Try rescuing yourself from this!" he snarled as he tossed Pete over the ledge of the building.

"Pete!!" he heard Lois scream in unison with Rachel's "Pete, no!!" as he fell toward the street.

The wind was blowing in his face so hard he couldn't catch his breath. "Su-Super-man!" He tried to scream. Barely a second after he'd shouted for help he felt something grab him from behind. "I've got you."

Pete looked back and let out a sigh of relief, "You have no idea how glad I am to see you." He shifted his gaze up to where the party had been hosted and frantically pointed at the flames that were engulfing the building's top three floors and rising. "Su-Superman..."

"Wha?" Superman looked behind him and let out what Pete could only describe as a muttered curse. "Why do I get the feeling your falling fifteen stories wasn't accidental?" He landed on the street below and released Pete before moving at super-speed to attend to the flames.

Lex Luthor took a puff on his cigar and looked at the screen

that showed his assailant attempting to force Lois Lane over the ledge of the Metropolis Museum of Art. He scowled when he saw a blonde-haired man tackle the aggressor to the ground.

“No!” Lex fumed angrily, slamming his fist against the table.

Gretchen Kelly jumped back, “Lex, calm down it’s fine.”

“Stop the timer.” Lex hissed angrily.

“But...”

“Look!” Gretchen pointed at the screen.

Lex looked up and saw the hired thug lunge toward the ledge and throw the blonde-haired man that had interfered earlier. “Get ready.” The screen filled with a red and blue blur and Lex ordered. “Now.” He smiled watching as Superman caught the meddler that had been pushed off the roof and ordered, “Fire.”

The screen filled with flames as Gretchen typed in a code to set the explosives to go off. They watched as Superman landed on the street with the man and moved at super-speed to freeze the flames into non-existence, effectively snuffing them out.

“Time,” Lex ordered.

Gretchen stopped the timer and gasped, “2.1191416 seconds. That’s faster than a speeding bullet.”

Lex took a deep breath, “Did you see what just happened? He breathed the fire in and let out ...what?”

“The units are at temperatures below zero.” Gretchen read from her monitors. “He froze the flames.”

“Interesting.” Lex took another puff of his cigar.

“Deep breath.” Rachel urged, running her hands up and down Lois’ shoulders. “He’s fine. He’s Pete. He’s fine.” Lois could hear the crack in her friend’s voice as she spoke but didn’t say anything.

‘The boss has a message for you and Superman.’

The words rang in her ear over and over as she did her best to calm her breathing. Stress usually ended with her in the hospital hooked up to a thousand machines while the nurses tried to force feed water to her. Stress was bad. She had to calm down. She couldn’t panic.

‘Punishment for betrayal is death.’

She stared at the man that was effectively being pinned down by two of the captains on Rachel’s new Special Forces squad and Jonathan Kent who looked like he was mad enough to spit nails. After throwing Pete off the roof, Jonathan had tackled the man to the ground, and the two captains had helped to pin him down to keep him from escaping.

“I’m calling the police.” Captain Raymond said to Rachel.

“Good.” Rachel nodded, “See? Everything’s fine.” She tried to reassure Lois tearfully.

“You know, where I’m from we have a special little cell block for people like you.” Captain Friez hissed angrily.

A loud bang and what felt like a tremor beneath her caused her to gasp. The simultaneous sound of glass shattering from below them as flames below them began to rise created an atmosphere of hysteria on the roof. Where was the hysteria when that man had been attacking her and Rachel? Where was the panic and screaming when he’d hoisted Pete over his head and thrown him off the roof?

In the hysteria, Captains Raymond and Friez lost their grip on the assailant, and he tried to escape. “Grab him!” Jonathan shouted, trying to fight his way through the crowds.

“No, after him!” Captain Friez chased after him, but through the crowd of panicked members of Metropolis’ elite society, he quickly lost him.

Jonathan shook his head, letting out a muttered curse before turning back to Lois and Rachel. “He’s gone.”

“Did you see which way he went?” Lois asked, standing to her feet with Rachel’s help.

“Everyone over there is rubberneckin’ trying to see what happened.” Rachel said with a bitter tone. “No telling which way he went through that crowd.”

“Here, why don’t you sit down?” Jonathan suggested, pointing to one of the tables a few feet away. The crowd of people around them was getting thicker by the moment. She kept scanning the crowd for any sign of Clark. He’d gotten a call for help. Then all hell had broken loose.

“I’d rather stand,” Lois said, continuing to scan the crowd for her husband.

After what felt like an eternity a familiar face landed on the roof as the smoke behind him cleared. “Is everyone all right?”

Lois did her best to hide the relief she felt when she saw Superman standing in front of them. “Yes, Superman, but our friend...”

“Mr. Ross is a bit shaken, but he’s all right.” He pointed to the street where Pete was talking to an EMT that had arrived moments ago.

“Oh thank God!” Rachel cried out.

“I was able to put the fire out before it could do any real damage so you all should be safe to take the stairs to leave,” Superman instructed.

“Thank you, Superman,” Rachel ran up to hug him.

Lois watched as Clark fought a smile, tried to remain neutral as his longtime childhood friend hugged him fiercely. Keeping the Superman persona on for the world was one thing, but it had to be challenging to keep the pretense around Pete and Rachel.

“I should be going.” He said, stepping away and disappearing into a red and blue blur.

“No, wait!” Rachel shouted after him, but it was too late. Lois watched Rachel’s face turn from anguish to determination as she scanned the crowd. Pete was okay. That was what mattered right now, but the man that had attacked them was still out there.

“Clark should be reappearing any minute now.” Jonathan mused in a low whisper.

Lois shared a smile with her father-in-law, glancing back at the crowd. Pete’s beautiful night had been ruined. The sharp whining of the feedback on the microphone echoed in her eardrums, and she winced.

“Everyone? Can I have your attention?” her mother’s voice echoed from the podium. “As I’m sure you’re all aware tonight’s event has had some bumps in the road. We will need to evacuate the building to allow the police and emergency crew to do their jobs. Tonight is not over. Our staff will be moving everything to the Metro Plaza across the street. We should have everything ready within the hour. Thank you for your patience.”

“He’s still going through with it?” Jonathan asked in surprise.

“Well, Pete never was one to back down from a fight,” Clark commented, walking up behind them.

Lois did her best not to overreact to his presence for fear it’d draw attention to his absence earlier. “Hey you,” She gave him a

half-smile as he pulled her to him, placing his hands protectively over her growing abdomen.

“I’m never letting go again.” He let out a shuddered breath against the nape of the neck and whispered in her ear. “Pete told me what happened. Are you all right?”

She moved her hand to cover his, intertwining her fingers with his as she sighed, “Been an eventful evening, but we’re fine.” She gave him a solemn expression, “Thanks to you and Pete.”

“I barely got to him in time.” Clark breathed. “I’ve never flown so fast in my life.”

“But you did.” Jonathan reminded him, clapping him on the shoulder. “Everyone’s fine.”

“Where’s mom?” Clark asked, looking around.

“She was with my mother when all hell broke loose,” Lois said, craning her neck to see if she could see Martha through the crowd.

Clark chuckled, pointing toward the dining area where Ellen and Martha were helping gather the centerpieces from each table. “She’s helping your mom clear the dining area.”

“Looks like those two will have the place cleared out before everyone’s even outside,” Jonathan said with an amused expression.

Clark looked to the doorway where the line of people was beginning to line up. “What do you think Rachel’s doing?”

“She may be checking to see if she can find the guy that attacked Pete.” Jonathan reasoned.

Clark lowered his glasses and shook his head, “I don’t see anyone fitting Pete’s description here.”

“Where do you think he went?” Lois asked.

Present Day...

Lucy Lane frowned as she examined the substance once more, uncertain if her eyes were playing tricks on her. She tapped her hand on her station when she found the same results. It was impossible. It was unheard of, but there it was staring her in the face.

She spotted Dr. Hamilton coming out of his office and grabbed her notes from her report to discuss her findings with him. “Dr. Hamilton?”

He looked up at her, readjusting his glasses, “Yes, Ms. Lane?”

“I’ve examined the ashy residue you found. Very interesting compound.” She began carefully.

“Haven’t found anything like it before.” Dr. Hamilton agreed.

“Were you able to pinpoint what it was?”

“Who.” Lucy corrected.

“Pardon?” Dr. Hamilton scoffed.

“It wasn’t a thing, but a human being. DNA has been extracted and is being run in our database. We should have an answer within the hour.” She explained.

Dr. Hamilton crinkled his eyebrows at her. “Are you telling me that ashy residue is a person?”

“Yes, a human body was disintegrated into an ashy residue.”

She crossed her arms over her chest, eying the uneasy expression on his face. “But I have a feeling you already knew that.”

“Luthor Towers has disappeared. No one can confirm where the blast came from, but it’s clear that the weapon Lex Luthor

threatened Metropolis with is no longer in his control.” The anchor said into the microphone as images from the attack on Luthor Towers replayed.

Lois looked down at Jon who was sleeping in her arms. “Don’t worry, sweetie. Daddy will figure this out. He always does.” She leaned in to kiss his forehead, smiling at the sleeping figure of her son. “Naptime.”

She got up and carried him over to his bassinet to lay him down. After ensuring he was sleeping soundly and nothing could come near his face, she walked back to the couch where her laptop was set up on the coffee table. Jimmy had promised to bring whatever he found on LexCorp by. She still hadn’t heard from him.

She frowned, recalling the obvious rift between Jimmy and Clark in the newsroom earlier. What could have created such a divide between the two men? Before she’d left for maternity leave, they’d been close friends. Jimmy had even turned to Clark for advice on his relationship with Lucy when things were heading south. What had changed?

A hard knock on the front door pulled her back to the present, and she stood up, walking to the foyer to answer it. She opened the door and found Jimmy with a large file box in his hand. “Jimmy, come on in.”

“LexCorp’s financial records.” Jimmy wheezed out, struggling to hold the three boxes in his hands.

“Here.” Lois reached out to take the top box from him.

“Thanks.” Jimmy sighed in relief.

“Just put them on the dining table.” Lois pointed to the dining room that had a few boxes lined up from the research she and Clark had been collecting on Intergang the last few months.

“There you go,” Jimmy said happily as Lois set her own box down.

Jimmy looked around hesitantly. “CK’s still not back, huh?”

“He’s following up on some leads,” Lois said sifting through the first box in front of her.

“Yeah, sure he is,” Jimmy muttered.

Lois pursed her lips. Unable to contain her anger any longer she slammed the folder on the table and walked to where the bi-fold doors were, slamming them shut with a loud bang. After ensuring the doors were closed, she turned to face Jimmy, “What the hell is your problem?!”

“My problem?!” he scoffed. “My problem?”

“Yeah, *your* problem!” Lois snapped angrily. “You’re like night and day. One minute you’re all best buds then the next you’re acting like Clark took your favorite toy. What is your deal?”

“You don’t want to know.” Jimmy retorted.

“No, I probably don’t, but I’m not going to deal with this any longer. It’s driving me crazy watching you go from one mood to the next. This isn’t you! Start talking!” She ordered.

Jimmy’s face twisted into a scowl for a moment before he finally relented and spat out. “Fine. You want to know why I can’t stand him? You remember a few weeks ago when that train collapse happened? I was running the research on Intergang’s latest terrorist attack?”

“Rings a bell or two.” She shot back irritably. At Jimmy’s annoyed expression she sighed, “Yes, fine. I remember. You and Clark were both working long hours that week to connect the

attacks to Intergang. What does this have to do with anything?"

"You sure you want to know?" He asked with a pained expression.

"Spill it!" she snapped irritably.

"Fine! I think he's cheating on you." Jimmy spat out.

"What!?" Lois shouted, uncertain that she'd heard him right.

Six Months Ago...

Bill Church Jr. looked around the disaster that had once been the Applied Science Division laboratory for Intergang. Glass was shattered everywhere. The top of the line security system had been demolished. Bullet holes were everywhere.

"What are we going to do?" Rollie Vale asked, taking a cigarette out and lighting it. "I'm not going to be the one to explain to your dad that we lost Metallo and Dr. Lane—and we don't even have a body to show for it."

"We're not going to tell him." Bill Jr. said as if it was the most natural conclusion in the world.

"Not going to tell him?" Rollie Vale looked around the disaster zone that had once been his laboratory. "I think he's going to notice."

A team of men in black and white suits entered the room, and Bill Jr. began to order them around. "We'll need the fixtures replaced, walls patched and painted and the security system reinstalled before eight am."

"Yes, Mr. Church." One of the men nodded to him before turning back to his task at hand.

"Not a word." Bill Jr. warned Rollie Vale.

Lois stared up at the moonlit sky, placing a protective hand over her abdomen. After checking on Pete to make sure he was really okay they'd excused themselves for the night, and Clark had taken her to get checked out. She had a few minor cuts from being knocked down on the concrete but nothing compared to the injuries she and her unborn son could have faced had the attacker succeeded in pushing her off the roof.

'The boss has a message for you and Superman.'

Clark said there had been people falling off of the roofs and balconies of several buildings across town. Each story was the same. The person had been minding their own business then out of nowhere someone came up behind them and pushed them. What would have happened if Pete hadn't been there?

"Hey," Clark ran his hands up and down her shoulders as he walked up behind her. "How are you doing?"

"Okay," she lied. "Not really. I don't know." She said numbly as Clark wrapped his arms around her.

"The doctor said everything's fine." He reminded her.

"He threw Pete over the ledge like it was nothing." Lois whimpered, turning to face him with tears in her eyes. "Those few minutes before you showed up...all I kept thinking was that could have been me."

"I know." He held her against his chest, running his hand up and down her back. "I'm grateful it wasn't but if I ever get my hands on the monster responsible for doing that—"

She let out a soft sigh, looking up at him, "You'll what?"

"I don't know." He admitted tightly.

Lucy finished sewing the final stitch in her father's side,

unwilling to meet his gaze. He'd been shot. He wouldn't go to a hospital. He wouldn't tell her what happened. He wouldn't talk. He just kept mumbling about something called 'Metallo' and 'stopping him.'

"Bullet is out," Lucy said, cleaning the wound quietly. "You want to tell me what happened?"

"I was shot." He said firmly.

"I can see that." Lucy sighed, running a hand through her hair. "By who?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Her father retorted with a grunt.

"What's Metallo?" Lucy asked.

"Project." He said gruffly.

"What kind of project?" Lucy asked.

"It's not important." Sam urged carefully.

"Are you in trouble?" Lucy blurted out, unable to suppress the questions that had been gnawing at her since he'd come to her door.

Images of the glowing green needle haunted his mind. Clark tried to push it out but found himself haunted by the memory. It was getting harder and harder to forget. The only time he was able to forget everything was here. In his wife's arms.

"Clark," she gripped his shoulders as he lost himself in her arms.

"Lois..."

The haunting images of the glowing green needle and memories of his captivity were gone. All he could hear, see, and feel was her. She let out a sultry purr as she cried out his name and he moaned against her lips.

"I love you," He murmured, cupping her face with his palm.

Lex Luthor looked around the abandoned warehouse that had been transformed into an undercover laboratory in a matter of days. Power had shifted in his partnership with Bill Church Jr. One of Intergang's biggest projects was out in the wind along with the scientist that created Metallo. Having Bill Jr. owe him worked in his favor. Getting his hands on the project Bill Jr. was scrambling to find was an added bonus.

He spotted one of the scientists scrambling across the room with a briefcase in his hand and immediately recognized him.

"Mr. Vale, might I have a word with you?"

"You're sure it was Bill Church Jr. that you saw?" Lois asked, looking toward Clark as he set a mug of coffee in front of her. Lucy had called them early this morning to share the news about her unexpected house guest and his insistence on not going to the hospital. Explaining to her sister why she couldn't go to the police without divulging what their father had been involved in proved to be difficult but, eventually, she had accepted that there were things she couldn't know for her protection.

Sam Lane nodded, taking a sip of his own coffee and looking up at the Kents that sat across the table from him. Jonathan and Martha had been uncharacteristically quiet after Clark had explained that Sam not only knew Clark was Superman but had been working with Intergang, the organization responsible for Bureau 39.

"I've seen him on the T.V.," Sam said quietly. "It was

definitely him.”

“You need to go to the police,” Jonathan said gruffly. His demeanor was anything but friendly at the moment.

“And tell them what exactly?” Sam asked incredulously. “Hi, officer I’ve accidentally been working for a criminal organization. You don’t know these people. I’d be dead before I even made it into the station.”

“But continuing to help the people that kidnapped and brutalized your daughter and our son is okay?” Jonathan spat back angrily.

“Jonathan, he didn’t know who he was working for until a few months ago.” Martha reminded him. “What did you want him to do? Get himself killed.”

Lois looked to Clark who was staring intently at the tablecloth. He hadn’t said anything since Sam had arrived and dropped the bombshell of what had happened last night on them. She knew he had to be worried. Intergang knew the ship was missing. They knew Superman had it. They tried to kill her father for helping Clark. Leaving her father to fend for himself against Intergang wasn’t an option.

“He can’t go to the police,” Clark said, interrupting the argument between his parents. “If they found out about the ship this easily then they’ll find out about Sam going to the police even faster.” He tapped his hand on the table. “We need somewhere you can hide out that they wouldn’t think to look.”

“You want me to go into hiding?” Sam looked at him uncertainly, “For how long?”

“As long as it takes to bring these guys to justice,” Lois interjected. “It’s not safe. It wasn’t safe for you to continue working there.”

“It would have raised too many red flags.” Sam reminded them.

“I think I know someone who might be able to help.” Lois sighed, “But it would require bringing him up to speed on what Intergang is capable of.”

“Who?” Clark asked.

“Dr. Klein from STAR Labs.” Lois saw the uncertainty cross both her husband and in-laws faces and quickly explained, “He’s worked all over the world on some of the most advanced scientific breakthroughs, and he’s one of the most connected scientists in the world. If anyone can find a place off the radar from Intergang, it’s him.”

“You trust him,” Clark said in more of a statement rather than a question.

“Yeah, I do.” She nodded.

“Then I guess we better talk to Dr. Klein.” Clark conceded.

“What are we going to tell Lucy?” Sam asked.

That next evening, Bibbo Bibbowski cleared off the bar, listening as the music played around him and he prepared for a long weekend. The truck was unloaded, and the bar was fully stocked. His band would be here to start playing for his patrons in the next hour. The bar was slowly filling up with customers. It was going to be a good night.

“Martini. Dirty.” A young blonde laid a twenty-dollar bill on the bar and slid it to him.

He smiled, taking the bill and examining it before filling her order. “Coming right up, Missy!”

The doors opened, and a man in a torn blue shirt stumbled in, looking around the bar before he moved toward Bibbo. “Sign says you’re hiring.”

Bibbo looked at the man uncertainly. “Busboy.” He began to mix the drink as he spoke. “You got any experience?”

“Some.” The man smiled at him. “I’ve been a little out of touch with things, but I need to work.”

“We all do.” Bibbo pointed out, pouring the martini in a glass and pushing it to the young blonde.

“Please,” He pleaded with Bibbo. “Just give me a chance. If it doesn’t work out then no hard feelings.”

Bibbo never could turn down a charity case. His mother had been a saint, always opening her home up to others in need. She taught him it was what was in a man’s heart that mattered. He wasn’t sure what was in this man’s heart, but it was clear he needed help.

Bibbo extended his hand to shake the young man’s. “Name’s Bibbo. And you are?”

“John. John Corbin.”

“Well, Mr. Corbin, that table looks like it needs bussing. If you’re still interested in a job, that is.”

“You got it.” Corbin grabbed the cart Bibbo had pointed at and began to get to work.

Present Day...

Clark landed on the pavement where Luthor Towers once stood. In its place was a grey ashy residue that covered the ground. Footprints on the pavement showed where people had been running to avoid the blast.

How many people had survived?

Where was Luthor?

He looked up at the sky and saw another beam come out of the sky, directed toward the sky. Something or someone was turning it, but who? He shot into the air to find out who but found no one.

The satellite was on a course toward space. It appeared something, or someone had put it into motion and directed it out of the Earth’s atmosphere. He couldn’t let it continue on course. It could easily waver from its path and strike anything in space.

He took hold of the metal object, applying his heat vision to the controls to stop the beam from striking anything else. A few moments later the white beam of light disappeared. After ensuring himself the weapon had been neutralized, he let out a sigh of relief and headed to STAR Labs to drop what was left of the satellite to Dr. Klein for analysis.

“It’s true,” Jimmy said, meeting her gaze with a pleading look.

‘I think he’s cheating on you.’

The words hung in the air as Lois’ heart pounded in her chest, her mind racing trying to comprehend what her young friend had just told her. The last seven years flooded through her mind as she tried to wrap her mind around what Jimmy had just accused her husband of.

It’s not true.

It couldn’t be true.

Clark would never...

<< “Uh, hi, Lois Lane,”

“Clark Kent.”>>
 <<“Where are we going?”
 “To dance...”
 “You know, usually people ask one another if they want to...”
 “Finally speechless...”>>
 <<“I’m not most guys,”>>
 <<“I love you, Lois Lane...”>>
 <<“So, we’re both in uncharted territory here...We could stop...”
 “Do you want to stop?”
 “No.”>>
 <<“I told you we were gonna be late!”
 “So worth it...”>>
 <<“You’re always saving me...”
 “Someone’s got to...”>>
 <<“A year ago today I was staring at these enormous gates, contemplating my future in Metropolis. Then you crashed into my life...”
 “I wouldn’t say crashexactly....bumped...maybe glided...”>>
 <<“I imagine the worldthe future....I can’t imagine any of it without you there...standing with me.”
 “Marry me,”>>
 <<“I know technically we’re already engaged, but I wanted to do this right...I’m not sure if I’m supposed to get down on one knee, but...”
 “Oh, my God...Clark...Is that for me?”
 “Yes...Do you like it?”
 “It’s beautiful,”
 “You’re beautiful. Lois, I love you and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.”>>
 <<“You could never lose me, Lois,”>>
 <<“A...son?”>>
 <<“There’s nothing to forgive. Please stop doing this to yourself,”>>
 <<“This is really happening. We’re really having a baby?”
 “Yeah, I guess we are.”>>
 <<“I don’t know what I’d do without you.”>>
 <<“Marry me.”
 “I already asked that question.”>>
 <<“I think we’ve both proven over and over again just how indestructible our love is...and always will be. You are everything to me, Lois. Today, I give you my heart, my soul, and our future.”>>
 <<“I have been in love with you for so long I don’t remember what it was like not to love you, Lois, and I don’t want to know.”>>
 <<“I’ve never seen anything so perfect in all my life,”
 “I love you,”>>
 <<“Jonathan Samuel Kent.”
 “Welcome to the world, Jon.”>>
 <<“I love your curves.”
 “You’re biased.”
 “For the rest of my life.”>>
 <<“You’re pregnant with our child. You could be wearing a paper bag, and I’d still think you’re the most stunning woman in the room.”
 <<“If you don’t get dressed we’re going to be extremely late

and have to explain to Perry why I had to ravish you against this countertop.”
 “Ravish, huh?”
 “Not helping.”>>
 Clark, a cheater? The idea seemed laughable. Nowhere in her mind could she reason why Jimmy would come to such a conclusion. She also couldn’t understand why Jimmy would lie. He had nothing to gain.
 “I don’t believe you.” Lois snapped back angrily.
 “Of course you don’t,” Jimmy said with a roll of the eyes.
 “Look, Lois, I know you don’t want to hear this, but it happens all the time.”
 “Not to us,” Lois said, narrowing her eyes at him.
 “That’s what they all say.” Jimmy pointed out.
 “You don’t know Clark like I do.” She argued.
 “Of course not.” Jimmy conceded. “I’ve just been working with him for the last year.”
 “And I’ve known him for the past seven,” Lois argued.
 “Five of which he was missing.” Jimmy pointed out. “I’m telling you, you don’t know him as well as you think.”
 “Clark would never cheat on me,” Lois argued, dismissing his claims.
 “Fine. Believe what you want, Lois.” Jimmy shrugged.
 “You know, you’ve got a lot of nerve!” Lois fumed angrily.
 “How dare you?”
 “You asked.” Jimmy pointed out.
 “You sit there and accuse him of something like that?!” She continued to ramble. “I know Clark better than anyone. How dare you try to insinuate that him being kidnapped and ...and tortured makes me know him any less!”
 “Fine, whatever. You know him.” Jimmy scoffed. “He gets up and leaves at the drop of the hat with ridiculous excuses. You can never find him when you need him. Then he shows up at bars across town known for their loose clientele.”
 “What are you talking about?” Lois spat back. “Clark doesn’t go to bars unless it’s undercover or to interview a source.”
 “And I guess you’ve never heard of Bibbo’s either?” Jimmy pressed.
 “Not that I recall.” Lois crossed her arms over her chest.
 “Of course not. It’s just the bar your husband was at with a very familiar looking blonde.” Jimmy opened his camera bag and pulled out a picture with a time stamp on the front of it.
 Lois took the photo from him, frowning when she saw Mayson Drake sitting at the bar with a man that looked exactly like Clark. The bar seemed to be just what Jimmy had described with the cheap looking women and rough looking men in the background. Why would Clark go there? Was he working on a story?
 She glanced at the time stamp on the photo and narrowed her eyes. There was no way the man in that photo could be her husband.
 “That’s not Clark,” Lois said, pushing the photo back at Jimmy.
 “Denial is usually the first step.” Jimmy retorted.
 “It’s not Clark!” Lois snapped angrily, pointing at the time stamp. “What does that date say?”
 “June sixteenth.” Jimmy shrugged. “So?”
 “That’s our anniversary.” Lois breathed heavily. “It was the

first time Lucy babysat Jon...overnight.” She arched an eyebrow at Jimmy. “You gonna tell me I imagined my husband being with me all weekend long?”

“Then who the hell is that?” Jimmy asked, pointing at the image. “Cuz he certainly looks a lot like Clark.”

“I don’t know, Jimmy, but it is not Clark.” Lois fumed angrily. “He would never cheat on me. If you knew him at all, you would know that.”

“Lois, he looked and sounded just like him.” Jimmy pressed. “He acted like him. He ...”

“Was not him!” Lois cut him off. “I’m done arguing with you about this. My son is trying to sleep in the next room. Just drop it. Clark would never cheat on me.”

“Then explain the photograph.” Jimmy shot back. “Explain the weird excuses and the disappearances....”

“I don’t have an explanation for you, Jimmy,” Lois said quietly. “It’s not Clark.”

“Believe what you want, Lois, but something is definitely going on,” Jimmy said shaking his head. “And I’m going to find out what.”

“What’s going on here, Dr. Hamilton?” Lucy asked, closing the door behind her.

“I’m not sure what you mean,” Hamilton said, tugging at his collar as if the temperature in the room had changed in the last few minutes.

“I mean, we’ve got evidence of a weapon being used on people that screams military operation.” Lucy accused, folding her arms over her chest. “You know what caused this, don’t you?”

“I don’t know anything.” Hamilton sniffed nervously.

“You designed it, didn’t you?” Lucy accused, meeting his eyes. “You were in the commercial market for thirty-five years. You designed it, didn’t you?”

“I can’t talk about anything I may or may not have developed while under contract in my younger days,” Hamilton said solemnly.

“Who made you build it?” Lucy pressed. “Please, Dr. Hamilton, there are people dying from this weapon. More people are going to die if we don’t find a way to stop it. Just give the police a name. Give them something.”

“I can’t.”

‘Annihilator.’ That was the project Dr. Klein had found in the military files he’d been given access to. Someone had found the plans for the Annihilator and built it. Had it been Luthor? Intergang?

Clark took a deep breath as he came in to land behind the two-story townhome on Hyperion Avenue. Something that he really appreciated when he and Lois had bought this place was the private backyard. The trees and bushes helped shield his landings and takeoffs as Superman.

He checked to make sure he was still out of sight and changed into his blue dress shirt and grey slacks from earlier. It had been six hours since he’d left to help stop the Annihilator. While he’d been at STAR Labs, he hadn’t brought up the attack that had happened earlier. He knew Lois would probably give him the riot act for it but after everything that had happened today, all he wanted to do was go home and hold his family in his arms and

never let go.

“Hey,” He opened the front door and saw Lois bouncing a distraught Jon in her arms.

“Hey,” she gave him a tired expression before turning her attention back to Jon who continued to wail. “I know. I know. It’s been a long day for me too.”

He knew from experience not to intervene unless she asked him to, but at the same time, he hated seeing her and Jon so upset. He sighed, looking toward the kitchen, “Have you eaten?”

She shook her head, “Not since this morning. He had a great nap this afternoon and then...” Tears began to fall down her cheeks uncontrollably. “I don’t know what I’m doing wrong. I can’t get him to stop crying.”

“You’re both probably just over-tired.” He reasoned aloud, wrapping his arms around her and Jon. “Just take a deep breath.” He soothed. Jon’s cries calmed to a whimper, and he heard Lois cry harder against him. “Here, I’ll take Jon and figure out something for dinner. Why don’t you try and relax?”

She seemed to be mentally debating for a moment before handing Jon over. Jon let out a whimper of protest as Lois disappeared upstairs. “Hey, bud, what’s wrong?” After a few minutes of bouncing Jon against his chest, he finally heard a loud burp and grimaced when he saw the mess he’d been gifted.

“Upset tummy?” He asked, nudging Jon’s cheek before laying him down on his playmat so he could discard the soiled shirt. Jon gave him a soft cry but quickly stopped when he leaned down to pick him up. “It’s okay.” He reassured him, resting him on his bare chest for a minute. “I guess we’ve all had a rough day today, huh?”

Jon let out a shaky breath with a soft sigh as his cheek nuzzled against Clark’s shoulder. “You shouldn’t give your mommy such a hard time.” He said, patting Jon’s back as he spoke. “She loves you so much. We both do. It’s just hard to figure out what you need sometimes.”

He heard the water upstairs turn on and smiled down at Jon who was beginning to drift off to sleep. He stood up, holding Jon to him as he carried him into the kitchen with him to see what groceries he had to work with. He frowned when he saw the few groceries they had in the fridge. Neither of them had had a chance to get any groceries this weekend. He reached for the phone and began to dial. Pizza would have to do tonight.

Upstairs he heard the water turn off after making his order. He set the phone down, continuing to bounce Jon in his arms lightly. Dinner was on its way, and Jon was asleep. Not bad for only being home for twenty minutes. He looked down at Jon as his little snores whistled against his chest. Poor little guy had worn himself out. He knew he should probably put him in his bassinet to sleep, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. Moments like this were what he cherished the most with his new role as a father.

“You have the magic touch.”

He turned around and saw Lois fresh out of the shower in his old Met U t-shirt and yoga pants. “He spat up a little while ago,” Clark explained, pointing to his soiled shirt on the floor. “I think he wore himself out.”

“Do you think he’s sick?” Lois asked in concern.

Clark shook his head. “He doesn’t feel any warmer than normal.”

Lois laid a hand on Jon’s back then moved it to his head. “I

guess we should get him to bed.”

“Yeah,” he sighed, looking back at her. There was that look he’d seen before. He’d thought she was just upset with Jon crying and not being able to soothe him, but now seeing the expression on her face, he wasn’t so sure. “I ordered pizza from Mario’s. It should be here in a few.”

“Okay.” She gave him a forced smile.

He set Jon down in his bassinet then turned to look at her. “Lois, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” She shrugged, “It’s just been a long day.” She looked away, not meeting his gaze.

He frowned, following her into the dining room. “Lois, I can tell when something’s bothering you. What’s going on?”

“I really don’t want to talk about it.” She said tearfully.

“Honey,” He moved to cup her cheek, and she began to cry. “Lois, what is it?”

“Clark, I…” She looked down, avoiding his gaze once more.

“Please, talk to me,” He pleaded with her.

“I…”

The doorbell rang, and she stopped. “That’s dinner.” She turned toward the door to answer it.

“Lois?” He called after her, watching as she opened the door for the pizza delivery man, signing the receipt and handing it back before closing the door.

“Let’s eat.” She said, pointing to the dining room table.

He knew she was avoiding the conversation, but it had been a long day for both of them. “Okay, let’s eat.” He agreed, grabbing plates and glasses from the kitchen.

“You did what!?” Lucy fumed angrily, slamming her file folder down on the table. “I..I can’t believe you would do something like that! After everything we discussed…How could you?”

“She asked. I told her.” Jimmy shrugged, matter-of-factly.

“You told Lois you thought Clark was cheating on her?” Lucy echoed, rubbing her temples as she spoke.

“Explain the photograph, Luce!” Jimmy shot back. “Explain the disappearances. Explain any of it.”

“I don’t know, but that doesn’t prove anything,” Lucy argued. “I told you before, Clark would never do that.”

“How can you be so sure?” Jimmy asked. “Something is obviously going on. You’ve seen the photo. That’s not just any blonde sitting with him, and you know it.”

“Let it go!” Lucy fumed angrily. “I told you it was impossible for the man in that photograph to be Clark and you went and took it to Lois anyway. Why not go to Clark?”

“I didn’t want to give him a chance to deny it.” Jimmy spat back. “I’ve seen it before with my mom. My dad would come home with some sorry excuse about where he’d disappeared to before we found out about his job. Found out later it wasn’t just work that was keeping him out. People tried to tell her, but she never listened. He always had an excuse.”

“Clark’s not your dad,” Lucy said quietly. “He’s not a cheater.”

“Then who the hell is that?” Jimmy asked, pushing the photo in her face.

“I don’t know, but I can tell you who it isn’t.” Lucy snapped back, pushing the photo back at him. “He would never do

something like that to Lois. Not after everything they’ve been through.”

“People change, Luce.” Jimmy pointed out. “If that isn’t Clark then he’s got someone that looks and sounds exactly like him.”

“You’re saying he has a twin brother?”

“I don’t know.” Jimmy sighed, raking a hand through his hair. “Something’s going on though. Haven’t you ever noticed how he just disappears? And I can tell you this, Mayson Drake sure seemed to think it was Clark.”

“But as I said before it was impossible for it to be him.” Lucy pointed out. “He was out of town with Lois all weekend long. He was nowhere near Metropolis, so there has to be some other explanation.”

“Like what?” Jimmy asked.

“I don’t know, but this conversation is really making me mad.” Lucy fumed, grabbing her things and heading for the door.

“Luce…” Jimmy called after her, but she was already out the door. “Great.”

He flew above the clouds, looking over the city with a sigh of relief. He’d stopped it. He still didn’t know where Lex Luthor had escaped to, but he had stopped it. Throwing the satellite into space had been a spur of the moment decision, but it had been the right decision. He had to protect the people of Metropolis and the world from the destruction that weapon could bring. If he hadn’t, who knew what would happen if it landed in the wrong hands?

Clark set the pizza box in the trash and finished cleaning up the downstairs. Lois was bathing Jon and getting him ready for bed. A few minutes into dinner Jon had woken up, making it impossible to get Lois to talk to him about whatever it was that was bothering her. He finished cleaning up the rest of the downstairs and let out a muttered groan.

Today had not gone how he’d anticipated it at all. Jon had had a good first day at daycare, and it had been great working with Lois again, but everything with Lex Luthor and that mysterious satellite had started the course for ruining the rest of the day. Someone had gotten ahold of the plans for the Annihilator. Someone had put the satellite into the air with such a force that it took a great deal of super-strength to stop it. There were no planes, no missiles or rockets around. It was like it had been thrown into the air out of nowhere. Then there was the attack he’d had at the Planet. They were getting worse.

He’d thought they were gone. He’d thought whatever was causing them had subsided. He hadn’t had one since before Jon was born. After the fight with Metallo, the dreams–flashbacks with Trask and the messages in his head had disappeared. Then a month ago they reappeared. He had to get this under control. He still hadn’t told Lois. He didn’t want to scare her. She’d want an explanation, and right now he didn’t have one.

He headed upstairs, hoping to figure out what had put Lois in such a sour mood this evening. Lois was finishing putting Jon in his pajamas when he entered the bedroom. He watched her tickle Jon’s tummy and smiled to himself when he heard Jon’s infectious cackle. He was just starting to learn how to laugh, but he loved to smile when he played.

“Where’s Jon?” Lois hid her face with the blanket, “There he

is.”

He walked up behind her and looped his arm around her waist, leaning in to kiss her cheek. “Hey,” He rested his chin against her shoulder and felt her relax for a moment. “I went ahead and made a bottle for his two am feeding.” He handed her the bottle he’d made. “Here’s his bottle.”

“Thanks.” She gave him a half-smile before turning her attention back to Jon who was stretching his arms over his head and balling his fists up. A sign he was getting tired. He released his arm around her so she could tend to Jon. “Did you see Dr. Klein?” She asked, picking Jon up and carrying him toward the rocking chair positioned in the corner of the room by his crib.

“I did, but I didn’t have a chance to talk to him about what happened earlier. We got a bit sidetracked with that satellite.” Clark explained, sitting on the corner of the bed as he spoke.

“Satellite?” Lois asked.

“That’s what Luthor was using to essentially vaporize that island.” He explained shaking his head. “I was able to neutralize it, and Dr. Klein is trying to see if he can pull any information from the hard drive to see who was controlling it for sure.”

“We know it was Lex. He was bragging on national television about how he was going to tear this city apart with it.” Lois pointed out, shaking her head in disgust.

“We don’t know for sure.” Clark retorted. “Not without evidence for the police.”

“I’m sure the evidence will lead somewhere entirely different.” Lois rolled her eyes. “You and I both know how well he can cover his tracks.”

“We’ll cross that road when we come to it,” Clark said, running a hand through his hair.

“Yeah,” Lois sighed, looking down at Jon who had dozed off mid-conversation. “He’s asleep.”

“Here,” He stood up and took Jon from her, careful not to wake him. Jon’s face crinkled for a moment then relaxed as he held him against him. He laid Jon in the crib then turned to Lois who was gathering Jon’s empty bottle and burp cloth from the chair to carry downstairs. He reached for the baby monitor on the nightstand, checking to make sure the volume was on and followed her back downstairs.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, he found Lois in the kitchen scrubbing furiously at a spot on the bottom of the sink. Another sign something was bothering her. When she was upset, she found something to clean that didn’t need cleaning.

“Lois?” he walked up behind her taking the scrub brush from her hand. “Honey, what are you doing?”

“There was a smudge.” She said numbly. “I was trying to...”

Something had happened. What he wasn’t sure but whatever it was it had put Lois into a state of panic. He looked down at her tear stained cheeks, brushing away the tears with his thumb.

“What happened?”

She looked down at the floor, shaking her head. “It doesn’t make any sense. I’ve gone over it and over it, and it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Gone over what?” He asked, growing exasperated with her insistence on not getting to the point.

She pulled away from him and walked into the dining room and pulled a manila envelope from the china cabinet and handed it to him. “Jimmy brought that by with LexCorp’s financial records.

Apparently, that’s why he’s been acting like a royal jerk lately.”

Clark sighed, still not sure what she was talking about as he pulled the photograph out of the envelope. He frowned when he stared at the image in surprise. The smoky atmosphere told him it was a bar or dive of some sort. He’d never seen it before but staring back at him was an image of himself sitting uncomfortably too close to Mayson Drake.

“What is this?” He asked, not sure how to address the thousands of questions that were racing through his mind.

“I thought maybe you would know.” She said quietly.

He tossed the photo on the table, shaking his head, “No.” He frowned, tapping his hand on his chin. “Where did Jimmy get this?”

“He said he took the photo around the time the case on Intergang broke,” Lois said quietly.

“That’s not me,” Clark said defiantly. “I would never...”

“I know, but I...I don’t know what to think.” She said shaking her head. “It looks exactly like you.”

“Except for one thing,” He said, pulling her to him. “The only woman I would ever have with me is you.” He tilted her chin to look at him, “Lois, I would never do anything like that to you.”

“Then who is that in the photograph?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know.” He shrugged, wrapping his other arm around her, “but it isn’t me.”

“Jimmy thinks you’re cheating on me.” Lois continued, her voice wavering slightly.

“I don’t cheat.” He reminded her.

“Tried to prove his point by pointing at your absences and disappearances.” She said shakily.

“You and I both know where I’m going.” He reminded her. “I always come back...to you.”

“He looks just like you.” She whispered.

“It’s not me.” He repeated.

“I know, but...” she stopped when he leaned in to kiss her, allowing his hands to wander up her shoulders as he moved her hair out of the way.

“You are my first and only.” He pulled her to him and whispered in her ear. “I could never hurt you like that, Lois.” He felt her body relax against his and sighed in relief. There was someone that looked like him in that photograph. He’d have to get to the bottom of that tomorrow but not tonight.

“You are my first and only.” Lois heard her husband say.

It didn’t make sense. None of it made sense. After Jimmy had left every ‘if’ scenario had crept into her mind and inner doubts began to plague her. There was still no explanation for the photograph, but she trusted Clark. She knew in her heart he’d never cheat on her. The date on the photograph proved beyond a shadow of a doubt it wasn’t him. Who was it?

“I could never hurt you like that, Lois.” He whispered in her ear, moving to capture her lips with his. She whimpered against him, allowing her hands to roam up and down his chest as he pulled her to him. “I love you, Lois,” He murmured breathlessly against her ear.

<< “I don’t cheat.” >>>

<< “You are my first and only.” >>>

<< “Then explain the photograph. Explain the weird excuses and the disappearances....” >>>

<<“It’s not Clark.”>>

<<“Believe what you want, Lois, but something is definitely going on, and I’m going to find out what.”>>

<<“It looks exactly like you.”

“Except for one thing. The only woman I would ever have with me is you. Lois, I would never do anything like that to you.”>>

<<“Lois, I would never do anything like that to you.”>>

He floated outside the townhome, listening to the sounds that were so familiar yet so foreign at the same time. The muffled cries of ecstasy accompanied with the soft snores from the four-month-old baby he could only assume was his son.

Jon.

That was what they had called him.

Jon.

“Oh, Clark!”

The soft purr from her lips sent a chill down his spine.

That was his wife with him.

That was his wife.

“I love you, Lois,”

He let out a muttered curse, hearing his double—this other Clark that fate seemed to determine was given the right to be Lois Lane’s husband—hold his wife in a way he could only dream of. He could remember every moment of being in her arms—every cry, caress, and whisper that haunted his dreams. Now, here he was, a stranger. Another man was kissing her, loving her and holding her at night. Another man was rocking his son to sleep. Another man was wearing the red blue and yellow suit. Another man was living his life with his family.

Unable to listen to another second he flew back toward the docks to patrol once more. Keeping the streets safe would have to do for tonight.

Six Months Ago...

Lex Luthor paced around the abandoned warehouse that was slowly transforming into a hidden laboratory. He’d put a tail on both Lois Lane and Lucy Lane to see if either would lead him to the missing Dr. Samuel Lane that seemed to be eluding both himself and Bill Church Jr. Dr. Lane had information on this project Metallo Bill Jr. kept rambling on about. He wrote it off as an experiment gone wrong, but Lex knew there was more to it than that.

“Asabi,” Lex turned to see the Middle Eastern man approaching him in a black suit. “To what do I owe this surprise visit?”

“Everything you wanted to know about Rollie Vale,” Asabi announced, handing over a thick file he’d obtained. “It seems he’s being controlled by Mr. Church with the threat of withholding care to his brother, Emmet.”

“Emmet Vale? Why does that name sound so familiar?” Lex asked.

“He was caught in the explosion at LexLabs a few years ago. The tests you were performing on the meteorite?” Asabi prompted.

“Oh, yes,” Lex skimmed the pages, shaking his head. “A pity, but advancements in science aren’t achieved without risks.”

“Of course,” Asabi nodded knowingly.

“Perhaps, a visit to Shady Brook Hospital will help remind Mr. Vale just what’s at stake?” Lex suggested, grabbing his briefcase.

“One week after the incident at the Metropolis Museum of Art and still no sign of the assailant behind the attack on Mr. Ross. Three unidentified men have been captured in connection with attacks that took place that evening, but no one is talking.”

“Pretty crazy,” Jimmy commented, looking to the television that replayed the footage from Pete Ross’ attack. He stood next to Lois’ desk watching the scene replay again. “Lucky Superman got there in time.”

“Yeah, it was,” Clark said, patting Pete on the shoulder.

Jimmy gave them a sympathetic smile. “Glad you’re all right, Pete.” When he’d heard what had happened all he could think about was how lucky Lucy was not to be there. He knew she’d been planning to attend, but had canceled last minute. Why, he still didn’t know.

“You and me both.” Pete said with a sigh, “But on the plus side I’ve got a lot of great press coverage, and my phone has been ringing off the hook for assignments.”

“Leave it to you to find the bright side in all of this,” Lois said with a smirk as she took a sip of her coffee.

“Hey, what’s everyone standing around for?” Perry bellowed as he approached them. “We’ve got a paper to put out and no front page lead.” He held up the empty mock-up of the Daily Planet’s front page.

“We’re working on an angle for the mysterious attacker that’s in the wind,” Lois said hurriedly. “Pete was just catching us up on the investigation.”

“Sure. It’s going nowhere.” Pete snorted. “What do you mean you have no clue who ruined my big night and almost tried to kill me and one of my friends, officer? Oh, just that Mr. Ross. No leads. Have a nice day.” He gave a roll of the eyes, “But hey they caught three of the four guys, right?”

“Sounds promising,” Perry said with a sarcastic grunt.

“Well, maybe you two can get more information out of Detective Johnson, but so far, nada.” Pete shrugged, sharing a wry look with Clark.

“Well, it may not have turned out how you wanted it to, but you’ve definitely made a name for yourself already.” Jimmy pointed out.

“Yeah, but I’d still like to see the guy locked up for what he did.” Pete sighed, shaking his head in disgust. Perry gave Pete a sympathetic pat on the shoulder before moving on.

“You and me both,” Clark said, placing a hand on Lois’ shoulder.

“I’m sure they’ll get him.” Perry reassured then walked toward Ralph’s desk, “Simms! Where’s that story on the Church Network release?”

The sound of Ralph stammering could be heard, and Jimmy chuckled. “Nobody’s safe when the Chief’s on the warpath.”

“I guess that’s my cue to get going.” Pete sighed. “Thanks for the info, CK. I gotta meet my new agent in five. You sure I can’t talk you into coming? Bigwig agent throwing money around and lots of good food.” He looked to Lois, “It’ll be fun.”

“As tempting as that is I’m afraid we just don’t have time.” Lois gave him an apologetic smile. “Maybe next time.”

“All right, well, maybe next time.” Pete grinned, grabbing his things as he headed toward the elevator.

“See you, Pete.” Jimmy waved after him.

“Later, Jimmy,” Pete called over his shoulder.

“Olsen!” Perry called from across the newsroom. Jimmy sighed to himself. Never a moment of peace.

Bill Church Jr. stood in front of the cameras with his father, Bill Church. A grey cloth hung over the front door to a tall building. “It is with great pride we bring you the next step in Cost Mart savings by introducing Church Network.”

The cloth fell down, and a large building in grey and blue was revealed with a large white ‘C’ on the front of it. Bill Church took the microphone from his son and began to start his sale’s pitch.

“Consumers will no longer be forced into watching television through cable networks but rather pick and choose what they want to watch and only paying for the channels they use. Church Network is committed to providing quality service to customers at a fraction of the price. I, uh...I...” Church turned to his son and whispered, “What was I saying, Billy?”

Bill Jr. took the microphone from his dad, “We hope that our loyal customers from Cost Mart will continue to expand their loyalty to us as we take a step forward with this new chapter.”

Rollie Vale stared at the screen and shook his head, “You really think you can control Metropolis by brainwashing them with your Church Network?”

“Well, as you can see I’m giving it my best shot.” Bill Jr. said taking a puff from his cigar. “The medication is starting to take effect. I think you’ve found the right formula.”

“You sure you want to do this?” Rollie Vale asked.

“Drugging my father to gain unlimited power and riches? Of course.” Bill Jr. smiled. “This time next year Intergang will be in my control, and this city will be mine. I’ll be able to do the one thing my father never could: destroy Lex Luthor and everything he holds dear.”

<< “What happened to him?”

“He’s been shot.”

“Just leave him.”

“No, I got a better idea...”>>

“Jon?” Bibbo’s voice penetrated his thoughts and Corbin shook himself from the painful memories that were nudging the back of his mind. The last week had been filled with flashbacks and memories from a life he didn’t recall. He couldn’t remember anything more than fragments of his life before he’d woken up in the lab with Dr. Lane.

He could still hear the gunshots as he tried to escape. There was something significant about that sound but he just couldn’t place it.

“Yes, sir?” Jon looked at Bibbo expectantly.

“Table five needs cleaning.” Bibbo pointed to the table a few feet away.

“Right.” Jon nodded, turning to see a tall and lanky man in a leather jacket with a blonde-haired woman next to him wearing a dress that was obviously a size too small for her. There was something so familiar about him, but he didn’t say anything.

“What’s your problem, man?”

“Nothing,” Corbin said quickly, wiping the table down.

Clark sat perched on the corner of Lois’ desk as they went over the background information they’d received from the victims of last week’s attacks. “Seven victims. Male and female. Different races.”

“Doctor. Lawyer. School Teacher. Bank owner.” Lois listed off. “No connection there.”

“Maybe we need to dig a little deeper?” Clark suggested, pointing to the database Lois had pulled up on her computer. “Employment records?”

“Luthor Hospital. LexCorp.” Lois frowned as she began to read the list off. “Luthor University...”

“I’m sensing a theme.” Clark scowled.

“Even after he’s been pushed out of power he’s still haunting Metropolis,” Lois muttered in disgust.

“We sure it’s Luthor behind it though?” Clark asked, pointing to her screen.

“What do you mean?” Lois asked, not following.

“Look at this subsidiary that these companies are all under. ‘JL Incorporated.’” Clark pointed out.

As he spoke Lois began a search in her browser and pulled up the company based in the Caribbean as ‘JL Incorporated.’ She let out a muffled groan, “Great. No paper trail.”

“Founded by Lex Luthor and George Thompson in the late eighties.” Clark read off. “Acting CEO is Gretchen Kelly.”

“Who’s that?” Lois crinkled her nose. “I’ve never heard of her before.”

“Let’s find out,” Clark suggested, pointing at the screen. In the search bar, she typed the name ‘Gretchen Kelly.’

<< “What happened to him?”

“He’s been shot.”

“Just leave him.”

“No, I got a better idea...”>>

Jon let out a low groan, gripping the sides of his head.

Why couldn’t he remember?

<< “Get out of here!”>>

His last conversation with the doctor that had been helping him weighed on him heavily. Dr. Lane had been trying to teach him about his new body. Teach him about this mysterious rock inside him that powered him. What would happen if his power source stopped working?

<< “We’ve got a job. Five million split between the three of us. If all goes well we’ll be riding easy street and out of town before anyone’s the wiser.”>>

Images of a man in a black leather jacket and goatee flashed through his mind. An image of a gun and the sound of gunfire around him echoed in flashes as the memories continued to tease him. The more he recalled, the less he was sure he wanted to know the person he had been.

Present Day...

Clark sat on the edge of his bed, watching Lois sleep. He’d turned the alarm off after the fourth time she hit the snooze button. After the long day both he and Lois had had yesterday, he decided to just let her sleep in. He looked toward the bassinet and smiled when he saw Jon’s little hand curl open and closed as he

slept. After his midnight feeding, he had slept quietly. Hopefully, Lois would be able to get some rest this morning.

He got up and leaned over her to kiss her goodbye before heading out to begin his morning patrol. “Clar...” she mumbled in her sleep but never made any attempt to wake up further.

He sighed, running a hand across her cheek. Before leaving, he grabbed the photo Jimmy had left Lois yesterday. It was time he had a long chat with the young man about his conversation with Lois and this double.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Bill Jr. slammed Lex Luthor against the wall. “The agreement was to take out Superman!”

“And I will.” Lex hissed back, peeling Bill Jr.’s arm off of him. “You’re the one that let our little experiment escape. I had to improvise.”

“Just like how you had to improvise with Metallo?” Bill Jr. challenged. “You cost me over half a million dollars.”

“If it weren’t for me you never would have found him in the first place. Remember your place, Billy.” Lex warned with a sinister glare. “Intergang has yet to leave Metropolis, yet you still live. I believe I’ve done you enough favors.”

“Intergang doesn’t leave until I get back what’s rightfully mine.” Bill Jr. shot back. “That was the deal.”

“No, the deal was I help you get your father out of the way and let you take the reins within your organization. All your lieutenants are already looking for you to lead. I’ve done my part.” Lex snarled angrily. “Get out of my city.”

“Make me.” Bill Jr. dared him.

Lois groaned when she sat up in bed and found Clark’s side cool to the touch. She glanced at the clock, glaring at the digits in red. She had overslept. Why hadn’t Clark woken her? The soft whine across the room reached her ears, and she swung her legs over the side of the bed to tend to Jon.

“Hey, sweetie,” She leaned over to pick him up, holding him against her chest as his cries quickly quieted down. She carried him over to his changing table to get him changed and dressed for the day. Jon graced her with a half-smile that resembled his father’s after she took his soiled diaper off. After putting a new diaper on him and changing him out of his pajamas and into a onesie and cotton pants, she carried him back over to the bed. He let out a soft gurgle, and she smiled at him. “Someone’s in a good mood this morning.”

A folded white paper sat propped up on the nightstand next to them. She reached over to read the note, seeing the familiar handwriting of her husband’s on the front.

//Lois,

You seemed to be tired this morning, so I let you sleep in. I told Perry you’d be working from home today. I’m going to see what I can find out about this double and should be back before lunch.

Love,

Clark//

Lois sighed, setting the paper down. She still wasn’t sure what to make of the picture Jimmy had taken. Clark said it wasn’t him and she believed him, but that still didn’t explain who the man was with Mayson Drake all over him. He looked just like her

husband. Did he have his powers? Who was he?

Clark spotted Jimmy at his desk and took a deep breath before approaching. He needed to talk to Jimmy but confronting him in front of the newsroom wouldn’t help him get to the bottom of this double business. He had to get him alone. He watched as Jimmy finished typing and tapped him on the shoulder.

“We need to talk,” Clark said firmly.

“Why am I not surprised?” Jimmy asked with a sigh, getting up from his computer to head toward the copy room. “You here to yell at me?”

“No. I just want to talk.” Clark did his best not to react. Now that he knew why Jimmy had been behaving like this it was a little easier to take. He was being a good friend to Lois, which he could respect, but getting to the bottom of who this double was and what he was doing in Metropolis meant getting Jimmy to talk to him and, hopefully, believe him. It hurt that Jimmy would think he was capable of hurting Lois like that but given that he hadn’t known him more than a year he could understand how it looked. He didn’t understand it himself.

Jimmy sighed, picking up the papers from the copy machine and heading back to his desk before turning to face Clark. “I don’t think you want to do that.”

“You have the wrong idea.” Clark began slowly. “I don’t know who or what is in that photo, but it is not me.”

“Looks like you...awfully close to be sitting next to someone that isn’t your wife.” Jimmy snapped back.

Clark did his best not to react and pointed to the conference room. Jimmy sighed, following him inside. After he closed the door, Clark turned to Jimmy. “How long have you had that photograph?”

“A month or so. What difference does it make?” Jimmy asked annoyed.

“So for a month you’d rather ignore me, and let your anger at what you think was going on fester than come and talk to me?” Clark pressed, giving him a stern glare.

“What’s there to talk about?” Jimmy asked.

“How about the fact that that’s not me.” Clark pressed.

“Then who is it?” Jimmy scoffed, “Your evil twin? A clone? The jolly green giant? Come on, give me a little credit!”

“I would never cheat on Lois...ever. After everything we’ve been through I would never throw all that away. I thought you would know me better than that.” Clark said solemnly.

“You know what the Chief says, if it looks like a duck...”

“It’s not me, Jimmy,” Clark repeated. “I get that you think you’re being a good friend to Lois. But I don’t want you upsetting her like this, and I really don’t appreciate you throwing around accusations like this without even talking to me. You got a problem with me you come to me. Lois has enough to deal with.”

“I wouldn’t have to come to her if you weren’t...”

“For the last time, it wasn’t me!” Clark growled at him angrily. “You upset Lois, you upset me. I’m not someone you want angry with you. Now, you can continue to act like a thorn in my side, or you can help me figure out who this is and where he came from.”

“You want me to help you research ... you?” Jimmy scoffed.

“No, I want you to help me prove to you that it’s not me in that photo and maybe, hopefully, make you think twice before

assuming the worst about someone.”

“Fine,” Jimmy said flatly. “I’ll help figure out who this ‘double’ is but if you’re yanking my chain I’ll find out and I will tell Lois.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not.” Clark retorted irritably. “Now, where was this at?” He asked, throwing the photograph on the table for Jimmy.

Five Months Ago...

Rachel tapped on the door frame for the ADA’s office, trying to hide her contempt for the woman. This was the third arrest that had been let go due to lack of evidence in the last month. Another thug out on the street because the District Attorney’s office couldn’t get it together.

“Yes?” the young blonde looked up at Rachel with an exasperated sigh.

“I know you don’t have time, but you need to make time, Ms. Drake.” Rachel said, taking a seat across from Mayson before she could argue.

Mayson let out a low sigh and set down the papers she was reading, folding her reading glasses with one hand. “Yes, Lieutenant Harris, how may I assist you?”

“You can start by explaining to me why three of my team’s collars have walked in the last month. Attempted arson is nothing to laugh at.”

“There was not enough evidence,” Mayson said between gritted teeth. “You know that thing I need to throw the criminals in jail and get a guilty verdict.”

“I think you’re full of it.” Rachel shot back. “You had motive. You had witnesses. You had everything you needed.”

“The DA decided not to prosecute,” Mayson said solemnly.

“Why not?” Rachel scoffed.

“You’ll have to take it up with him,” Mayson said, pointing to the office across the hall.

“Maybe I will.” Rachel said, turning on her heel.

“Good luck,” Mayson called after her, picking up the paper she’d laid down on her desk.

Rachel narrowed her eyes at Mayson. She wasn’t sure what it was, but there was something about the woman that set her off. She didn’t trust her...not for a minute.

<< “He’s under arrest, officer.” >>

<< “If you’re willing to, son, we can make this all go away. All you have to do is sign on the dotted line.” >>

<< “You’ll become better than human, son.” >>

<< “Get out of here!” >>

<< “Metallo.” >>

“Thanks for all you did for me,” Corbin said, handing the red and white apron back to Bibbo. “It’s time I get back to the life I had before all this.” He gave him his best smile before adding, “I won’t forget everything you’ve done for me this past month.”

Bibbo still seemed uncertain, “You sure you going to be okay?”

Corbin flashed him another smile, “Of course. I’m better than okay, Bibbo.” He grabbed his jacket and headed out, calling over his shoulder, “See you around.”

He had an old score to settle and money to collect.

“It’s not funny!” Rachel glared at Pete as he snickered at her.

“It kind of is.” Pete chuckled a little harder.

“I’m telling you there is something going on in that office. I’m going to find out what.” Rachel crossed her arms over her chest defiantly.

“If you say so, but just remember not to threaten to beat up the DA next time. I’m not in law enforcement or anything, but I think that’s frowned upon.” Pete teased.

“I’ve never been so humiliated in all my life.” Rachel shook her head in disgust.

“It was for an hour in a holding cell. It could have been a lot worse.” Pete laughed.

“Not funny.” Rachel shot back.

“Yes, it is.” He leaned in to kiss her cheek.

Dr. Hamilton pointed to the alleyway where a covered body was being surveyed by the medical examiner. “Third one this month. No witnesses. No physical evidence.”

“No fingerprints? No DNA?” Lucy prompted. Hamilton shook his head with a grim expression on his face. “Just like the others.” Lucy mused more to herself than anyone in particular.

“Well, this one’s a little different.” Hamilton frowned. “Our victim was a Congressman. Police Commissioner is putting a lot of pressure on the department to figure out who’s behind it. I want you and the rest of the team to make this priority one.” Hamilton instructed.

“So, now that it’s someone important we get more manpower on it?” Lucy mused.

“That’s politics.” Hamilton shrugged. “Someone is on a killing spree, and before we create panic in the streets, I’d like to know what we’re dealing with.”

“We’ve been over the evidence, Dr. Hamilton. There is nothing tying the killer to the scene of the crimes.” Lucy pointed out.

“Not these crimes.” A familiar voice said from behind her. Lucy turned and was surprised to see Superman standing with Bill Henderson and a few other officers that were surveying the scene.

“Right over here.” Henderson pointed to where a flag on the brick wall behind her marked where a bullet had misfired.

“Superman,” Lucy breathed in surprise. She’d heard Lois talk about him from time to time, but she’d never actually met Superman in person before. The checkout lines were littered with headlines from the latest rumors and the super rescues he’d performed over the last few months.

“Lucy Lane, right?” He guessed, extending his hand to shake hers.

“Yes.” She nodded, doing her best to remain calm and collected. It was so weird seeing him in person and talking to him.

“Sorry,” Henderson interrupted. “Lucy, Superman. Superman, this is Lucy Lane one of the newest CSI’s.”

“Uh, nice to meet you,” Lucy said quicker than necessary. She noticed him looking intently behind her and asked. “Do I need to move?”

“You’re fine.” Superman pointed to the right corner of the wall where a white mark was barely visible. “Right there.”

Henderson nodded to the team to recover what he was looking for. “Mind telling me what you’re looking for?” She asked.

“If these cases are connected to the cases I think they, are we

might have the killer's fingerprints in the system," Henderson said coolly. "There was a murder here a few months ago. No match on the DNA but we never recovered the missing bullet."

Lucy frowned, "Yeah, I remember I surveyed that scene with Jack Warner."

"Well, Mr. Warner was caught planting and hiding evidence, so we've been going over his open cases with a fine-tooth comb," Henderson explained. "Superman's been helping us where he can with the support of the Commissioner."

"That's great." Lucy beamed. "The more help, the better."

"Looks like we've got a bullet," Hamilton shouted, lifting a long tweezer-like instrument from the wall and holding up a round gold and bronze shaped object.

Congressman Murder Linked to Intergang Hit

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

"Boy, this is great stuff, kids." Perry White said, skimming over the front page of the Daily Planet. "Keep this up you'll be bringing home more than one Kerth next year."

"Thanks, Chief," Clark said, slipping a supportive hand on his wife's shoulders. After Henderson had retrieved the bullet from the crime scene, it had been run through the system and matched to a weapon used in several previous crimes connected to Intergang.

Henderson had agreed to let Clark and Lois break the story after everything had been cleared internally with the department. For the most part, things seemed to have settled down within the Metropolis P.D., and the newly appointed officers and department heads were keeping the streets clean again. Still, it seemed Intergang kept poking its ugly head out from every corner.

There was no evidence as of yet on who had been behind Intergang, and nothing Sam had given them could connect Bill Church Jr. with the organization other than his identification. They needed more than a witness ID to arrest him though. Unfortunately, Bill Church Jr. appeared clean as a whistle. Like his father, his criminal record was clean of any imperfections.

They still hadn't found the source behind the attempt on Lois and Pete's life the night of his gallery opening. Gretchen Kelly may be listed as the acting CEO of JL Incorporated, but finding anything more than an old photograph of the woman seemed an impossible task. No one had heard from her in months. She appeared and reappeared at a moment's notice and handled many of Lex Luthor's lucrative business dealings. A perfect partner for Luthor as far as he was concerned.

He glanced back at Lois as she looked down at her swollen abdomen. She was now seven months pregnant and glowing. Gone were the days of her being self-conscious about her baby bump or appearance. She'd embraced the changes that had come with this pregnancy, and he was falling more and more in love with her each day. Watching their son grow and change inside her was the most miraculous thing he'd ever seen—considering the things he had seen in his life, that was saying something.

"Congressman Wallace was last seen outside Judge Wright's chambers, but no one's seen or heard from him either," Lois said solemnly. "There's talk that someone's slowly taking out politicians that have refused to work with Intergang."

"What's your take on all this?" Perry asked.

"I don't know." Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair.

"It feels like we're missing something here."

"There have been quite a few deaths over the past few months—unexplained." Clark elaborated. "The police have no leads."

"You thinkin' we might have a serial killer on our hands?" Perry asked in a hushed whisper.

"Or possibly someone's cleaning house," Lois interjected. "Criminals, politicians... That's not random."

"But no one within the police department is willing to confirm or deny there's a connection with these deaths and the ones from earlier last month," Clark added.

"Well, that never stopped you two before." Perry mused with a twinkle in his eye before walking away with a soft yodel.

Lois looked up at him, and Clark shrugged, "You really think there might be a serial killer out there?"

"I'm more inclined to believe that we have someone working with Intergang to silence everyone that won't work with them." Clark ran a hand through his hair, worry written all over his face. "The biggest problem is it's happening so quickly there's nothing to indicate the attack. No screams for help. No police calls. Whoever is doing this knows what they're doing."

"Or could possibly know the victims?" Lois guessed.

"I..." He tensed when a cry for help reached his ears.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Someone's in trouble." He said, straightening up.

"Go. Be careful." She whispered, leaning up to kiss him.

"You too." He placed a hand on her abdomen before moving toward the stairwell that led to the roof, tugging at the knot to his tie.

Johnny walked down the familiar alleyway he'd done so many deals in. Drugs, stolen goods, robberies, and muggings... He'd done it all. He took a deep breath in, savoring the sweet smells from the hot dog stand around the corner. Still the same people that had been here years ago and the same shops. Nothing had changed.

The little corner had been the place he'd called home for so long. He recognized the group of disheveled men standing in the corner, pulling out their loot for a familiar looking man. He wore a black bandana around his forehead and black leather jacket with a white tank top. Some things never changed.

"Hey, punks, scram!" He ordered in a commanding voice.

"Me and Angel got some business arrangements to discuss."

"Jon?" Angel looked up at him in surprise.

"Corbin." He finished for him. "What's the matter, Angel, surprised to see me alive?"

Clark flew through the sky and quickly zeroed in on the cries for help. Near Queensland Bridge, a group of thugs were running out of an alleyway while a man in a dark navy shirt held another man in a black leather jacket against the wall by the throat.

"I thought I was helping you."

"I think you mean helpin' yourself. I hear you got ten bills for me. I want half... or I'm snappin' your neck like a pencil!"

"Okay John, whatever you say..." the man in leather stammered frantically, fighting to catch his breath as Clark landed in the alleyway. The other man released him, and the man in leather pulled a gun from his jacket and shouted, "You should have kicked it the first time, Corbin."

<<“Destroy. Alien. Destroy.”>>

Clark winced as he felt his mind rage against the messages that plagued him. The hidden demons that continued to haunt him at night threatened to overtake him as he heard the shots fired. He looked up in shock when he saw the bullets bounce off the man Corbin.

How was this possible?

Corbin reached for the gun in the man in leather’s hand and crushed it. As he approached, Clark felt his insides splitting. He watched in horror as Corbin lifted the man in leather over his head, “Should have taken the deal, Angel.”

“No!” Clark shouted, blowing a blast of freezing breath toward Corbin.

Corbin threw Angel across the alleyway, and Clark caught him. “Are you okay?” He asked.

Angel nodded, scrambling away when Clark released him. “Should have let him fall. Waste of air.” Corbin called out, approaching him with a growl.

“Who are you?” Clark asked, stepping back as Corbin came near him. He could feel his head splitting into two once more.

“That’s for me to know and you to find out,” Corbin called out. “Who are you, little boy blue?”

Clark fell to the ground, cradling his head in his hands as he fought against the mind-numbing pain that washed over him. It felt like he was being split in half. He focused his energy on x-raying Corbin to see if maybe there was a sample of the meteorite nearby. His eyes widened when he saw a black stone inside the metal chest plate of Corbin’s. He wasn’t even human.

“You’re a machine?” Clark gasped in surprise.

“Ah, you peeked!” Corbin grabbed him by the throat and lifted him in the air. “What a wuss. I hardly laid a hand on you.”

‘Metal. He’s made of metal.’ Clark reminded himself. He wasn’t sure what would happen, but he had to give it a try. He shot a beam of heat vision at the metal chest plate, allowing the metal mulch to fade away. He groaned when he felt the black glowing rays on him, but pushed through the mental trauma and focused on applying his heat vision to the stone. He had to get rid of the meteorite.

“Hey!” Corbin called out. “Let go of me!”

Clark grabbed Corbin by the shoulders, holding him in place as he continued to apply his heat vision. A blinding light filled the air, and he fell back. He groggily looked up to see what looked like a reflection of himself in a black suit and tie and glasses. He reached up to his face, feeling for any injuries.

“I...I...I...I...” the stutter of Corbin on the ground caused Clark to cringe as he stood up. He looked around and the reflection he’d thought he’d seen was gone. He walked toward Corbin and grimaced when he saw a white, clear diamond in Corbin’s chest.

“Who are you?” He asked.

“Metallo...Metallo.” Corbin groaned. “Do...Doctor...Lane.” He coughed, holding his chest.

Clark frowned, unsure of what to do. It was clear whatever meteorite that had been inside Corbin was responsible for keeping him powered and now that the meteorite was gone he was fading fast. “I’ll get you some help.” He promised.

A tall man in a white uniform wheeled Emmet Vale down the

narrow hallways. He smiled to the nurse at the front desk and continued toward the staff elevator. “We appreciate your cooperation, Mr. Vale.”

He leaned over to press the call button and waited patiently for the elevator car to arrive. Another patient wheeled past the corridor and the man stiffened, tightening his grasp on Emmet Vale’s wheelchair hand bars. He breathed a sigh of relief when the patient turned to the other direction.

The elevator car arrived and he wheeled Emmet Vale inside, breathing a sigh of relief when the doors closed behind him. He pulled out his cellular phone and pressed the speed dial. “Mr. Luthor? We’re ready when you are.”

“You hear that?” the doctor smiled at Lois as she rolled the wand over her abdomen which was covered in blue goo.

The room had filled with a loud, rapid thumping and Lois smiled, looking back at Clark. “That’s our boy.”

Clark leaned over, pressing his lips to hers and rested his forehead against hers, “I love you,” He whispered, fingering her hair strands as he spoke.

“Baby looks good. You’re right on target for growth.” the doctor continued, looking up at the monitor as she took a few more measurements on the screen. “Just a few more weeks and you’re home free. Then the real work begins.”

Lex Luthor smiled as he listened to Asabi on the other end of the phone. He turned to Rollie Vale who was eying him warily. “It seems your brother has gone missing from Shady Brook, Mr. Vale.”

Rollie glared at him angrily, “What do you want, Luthor?”

“Something you and your brother stole from me...” Lex tapped his fingers on the desk in front of him. “The meteorite. Where is it?”

“I don’t have it.” Vale sneered. “Haven’t had it in months.”

“That’s too bad.” Luthor turned his attention back to the phone, “Asabi, it seems Mr. Vale’s attachment to his brother was exaggerated. You know what we do to traitors.”

“No, no, no!” Rollie Vale shouted adamantly. “Wait, please!” He pleaded with him. “I don’t have the original sample but I know where Intergang kept their collection.”

“Collection?” Lex mused.

“They made about fifteen different kinds by experimenting on it with everything you could imagine, chemical, heat, cold... Each one gave a different result.” Rollie Vale explained frantically as he pleaded with Luthor. “Please haven’t you done enough to my brother?”

“It seems I haven’t done enough if he thinks he can steal from me.” Lex hissed angrily.

“It wasn’t him.” Rollie pleaded. “Please, I can get you what you want. I can get you the meteorite and everything Intergang had on Superman.”

“Oh?” Lex turned to his phone, “Just a moment, Asabi.”

“A machine?” Clark wrinkled his forehead, unsure if he’d heard Sam correctly.

“A cyborg.” Sam corrected, pulling up the notes he’d made on the screen for Clark to see. “Metallo.”

Clark looked around the small laboratory Dr. Klein had

arranged for Sam to use within STAR Labs. It wasn't much but it had the basics that Sam needed to live off of. Somewhere to sleep and groom himself and a kitchen that Dr. Klein kept stocked. With his security clearance Dr. Klein was able to hide Sam within plain sight and keep the organization from finding him. Unfortunately this meant keeping Lois in the dark about where her father was. Though she said she understood why, it still made him uneasy not being able to talk to Lois about what was going on with her father.

He looked to the silver and white plug that was hooked up to Corbin's chest cavity. "He's plugged into a wall." Clark pointed out. Sam had entered a code after hooking Corbin up to his computer and he'd gone still. Sam assured him Corbin was all right but he wasn't sure what to believe anymore.

"He was hooked up to a machine when I found him. The organization wanted me to find a way to save him. Said it was military research on how to save soldiers that had been wounded on the battlefield," Sam said bitterly as he ran the diagnostics program on Corbin. His face fell and Sam shook his head.

"What is it?" Clark asked, concerned.

"His power source and memory's been wiped. I'm going to have to reprogram him." Sam sighed.

"He didn't leave me much of a choice," Clark said flatly, crossing his arms over his chest.

"No, I wouldn't imagine he would." Sam's expression grew grim. "Thankfully I made a backup of his programming. It won't take as long to reprogram, but the hardware repair may take a while."

"Just keep me posted," Clark instructed, turning to the exit.

Present Day...

"Bye, sweetie." Lois waved goodbye to Jon before heading to the elevator. Despite being late and Clark requesting she work from home today, there was still a mystery on their hands. If there was a double of Clark, then there was possibly a double of Superman, which meant trouble for Metropolis.

Five Years.

It was a long time that he had been in the custody of Bureau 39. They already knew the organization had gotten ahold of his blood thanks to her father. With the breakthroughs in medicine, there was no telling what Trask had done.

A clone?

A twin they didn't know about?

Someone made to look like him?

'Stop it. You're driving yourself crazy.' she told herself.

The elevator doors opened, and she stepped into the elevator car, glancing at her watch with a grimace. Two hours late. It could be worse but today was supposed to be her second day back and showing up late didn't look good. It had taken a lot of convincing on H.R.'s part to agree to the transition. She didn't want to give them a reason to back out of the arrangement and be forced into full-time hours before Jon was six months old.

The doors pinged open on the newsroom floor, and the smell of coffee and stale doughnuts mixed with the fresh ink from the printing press lingered in the air. "Lois! What in the Sam Hill are you doing here? I thought you were working from home today?"

Lois threw him an annoyed look, tucking a hair behind her ear as she maneuvered her way to her desk through the maze of reporters hard at work. "I changed my mind." She looked across

the aisle at the empty desk where her husband normally sat.

"Where's Clark?"

"I think he's holed up in the conference room with Jimmy." Perry pointed to the door that was closed and the blinds were drawn. He pulled up the front page of the evening edition, "By the way, great work on that Lex Luthor story. Top notch stuff."

"It was a team effort." Lois managed a weak smile. Most of the story she'd written waiting for Clark to get back last night from his rescue. After their argument and their making up, he'd helped her clean it up into something legible and provided some of the background info on the satellite that had been hijacked by Lex.

"Well, it felt good to see my top two reporters' by-line on the front page again." Perry complimented with a pat on her shoulder.

She nodded her recognition, and half-grin before turning to the conference room. Clark was talking to Jimmy. That was a good sign, right?

Five Months Ago...

The room felt ten times smaller as Clark relayed the events that had occurred that evening to her. Lois placed a protective hand over her abdomen, listening intently as Clark tried to downplay what had occurred. She'd seen the news coverage of her husband cradling his head and struggling to his feet to face off against the assailant he'd been trying to stop. She'd seen his chest open and a glowing black light emit from it. Then she'd seen Clark use his heat vision and an explosion short-circuited the coverage, leaving nothing but static.

Two hours she'd waited to hear from Clark. He didn't know about the footage when he'd arrived home. He just wrapped her in his arms and she did her best not to overreact when he relayed what happened that afternoon to her.

She laid a tentative hand on his shoulder, "Are you sure you're all right?"

He took her hand in his, pulling her to him. "Fine, I promise." He shrugged his shoulders, "Just a few bumps is all." He offered her a broad smile, "Good thing I'm invulnerable."

"It was more than that." Lois shook her head, pulling away from him. "I saw the footage. What happened?"

"I don't know." He whispered hoarsely.

Lex looked around the underground tunnel, following the map he had been given. He tapped the red button on his earpiece and spoke, "Are we sure this is the right place, Asabi?"

"Mr. Vale has been informed of the punishment if he should double-cross us," Asabi said coolly. "Unfortunately for him, Dr. Kelly is less patient than I am when it comes to carrying punishments out. He may not have time on his side should he betray us."

"All our information told us the research into Superman was destroyed when Bureau 39 was taken out." Lex mused, looking around the damp corridors. "Who else in Intergang would be working on a project regarding our alien friend?"

"There was a man named Darryl that was supposed to be in charge of the research department. Perhaps he took on the project alone?" Asabi guessed, pointing to the metal door in front of them. "There it is. The old Applied Science Division. Before the fire."

Lex turned the handle to the door, and a loud creak echoed down the hall. “The secret to Superman’s undoing underneath my company’s headquarters. What are the chances?”

“Coincidence?” Asabi guessed.

“I don’t believe in coincidences.” Lex smiled.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Lois pressed, taking a step toward her husband. The image of him holding his head as he struggled to stand up straight and the powerful blow he’d taken from Corbin haunted her.

“I don’t know.” He repeated, taking her hand in his. “It was like something was splitting my head into two the closer I got to Corbin.”

“His chest was glowing.” She whispered.

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “Unfortunately, I destroyed whatever it was when I blew it up. There’s no way to tell what it was.” He looked down, tightening his lips. “Everything’s fine. I promise.”

“It didn’t look like everything was fine to me,” Lois said with a knowing look.

“It was gone after the explosion.” He pointed out. “Maybe it’s for the best.”

“Aren’t you at all curious what caused that?” Lois asked.

“No,” He shook his head. “I really don’t want to know.” He placed a protective hand on her stomach and linked his arm around her waist. “All I care about right now is right here.” He patted her round abdomen for emphasis. “Now, why don’t you catch me up on where you left off with the investigation?”

A loud bang from the harbor caught the attention of the dock workers outside Bibbo’s bar. Bibbo looked up from his desk, following the sound of commotion outside where he found the right pillar of the dock in flames. Water pails and wet towels were being thrown frantically at the flames as they continued to spread with the wind’s strong current.

Bibbo raced back inside and grabbed his fire extinguisher, dousing the flames with the white foam. A scatter of applause from the fishermen and dockworkers echoed around him, and he nodded gruffly before turning back to the inventory sheets on his desk.

When he reached the front door to his bar, he found a man with horn-rimmed glasses, dark hair, dark jeans and a t-shirt despite the unseasonably cold air that afternoon. There was something oddly familiar about the man, but he couldn’t place it. The man nodded in his direction and continued to move down the narrow alleyway with questionable characters lurking ahead.

Any other time he’d have minded his own business. Maybe it was the familiarity about the man. Maybe it was the soft edge with which the man carried himself. Whatever it was, it made Bibbo feel the urge to reach out and help him.

“Hey, you think you could help me out?” Bibbo pointed to the large pile of pallets that had been unloaded from the truck earlier. The man looked at him uncertainly but didn’t say anything and Bibbo continued. “I could fix you up a hot meal in return. My back isn’t what it used to be.”

The man seemed to ponder his response for a moment before giving half-smile and grunting, “Yeah, sure. Where you want them?”

The next morning, Lois, Clark, and Jimmy sat in the conference room going over everything they’d discovered on Gretchen Kelly and LexCorp. “Gretchen Kelly.” Clark laid the image of a young blonde woman with blue-green eyes on the conference table. “Last photo was taken three years ago at one of Lex Luthor’s fundraisers.”

“And no one’s seen or heard from her in the last year. It’s like she’s completely gone off the grid.” Jimmy explained, laying out the little information he’d found on the table for the duo.

“Weird,” Lois commented, flipping through the slim file in her hand.

“According to this, five years ago Dr. Kelly was Lex Luthor’s personal doctor. How did she go from a private practice to head of a multi-billion dollar corporation?” Clark wondered aloud, handing the medical journal to Lois.

“One can only wonder.” Lois snickered with a roll of the eyes.

“So, do you guys think this Gretchen Kelly is really running LexCorp under this dummy name?” Jimmy asked, looking through the files in front of him.

“I’m not sure.” Clark said, tapping his hand on the table. “We know Luthor is still out there. He can’t run things the way he used to. He needs a frontman, or woman, in this instance. Given Luthor’s history with her it’s not a stretch, but there’s still quite a bit we don’t know about her.”

“Lois, Clark,” Perry’s gruff tone at the conference room door interrupted.

They looked to their editor, “What is it Chief?” Lois inquired, setting the medical journal she was reading down.

“I just got off the phone with Bill Church. Seems there’s a big announcement that’ll be made at City Hall this morning. I want you two down there. Get me the exclusive on what’s going on.” Perry ordered.

“Any idea what the announcement is?” Clark asked, looking back at the files they’d been elbow deep in most of the morning. He really didn’t want to stop their research just yet. They were onto something. He could feel it.

“Will Bill it could be anything.” Perry mused, turning to Jimmy, “Jimmy, why don’t you tag along with Sanchez and help him out?”

“Really?!” Jimmy shot up happily. Clark could tell the young man was ecstatic about being able to tag along on something other than a ribbon cutting or dog show piece. “I won’t let you down, Chief!” Jimmy raced to his desk to grab his camera.

Perry turned back to the bullpen and made his way toward Ralph’s desk, “Simms! My office!”

Clark turned his attention to the piles of paperwork they’d made their way through the past three hours. “I guess we’ll have to table this until after Bill Church’s big announcement.”

“Yeah, unless his big announcement is that he’s the head of Intergang?” Lois teased, letting out a long sigh. She leaned back in her chair, rubbing her lower back. “Just what the doctor ordered. Standing around for another charity fluff piece while my ankles grow bigger and bigger by the second.”

“Come on,” Clark chuckled, “The sooner we get this over with the sooner we can get back to figuring out who’s behind JL Industries and what their interest is in Metropolis.”

The room emitted in a rainbow of glowing meteorites. Each one had been labeled and tagged with detailed reports on how subject 'K' had reacted to each specimen of the meteorite and how the different forms of the meteorite had been created. There were gold, green, yellow, red, and black variations all encased in glass viewing boxes.

"What do you want to do?" Asabi asked, looking at the glass case then back at Lex. He'd been back and forth between this room and the underground bunker over and over again for the entire evening. They needed to make a decision.

"Move it. Move all of it to the underground office. We'll use all of it." Lex instructed.

The balloons and popcorn vendors on the street gave the illusion of a fun celebration taking place. Lois wasn't buying it as she and Clark approached the City Hall steps where Bill Church Jr stood with his father. "I still don't understand why we're wasting our time covering this," Lois complained.

"Perry said there was a big announcement being made today." Clark sighed, looking around. "So here we are."

Lois looked to Jimmy who was following one of the senior photographers around the perimeter of the building, capturing the scene of the crowd. She glanced back at Clark, "Looks like Sanchez is showing Jimmy the ropes on his new camera."

"It'll be good for him to get his feet wet on a big assignment." Clark reasoned aloud. "He's got the eye for photography."

"Yeah," she chuckled, watching Jimmy struggle to keep up with the older yet active Ricardo Sanchez, one of the more senior photographers employed at the Daily Planet. "If he can keep up."

What was it that kept drawing him to this street? He stared up at the street sign that read 'Hyperion Avenue' and sighed.

Why couldn't he remember?

Why couldn't he remember who he was?

He kicked a pebble in front of him aimlessly and stopped when he saw the pebble fly at an impossible height into the stars. He looked around, trying to see if anyone had seen him. Thankfully it was late enough that no one was around.

What was going on?

He was hearing things he shouldn't be hearing.

He was seeing things he shouldn't be seeing.

He was doing things he shouldn't be able to do.

Who was he?

Bill Church stood in front of the City Hall steps with his son, Bill Church Jr., a smile pasted on his face and cameras trained on both of them. "It is with great pride that we announce the official news that Billy will be running against Governor Barnes in the upcoming election."

An uproar of questions echoed around them, and Bill Jr. raised his arms to calm the crowd, "One at a time. One at a time."

Below the steps of City Hall, a digital clock connected to an incendiary device ticked away the seconds. The echo from the streets around the device could be heard.

Clark heard the ticking in his ears. Everything around him seemed to move at slow motion as he pushed Lois away from the steps and toward the underground parking deck they'd come in at,

signaling he had to leave. The crowd of reporters made it impossible for him to do anything 'super' without changing into uniform first.

As fast as humanly possible, he moved behind the alleyway on the corner and reappeared a second later in front of the steps of City Hall.

"Superman!" the crowd cheered, oblivious to the impending danger below.

"Everyone get out of here now!" He warned.

Before he could finish his statement, a rumble below could be felt. He looked below him in a panic, seeing the explosives device he'd detected beneath the steps of City Hall were nothing but a ruse. Below him, the rumble from the explosion in the underground subway tunnel—where the underground parking and transportation for the city connected—was in flames.

'Lois...'

Present Day...

Lois closed the door behind her. She looked around the conference room, finding Clark on one end of the table engrossed in the files laid out in front of him. On the other end was Jimmy, buried in his own stack of files.

Clark looked up and met her gaze with a humorous expression, "You couldn't stay away, huh?"

"Someone turned my alarm off." Lois retorted, walking toward him with a teasing smile.

"Someone was tired from, uh, working late," Clark said hurriedly, glancing toward Jimmy who had just poked his head out of the file he was reading to watch the two of them.

"Working? Is that what we're calling it?" Lois smirked, watching the red blush that had begun to spread on the back of her husband's neck flood to his ears. "What are those?" she asked, pulling up a seat next to Clark.

"Daily Planet tipline calls," Clark said, showing her the full thickness of what he was going through. "For the last six months."

"We're eliminating the prank calls and looking for any other sightings of the supposed double," Jimmy said, skeptically. "But all I'm able to find is a lot of strange Superman sightings."

Clark frowned, sharing a look with Lois, "Me too."

Lois looked between the two of them, uncertain how to respond. It was times like this she wished she could explain to her young friend the truth. The Superman sightings might not be Clark. There was proof for her and Clark, but not to Jimmy who still seemed ambivalent toward her husband.

"Well, that's a start I guess," Lois reasoned aloud, "But the Daily Planet is the paper with the most exclusives on Superman. It'd make sense we'd get a lot of tips on him. What about other papers?"

"Jimmy's got a request in to get a copy of tips the Metropolis STAR has received over the last six months," Clark explained.

"I've got a friend that works the phones over there," Jimmy explained.

"Olsen!" Perry's voice could be heard through the glass panel doors, and Jimmy looked to Lois.

"Go on. We'll handle it from here." Lois urged.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Clark called after him.

Lois watched Jimmy leave then turned her attention back to

Clark, “What did you find?”

“Over the last five months or so there have been reports of rescues from Superman that were not me. For every single one of them there’re complaints from the person he caught about excessive force or police brutality, but considering the source...”

“Five months. How could this be going on for five months and this is the first we’ve heard about it?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know.” Clark shook his head, “The notes here state it was chalked up to a criminal getting what he deserved or deemed not a Planet story.”

“Clark, someone out there has your powers.” Lois breathed, feeling the hair on the back of her neck stand up.

“I know.” Clark sighed.

“How did this happen?” Lois asked.

“I wish I knew.” Clark shook his head. “The important thing is we know now. I’m going to try and find him and see if I can get some answers.”

“And if you can’t?” Lois asked, “What then?”

“We’ll figure something else out.” He said. “Most of these rescues seem to be happening around Hobb’s Bay. I think once we finish up with the staff meeting and get the follow up on last night’s rescue filed, I’ll try and do a patrol around the area and see what I can find out.”

“Okay,” Lois glanced at the time, “I’ll see what I can find out on the Annihilator and hopefully we can figure out how Lex Luthor got his hands on something like that.”

Jack Warren made his way down the narrow hallway, looking over his shoulder at the burly man that stood behind him. He didn’t dare question the reasoning for his being called. He knew where he was. He knew where he was going. He’d spent the last six months in hiding.

The DA had assured him that his cooperation would ensure his safety and then she’d stopped returning his calls. The security detail had disappeared and this man had appeared on his front door.

The boss had two meanings to Metropolis. One had been the elusive Lex Luthor that worked the system all the way up to the President of the United States. The other was a mystery to many. No one knew who he was or where he came from, but they all knew not to cross him. Of the two, the latter was more lethal and dangerous.

“In here.” the metal door opened and Jack found himself shoved inside.

A small table and chair stood in the middle of the room. “Take a seat.” a voice behind him ordered. Warren turned to see Bill Church Jr. standing behind him with a leather briefcase in his hand. “We’ve got a lot to catch up on, Mr. Warren.”

Five Months Ago...

The chaos of ambulatory workers, firefighters, and police moved at an excruciating speed as Clark hovered over his wife, holding the large concrete slab up so they could move her. He wanted to yell, scream and cry at the same time. He couldn’t move.

“Okay, we’ve got her.” the lead EMT said as he tightened the last strap on the gurney. “On my count. One, two, three...”

He felt a bile rise in his throat when he saw the blood-stained

gauze pressed against her right side. Once all of the rescue workers were safely out of the way, he lowered the cement block and began scanning the area for any other victims. He wanted to follow the ambulance. He wanted to be at the hospital and know what was going on.

But he was Superman.

People were trapped.

Someone’s child.

Someone’s mother.

Someone’s father.

They all belonged to someone. He had to help. He knew he had to, but he hated it just the same.

The bright lights shone overhead. Lois groaned in pain as she groggily came to. She turned to her side and winced when she felt the pain pulse down her right side.

“Lois?”

She could make out her sister’s voice, and she tried to sit up, “Luce?” Her voice croaked like she’d been crying.

“I’ll get the doctor.” Lucy placed a hand on her shoulder.

Lois squinted, seeing the scratch on her sister’s face. “What happened?”

“Not now,” Lucy said, stepping out into the hall.

Three hours. Fifteen hundred lives had been saved tonight. No casualties. Plenty of injuries. The city would probably be spending close to half a million dollars to rebuild the underground transport system that had been destroyed.

Who had been the target?

He couldn’t rationalize a reason behind the attack.

Someone had planted a fake bomb beneath the steps of City Hall. He’d been so focused on that bomb he hadn’t even thought to look for another incendiary device. Luckily Lucy had been nearby and able to ride with Lois to the hospital.

He straightened his tie, looking up at the double doors to the Metropolis General Hospital. When he’d called Lucy earlier, she’d said Lois had been unconscious most of the ride over to the hospital. He glanced at the time and grimaced. Three hours later and he was finally darkening the hospital doors.

Room 103.

He recalled the room number Lucy had given him earlier. He bypassed the emergency room entrance and made his way toward the reception desk in the hospital lobby, pulling his ID out for verification. After checking his information, the receptionist waved him through and directed him to the Women’s center where Lois had been checked in.

Once he was behind closed doors, he scanned the hallway, quickly finding the room with ease. He took a deep breath, preparing himself for any possible outcome and the barrage of questions he knew was sure to follow. His hand tightened on the metal doorknob.

‘Breathe.’ he told himself.

Lois winced as the strap around her arm tightened and the cold stethoscope pressed against her arm. She looked up at the nurse who seemed oblivious to how tight the armband was around her.

“The doctor should be in in a few minutes.” the nurse

instructed, releasing the armband from her arm.

“Lois?” She heard Clark’s voice as the door opened.

She turned to see her disheveled looking husband standing in the doorway. “Hey,” She could feel the corners of her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“Hey,” he said, moving to her side. She released the breath she didn’t know she’d been holding when his hand brushed against her cheek.

“Nobody’s telling me anything,” she said, holding back tears. “Lucy went to find the doctor and I...”

“It’s okay,” He wrapped a tentative arm around her. “I’m sorry I couldn’t get here sooner.”

She let out a shuddered breath, holding back tears that were threatening to escape. “You’re here now.” She could feel a hard lump in her throat.

The familiar voice of her doctor accompanied with a soft knock on the door pulled her attention to the present. “Lois, how are you doing?”

“That depends on what you’ve got to tell us?” Lois said eyeing the folder in her doctor’s hand. “How bad is it?”

“While you were unconscious, we did a few tests and scans,” she explained. “We were able to find a heartbeat. That’s the good news.”

Lois let out a sigh of relief as Clark leaned over to kiss her cheek, tightening his arm around her. “What’s the bad news?” Lois asked, seeing the uncertain expression on her doctor’s face.

She crossed her arms over her chest, taking a deep breath before diving into the explanation. “The bad news is you have what we call a Class one Placenta Abruption.”

“What is that?” Clark asked, placing a hand over the left side of her abdomen.

“It means the placenta has begun to pull away from the uterine wall,” the doctor explained. “I’m not going to lie. This is very serious. I’m going to put you on complete bed and pelvic rest. I want to try and keep your son where he is as long as I can.” She explained, writing her notes on the file in her hand.

“Is he in pain?” Lois asked, placing her hand over Clark’s, fingering the gold band on his hand.

“No. He’s perfectly fine and safe where he is right now. As long as the abruption doesn’t increase we can still try and make it as close to your due date as possible,” the doctor explained, offering a gentle smile. “It’s just a little bed rest. Your son is alive and healthy. The bumps and bruises you sustained during the explosion are minimal compared to some of the other cases I’ve seen this afternoon. It’s only eight more weeks.”

Present Day...

Bill Church Jr. looked at the face of Jack Warren, staring him down. He knew he had the upper hand. He knew he could intimidate and bully the information out of Warren without any issue. The man had been in hiding since the takedown of his and his father’s intricate corruption of the Metropolis P.D.

Now that his father was showing signs of weakness it was up to him to show Intergang who was in charge. His first piece of business would be to find the person responsible for the organization losing its hold on Metropolis and making that individual pay for crossing them.

“You know why I’m here. You know why you’re here. We

know the leak came from your department, Warren. You ran. You hid like a coward. Now, I’m going to give you one chance to make it right.” Bill Jr. instructed.

“What do you want to know?” Warren asked.

“The leak. You know who it was?”

“Depends,” Warren looked warily around the room.

“On what?”

“What you plan to do to me after I give it to you,” Warren said hesitantly.

“What do you want?” Bill Church Jr. asked.

“Intergang off my back,” Warren ordered. “Let me live my life in peace.”

“Give me the name, and you have yourself a deal.” Bill Jr. said in a cold, menacing tone.

“It was one of our new recruits. Lane. Lucy Lane.” Warren said.

Bill Jr. snaked his arm around his shoulder, “See, Jack, now was that so hard? All that running and hiding for nothing.”

“Yeah, I guess....”

Warren fell to the ground, and Bill Jr. looked to the burly man with a needle in his hand. “Take him out to the bay. No witnesses.”

“You got it, boss.”

Four Months Ago...

Dr. Klein watched as the man of steel paced in front of him. Ever since he’d come to him a few months ago with the tale of how a government agency had put him through tests right after his arrival on Earth he’d been working tirelessly with the superhero to help put a stop to the subliminal messages that had appeared. Unfortunately, nothing that they had tried seemed to have any effect. The messages were still there, and recently the messages were tied with images and memories that were not of Superman’s.

It was a mystery in itself, but the more he dug into the testing Superman had been subjected to, the more he pulled away. The discussion of needles and the meteorite had come up a few months ago, but Superman had been adamant that he would not allow himself to be tested on with the meteorite—even if it did help stop the messages.

“It’s happening again,” Superman said, pacing in front of Dr. Klein. “One minute I’m fine. The next I feel like my head’s being split into two and then all of a sudden there are memories in my head that weren’t there before.”

“How can you be sure they’re memories?” Dr. Klein pressed.

“I don’t know. They feel...like a memory?” Superman shrugged, throwing his arms up in the air. “It feels like it’s something that happened. Not something planted like the messages before.”

“Could these be repressed memories?” Dr. Klein guessed.

“I don’t know.” Superman sighed. “I just need them to stop.”

“How long have you been having them?” Dr. Klein pressed.

“A month or so,” Superman said bitterly.

“Everything looks great. The bed rest seems to be helping” the doctor looked up at Lois happily, tapping her pen on the notepad in front of her. “Baby is getting in position, and you’re already dropping. A little earlier than I’d like but we’ll keep an eye on it and intervene if we need to.”

“Intervene?” Clark asked uncertainly, glancing at Lois who was wiping the gel off her abdomen with the paper cloth.

“As we discussed last month, the remainder of this pregnancy is very fragile. The abruption to the placenta wall could cause this little guy to come early. We’re taking all the precautions we can to ensure he stays in the womb as long as possible. “The doctor explained gently.

“I’m already experiencing Braxton Hicks though.” Lois pointed out with a frown.

“Yes, but that doesn’t necessarily mean anything.” the doctor reassured. “Just try and stay hydrated and avoid stress where you can. Four more weeks until your due date. You can make it.”

Lois watched the doctor leave and muttered, “Easy for her to say.”

‘Church For Governor’ was plastered all over the side of Metropolis General’s parking garage as Lois and Clark exited the building.

“Avoid stress?” Lois mimicked, shaking her head in disgust. “I’d love to know how we’re supposed to do that when the city is falling apart at the seams.” She stopped in front of the automated newsstand and pointed to the front page of the Daily Planet with an image of a fire station engulfed in flames. “They’re getting more and more bold. I thought this new department was supposed to help stop Intergang. What are they doing?”

Clark shook his head, wrapping a supportive hand around her shoulders and steered her back toward the aisle they’d parked on. They’re doing what they can, Lois, but just like Superman, the police can’t be everywhere at once.”

“It’s Intergang. We know it is. Why won’t the mayor at least point the finger and call them out? He still refuses to admit Intergang is still in Metropolis. The attacks are getting worse and worse.” Lois asked as they approached the silver Jeep Cherokee. “That explosion last night nearly took out an entire block.”

“I don’t know.” Clark sighed, opening the passenger side door for her. “I’m sure the mayor has his reasons, but right now you need to calm down and breathe.” He instructed, running a hand against her cheek. “The doctor just said to avoid stress. I don’t think working yourself up over everything that is out of your control is what she had in mind.”

“Sorry,” Lois smiled sheepishly at him. “I guess the not knowing is starting to get to me.”

“We are going to stop them,” Clark promised her. “We’re going to find out who’s behind Intergang and expose them, but you’re going to have to accept that it may not happen before this little one is born.” He placed a hand on her abdomen.

“I know,” Lois said softly, looking down at her feet. “I just want to stop them.”

“We will,” Clark reassured her. He tensed a moment, and she looked up at him in concern.

“You okay?” she asked.

“Fine.” He said hurriedly. “We should get you back home.” She felt a slight pain move down her lower back then to her side and turned away. Braxton Hicks again. “You having more of those Braxton Hicks?” Clark asked.

“Yeah,” Lois said, rubbing her side where the pain had been a moment ago.

“You want to have the doctor look you over again just to be

sure?” Clark suggested.

“No, let’s just go home.” She said with a sigh.

“What were you able to find out?” Lex asked, looking over Gretchen Kelly’s shoulder.

The screen showed the footage from Superman’s fight with Metallo last month. Gretchen continued to fiddle with the knobs, forcing the image hidden beneath the static to show. “It’s still not near the resolution you’d want to see, but if I freeze this frame here you can clearly see right here when the meteorite exploded there are three figures in that alleyway.”

“So, someone was nearby?” Lex asked, not following what she was saying.

“No, Lex, look!” She pointed to the screen. “Here before the explosion there’s Superman, and there’s Corbin. No one else. As the explosion takes place, there are three figures.” She turned a knob and clicked on the image in the shadows, zooming in to see a familiar face.

“Superman?”

She shook her head, pointing to another figure. “Nope, he’s right here.” She pointed to the other side of the screen and zoomed in.

“There’s *two* of them?” Lex asked.

“I think the explosion created a double. A mirror image of what the meteorite was looking at in that moment. In that particular moment it was looking at Superman so essentially yes, there are two Supermen in this image.”

“We need to find him,” Lex ordered.

They arrived home in silence. Lois let out a heavy sigh as she stepped out of the passenger side of the Jeep. One month of bed rest. It had been torture having to sit around and literally do nothing while everyone around her was able to do what her mind was screaming at her to do. Perry had ordered her on maternity leave which left her unable to work on any story, research or anything she and Clark had been focused on before the subway collapse.

It was hard.

She was growing impatient with the hours and minutes and days that passed. Clark did his best to try and be home with her in the afternoons to transition both of them into the working schedule they’d agreed to for when she went back to work. Though it was nice to have him home, it was growing frustrating for her given that she couldn’t take advantage of the extra alone time considering she was on pelvic and bed rest.

Not that she felt like doing anything but crawling into the bed and sleeping most of the day away lately. The injuries she’d sustained last month had healed for the most part. All that was left of her injuries was the placenta abruption that, thankfully, hadn’t changed.

“You hungry?” Clark asked, opening the door to the foyer for her.

“A little.” she said, “You home for the rest of the day?”

“Yeah,” He leaned in to give her a peck on the cheek. “I thought I could keep you company while you complain about being tortured from the excruciating boredom you’re being forced to endure.”

“I can’t even nest properly. You already finished the nursery.”

She gave him a fake pout.

“One less thing to procrastinate about.” He countered, scooping her up in his arms. “No standing.” He ordered, walking her into the dining room and setting her down in front of the dining table.

He began moving at super-speed, preparing lunch while she took a seat. She took a shallow breath. She really didn’t feel good. The pain from the last contraction was still lingering on her back. She felt the tightness around her abdomen and shook her head. Maybe she should have gone back to the doctor earlier. She felt moisture between her legs and looked down.

Blood.

“Clark?” she called after him.

He stopped in front of her. “What is it?”

“I’m bleeding.” Her voice trembled as she spoke, knowing it was still considered early for her to deliver. “We need to get to the hospital.”

“Don’t move.” He ordered. A split-second later he had changed into the Superman suit and was carrying her hospital bag. A second later they were in the air.

Lucy paced in the waiting room, looking for any sign of Clark from the double doors that led to the maternity ward. Flashes from her time in this hospital five years ago came back to her. The yelling and crying that came with tears of joy when Jamie was born. The soft cries when he made his presence known in the world.

It was an emotional journey.

“Hey, Luce, why don’t you sit down?” Jimmy pointed to the seat next to him.

“I’ll sit down once I know everyone’s okay.” Lucy said uncertainly.

“That could be hours.” Jimmy reminded her.

“Then I’ll wait hours,” Lucy said, turning her attention back to the double doors. “Have you called Perry?”

“Already called.” Jimmy reminded her.

“The Kents?”

“Their plane lands in an hour. Your mom is picking them up.” Jimmy reminded her. “Pete and Rachel are waiting by the phone. Everyone’s been called. All that’s left to do is wait.”

“I hate waiting.” Lucy retorted.

“You’re doing great, Lois,” the doctor called out, looking up from the edge of the exam table. “Let’s take a look.”

Lois fell back against her husband, allowing him to support her as he gently massaged her lower back. Back contractions. Painful, excruciating back contractions. If it weren’t for Clark giving her the added heat vision to her back she would have been in tears hours ago.

Three and a half weeks of on and off contractions until she’d finally been far enough to get pushed into active labor. From the time they broke her water to the time she’d received the epidural she was in hell. Her back felt like it was on fire. She felt like her insides were ripping her in half. Then finally the pain subsided and was replaced with an unbearable pressure all along her back with every contraction.

“I swear to God if you tell me I’m doing great one more time without being any further along...” Lois muttered irritably.

The doctor gave her a knowing smile and Clark brushed his lips against her temple, kneading at her lower back. She looked back at him, seeing the emotion on his face. “It’s okay. Everything’s going to be okay.”

“I love you so much, Lois,” he murmured in her ear.

“Okay, Lois, it looks like you’re just about ready to push,” the doctor said, pointing to the stirrups.

“Oh, thank God!” Lois sighed, holding her husband’s hand as she hooked her heels into the stirrups.

“It’s a boy!” the doctor cheered happily.

The soft cries of their son echoed in his ears as Clark held his wife against him, kissing her happily.

“Hi,” Lois looked up at their son that was wrapped in striped blankets as the doctor cleared his lungs, holding him up for them to see. He stared back at them with the most peculiar expression.

The tears fell down both of their cheeks. Clark whispered a soft, “I love you,” to Lois.

The nurses began looking their son over, and Lois turned back to him panicked, “Stay with him.” She leaned back on the hospital bed, completely spent from delivering their son.

He nodded, following the nurses to the small table where his son was patted down with several striped blankets by six different hands, reaching in. His son’s soft cries were like music to his ears. Clark took his hand, allowing it to curl around his finger. “It’s okay,” He reassured him. His pink wrinkled face turned to him. His cries stopped.

“He recognizes your voice.” One of the nurses told him.

“Hey, little guy,” He whispered hoarsely, trying to suppress the emotion that had been building up for the past nine months. He was here. He was finally here. He and Lois had read all the books. They had gone to all the classes—but nothing had prepared him for looking into his son’s eyes for the first time.

He winced as he watched the nurse apply a solution to his son’s eyes, matting them closed. A soft cry could be heard from his little lungs, and he laid a hand on his chest, “It’s okay,” He reassured him. He could feel the tears in his eyes as his son’s small hand wrapped around his finger tightly.

“Hey there little one, are you ready to see your daddy?” the nurse nodded to Clark, handing him to Clark.

He reached his hands out, allowing one hand to support his head and the other his back as he cradled him in the tiny diaper they had him in. The nurse handed him a small blanket, but he shook his head, recalling Lois’ fear of swaddling and blankets after what happened to Jamie. Even though they weren’t the cause of his death the idea that so many babies could die from being swaddled improperly or getting strangled on a blanket was enough to make Lois decide against the practice of swaddling and take extra measures to keep their son safe.

‘What’s preventable we will prevent.’

“Just support his head like this,” the nurse instructed, raising his elbow slightly which allowed his son to nestle himself against his chest.

“Clark?” Lois called out to him. He turned to see his wife who was watching the two of them with a tearful smile.

“Okay, little guy, let’s get you all bundled up,” the nurse cooed.

“No, don’t swaddle him,” Lois pleaded. “Please just let me

see him.”

The nurse hesitated for a moment and then nodded, motioning for him to take him to Lois.

He took a seat on the edge of the hospital bed with her. “He’s incredible,” his voice cracked looking back at her as she reached out for their young son. As carefully as he could, he laid him across her bare chest. He seemed immediately at ease—almost knowing that this was his mother and he was safe.

“I’ve never seen anything so perfect in all my life,” He managed, wrapping an arm around her shoulder as he leaned in to kiss her.

“I love you,” She whispered hoarsely as her voice cracked, giving away the emotion she was feeling as her hands ran up and down the pink skin of their son’s back. “Oh, Clark, he’s so beautiful.”

His little eyes blinked through the solution, trying to see the lights and sounds around him. He let out a soft whine then nestled himself back against Lois’ chest. “Hey, there bud, you’ve got your whole life to check the world out and explore,” Clark reassured, placing a tender hand on his back, covering Lois’ hand with his.

The nurse approached with a bracelet for Lois, “You all will have matching hospital bracelets to make sure everyone matches. Each nurse that comes in should check before performing any tests on either of you.”

Lois nodded her understanding and a small whimper came out of the small baby lying across her chest. “It’s okay,” she whispered, cradling him in her arms and positioning him against her breast to begin nursing.

He watched in amazement how at ease Lois seemed with something that was so foreign to him. There was a slight whimper as the small hand fisted against her chest in protest. “I know. I know. I ‘m sorry, but you’re just gonna have to be patient. It’ll come out eventually.” He gave another whimper then stopped, focusing on his task of trying to get nutrients from his mother rather than cry.

“Do you have a name picked out?”

Clark looked toward the nurse that was preparing their son’s chart, “Jon.” He smiled at the image of his wife and son, unable to wipe the grin from his face. “Jonathan Samuel Kent.”

“Welcome to the world, Jon.” The nurse smiled, printing the name on a certificate as she reached out to ink his foot to get his footprints.

Two Months Later...

“Are you sure you’re going to be okay?” Lois asked apprehensively, watching as Lucy held Jon against her chest, making himself comfortable. “We can cut the day short if you —”

“We’ll be fine.” Lucy cut her off. “Go. Have fun. Enjoy some much-needed time alone.”

“Thank you, Lucy,” Clark smiled, wrapping an arm around Lois’ waist. “We’ll have both our cell phones on. Just call if you need anything or have any questions.”

“This is not my first rodeo, you two.” Lucy laughed at them. “Go! Have fun. No calling allowed for at least an hour.”

Lois exchanged a look with Clark. She knew she had to get used to leaving Jon with someone other than Clark. So far the only person he’d been left alone with had been Martha and that had only been for a half an hour nap that both she and Clark had

been desperate for after her delivery.

“We’re going. We’re going.” Clark smiled, leaning in to place a hand on Jon’s head. “Be good for your Aunt Lucy, bud.”

“He’s just waiting for the two of you to leave so we can start the party.” Lucy teased.

“Uh-huh,” Lois smirked, giving her sister a hug. “Thank you.”

“Love you. Both of you. Now go!” Lucy pointed to the door.

Lois allowed Clark to guide her to the door, looking back one last time at her sister.

‘He’s fine.’

Clark closed the door behind them and turned her in his arms. “Now, about this date...”

She giggled, leaning into him as he captured her mouth with his. “A whole weekend of you all to myself.” She ran her hands up and down his chest seductively.

“This time we’re actually *leaving* the bedroom.” He murmured against her lips.

Bibbo Bibbowski cleared off the bar, listening as the music played around him. Business was looking good. He prepared for a long weekend, checking his inventory and making sure his staff was ready. The truck was unloaded and the bar was fully stocked. His band was starting to hook up their equipment. The bar was slowly filling up with customers.

He spotted a young blonde in her early thirties and a navy business suit with a mini skirt that just barely reached her knees. Bibbo smiled to himself, admiring the view and enjoying his musings on thoughts of what he could do if he were a younger man.

“Oh, what a day I’ve had.” she groaned, perching herself up on the bar stool. She laid a twenty-dollar bill on the bar and pushed it to him. “Martini. Dirty.”

He smiled, taking the bill and pocketing it in his breast pocket before filling her order. “Coming right up!”

“Hey,” Lois bumped his hip, looking toward the pier. “We gonna stand here all day or is there a reason for this trip to the coast?” She inquired with a twinkle in her eyes.

He took her hand in his, running his thumb over the gold band, pulling her to him. “This is one of the best spots. My dad used to take me out here as a kid. His annual fishing trip with his dad which got passed down to me.”

“It’s beautiful here.” She observed, looking over the pier they were standing on. “It’s nice to get away from it all every once in awhile.” She shot him a half-smile, “Even if you did have to twist my arm to get me to agree to this trip.”

“Yeah, but we’ve done nothing but work and take care of Jon these last few months.” Clark pointed out, wrapping his arms around her. “Getting away and letting Lucy have some much needed bonding time with Jon is important...for all of us.” Clark reasoned, leaning in to kiss her.

“It is nice not to have to worry about the next feeding or changing...” she relented, leaning back against him.

“Or what combination of food equals crabby Jon.” Clark added shaking his head. He frowned, hearing the thunder rumble above the clouds.

Lois laughed, feeling the raindrops begin to pour on them

one-by one. He pulled his coat over them, running toward the nearest shelter to get out of the rain. She leaned back against the brick building, her hair damp from the rain and turned to him. “Here,” she ran a hand through his hair, tousling it as she leaned in to kiss him.

“Thank you,” he whispered against her lips.

“I don’t think we’ll be fishing anytime soon.” She said, licking her lips as she ran a hand up and down his chest, fingering the famous ‘S’ on his wet t-shirt.

“I could take us back to the hotel I suppose...to change.” His eyes lingered over the teal blouse that clung to her in the right places.

“You could.” She nodded, reaching for the hem of his t-shirt. “What exactly did you have planned for us today besides conveniently getting me soaked in the rain on a fishing trip?”

“I was planning on cooking the fish.” He said with a grin, running his hands through her hair, “I guess I’ll have to settle for buying them.”

“No more fishing?” she asked with a fake pout.

“Nope.” He leaned in to kiss her.

Mayson looked around the bar, taking in the atmosphere. Why her witness had to meet in the seediest part of town was beyond her understanding. After finishing up her deposition, she’d gotten as far away from Southside as she could and found the closest bar that was open.

It wasn’t overly crowded.

She could see a few people had filled up the bar stools. She reached for the menu that sat in front of her and began scanning for the least greasy item she could find. She was famished. The last few weeks had taken a toll on her. The DA’s office was under fire for their involvement in the police corruption and now the mayor was pointing the limelight back at them for allowing Intergang to continue to threaten the people of Metropolis. It wasn’t like she wasn’t trying to put them away.

“Everything’s all set, Bibbo.” A familiar voice said on the other end of the bar.

She looked up and did a double take. Sure enough standing by the bar in black jeans and a worn out t-shirt that fit him in just the right places was Clark Kent.

“Hi,” Clark brushed a strand of hair out of Lois’ face, nuzzling her neck as he held her close.

She grinned back at him, staring down at the living room from where they were floating on the ceiling. “Hi,” She let out a long sigh, “That was some date.” She giggled.

“Not exactly what I had in mind when I said we were going to actually leave the bedroom, but I’m not complaining.” He whispered in her ear.

“You know, technically, we did spend all day...*not* in the bedroom.” She pointed to the ceiling. “See? Ceiling. Not the bedroom.”

He chuckled, “Sorry about the pier and picnic.”

“We can always try again tomorrow...” she breathed heavily against him. “or not ...”

He began to stir.

Images from his dreams still haunted him.

Who was that brunette that haunted his dreams?

The mysterious blonde he’d met earlier seemed to know him. She said his name was ‘Clark.’ What was her name again?

Mayson.

Yeah, that’s it.

Mayson.

He stared up at the dimly lit walls. Nothingness filled his mind as he stared at the window that showed him it was still dark out.

He let out a piercing scream as image after image ran through his mind. The face was so familiar yet foreign at the same time.

A baby.

A brunette with a loving stare.

The images changed at an impossible speed, leaving as quickly as they had come.

“Whoa,” He gasped, panting heavily as he cradled his head in his hands.

One kiss became two, then four until they both lost count. Her arms wrapped around him, deepening the kiss. He groaned his approval against her lips as she ran her palms up and down his back. She molded her body against his.

His hand fingered the back of her head, slowly breaking off the kiss. He looked at her through his passion-filled eyes, silently asking for permission. She nodded mutely, unable to voice the demands her body was screaming at her.

A split-second later his lips were on hers. Both of his hands cupped her face, outlining it as his mouth found hers, desperately seeking her taste as his hands moved up and down her sides. She nodded mutely, and he rolled them over, allowing her to wrap her legs around his torso.

He moved both hands to cup both sides of her face, tracing the frame of her face as he looked at her tenderly. “I love you, Lois,” He murmured, resting his head against hers.

“I love you too, Clark.”

He stared up at the Daily Planet globe from across the street. It felt right. Something in there was drawing him to it. Something...

‘Oh, no,’ He felt the nauseated feeling overtake him and he let out a low growl as the piercing pain hit the back of his neck. Everything went numb as he felt the throbbing pain pulse through his veins.

Memories flooded back one by one.

Bureau 39

Lois

Trask

Lois

Jamie

Lois

Superman

Lois

Met U

Lois

Nightfall

Lois

All of it came rushing back as he felt himself become overpowered by four armed guards.

What was happening?

“You sure that’s him?”

“I saw him. That’s the double all right.”

“They look the same.”

“It’s no matter now.”

Flashes from his life and his fight with Metallo came back. The iron fist. The black stone that made him feel like he was being split into two. Something clicked inside his mind as realization came over him.

He wasn’t crazy.

He wasn’t a science experiment.

He was Superman.

He was Clark Kent.

He felt his body give out as darkness fell over him.

Present Day...

Clark soared through the sky, searching for a clue that would lead him to where this double was. Every if-scenario began racing through his mind. How had a double of himself been created? There were instances over the last few months of superhuman rescues that were impossible for him to have done. Months. There had been a double of himself walking the streets of Metropolis for months and he hadn’t known. Why?

Report after report of superhuman rescues where armed robbers were being stopped by someone throwing the assailant into the police cars, gunmen seriously injured. It was behavior he never thought possible of himself yet here was this other Superman...this double performing these heinous acts.

The sound of a loud crash below caught his attention. He looked down and saw a school bus being held by none other than Superman. To the other side was an armored car that had been thrown against the brick wall. His jaw tightened with distaste, uncertain who or what he was dealing with as he came into land.

Lois stared at the scene on the television, uncertain what to make of the scene that had unfolded. It was Clark, rescuing a school bus full of children by throwing an armored car into the side of the brick building to avoid a collision. Information continued to come out about a bomb and gunman that had been on the scene. She took note of the address and headed toward the elevator.

The behavior of Superman was being called into question by reporters as the reports came in. She knew in her heart Clark would never do anything to hurt anyone, but that meant the Superman on the scene was not Clark.

Clark came in to land and within seconds the double disappeared. He followed the red and blue blur, trying to catch up to him. Who was he? Where did he come from? He had so many questions that plagued his mind. He needed them answered. Finally, he came in to land on the roof of Metropolis Towers, staring at the man in the familiar red and blue costume.

It was like staring into a mirror. He stared at the stranger in front of him that looked and sounded like him but was not him. He wore the same suit as him. He sounded like him, but he wasn’t him.

“Who are you?” Clark asked, staring at his double with a stern gaze.

“Who are you?” he shot back.

“You’re the one that’s been doing all of this. Throwing that shooter into the police car. Stopping those bank robbers by nearly killing them—”

“I did what needed to be done. A lot more than I can say for you.” The double spat back angrily.

“How did you get your powers?”

“I was born with them. Just like you.” He shot back, circling around him as he spoke.

Clark followed his gaze as he spoke, “Who are you?”

The double chuckled, looking around, “I guess no one can hear us up here.”

“Now you’re concerned with making a scene?” Clark scoffed sternly. “You could have killed someone!”

“I was protecting the innocents.” His double retorted.

“Who are you?”

“I’m you. A better version of you.”

Clark scanned the double looking for anything that would explain his presence. No sign of robotics or mutated genes. He looked and sounded just like him. How was this possible?

“I’ll be the judge of that.” He shot back angrily, recalling his and Lois’ fight last night over someone that looked just like him having a date with Mayson Drake. The double was ruining his life. He was hurting people. Who knew how many times he’d used force to protect the innocent like that?

“I’m the part of you that you want to deny.” He snapped at him with an icy edge in his tone as he continued to circle him. “That damaged part of you that you’ve buried so deep inside you don’t even know it’s there. You can deny it all you want, but you know what I did today was something you’ve wanted to do for a long time. You wanted to make those men pay. You wanted to keep those children safe. You know it and I know it. I’m a part of you. Every memory you have, I have. You can’t deny it and you can’t destroy yourself.”

“I’m nothing like you!” Clark growled angrily.

“You think you’re so perfect? Less damaged. The perfect hero, but I know the truth. I know how badly you want to destroy them. I know the only thing that keeps you from crossing that line.” He taunted, meeting Clark’s gaze.

Realization dawned on him when he saw the smug expression on the other man’s face. “You stay the hell away from her!”

“Or what?” he mocked him with a laugh. “You can’t stop me and you know it. I’m just as strong as you. I’m just as fast as you. I am you.” He growled angrily taking a step toward him so he was only a few inches from his face. “You’ve had how many months now? How many months of living your life with her—with my son?”

“He is not your son!” Clark bit back venomously. “I’m warning you—”

“You think if given a choice she wouldn’t choose me over you?” He asked, narrowing his eyes at Clark. “I can be very convincing.”

“Over my dead body.” Clark growled.

“You aren’t the only one married to her.” He warned, floating a few feet away as he threw back in a taunting tone, “I’m the part of you she wants.” He narrowed his eyes at Clark, “For months I’ve sat on the sidelines and watched while you take everything from me. That ends now. I plan on reclaiming everything.”

Before he could respond, the double disappeared before his eyes.

'Lois,'

Lois stepped out of the taxicab, looking around the scene where the two Supermen had been moments ago. Press and police were crawling all over. School officials were directing students and EMTs to be checked out.

She began moving through the scene and talking with witnesses to get an accurate account of what had transpired. There had been a gunman. The gunman was injured and had several cracked ribs. The students on the bus were safe. There were two Supermen.

Two.

She made her way back to the police line where the crowd of people craned their necks to see what they could over the police and school officials. Twenty broken bones and a concussion. The children were safe. She took a deep breath as she leaned against the tall red brick building around the corner, trying to gain control of her emotions.

"Lois?" She heard the familiar voice behind her and she bit her lip, praying it was her Clark calling her name. She turned around and saw the man in red and blue, eyeing her uncertainly. "What are you doing here?" He asked.

"Big story," she said, crossing her arms over her chest "Seems Superman has been using brute force to stop criminals."

There was a flicker of something on his face. Something that was unfamiliar as he took a step toward her. "He was doing what he had to do."

"You could have killed him." She said, taking a step back.

He looked down, toying with something internally for a moment. A split-second later she felt a gust of wind against her face and she was in the air, several hundred feet above the ground. "Put me down!!" she yelled angrily.

"Not until we talk." He said sternly.

Something was wrong.

He could feel it.

He walked through the newsroom, looking for any sign of Lois.

"Lois?"

<< "*I'm the part of you you want to deny. You can't destroy yourself.*" >>

'I'm nothing like him.'

He spotted Jimmy coming out of the dark room. "Jimmy, have you seen Lois?"

Jimmy shrugged, trying to walk away and Clark grabbed his arm, "Jimmy, it's important!"

Jimmy stiffened then nodded, "Yeah, she left here a little while ago to cover the Superman double story."

"Superman double?" he half croaked.

Jimmy pointed to the screen, showing amateur footage of two Supermen on the roof of Metropolis Towers. No audio footage was retrieved, thankfully, but the image was unmistakable.

<< "*You think you're so perfect? Less damaged. The perfect hero, but I know the truth. I know how badly you want to destroy them. I know the only thing that keeps you from crossing that line.*" >>

'I'm not damaged. I'm nothing like him.'

<< "*You think if given a choice she wouldn't choose me over you?*" >>

"Lois left here about half an hour to cover it. Hasn't returned any of the Chief's calls." Jimmy continued.

That perked Clark's interest. That wasn't like Lois to not at least update Perry on an assignment. "Jimmy, do me a favor, keep calling her. Don't stop until you get an answer."

Jimmy narrowed his eyes in concern. "Yeah, no problem."

<< "*You aren't the only one married to her. I'm the part of you she wants.*" >>

'Lois...'

Clark hung up the mobile phone and ducked into an alleyway to change into his Superman suit. He wasn't sure where Lois was, but he could feel something was wrong. He called Lucy to make sure Jon was taken care of before continuing his search for Lois. Just as he became airborne images popped into his head, and he let out an excruciating cry.

The image of Hobb's Bay came to him. Lois, crying and trying to run.

<< "*Get off of me!*" >>

The image of an old rundown street near the pier and the number '373' popped into his head.

"Where did that come from?" He wondered aloud.

Bill Church Jr. laid an image out on the table as he conducted the staff meeting with his lieutenants. "Gentlemen, we have a leak. Our hold on Metropolis was thwarted by one lowly CSI worker. I don't care how it's done. I don't want details. Just make sure the message is sent that you don't cross Intergang and live to tell about it."

A grumble of agreement filled the room, and Bill Church Jr. smiled to himself. "Make me proud."

Lucy looked over her shoulder as she made her way through the Daily Planet lobby doors. She turned the corner and went down the long hallway that led to the daycare facility where her nephew was under the care of Ms. Deb and Ms. Lily. Clark's message had been cryptic. He couldn't tell her why or what the circumstances were. Just that she needed to pick up Jon. The worry in his voice was unnerving.

She looked over her shoulder once more and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw no one was behind her. *'Pull it together.'* she thought to herself.

They'd landed in a run-down building near Hobb's Bay. After they'd landed, he'd changed into a pair of jeans and t-shirt with the familiar looking glasses her husband wore. She'd tried to run. That had been a mistake.

"Get off of me!" Lois fought against the stranger that looked and sounded like her husband but obviously was not. His hand clamped over her mouth as he pinned her against the wall, holding her in place.

He'd flown.

He had super-speed.

"Are you going to stop trying to hit me?" he asked in an irritable tone, looking at her for confirmation.

She whimpered against him when she felt his body press against her as he pinned her arms up over her head with ease. He looked at her and whispered, “I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to talk.”

He removed his hand, and she began to cry, “Get off of me!” “Not until you calm down.” He said sternly.

“Who the hell are you?” she asked, realizing that fighting him wasn’t doing her any good. He was probably as strong as her husband.

He flew.

How could he fly?

“I’m Clark.” He said, running his palm over her jawline.

She flinched away from him, “You are not Clark!”

“Yes, I am.” The doppelganger said, grabbing her chin, forcing her to look at him. “I’m not going to hurt you, Lois—I would never hurt you.”

“Let go of me.” She ordered vehemently, feeling a twisting in her stomach as she felt his breath against her neck.

“I’m not going to hurt you.” He repeated.

“Then get off of me!” she spat angrily.

“I just want to talk.” He whispered, running a hand down her side as he pressed himself against her.

“Fine. Talk.” She snapped, gasping in surprise when she felt his hand move to the hem of her skirt. “Get your hands off of me.”

“God, you’re more beautiful than I remember,” he whispered in her ear, moving to cup her cheek, a motion her husband had done countless times before.

She jerked her face away from him, feeling a sense of dread fill her mind as she felt his palm against her jaw. “Hands to yourself!” He felt, looked, and sounded like her husband but she already knew he wasn’t. He’d already he admitted he wasn’t. The problem was, trying to convince her body of that. He was too close. She snapped her eyes closed, looking away from him. “Let go of me.”

He ignored her plea, running his hand through her hair as he whispered, “Do you remember the last time I held you like this?” He whispered in her ear, “When I ripped that dress off of you after our first Kerth win? When I held you against our bedroom wall and made love to you over and over again?”

She could feel the blood pulse in her abdomen at the memory. How could he know that? She could feel her mouth go dry as she struggled to form a response. “Th-that was —How do you—” her voice trembled as she spoke.

“Because I *am* Clark. I know everything about you, Lois.” He murmured, pressing his lips against her throat, sending a shiver down her spine. “Like right now you’re trying to figure out how I know exactly where to touch you to make you melt in my arms.”

She tried to regain control but still felt her voice wavering as she spoke, “You’re not Clark. He would never—”

“Never what?” He asked, turning her face to look at him.

“You seem so sure I’m not your husband, but you and I both know only two people could know about that night.”

She bit her lower-lip, turning away from him. This didn’t make sense. How did he know about that night? She could feel her legs tremble at the memory and he smiled, leaning into her. His other hand moved back up the length of her arms, separating her wrists from one another and intertwining his hands with hers.

A movement that her husband had done countless times.

“Your favorite movie is *When Harry Met Sally*. You’ve seen it a million times and can quote the entire thing verbatim, but you still cry at the end.” His mouth twitched at her, and she looked down, trying to calm the hammering in her chest. He looked and felt like Clark. He knew things that only he would know.

“You won’t go inside the Lexor Hotel because of what almost happened there with Roarke.” He said gently, releasing her right hand and moving his hand to cup her cheek. It was something he’d done countless times before. She could feel her heart hammering in her chest as he continued, “The first time you kissed me was on the dance floor at that party after they drugged you. That was the first time I ever came close to killing someone.” She saw a solemn look cross his face, but it was gone in an instant as he released her other hand and cupped her face with both hands, “The first time we made love was after we were trying to hide from Harrington in that supply closet. Your sister walked in on us the next morning.”

She could feel tears burning in the corners of her eyes as he continued to recite memory after memory that only Clark could know about her. “How did you—”

“Because I am Clark—*your husband*. I know everything about you.” He whispered in her ear, tightening his grip on her as he nuzzled her ear. “I know you twist your toes when they’re going numb from us making love all night.”

‘*Stop!*’ her mind screamed at her. ‘*He’s not Clark! Clark wouldn’t kidnap you.*’

“N-no.” She stammered, unable to push the images of the very heated encounters between herself and her husband out of her mind. “You are not Clark. You are not—”

His mouth smirked, and he whispered, “Go ahead. Say it. Tell me to stop.”

“I…”

He then leaned in and whispered, “You can’t, can you?”

He leaned in to kiss her, and she felt tears burning in the corners of her eyes. Despite the memories, he seemed to have of her and Clark’s life together. It wasn’t Clark. He wasn’t her Clark. “Stop! Please stop,” she pleaded with him.

He pulled away from her and looked at her in surprise. “I’m not going to hurt you, Lois. I could never hurt you.”

“Let me go.” She flinched, trying to free herself from his grasp, desperate to get some distance from this man that looked and sounded like Clark but clearly didn’t behave like him at all.

He looked down at his feet then back at her. “I’m not going to hurt you, Lois.” He repeated once more, releasing his grasp on her.

“You’re not Clark.” She shook her head adamantly, willing the images he’d tried to paint in her mind to leave.

“Yes, I am.” He said, taking a step toward her. “I *am* Clark.” He ran a hand up to cup her cheek, “You are *my* wife. I’m not going to hurt you.”

“This is insanity,” She whimpered against him. “You just said you were—”

He pressed a finger to her lips and silenced her. “It’s a bit complicated to explain.” He whispered.

“Stay back.” She ordered, taking a step away from him. “Just stay there.” She said, holding her hands up and backing away from him. She knew if she allowed him to touch her again she

could come very close to succumbing to his charms. He sounded like him. He looked like him. He flew like him. But he wasn't Clark. He wasn't her Clark.

"You don't mean that." He whispered, "I can see it in your eyes. You want me. You want me so bad. It's okay, Lois. I want you too."

"You're not Clark." She repeated.

"Yes, I am." He argued. "I'm just as much Clark as the other man you call your husband. I can fly. I have x-ray vision, super-strength, heat vision and more. Just like him."

"I..I don't understand." She began shakily. "How did this happen? Who are you?"

His face fell to a stony expression. "I'm told it comes from something they called Black meteorite. At least that's what Intergang dubbed it. Either way, it leaves us with two Clark Kents and two Supermen." He said meeting her gaze.

"Black?" she echoed uncertainly.

"Apparently there's an entire collection." He held up his forearm, sliding his shirt sleeve up for her to see the bruises. Guess who's been the guinea pig for the last few months?"

Her eyes widened when she saw the purple and blue marks on his arm. "Oh my God!" she took a step toward him to examine his arm.

"After the split that happened with our fight with Metallo, I wasn't exactly sure who I was. Intergang found me and decided I'd make a good test subject." He said softly.

"Split?" she echoed, trying to put the pieces together. The fight with Metallo. Clark said he felt like his insides were being split into two. What if it hadn't been an anxiety attack but an actual split? If that were true then what he was saying would make sense. He shared the same memories because it was him.

"Metallo." She breathed, realization dawned on her as the pieces began to fit. "What are you?"

"I'm the part of himself he tries to hide. The part of him that wants to destroy the people that took him from you. I'm the part of him that he's buried so deep inside he doesn't even know it exists."

<< "*Fine, whatever. You know him. He gets up and leaves at the drop of the hat with ridiculous excuses. You can never find him when you need him. Then he shows up at bars across town known for their loose clientele.*" >>

"You're the one Jimmy saw with Mayson." She accused.

"I didn't remember who I was. It was right after the split." He explained, moving to cup her cheek, "I would never hurt you like that, Lois."

"No," she shook her head adamantly. "Don't touch me." She hissed out angrily as question after question raced through her mind. She bit her inner lip, unable to find her voice as thousands of thoughts ran through her mind. Finally, she found the strength in her vocal cords to speak, "What about Mayson?"

"What about her?" he asked, confused.

"Jimmy saw you with her." She looked back at him with an accusatory stare.

"When I didn't remember who I was." He pointed out, running his palms up and down her shoulders. She jerked her face away from him, and he sighed, "Lois, you are my first and only." He pulled her to him and whispered in her ear. "I'm your husband. Just as much as he is."

Her mind flashed back to the countless times she and Clark had made love since his encounter with Metallo. This version of him was just as much her husband as the man she'd shared a bed with... a home with for the past few months. She caught sight of his left hand and sighed, pulling away from him.

"No, no, you're not." She pointed at his left hand, noting the important piece of jewelry that was missing from his hand. "I want to go home."

"Lois," she could hear the crack in his voice as he looked up at her.

"You threw that shooter into the police car." She accused, recalling his actions from earlier that day. "Clark wouldn't do that."

"He had it coming. He could have killed a lot of kids that day." He snapped back irritably.

"You almost killed him!" she snapped back.

"But I didn't!" he retorted, "I was very careful."

"Yeah, twenty-two broken bones is very careful, isn't it?" she pressed, poking her hand into his chest defiantly.

"There are a lot of things you don't understand. You could never understand."

Anger flashed in his eyes, and she crossed her arms over her chest defiantly. "The Clark Kent I know would never do those things. He would never hurt anyone intentionally and—"

"I didn't!" he argued.

"You threw him into that police car. What did you expect was going to happen?" She snapped angrily.

"I was doing what I had to do. One more second and those children could have been killed." He argued angrily.

She swallowed hard, feeling a sense of dread go down her spine as she saw a flicker of red flash in his eyes. She'd never seen him like this before. "There's always another way." She said, softly.

"But those other ways have consequences I wasn't prepared to live with." He said hoarsely. "You think this has been easy for me? I live with the consequences of my actions every day. I live every day choosing who lives and who doesn't. I made a decision."

"You made the *wrong* decision." She corrected. "The Clark Kent I know would never do that. The Clark Kent I know would never kidnap me or ...or try to force me to do anything I didn't want to do!" She snapped irritably.

"I never forced you." He corrected.

She ignored the remark and continued, "And he certainly wouldn't allow himself to be caught in a compromising situation like that with *Mayson Drake*."

"For the last time, nothing happened!" he argued irritably, pacing in front of her. "You're the only one." He took another step toward her and continued. "You think this is easy for me? I remember every second of every day with you, but somehow I've been robbed of the right to be your husband." He held up his naked left hand.

The images he'd planted in her mind continued to haunt her as she tried to regain control of herself once more. She had to get out of here. She had to think.

"Lois?" He looked at her in concern.

"Please, just stop. This is too much to digest and I can't..." she felt tears falling down her face as she backed away from him.

A loud sonic-boom caused her to jump. She looked up and saw Clark—her Clark holding the other Clark against the wall by his arm. “I swear to God, you come near her again or hurt a hair on her head I will end you!”

She took a shaky breath, watching as her Clark in the Superman uniform, pinned the other Clark to the ground. She could feel the tears burning in the corners of her eyes as she fell to the floor in tears. It was over. They continued to argue around her as the tears fell down her cheeks one by one.

“You don’t have it in you!”

“Try me!”

“Doesn’t feel too good, does it?” He snapped back at him, “Knowing another man is with your wife.”

There was a sonic boom and then two strong arms wrapped around her, “Lois?” He held her tight, and she cried harder, fingering the gold band on his hand. “It’s okay. I’m right here, honey.”

“He looks and sounds ...just like you...” She whimpered in-between tears.

“It’s okay. It’s over. Shhh...” He soothed, holding her to him. “I’m right here. You’re safe.”

“He flew.” She cried.

“I know.” He said, rocking her back and forth. “Did he hurt you?”

She didn’t even know how to respond.

Did he hurt her?

He kidnapped her.

<< “You know you want me.” >>

“Lois?”

<< “I won’t hurt you.” >>

She looked up at Clark, unsure how to respond.

“Can we please just get out of here?” She whimpered hoarsely. She didn’t want to talk. She could feel goosebumps run down her spine as he scooped her into his arms and carried her with him out the window.

<< “Doesn’t feel too good, does it? Knowing another man is with your wife.” >>

Clark landed on the terrace with her, dropping her to her feet after a long flight under the stars. Lois had been quiet for most of the flight. She didn’t want to talk. It was driving him insane not knowing what had happened. What had his double done to her? She had been in tears, backing away from him when he had shown up.

“I had Lucy pick up Jon.” He said solemnly. “We can pick him up tonight or in the morning.”

Lois shook her head, “He’s probably already asleep. Just let him stay with Lucy tonight.” Her voice cracked as she spoke.

He pointed to the sliding glass door that led to their living room. “I’m just going to change. The door’s unlocked.”

“Thanks,” she nodded, heading inside.

He scanned the neighborhood to make sure he was out of sight, floating down behind the bushes to change back into his jeans and black button up shirt. He readjusted his glasses, checking once more that there was no one else around before walking up the steps to the back porch that led to their living room.

Inside he found Lois huddled in the corner of the couch with a

red fleece blanket. “Lois? Honey?” he ran a hand over her shoulder uncertainly. “Did he hurt you?”

“No.” she said softly.

His lips tightened when he saw the unshed tears in her eyes. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” she repeated, shaking her head.

“Lois,” He repeated, moving his hand to cup her cheek, “Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

“What’s there to talk about?” She asked in between tears.

“Someone that looks exactly like you and seems to have all your memories has shown up and is almost paralyzing criminals and and...”

“Lois,” He took a step toward her, placing a hand on her shoulder. “I’m not going to let him hurt you. I would never let anyone hurt you.”

“I know.” She said tearfully.

“Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.” He whispered, pulling her to him. “What do you need me to do?”

“Kiss me,” she pleaded with him, grabbing him by the collar and pulling her to him.

He obliged, leaning in to kiss her. She sighed against him, and he leaned into her, encircling her waist with his arms. “I love you, Lois,” he whispered. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

He felt her relax against him and smiled. She was safe. This imposter was gone, and he would make him pay for whatever it was he’d done to Lois to put her into a state of panic.

Her arms roamed aimlessly up and down his back, and he smiled against her lips. She lowered herself down to the couch, running her ankle up and down the back of his calf seductively, “Make love to me, Clark,” she whispered against his lips.

“How many samples were we able to obtain from the hidden vault?” Bill Church Jr. asked, looking over Lex Luthor’s shoulder as he examined the green glowing meteorite in his hand.

“Just about every sample your organization had. It’s a shame you felt the need to eliminate Bureau 39 before its usefulness could be tapped into.” Lex mused. “There’s no telling what intelligence you lost when you got rid of Trask.”

“He wasn’t focused on the goals of the organization.” Bill Church Jr. shrugged. His face tightened. “Bureau 39 never was part of Intergang. Just a tool we used to gain access to some of the government’s intel and keep us ahead of them.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Lex said, pointing to the files on the desk across from him. “Dr. Lane had quite the detailed account of your father’s involvement in the start of Bureau 39.”

“Impossible.” Bill Church Jr. snorted. “Dad thought Trask was a crackpot. He was using him. He wouldn’t spend good money to chase one man’s...” He stopped when Lex Luthor stood up and handed him a glossy black and white image of Bureau 39’s founding members. “That’s impossible.”

“That’s your father, correct?” Lex confronted him with a grim expression. “Seems he isn’t as docile as you once thought?”

Rollie Vale finished measuring the last of the solution in the vial in front of him. “Everything set?” Bill Church asked, approaching him from behind.

“Perfect dosage,” Vale said with an evil grin. “How long are you going to continue to play both sides of the coin like this?”

"I'm waiting to see Billy show his cards then I'll rip the carpet out from under him." Bill Church said with a smug expression.

"It's a dangerous game, Mr. Church," Vale warned.

"It always is." Church said smugly, "But Billy never responded to traditional forms of discipline."

"He still has no idea you've been pulling the strings all along?" Vale asked in awe.

"There are a lot of things he doesn't know," Church said, pointing to the sleeping Metallo on the table across from Vale. "Have you made the transfer?"

"Green meteorite has been placed in Metallo's heart. Seems to be holding strong. We'll be waking him up in twenty-four hours to complete the programming."

"And when Billy comes to you to program Metallo, you'll do as he says." Bill Church instructed.

"Always, Mr. Church," Vale responded with a grin

Five.

Clark had counted them.

Each and every delicious time his wife's body had gone limp in his arms while they made love. She kept her legs wrapped around him in a vice-like grip, unwilling to free him from her grasp. He held her against him, whispering reassurances to her as he made love to her for the last few hours.

<< "You think you're so perfect? Less damaged. The perfect hero, but I know the truth. I know how badly you want to destroy them. I know the only thing that keeps you from crossing that line." >>

<< "I need you so much, Clark." >>

<< "You think if given a choice she wouldn't choose me over you?" >>

<< "Just take me home." >>

<< "You aren't the only one married to her. I'm the part of you she wants." >>

<< "Make love to me, Clark." >>

Something had happened. He wasn't sure what, but he would make his doppelganger pay dearly for hurting Lois. Images from the scene in the bedroom flashed through his mind, and he tightened his arms around her protectively.

"I love you, Lois Lane Kent," he whispered possessively in her ear.

She grinned against him, "I love you, Clark Kent."

"I think even my legs are numb after that." He whispered in her ear. She giggled as he ran his hand up and down her back.

She grinned, "I know. That was..." She let out a long sigh, "...so good."

"Incredible." He agreed, running his hands through her hair to cup her face. He leaned in to kiss her, feeling her arms tighten around him as he brushed feather-light kisses against her lips. "Just like you." He reassured her. "I'm right here, Lois, and I'm not going to let anything happen to you or Jon."

She let out a muffled sob against him, and he smoothed the hair out of her face, rolling them over, so she was facing him. "Honey, please talk to me."

"It was you, but it wasn't," she said tearfully.

"It's over." He reminded her.

"He flew just like you."

"I know." He said softly.

"He said he was the part of you that you buried inside. A split or something he called a Black meteorite."

"Black?" He asked, curious about the information she'd learned.

"Jimmy wasn't seeing things. It was all him. I'm so sorry, Clark," she cried against him.

"Hey, hey, hey, enough of that." He soothed, holding her to him. "That's not important." He reassured her.

"He has your powers." She said in a hoarse whisper.

"I know," he said solemnly.

"Your memories." She added.

"I know." His face fell into a frown as he ventured on how to explain the dreams he'd been having recently. They had stopped until his encounter with Metallo. After finding his ship, they had disappeared. He found Lois from the 'dreams' that were coming to him.

"What is it?" Lois asked, a concerned expression fell on her face.

"I think I know how he has my memories." He said in a hoarse whisper.

"How?" Lois asked.

"I think that's where the dreams are coming from." he finished solemnly.

"Dreams?" She echoed, not understanding.

"You remember the dreams I had when I first came back after Nightfall?" He prompted. She looked away, and her expression remained chilled as he continued. "They were coming back around the time we found the ship."

"What?!"

"I didn't want to upset you because you were dealing with so much already." He continued, ignoring the angry expression in her eyes. "I went to Dr. Klein and explained what was going on. He ran a test and couldn't find anything. The dreams seemed to stop after we found the ship."

"Until after your fight with Metallo." Lois finished for him. "You need to talk to Dr. Klein."

"The Annihilator will be launched on EPRAD's next shuttle." Bill Church instructed. "In the core is a very large glowing green meteorite that will allow us to destroy Superman from anywhere in the world as well as destroy anyone that gets in the way."

"Interesting proposal." Mayson Drake said uncertainly, "Has it been approved by the military?"

"After Superman's latest stunt, the president was all too eager to sign the agreement." Church beamed. "I'll need your assistance in helping protect my stock in this of course."

"Anything for a friend." Mayson smiled.

"I'm not sure I understand," Lois said, pacing in front of her father angrily. "You worked on a genetic tag to control Clark and in all this time never thought to mention it?" After their visit with Dr. Klein this morning they'd been instructed to talk to Dr. Lane since Dr. Klein was unfamiliar with what could be causing the memory flashes. Diving too deep into Superman's past wasn't something she or Clark were comfortable with.

Sam sighed, looking down at his notes. "I didn't think it was important! I gave you the research on the flash drive."

“Sorry I don’t speak scientist!” Lois shot back angrily. “First you work for an organization whose sole purpose seems to be destroying my family. Then you help build the very cyborg that tried to kill my husband. Now, I find out you were helping them program him!”

“I didn’t know what it was for!” Sam argued.

“How am I supposed to trust you if you won’t be honest with me?” Lois shot back angrily.

Sam sighed, looking around the run-down laboratory. “Sit down, and I’ll tell you everything.”

Four Years Ago...

Sam Lane adjusted his tie nervously as he walked through the tall red doors, following the man in front of him. “You said this is a ‘Research’ position?” He inquired.

“Yes, best of the best work here, Dr. Lane. You’ll be doing research that tests the boundaries of everything you thought possible.”

“I still don’t understand how I got the job? I didn’t even apply —” Sam began but was cut off once more by the man.

“We keep a lookout for talent all over. The organization is very proud of its resources.”

“The organization?” Sam asked.

“Yes, ‘the organization.’” The man nodded.

“What is the organization?”

“That’s on a need-to-know basis, Dr. Lane.” He pressed a red button, and the doors opened to reveal a large lab, lit in white from one end to the other. “Here’s where you’ll be working. We’re very excited about bringing you on. Don’t disappoint us.”

“Yes, sir,” Sam looked around the room in marvel. He’d never seen such powerful equipment in all the hospitals and labs he’d worked for. “This is incredible.”

“The organization strives for the best.” The man beamed happily.

“They should be proud.” Sam grew thoughtful. “Who do I report to?”

“That would be me. Your Applied Science Director. I manage the research into ‘Project K’ and all the special weapons.”

He didn’t even have a name for his new boss.

“Project K?” Sam ventured cautiously.

“Need to know basis.”

“Ah, well, thank you for the opportunity, Mister—”

“Darryl. You can call me Mr. Darryl.”

Sam stared at the nursery window, watching as the nurses tended to his grandson. It had been shocking to hear what had happened to his daughter. He’d been working round the clock with the organization in developing a new weapon that was supposed to fight against chemical warfare by absorbing the toxins. It was some of his best work. His ex-wife had called him last week to tell him he should come to the hospital to see his grandson –if he even cared.

Of course, he cared.

Why wouldn’t he?

Finding out his daughter had not only been engaged without his knowledge –but pregnant—with her missing fiancé’s child. It had been a lot to take in. Lois had always been spontaneous. He’d thought he’d raised her to be smarter than this though. Not only

had she been put in danger but now she was left to raise a child on her own. She insisted this Clark Kent was still alive. If he was, Sam knew he had a few words for the man for leaving his daughter and grandson like this.

“Brings back memories, doesn’t it?”

Sam turned to see Ellen standing behind him.

“He’s beautiful.” Sam cleared his throat, trying to hide the emotion that was beginning to build up.

A boy.

“The nurse I spoke with said he’s doing better. She thinks he should be ready to go home with Lois today.” Ellen continued.

“That’s good news.” Sam smiled.

“Lucy is taking a semester off to help Lois with Jamie.” Ellen continued. “Those two really are wonderful young ladies.”

“Yes, they are. I’m glad...” He cleared his throat, “I’m glad they turned out okay.”

“Don’t forget to support his head,” Lois said nervously, watching as he held Jamie in his arms for the first time. He looked around the apartment. It had been completely transformed to make room for his grandson. His heart burst with pride as he watched both his daughters come together to take care of him.

A small nursery was set up in Lois’ bedroom. A play area had been set up in the corner of the living room, and a changing station was set up in the alcove near the window. She’d thought of everything.

A sharp jab on his finger pulled him back to the present. He looked down at the little boy in his arms and smiled, “You’ve got quite a grip there, Jamie.”

“He’s got his daddy’s eyes,” Lois said softly as Jamie’s face lit up, looking at his mother. Sam looked at the picture of his daughter and the young man he’d learned to know as ‘Clark’ from Lucy and Lois.

It had taken him three weeks to get the nerve to show his face on Lois’ doorstep. His last conversation with her had been an argument over her pursuing Journalism instead of Medical School. He’d kicked her out, and she’d moved out that night, moving back in with her mother. He’d never heard from her after that aside from the occasional ‘hello’ at family gatherings.

Three weeks.

It had taken him three weeks to get the courage up.

In those three weeks, he’d reached out to Lucy to find out what he could about this Clark. The more he dug into what had happened in Smallville, the more he realized his first assessment of the situation had been wrong.

“Ah!”

Jamie yanked his finger again, and he looked down at him with a smile. “You need a rattle, little guy.”

“He’s got all these toys but would rather grab fingers, arms, and hair,” Lois said wryly.

“Stubborn, are we?”

Jamie gave him a slow smile.

Sam grinned. “He smiled at me.”

“Uh-huh...” Lois said in a skeptical tone.

“Well, sure he...”

Then it hit his nostrils.

Lucy laughed, “Here, I’ll take him.”

A glass test tube filled with blood was placed in his hands. Sam Lane looked up at Darryl in confusion. “What is this?”

“Blood sample from a subject we’re testing. I want you to run some tests and let us know if you come across anything... abnormal.”

“Okay.” Sam agreed, taking the test tube from him.

“Get *OUT!*” Lois snapped angrily, holding the small baby to her chest as she wiped her tear-stained cheeks.

“All I’m saying is it’s time to face facts. You have a child to think about, and you can’t continue to—” Sam Lane found himself being pushed toward the door to his daughter’s apartment.

“You need to go,” Lucy said, opening the door.

“I don’t understand why you haven’t declared him dead. All the evidence points to it. Lois, you’re denying yourself and your son so many resources by...”

The hard wooden door slammed in his face.

“...continuing to live in denial.” He finished softly. He raised his hand to knock on the door but then stopped mid-swing. “Goodbye Jamie.” He whispered softly, turning down the hallway to leave.

“I want some answers, and I want them now.” Sam laid the test tube down on Darryl’s desk.

“Something... *wrong?*” Darryl edged cautiously.

“Where did you get the blood sample?” Sam asked, advancing toward him.

“Why does it matter?”

Irritated with Darryl’s lack of response Sam grabbed him by the collar, “I swear to God I’ll snap you like a twig you maggot! You come near my family again, and I will unleash a living hell on you that will rival any nightmare you ever thought, dreamt, or imagined!!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about!” Darryl snapped angrily. “Don’t you dare threaten me! I’m the one in charge. I’m the one calling the shots!”

“Not *anymore,*” Sam growled angrily, throwing him to the ground.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Darryl asked uneasily.

“Seems I have a new supervisor,” Sam said smugly. “You didn’t get the memo?” He asked, watching Darryl’s face twitch in surprise. “Seems you’ve been demoted.”

Present Day...

Lois stared at her father uneasily, “I thought you said this Darryl character was in charge.”

Sam looked down at his hands, “He was. I was duped... manipulated into thinking I had the upper hand.” He took a deep breath, “Lois, I would never do anything to hurt you. You have to know that.”

Lois wiped the tears in her eyes, “But you did!” Her voice cracked as she spoke to him. “You did every day for five years. You went to work for Intergang and you didn’t tell anyone. You performed tests that are probably the reason Clark still has nightmares from his time in captivity. You hurt me. You hurt him. You hurt Jamie. In all of this you hurt Jon.”

“I didn’t know it was connected to you or Clark.” Sam pleaded with her. “Do you really think I would purposely hurt

you?”

“I don’t know!” Lois shouted at him. “I don’t know anything anymore. You keep hiding stuff from me. You said you got rid of the meteorite and the files Intergang had on us and then we find out that’s not true when someone breaks into your vault. All I know is I can’t trust you right now.”

“Then let me prove it to you,” Sam said, taking a step toward her.

“How?” Lois asked hoarsely.

“I know what’s causing the nightmares.” Sam said gruffly. “And I think I know how to stop them.”

Lex Luthor stared at the empty concrete walls that once stored the remains of his satellite. The secure eight inch lead didn’t look to be tampered with, but the empty space was unmistakable. The Annihilator had been almost operational when he’d left it. There were only two other individuals besides himself that knew of its location.

“I thought he was one of the good guys.” a woman spoke into the camera. “I can understand helping keep law and order, but he went too far. You saw what he did! That man is someone’s son. Someone’s brother...”

“Turn that garbage off!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom.

Jimmy quickly jumped up and turned the television off then caught up with Perry, “You don’t think there’s anything to what they’re saying, Chief?”

Perry gave Jimmy a disapproving look. “I think if you give anyone a camera and fifteen minutes of fame, they’ll say whatever they think will get them the most camera time.” He grunted disapprovingly. “The Daily Planet isn’t going to waste one drop of ink on this smear campaign against Superman. The footage of the two Supermen and Lois and Clark’s piece this morning on the double should be enough coverage.” He pointed to Jimmy’s desk. “Now, don’t you have a job to do?”

“I’m sure your Mr. Foot can wait, Chief.” Jimmy pleaded. “This is *big!*”

“Get on it!” Perry wagged his finger at Jimmy before turning toward his next unsuspecting victim, “Simms! What are you still doing here? You’re supposed to be covering the EPRAD launch this afternoon.”

“I’m on it, Chief!” Ralph called out, grabbing his things and heading for the elevator.

“The first launch to repair equipment on the Messenger will be taking place this afternoon. Three shuttles have been sent with supplies to Space Station Prometheus since Superman’s miraculous rescue of the launch last year. This is the first repair launch that will require the shuttle to be manned...”

Clark reached over to mute the television, setting the remote on the coffee table. He turned his attention to Jon who was sleeping in his bassinet next to the couch. After their trip to STAR Labs and sending their story to Perry that morning on the Superman double he decided to work from home the rest of the day. He still felt the need to stay close to home after Lois’ encounter with the double yesterday. He knew she was still slightly rattled by the experience.

“You don’t want to watch the launch?” Lois’ voice penetrated

his thoughts, and he turned back to see her fresh from her shower, standing behind him.

He smiled, watching as she took the seat next to him. “I figured we got enough excitement the first time around.”

“He’s still sleeping?” Lois asked, peering over him to see Jon’s sleeping figure.

“Yeah, this growth spurt is really taking a toll on him.” He commented with a chuckle.

“It could be worse.” Lois acknowledged quietly.

“What’s up?” He asked, nudging her shoulder with his hand.

“I went to talk to my dad after we left STAR Labs,” Lois explained slowly, staring down at her hands.

“Your dad?” Clark wrinkled his eyebrow at her. “I thought you said you didn’t trust him after he lost the Intergang files.”

“I know.” Lois sighed, running a hand through her hair, “but I just thought maybe he could provide some answers to what’s been going on with you since Dr. Klein can’t.”

“And did he?” Clark asked, knowing from her face that he had to have some idea if she was this torn up about what she was going to say.

“Yes,” Lois barely whispered out. “He thinks he can create a cure for what Trask did to you.”

“He would know, right?” Clark muttered bitterly.

“The only problem is in order to do that he’d have to get a blood sample.” Lois explained, not meeting his eyes.

“In other words, purposefully expose myself to the meteorite and weaken me so he can experiment on me even more?” Clark guessed with a look of disgust. “Thank you, but no. I’ve had my fill of unwanted needles to last me a lifetime.”

“I know.” Lois nodded, “Just think about it though, okay?” She rested her head on his shoulder. “With everything that’s going on, you don’t need to be out of control.” She looked up at him with a sideways glance. “We need you at a hundred percent.”

“I’m fine.” He acknowledged. “Now that I know where the memories are coming from I can control it.”

“Are you sure?” Lois asked cautiously.

“No, but it’s safer than your dad’s plan,” Clark said, tightening his arm around Lois.

“In a surprising turn of events, the once favored current governor is finding himself on the losing end of the poll once again. It seems Metropolis is ready for a new governor.” The newscaster spoke into the camera as the number for the poll scrolled across the screen.

“Seems everything is falling into place,” Mayson said, shifting her chair to face her guest. “Numbers look good.”

Bill Jr. Let a smile spread across his face and leaned back in his chair, reading the latest polling numbers. “I can’t thank you enough for your support in all of this, Mayson. I know your boss wasn’t thrilled with having the ADA choose sides.”

Mayson shrugged, “I look at it as helping out a friend.” She stood up. “Can I walk you out?”

Bill Jr. stood to his feet and they made their way out of the District Attorney’s office. “I heard your name got tossed in the ring as being the next District Attorney. It seems I’m not the only one with political ambitions.”

Mayson blushed, “I had nothing to do with that.”

“No of course not,” Bill Jr. commented, pushing the call

button for the elevator. “You’ve just had the best conviction rate of all the ADAs in this office.”

“It helps when I’ve got good police work and don’t have the interference of a certain someone in my investigations.” Mayson quipped. “Once the launch happens, hopefully we can be rid of that menace.”

“The launch?” Bill Jr asked, his face falling into a frown.

“What’s happening at the launch?”

Mayson’s face twisted, “I think you may want to talk to your dad.”

“Maybe I will.” Bill Jr. stepped on the elevator. “Thanks for lunch.” He waved to her as the doors closed behind him. He didn’t even notice the tall man in a black suit on the other side of the elevator until it was too late.

“What are these?” Asabi asked, looking over Lex Luthor’s shoulder. The desk was covered in file after file of Bureau 39’s case study on ‘the alien’ as they labeled Superman. Unfortunately, there was nothing detailing who the alien was or where he came from.

“I must be missing something.” Lex fumed, tapping his hand against the wood grain desk angrily.

“Maybe there is nothing here,” Asabi suggested, polishing the barrel of his revolver with a cloth.

“Dr. Lane wouldn’t have gone to such lengths to remove these files from Intergang’s possession if there was nothing here.” Lex pointed out. “I’m going to find out what it is and I’m going to expose it.”

Three Months Ago...

“Darryl’s last message to my father was that he’d found a leak.” Bill Church Jr. said as he twirled a flash drive in his hand. “There were only four people alive at the time that knew about Bureau 39’s existence. Me. My father. Darryl...and Dr. Sam Lane.”

“You think the missing files have information on Superman?” Lex asked, taking a puff of his cigar as a menacing look crossed his face. “I worked with Trask from time to time. He seemed very reluctant to share his knowledge of this...alien with anyone. I doubt he kept records.”

“Then why did the files go missing?” Bill Jr. pointed out.

“Why did Dr. Lane go missing?”

“You’re a bad shot?” Lex guessed, humor in his tone. “I’m not seeing what this has to do with taking over Metropolis. Bureau 39 is gone. Trask is gone. The other meteorite samples you collected are gone.”

“What if they’re not?” Bill Jr. asked, plugging the flash drive into his computer. He waited for the two devices to connect and then opened the folder where a single .wav file was located. He double clicked on it and allowed the audio file to play.

“If you’re hearing this it means I’ve met my demise. Everything I’ve built within the organization is crumbling. One of the most trusted scientists working on Project K has betrayed us. Everything is gone. The meteorite. The video surveillance. The case studies. If anything ha-happens to me know, I did everything in my power to stop hi-him. Sam Lane will pay.”

The audio cut out into a garbled screech of static.

“You think Dr. Lane stashed everything somewhere?” Lex

Luthor asked, fingering the grain on the wood desk as he spoke.

"I think if I were a scientist working on a project for over five years I wouldn't just throw all my research away." Bill Jr. pointed out.

Rollie Vale looked over his shoulder as he approached the large double doors. He was doing the right thing. He had to choose a side. He just hoped it was the right side. The doors opened, and a tall man with a large pot belly and balding hairline opened the door.

"You must be Dr. Vale." He motioned to the open office. "Come in."

"Thank you, Mr. Church." Rollie nodded, stepping inside.

"Your message seemed urgent," Church noted, taking a seat behind his desk.

"It is." Vale took a deep breath.

"Well, out with it." Church prompted.

"Your son is trying to kill you." Vale blurted out. He stared at Church as his face went from shock to anger then to menace all in a matter of seconds.

"Oh, really?" Church leaned back in his chair. "What makes you say that?"

"Because he hired me to do it," Vale said, pulling out a tape recorder. He hit play, and Bill Church Jr's voice filled the air.

"The old man has had his turn. I thought all I had to do was wait till he went into retirement but after the divorce, it's like he just won't let go. I'm going to force him out. Make a drug that will deteriorate his mind, his memory, and slowly kill all his brain cells. Once he's proven he can't run Intergang effectively, I'll be there to step in and push him out. Then for kicks, I'll put him out of his misery."

"Put me out of my misery?" Church scowled angrily. "Me?!"

"He seems to think he's entitled to Intergang." Vale supplied uneasily.

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Dr. Vale,"

Church said uneasily. "I can trust you to keep this between the two of us?"

"Yes, Mr. Church."

"Are you sure this is the right place?" Lex Luthor asked, peering through the long hallway of storage rooms.

After researching Sam Lane's history, it was found he had a number of infidelities in his past. One of the nurses he'd had an on again off again affair with had provided the address of one of his secret apartments. Breaking in hadn't been hard. After searching the apartment, they found a pair of keys to a storage facility a few miles away.

"There it is." Bill Jr. pointed to the sign that read '303' on the door.

Lex took the key and unlocked the door, pulling the metal door open. The room was filled with several large samples of glowing meteorites of different colors. A file cabinet and computer that seemed to come from Intergang's lab.

"Bingo." Lex mused.

Present Day...

"Mayson, you made it!" Bill Church announced as the young blonde approached in a dark emerald dress.

"Bill," She gave him a peck on the cheek, "Thanks for getting me a seat." She looked around the gallery of many familiar faces. "Quite the crowd." She said, slightly intimidated.

"I figured with all your help it only made sense for you to be here and watch history be made." He pointed to the space shuttle.

"The satellite's onboard?" Mayson asked.

"Along with the meteorite." Bill Church nodded. "Just think, once the satellite is in place we'll have the power to take Superman out with the push of a button."

Mayson wore an uneasy smile as she watched a flicker of something she'd never seen in Bill Church's eyes cross his face. It seemed almost sinister.

Lex tapped away at the keyboard, sifting through file after file that he'd seen dozens of times before. He let out a frustrated sigh. He was missing something. Months of research into the Bureau 39 files had left him frustrated and angry. He knew the answer was here. He just had to find it.

He went to the file browser and sorted the files by type instead of date. Many of them were documents, but one of them was a video file. It didn't have a name that was recognizable. Just numeric. The file appeared to be set to hidden. He right clicked on the file and changed it to visible. The screen prompted him for a password.

He tried 'Lois Lane' and received an error.

He tried 'Ellen Lane' and received an error.

Then the image of the young baby in Sam Lane's arms on the desktop with the name 'Jamie' printed on his hat caught Lex's attention. He smiled to himself. "Too easy." He muttered to himself, but tried the name anyway.

'Access Granted.'

He opened the file, and a video footage began to play of Sam Lane and Darryl.

<< "You didn't really think we'd let the alien go without having some sort of surveillance on him, did you? When will you invalids realize you don't make the rules. I don't make the rules. The organization makes the rules. Did you really think the alien just showed up on Earth and decided....HmMMM....there's an asteroid I should stop it from hitting that planet?"

"He saved all our lives including yours!"

"He's a LIAR!!! What you're too STUPID to realize, Dr. Lane is this....he's been right under your nose the whole time...."

"You're out of your mind!"

"I'm out of my mind? Well, maybe you don't mind....I guess that's okay. We can just keep monitoringYour daughter will continue to star in all the footage..."

"You get those cameras out of her and Clark's apartment now...They have nothing to do with this!"

"Oh, but they do, Sam. They do. That's your daughter allowing that alien to put his hands on her. That's your daughter agreeing to carry his child. That's your daughter with" >>

Carrying his child.

His daughter.

Lois Lane.

Clark Kent.

<< "Yes, the alien, also known as Superman is, in reality, the adopted son of Jonathan and Martha Kent, Clark Kent." >>

"Clark Kent?" The idea seemed preposterous. Was it really

that easy? Could he really have known Superman's identity this whole time and not realized it?

He scanned in an image of Clark Kent and then one of Superman and compared them side by side. Remove the glasses and change the hair...

"Superman." Lex snarled with a sinister smile.

Lucy looked over the bullpen of the newsroom, scanning for the familiar face amidst the crowd of reporters. She frowned when she didn't see the face she was looking for.

The sound of Perry White's voice rang in her ears, "Drop this off at Marie's. Tell her it's for me."

Lucy saw the defeated expression on Jimmy's face as he exited Perry's office with a green box in his hand. She shook her head, recognizing the signs of another project assigned by Perry that Jimmy didn't feel met up to his qualifications.

"Jimmy!" She waved her hand in the air to get his attention.

Jimmy mumbled something to Perry then turned to her and smiled, grabbing his jacket from his desk before meeting her by the elevator. "Hey, Luce, I thought I was picking you up."

Lucy shrugged, "I needed to get out of the lab. Dr. Hamilton has been in meetings all day." She turned to press the call button on the elevator. "I don't know what it is, but I kept getting the feeling like I was being watched."

"Watched?" Jimmy asked, stepping into the elevator with her.

"You know that feeling you get when you get goosebumps on the back of your neck?" Lucy prompted. Jimmy gave her a humorous expression, and she groaned, frustrated with him not taking her seriously. "I don't know. I just feel like I'm being watched."

The elevator pinged and they stepped out into the lobby. "I'm sure no one's watching you." Jimmy said good-naturedly. "It's been an intense few weeks, Luce."

"Whatever," Lucy sniffed, "Don't believe me." She looked at the box in his hand. "What's that?"

Jimmy's face fell into a sarcastic smile, "Big assignment from the Chief. Watch needs to be repaired."

"Didn't Clark and Pete talk to you about standing up to him?" Lucy asked as they made their way through the revolving doors. Jimmy's eyes did a sideways glance, and Lucy wagged her finger at him. "Don't you dare start. He's a good man and I won't have you talking like that in front of me."

Jimmy seemed to be having an eternal debate before forcing a smile. "I didn't say anything."

After their last fight, she'd gotten him to agree not to talk any more about his suspicions in front of her. For the most part, he seemed to hold up his end of the agreement, but she could still feel the tension between them whenever Clark's name came up.

"We should get going," Lucy said, pointing to the parking garage.

"Let's go." Jimmy nodded, following her across the street.

Unnoticed by either Jimmy or Lucy was a tall man dressed in black. He held a photograph of Lucy Lane up and compared it to the young woman on the street in front of him. He watched them walk a few feet ahead of him then began to follow.

"That's it, folks. EPRAD's first manned launch of the year has

successfully taken off." the newscaster said as the screen filled with the image of the space shuttle's thrusters being fired.

"At least this time we know Lex Luthor won't be trying to sabotage the launch," Lois commented, leaning back against her husband's shoulder.

"Don't remind me," Clark remarked, shaking his head as he finished up the last of the story he was typing up for Perry. "I think this one's just about ready. What do you think?" He handed the laptop to her to look it over.

She took the laptop and began scanning through the article he had pulled up in the word processor, adding a few notes as she went along. After reaching the end, she nodded, "I think that's everything." She handed the laptop back to him.

He nodded and pulled up the email application to send the article to Perry, "Hopefully, that's the last we see of that double." He said, hitting the send button.

"Something tells me he's not going to just disappear with his tail between his legs," Lois said, fiddling with a stray string on her sweater.

"Maybe not, but I just hope he doesn't try and hurt you again," Clark replied softly.

Lois sighed, looking up at him. His double's words ran through her mind for a moment as she thought of how to respond.

<< "I would never hurt you, Lois." >>

<< "I'm the part of him he wants to deny." >>

"He's a part of you." She pointed out gently.

"He kidnapped you." Clark shot back, tightening an arm around her.

"I know." She said softly, uncertain how to respond. "I guess I'm just trying to make sense out of this just like you are."

"I've never been so scared." He said, pressing his lips against her temple. "I didn't know where to look or what to do. I panicked."

"I'm fine." She reminded him.

"No, you're not." He pointed out, tilting her chin to look at him. "You put on a brave front, but you're not fine."

She was thoughtful for a moment until finally responding. "I know. I'm not fine. I'm scared."

"Me too." He whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

Their lips had barely touched when she felt him tense in her arms. She pulled away, realizing he was needed elsewhere. "What is it?" She asked.

"There's a fire on the bridge. They need help evacuating." He said with a faraway look on his face.

"Go." She gave him a peck on the cheek before he stood up. "Be careful."

"I will." He looked back at her with a warning tone, "Don't open the door for anyone you don't know." She nodded her agreement, and he disappeared.

Lucy stared at the broken door where her apartment door lay in shambles. The words 'die' were spray painted on the wall and her apartment had been ransacked. She fumbled with her phone in her hand as she waited for the police to arrive.

She heard sirens outside and breathed a sigh of relief. It hadn't been her imagination. It was real. Someone was after her. Someone had been in her apartment.

"This place looks familiar."

She turned around in surprise, hearing the familiar voice of Captain Raymond behind her. “Cap-Captain Raymond?”

“I thought I told you to call me, Danny,” He nodded to her, “Ms. Lane.”

“What are you doing here?” She asked, watching as the team of officers began to close off the scene of her apartment with tape.

“Special crimes unit.” He explained. “Lieutenant Harris put us on it as soon as she saw the address.” He winked at her, “I think she just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Thanks,” Lucy said shakily.

“Anything missing?” He asked.

“My sense of security,” Lucy whispered hoarsely.

“We’ll find the guys responsible. Don’t worry.” He reassured her.

“Superman must go!”

“Down with Superman!”

“We don’t need a Super-Bully!”

The chanting could be heard for miles as Clark held the two beams together, melting the two pieces together. He listened intently as the officers and first responders worked to get everyone off of the bridge.

The chanting continued to grate on his nerves as he heard the very people he swore to protect turn against him so easily. Every channel and every station was talking about what his double had done yesterday. No one tried to ask him what had happened. No one tried to give him the benefit of the doubt. Though he knew it wasn’t something he could explain without evidence, it hurt to know the city he loved and protected could turn on him so easily.

He felt a jolt behind him, and a familiar voice hung in the air in a dark tone, “You really think saving them is going to change their opinion?”

He turned to see his double hovering behind him. “What are you doing here?”

“Seeing how long it’s going to take you to admit to yourself what you really want to do.” He taunted.

“They need my help.” He growled.

“They don’t deserve it.” His double countered.

Lois heard the hammering at her door and opened it. “Lucy?” She saw her sister in tears and quickly ushered her inside. “Lucy, what happened?”

“Someone tore my apartment up.” She said shakily.

Behind her was Captain Raymond stood with another officer by his side. “A special unit has been assigned to the case, but we’re putting a unit outside to help keep an eye on her as well.”

Lois nodded, ushering them inside and closing the door behind them. “What’s going on?”

“From what we can tell this is a veiled threat, but considering the damage and the notes left in her apartment we have reason to believe we could be dealing with a hitman associated with some of the murders that have taken place earlier this year.” the officer explained.

“The unsolved deaths that were connected to Intergang.” Lucy said shakily.

“No fingerprints. No witnesses.” Captain Raymond explained. “Safest thing to do is stay where people are. Don’t go anywhere alone.”

“I work in a crime lab.” Lucy pointed out.

“Your protective unit will escort you to and from work.”

Captain Raymond instructed. “You don’t leave without your unit.”

“Fine.” Lucy huffed angrily.

“I mean it.” He added.

“I’ll make sure she complies.” Lois cut Lucy off before she could add anything else.

“See that she does.” Captain Raymond instructed.

Lois watched the two officers leave, then turned to her sister, “What happened to you staying out of trouble?”

“I can’t help it if I become a target.” Lucy began to pace around the living room. “I don’t know what to do. What do you do when you become a target? I mean...”

“Lucy, calm down,” Lois interjected. “Everything’s going to be fine.”

“Someone’s trying to kill me,” Lucy whispered tearfully.

“I’m not going to let that happen,” Lois promised, reaching out to hug her sister. It was a sharp, piercing pain. She didn’t have time to register the pain as she felt her body go numb. She heard her sister scream before the room went dark.

“They don’t deserve it.” His double countered.

Clark did his best to ignore the statement. Everything about his double angered him. His attitude toward the people of Metropolis. The way he’d kidnapped Lois. Everything angered him.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” He quipped.

“They love you when you benefit them, but in reality, they fear you. You’re different...alien.” his double taunted him.

“Enough!” Clark growled.

“Yes, enough!” Another familiar voice spoke as the metallic face of Johnny Corbin hung down face to face with him.

Immediately Clark felt the nauseating sensation wash over him. There was only one substance that made him sick like that...

“Metallo,” Clark growled as he fell against the concrete beams below.

Lucy felt a cold object against the back of her head. She did her best not to react as she began to take in her surroundings. She could feel the pain in the back of her head from where she’d been hit. The cold object disappeared and she suppressed the urge to sigh in relief. She didn’t dare move and give away the advantage she had at the moment. Whoever it was appeared to think she was unconscious.

Lois.

She remembered her sister going limp in her arms. Then a hard blow to the back of her head.

Jon.

Where was Jon?

“Find the baby.” a man’s voice she didn’t recognize spoke.

As carefully as she could, Lucy fluttered her eyes open, peering into the brightly lit townhome. She had to find Jon before they did.

Who were they?

She tilted her head to the side ever so slightly and suppressed a gasp when she recognized Daniel Raymond standing with another familiar looking man. ‘The man that tried to push Lois off the roof.’ she recalled mentally.

They'd never caught him.

Daniel Raymond was a dirty cop.

She suppressed her revulsion at the idea that he'd been trying to pursue her months ago when she and Jimmy had been having problems. She'd actually danced with him. She'd actually...

'Don't think about that now.' she told herself, watching as the two men disappeared into the kitchen.

It came out of nowhere.

The green glowing beam that shot out of Metallo's chest and into Clark, knocking him down. It hurt like nothing he'd ever experienced before. He looked to the side and saw his double was suffering just as much.

"A two for one deal." Metallo cheered happily as he approached Clark. "I'm going to enjoy this."

"Corbin, you don't want to...do this." He tried to reason, looking up at the barely stable bridge he'd been working on repairing.

"Oh, but I do." Corbin shot a beam of green at the bridge causing it to crumble. "You almost killed me last time. I'm not going to make the same mistake again."

"No..." Clark heard a crack above him and shot a beam of heat vision to where Metallo had separated the two beams.

It wasn't enough.

Mayson looked over the paperwork in her hand, scanning Bill Church's contract. For the most part it covered everything. She made a few notes on errors she found in the margin. A spelling error here or question there. She was just about done when she came across a clause that had been added to the contract that seemed out of place.

'Church Network accepts no liability for the actions taken by users....'

Mayson frowned as she read the statement again and again. "Why would they need a Release of Liability clause?" she wondered aloud.

The room was dark.

It hurt.

Her face. Her body. Her limbs. Even her eyes...

It all hurt.

Lois let out a muffled groan as she forced herself to open her eyes. A bright fluorescent light shone brightly in her eyes. She reached her hand up to cover them but found her arms unmoving. She felt a pain against her wrists as she tried to move. Her fingers moved up, feeling the edge of the rope fibers against her wrists.

'Where am I?' she tried to pull her head out of the fog it was in as she looked around the room.

"Regaining your wits I see." the smooth voice of her captor spoke as he neared her. She strained her neck to see his face. She felt a lump in her throat form when she saw him step into the light.

"You." she gasped in surprise.

"I know it's been some time, Lois, but I'd really thought I'd left some sort of lasting impression with you," Lex said, running a hand across her cheek.

She flinched away from his grasp. "You won't get away with this." She snapped angrily.

"Oh, I beg to differ," he said with a sinister expression on his face, pulling out a small lead box. His face scowled as he approached, "All that time wondering how you could choose a hack like Kent over me...even in death."

His eyes darkened, and she glared at him, daring him to make the wrong move. "People will be looking for me. Clark will..."

Lex chuckled an eerie laugh that sent a chill down her spine. "Ah, yes, Kent. So many questions and so many clues. Now it all makes sense."

"What makes sense?" She asked, suppressing a gasp when she saw the green glowing stone in his hands.

Lex's face pursed into a satisfied smile as he leaned in and hissed, "Now why would the tenacious Lois Lane be afraid of a rock?" She flinched as she felt his breath against her face. "Maybe because you know it's more than just a rock? A meteorite? A deadly meteorite...to someone important?" She didn't react, hoping to keep her reaction in check as he continued. "No reaction, hmm? Well, you're certainly loyal. I'll give you that." He stepped away from her, and she sighed in relief. "I'll prove my theory when he arrives."

"When who arrives?" She asked, uncertain if she wanted to know the answer.

"It's only a matter of time before Superman finds you." Lex mused, tossing the green glowing stone in his hand as he paced in front of her.

"What makes you think he'll come for me?" she asked shakily.

"Why wouldn't he?" Lex asked with a sinister smile. "Hard to stay away when both his wife and child have been abducted."

Lucy stared at the baby monitor on the coffee table from where she lay at the foot of the stairs. She could hear the two men talking about 'the baby' and 'the boss' orders. Who the boss was she wasn't sure, but she knew she had to get herself and Jon out of here.

Keeping her eyes on the corridor where the kitchen was, she began to crawl backward, nearing the staircase. She let out a sigh of relief when she didn't see either man exit from the kitchen. She looked back at the stairs. It was a straight shot. She just had to find Jon and call for help. Mustering up all the energy she could she stood up and started up the stairs. She made it up three stairs when she felt two cold hands grab her from behind.

"Going somewhere?" the familiar voice of Daniel Raymond hissed in her ear. All nerves went on edge as she felt his grip on her.

"Get your hands ...off of me." She struggled to free herself from his grasp.

"The boss won't appreciate any loose ends." He tightened his grasp on her arm, pulling a pistol up and pressing the barrel against her neck, "It seems I underestimated you," the barrel pressed hard against her throat as he hissed in her ear.

She hocked a spit wad and spat in his face, smiling to herself when his grip on her loosened. Before he could wipe the fluid off his face, she delivered a hard blow to his stomach then another behind his knees, causing him to lose balance and drop the pistol. She reached down to grab it and held him at bay, "Seems you've underestimated me again, Captain."

"And you've underestimated me." She felt a cold object press

against her back. “Drop the weapon.”

Clark stared at the bridge above him, willing it to mold together as it had once before. It was no use. As hard as he tried, his heat vision wasn't enough. Nothing was enough.

Then it happened.

Out of nowhere another beam of heat vision joined his.

'You get the left side I'll get the right.' the thought entered his mind, but it didn't feel like it was his own. *'The double.'* he reasoned to himself, focusing on what he was doing before he felt another hard blow from the green meteorite beam.

“Do you really think it's going to be that easy?” Metallo taunted. “You destroyed my chance at a normal life.” He pointed to the metal face and body he was left with.

“I didn't...do...anything.” Clark struggled to hold his breath as Corbin opened the chest compartment, revealing the poisonous green rock once more. It hurt. His body ached. He looked to the side and could see his double was struggling with the same symptoms.

'I've got to get rid of it.' he thought to himself.

A memory popped into his head. An experiment Trask had done on the meteorite years ago. Too much heat caused it to explode.

'Heat.' he thought to himself. He aimed his heat vision at the meteorite, hoping his double would catch on to what he was doing. A few moments later another beam of heat vision joined his. The light from the meteorite changed from green to red then to black and then white before a loud explosion filled the air.

He took a shallow breath, looking to the side where the other Clark sat, hanging his head in his hand. He then looked to Metallo where the metal chest cavity that once had been glowing green from the meteorite was a melted, discombobulated mess with a bright white stone inside his chest. The radiation that had once been there was gone.

“Is he?” the other Clark asked, standing to his feet.

“I don't know.” Clark shook his head.

“Help! Superman!” the sound of Lucy's cry for help reached both of their ears.

“Go.” the other Clark ordered. “I'll get him to STAR Labs. You take care of Lucy. Lois might be in danger.”

Clark nodded, not allowing himself to ponder the situation any longer. He had to admit; it was helpful having someone to help on rescues. Though when he imagined having help, he always imagined it to be his son, not a less than ethical part of him that had been split from him by a meteorite.

'Help! Superman!' Lucy cried trying to run up the stairs and away from Captain Raymond and the mysterious man that had overpowered her.

'Jon.' she had to get to Jon. She had to....

“Your time just ran out.” the mysterious man said, grabbing her from behind.

She closed her eyes, preparing herself for the worst when a burst of cold air brushed against her face.

“I'll say,” Superman's stern voice came from behind her.

She looked over her shoulder and sighed in relief when she saw the very angry face of Superman hoisting both men in his arms with ease several feet off the ground. “Oh, thank God!”

“Ms. Lane, are you all right?” He asked, not taking his eyes off of the two men.

“I need to check on my nephew. I need to...” She stammered shakily.

He looked up for a split second. “He's sleeping.” He said quickly, his face full of concern. “Where's Lois?”

“I don't know,” Lucy said in tears.

Dr. Klein looked at the sample under the microscope, tightening the knob and zooming in. “Definitely a human organism.” He looked up at Dr. Hamilton. “I'm not sure what to tell you.”

“It was a prototype, Dr. Klein...for a proposal to the military.” Dr. Hamilton paced in front of him. “It was never meant to...”

“Obviously you weren't given all the information.” Dr. Klein said with a concerned expression. “Who brought the plans to you?”

“I wasn't ever given a name.” Dr. Hamilton said shamefully. “I know his face. If I ever saw him again, I'd...”

“Dr. Klein!”

They both looked up and saw Superman carrying the metal body of Metallo in his arms.

“Superman!” Dr. Klein rushed to his feet to help him. “What happened?”

“I don't know,” Superman said remorsefully. “I was trying to stop the radiation from the meteorite, and then this happened.” He pointed to the white stone in Metallo's chest.

Dr. Klein peered at the stone and looked back up at Superman, “I'd have to examine it further, but that doesn't look to be the meteorite you described.”

“Can you help him?” He pointed to the powered down Metallo.

“I can try.” Dr. Klein assured.

Mayson picked up her phone and began to dial, uncertain if she was being paranoid about what she'd uncovered. Why would a cable network company need a liability clause in their contract? Why would Cost Mart? Why would Bill Church require a liability clause in a contract for a satellite weapon only meant to hurt Superman?

It didn't make any sense.

Nothing made sense.

The more she thought about it, the more she felt Bill Church wasn't being upfront about what he was doing. That bothered her.

“Yes, Cyber Crimes Unit? This is Mayson Drake.”

Lucy held Jon in her arms, bouncing him as she tried to soothe him. After Superman had left to deliver Captain Raymond and the man finally identified as Joey Bermuda to the police station, she'd found her nephew waking up. After giving him a bottle and changing him, she did her best to keep him calm but was finding herself failing miserably at the task.

“I know sweetie I know.” She cried, setting the phone down. “I've left a message everywhere, but I can't find your daddy. I don't know where your mommy is, but I promise you we're going to find them.”

Jon wailed louder.

“I know I suck at the pep talks.” Lucy whimpered to herself.

A sonic boom could be heard outside. She carried Jon downstairs with her. Hopefully, Superman had some news for her. When she arrived downstairs, she found both Clark and Superman in the living room.

“Clark!” she ran up to him, offering him a sideways hug.

“Are you all right?” He asked, taking Jon from her.

Lucy shook her head, unsure of how to respond. “I’m so sorry.”

“Captain Raymond has been turned over to Internal Affairs for investigation. Inspector Henderson assured me he would be detained without bail for at least twenty-four hours.” Superman said, looking at her with concern.

“Any sign of Lois?” Lucy asked.

“He, uh,” Clark shook his head. “He’s been looking.” He was quiet before he finally asked her. “Lucy, what happened?”

Lucy looked down shamefully, “I came over. We were talking, and the next thing I remember was her going unconscious in my arms and something hitting me from behind. I woke up, and she was gone, and those two were talking about finding the baby...” She burst into tears. “I’m so sorry, Clark.”

“You protected my son, Lucy,” Clark reminded her gently. “Given the circumstances, you did everything you could.”

“Why would Captain Raymond be involved in kidnapping Lois?” Superman asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t even know who that Joey Bermuda was.” Lucy shrugged, “except he was the same man that tried to attack Lois the night of Pete’s showing.”

“He’s involved in this up to his neck. I can feel it.” Clark muttered. “Did they say anything?”

“No, I heard that one guy...Bermuda something? He kept referring to a boss.”

“Boss?” both Clark and Superman exchanged a look.

“Yeah, does that mean anything to you?” Lucy asked.

Dinner was exquisite. The food was the best money could buy. The atmosphere was something Bill Church could only dream of as a child. “You understand no one can know about this.” He told his guest.

Asabi wore a satisfied smile as he sipped his wine.

“Discretion is one of my strong suits, Mr. Church.”

“This young woman has become a problem for my son. When he comes to you and tries to have you kill her, you bring her to me.” Bill Church instructed.

“Of course, Mr. Church,” Asabi nodded his understanding. A quiet chirp came from his jacket, and Bill Church patted his jacket. “Left pocket,” Asabi instructed.

“This better be good news.” He spoke into the phone with a bark. After a few moments, he nodded and smiled. “The satellite’s in place? Yes, that will be all. I’ll let the president know.”

“The only boss that I’ve known of was Lex Luthor,” Superman said carefully.

“Who has been on the run for months.” Clark finished his thought for him as he stared down at Jon, nestled up against his chest with a sigh of relief.

“You think Lex Luthor has Lois?” Lucy asked in surprise.

“Why?”

“There’s no telling,” Superman said, sharing a look of

concern with Clark.

Clark nodded, understanding the silent message he was trying to send. “Lucy, do you think you could watch Jon for me while I help try and find Lois? There might be something in all our research that could help us find where he might have taken her.”

Lucy seemed uncertain but agreed. “Just bring her home.”

“I will,” Clark promised.

Henderson slammed six twelve-inch binders on the table one by one. “Joey Bermuda.” A smile spread across his face, and he took a chair across from the dark-haired man. “I’ve been waiting a long time for this.”

“Keep waiting.” Bermuda shot back. “I ain’t saying nothing without my lawyer.”

“Yeah, about that,” Henderson shrugged. “Seems Mr. Bender informed the captain you’re no longer represented by him.”

“What?!” Bermuda’s face went pale, and his eyes widened.

“He can’t do that to me!”

“He did,” Henderson said with a smug expression. “Hey, what can you do?”

“That low-life, scum sucking...”

Henderson grabbed him by the collar and pulled him to him, “You’re going to go away for a long time unless you start talking.”

“What do you want to know?” Bermuda asked.

“Where’s Lois Lane?” Henderson growled.

“Bermuda has failed the test.” Bill Church Jr. said, tapping his hand on his desk. “It’s time he was taken out. My men are working on taking care of Captain Raymond as well.”

“And the girl?” Asabi prompted.

“Make sure she disappears. I can’t have anyone pointing the finger at Intergang.” Bill Jr. looked at the television, showing his latest ad. “Who knew stealing an election would be so easy?”

“Yes, Mr. Church,” Asabi nodded.

“What do you think you’re doing?” His double chastised as Clark flew next to him, scanning the city.

“Looking for Lois.” He growled angrily, zeroing in on the cemetery where Luthor’s family was buried. Henderson said Bermuda had helped carry Lois to an old crypt with Luthor. If they could just find it...

“What do you think is going to happen when two Supermen show up to rescue Lois?” the double asked.

“Then Luthor will be double scared.” Clark snapped angrily. “Why don’t you worry about checking for where Lois is? This whole cemetery was built on top of a fallout shelter. I can’t see anything below ground.”

“Figures.” the double snorted. “Leave it to Luthor. You know you should have let me kill him when I had the chance.”

“I don’t kill.”

“Maybe you should start.”

“Maybe there’s a better way.” Clark shot back. “Maybe the answer isn’t always to hurt but to help despite everything.” He glared at his double. “You can’t solve everything by snuffing your enemy out.”

“You can’t solve everything by denying the urge to either.”

His double retorted as they came in to land.

“Are you done?” Clark growled. “As much fun as it is fighting with you, I need to find my wife.”

A flash of anger crossed his double’s face, “Not without me.”

“You want to help then help, but don’t get in my way.” Clark warned, “If anything happens to Lois...”

“You really think I’d do anything to hurt her?” his double challenged.

“I don’t know what to think.” Clark snapped, “I do know you go against everything I’ve ever been taught. I know you are reckless. I know you do more harm than good.”

“The same could be said about you.” his double shot back. “I do what I can on the information I have at the time. I protect the weak and enforce justice.”

“There is a better way.” Clark retorted.

“Better way or *your* way?” his double challenged.

“It’s not justice if you create an atmosphere of fear and hate.” Clark retorted.

“I told you before. I’m the part of you that you want to deny. The sooner you accept that part of you exists the sooner you can be at peace.”

“I’m nothing like you.”

“How long are you going to keep telling yourself that lie?” his double taunted.

“We’re wasting time,” Clark argued, stepping away from his double. He didn’t want to admit to thinking the things his double thought of, and he didn’t want to admit that sometimes fear was needed to enforce justice. He wanted to encourage people to do the right thing not scare them into it.

“There’s a part of you that knows I’m right.” His double taunted him. “You know you wanted to snap Luthor in half when he tried to hurt her...she was pregnant with Jamie when he sent that dirty cop after her.”

“Stop it.” Clark shook his head, unwilling to go where his double was dragging him.

“She was pregnant when she and Lucy were attacked, and she nearly died!” his double continued. “He cut off her oxygen. He scared her so much she wouldn’t touch another investigative piece until after Jamie died.”

“I said enough!” Clark growled angrily.

“He tried to break her!”

“No!”

“Yes, you know what you wanted to do to him. You’ve known it all along. You wanted to break him in half and make him as scared as she was. You wanted to scare him. You wanted to hurt him. You wanted him dead.”

“*Fine!*” Clark snapped angrily. “*Yes*, I wanted him to suffer, and I wanted him *dead!* *Wanting* it and *doing* it are two completely different things though.”

“Finally, the truth.” his double narrowed his eyes. “You’re just as damaged as me.”

“Except I know where the line between right and wrong is.” Clark countered.

“Do you?” his double paced around him, his cape swayed in the wind as he challenged him. “You think Luthor is going to let you just barge in and take her? No, he’s going to have a plan. He’s going to have guns. What are you prepared to do to stop him from hurting Lois? From hurting others?”

“I won’t kill.”

“Even if it’s the only way?” his double challenged.

“After a fierce battle by the cyborg many have dubbed, Metallo and not one...but TWO Supermen there has been a stir of mixed reactions to the city’s superhero.” the reporter said into the camera as she approached different people on the street.

“Where the heck did the second Superman come from?”

“I don’t know what to think. It’s like we don’t even know him anymore.”

“If he can do that to that Metallo creature, what’s stopping him from doing it to one of us?”

“He’s too powerful. No one should have that much power and...”

Pete clicked the television off and turned to Rachel. “I’ve had enough of the negative nancy patrol. How about you?”

Rachel tossed a rag at him after she finished wiping the last of the countertop. “I think everyone’s entitled to their opinion, but I don’t think they should necessarily voice that opinion.” She let out a huff and added, “Especially when that opinion is wrong.”

“How you holding up?” Pete asked gently noticing the signs of avoidance in her.

“Just dandy. Found out one of my guys has been feeding information to criminals and helping give away witness locations in major cases without anyone being the wiser, but yeah I’m great.” Rachel muttered.

“Rach, that’s not your fault.” Pete soothed, running a hand up and down her arm.

“He could have killed Lucy tonight, Pete. Killed her. How would I ever have been able to look Lois in the face again?” Rachel pressed and then added with unshed tears, “Or Clark?” She sniffed, “It’s my name, my reputation on the line.”

“I know.” Pete said softly. “The important thing is he was caught.”

“Thanks to Lucy.” Rachel pointed out.

Pete sensed there was more to Rachel’s bad mood than Captain Raymond being a dirty cop. “They’re going to find her.”

“What if they don’t?” Rachel asked.

“Nothing.” Clark said bitterly when he reached the bottom of the staircase at the end of the crypt.

“Of course not. Why would Luthor make it easy?” his double asked, looking around.

Clark took a step to try and leave when a message appeared on the far wall. The image of Lex Luthor’s face appeared on the screen and Clark did his best not to react to his enemy’s taunting.

“Did you really think it was going to be that easy? You really think I’d leave my fate in the hands of that brute?” Lex shook his head and spoke in a condescending tone, “Tsk tsk tsk, now-now Clark you should know me better than that.”

“What did he just say?” Clark asked, his ears perked up uncertain he’d heard Luthor right. Clark. He’d used his name.

“He knows who you are.” His double said firmly.

“It must be true. Brain over brawn. I mean, you have been standing there all of five minutes and still haven’t noticed the clue I’ve left you. The longer you wait, the less time your wife has to live.” Luthor taunted.

“Clue?” Clark asked, looking around the room when he spotted a lead-lined box in the crevice of the corridor. “There!”

"It's lead-lined." His double pointed out uneasily.

"He said it's a clue to find Lois." Clark retorted, reaching for the box.

"Don't open it." his double warned. "It's from Luthor. It could be a trap."

"I have to find Lois." Clark shot back, reaching for the lid of the box. At super-speed, his double threw the box to the other end of the corridor, burrowing a hole through the cement walls. Through the hole, they could see a glowing green radiation emit from the hole. "The meteorite."

"Maybe you should be a little more cautious?" his double shot back angrily.

The screen played another recording. "Did you really think it'd be that easy? From what my scientists have found this meteorite is deadly to anyone from the planet you called Krypton."

"How did he...?" Clark muttered aloud.

"Have a nice death, Superman." Luthor laughed.

"He knows." his double said again.

"He thinks he got me," Clark added.

"Us." the double corrected.

"How do we find Lois?" Clark asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Friez ran it four times. It's definitely embedded in the frequency." Mayson said with a long sigh.

"You better be careful with what you're doing, Mayson," Bill Henderson warned. "You understand how powerful Bill Church is."

"I can't just sit back and watch him do something like this either," Mayson said. "He's trying to control people with subliminal messages hidden in the frequency of the cable network and phone lines they've got hooked into most of Metropolis." She let out a long sigh, "What I can't figure out is why?"

"Have you had any unexplained anger toward anyone lately?" Henderson asked.

"Now that you mention it, I seem to recall not liking Superman very much." Mayson pondered aloud. "I can't understand why though."

"Could be the connection." Henderson reasoned. "You're going to need more than a hunch and IT analysis to prove it though."

"I know," Mayson said with a firm expression. "That's where you come in."

"Me?" Henderson asked.

Lois looked around the room, feeling her head still in a fog as she struggled with the knots tying her hands behind her back. Across the room, she could see Lex working on something. His head was buried in the computer on the desk.

"What are you doing?" Lois snapped angrily, fidgeting as she rubbed the edge of the rope against the dull edge of the chair, hoping to cut the binds. "Where am I?"

Lex chuckled, "You never were one to dance around. Right to the point." He stood and walked to a television set on the wall. The coverage showed a satellite being placed on the Prometheus Space Station by the astronauts sent up by EPRAD.

"I don't understand," Lois shook her head.

"Ever wonder why I was so insistent on replacing

Prometheus' Space Station last year?" Lex prompted, a smile spread across his face.

"I figured money and power were two good incentives." She shot back with a disapproving frown.

"True, but the money in medicine isn't anything compared to the money from developing military weapons." Lex mused, "You won't believe the kind of money that gets thrown at you when you tell someone you can make it so they can annihilate their enemy with the push of a button and no soldier has to die."

A satisfied grin washed over Lex's features, and realization hit her. She looked back at the screen. "Oh my God. The satellite..."

"Honeybraun Industries liked to call it their most prized possession. It was one of the motives for the takeover. Getting my hands on those plans and developing my own Annihilator was a dream come true." His eyes narrowed at her, "Until you and Superman destroyed all of it."

"You can't do this. That much power in the wrong hands..." Lois tried to plead with him, knowing all too well her pleas fell on deaf ears.

"Yes, power. Real human power." Lex leaned in closer, so he was a few millimeters from her face. She could smell the stench of old scotch on him and pulled away.

"You sick, twisted, disgusting sociopath." she hissed angrily.

"I've added something special to ensure even Superman will bow to me. All the power in the world and he can't even put his powers to good use." Lex sneered. "Pity."

"You don't get it. Superman. It's not the gifts he has that gives him power. It's the heart. It's his ability to know when not to use his power. It's his ability to know right from wrong. Something you could never understand." She shot back at him, smiling inwardly when she saw the look of confusion on his face.

"Oh, does he?" Lex chuckled. "From what I'm hearing these days Superman isn't the beloved superhero you make him out to be." He hit a button and showed a screen of embedded ANSI code, "It's amazing what you can accomplish when you use the right resources. Steal an election. Turn the city against a loved hero. Turn a hero into a villain." His eyes narrowed at her. "So many opportunities with radio, television, phones, and computers..."

"He'll stop you," Lois said, trying to portray a confidence she didn't feel at the moment when she felt the rope behind her begin to loosen.

A loud crash from across the room echoed as the cement wall came caving in around them. Lex quickly moved toward the lead-lined box, "Superman, right on time."

Lucy opened the door and sighed in relief when she saw her mother on the other side. "I'm so glad you came."

Ellen nodded, stepping inside. "How are you holding up?"

Lucy shrugged, looking at the disaster that was the living room. She'd fed and changed Jon and he'd finally fallen asleep in his bassinet, but she was exhausted and afraid to fall asleep without someone here to help. She'd left a message with Jimmy and hadn't heard back yet.

"I'm tired," Lucy admitted shyly. "I haven't heard anything from Clark yet, and I want to know what the police are doing and I..."

Ellen put a supportive arm around Lucy, "It's okay. Take a

deep breath. Now, why don't you start from the beginning? Just sit here and rest while I clean this up."

"Okay," Lucy sighed, wiping her cheeks with her hand to brush away her tears. "You remember Pete's showing?"

"Look out!" Lois shouted.

Clark quickly turned to see Luthor holding a lead box in his hands. After focusing in on the heartbeat he knew and following it through the maze, he quickly found where Luthor was hiding Lois. He heard Luthor reveal his plans and then made his entrance.

Clark shot a beam of heat vision at the lead box, causing Luthor to drop it. He flew across the room to Lois, ripping the binds loose with ease. She stood, and he embraced her in a hug. "Are you all right?"

"I think so." She said shakily, "Are you...?" Her eyes widened, "Clark!"

A nauseating feeling washed over him, and he fell to the ground. 'The meteorite.' He recognized the feeling almost instantly.

"Bill Church Jr. Lex Luthor. Asabi Kharti. Bill Church Sr." Bill Henderson read off the list of names. "Joey Bermuda has agreed to testify against all of them in return for taking the death penalty off of the table."

Mayson twisted her lips for a moment. "He's killed over a thousand people for Intergang and Lex Luthor." She pointed out.

"He'll be in prison for the rest of his life." Henderson pointed out.

"I want video testimony recorded before I agree to anything. I don't agree to anything until I've seen and heard it. That way, if he tries to back out, I can use the video in court." Mayson listed off.

"We can do that," Henderson said. "His attorney's in the box with him. If you're willing to play ball, I'm sure she'll play with you."

"Let's go." Mayson grabbed her briefcase.

Lois opened her mouth to scream but couldn't find her voice as she watched Lex hit Clark from behind with a large chunk of green meteorite. In an instant, Clark fell to the ground. Blood covered his face.

"No!" she cried out, kneeling by his side.

"Almost a year of planning and waiting..." Lex taunted, leaning in as he paced over Clark's slumped body. "Dream all you want, but nothing prepares you for the moment of triumph."

"Clark?" Lois shook his body, listening for any sign of him breathing. He was breathing. She sighed in relief and looked back up at Luthor. She wanted to scream, yell...anything, but found herself too angry to react.

"You're too late. By this time tomorrow, Metropolis will be in ruins, Superman will be no more, and I will take my place back where I belong." Lex cheered in triumph. The television showed the riots in the street chanting against Superman.

"Oh my God," Lois gasped in disbelief. She looked down at Clark who was still too close to the poisonous meteorite Lex had struck him with. She noticed Clark's face scrunched in pain and looked to the rock that was a few feet away.

"Yes, a travesty, isn't it? Everything you've worked for gone in an instant." Lex taunted.

Lois looked down at Clark as she managed to scoot away from the rock another foot. She needed to get him away from it so he could heal. She began to move away from the green glowing rock, struggling under the weight of her husband when she felt a rumble from across the room. She saw Clark's face relax. On the other side of the wall, a loud crash broke down the cement wall, and everything went black.

A tall man in black watched from the visitor's room as police came in and out of the station. So far, there was no sign of Joey Bermuda or the police officers helping him. He tightened his hand over the phone in his pocket. Orders had come from both sides to take care of Bermuda. He wouldn't disappoint.

Lois stared up at the man in red and blue holding a large piece of concrete up. "Get him out of here." He said, gesturing to the man in her arms.

"How...?" She began to ask, and he shook his head.

"Just get him out of here before Luthor comes to." He looked back behind him where Lex was groaning from beneath the debris.

She didn't waste any time, standing and helping Clark to his feet. "Clark?"

"I'm okay," He said before looking up at his double and nodding, "Thank you."

"Wait!" Lois stopped, "The meteorite."

"Meteorite?" the double asked.

Clark shook the debris from his hair as an arm wrapped around her waist. "Over there." He pointed to the right corner where a green glow reflected off the wall. Recalling what had worked with Metallo, he aimed a blast of heat vision at the rock. His double aimed a blast toward it as well.

Lois watched in amazement as the rock changed different colors until a clear white replaced the green rock and a loud blast was heard from across the room. "What just happened?" Lois asked as the double set the concrete slab down.

"When the meteorite gets to a certain temperature, it becomes hard like a diamond and loses the radiation that makes it lethal to me..." the double explained then corrected, "err...us."

"Thank you," Clark said, reaching his hand to shake his double's.

His double took his hand and shook it, pointing to Luthor, "What are we going to do with him?"

"Let the police handle him," Clark said firmly.

"He knows," Lois interjected.

"Something tells me he's got bigger problems." Clark pointed at the large slab of concrete on top of Luthor. "We're going to have to get someone down here. If I try and move it the whole place could cave in."

"He knows," his double repeated.

"And I hate that, but it doesn't change anything," Clark said firmly. "He'll be dealt with like any other criminal and lowlife."

"You could leave him here," his double pointed out.

"I could," Clark admitted.

"Clark!" Lois chastised before he could finish.

"But I won't." His jaw tightened as he met his double's

surprised gaze. “I uphold law and order and truth and justice. If I were to do that in this one instance, it would take away from everything I’ve done. Justice will be served.”

His double’s face grew perplexed then softened, “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I do,” Clark said, tightening his arm around Lois.

“We do.” Lois corrected.

His double nodded. “We do.”

Before the words escaped his mouth a bright light emitted around the two of them. Lois jumped back, feeling something push her back as the two men fell to the ground. “Clark!”

She held a hand over her eyes, watching in surprise as the two figures began to merge together. A bright light filled the room and then dimmed once more. She looked up and saw one Superman standing in front of her where the two had been moments ago.

“What happened?” Lois asked, standing to her feet as she approached him cautiously.

“I stopped being afraid.” He said with a smile.

“Afraid?” Lois asked, not sure she understood.

“All this time I’ve been afraid of being found out and losing everything to people like Trask and Luthor.” He threw a look at the unconscious Lex Luthor. “After I let go of the fear and just accepted it... I don’t know. The two just became one.”

“You accepted that part of yourself.” Lois reasoned aloud.

“I guess.” Clark shrugged. “We need to call Henderson and get someone down here to help Luthor out.”

Lois nodded, “And make him finally answer for all the crimes he’s committed against Metropolis?”

He nodded, running his hand across her cheek, “Are you okay?”

“I will be when we can get him behind bars and us back home with Jon,” Lois said, rubbing her hands up and down her arms.

“Me too.” Clark smiled back at her. “I left him with Lucy, but as far as I’m concerned the sooner we get home, the better.”

“I don’t have my phone.” she frowned, patting her pockets.

Clark looked around the debris of their unstable surroundings. “Just a sec.”

She felt a burst of wind against her face as he flew them out of the underground lair and back to the front door in the Wayward Pines Cemetery. “Oy, warn me next time you do that.” She said, holding onto him for support as she waited for everything to stop spinning.

“Sorry.” He apologized, “You okay?”

“I think so.” She leaned up to give him a peck on the cheek. “About the phone...”

“Right,” He stepped back and disappeared into a blur of red and blue, reappearing before her in his suit and glasses holding his mobile phone for her.

“Thanks,” Lois took the phone from him. “Let’s hope Henderson doesn’t keep us here all night.”

Henderson watched as a construction crew worked tirelessly to remove the concrete slab from Luthor’s back. He looked behind him where Clark Kent and Lois Lane stood, watching as the crew worked to help release Lex Luthor from a prison of his own making and finally see him pay for his crimes. The story of how they found him was vague at best but the expression on Lois’ face told him not to press the issue. Whatever it was that had

brought the couple to Lex Luthor’s secret lair wasn’t something either of them seemed willing to discuss.

“How we looking?” He asked, looking to the medical team on site that had Luthor hooked up, monitoring his vitals as the construction crew worked to free him from the concrete wall that had fallen on top of him.

One of the EMT’s nodded in his direction. “Everything seems to be stable.”

Henderson nodded to his team of officers, “Everyone ready?” “Let’s go!”

The concrete slab slowly lifted up, and the bloodied and bruised body of Lex Luthor was revealed. He let out a long breath.

“Is he talking yet?” Henderson asked.

“Sir, can you hear me?” one of the EMTs asked.

He let out a low groan. “D-die.” he stammered out.

“What?” the EMT asked.

“Y-you d-die.” he stammered out, his gaze looked to where Clark was standing with Lois Lane, holding her protectively.

“You’re not going to die,” he reassured, gesturing to another EMT to help him. “Heart rate is steady.”

“Get ready to move him.” the other EMT instructed.

“One, two, three, and lift.”

Henderson wore a smug expression on his face as he watched the EMTs strap Lex Luthor in and carry him toward the exit. He approached with a pair of handcuffs. “I’ve waited over a year to say this. Lex Luthor, you’re under arrest.” He began to recite the Miranda Rights. Luthor’s face scrunched into a look of rage as the EMTs carried him away.

“I’m so glad you’re all right!” Ellen hugged Lois fiercely.

Lois nodded, “A little banged up, but I’ll live.” She looked around the living room. “Where’s Jon?”

“Passed out asleep.” Her mother said with a smile. “Lucy left a little while ago with that boyfriend of hers. Poor thing looked like the walking dead. I sent her back to the condo.”

“Probably a good idea,” Clark said with a weak smile.

“Thanks for watching Jon.”

“Anytime,” Ellen reassured. “I’m just glad I was able to get away. I still can’t believe the gall of that captain. Working with the likes of Lex Luthor and then attacking both you and Lucy in your home.” She shook her head in disgust. “A shame.” Lois managed to nod along as she took a seat on the couch, poking her head over the bassinet. Jon was indeed fast asleep.

“I hope you don’t mind me keeping him down here. I just wanted to keep him where I could see him.” Ellen explained.

“It’s fine.” Clark sighed. “Probably best, considering everything.”

“Moments after the satellite was installed, a mysterious white beam could be seen emanating from it. It’s unclear what is causing this phenomenon. EPRAD has denied any connection to the satellite and is unaware of who authorized its installation on the Prometheus Space Station.”

“Clark...” Lois gasped, staring at the image. A look was exchanged between them, and he nodded, knowing what he needed to do. “Lex said he was going to destroy Metropolis.”

“Oh, my word!” Ellen gasped, taking a seat next to Lois, unaware of the exchange between the couple.

'Be careful.' Lois mouthed to him as he stood to leave, tugging at his tie and heading upstairs. A sonic boom could be heard outside as Lois and her mother remained entranced by the footage on the television.

"Moments after the satellite had been placed, EPRAD picked up footage of Superman flying toward the station it had been installed on." the newscaster announced as footage of Superman flying toward the metal disc floating in the sky.

Mayson looked up at the television, seeing the image of the satellite shoot a long white beam. A sense of dread washed over her before an unusual feeling of relief replaced it. 'Superman bad' the thought popped into her head, and she closed her eyes, willing the thought to leave. 'Not my thoughts.'

"This just in." the reporter spoke into the camera, "Orders to take Superman out have come down from Washington." The reporter looked around, "Is that right?"

"A bunch of hooley if you ask me." a voice from behind her spoke.

"Lieutenant Harris," Mayson looked behind her to see the young woman standing behind her with a scowl on her face. "What brings you here?"

"Orders from the Police Commissioner for our team to take Superman out." Rachel snorted in disgust. "This stinks worse than a pile of cow manure."

"I thought Superman was invulnerable," Mayson said with a quizzical expression.

"So did I." Rachel said with a worried expression, "but there's a first time for everything." A quiet chirp came from Rachel's radio, and she excused herself.

Mayson spotted Bill Church and his son coming out of Governor Barnes' office. All three men looked to be up to something. "Thank you for your support." she heard Barnes say.

Feeling in her briefcase, she found the small square device she was looking for and pressed the red button, keeping the microphone pointed upward. Henderson had obtained the warrant for undercover recording. All she had to do was hold up her end. Bill Church trusted her, which made what she was doing hard, but if he was doing what Bermuda said, then a lot more would be at stake. She took a deep breath, preparing herself for the task at hand. A smile spread across her face as she walked over.

"Mr. Church, Billy, Governor Barnes." she nodded to each of them. "I thought I could get some more information on this order that came down against Superman."

"Superman is the problem. The Churches are the solution." Barnes said with a broad smile.

Mayson frowned, looking over at the governor, "But you're running against them, Governor."

"Something I plan to rectify," Barnes said with a smile. "I will be pulling out of the race this afternoon. I see now Mr. Church can help this city more than I can."

"I see," Mayson said cautiously, looking between Bill Church and his son. "Could you excuse us for a moment, Governor?"

"Of course," Barnes pushed past them and walked toward the mayor's office.

"Something wrong, Mayson?" Church asked innocently.

"How about we start with what you're doing with the Church Network to turn this city into walking zombies." Mayson crossed

her arms over her chest, confronting them.

Church looked at her in surprise, "I guess I should have known I couldn't hide it from you, Mayson. You're just too smart."

"Doing what?" Mayson countered, doing her best to hide the uneasy feeling that washed over her as a look exchanged between the two men.

"Control." Bill Church Jr. said with a satisfied grin. "Complete and utter control of the masses." He pointed to the television screen. "We can turn the hero into the villain."

"And the villain into the hero." Church slapped Bill Jr on the back. "The perfect way to take over a city."

"You won't get away with this." Mayson stammered out, shaking her head.

"Who's going to stop us?" Church countered. "With technology like this, we don't even need Intergang anymore."

She'd heard enough. She could feel a chill run down her spine. "Intergang?"

"Mayson?" She looked over and sighed in relief when she saw Lieutenant Reagan approaching her.

"Lieutenant Reagan," She forced a smile.

He looked at his watch, "You said seven o'clock for the deposition, right?"

"Right, the deposition." Mayson nodded. "We'll finish this later, Bill." Before he could argue, she had already stepped away, walking down the hall with Lt. Reagan toward the conference room.

"Count on it." Bill Church called after her.

The room was dimly lit and smelled of old oil and mold. Lucy scrunched her nose as she looked around. Jimmy sat next to her with his hands tied behind his back as well.

Two feet. If she'd just been able to get two feet ahead, she'd have gotten away.

"Any luck?" she whispered to Jimmy.

He shrugged, still fiddling with the handcuffs keeping his hands tied behind his back. "Nothing yet."

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Hobb's Bay. Some old abandoned warehouse." Jimmy explained.

"What do you think he's doing?" Lucy asked, looking across the room where the man that had grabbed them was working on the computer.

"I don't know."

"Where's Clark?" Ellen asked, looking behind her.

"He had to give Henderson some more information about the case," Lois said, running her hand through her hair.

"The white beam has now changed to green." The reporter on the television spoke.

Lois' attention moved to the television, "Oh, my God,"

"That's new," Ellen said with a frown. "I can't understand how anyone would think they can hurt Superman. After everything, he's done to help..."

"I don't understand it either," Lois said weakly.

Clark flew toward the satellite, aiming his heat vision to the base of it. The metal began to melt, changing the angle of the

beam coming out of the satellite. He took the brunt of the blast, inching his way closer and closer and keeping his heat vision aimed at the satellite. Then something changed. He felt weak and nauseated. He opened his eyes and saw the white light that had been coming out of the satellite had been replaced with a green glowing light.

'The meteorite.' he could feel himself growing weaker and weaker by the second. He had to find it and get rid of it. Something caught his attention in the corner. A small crystal that hadn't been there before. He shot a beam of his heat vision toward it and felt the effects of the meteorite and fought through it.

'Just like before.' he told himself. The colors began to change on the beam, and he could feel himself losing altitude as he fell back into the Earth's atmosphere. A smile spread across his face as he saw the white beam give out.

Lois felt a lump in her throat as she watched the image of her husband falling with the metal disc from the sky. Her mother continued to talk around her as the newscaster continued to narrate the horrific scene before her.

"Lois?" her mother's voice echoed around her but all she could focus on was the image of red and blue in front of her.

"No, no, no, no," she held a hand to her mouth, unable to move her focus off the television screen.

"Lois?" Ellen called her name again.

"Where is that?" Lois pointed to the screen where the reporter was standing and a red and blue streak could be seen against the waterfront before a loud crash knocked her and the cameraman to the ground.

"Looks like maybe the pier on 45th." her mother said uncertainty. "Why?" Lois reached for the phone and began to dial. "Who are you calling?" Ellen asked.

"Dr. Sam Lane, please," Lois tried to steady her voice and she listened to the monotone beeping that rang in the receiver.

"It's been hours." Lucy whispered, craning her neck toward the computer where the man had been at before. After typing something into the computer he had left them tied to one another against a pole.

His evil smile seemed so familiar but she couldn't place it. She knew that face. She knew that voice but couldn't seem to connect it with anyone. The missing puzzle piece.

"I know." Jimmy groaned, "My arms feel like lead."

"What do you think he was working on over there?" Lucy asked, looking toward the computer.

"I don't know, but there's only one way to find out..." Jimmy said pulling out his bloodied hand from the handcuffs.

"Jimmy!" Lucy gasped seeing the red and blood around his wrist. A long piece of skin was hanging around his wrist.

"It'll heal," Jimmy reassured, standing to his feet. "Can you stand?" He asked, helping release her arms from the back of the chair.

"I think so." Lucy let out a low moan when she stood. "What's the plan?"

"Find something to get these off?" Jimmy held up the dangling handcuffs from his other wrist.

"There's a toolbox by the computer." Lucy offered, craning her neck to look across the room.

"Let's go." Jimmy said, taking the first step toward the desk.

Ellen paced in the waiting room, holding Jon to her chest. She glanced at the time for what seemed like the thousandth time. Why her daughter had insisted on driving to STAR Labs in the middle of the night was beyond her, but staying at the house just waiting wasn't something she was comfortable doing. Lois was in no condition to drive. Something had spooked her on the footage of Superman's fall from space. What that was she still was in the dark about.

The clock on the wall read '8:34am.' She let out a long sigh.

The information Lucy had told her earlier continued to gnaw at the back of her mind. Why had someone attacked Sam? Why was he working in secret at STAR Labs? What did any of this have to do with Lois? The more she thought about it, the more the questions arose.

Jon let out a light whimper and she sighed, turning to the sleeping figure of her daughter curled up in the corner. She'd just given him a bottle an hour ago. Could he already be hungry? She checked his diaper and sighed when she saw it was still dry. Jon wailed louder and she nodded. "I know, I know." She hated to wake her daughter, but it was clear grandma wasn't going to be accepted as a substitute any longer.

"Lois?" she gently shook her daughter's arm.

"Hmm?" Lois opened her eyes, taking her surroundings in before asking, "Has anyone come in yet?"

"Not since three." Ellen frowned, glancing at the double doors they were both being kept from. Whatever was going on back there was connected to whatever trouble Sam had gotten himself into. That much she was sure of, but how it connected to Lois she wasn't sure.

"Here sweetie," Lois took Jon from her, sitting up and pulling a bottle out of the cooler they'd brought. "Good thing he likes it cold." she said aloud, stroking his cheek as he eagerly began drinking his bottle.

"Quite an appetite." Ellen observed.

"He's going through a growth spurt," Lois said sleepily.

Ellen nodded, looking toward the double doors once more. What could Sam be doing back there that would warrant Lois taking her child out in the middle of the night and spending all night in the uncomfortable waiting room chairs?

"So?" She prodded.

Lois looked at her in confusion. "What?"

"When are you going to tell me what's really going on with your father?" Ellen gave her a pointed look. "Don't look so surprised. I know he's in trouble. What I don't know is how you're connected." She glanced at the clock. "Looks like we've got time to kill. So talk."

"Where did you say you found him?" Dr. Klein asked as he tried once again to do a body scan on the unconscious man of steel. The problem was the radiation emitting from his body kept causing the machine to malfunction.

"He was fished out of Hobb's Bay." Sam said with a frown, holding another device against Superman's face. "Radiation is going down."

"That's a good sign, right?" Dr. Klein asked.

"As long as it keeps going down, yes," Sam said with a sigh.

“Let’s just hope we’re not too late.” He said, glancing at the sun lamps above the man of steel’s body.

“Okay, looks like there’s a screw driver under that binder there. You see it?” Lucy pointed with her neck.

“Yeah, I see it.” Jimmy reached over and lifted the binder. Sure enough, a long flat head screwdriver with a yellow and black handle sat on the desk. Next to it was a black stone with a strange glow to it.

“What’s that?” Lucy asked.

“Don’t know.” Jimmy said, fiddling with the screwdriver on the lock for the handcuffs. “Okay, I think I’ve got it.”

Lucy sighed in relief when she heard a click and release of the metal holding her hands behind her back. “Oh, thank God!” She gasped, rubbing her hand over her left wrist. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

Jimmy nodded, looking at the papers on desk. “I wonder what Project K is?” He reached for the file and brushed against the black rock.

Lucy jumped back when she was a strange glow emit from Jimmy. “Jimmy?”

“Who’s going to stop us? With technology like this, we don’t even need Intergang anymore.”

“Intergang?” Mayson’s voice echoed from the tape recorder.

Sheldon Bender shot Mayson a glare as Judge Richard folded his hands across the desk. “Your honor this is a frame up. My client had no idea he was being recorded.”

“I’m sure he didn’t.” Judge Richmond gave Bender a disapproving look. “But that’s something you can argue in court.” He shot Bender a smug grin as she signed the warrants in front of him. “Your clients have one hour to turn themselves in or their arrest will be on the morning news. Any questions?”

“No, sir,” Bender said tightly.

“Your father was *what*!?” Ellen gasped in surprise. Her facial expression had fallen from concern to outrage and shock.

Lois took a deep breath and she repeated. “He was working for Intergang, mom.”

“Intergang?” Ellen zeroed in on the name. “The *criminal* organization?”

“He didn’t know who he was working for when he signed on.” Lois said carefully.

Just as Ellen was about to respond, the double doors slid open and Sam Lane and Dr. Klein stepped out. Lois stood up, “Is he going to be okay?”

Dr. Klein and Sam exchanged a look and Lois held Jon to her chest, waiting to hear the verdict.

“Joey Bermuda’s transfer unit will be moving him at 1500.” Friez said, looking at his watch. “All units need to be prepared for an ambush from the men he’s turning on.” He paced in front of the crowd of men and women in blue.

“Luthor’s in jail.” One of the beat cops pointed out.

“Last time we underestimated him, he nearly destroyed the space station and tried to level this city to dust.” Friez reminded the officer. “You’ll each be assigned a station. I want all eyes on your surroundings. It is our job to get Bermuda from the police

station to City Hall in once piece. Any questions?”

There was a murmur of agreement and Friez nodded, pointing to the door. “Fan out.” As the officers stood from their chairs and began leaving, a tall man hung to the back, watching him leave. Friez turned down the hall to where Bermuda was being held in a private holding cell and the man followed.

Friez typed a code into the keypad and the lock released. The man reached around to grab Friez from behind. He smiled to himself as he felt the man struggle against him. “Easy, easy,” he whispered in Friez’s ear. “It’s not you I’m after.”

He reached out to open the door only to find himself face to face with the barrel of four Glock 22s and the face of Bill Henderson and Detective Ryder. “We figured it was only a matter of time Mr. Kharti and you didn’t disappoint.”

Asabi gasped when he felt the cold barrel against his throat. Immediately he released his grasp on Lieutenant Friez. He struggled to catch his breath and was quickly ushered behind the line of officers as they moved in to take Asabi into custody.

“Asabi Kharti you are under arrest for murder, arson, aggravated assault....”

“Well?” Lois looked to Sam for the news.

Sam’s brow furrowed and he tapped his chin with his index finger, something he usually did when he was unsure of how to broach the subject at hand. “He’s going to be okay, but we’re still unsure about the recovery time.”

Ellen did her best to remain calm as she watched relief wash over her daughter’s face. Sam wore a satisfied grin. She wanted to smack that smug grin off his face and drop kick him into next week. She looked at Lois who seemed to be having an internal battle on what to do at that moment. It was clear she wanted to see her friend and make sure he was okay for herself. Ellen approached, holding her arms out to take Jon, “Why don’t you leave Jon here and go check on your friend?”

“You sure?” Lois asked, looking down at the happy baby in her arms.

“I’m sure.” Ellen said taking him from her. “Come to grandma.” Jon gurgled in her arms for a moment and Lois stood up to follow Dr. Klein behind the double doors. She shot Sam a glare, “Why don’t you take a seat Sam? We need to talk.” the tone in her voice told him this conversation wouldn’t be good.

Perry looked over the desks in the bullpen, shaking his head. Jimmy had been a no-show. Ralph hadn’t come back from his interview yesterday with Bill Church Jr. on the Church Network and the biggest story had landed in his lap and his star reporters weren’t answering their phones. He’d come in that morning to find the story of Lex Luthor’s arrest in his inbox along with a message from Lois that she and Clark were working from home the rest of the day. Not something he’d argue with considering the big story they’d brought in, but then he found out the arrest of the leader of Intergang was supposed to break and all his city beat reporters were MIA.

“Jimmy!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom when he saw the young man exit the elevator. “It’s almost nine o’clock! Where have you been all morning?!”

Jimmy shrugged, making his way into the bullpen, still not acknowledging Perry’s roar. Perry frowned, approaching him as

he raised his voice again, “Jimmy! Am I invisible!? I said, where have you been all morning?!”

“Can it Gramps!” Jimmy shot back with a snort. “So your dry cleaning doesn’t get picked up on time. Big deal.”

“Excuse me?” Perry’s eyebrows rose and he wagged a finger in Jimmy’s face. “Now you listen here...”

“No, you listen here. I’m sick and tired of your running me like a dog. I work hard and you give me no credit. You treat me like your personal lap dog. I’m a journalist not your errand boy!” Jimmy jabbed him in the chest then spun around. “I’m outta here. Call it a personal day.”

With that, Jimmy headed back up the steps to the elevator, leaving the very baffled Perry White behind.

“You wanted to talk?” Sam said, taking a seat next to his ex-wife. He glanced toward the double doors Lois had just disappeared behind with Dr. Klein. He looked around the empty room and then back to Ellen.

Ellen set their grandson into the carseat, tucking the blanket around him. “Not sure if that’s a good idea considering...”

“What do you mean?” Sam scrunched his eyebrows at her in confusion.

“How long were you working for Intergang before you knew who they were?” Ellen snapped in a harsh whisper.

Sam gasped in surprise, uncertain how to respond. “I, uh,”

“Don’t try and deny it.” Ellen hissed angrily. “Your daughters already told me everything.”

“Everything?” Sam ran a hand through his thinning hairline. “I’m not sure what’s left to say.”

“How about we start with the truth?” Ellen snapped, trying to keep her voice down. “You put this family, our children... in danger. For what?”

“He’s still very weak but he’s conscious,” Dr. Klein explained as they stepped into a room with bright sun lamps set up around the table Superman was sitting on. Dr. Klein shook his head, “I see you’re feeling better, Superman?”

“I wouldn’t go that far.” He managed weakly.

“The meteorite weakened your system quite a bit. We’re not sure how long it will take your dense molecular structure to repair itself.” Dr. Klein explained gently.

“How are you?” Lois asked, doing her best to appear as distant as she could considering the circumstances. With Dr. Klein being unaware of the connection between Clark and Superman it was hard to keep herself from asking the questions she wanted to ask and not raising suspicions. It was even harder not to throw her arms around him and kiss him senseless.

“Okay,” Clark said with a partial smile. “Dr. Lane and Dr. Klein seem hopeful that I’ll be back at a hundred percent by the end of the week.”

“That’s good.” Lois whispered.

“Yes, he’s still very weak though.” Dr. Klein pointed out.

“How weak?” Lois asked.

“For instance, his skin is completely penetrable.” He pointed to the bandage on Clark’s arm where it looked like some blood had been drawn. She noticed the scowl on Clark’s face as he ran a hand over it.

“Earthbound for some time.” Clark said with a frown.

A ding from the door echoed through the intercom. “Who is it?” Dr. Klein asked, pressing the button. The camera showed Sam Lane on the other side of the door with his badge in hand.

“Right.” Dr. Klein pressed a button and let him in.

Sam stepped in, watching the double doors slide closed behind him then turned to Lois. “I assume he’s updated you?”

“We were just getting to that.” Dr. Klein said, gesturing to Sam to finish.

“Getting to what?” Lois asked suspiciously.

“Well, given the instances where Intergang was trying to control Superman, we thought it best to take advantage of his weakened state to try and remove the suggestions programmed by Trask.” Sam began carefully. “It’s a rather painless procedure. As I explained before. All I’d need is a small blood sample and...”

“And you can experiment on him even more?” Lois interjected with a disapproving glare. “I don’t think so.”

“It’s not experimenting, Lois, it’s a way to remove any third party interference and give him back control.” Dr. Klein interjected.

“I have it under control.” Clark said bitterly.

“It didn’t seem like that to me.” Dr. Klein pointed out. “What about that scene at the school shooting?”

“That wasn’t him.” Lois interjected. “It was a double.”

“A what?” Dr. Klein gave her a dubious look.

“It’s a long story.” Clark said shaking his head. “Are you sure this procedure won’t have any side effects? No more programming from Bureau 39. All of it will be gone?”

“I helped develop the programming. I can reverse it.” Sam said confidently.

Clark looked down, not meeting Sam Lane’s gaze. He looked to Lois, “What do you think, Lois?”

Metropolis General was busy with activity. Nurses and doctors were racing from one end of the hospital to the next. Bill Henderson looked down the hall and found his men standing guard outside room 601. He nodded to them and they opened the door. Two officers were in the room keeping guard as Lex Luthor was treated for his wounds.

“He still hasn’t regained control of his vocal cords yet.” one of the officer explained. “Comes in spurts.”

“What a shame,” Henderson noted with an amused expression.

“Doc said they’d be discharging him this morning. All fractures have been bandaged up. Everything else will heal with time. Our docs can keep an eye on him.” the other officer said with a grin.

“And this time there’ll be no escape for you, Luthor.” Henderson shot his inmate a threatening glare. “Six years of waiting and finally I get to see justice served for everything you’ve done.” Luthor looked away and didn’t say anything. “We caught your henchman, what’s his name? Oh, yes, Asabi. He’s agreed to give us everything on you and the Churches. Your friend Joey Bermuda’s agreed to testify against you also. Seems you have a lot of skeletons in your closet.”

“Killing the president of the United States will get you automatic death penalty too.” one of the officers interjected with a disapproving tone. “I’ll be sitting front row.”

The doctor came in with a clipboard in hand. “Officers,

Inspector.” He nodded to the men in the room. “I’ve got the discharge and transfer papers ready for you.” He handed the clipboard for Henderson to sign. “I’ve sent the paperwork to your doctor at Metropolis Corrections.” the doctor explained. “You shouldn’t have any further issues. We’re hoping with time his vocal cords will repair themselves.”

“Time isn’t something he’ll have a lot of doc.” Henderson smiled as he gave the final initial for authorization on the transfer. “Let’s pack him up boys.”

Lucy sat up, holding her head. She felt the back of her head and winced when she felt the lump. She looked to the side and saw Jimmy slumped over. “Jimmy?” She crawled toward him, reaching out to shake him.

“Oh!” Jimmy groaned, holding his head as well.

“Are you okay?” Lucy asked.

“I feel like I’ve been hit by a truck.” He groaned in pain, still not opening his eyes.

“Jimmy, we need to get out of here.” Lucy pleaded with him. “He could come back anytime.”

“I know,” He groaned, forcing himself to sit up, wincing in pain. “I feel like my insides are on fire.”

“What happened? You were glowing and then”

“I don’t know.” Jimmy shrugged. “It was weird. For a second there it was like all the anxiety and fears I had were attacking me and then they were gone.”

Lucy opened her mouth to respond when a loud bang could be heard across the room. “Come on, we gotta get out of here.” She helped him to his feet, preparing for the worst. The doors opened and in front of a crowd of officers, Lucy recognized Lt. Harris. “Rachel?”

Rachel Harris relaxed upon seeing her and Jimmy, “Ms. Lane, Mr. Olsen, what are you two doing here?”

“Trying to escape.” Lucy said, pointing to the handcuffs Jimmy had taken off of them earlier.

“Check the area. Make sure we’re clear.” Rachel instructed her team as she approached. She saw the condition of Jimmy’s arm and frowned “EMTs are on route. We’ll get them to look that over.”

Jimmy nodded his appreciation. “Thanks.”

“You two wanna tell me what happened here?” Rachel asked.

“How are you feeling?” Lois asked, watching as Clark took a seat on the sofa. They’d been home all of an hour when they’d been bombarded by calls from their parents, Perry, and Cat. Jimmy had lost his cool with Perry, and Martha and Jonathan were trying to get a flight out to Metropolis. Clark tried to reason with them that they didn’t need to do that but once Martha Kent got something in her head there was no talking her out of it.

“Fine.” Clark said with a frown. “I think I feel fine.”

“What do you mean you think you feel fine?” Lois asked, bouncing Jon in her arms as she spoke.

“I’m not in pain or anything, but I don’t have my powers and I still feel a little weak.” Clark frowned.

“Dr. Klein said it would take some time for you to get back to a hundred percent.” Lois reasoned, taking a seat next to him.

“I guess,” Clark sighed, taking her hand in his. He turned to face her, running his other hand against Jon’s cheek. “I’m just not

used to feeling like this.”

“What?” Lois asked.

“Helpless.” He gave her a wry grin. “It wasn’t ever about not having the powers, but not being able to help you. Not being able to protect you...” He shook his head in disgust. “I should have been here.”

“You had no way of knowing.” Lois reassured him, running her hand against his cheek. “I’m fine. Jon’s fine. Can’t that just be enough for now?”

“I love you, you know that?” He whispered, cupping her cheek.

“I know.” She smiled, leaning herself against him so she and Jon were nestled against his chest. His arms wrapped around her instinctively and she added, “You have to love us. It’s a rule.”

“A rule?” He chuckled, leaning in to kiss her.

“We’re quite fond of you too.” She looked up at him, her eyes told him she was only half-serious.

He grabbed a throw pillow from the otherside of the couch and tossed it at her. She laughed and he captured her mouth with his. Jon gurgled, making his protest at the lack of attention known. Clark pulled away, looking down at his son, holding him protectively in his arms. “I know, I know.” He blew a raspberry on Jon’s belly and smiled when he heard him giggle.

Lois watched the two of them, feeling tears in her eyes as the gravity of what could have happened began to hit her. It had taken them so long to get here. They were finally a family...together and they’d almost lost all of that.

Clark seemed to notice her withdrawal and wrapped an arm around her, leaning in to kiss her cheek. “I know.” He whispered hoarsely.

“What is it?” Officer Jensen asked, looking at the black stone they’d found in Lex Luthor’s warehouse.

“I’m not sure.” Rachel frowned, looking at the metal box Jensen had gathered the stone in. “Send a runner to STAR Labs. Have it analyzed.”

“You got it, lieutenant.” He took the box and carried it downstairs with him.

Rachel watched him leave and turned her attention to the file folders they’d gathered. ‘Project K’ seemed to be an important file with how worn the edges of the papers were. She grabbed the file and carried it with her to her desk.

Lucy took a deep breath as she looked around the apartment. She’d had help from a few of her neighbors and even her landlord to help put everything back where it had been. Some things had been too damaged but she was able to salvage most of her things.

After giving their statements to Rachel she and Jimmy had gone home. Jimmy had insisted on staying with her but after being poked and prodded by doctors, her mother, and the police, all she really wanted to do was be by herself in her own place. Thankfully he didn’t push her too hard on the issue.

“Finally.” Lucy sunk back on her couch and sighed, looking at the four trash bags by the front door. She could take care of those later. Right now she just wanted to rest.

“Luce!” She heard Jimmy’s voice from the other side of her front door and groaned.

She got up to answer the door, “Jimmy, I thought I told you to

go home?"

"I didn't feel like it." Jimmy said, stepping inside the apartment.

Lucy sighed, running a hand through her hair, "Fine. I'm not really the best company right now though."

"I'll be the judge of that." Jimmy grinned back at her. "Spring cleaning?" He teased, looking at the bags by the door.

"That's not funny." Lucy shot him a look.

"Someone's touchy," Jimmy commented, taking a seat on the couch next to her.

"It's been a long few days." Lucy said, rubbing the back of her neck.

"Yeah," Jimmy shrugged nonchalantly.

Lucy frowned, noticing the scowl on his face. His behavior seemed odd. His face was anything but friendly, but considering everything they'd been through she didn't pay it much attention. "So, have you talked to Perry? Maybe he'll let you work with one of the reporters on the story?"

"I'm done with the Planet." Jimmy growled angrily. "Thinkin' about getting a job at the Inquisitor. At least there I'd have a chance at getting my work published."

Lucy stared at him in disbelief, uncertain how to respond. "Are you out of your mind?!"

Clark ran his hand up and down Jon's back, listening to the soft snores he made in his sleep. It had been a long day for all of them. Trying to write up their stories for Perry without the help of super-speed and keep up with Jon had given him a new appreciation for what Lois did every day. How she was able to keep going strong with little sleep he wasn't sure. He could feel the muscles in his body ache from going up and down the stairs most of the day. He could feel himself getting a little stronger as the day went on. Staying near the sunlight seemed to help.

He grabbed the baby monitor on the nightstand and went downstairs to check on Lois. All he wanted to do when they got home was take her in his arms and never let go. Unfortunately, given their commitments with work and responsibilities with Jon, it wasn't practical.

Lois was just hanging up the phone when he came downstairs, "Okay, we'll see you then. Bye Jonathan." She turned and smiled at him then set the phone down. "Your parents got an early flight. We'll need to pick them up from the airport by ten."

"Jon's fast asleep." He said, pulling her to him and wrapping his arms around her from behind.

"Thanks for getting him settled." Lois smiled back at him.

"Of course," He leaned in to kiss her cheek. "Perry okay with the final revision?"

"Leading story for the evening edition." She turned her head to look at him, a mischievous expression on her face.

"You know what I just realized?" he murmured in her ear.

"That the baby is asleep and we..." She yelped in surprise when he scooped her up in his arms and carried her back upstairs, "Clark!"

"What the hell is your problem?" Lucy shouted, standing to her feet. "Quit the Planet?"

"What do you care?" Jimmy snorted, getting up from the couch.

"What do I care?" Lucy echoed, taking a step toward him. "I don't know what your problem is, Jimmy or where you got the idea that it's okay to talk to me like that."

"I don't got a problem." Jimmy shot back. "Maybe if you weren't so busy with your boyfriend turned killer you would notice!"

Lucy slapped him across the face, "Get out!"

"Gladly," Jimmy snorted, making his way to the door.

She followed him, slamming the door behind him and being sure to lock all the locks on her front door. She let out a frustrated scream, kicking the door.

<< "You guys want to tell me what happened here?" >>

<< "They grabbed Clark though. We don't know where they took him...." >>

<< "He wasshot," >>

<< "We'll find him...I won't rest until we find him," >>

Rachel sat at in the living room, looking at the folder in front of her. She kept replaying that night she'd found Lois and the Kents tied up in the Kent barn. For years she'd tried to make sense out of that night. Nothing made sense.

The information in these files explained so much, but if they fell into the wrong hands...

'I'm protecting a friend.' she said, setting the file inside the fireplace. She lit the pages with a match, watching as the orange and yellow light flickered and soon engulfed the pages in flames.

Lois and Clark sat in the conference room with Lucy and Perry. "It's like he's a completely different person." Lucy said, dabbing her eyes with a tissue. "I don't know what's going on or what's happened to him."

"I've been trying to get the boy to stand up for himself. Be his own man. I just never imagined..." Perry snorted, "I didn't even recognize him."

"Seems like something had to have triggered this." Clark observed, looking around the room. He noticed the uneasy expression on Lucy's face.

"Was there anything strange or unusual going on when you two were abducted?" Lois asked, turning to Lucy.

"You mean besides being abducted and held in a rundown factory for twelve hours?" Lucy asked half-jokingly.

Lois reached out to hold her sister's hand. "I'm sorry, Luce,"

"It's not your fault." Lucy said shaking her head. Clark squeezed Lois' shoulder.

"None of this is anyone's fault but Lex Luthor's." Perry added gruffly. "I still can't believe he went that long without getting caught."

"Me too, Chief," Clark frowned, looking to Lucy.

"That man is shades of crazy like you wouldn't believe."

Lucy added, rolling his eyes. "Had some weird rock and strange files and computer system..."

"Rock?" Clark asked. "What kind of rock?"

"I don't know. It was black. It made Jimmy glow a little when he touched it." Lucy shrugged taking a sip of her coffee.

"That mean something to you two?" Perry asked, a knowing look crossed his face.

"If it's what we think it is, it could explain Jimmy's odd behavior." Lois began carefully.

“What do you mean?” Lucy asked.

“The Superman double.” Lois prompted.

“There were really two of them?” Lucy looked between Lois and Clark.

Perry nodded, rolling his chair across the room to grab a copy of the paper from a few days ago. The front page had an image of the two supermen face to face on top of one of Metropolis’ skyscrapers.

“How is this possible?” Lucy gasped, staring at the image.

“I don’t know.” Clark said with a sigh. “We’re still waiting for answers from Dr. Klein.”

“This is crazy.” Lucy shook her head. “So you think that rock Jimmy touched... what?”

“Made him split into two.” Lois answered.

“This doesn’t make any sense.” Lucy sighed, running a hand through her hair. “I mean, really? A rock? How is this even possible?”

“We don’t know.” Clark said.

Bill Church took a sip of his scotch, staring at his son who seemed preoccupied with his phone at the moment. “Quit messing with that contraption or you’re going to give us away.”

Bill Church Jr. looked back at him with a grunt. “Fine, dad.” He clicked the phone closed and set it on the table in front of him. “You happy?”

The head flight attendant approached, “Pilot is doing one last inspection, and then we’ll be taking off, Mr. Church.”

“Thank you.” Bill Church nodded then turned his attention back to Bill Church Jr. who seemed distracted. “Something wrong, Billy.”

“No, of course not. I always dreamed of spending the rest of my life in Cuba.” Bill Jr. snorted in disgust. “How did he get caught?”

“That’s not important now.” Church took a heavy breath, “What’s important now is securing our hold on the organization and ensuring we don’t make the same mistake again.”

“Yeah, don’t hire the Handyman for any jobs anymore.” Bill Jr. said haughtily.

“I’m thinking more along the lines of your assassination attempt on me.” Bill Church said, taking another sip of his scotch.

“What are you talking about, dad?” Bill Jr. lied, flashing a brilliant smile at him. “Assassination attempt?”

“You did instruct Rollie Vale to construct a drug that would make me seem crazy, so you could take over the organization and then planned to ‘put me out of my misery’ did you not?” Church’s tone was calm, but his glare was lethal.

“So what if I did?” Bill Jr. scoffed. “That’s what you wanted, isn’t it? A cutthroat son capable of taking over the business? At least that’s what you’ve been telling me for the last twenty years.”

“A good plan, son, but flawed in many ways, I’m afraid.” Church said, folding his hands in front of him. “You forget I built this organization piece by piece from the ground up. There isn’t anything that goes on that I don’t know about.”

“Oh, I think you’d be surprised.” Bill Jr. said, sipping his wine. “There’s a lot that goes on that you don’t know about, dad.”

“Really?” Church challenged. “Did you really think I didn’t know you were working with Luthor?” He chuckled as his son’s eyebrows rose. “Who do you think told him to go to you? I knew,

given the chance your worst instincts would come out, but I never imagined how badly you’d fail. Hiring someone to handle a job without a backup plan? Putting out a blanket hit order with no intended safety net? Including information in your contracts to give away what you’re doing to the Church Network’s system?” Church shook his head in disapproval. “You’ve really disappointed me, son.”

“You knew?!” Bill Jr. gasped in surprise, sprung to his feet.

“Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to sit down. The plane is about to take off.” the flight attendant ordered.

“I’ll sit down when I’m good and ready.” Bill Jr. growled angrily.

“I believe you should do as he says, Mr. Church.” a voice in a British accent spoke from behind them.

Church smiled a satisfied grin when he saw the recognition in his son’s eyes. “Mr. St. John, so good of you to join us.”

Jimmy walked through the newsroom, noting the whispers as he approached his desk.

“How does he even still have a job?”

“I wouldn’t be showing my face after yesterday.”

He frowned, uncertain where the remarks were coming from. He spotted Cat at her desk, typing away and approached with a cup of coffee, “Hey, Cat, how’s it going?”

“What is this, a joke?” Cat asked, not looking up from her computer.

“No,” He began carefully. “What’s going on?”

“You’re kidding right?” Cat snorted turning in her chair to face him. “After yesterday I don’t know how you can even step foot in this newsroom. Standing up for yourself is one thing but you took it way too far.”

“Standing up for what?” Jimmy asked, confused.

“Oh, don’t try to play like you don’t know what you did.” Cat snapped angrily. “You know you really hurt Perry. We’re like family here and you don’t hurt your family.”

“Cat that’s enough,” Perry said, approaching from behind.

“But Perry...” Cat began to argue but stopped when she saw the solemn look on his face. “Fine.” She reclaimed her seat and turned back to her computer. “Cat’s Corner will be ready in five.”

“Thanks,” Perry said motioning for Jimmy to follow him. “Jimmy, follow me.”

Lucy tapped her hand on the table, watching Perry leave. “Am I the only one that finds all of this bizarre?”

“No,” Lois said shaking her head. “We’re just as confused as you are.”

“Why didn’t the news of this double make in the paper?”

Lucy asked. “Aren’t you two supposed to print the news? Seems pretty newsworthy to me.”

“Well, we’re not sure how to explain it yet,” Clark edged cautiously. “We only found out about the double a few days ago. He was a part of Superman, but mostly seemed to have many of his fears.” There was a frown on his face that seemed saddened by his statement.

“So what happened to him?” Lucy asked. Clark looked at her in surprise, and she elaborated, “You keep discussing him as if he’s no longer here. The past tense reference.”

“Superman came to term with his fears, and the two merged

back together,” Lois explained.

“Do you think that’s what happened to Jimmy?” Lucy asked.

“It sounds like it,” Clark said with a sigh.

Lucy nodded, letting out a light chuckle, “I don’t know how you guys do it. I mean, you deal with these crazy situations and criminals on a daily basis. I’m a wreck. Someone tried to kill Lois and me. Then Jimmy and I were kidnapped. I still have no idea why...”

“We may have some news on that,” Lois said, pushing a folder to her.

“What is this?” Lucy asked.

“Joey Bermuda, the guy that attacked us, said there was a hit put out on you,” Lois explained carefully. “Asabi being following orders from Lex Luthor when Joey Bermuda failed.”

“A hit?” Lucy gasped in surprise. “Why?”

“We’re not sure,” Clark said gently. “But we will find out.”

The door opened, and Jimmy stepped inside with Perry. Lucy did her best not to meet his gaze. The things he’d said yesterday had been hurtful, and right now she wasn’t sure if she was dealing with the real Jimmy or his evil double.

“Jimmy, why don’t you have a seat.” Perry pointed to the chair across from Clark.

“Are you guys going to tell me what’s going on?” Jimmy asked.

“Take a seat.” Clark pointed to the chair.

Jimmy stared at Clark for a moment before plopping down in the chair with his arms folded over his chest. “I’m here. What’s going on?”

“We thought you might be able to tell us,” Lois said carefully.

“You can’t be serious!” Bill Jr. looked at Nigel St. John then back at his father. “Him? You’re working with him!”

“I prefer to think of it as consulting,” Nigel said, taking a seat. “I tend to go where the best cash flow is.”

“Hence why Mr. St. John will be heading up the organization in Europe.” Church said with a satisfied smile.

“That’s my territory.” Bill Jr. said flatly.

“Not anymore,” Church said, narrowing his eyes at his son. “Billions of dollars have been lost because you want to throw a tantrum. The tantrum is thrown. Jobs have been lost. Territory is gone. You’re out.” He snapped his fingers, pointing to the flight attendant. “Please escort this young man off the plane. The pilot can take off when he’s been cleared.”

“I’m afraid there’s been a delay,” the flight attendant said nervously.

“Delay?” Church echoed.

The door to the cockpit opened and out of it came the pilot and four uniformed police officers. “Look at that, Bill. He got us a present!” One of the officers pointed to Nigel.

“It’s going to be a good day,” the man spoke, holding his gun on Church and his son. “Tsk tsk tsk, trying to run from your warrant. Not a smart move.”

“How did you...?” Church stammered.

“Should have paid your attorney more. Seems he isn’t willing to let you escape either,” another officer interjected, holding his gun on Nigel. “Mr. St. John, we meet at last.”

“And you are?” Nigel looked at him blankly.

“Detective Ryder. I’m the one that’s been tracking you for the

last year.” Ryder spoke with a smug grin as the other two officers slapped handcuffs on him. “You’re under arrest.”

Jimmy stared at Clark uncertainty then back at Lois. If someone had told him this story a few weeks ago, he would have laughed in their face. Now, given the activities that had occurred over the last few days, he knew what Clark was saying was true.

Superman had been split in two.

It explained why Superman had attacked the shooter.

It explained the odd behavior of Superman.

It explained a lot.

Could it really be that easy? It explained so much...

Jimmy frowned, looking at Clark. The last few months had been anything but easy. Clark claimed it wasn’t him in that photograph. Lois showed him proof it couldn’t have been Clark. Could the same thing have happened to him?

It would explain him being in two places at once.

“A double?” Jimmy croaked uncertainty.

“Seems to be connected to this black stone,” Lois explained cautiously. “We’re waiting to hear back from STAR Labs on what it is.”

“So this other me is what?” Jimmy asked, looking over at Lucy who was avoiding his gaze. After hearing what had happened last night, he didn’t blame her. “An evil twin?”

“All we know is the double in Superman’s case seemed to come from his fears.” Lois glanced over at Clark, and he reached out to squeeze her hand. A gesture that wasn’t lost on anyone else in the room.

“I never thought Superman could be afraid of anything.”

Jimmy mused. “Hard to believe something like this could happen from a rock. How is that possible?”

“STAR Labs is running some tests on the sample that was found in Luthor’s lair,” Clark explained.

“So how do I stop this evil me?” Jimmy asked, looking at Lucy in concern. “Superman’s double made everyone hate him. I don’t want that.”

“We don’t either,” Lucy said, looking up at him for the first time.

“Luce...” Jimmy began, turning to look at her. “I would never...”

“I really don’t want to talk about it right now,” Lucy said quickly. “Let’s just find this double and figure out how to get rid of him. Maybe we could ask Superman for help?”

“I think he’s still recovering,” Lois explained, avoiding Lucy’s gaze. “We can talk to Dr. Klein. See if he’s got any ideas.”

“Well, for Superman, it was coming to terms with his fears,” Clark said.

“What are you afraid of?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know.” Jimmy shrugged, not meeting her gaze.

Lois watched Jimmy walk with Perry into his office. Jimmy seemed almost docile when it came to dealing with this double that was already making his life hell. At least with Clark’s double, it had only been a few weeks the double had been in public as Superman. She frowned, recalling the bruises he’d shown her. Someone had been testing pieces of that meteorite on him. Was that why it had taken so long?

“He’ll be fine,” Clark whispered in her ear, leaning in to kiss

her.

“I hope so.” Lois sighed against him. “Henderson called earlier. The Churches and Nigel St. John have been picked up. A sting operation has been setup to catch Rollie Vale.”

“Good.” Clark nodded, watching her carefully.

They still hadn’t talked about what had happened yesterday. She’d been so relieved that he’d been okay. Talking about it hadn’t been a priority with everything else going on. Now that things were starting to settle down, they needed to talk. She looked around the empty conference room. Here was as good a place as any she supposed. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m not ready to go face to face with a double of myself again, but most of my powers seemed to have returned.” He said, wrapping an arm around her waist.

“That’s a good sign, right?” Lois reasoned aloud.

“Yeah, it’s a very good sign.” He nodded, nestling his chin in her shoulder blade.

“Are you sure you want to tell people about the meteorite?” Lois asked, not looking up.

“It’s the only way to explain what’s been going on,” Clark said, softly. “Any hope of keeping the meteorite’s existence hidden disappeared when they used it in the satellite.”

“I know.” She reached up, stroking his cheek with her hand. The image of him falling from space flashed through her mind, and she felt a shiver run down her spine.

He tightened his arms around her and whispered. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” She flashed him a quick smile, leaning against him. “Everything’s fine.” He seemed to be debating on whether he believed her when she felt it. His body went stiff, and the faraway look crossed his face.

“I’m sorry.” He whispered. “I’ve got to go.”

“Go?” she crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at him. “You just said...”

“It’s the double.” He said before running out the door and heading for the stairwell.

“Of course it is.” Lois sighed, taking a deep breath. She glanced at the clock. She still had to pick Jonathan and Martha up from the airport.

“Jimmy,” Perry handed him a card, “I want you to go down to STAR Labs. Find out what you can on what they’ve found out about that rock. Don’t leave until you get some answers. We’ve got to get to the bottom of this and fast.”

“You really think that’s going to help stop this double?” Jimmy asked skeptically. “I’m not sure STAR Labs is going to have the answers you’re looking for, Chief.”

“Won’t know until you take your tail over there and find out,” Perry said, wagging his finger at him and pointing at the door. “Now get going.”

“You got it, Chief,” Jimmy said, heading out the door.

“Jonathan, Martha,” Lois looped her arms around the couple in a fierce hug.

“Lois, good to see you,” Jonathan cheered happily, looking over her shoulder. “Uh, how’s Clark doing?”

“Good.” Lois nodded, adjusting her purse on her shoulder.

“He’s trying to do too much too fast, isn’t he?” Martha

guessed, seeing the expression on Lois’ face.

“That obvious, huh?” Lois gave her mother-in-law a wry look.

“How are you doing?” Martha asked. “I know that had to be terrifying...”

“I’m okay. I mean, I’m nursing a few bruises here and there but other than that...” Lois shrugged. “It just comes with the territory I guess. You expose criminals’ activities they want revenge.”

“I’m just glad they finally got that dirt bag behind bars,” Jonathan muttered. His face was solemn, and Lois could see the concern in his eyes.

“It took them long enough.” Lois sighed.

“How’s Jon adjusting to daycare?” Martha asked as they made their way through the crowd.

“He’s good. He seems to like the teachers okay. Clark and I like having him so close when we’re working. We can just pop in and check on him.” Lois said with a smile. “I think Clark actually prefers when I’m in the office just for that benefit.”

“I’m sure.” Jonathan chuckled as they made their way toward baggage claim.

As they approached, a security guard stopped them. “I’m sorry Ma’am this area’s been blocked off.”

“Blocked off?” Lois echoed, looking over his shoulder. He wasn’t kidding. The entire area behind him was closed off. No one was coming in or out. Baggage terminals continued to turn with the baggage on them as police officers continued to direct passengers elsewhere.

“What’s going on?” Martha asked.

“I don’t know.” Lois frowned.

“As you can see it’s a very complex procedure.” Dr. Klein pointed to the black stone under a digital laser. A red light shone against the stone, and a black light reflected on the silver stand above it. “We’re still analyzing.”

“Any idea where this came from?” Jimmy asked, taking a picture of the laser.

Dr. Klein shook his head, “Not of earthly origin.”

“What is this test supposed to do?” Jimmy asked, pointing to the laser’s change in direction.

“We’re applying different levels of heat to the meteorite to see if there’s a change in its structure.” Dr. Klein explained, “A common procedure when analyzing any alien substance.”

“What are these?” Jimmy pointed to the line of different colored stones being analyzed under similar laser scanners.

“Metropolis P.D. found them in Lex Luthor’s underground lair.” Dr. Klein explained. “We’re testing them to see if there are any similarities. So far the scans are almost identical minus a few structural differences. We’re testing heat absorption right now.”

“Is it supposed to spark like that?” Jimmy asked, pointing to the green stone that seemed to be emitting its own electricity from the laser.

“I’m not...” Dr. Klein began but was cut off by the crackling of his intercom system.

“Dr. Klein?” the security guard’s voice echoed from the intercom.

“What is it, Larry?” Dr. Klein held down the red button on the box.

“I think you may want to come down here and deal with this.”

he responded.

Rollie Vale stared at the news coverage of Bill Church and his son being taken into custody along with Nigel St. John. A smile crossed his face as he watched the men fight against the officers. He patted the briefcase in his hand. Keeping one step ahead of both the Churches and Luthor proved to be easier than he had originally anticipated.

Everyone was too busy focusing on the other and they left themselves wide open for a takeover from within. He hadn't been surprised when Dr. Lane had turned on Bill Church. After discovering how invested Bill Church had originally been in Bureau 39, he knew it was only a matter of time before the scientist left the organization. Given that a lot of his technology was the bread and butter for many of Intergang's overseas contracts, he knew it wouldn't take long for Church's son to make a mistake. That mistake had opened the door for him to arrange the ultimate revenge. His brother had nearly died from his accident at LexLabs, and the organization continued to hold his brother's care over his head.

Each man seemed to think he was in control. No one suspected that the lowly scientist doing the bidding of three career criminals could outwit them all and make it so they all ended up in prison while he reaped the benefits. A cool fifty billion dollars had been siphoned off into an offshore account in total. With everything else going on, no one noticed the missing money. Whenever they did it would be too late. He would be long gone.

"You know they say if you stare at that flight board for too long time will freeze." A voice behind him said.

He looked behind him to see a young blonde staring at him. "Sorry. Just trying to decide where I wanted to go?"

"Personal trip?" she asked, a twinkle in her eyes as she flashed him a smile.

"Much needed vacation. I'm looking to get out of the country and check off some bucket list items." He said with a deep breath. "You?"

She shrugged, "Not much of a traveler...and I'm afraid you won't be either, Mr. Vale."

The hair on the back of his neck stood up, and he looked at her suspiciously. "How did you know my name?"

Before he could ask anything more, three men in dark suits approached him. "You'll have to come with us, Mr. Vale." She spoke tightly. "You don't want to make a scene, do you?"

Dr. Klein came to the front desk, uncertain of what to make of Larry, the security guard's message. He'd been told there was someone here about the stone he was analyzing, but the behavior didn't sound like anyone he knew.

"Dr. Klein, glad you could make it!" Larry cheered, looking at him in relief.

"Something I can help you with?" Dr. Klein looked warily at the young man at the front desk with a camera. He looked exactly like...

"Name's James Olsen. I'm one of the best photojournalists this city's ever seen." James approached Dr. Klein confidently. "I hear you have a very interesting rock here at STAR Labs."

"I don't talk to the press." Dr. Klein lied, looking warily at the young man.

"Now that I know is a lie," James said, getting in his face. "I think you've worked with a few reporters I know. Lois Lane and Clark Kent?"

"Uh-huh," Dr. Klein nodded. "Why don't you come with me, uh, James?"

They made their way down the hallway and turned toward his lab. He entered the code to open the door, and sure enough, the man in his lab looked exactly like the man standing with him.

"You!" Jimmy approached him red-faced with fury. "Who do you think you are?"

The man behind him laughed, "I think I'm a better version of you."

"Someone want to tell me what's going on here?" Dr. Klein interjected.

"Sure. I'm finally free of this weak doormat." James looked at Jimmy with a sneer. "How many times are you going to let yourself be walked all over before you finally stand up for yourself, Jimmy? How many times are you going to sit on the sidelines while everyone else gets a piece of the action? You're pathetic!"

"At least I don't go around trying to hurt others." Jimmy got in his face. "How dare you do that to Lucy?"

"Wake up!" James shot back. "She needed a slap of reality. All this back and forth. Aren't you tired of being taken advantage of? Aren't you tired of the games? The only reason she was attacked was because she trusted that psychopath?"

The scene unfolded in slow motion. "No!" Dr. Klein shouted, seeing Jimmy raise his right arm to deck James to the ground. His elbow hit the first stone, and a crackle of green electricity filled the air. A loud crash could be heard from down the hall. "Oh no!"

Clark landed in front of STAR Labs, hearing the sirens around him. The white and silver building was engulfed in flames. He flew inside the building at full speed. Smoke filled the hallways, and he took a deep breath, inhaling the smoke to clear the air.

He moved toward the hallway and immediately recognized the lab as Dr. Klein's. He moved at super-speed through the corridor and found the scientist on the ground beneath a metal beam that had fallen. "Dr. Klein?"

"Su-Superman," the scientist mumbled. "Th-there's two of them."

"Two?" Clark asked, uncertain what he was talking about.

"The pho-photographer." Dr. Klein coughed as Clark helped him up.

"Photographer?" Clark asked, looking toward the lab that was engulfed in flames. Just inside the doorway was a familiar looking man, struggling beneath another beam, "Jimmy?" He walked toward the open doorway of the lab and groaned when he felt a wave of nausea hit him.

"Superman?"

A loud crack could be heard from above him, and then the sliding door separating him and Dr. Klein from Jimmy came crashing down. "No!" The nauseating feeling was gone. The pain subsided. He stood and looked to Dr. Klein, "What happened here?"

Sam Lane sat in Inspector Henderson's office with a thick file and several flash drives in his hand. He looked to his attorney

who was doing most of the talking at the moment. After the long and uncomfortable conversation with Ellen, he'd come to a decision. Good, bad or ugly he needed to take responsibility for his part in all of this. He needed to make sure his family was safe. The only way to do that was to come forward with what he knew.

"You do understand that there is no guarantee you won't see the inside of a cell for your part in all of this, Dr. Lane?" Henderson reminded him, looking warily at him then back to his attorney.

"Dr. Lane is bringing you information on every known member of Intergang. He is giving you a slam dunk case. Surely his part in all of this, though minimal, can be overlooked to see the big picture here?" his attorney prodded. "He had no knowledge of who he was working for when he started."

"He knew enough to get copies of everything." Detective Ryder pointed out.

"When he was trying to escape...after he figured out what they were using his technology for." his attorney pointed out.

"We can work with the DA and see if we can get a deal negotiated." Henderson interjected, standing up from his desk.

"You don't get anything until we come to an agreement." His attorney said.

"Understood." Henderson nodded. "I guess I don't need to tell you to stay in town?"

"No, sir," Sam looked warily around the room. So much rode on this decision.

"Let us know when the DA is ready to meet. In the meantime, Dr. Lane will be at my office awaiting your call." the attorney stood.

"Now, hold on a minute..." Ryder began to argue.

"Save it, Dave," Henderson interjected. "Dr. Lane hasn't been charged because we don't know what his full part was in all of this yet. We'll use this time to find out what his part was...if any."

"You do that." his attorney said, motioning for him to follow. Sam nodded, taking a deep breath as he followed him out of the police station.

Jimmy groaned on the floor, holding his head. He looked around the room and saw the doorway in shambles. His double lay on the ground with a large beam on top of him. He struggled to stand, looking around the room. Electrical wires hung down from the ceiling lights that were destroyed. He could feel the weight and pain on his chest. He reached up to push the debris off of him, but nothing was there. His head felt like it weighed a ton as images and memories that didn't belong to him flashed through his mind.

James' conversation with Dr. Klein. His fight with Lucy. His confrontation with Perry. It was all there. He felt like his insides were being torn in two as the memories crowded his mind. Then when he thought he couldn't take anymore, it stopped.

He panted heavily looking around the room back at James. He scowled, recalling the way his double had treated those he cared about.

"Hurts like hell, doesn't it?" James groaned, trying to lift the beam off of him.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Jimmy staggered to his feet, looking around the smoke-filled room.

"The memories," James said flatly.

"They're not my memories," Jimmy said, narrowing his eyes at James.

"No, they're both of ours," James replied with a groan. "You don't get it. Everything that happens to you happens to me. We're connected." As realization crossed his face James shot back a snide, "Sucks, don't it?"

The smoke in the room was filling it up fast. He could feel his eyes burning from it. He coughed, trying to catch his breath and James repeated the gesture at the same time. Jimmy looked at him in surprise. "You gonna just stand there or help me out so we can get out of here?" James asked.

"Why should I help you?" Jimmy asked. "You've done nothing but terrorize everyone I care about."

"I've done everything you've thought about doing or saying." James shot back. "I'm the part of you that you want to deny. I'm the part of you that wants to stand up to your fears of rejection. I'm the part of you that wants to big stories and the respect. I'm the part of you that loathes the way you're treated like the bottom of the food chain. I'm a part of you."

"Superman, everyone's been evacuated." the fire chief said, looking down the smoke-filled hallway. "This is the only part of the building we haven't been able to get secured. The power has been cut to ensure the safety of everyone, but until we can get in there..."

"This door's controlled by a computer network. If the power's been cut, there's no way to get it open." Dr. Klein interjected, holding his hand up as he coughed through the smoke.

"There has to be something we can..." Clark stared hard at the metal door in front of him. Try as he might he couldn't see through it.

"What are you trying to do?" Dr. Klein asked.

"Is this door made of lead?" Clark asked with concern.

"Yes, it's to keep the radiation out." Dr. Klein explained. A loud crash could be heard from inside the lab.

"We could try and pry it open, but there's nothing to grab onto." the fire chief frowned, feeling the door. "It's hot."

"Do you think you're up to it?" Dr. Klein asked, worry lines were evident on his face as he looked to Clark.

Clark stared at the door and then back at Dr. Klein. Was he up to it? He still wasn't completely recovered from his encounter with the Annihilator's meteorite laced laser. That and knowing that once he opened that door, he'd be exposing himself to more meteorites...

"I can't," Clark mumbled quietly, looking away.

"You can't?" Dr. Klein asked, looking over his shoulder to the fire chief. "You flew in here. I just assumed..."

"It's not that." Clark cut him off, looking at the door in concern. "I can't open that door. There are meteorites in there."

"The meteorites?" Dr. Klein's brow furrowed. "I don't understand..."

Clark looked at him, debating internally for a split second on how much he wanted to divulge to him. "They can kill me." He whispered, noting the fire chief's attention wasn't on him and Dr. Klein at the moment.

"Kill you?" Dr. Klein's face fell. "So that means..."

"If I open that door it could kill me. Jimmy's on his own." Clark said solemnly.

The room was becoming more and more unbearable. The smoke continued to grow thicker and thicker. Electrical wires hung from the ceiling with a white electrical spark hitting the wall where one of the three windows was.

“One, two, three...” Jimmy helped lift the large beam off of James, holding it up with the help of James pushing it up with his legs so he could roll out from beneath it.

“Not bad,” James said, standing up, patting Jimmy on the shoulder. “Who knew you had it in you?”

“How about you quit with the remarks, and we try and find a way out of here?” Jimmy suggested, looking around the room, ignoring the dig. He held his arm to his face, preparing himself for another coughing fit. James appeared to be having the same problem.

“Looks like the door is sealed off,” James said, looking around the room with him.

“There’s a window if we can get to it.” Jimmy pointed.

“Yeah, right by the live wires...” James pointed out. “Face it. We’re trapped.”

“Jimmy?” Superman’s voice came from the other side of the door.

“Maybe not.” Jimmy smiled.

Smoke hung in the hallway. Clark sighed, looking down at the material Dr. Klein had hung over him. It looked more like a black poncho than anything, but given the current circumstances, he was willing to try anything right now. A few feet away a team of firefighters stood ready to charge in to help secure the area.

“The material’s lead-lined.” Dr. Klein explained in a low voice so no one but Clark could hear him. “In theory, that should keep you protected from the radiation from the meteorites in order to get the door open.” He looked at Clark and said, “Once we get the door open...”

“If you can get the meteorites out of the room I can help get the fire contained,” Clark said taking a deep breath, mentally preparing himself.

Dr. Klein patted the large case in his hand. “I’m ready when you are.”

Clark knocked on the door. “Jimmy, can you hear me?”

Jimmy and James stopped, setting down the beam in their hands. They looked at the door. “Superman?” They both echoed.

“Get back.” Superman’s voice echoed from the other side of the door.

Jimmy looked behind him, taking a few steps back and James did the same. The sound of metal crushing echoed from the doorway. He watched as the bottom half of the door curled up. A burst of fresh air filled the room, and the smoke that had filled the room began to clear.

Dr. Klein rolled under the door with a case in his hand. Without a word he began gathering up the meteorites, he’d been examining earlier and placed them in the case.

“Dr. Klein!” Jimmy watched in amazement as the older man raced around the room, grabbing the different colored stones that had fallen during the explosion earlier.

After slamming the case closed, Dr. Klein hollered across the room. “Okay, Superman. We’re ready for you.”

A loud bang could be heard as Superman ripped the door out. Before he could react, Superman began to blow a blast of cold air across the room. The flames around the room dissipated and he looked behind him. The same awe he felt watching Superman was reflected on James’ face. “Pretty amazing,” He said, watching as Superman sped around the room, clearing the area of debris and live wires. Firefighters followed him in, helping put out the fire. Jimmy and James were escorted out of the building.

Jimmy stared up at the remains of STAR Labs. He reached for his camera, frowning when he realized it wasn’t there. “Guess this is one story I won’t be having photos for.” He said with a solemn expression.

“I think the Chief will live,” James said, following his gaze to where Superman was helping ventilate the building by inhaling the smoke and releasing it into the air. James rubbed the back of his neck, debating internally for a moment. “You didn’t have to help me back there. Thank you.”

“I didn’t think I had a choice. We’re connected remember?” Jimmy quipped with a sour expression. James looked down, not responding to the remark. “You hurt Lucy.”

“I said things that you’ve been thinking,” James corrected.

“You hurt her,” Jimmy said with a pained expression.

“She hurt us.” James shot back.

“I forgave her,” Jimmy said, not meeting his gaze.

“Did you?” James asked, narrowing his eyebrows. “You told her what you saw, and she got angry. You tried to protect her, and she was flirting with some other guy.”

Jimmy narrowed his eyes at him. “How did you...?”

“We share the same memories. Remember?” James reminded him. “Everything you’ve ever thought or said I experienced too.”

“I was wrong,” Jimmy said, brushing him off. “I was wrong in a bad way.”

“About CK?” James asked, looking at Jimmy with a smirk.

“Yeah, I think given our current predicament that’s pretty obvious.”

“She was right.” Jimmy shook his head. “I was the one that wouldn’t let it go.”

“Was she?” James challenged.

“Yeah, she was,” Jimmy said solemnly. “I treated someone that had become a really good friend like dirt for no reason. She told me I was wrong, but I wouldn’t listen.”

“You refused to stand up for yourself with the Chief but continued to fight when it didn’t affect us,” James remarked with a sad smile.

‘Weak’

‘Stand up for yourself.’

‘I don’t want you to hate me.’

“You’re right,” Jimmy said out of the blue.

“What did you say?” James asked his tone in disbelief.

“I said, you’re right,” Jimmy said. “I don’t stand up for myself. There are a lot of things I don’t do that I maybe should. It’s easier to fight for other people.”

James crossed his arms over his chest, “Sometimes you do make the right decision though.” Jimmy offered him a smile.

‘Superman came to terms with his fears.’

“Like helping you even when I’m afraid I can’t?” Jimmy asked.

“Something like that.” James smiled.

Superman approached them, “I think that’s everything.”
 “Thanks, Superman,” Jimmy said, running a hand through his hair.

“Either of you want to tell me what happened here?”
 Superman asked, folding his arms over his chest.

Jimmy looked at James then back at Superman. “I guess I let some things get the best of me,” he explained sheepishly.

“We both did.” James offered with a half-smile.

“Jimmy?” Superman’s voice echoed around him.

He looked up and saw James on the ground with a black glow around him. “What’s happening?” He mumbled before falling to the ground.

Chapter 21

Lois lay wrapped in her husband’s arms, listening to the sound of her in-laws playing with Jon from the living room. She leaned back against Clark as they sat on the bench on the patio, enjoying the quiet for the moment. Martha had insisted on both of them taking it easy so she and Jonathan could catch up on time with Jon. It had been almost a month since their last visit.

She held up a copy of the afternoon edition of the Daily Planet, smiling at the cover photo on the front that read, ‘*Vale Arrest = Intergang Fall*’ in bold letters.

“Only you would end up with a story going to pick up my parents from the airport,” Clark whispered in her ear with a smile.

“I’m just glad your mom had a camera on her. Perry would have had my hide if I didn’t get a page one photo for him. Surprisingly good quality for a disposable too.” Lois commented with a smile.

“Jimmy would be proud.” Clark smiled back at her.

“How’s Jimmy doing?” she asked, fingering the cotton to his rolled up dress shirt sleeve.

His arms tightened around her as he spoke. “Dr. Klein’s still running some tests, but he seems to be back to his normal self.”

“Lucy’s been worried sick about him,” Lois said sadly. “The doctors wouldn’t let her in to see him earlier.”

“I think after Dr. Klein finishes the last of the tests they should allow him to have visitors,” Clark said, leaning in to kiss her. “If not, I’ll see if we can get him to make an exception for her.”

Lois turned the page to where the article about the dangers of the different types of meteorites was. She frowned, seeing the new name Cat had given them. “Who would have thought Cat Grant would be the one naming those evil rocks?”

“I don’t know.” Clark shrugged, “I kinda like the name. Kryptonite. It fits.”

“Kinda scary, huh?” Lois looked back at him.

“Yes and no,” he said, leaning into her. “Yes, it’s scary that everyone knows about something being a danger to Superman, but no in that they also know the meteorite is a danger to everyone here on Earth too. Hopefully, that’ll be enough to prevent anyone from using them.”

“One can only hope.” Lois sighed. “With all the deprogramming that’s left to do from the Church Network scandal, there could be a lot of opportunities for criminals to come out of the woodwork. I’ll be glad when STAR Labs finds a way to destroy them for once and for all.”

“Well if they’re put under enough heat they turn into a

harmless diamond,” Clark said with a shrug. “At least I know how to get rid of the lethal radiation now.” Lois nodded, not really agreeing with his sentiment. He ran a hand through her hair, “How about you? How are you holding up?”

“Clean bill of health. I told you I’m fine.” She said, shooting him a weak smile. “I don’t understand why you insist on me getting checked out every single time we have a run-in with a criminal. By now you should be used to it.” She twisted her mouth, looking at him in concern, “I’m not the one that decided to try and put out an electric fire less than twenty-four hours after being exposed to meteorite radiation.”

“Jimmy was in danger.” Clark breathed with a sigh, “But maybe it wasn’t the smartest move on my part.” He conceded. “Whatever powers were coming back seemed to have become weaker after that encounter with STAR Labs’ collection of meteorites.”

“At least now we know where Intergang’s collection went to.” Lois reasoned aloud, trying not to think about the rocks that were sitting in STAR Labs’ secure vault.

“After explaining the situation and seeing what a danger the meteorite is to everyone, Dr. Klein’s decided it’s best to try and find a way to destroy it.” Clark pointed out. “So hopefully we won’t have any more surprises like that in the future. I’d hate for Jon to have to deal with that.”

“Me too.” Lois smiled at him. “Are you sure you’re okay though?”

“Weak and a little sore, but that’s about it.” He tightened his arms around her. “I think I’ll try and give it a few days before I attempt going on rescues unless it’s something the authorities can’t handle.”

“So, I get your undivided attention for a few days?” She grinned back at him, and her eyes sparkled as she spoke.

“You always have my undivided attention.” He grinned at her.

“You’re really pouring it on thick.” she sighed.

“It’s the truth.” He murmured, holding her close. “There is nowhere else I’d rather be than right here with you.” She gave him a weak smile, and he brushed the hair out of her face, “What is it?”

“Just try and be more careful, okay?” her voice cracked as she spoke.

“I can do my best, but that’s about all I can promise.” He tilted her chin to look at him, surprised to find unshed tears in her eyes. “Lois?” The knock on the patio door caught their attention. She looked up, and cleared her throat. “Always something.”

They turned to see Jonathan standing with Jimmy at the patio door. “Jimmy, this is a surprise,” Clark said, standing to greet him.

“Yeah, sorry, guys, I just got discharged and wanted to come by and thank you for everything.” Jimmy began, shoving his hands in his pockets as he stepped out on the patio. Jonathan closed the door behind him and motioned to them that he’d be in the living room if they needed him.

“How are you feeling?” Clark asked, looking at him in concern.

“Weird.” Jimmy flashed them a smile. “Really weird.”

“It’s an experience.” Clark agreed.

“Why didn’t you guys tell me what happened to you sooner?” Jimmy asked, looking at them in concern. “If I’d known…”

“Jimmy, you have to understand we were told about the

meteorite...err Kryptonite under the strictest of confidence from Superman,” Lois interjected. “It wasn’t our story to tell.”

“I know, but...” Jimmy sighed, taking a seat on the patio chair. “I treated you like dirt.” He looked at Clark. “The things I said...I’m sorry.”

“I appreciate that, Jimmy,” Clark said, cutting him off.

“I wish you would have told me what had happened sooner,” Jimmy said with a pleading look. “You didn’t deserve the way I treated you. I thought...”

“I know what you thought.” Clark said, looking up at him, “But like I told you before I would never do something like that to Lois. I understand where you were coming from though and I consider myself lucky that I’ve got a friend willing to look out for my family like that.”

“You still consider me a friend?” Jimmy asked, surprised.

“Always.” Clark smiled at him.

“Have you had dinner yet?” Lois asked, “Martha’s cooking up a storm in there...” She pointed to the glass patio door. “Usually she cooks enough for an army.”

Jimmy sighed, “I wish I could, but I’m making my rounds on the apologies tonight. You guys were my first stop.”

“If you change your mind, you know where to find us.” Lois smiled at him.

“Thanks,” Jimmy waved, heading back inside.

“Poor guy,” Clark said, watching him leave.

“I would not want to be him right now,” Lois said with a sigh.

“Lucy still mad at him?” Clark guessed.

“Hurt.” Lois corrected. “Which is far worse.”

Mayson folded her hands on the desk in front of her, looking at Sam Lane and Bill Henderson. Dr. Lane’s attorney was sitting in the corner, jotting down notes. She cleared her throat, looking to the court reporter. “This is a deposition to find out if the information Dr. Lane has is important enough to allow the courts to set aside his involvement in possible criminal acts for the greater good of putting certain criminals behind bars. Is everyone ready?”

Dr. Lane nodded, “Yes, Ms. Drake,”

“We’ll start at the beginning. How did you find yourself involved with Intergang?” Mayson asked, nodding to the recorder.

“When I was employed I was never told who I was working for. No one knew who the employer was. It was just ‘the organization,’ No one asked. No one provided information. The man I worked for seemed intent on keeping that information from everyone in my department.”

“Why did you agree to work under these conditions?”

Mayson asked.

“I felt if I tried to leave, my life and my family’s life would be in danger,” Sam explained, taking a deep breath.

“Something changed along the way though, didn’t it?” his attorney prodded.

“Yes, I took advantage of a weak moment in the organization’s leadership and was able to get ahold of several encrypted files that included names, dates, and history of their criminal activities,” Sam said carefully.

“How many names are there in these encrypted files?”

Mayson asked.

“Close to a million.” Sam said with a deep breath.

Mayson looked at Sam’s attorney then back again. “You worked on Metallo, did you not?”

“I helped Mr. Corbin the best way I knew how. I did not program him to attack or kill.” Sam said gruffly.

“You went on the run after an attack from Bill Church’s son. Is that correct?” his attorney asked.

“Yes.” Sam nodded. “I was attacked when they discovered I’d helped remove something they were trying to use to control Superman.”

“Which was what?” Mayson asked.

“I won’t say.” Sam said flatly.

“Dr. Lane...” Mayson gave him a look.

“Superman just got done saving my daughter and everyone in this city. I will not do anything to put him in harm’s way.” Sam said coldly. “I will give you the names, dates, and everything I have, but I will not give you that.”

“Very well.” Mayson said, looking to Sam’s attorney. “I believe we have everything we need. Have your office send over the paperwork in the morning.”

“Thank you, Ms. Drake.” Dr. Lane’s attorney said, reaching out to shake her hand.

“Dr. Lane, one last question,” Mayson asked, “Are you willing to take the stand against these criminals?”

“As long as you keep my family and me safe I’ll do whatever’s necessary.”

“Then we have a deal.” She smiled at him. “When we’re done here, there won’t be anyone left to send after you or your family.”

Jimmy knocked on the old wooden framed door, peering through the glass at his editor who was still hard at work, marking up the latest copy for the late night edition. “Chief?”

Perry looked up at him. “Jimmy?” His expression seemed to be second guessing if it was really him or not.

“It’s me, Chief.” Jimmy smiled at him. “I got released about an hour ago. Wanted to stop by and say thanks for everything.”

“You, uh, had me worried there for awhile.” Perry said gruffly, standing to his feet.

“I know,” Jimmy said, looking at him with remorse. “I said a lot of things I shouldn’t have. You didn’t deserve that.”

“It wasn’t you though.” Perry reminded him.

“It was, but it wasn’t.” Jimmy corrected. At Perry’s confused expression he elaborated. “I didn’t mean to say them, but sometimes it is how I feel, Chief...partly anyway.”

“I see,” Perry drawled, tapping his hand on his chin.

“So, you, uh, think I treat you like a lap dog?” Perry looked at him with a concerned look.

“Sometimes,” Jimmy shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Jimmy, do you know why I send you on those errands?” Perry asked, putting an arm around his shoulders as he spoke.

“Cuz you’re too busy to leave and do it yourself?” Jimmy guessed.

“Partly.” Perry nodded. “When you first started here, you had a vision of what it was going to be like to be a newspaperman, but you never showed me what I was really looking for...until yesterday.”

“Which was what?” Jimmy asked, confused.

“Guts,” Perry said with a smile. “I’ve been waiting for you to stand up to me. Stand up for yourself. In this business, people will

walk all over you. You've got the talent to make it in this business, but you've got to have the tenacity and know how to handle yourself."

"So you were testing me?" Jimmy asked.

"More or less," Perry smiled. "Now, I would have preferred a little less of a colorful expression when you finally did stand up to me, but I'm glad you did." He patted him on the back. "I don't need an errand boy. I need a journalist that can hold his own. Maybe he's got an eye for the camera, and I think he might turn into a great photojournalist one day."

"Really?" Jimmy looked up at him, uncertain he'd heard him right.

"Really." Perry nodded. "I want you to move your desk into the City section starting Monday. It's time you started working with the big leagues."

Jimmy reached up and hugged him, "Oh, Chief, thank you so much! I won't let you down." After a minute he realized he was still hugging Perry and backed away, "I mean, thank you, sir," He held out his hand to shake Perry's.

"Jimmy, don't you ever hug me again." Perry looked at him bewildered.

"Right, Chief." Jimmy nodded, shaking his hand. "No hugging."

"What kind of newsroom do you think I run here?" Perry barked. "Now get out of here and go find that girlfriend of yours and treat her to a nice evening. On me." He handed him a fifty dollar bill.

"Thanks, Chief," Jimmy said with a smile.

"I'll see you Monday." Perry smiled at him.

Jimmy frowned, "But it's only Wednesday."

"And I'll see you Monday." Perry smiled at him.

"Thanks, Chief," Jimmy smiled at him.

"Night, son," Perry called after him.

Lois smiled, watching Clark carry Jon to his bassinet. After playing with his grandparents, he had passed out early. It was nice to see everyone so relaxed after everything that had happened. After six years of investigating, Lex Luthor was finally behind bars. Finally, after everything, she felt like everything was going to be okay.

"Hey, little guy," Clark rubbed Jon's back, leaning in to kiss him goodnight. "Sweet dreams."

"You're so good with him," Lois said, taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

"He makes it easy," he said, taking a seat next to her. "I think he wore mom and dad out. Dad was snoring in the recliner earlier. Mom had to wake him to go to bed."

Lois giggled at the mental image. "It's been nice having them here. After everything that happened these last few days..."

"I know," Clark whispered, running a hand up her back. She felt a shiver run down her spine and leaned into him. "These last few days have been a nightmare, but it's over now." He whispered to her. "Luthor's finally in jail. Intergang and the thousands of members around the world will be brought to justice one by one with the help of your father. Rollie Vale's going to prison along with the rest of Luthor's gang of thugs. It's finally over." He pressed his lips against her cheek, running a hand through her hair and outlining the frame of her face with his palm.

"I was so scared, Clark," she whispered tearfully.

"Scared?" He asked.

"When Lex kidnapped me I knew you'd find me. You always do but when I saw you trying to dismantle that satellite and when that beam changed from white to green...it physically hurt me to watch. I was so scared I wasn't ever going to see you again. I wasn't ever going to..." She could feel a lump in her throat as she fought back tears, unable to look him in the eyes.

"Lois," he whispered in her ear, holding her close. "I was scared too. Terrified really. I kept thinking of everything I still wanted to do. The things I wanted to teach Jon. Things I wanted to say." He brushed a strand of hair out of her face.

"Like what?" she asked, turning to face him.

"Like how much I love you. How much I need you. Every fear, and doubt seemed so small after everything." He pressed his lips to her forehead, then moved his hands up her back, holding her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder. "I'm sorry I scared you, Lois."

"Just try and be more careful, please. I don't think I can take it if something happened to you..." Lois whispered.

He nodded, leaning into kiss her. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Promise?" she teased, fingering the collar to his shirt playfully.

"Scout's honor," he held up his fingers showing the Boy Scout promise. She couldn't help but laugh. Jon began to stir, and they both froze, afraid to move or say anything. Clark looked back at the bassinet and whispered, "He's asleep. Just babbling in his sleep like his mom."

"I do not babble." She whispered back.

"Yes, you do." He teased, leaning in to recapture her lips with his. She could feel the heat from his breath tickle his lips. He moved his hands to cup both sides of her face as he lost himself in the art of kissing her.

Lucy looked around the dining room, mildly impressed with the lights and music. "Pouring it on a little thick, aren't you?" She asked giving him a half smile. "I would have been fine splitting a pizza and watching an old movie together." She looked at him in concern. "Can you afford this place?"

"I figured I had a lot to make up for but don't worry, dinner's on the Chief tonight." Jimmy dazzled her with his best grin.

"Really?" Lucy laughed, "How'd you manage that?"

"It was his idea that I take you out and make up for everything from yesterday." His face fell slightly. "I'm sorry, Luce. I really don't know what to say. I just hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me."

Lucy leaned over to give him a peck on the cheek. "I already have. I know this year's been complicated for the both of us." She shrugged her shoulders. "Forgiving you for your evil twin's behavior shouldn't be an issue we have to work through."

"What do you think we should work through?" Jimmy asked curiously.

"Trust," Lucy said carefully.

"Trust?" Jimmy echoed. "I trust you."

"Do you?" Lucy asked, looking at him with concern. "I know it wasn't you that said those things, but a part of you had to have felt them at one time or another. The double was created from you."

"I know." Jimmy's face fell. "I guess I haven't exactly handled things the best way."

"I could have handled things a little better too," Lucy admitted, leaning in to kiss him. "I do love you, Jimmy. I shouldn't have let my anger get the best of me. I shouldn't have shut you out. We've been fighting so much over these last few months about the same thing because neither of us is listening to one another."

"I know," Jimmy said sadly. "A lot of that's my fault. I didn't listen." He sighed, "I still wish Lois and CK had told me what had happened with his exposure to the Black Kryptonite before. It would have saved so much aggravation."

"Tell me about it." Lucy smiled back at him.

"Are we going to be okay?" he asked.

"Are you going to quit assuming the worst scenario without getting the facts?" Lucy asked.

"No," Jimmy smiled back at her. "I'm also going to stop letting other people push me around. I know what I want to do with my life. I can't let other people stop me from achieving those goals."

"Even Perry White?" Lucy teased.

"Even the Chief." Jimmy grinned. "Turns out he's been trying to get me to stand up to him."

"I figured," Lucy said with a smile. "He did the same thing to Lois when she and Clark first started."

"And you didn't tell me because?" Jimmy gave her a teasing glare.

"Pete and Clark and Lois were all telling you to stand up for yourself. I was being the supportive girlfriend. Someone's gotta have your back." Lucy said with a shrug.

"Thanks." Jimmy smiled at her.

One Week Later...

A crowd stood gathered in front of the Daily Planet. Lois looked up at the stage that had been set up. A banner hung over the stage with a yellow and red sign that read, 'Superman Day' on it.

"I'm sure Clark is going to love that," Lois muttered to herself, looking in the sky for her husband.

It had been a week since Clark had stopped the Annihilator satellite and Lex Luthor had been arrested with the Churches. Since the programming that had been encrypted into the cable, television and internet had been found, slowly but surely different members of the government had been issuing apologies to Superman in one form or another. The most recent one had come from the president of the United States, President Garner requesting Superman visit the White House. Clark planned to make a visit at the end of the month. He had gone from being public enemy number one to being a celebrity overnight.

It had been discovered that LexTel had been working with the Church Network and using the subliminal messages to steal the presidential election. It wasn't until the programming was discovered that people's true reaction to Clark's alter ego was coming out.

A familiar sonic boom could be heard from up above. Lois smiled, looking up to see the red and blue streak flying through the air.

"Looks like a good turnout," Jimmy said from behind her.

She nodded, "Yeah, everyone's going out of their way to welcome Superman the way he should have been last year."

Jimmy held up his camera, capturing the photos of Clark landing on the stage and greeting the mayor with a smile. "I still don't understand what the reasoning was for Intergang to turn everyone against him."

"Power," Lois said softly. "He was a threat to their way of life. Superman represents good. He represents a way of life that they refused to let people live. So they went out of their way to build a propaganda campaign against him fearing he'd encourage others to be more than what the Churches wanted them to be."

"Well, look around Lois." Jimmy gestured to the crowd. "They were right. Everyone loves him. He's famous."

"Yeah," Lois smiled, looking up at the stage as Clark stood next to the mayor by the microphone.

The mayor approached the microphone, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming." She looked to Clark and smiled, "Superman, as thanks for everything you've done to help and protect this city...even when we didn't deserve it, we would like to give you the key to the city and proclaim this day, Superman Day." She placed the key around Clark's neck. Jimmy took some more photos, and the crowd erupted in applause.

Clark seemed nervous, meeting her gaze in the crowd. She smiled at him, nodding her encouragement. "Thank you. The people of Metropolis have made me feel very welcome here. I'm proud to call it my home."

Superman Gets Key to the City

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

Photo Credit: James Olsen

"Your first front page photo credit," Lois remarked with an impressed smile. "Not bad."

"Well, thanks for letting me tag along." Jimmy shrugged.

Perry walked up to them, "What's everyone standing around for? This is a newspaper! Get movin'!" He wagged his finger in their direction as he walked by.

Jimmy shook his head, "Back to the grind."

Clark walked up to them, notepad in hand with a broad smile on his face. Lois turned to him. "Hey you," She held up the front page for him to see. "Front page. Did you see?"

"Yeah, CK, check out the byline." Jimmy pointed to his photo credit."

"That's great work, Jimmy." Clark complimented.

"Metropolis is my home." Jimmy read the quote. "I don't know about you guys, but that sure does make me feel good to know we've got a guy like Superman looking out for us."

"Yeah," Lois shared a look with Clark. "It definitely does."

THE END