

Rules of Battle

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Summary: In the next installment of “Rules Series,” Lois and Clark deal with the headaches of family when Lucy Lane shows up back in Metropolis with her newest boyfriend, Johnny Corbin. After finding out about Corbin’s criminal past, Lois does everything she can to pull her sister away from the petty thief, but he may be more dangerous than either she or Clark realize. (3 of 10)

Story Size: 14,814 words (81Kb as text)

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Previously On Rules of Trust

“I’ll fly you home,” Clark offered.

“I appreciate the offer, but that would prove to be a problem in the morning when I need to drive to work,” she pointed out.

“I can come back for the Jeep,” he pointed out, running his hands up her sides. “It’ll only take a few minutes.”

“And when someone takes a picture of Superman flying my Jeep to my apartment?” Lois prompted, looking back at him with a teasing smile.

“Probably not a good idea,” he conceded, leaning in to kiss her.

“Probably not,” she agreed, smiling back at him. “So…” she fingered the collar of his dress shirt, folding the flap of his collar where it had come unfolded earlier.

“So…” he repeated, looking down at her with a smile.

“I guess I should go home. Get some rest,” she whispered softly, still not making a move to leave.

“Yeah,” he smiled at her. “I guess you should.”

“So, tomorrow?” she whispered, sliding down from the counter to stand in front of him.

“Tomorrow.” He leaned in to kiss her.

Two Months Later...

Lois stared at the one-hundred-and-seventy-five-foot wheel in front of her with a sign that read, “Niagara Falls Sky Wheel.” The sound of the nearby falls could be heard in the distance amid the chatter of children running and playing around the theme park. When Clark had said he had a surprise for her, she didn’t imagine the surprise being a theme park at Niagara Falls.

It had been two months since he’d let her in on his secret. Two months since she’d taken a chance and said ‘yes’ to what her heart had been pushing her to do since the fallout from her failed wedding to Lex. Though they worked together for over a year each date proved to reveal something new and different the other hadn’t known.

One of her biggest fears about starting a relationship with him was that things would change between them. He was her best friend—the person she thought she knew better than anyone—losing his friendship wasn’t an option for her. That was one of the reasons she’d fought so hard against admitting how she really felt about him. It had come as quite a shock to discover that the man she’d fantasized about for nearly a year had been the same man she’d been working side by side with and joking around with.

After her initial shock had worn off, they’d agreed to try and adjust to the bombshell he’d dropped on her and the change in

their relationship slowly. They’d agreed to take things slow, but that proved to be more difficult to follow through with than either of them had anticipated. Less than twelve hours after their first date and neither of them seemed to be succeeding on keeping their hands to themselves. Jimmy and Perry had figured out what was going on before the week was up.

She smiled to herself, recalling the very heated make-out sessions on his couch from the beginning of their relationship. They’d come very close to pushing the envelope and giving into the temptation to make that leap in their relationship to satisfy the more physical urges, but Clark had been quick to put the brakes on when things got too heated. Looking back, she was grateful he had. Her past relationships had begun with moving things to the physical side of the relationship almost immediately. Her last experience with Claude had left her uncertain of herself and created a mental stigma against getting involved with anyone at work. It had taken her almost a year to allow Clark to get close enough to consider him a friend after what had happened with both Claude and Lex.

She’d never felt that pull toward Lex that she constantly felt with Clark. If she was honest with herself, she hadn’t felt it with Claude or Paul either. It was lust and infatuation that had drawn her in, but neither man made her weak in the knees the way Clark had. The closer they got over the past few months the deeper her feelings grew. She knew she loved him and had been in love with him for quite some time—even if she wouldn’t admit it to herself until recently.

It had been a hectic few months with the fiasco of dead criminals being resurrected by Dr. Hamilton and Molly’s ex-fiance coming back from the dead to try and hold the world hostage. Then there had been the incident last month with Clark’s powers being transferred to William Wallace Webster Waldecker. It had taken them two days to track him down, and a long heart to heart talk with Clark seemed to not persuade the man he couldn’t charge people for his saving them.

What did help was the reminder of everyone that had come after Superman since his arrival and everyone that had used his friends to get to him. That got the man’s attention. Low and behold at that very moment his sister, Wandamae had just been attacked and almost kidnapped. Thankfully Clark and Waldecker had shown up in time to stop it, but unfortunately, the attempted kidnapper got away.

With some experimentation and research from STAR Labs, they were able to reverse the transfer and return Waldecker to normal. Waldecker was able to provide a brief description of a woman that had tried to bribe him into letting her take his superpowers. That was two weeks ago, and as of yet, they hadn’t been able to track down the mysterious woman or match the description Waldecker gave them with anyone in the system. It was like she had disappeared into thin air.

“The view from the top is amazing,” Clark said, wrapping an arm around her waist from behind and pulling her to him.

She smiled back at him, pulling herself back to the present and looking toward the large white and gray wheel that was slowing down. “I haven’t been to one of these things since I was a kid,” Lois said as the group of passengers exited the Sky Wheel and the gate in front of them opened for their aisle.

“Come on. It’ll be fun,” Clark whispered, leaning in to kiss her cheek before leading her to the carriage with tinted glass walls all around it.

“Watch your step,” the attendant instructed as she stepped inside.

There was a bench to sit on and a white metal pole in the center of the carriage. The walls and doors were covered in tinted glass, allowing a three-hundred and sixty-degree view around the park. “Wow,” she gasped as the sliding door closed, and the lock clicked. She felt the carriage begin to move and reached out for

the pole, smiling when her hand brushed against Clark's.

He pointed to the right corner and said, "If you keep your eye right there you'll see the falls the whole time."

She followed where his hand pointed. Sure enough, the majestic Niagara Falls could be seen in the corner as they rode up the wheel and came to a stop halfway up the wheel, waiting for the next passengers to be loaded on.

"Pretty incredible, huh?" Clark asked next to her.

"It's gorgeous," she breathed, watching the colored lights reflect off the water that tumbled down in harmony. The sun was beginning to set, and the final gaze of the sun's orange and yellow rays reflected off the water as they began to move again.

Lucy Lane set her suitcases down on the pavement, looking up at the familiar brick building with a sigh. It had been nearly a year since she'd been in Metropolis, but she missed it. She turned back to the cab driver who was helping pull the last of her luggage out of the trunk.

"That'll be twenty-eight-fifty." He said with a heavy sigh as he handed her her last bag.

"Right." Lucy looked in her purse and began to rummage inside for the fifty-dollar bill she'd stashed in there earlier. "I had it..." she frowned, digging a little deeper until she found the green bill folded in the bottom pocket. "Ah-ha." She proudly pulled out the fifty-dollar bill and handed it to him.

He counted out her change, and she returned a five to tip him. He nodded his thanks and walked back to the driver's side of the cab to leave.

Lucy grabbed her bags and headed inside. Hopefully, Lois was still on the first floor.

After an afternoon at the Niagara Falls theme park and finishing the evening with a ride on the Sky Wheel to watch the sunset, Lois and Clark enjoyed a light dinner at one of the local restaurants before returning to Metropolis. Lois rested her head against Clark's shoulder as he flew them through the night sky. The stars looked close enough she was sure she could reach out and grab one. The moon's pale yellow light reflected off Clark's cheek as they flew over the city lights of the city she'd called home for so long.

Her body shivered against him, and he whispered in her ear, "You cold?"

"No," she shook her head as she saw the familiar streets below. "Thanks for today. It was nice to get out of Metropolis and do something fun."

"I'm glad you had fun." He smiled at her. "That's one of my favorite views. The way the light hits the water right when the sun is setting." They came in to land a block from her apartment in the familiar looking abandoned alleyway.

Lois looked around to make sure the coast was clear before nodding to him. "We're good."

He took her hand in his and walked with her toward the red brick apartment building. "Maybe we can make a trip back up there one weekend and check out some of their other attractions?" he suggested.

"Yeah, I'd like that." Lois smiled and nodded before teasing, "If I don't have any other plans, that is."

"Of course." He grinned back at her.

She felt butterflies in her stomach when he smiled at her. The closer they had gotten over the past few months the more she had moments like this. He was no longer just Clark, her friend, but Clark her boyfriend. The guy she wanted to spend her spare time with and kiss senseless. They'd promised one another that things wouldn't change between them, but they had. They'd changed in a good way. There was that pull again.

They walked up to her apartment, and she pulled her keys out to unlock the several locks on her door and turned back to him.

There were those butterflies again. "Thanks again for the, uh..." she caught her neighbor across the hall stepping out of her apartment to take her trash out and quickly covered for herself. She made a flying motion with her hand and took a step toward him. "I had a really nice time."

"Me too," he whispered, leaning in to kiss her.

She smiled against his lips, feeling his hand cup the side of her face. She ran her fingers up the front of his dress shirt and murmured, "Do you want to come in for...uh, coffee?"

He chuckled against her lips, "Since when do you have a coffee maker in your kitchen?"

"We can get some...from the cart down the street." She purred mischievously, fingering the hair on the back of his neck as she felt the wood frame of her door against her back. "Or we could just keep doing this," she whispered breathlessly.

"I like doing this," he whispered in her ear, moving his attention to her jawline as she looped her other arm around his neck.

"Me too," She murmured against his lips, reaching behind her for the knob to her door. Before she could turn the door handle, she felt the solid wood against her back give away. "Oh!" she gasped as Clark caught her. She leaned against him to see her front door open with her sister in the doorway. "Lucy?"

"Hi, Clark, Lois," Lucy's cheeks blushed with a crimson red, looking between Lois and Clark.

"Hi, Lucy," Clark managed at the same time Lois interjected, "How'd you get in here?"

"You gave me your keys." Lucy shrugged.

"Uh, Luce, wh-what are you doing here?" Lois stammered, running a hand through her hair self-consciously as Clark released his arms around her and cleared his throat nervously.

"My roommate doesn't get back in town until morning. I figured I could just stay here for the night, but..." Lucy explained, stepping aside for Lois and Clark to enter her apartment. She glanced between them with a knowing smile, "Boy, a year certainly changes things, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Lois sighed, sharing a look with Clark. "So, how long are you in town for?"

"At least until I'm done with college," Lucy said, walking back toward the kitchen. "By the way, you might want to run to the store sometime. There is like nothing in here to eat."

"I've been a little busy," Lois said hurriedly.

"I noticed." Lucy teased, pulling out the Chinese carton she'd been eating from earlier. "I ordered some Sesame Chicken if you want some."

"I've got to get going," Clark whispered in her ear.

Lois looked at him in surprise then nodded when she realized what he was referring to. He really had to go. She nodded, "I'll see you tomorrow." He leaned in for a quick peck and was out the door before Lucy could respond.

Lucy glanced at the door that had just closed behind Clark then back at Lois. "So, you and Clark, huh?" She gave Lois an impish grin.

"Don't start," Lois warned, throwing a pillow from the couch at Lucy.

Clark flew toward the alarm that had caught his attention on the corner of Division and Wright Street. An armed officer stood in position outside the jewelry store with his weapon drawn on a man in a dark green jacket. "Okay, pal, drop the ice!"

To Clark's surprise, the man advanced toward the officer, and the officer opened fire. "Back off man. Just back off!"

The bullets bounced off the robber, and Clark heard the feedback from the police radio echoing from the robber's head. Concerned, Clark used his x-ray vision on the robber as he came in to land. He looked at the robber in surprise then back at the officer. He used his x-ray vision to confirm his suspicions.

“Stop!” Clark warned the officer, ordering him to stop firing. “It’s a robot.”

“A what?” the officer looked at him in surprise.

Clark aimed a blast of heat vision at the robber’s feet, and the officer looked in surprise as metal pooled at the robber’s feet. “He’s a robot...or it is,” he corrected himself.

“Four thirty-one Metro, requesting back-up at 321 Division street.” the officer spoke into the radio. The robotic man slowed down as he stood in place.

“You might want to page STAR Labs while you’re at it,” Clark instructed.

“A robotic thief. Now, I’ve seen everything,” the officer mused to himself.

Chapter 1

The smell of turkey and bacon on the grill hung in the air as the servers around them bustled from one end of the restaurant. Lois finished her iced tea, turning the ice cubes with her straw to get the last few drops. She pushed her glass to the side and turned to the vacant booth seat Clark had just vacated.

She spotted Lucy across the aisle, taking an order and leaned back against the plastic cushion of the booth. She and Clark had come here for lunch to work through the information they’d been able to find out about the robotic thief that had tried to rob a jewelry store last night.

She and Lucy had spent a few hours last night catching up. Lois had caught her up on everything that had happened with Ryan and Molly a few months ago and her and Clark’s budding relationship. Lucy had caught her up on the new relationship she was in. From the sound of him, Lois suspected he was no different from Lucy’s previous boyfriends — a deadbeat that would use her sister and break her heart. She tried to put on the supportive sister front, but it was hard when she saw Lucy making the same mistakes repeatedly.

What was worse was the buffoon actually lived here in Metropolis. They’d apparently met during Lucy’s break from school last spring. They exchanged numbers, and now here Lucy was back in Metropolis, conveniently close to the new loser of the month and not wanting to share an apartment with her sister. It wasn’t that she thought Lucy needed to stay with her but — it was out of character for her. She was hiding something, and Lois was going to find out what.

Clark returned to the table with his notepad in hand and a satisfied expression on his face. “What are you so happy about?” Lois inquired as he took a seat across from her.

“That was Jimmy. Apparently, the robot was powered by uranium,” he said with a satisfied grin. “Which means...”

“We track down who had access to uranium, and we have our suspect pool,” Lois finished for him. He laid a stack of files on the table. “What’s this?” she asked.

“I made a detour to grab the paperwork Jimmy had on our research labs,” he explained.

“Detour, huh?” She began flipping through the notes Jimmy had made on the first file. “Looks like STAR Labs has had some cutbacks.”

“Yeah, only two labs in Metropolis had the technology capable of creating a robot that advanced. Most of the other labs specialize in chemical compounds and simple mechanical arm robotics,” he explained. “LexLabs was the first one...” His face fell into a frown at the mention of the company’s name.

“Which is out of business,” Lois interjected.

“Good riddance,” Clark added before returning to his train of thought, “And STAR Labs.” He tapped on the folder in her hand.

“Well, considering all the defense cut-backs that came through once the ATS got shut down, I’m willing to bet there’s a long list of disgruntled employees with the capability of robbing a jewelry store with their latest gadgets.”

“The question is who,” Clark agreed, growing thoughtful for a moment. “You know, what do they call someone who’s happy with his job? A ‘grunted’ employee?”

Lois rolled her eyes at the corny joke. “I believe they’re called employed.”

Lucy walked up to them with a fresh pot of coffee and mug in hand. “Black, low-fat cream, and two sugars.” She handed the mug to Lois. “How’s that for memory?”

Lois took the mug from her and took a sip. “Thanks.”

“How was everything?” Lucy asked.

“Well, the service was kind of slow, but aside from that...”

Lois gave Lucy a teasing smile.

“I’m so sorry.” Lucy’s eyes twinkled at her. “Tell you what your dessert’s on me. That and your senior citizen discount should make up for it.”

“Ha, ha,” Lois scoffed, throwing Lucy a dirty look.

“Well, if the broom fits.” Lucy shrugged.

“You know, I always envisioned the relationship between siblings to be... well... something different,” Clark said with an uncertain expression.

“That’s because you’re an only child,” Lois said, taking a sip of her coffee.

“So Lucy, how’s it feel to be back in Metropolis?” Clark asked.

“Great. California was fun, but it was time to get back to school and finish my degree,” Lucy said with a sigh.

Lois looked down at her coffee, uncertain of how to react. Lucy had moved to California after the fiasco with their dad and a fight between Lois and Lucy over how to move forward. Lois fresh off the near-death of their father wanted to try and mend fences and Lucy didn’t or couldn’t support that decision. She’d moved out then followed her friend Maria to California for a few months. It had been a rather painful time in her and Lucy’s relationship that she wished to forget.

“Well, good for you, Luce,” Clark responded with a congratulatory nod. “Do you know what you want your major to be?”

“Well, I...” She stopped mid-sentence when a man in a green plaid jacket, black jeans and grey t-shirt approached. Lois narrowed her eyes when she saw him wrap her arms around her sister.

“Hey, Lucy!” the light brown haired man beamed, pawing all over Lucy.

Lois looked up at Clark who was avoiding the awkward scene of Lucy and her boyfriend’s public display of affection by staring intently at his glass of melted ice. Lois let out a sigh, tapping her fingers on the table irritably. Finally, unable to stand the uncomfortable feeling of watching the buffoon paw her kid sister a second longer she cleared her throat, drawing the attention back to herself and Clark, who were left to watch the scene unnoticed by either of them.

Lucy blushed, pulling away from her boyfriend. He beamed at Lucy with a smile. “How’s my girl?”

“Johnny, I want you to meet my sister, Lois Lane.” Lucy gestured to the table. “Lois, this is Johnny Corbin.”

“How ya’ doing?” Johnny extended his hand to Lois, “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Lois stared at the offending hand, unwilling to acknowledge the man as anything more than another man that would break her sister’s heart. “And I’ve heard about you.”

Lucy tightened her jaw at Lois, but she ignored it. Instead, Lucy then turned to Clark, “Um, Johnny, this is Clark Kent. He and Lois both work together at the Daily Planet.”

“Yeah? I used to work for the Planet. I had a route when I was a kid till they fired me. I was a little short on my subscription money a few times. Big deal, right?” Corbin laughed his juvenile thievery off.

Lois gritted her teeth about to respond when Clark interjected, “You know, I think we need to get going.” He raised his eyebrows, gesturing to the files on the table. “Follow up on that story.”

“You sure?” Lucy asked.

Clark pulled out a few bills from his wallet and handed them to Lucy, standing to his feet. “We’ve got a busy morning,” he explained helping Lois to her feet.

“Right, busy,” Lois agreed unenthusiased as she bore into Johnny Corbin suspiciously. He seemed all too eager for them to leave.

“Luce, I’ll call you later? Maybe we can share a meal where you’re not working?”

“Sure,” Lucy nodded. “Sounds good.”

Lois watched as Corbin followed Lucy to the register, whispering in her ear as she rang the check up. “That’s the guy that got her to move back to Metropolis? Him?”

“Now’s not the time,” Clark reminded her. “If we don’t get out of here now you’re going to say something you’ll regret.” he finished, pulling her toward the door. “Remember? Jewelry store? Robot thief?”

Lois let out a long breath, staring at Lucy one last time before following Clark out the door. “Fine. Maybe I can get Jimmy to see what he can dig up on Mr. Johnny Corbin while we’re at it.”

Clark glanced at the list in his hand as he and Lois waited for the elevator. It had been a long walk back to the Planet. Lois’ attention seemed focused on the latest boyfriend of Lucy’s, and he was finding it difficult to hold her focus for more than five minutes on the investigation.

“It looks like there were quite a few layoffs from the robotics department with STAR Labs,” Clark observed from his notes, “but part of that department was scooped up from LexLabs earlier this year too.”

“Great,” Lois sulked, tapping her foot impatiently as she waited for the current occupants of the elevator to step off. “How long is Lex Luthor going to haunt Metropolis?”

“At least we don’t have to worry about anything new leading back to him,” he pointed out, holding the elevator doors open for her as she stepped inside.

“Yeah, well knowing my luck it’ll lead right back to my kid sister’s latest boyfriend.” She muttered, pressing the button to the newsroom. “Did you see that guy? I mean, I can’t understand what she sees in someone like that. She followed him to Metropolis. She had a good job. She was working on her degree, but no she had to put it all on hold again...” Lois seemed to notice the expression he was giving her and shook her head, “Don’t expect me to be rational. My kid sister is dating a monosyllabic illiterate goon!”

“Lois, calm down.” He ran his hand up and down her arm. “If the guy’s as bad as you think, I’m sure your sister will see it.”

“Lucy is pigheaded and doesn’t like admitting when she’s wrong,” Lois retorted. He fought back a smile, and she added, “And no it doesn’t run in the family.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything,” he chuckled.

“Yes, you were,” she laughed, fingering the knot of his tie.

He leaned in to kiss her and whispered, “Okay, maybe I was.”

Instantly, he felt her relax against him. Her hands wandered over his shoulders, and she smiled against his lips. He moved his hand to her cheek, fingering her dark silky hair between his fingers and inhaling the unique scent against his super nostrils that was a mixture of vanilla and lavender.

The soft ping of the elevator doors opening on the newsroom floor reached his ears, and he slowly pulled away from her, hearing the gentle egging from their co-workers. Unembarrassed, they separated and stepped off the elevator hand in hand. About a week after the fiasco with the resurrected mobsters from Dr. Hamilton’s experiments, they’d finally stopped trying to hide their relationship in the newsroom. Both Jimmy and Perry had been

quick to figure it out, and he and Lois weren’t very good at hiding their relationship in the newsroom either. Most everyone had already been speculating on what was going on between them when they let the cat out of the bag.

Before they could make it to their desks, Perry was approaching them with his half-empty mockup of the afternoon edition. “Lois, Clark, you two better have something more than ‘we’re working on it’ to go on my front page.”

Clark let out a long sigh, meeting Perry’s gaze warily, “Unfortunately we’re still following up on a few leads, Chief.” Perry let out a snort of defeat. “The police aren’t sure what to make of last night’s robbery either.”

“Thankfully no one was hurt,” Lois interjected. “We should have more to go on soon though.”

“Hey, Lois, CK, here’s that list of employees from LexLabs and STAR Labs that have ordered uranium in the last six months,” Jimmy said, handing a thin manila envelope to Lois.

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Lois took the folder from him, flipping through the file for a moment with a frown.

“Uranium?” Perry inquired.

“That’s how the robot was powered,” Jimmy explained.

“Copy boy!” the request came from the other side of the newsroom and Jimmy sighed, with a defeated expression to head that way.

“All right,” Perry wagged his finger at the two of them, “I want to see everything you’ve got on this by five. Maybe we can piece something together for the evening edition.”

“You got it, Chief.” Lois nodded. Perry moved off, heading toward Steve in Sports.

“So, where do you want to start?” Clark asked.

She handed him a few leaves of paper from the file. “You take LexLabs, and I’ll take STAR Labs.”

He nodded and took the list from her heading to his desk. His attention focused on the familiar logo for a moment and sighed. No matter how long it had been, it was still a sore spot for him, the reminder of how close he’d been to losing everything to Lex Luthor. He’d underestimated Luthor. He never thought he’d get his hands on Kryptonite. It was a painful lesson that he’d taken to heart and made him remember to never underestimate an adversary.

Lex Luthor was gone, but his influence and crimes still seemed to haunt Metropolis. A fact that he himself found bothersome. He could tell the mention of LexLabs disturbed Lois as well. It was a painful reminder of how wrong she’d been about someone she thought she knew.

Lois was engrossed in the list she’d gone through of STAR Labs former employees with access to uranium. She and Clark had highlighted the employees that showed up on both lists. So far she hadn’t made any progress on her end. No one from STAR Labs wanted to discuss the former employees with her.

Jimmy approached her with a file in hand, “Lois? Here’s that research you wanted on Johnny Corbin.”

Lois set the paper down and took the file from him gratefully. “Thanks, Jimmy. Anything jump out?”

Jimmy shrugged, “He’s an overall bad guy. Two arrests for grand theft auto, half a dozen misdemeanors. Currently on probation... Not exactly someone you’d want to bring home to mom and dad if you get my drift.”

“Yeah,” Lois frowned at Jimmy’s last statement. “Thanks, Jimmy.” He nodded, heading back to his desk. Lois watched him leave with a frown. Something seemed to be bothering him but she wasn’t sure if she should press the issue.

Lois took the paper in hand and walked over to Clark with a smug expression, “Well, well, well, guess what I found out?”

“The person behind the jewelry thief robot?” Clark guessed, tapping his fingers on his chin.

“No, I’ve hit a dead end. I’m trying to get STAR Labs to call me back but no one wants to talk to the press right now.” Lois sighed, handing him the file in her hand. “But I did find out something about Lucy’s latest boyfriend.”

“Lo-is,” Clark let out a low sigh, taking the folder from her.

“He’s got a rap sheet, Clark.” Lois pointed at the black and white images showing Johnny Corbin posing front and side for his mug shots.

Clark’s face fell to a disturbed scowl as he flipped through the very thick file on Corbin in his hand. “He definitely likes to tread on the wrong side of the law.”

Lois reached for the phone on his desk and began to dial, “I’m calling Lucy.”

“Whoa, whoa.” He reached out to stop her, returning the phone to its cradle. “Just think about this for a second, Lois. What are you going to say?”

“That I found out her boyfriend’s a criminal,” Lois said, reaching for the phone.

“And how did you find it out?” Clark pointed out. “She’s not going to be happy about you digging into her boyfriend’s past like that. In my experience, people don’t like to be told they’re wrong.” He offered her a smile. “Given that she’s related to you she definitely won’t take it well.”

“Ha, ha,” she snorted sarcastically, crossing her arms over her chest. “What do you think I should do?”

“I’m not sure. You know her better than I do, but admitting you were digging into Corbin’s past is definitely not the way you want to go if you want her to listen to you,” Clark pointed out.

“So, what? I just sit on the sidelines and wait for her to find out the hard way?” Lois fumed irritably.

“How about just a gentle conversation about what she does know about the guy?” Clark prompted. “Let her be the one to dig into his past?”

“Okay.” Her face softened, trying to figure out the best way to go about talking to Lucy. Clark was right. Lucy wouldn’t want to admit she was wrong. “I suppose it’s not a terrible idea.” She turned her attention back to the computer Clark was working at. “How are you coming with LexLabs?”

“Well, none of the labs I spoke to reported any theft of uranium. But... apparently, when Lexcorp broke up, there was a significant amount missing from Lexlabs.”

“Significant enough to build a robot?” Lois prompted.

“Try an Army’s worth,” Clark responded with raised eyebrows. “Someone stockpiled a lot of LexLabs nuclear weapons division as well as robotics equipment.”

“Any idea who had access to those areas?”

He showed her the list in his hand with five names circled. ‘Emmet Vale, Gretchen Kelly, Nathan Wallace, Jaxon Xavier, and Edward Hanson.’

“Gretchen Kelly?” Lois peered at the name suspiciously.

“The one and the same, but I did some checking, and she wasn’t even in the country when the uranium went missing,” Clark pointed out.

“So where are we now?” Lois asked.

“Trying to hack into Fort Knox here.” Clark pointed to the computer screen with the familiar LexLabs logo on it.

Jimmy walked up to them still with a sour expression on his face and handed them five separate folders. “CK, here’s all I could find on the guys on your list. Not much I’m afraid.”

“Thanks.” Clark took the file from him. “You all right, Jimmy?”

“Yeah... I guess. It’s just, they raised my rent and I can’t afford it, so I gotta find a new place.” Jimmy sighed.

“Why don’t you ask Perry for a raise?” Clark suggested as if the answer was obvious.

Jimmy’s eyes widened at the prospect, “Ask for a raise? I don’t think so. I saw Pete in sports ask him for a raise and a week

later Pete was gone.”

Lois sighed, “Jimmy, unlike you, Pete wasn’t very good at his job. Just remember, it’s the squeaky wheel gets the oil.”

“Or, they get a new wheel,” Jimmy grumbled, “I just gotta find a way to get the Chief to notice my work.”

Clark stiffened in his chair, and Lois noticed Dianne gathering her things, heading to the elevator as she called over her shoulder, “Virgil, we got an armored car robbery going down at third and Shuster! Get your camera!”

“I’m on it!” Virgil called out.

Jimmy jumped on the lead, grabbing his camera before Virgil could stand up, “Virgil, that’s okay. I got it!”

“I’m off it!” Virgil called.

Lois looked back at Clark who gave her a quick nod before heading toward the stairwell. “Be careful,” she mouthed to him.

Chapter 2

Clark flew through the open sky, finding the crowd of police cars outside Metropolis Savings and Loan. He flew down, landing in front of a black sedan, driving on the sidewalk. People were jumping out of the way to avoid being hit. Three police cars were behind in close pursuit.

Clark aimed a beam of heat vision at the tires, and the front tires of the sedan went flat. The driver quickly lost control, and Clark grabbed the front of the car to stop it. The police pulled up on both sides, blocking the passengers of the sedan inside. The two men with face masks on held their hands up, surrendering as the officers began to take them into custody.

“Thanks, Superman. Two other suspects took off in a gray Olds. We wounded one of them,” one of the officers informed him.

Clark nodded, “They’ve probably changed cars by now, but I’ll take a look from the air.”

Lois stared at the screen in front of her in frustration. So far she’d tried close to three hundred different combinations to access LexLabs’ information database but no luck. It seemed to be just another reminder of how little she knew about Lex Luthor. The normal dates she’d tried like birthdays and company founding dates came up short, but any other dates like his mother or father’s birthdate or date of death were harder to try as she had to look those dates up.

“Hey,” a paper cup of coffee appeared in front of her, and she took it gratefully. “Any luck?”

She looked over at Clark as he took a seat next to her, pulling his chair up to hers to peer over her shoulder at the screen. “Nope, I’ve been trying to access this system for the last three hours and no luck. The password’s some alphanumeric impossible code. I’ve hit a wall.”

Clark reached for the keyboard, “Why don’t I give it a try?”

“Sure, but it’ll probably take you five years to go through the possible combinations...” she lowered her voice, watching as he scanned the newsroom carefully, “Even with superspeed.”

He chuckled and shrugged, “We’ll see about that.” Lois watched as his hands flew across the keyboard at superspeed, disappearing into a blur. She glanced at the screen seeing the green and white screen change from red to yellow almost simultaneously when a final beep signaled he’d finally cracked the code.

“Unbelievable.” Lois looked at him with a smirk. “What was it?”

Clark frowned, shaking his head as he typed the first employee’s name into the search query, “The password was ‘highground09121993.’”

“High ground?” Lois frowned, recalling the phrase but uncertain of its significance.

“It’s a phrase he used when he caught us in his study the night of the Orchid ball. It was also the same phrase Dr. Baines used

right before she tried to blow us up.” Clark typed a few more keys, scrolling through the information as he spoke. “Okay, the week LexLabs was shut down there was a theft report filed for half the supply of uranium.”

“Look at the name on the report.” Lois pointed out, grabbing the file Jimmy had brought them earlier. “Emmet Vale, head of Robotics.”

“He just moved to the top of the list,” Clark breathed.

That evening, Lois sat with Lucy at a table for four at Lois’ favorite Chinese restaurant. Clark had left a few minutes ago to put money in the meter, leaving Lois a few minutes alone to talk to Lucy. She caught her sister’s gaze as Lucy looked back at the empty chair next to her and offered them a forced smile. “I don’t know what’s taking Johnny so long. He said he’d come.”

Lois bit her lip, fighting the urge to say what she wanted.

Clark was right. Trying to point out that Lucy was wrong wasn’t the issue here. Lucy needed to know about Johnny Corbin’s past, but she wouldn’t be open to hearing anything she had to say if Lois came across like she was telling her what to do. An urge that she found very hard to suppress.

“I’m sure he’ll show up,” Lois said with a forced smile. “How do you like your roommate?”

“Things are good. I’ve only been there a day, so I’m still settling in,” Lucy said, taking a sip of her tea.

Lois wanted to shout what she knew from the rooftop, but she bit her tongue. Getting Lucy angry with her wasn’t going to make her see the light. She needed to be careful how she approached the situation. She recalled how she’d reacted when Clark had tried to warn her about Lex. She just ignored him and found herself getting closer and closer to him. She’d been stubborn and blind when it came to Lex Luthor. She didn’t want the same thing for her sister. She had to be smart. She had to be supportive. She had to not be right in this instance.

“So, I was surprised to find out you’d moved back to Metropolis,” Lois began, stirring her tea with her spoon. “I mean, the last time we talked you seemed pretty adamant about not wanting to be in the same city as Daddy.”

Lucy looked down at her drink, contemplating her answer for a moment before shrugging, “I guess I found a reason to come back.”

“Johnny seems...” Lois struggled to find a trait to hold onto that would be somewhat positive but couldn’t think of one. She offered a weak smile before squeaking out, “colorful.”

“He’s an acquired taste I know,” Lucy smiled, “but he really is a good guy at heart.”

“How long have you known him?” Lois asked, letting out a sigh of relief when she saw Clark making his way through the crowded restaurant toward them.

“A few months, I guess.” Lucy glanced at the empty seat. “I really wish I knew what was taking him so long.”

“Maybe he got caught up at work?” Lois offered.

“He’s between jobs right now.” Lucy frowned.

“Oh.” Lois frowned as Clark reclaimed his seat.

“Hi, Clark, that must have been a long line to put money in the parking meter.”

Clark nodded, “Yeah, there was an accident about a block away that’s keeping the streets crowded. It seems the bank robbers thought they were going to hit another bank. They caught three of them, but the two that were injured earlier are still on the run.”

“Yeah, I heard about that.” Lucy nodded. “You’d think after a while these guys would learn they can’t hide from Superman, huh?”

Lois shared a look with Clark before turning her attention back to Lucy. “So, do you want to go ahead and order?”

Lucy glanced back at the empty seat and frowned. “We might as well. It doesn’t look like Johnny’s going to show.” The frown

quickly disappeared as Lucy turned her attention to the two of them. “So, Clark, I’ve heard Lois’ side. How about yours?”

“Mine?” he asked in an uncertain tone.

“Yeah, I’ve found there are usually two sides to every story. Lois’ version and the real version. So what’s going on with you two?” Lucy’s eyes twinkled with intrigue.

“Well...” Clark’s ears began to burn a bright pink as Lucy continued to give him the third degree. Lois did her best to focus on the conversation over dinner, but all she could think about was how blind her sister seemed to Johnny Corbin’s faults.

The next morning, Lois drug herself out of bed, still focused on her dilemma with Lucy. She felt like she was lying to her sister by not telling her what she knew, but at the same time, she only knew what she knew because she’d gone digging for it. She was in a lose-lose situation.

She and Clark were supposed to try and find Emmet Vale to day and find out what they could about the unemployed robotics expert, but after last night’s dinner with Lucy, neither of them were interested in research. Clark had brought her home around eleven, and she’d been asleep before her head hit the pillow.

She was finishing putting on her makeup when a soft knock on the door echoed inside her apartment. She stepped out of the bathroom and headed for the front door. “Lucy?” She widened the door when she saw her sister on the other side in tears.

“I think something happened to Johnny,” Lucy said, stepping inside the apartment.

“What do you mean?” Lois asked, closing the door behind her.

“I mean, I don’t know where he is. I went over and asked his roommate if he’d seen him and he hasn’t seen him since yesterday morning. Lois, what if something happened to him? I...” Lucy said tearfully.

“Okay, okay, calm down,” Lois soothed, wrapping her arms around her sister. “We’ll figure this out. Now did Johnny tell you what he was doing yesterday? Maybe where he was going?”

Lucy shook her head tearfully, “No, he said he had some business he and Angel were going to take care of that afternoon, but that was it.”

“This Angel? Who is he?” Lois prodded gently.

“His roommate,” Lucy sobbed.

“Okay, give me all the numbers and address information you have and I’ll see if I can get Henderson to start looking for him,” Lois reassured her, running a hand up and down her sister’s arm.

“Okay, thanks,” Lucy gave her a watery smile.

“What are sisters for?” Lois said with a shaky breath. “Are you going to be okay?”

“I will once we find Johnny,” Lucy said adamantly.

“I’ll do what I can,” Lois reassured her. “When I get to the Planet, I’ll get Clark and Jimmy to...” She stopped when she heard a knock at the door and sighed. “Speaking of which...” She opened the door and managed a half smile when she saw Clark on the other side of the door with a bag of pastries with French script on the bag and two coffees. “Hi.”

He smiled stepping inside, but his face immediately fell when he saw Lucy’s distraught face. “Lucy, what’s wrong?”

“Johnny Corbin is missing,” Lois explained solemnly sharing a look with Clark. She wasn’t sure what to think of her sister’s boyfriend disappearing. Was he in jail? The hospital? Or worse? For Lucy’s sake, she hoped this had a happy ending but knowing what she knew she couldn’t push the what-if scenarios out of her mind.

“Missing?” Clark echoed with an uncertain expression on his face. His jaw tightened, and a solemn look crossed his face. “I’m sorry, Lucy. You know Lois and I’ll do whatever we can to help.”

“Thanks,” Lucy said wiping the tears from her face. “I’ve got to get to work.”

“Lucy, don’t you dare go into work like this,” Lois argued.

"I've got bills to pay." Lucy shrugged, wiping a few stray tears from her eyes. "I'll call you on my lunch break. Just keep me updated?"

Lois nodded, "Of course." She managed a forced smile and watched Lucy leave with a sigh. "Somehow, I don't think this is going to end well for her."

"Maybe it's something innocent," Clark offered. "He could be in the hospital injured."

"Or dead. Or in jail," Lois pointed out with a frown. "So much for letting her down lightly." She muttered to herself taking a pastry from the bag Clark offered her. "How was your morning?"

"Okay," Clark took a bite of the croissant in his hand. "Those two bank robbers are still on the lam, but patrol was pretty quiet."

"They'll show up eventually." Lois gave him a reassuring smile before taking a sip of her coffee. "They always do."

"I did get some information on Emmet Vale though," Clark said, pulling his notepad out of his jacket. "I couldn't locate him, but I did find his ex. I thought she might be worth a visit."

"Yeah, let's stop by the police station then swing by?" Lois suggested. Clark nodded his agreement, leaning in to kiss her. "What was that for?" she asked.

"I have to have a reason?" he asked with a smile.

"No." She leaned up to kiss him once more.

Henderson made his way through the crowded police station with Lois and Clark in tow. "Don't you have a missing persons section in your paper?" he asked, taking a bite of an apple as he walked.

"Those are for reported missing persons," Lois reminded him.

"It's only been eighteen hours," Henderson pointed out. "I can't open a case until we hit the twenty-four mark." He took a seat at his desk and booted up his computer.

"Come on, Bill, this could be the difference between life or death. What if he's seriously injured somewhere?" Clark interjected.

"Given his criminal history, he's probably in a holding cell somewhere," Henderson said gruffly. Lois and Clark both gave him a pleading look, and he relented. "Fine. I'll see what I can find out, but no promises."

"Thank you," Lois said happily.

"The things I do," Henderson muttered to himself, pulling up the Metropolis P.D. database on his computer.

Chapter 3

After two hours of going through hospitals and jail records with Henderson, there still was no sign of Johnny Corbin. Lois left her information with Henderson, and she and Clark made their way to Broad Street to find the hot dog stand run by the ex-Mrs. Vale.

"Any idea what we're going to say to her?" Clark asked, looking around the rundown street they were on. A line of construction crew workers was huddled around a stand, but they couldn't make out what food was being served.

"I guess ask if she knows where Emmet Vale's known to hang his hat?" Lois shrugged. "I'm not really sure."

Clark lowered his glasses and saw the woman in her mid-forties serving a hot dog to one of the construction workers. He heard one of the workers thank her and call her 'Louise', the name he'd been given for the woman. "This is her," he told Lois.

They waited for her to reach the end of the line, handing the last hotdog to a man in tan and blue. "Be glad I'm out of onions. Your girlfriend might kiss you for a change." The man nodded with a smile and left.

Lois and Clark approached, and the woman smiled at Clark, "What'll it be, handsome?"

Lois cleared her throat, "Uh... Mrs. Vale?"

"Who wants to know?" The chip on the woman's shoulders

was the size of Mount Everest.

Lois fumbled for her words, and Clark listened to the woman's heart rate. "We're reporters for the Daily Planet. We're trying to locate your ex-husband."

"So am I. Try lookin' in a sewer," the woman snapped irritably.

Clark could sense the tension in the air and pulled out his wallet, "Uh, how are your hot dogs?"

"They're delicious," Mrs. Vale snapped.

"May I have one? Mustard, no onions," he said, sighing as he felt the tension slowly clear.

Lois continued to ask questions to Mrs. Vale while she prepared his hotdog. "We think your ex-husband may be involved with that robot that robbed a jewelry store?"

"Good," she snorted. "Maybe I'll start gettin' my alimony and quit this stinkin' job."

"So you think he could be behind it?" Clark asked, taking his hotdog from her and handing her the cash.

"Well, the jerk was obsessed with robots, and his dream was to create a cyborg. What do you think?" Mrs. Vale asked.

"Cyborg? You mean a robot with a human brain?" Clark asked.

"The perfect playmate for Emmet." Mrs. Vale shook her head. "Y'know, dumpin' him was the best thing I ever did. Creep

couldn't do anything unless there was a mechanical device involved. And I mean *anything*... you get my drift?"

Clark cleared his throat and Lois looked away. He noticed her cheeks turned a slight pink at the mention of what Mrs. Vale was getting at. "Ah... did he set up a laboratory somewhere after he was laid off from Lexcorp?"

"I doubt it. He's got no brains for finance. Now his brother Rollie, he was the really smart one. Rollie could do anything. I should have married him." Mrs. Vale's lips pursed into a smile as she recalled Rollie Vale.

"Do you know where Rollie is?" Lois asked.

"Last I knew he was tryin' to be a writer for some science magazine. Futureplex? Futurewhiz... Future something." Mrs. Vale shook her head.

Lois and Clark exchanged a look and made their way to Lois' Jeep where they had parked earlier. "What do you think?" Lois asked.

"I think Emmet Vale is definitely a suspect, but..." he stopped mid-sentence hearing the sirens.

"What is it?" Lois asked.

"Someone just got held up at the Metropolis Savings and Loan ATM. Another robot," he said grimly.

"I'll meet you there," Lois said with a smile as he turned toward the alley and began jogging to the end of the abandoned street. He looked behind him, checking to make sure no one was around before changing into the Superman suit and flying into the air.

Lois pulled her Jeep up to the side of the street where a crowd of police were huddled around the gaping hole in the ATM machine. A young blonde woman in her early thirties sat with Detective Tuzzolino, a short, overweight detective from the Metropolis P.D. with a jacket draped over her shoulders.

She got out of the car and walked toward the scene. As she got closer, she recognized the familiar red cape and her boyfriend's voice as he spoke with one of the officers.

"Have any other instances like this occurred?"

"These robots keep coming out of the woodwork," the officer talking to Clark said.

"And destroying everything in their wake." Clark looked at the ATM and then to the victim that was leaving the scene.

Detective Tuzzolino approached her, shaking his head. "Lane, what are you doing here?"

"I, um, heard the commotion," Lois lied, motioning to the crowd of police on the scene. "Another robot?" She pasted on a smile, hoping to distract Detective Tuzzolino from her quick appearance on yet another crime scene.

Detective Tuzzolino pulled out a small Ziploc bag of what looked to be skin but had no tissue or blood on it. He nodded to Clark and grunted, "Our witness decided to take a bite out of crime. . .literally." He handed the sample to Clark. "Not sure what that is, but victim said he had a metal hand underneath."

Clark lowered his gaze to the Ziploc bag. "Looks to be some type of latex."

"You said 'he'," Lois prompted, pulling her notepad out. "Did your victim get a description?"

"Better." Tuzzolino beamed, pulling a snapshot out of his jacket. "Got a photo from the ATM's security camera."

Lois' eyes widened when she saw the image in front of her. "*Johnny Corbin!*"

Tuzzolino looked at Lois in surprise, "You know this guy?"

"I, uh," she glanced at Clark, then realized he couldn't help supply an explanation given he was here as Superman, "saw him yesterday. He seemed. . .normal," then quickly added with a sarcastic roll of the eyes, "for a neanderthal."

Tuzzolino chuckled, "Well you just made my job easier." He moved through the crowd. "Thanks for the ID."

Lois watched him leave then turned to Clark, "We need to call Lucy."

"And Henderson," Clark agreed.

Before she could respond, Jimmy approached with his camera in tow, "Wow, Lois, how'd you get here so fast? The Chief just now sent me here to cover the robbery."

"I, um," Lois stammered, "just can't tell you," she finished weakly.

"Lucy, it's Lois. I need you to call me as soon as you get this!" Lois spoke into her phone as she climbed into the Jeep.

Clark took his seat next to her as her face tensed with worry. "Still no luck?" he asked.

"I don't know what her deal is," Lois muttered, fumbling in her purse to replace her phone in the right spot.

"I left a message with Henderson. Hopefully, he and Detective Tuzzolino can exchange notes and . . ." He stopped mid-sentence. "Great."

"What is it?" Lois asked.

"Assault. A few blocks from here." Clark explained with a frown. "Stay here."

Lois nodded, "Be careful." She watched as Clark ran toward the alleyway behind the bank and sighed. It was probably a really bad idea to follow him. An assault wasn't page one news, but there was something about the expression on his face just now.

"Hey, Lois!" Jimmy held his camera up with an excited grin, tapping on the driver's window of her Jeep. "I got some great shots. The kind that could finally add another zero at the end of my paycheck."

"That's great," Lois said with a pensive look.

"You okay?" Jimmy asked.

Determination crossed her face, "Get in."

Clark soared through the air, zeroing in on the sound that reached his ears. His super-hearing picked up on the sound of a man gasping for air as he wheezed out. "I thought I was helping you!"

"I think you mean helpin' yourself. I hear you got ten bills for me, Angel. I want half. . . or I'm snappin' your neck like a pencil!"

Clark heard Corbin threaten as he took the scene in. No one was around but the two men. The normal homeless people and gangbangers seemed to be avoiding the alleyway for good reason.

"Okay, John, whatever you say. . ." Corbin's grip on the man

loosened. He lowered him to the ground. Clark breathed a sigh of relief as he came in to land outside the alleyway. Then he saw it. The metal pistol aimed at Corbin. "You should have kicked it the first time, John!"

The shots fired, and Clark started to move in, but stopped. A weakening sensation washed over him. He shook his head, trying to gain his wits and watched as Corbin crushed the gun in the other man's hand then lifted him over his head. At the last minute, Clark caught the man and set him down.

"Good catch. Maybe you oughta look into a new career in the majors," Corbin called, approaching Clark with a smug expression.

Another nauseating feeling washed over him but Clark fought to stand strong. "Then there'd be nobody to clean up the filth like you, Corbin."

"Oh," Corbin grinned happily. "You know my name. I'm impressed."

Clark shook his head again, feeling the weakening sensation. He knew this feeling. Flashbacks from his fight with Trask pushed through the forefront of his mind and the memories of the green glowing rock he'd found in Smallville.

Corbin lifted his arm to throw a right hook at him, "Now show me what you got."

Clark ducked to the side at the last second and threw a punch to Corbin's jaw. To his astonishment, he found Corbin had caught his fist and then threw another punch back at him. Clark flew through the air, landing in the back of the alley where recycled goods were being stored.

"What a wuss. I hardly laid a hand on you." Corbin called out.

Lois parked across the alleyway and motioned for Jimmy to follow her as she approached. He had his camera ready, taking shot after shot of the fight with Superman and Johnny Corbin. As they approached the entrance to the alleyway, she could hear Corbin threaten Clark as he grabbed him by the throat.

"I'll let you walk away. . .if you beg."

Both hands went to her mouth as she looked around. Clark was struggling to fight Corbin. He seemed weaker, something she wasn't used to seeing. There was only one thing that caused that: Kryptonite. She looked around, trying to find where it could be hiding but saw nothing. No green glowing rocks. No green glowing anything.

'Unless he's made of it,' the thought popped into her head.

She had to get Corbin away from Clark. "Jimmy, stay back," she ordered, running to where she parked the Jeep.

"Where are you going?" Jimmy asked in a hushed whisper.

"Just stay back," she repeated.

Clark felt Corbin's grip tighten on his throat and grabbed his hand, peeling the digits back one by one to the horror of his assailant. Corbin may be strong, but he was stronger. He could feel the affect of the Kryptonite on him, but just like he had with Trask and with the Kryptonite cage, he fought through it. With a cold hard snap, he jerked Corbin's arm out of its socket and snapped it in two.

"My arm!" Corbin gasped in horror. "Look what you did to my arm!" Corbin lifted his other arm to swing it at him but before he could headlights blinded them both as a familiar silver Jeep barreled through the alleyway and knocked Corbin and himself a few feet back.

Lois opened the passenger door. "Get in."

Clark looked back at Corbin, who was struggling to stand to his feet, then to Lois who was holding the door open for him. "I thought I told you to stay back."

"Do you really want to argue about this now?" Lois asked with an annoyed expression.

Clark looked back to where Corbin had been a few moments

ago and frowned. “Where’d he go?” He was still weak from his encounter with Corbin and hurting from his collision with Lois’ Jeep.

“Are you okay?” Lois turned the engine off and stepped out of the Jeep, approaching him.

“Lois?” Jimmy called out, running toward them with his camera.

“Fine,” Clark said weakly, holding onto the passenger door for support as he put on a brave face for Jimmy.

“Superman, you okay?” Jimmy asked.

Clark held his head in his hand, and he heard Lois instruct, “Jimmy, no pictures.”

“Okay.” He heard Jimmy say before asking. “Do you want me to call for an ambulance?”

“No,” Clark shook his head, recalling the words that had been drilled into his head for so long. *‘Dissect you like a frog.’* The idea of being under any doctor’s care no matter how hurt he was sent a chill down his spine. “I’ll be okay,” he said hurriedly then nodded to Jimmy and Lois. “Lois, try and be more careful where you park next time.” With that he was in the air, flying home.

Chapter 4

Superman Defeated!

Cops Dub Suspect “Metallo”

By Lois Lane

Lois looked at the front page of the Daily Planet where the main headline read *Superman Defeated* in bold typeface letters. The heading below that read, *Cops Dub Suspect “Metallo.”* Lois frowned, staring at the image of Metallo with his hand around Superman’s neck as the two struggled against each other.

“Lois, you and Kent get anywhere on this Metallo?” Perry’s voice interrupted her thoughts.

Lois looked up at him with a sigh. “Still running down leads.”

Perry drawled out a long, “Uh-huh, speaking of Kent. Anyone seen him this morning?”

Jimmy piped in, “He called in this morning. He’ll be in this afternoon. Came down with a cold.”

Perry nodded then moved his attention to the next unsuspecting victim. Lois let out a long sigh, tapping her hand on the conference room table. Clark had called in this morning. That was good, right? She didn’t have to cover for him. It didn’t feel good though. She hadn’t seen him since yesterday afternoon. She hadn’t talked to him. When she’d gone by his apartment last night no one had been home. When she’d tried to call she kept getting voicemail. The longer she went without talking to him the more irritable she got.

“All right, that’s it folks.” Perry called out and the conference room quickly emptied out, leaving herself with Jimmy as Perry gathered his things at the other end of the conference room table.

Lois stared at the image on the front page of the Planet once more and pushed it aside. Jimmy walked up to her cautiously, taking the empty chair next to her. “I never thought I’d see the day Superman would lose a fight.”

Lois nodded, trying to control the emotion and anxiety in her voice as she spoke. “Superman was hurt, Jimmy. When we’re sick or hurt we go to a doctor. Where does he go for help?”

Jimmy’s brow furrowed, “I guess I’ve never thought about that. I mean, he always seemed so... I don’t know... invincible.”

Perry cleared his throat, cutting into the conversation at just the right time because Lois didn’t know how to respond. She’d thought of Superman as invincible for so long just as Jimmy had, but these past few months she’d come to learn he had just as many flaws, fears, and doubts like anyone else. He was Clark. That was Clark in pain and nursing his wounds after his fight with Metallo.

“Jimmy! I think it’s time you and I had a little talk about the quality of your work.” Perry’s voice was monotone as Jimmy stood to his feet full of hope.

“Really, Chief? That’s great!” Jimmy said happily.

“Son, I can’t tell you when I’ve been more disappointed.” Perry spoke harshly and Jimmy’s face fell. “You let a great opportunity slip right through your fingers.”

“I... I don’t understand...” Jimmy stammered.

“You had the chance to shoot something every photo-journalist dreams of. A defining moment in history, a fight between Superman and an extraordinary creation that’s shaken the security of every citizen in this city.” Perry urged, putting his arm around Jimmy’s shoulder, pointing at the imaginary view of the defining moment.

“But Chief, that’s my picture on the front page...” Jimmy tried to argue, confused.

“I know that,” Perry sighed, “But according to witnesses, Superman was left beaten by this Metallo. Where are those photos? The images that tell us we’re alone and vulnerable. You didn’t get one shot of the Man of Steel on his knees.”

Lois looked down at the table then met Jimmy’s eyes, full of remorse. “I, uh, I ran out of film,” Jimmy lied. Perry shook his head in disappointment and Lois sighed, unable to hide the truth or let Jimmy cover for her.

“That’s not true, Perry. I told Jimmy not to take those pictures,” Lois supplied, meeting Perry’s gaze.

Disappointment crossed Perry’s face. “What? Why?”

Lois looked down, taking a deep breath, “I guess... I didn’t want the world to see Superman like that.”

Perry nodded, looking to Jimmy and pointing to the door, “Jimmy, I’ll talk to you later.” Jimmy nodded and headed for the door. Perry waited until the door was closed before responding. “Now, Lois, I know you have personal feelings toward Superman. We all do. He’s the Daily Planet’s bread and butter for stories and seems to keep a certain pair of reporters out of trouble for which I’m very grateful.” He gave her a rueful look. “But our job is to report the news, exactly as it happens, without shading it one way or another to suit our needs.”

Lois nodded, “I know, Perry. It was a mistake. It won’t happen again.”

His jaw tightened. “Part of me says I should assign someone else to cover this story.” Lois bit her lower lip, preparing for the worst. She would deserve it if he did. She’d crossed a line yesterday... a big one. “But the *smarter* part says I should let my top reporter prove to me why she’s the best.”

“Thanks, Perry,” Lois patted his arm, standing to her feet.

Clark listened to his mother on the other end of the phone, staring at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. He could see the shadow of a bruise on his throat from where Corbin had grabbed him yesterday. “I don’t know, Mom. All I know is I got dizzy and weak when I got near him.”

“I thought you said the sample of Kryptonite Lex Luthor had was destroyed?” His mom asked.

“Who knows how big that sample Wayne Irig sent for testing was? The piece the police recovered wasn’t very big,” Clark responded with a sigh, “It’s got to be Kryptonite. I just don’t know if he’s made of it or carrying it.”

His mom was silent for a moment before adding, “Have you talked to Lois?”

“No, not yet,” Clark sighed, feeling the corners of his mouth twitch at the mention of his girlfriend’s name. She’d tried to come by last night to check on him but he just couldn’t face her. Despite his past experience with Luthor and not looking before he left into action, he still found himself at the mercy of that poisonous rock. If Lois hadn’t...

“Clark?” His mother’s voice penetrated his thoughts. “Is everything alright?”

“Everything’s fine.” He forced a smile. “I just got to figure out what I’m going to do.”

"You need to talk to Lois," his mom said firmly. "She's probably worried sick."

"I know," he said solemnly. "I will. Bye." He hung up the phone. He let out a long sigh, staring at the cut above his eyebrow in disgust. It didn't look like that one would heal on its own before he had to go into work. He aimed a beam of heat vision at the mirror, allowing it to reflect off it and to his skin to painfully cover the cut with a layer of loosened skin.

He let out a low groan, holding his head for a moment as he waited for the burning sensation to fade away. He was slowly gaining his wits back but he wasn't completely back to a hundred percent yet.

"*You need to talk to Lois.*" The words ran through his mind. His mother's reminder to stop avoiding her. She knew him too well. It was hard to admit he needed help. He was used to being the help.

"Clark!?" the loud insistent tapping at the front door reached his ears and he sighed.

"Speaking of which," he muttered to himself.

"I know you're in there, Clark Kent. Open this door right now!" She shouted from the other side of the door.

He sighed, grabbing his plaid button shirt from the bed and putting it on, buttoning it halfway up by the time he reached the front door. "You know I do have neighbors," he said, answering the door with a rueful expression.

Lois ignored the comment and pushed her way inside, closing the door behind her with a loud thud. "I have been worried sick! You don't answer the phone or the door but you make the time to call Jimmy and call in sick this morning?!"

Clark let out a long breath, "I wasn't sure what to say."

"How about this?" She gave a sarcastic tone and began imitating a conversation. "*How are you Clark?*" *'Pretty crappy Lois.'*" She gave him an annoyed look. "Little thing called communication. I think you've heard of it."

He took a tentative step toward her. "I know. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have shut you out. I just..." He stopped when he saw the worry in her eyes. "I didn't mean to scare you. I just got caught up in my own head. I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking."

"No you weren't." Lois agreed, letting a partial smile spread across the corners of her mouth.

He placed a hand on her shoulder. "I *am* sorry."

"Are you okay?" she asked, pointing to the shadow of a bruise that was still evident on his collarbone.

"My ego's more bruised than anything," he admitted with a smile.

"Don't ever scare me like that again," she warned, wagging her finger at him.

"I won't," he promised, leaning in to kiss her.

"What happened?" Lois asked, wrapping her arms around his neck.

He let out a low sigh, "Kryptonite."

"Yeah, I figured that," she said with a wry look.

"Thank you," He gave her a small smile. "If you hadn't showed up when you did..."

"I'm just glad it worked," she said resting her head on his shoulder.

"Me too," he admitted, running his hand up her back.

"Are you going to be okay?" she asked, running a hand over the dark bruise on his collarbone.

"I should be back to a hundred percent in a few hours." He shrugged. "Come on, let's see if we can get to the bottom of what happened to Corbin."

A few hours later, Lois looked at Clark with a sigh of relief. "Looks like that bruise is just about gone."

"Yeah, thankfully most of the bruises and cuts seem to have healed up." Clark admitted, tapping his hand on the table.

Lois had set her research on Johnny Corbin and what they had on Emmet Vale out for them to go through while they waited for Clark's bruises to heal. "From what I've been able to gather it looks like this Angel character was with Corbin yesterday and he was shot during that robbery."

"The cops said one of the assailants was injured. We looked at hospitals but no one ever showed up." Clark pointed out.

"We also know Emmet Vale's dream was to create a cyborg," Lois pointed out, "And according to Bobby Bigmouth there was an advertisement on the streets for a living human brain. Five thousand dollar reward."

"For a petty criminal, that's nothing to sneeze at," Clark said, taking a sip of his tea. "So you're thinking this Angel character turned Corbin over to the Vale brothers?"

"It adds up." Lois pointed out. Her phone rang and she sighed, "One sec." She pulled her phone out and answered it, "Hey Jimmy, what's up?"

"Hey, I got that address for you on Rollie Vale." Jimmy said on the other end of the phone. "The guy who runs FutureTech magazine says they're always sending rejected manuscripts back to him."

Lois nodded, grabbing a paper and pen as she responded, "Go ahead." She listened for a moment and frowned, "That's a PO Box, Jimmy."

"Yeah, but I checked and it's one of those private mailbox places. Maybe they have another address for him," Jimmy suggested.

"Okay, thanks, Jimmy." Lois hung up the phone. "Looks like we've got a PO Box to snoop into," she said, handing the address to Clark.

Lois and Clark walked down Broad Street, checking the addresses on the buildings until they found themselves standing in front of the New Troy Mail Express. It was a red and white brick building with tall glass windows where the front desk was visible from the outside.

"This is it." Lois pointed, walking up to the door.

"Okay, what's the plan?" Clark asked, looking around.

"I distract and you snoop?" Lois suggested, opening the front door.

Clark nodded, letting out a sigh as he lowered his glasses, looking around the bleak mailroom. He heard Lois begin asking the clerk about rates for the PO Boxes and security as he continued scanning each box with his x-ray vision. Two rows down he found the box he was looking for. A letter addressed to Rollie Vale from Wind-Up Toy Weekly and an eleven by fourteen size manila envelope that was addressed to Rollie Vale and from Infinity Laboratories. 322 Gilmore St., New Troy, Metropolis. "Bingo." he said to himself.

He turned and saw Lois pointing at the PO Boxes on the left side, "What's the difference between those PO Boxes and these?"

The clerk seemed to be losing his patience with Lois, "Ma'am, as I said before there's no difference. They're just..."

"Uh," He fought the urge to call Lois by her name due to them being here to snoop, "Honey?"

That got a surprised expression from Lois and a sigh of relief from the clerk. "I think it's almost time for that appointment." His eyes pointed to the door.

"Oh, right!" She smiled. "We should get going," she nodded. "Thank you for your help," she called over her shoulder. Once they were out the door she whispered, "What'd you find out?"

"I found Vales' box. The only thing in it was a bill from Wind-up Toy Weekly and an envelope with a return address from a place called Infinity laboratories," he explained, pointing to the cab waiting for them and held the door open for her.

"Infinity Laboratories?" Lois echoed. "Never heard of them."

Clark climbed into the cab next to her. "I guess we should find

out what we can about them.”

“And hopefully we can find Lucy before Corbin does,” Lois agreed.

Chapter 5

Lucy Lane stared at the images in front of her. Her facial expression was tense as the information Lois and Clark told her sank in. “I don’t understand. I just saw him yesterday.” She looked up at them through her tears. “How can he...?”

Lois took a seat across from Lucy, taking a deep breath as she pulled out the papers she’d kept hidden earlier. “Lucy, Johnny got himself mixed up with the wrong people. The wrong people that betrayed him for five thousand dollars.” She pushed the mug shots of Johnny Corbin and Angel Romero to her sister.

“Oh, my God!” Lucy gasped in surprise.

“I’m guessing by your reaction you weren’t aware of his past?” Clark guessed hesitantly.

“No,” Lucy wiped the tears from her eyes. “He had a bad childhood. We connected and ... Oh, my God!”

“Luce, your boyfriend’s not only a criminal now.” Lois began carefully. “He’s at large and he’s dangerous. He’s a...”

“Cyborg,” Lucy repeated tearfully. “Yeah, you said that.”

“Oh, Lucy, I’m... I’m sorry.” Lois apologized, putting a hand on hers.

“So am I,” Lucy said, shaking her head. “You warned me I might be getting in too deep too fast and I didn’t listen.”

“Luce...” Lois tightened her hand over Lucy’s.

“I can’t believe my intuition about men can be so far off,”

Lucy whimpered in tears.

Lois looked back at Clark who nodded. She sighed in relief, watching as Clark left the conference room. She was grateful she didn’t have to ask him to give her and Lucy a moment. She looked back at Lucy with a sad smile, “I think it’s a family trait.”

“At least Lex Luthor was human.” Lucy cried, dabbing at her eyes. “I just can’t believe someone did this to him.”

“Clark’s talking to Superman about tracking down the guys that did this to him,” Lois explained gently.

“I don’t suppose there’s going to be anyway to put him back how he was?” Lucy asked skeptically.

“I, uh,” Lois sighed, “I don’t think so, Lucy.”

“What do you need from me?” Lucy asked.

“Information,” Lois said. “I need to know everything there is to know about Johnny Corbin.”

STAR Labs was pristine with the clean white tile floors and blue coated scientists roaming from one end of the building to the other. Clark took a deep breath, steadying himself as he searched the directory for the name he’d been given by Dr. Hamilton. He approached the security desk and smiled, “I’m looking for a Dr. Bernard Klein?”

The security clerk did a double take, obviously not used to having the man of steel in the STAR Labs lobby. “Of course.” He pressed a button beneath the desk and handed Clark a visitor’s badge. “Top floor. First door on your right.”

“Thank you.” Clark smiled, taking the visitor tag with him as he entered the double doors. Hopefully Dr. Klein would be able to help him and Inspector Henderson catch Metallo. One thing that he had going for him was the knowledge that Corbin was made of metal. If they could find the right magnetic frequency it would help render Metallo powerless and give them the opportunity to catch him without any more innocent lives put at risk.

Henderson was planning a raid on Infinity Laboratories but they needed a way to render Corbin powerless and allow the Vale brothers to be taken into custody.

Lois walked with Lucy to the parking garage. “So other than this Becca, Johnny doesn’t have any other family?”

Lucy shook her head, approaching the old beamer she’d parked in the Daily Planet parking garage. “No, she was murdered when he was seventeen.” She let out a long sigh, “I thought it was admirable that he’d preserved through such hardships and made a life for himself.” Lucy’s tone grew bitter when she added, “I didn’t realize he preserved by becoming a criminal. I feel so stupid.”

“I know,” Lois said sympathetically, reaching over to hug her sister. “It’s not easy to admit when you’ve been wrong about someone.”

“He just seemed like such a great guy,” Lucy said tearfully. “I don’t get why I keep picking all these jerks!”

“Who says I’m a jerk?” A familiar voice said from behind them.

Lois looked behind her and jumped in surprise when she saw Johnny Corbin dressed to the nine in a sports jacket, trousers and button-down shirt. “Johnny!” Lucy gasped in surprise as Lois took a protective step in front of her.

“You need to get out of here,” Lois warned.

“I’m not going anywhere until I have a chat with my girl,” Corbin said, pushing Lois to the side with ease. Lois winced as her face came in contact with the concrete floor.

“Let me go!” she heard Lucy scream.

Lois rolled over, reaching her leg up to try and kick Corbin off balance but found him unmoving and her shin pulsing from the pain after making contact with his metal leg. “Let her go!” she ordered.

“Help!” Lucy screamed, struggling in Corbin’s grasp.

“I don’t think so.” Corbin snapped, dragging Lucy with him into a waiting van. “See ya around,” he called after her.

“*Please be ready.*” Lois thought to herself before letting out a loud, “Help Superman!”

Dr. Klein placed a blue metal disc on his desk. “It’s a magnetic field. You set this where you want your man of metal to stick.” He handed Clark a small remote, a blue box with an antenna on the end of the device. “Hit the button on the top.”

He did as instructed and a loud humming noise came from the device. Dr. Klein’s box of paper clips and stapler moved across the table and onto the metal disc. “Will this be powerful enough to hold him?”

“Oh, yes,” Dr. Klein adjusted the frequency on the side and more of the devices in the room began to move toward the table. He hit another button and it stopped. “Just be careful with the setting. You might get more than you bargained for.”

“Thank you for your help, Dr. Klein,” Clark said, pressing the button to release the magnetic hold on the table and Dr. Klein’s metal objects that had stuck to the table during the test. “Hopefully we can use this to catch...” He stopped when he heard a familiar voice calling for him.

“Help Superman!”

“I’m sorry. I’ve got to go,” he said, disappearing in a red and blue blur.

“Let go of me!” Lucy shouted, fighting Corbin as he tried to force her into the van.

“Quit fighting me, babe. You know I don’t want to hurt you,” Corbin warned, tightening his grasp on her.

“You’re hurting me!” she yelled angrily.

“Let her go, Corbin!” Clark’s voice boomed from the other side of the garage. Lois sighed in relief when she saw Clark standing at the end of the aisle in his famous Superman pose.

Corbin grinned, tossing Lucy to the side as he approached Clark. “You got that right, pretty boy.” He moved his neck from side to side. “Let’s see what you got.”

Clark blew a burst of freezing breath in Corbin’s direction to throw him back against the van. “I hope you don’t think I’m anti-social, but I’ll keep my distance this time.”

“Scared?” Corbin taunted.

“Lucy?” Lois helped her sister to her feet. “Are you all right?”

“I will be.” Lucy said, looking toward Clark as he threw another blast of freezing breath to Corbin. “Is he going to be able to take him?”

“I hope so,” Lois said, pulling her sister with her toward the exit. “Come on, we need to call Henderson and let him know what’s going on.”

“Scared?” Clark heard Corbin taunt him, challenging him to make a move.

“No, but you oughta be,” Clark shot back, watching as Lois led Lucy out of the parking garage. He slid the blue disc toward Corbin, watching as a look of confusion crossed his nemesis’s face. He hit the blue button on the remote and watched as Corbin froze in place.

“What’s . . . hap . . . pening?” He stammered out.

The sound of sirens could be heard in the distance and Clark wore a smug grin. “I think I’ll let the police explain the rest to you.”

Vale Arrested! Metallo UnPlugged!

By Lois Lane and Clark Kent

Lois stared at the front page of the Daily Planet with a smile, reading the article she and Clark had written yesterday afternoon. Jimmy’s photo of Clark holding both Vale brothers by the collar and the photo of the frozen in place Johnny Corbin made their way to the front page. Something she was sure would help Jimmy’s case for trying to get a raise. She felt a pair of familiar lips press against her cheek and she turned to see Clark hovering over her with a cup of coffee. “Admiring your handiwork?” he teased.

“It never gets old.” She grinned back at him. “You’re late,” she pointed out, looking toward the clock.

“Yeah, Superman had to return the magnetic field device and Corbin to STAR Labs this morning. They wanted to make sure there weren’t any hiccups with the transfer.”

“Do you think he’ll be in good hands at STAR Labs?” Lois asked.

“Now that they know the Kryptonite is his power source, they’ve removed it and are keeping him powered by a cord and battery pack to keep him from escaping,” Clark explained with a sigh of relief.

“That’s good,” Lois reasoned. “I’m glad Dr. Klein was able to help. Sounds like he’ll make a good source for the weird and strange things that pop up in Metropolis.”

“Yeah, he seems like a trustworthy guy,” Clark acknowledged. “I’m just glad we were able to catch Corbin without another Kryptonite exposure.”

“Me too.” Lois smiled. She noticed Clark look away and prodded, “What?”

He took her hand in his, perching himself on the edge of the desk. “Lois, I’m really sorry for the way I reacted the other day. I’m not used to needing saving.” He shared a small smile with her. “You saved my life. I want you to know I’ll never forget that.”

Lois smiled, leaning in to kiss him. “I figure I owed you a few.”

“Aw, hells bells can’t you two keep that mushy stuff out of my newsroom?” Perry teased, walking up to them as he wagged a rolled up copy of the Planet at them.

“Morning, Chief,” Lois said, unfazed as she pulled away from Clark.

“Morning?” Perry echoed with the roll of his eyes. “I thought I told you two to take some time off.”

Lois and Clark exchanged a smile before Clark offered, “I know, Chief, but I guess this place is habit forming.”

“You’re starting to sound like someone else I know.” Perry gave a knowing look toward Lois.

“I had a lead to follow up on.” Lois shrugged. “So sue me.”

“What kind of lead?” Perry asked.

“Well for starters where did Emmet Vale get his hands on Kryptonite in the first place?” Lois pointed out.

“You thinking there’s more to this than meets the eye?” Perry asked with a knowing expression.

“It is awfully suspicious that a former LexLabs employee with little means has in his possession a meteorite that’s value is over a million dollars when he can barely pay to keep the doors to his lab open,” Clark pointed out.

“Stay on it,” Perry ordered.

“Chief!” Jimmy called, walking up to them with a smile on his face. “I see you ran my photo. I guess you liked my work yesterday.”

Perry nodded, “Yeah, Jimmy, I like it a lot.”

Jimmy seemed to hold back for a moment, glancing back toward Lois and Clark where they were seated at her desk. She and Clark both nodded their encouragement and Jimmy cleared his throat, “Well . . . I think in light of this good work, I uh . . . well . . . deserve a raise . . . sir.”

Poor Jimmy looked like he was about to faint as his eyes looked pleadingly to Perry. The Chief gave a pensive expression, running his hand against his chin before adding, “I think you’re long overdue for a raise.”

“You do?” Jimmy’s eyes lit up. “Then why haven’t I gotten one?”

Perry shrugged, “You never asked.” With that he walked off, leaving a dumbfounded Jimmy who glanced back to both Lois and Clark. Lois suppressed a giggle and Clark chuckled.

A young blonde woman in a blue uniform held a clipboard as she approached the security desk of STAR Labs. “Can I help you, miss?” the clerk asked.

“Yes, I’m looking for a Dr. Klein?” the woman said, looking at her clipboard. “I’m supposed to assist in the transport of Metallo.”

“Metallo?” the guard frowned. “I’m not showing him cleared for transport yet.”

“It was a last minute change,” she said, holding a gun up. “Open the door.”

The guard nodded frantically and pressed the button to clear the intruder into the secure area of STAR Labs and to the unsuspecting Dr. Bernard Klein’s laboratory. She pressed the trigger and a white haze released from her gun, knocking the guard unconscious.

“You’ll have a killer hangover in the morning,” She muttered to herself, making her way down the long hallway.

THE END

Continued in “[Rules of Family](#).”