

Testing a Theory

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Summary: Cat Grant is back and she knows a secret...or does she? Taking place after the episode "Sex, Lies and Videotape" in Season 4, Cat Grant goes to hilarious and insane lengths to prove her theory just as Lois and Clark begin to work through the trauma of being under the limelight of the media after the Superman scandal. Can Lois and Clark stop her from discovering Clark's biggest secret? Or will the gossip columnist land the scoop of the lifetime?

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A/N: I took the idea of Cat Grant coming back to a married Lois and Clark and threw around some ideas with NostalgiaKick and Deadly Chakram until I found a plot that worked. Cat testing her theory that Clark was Superman was too tempting to pass up. I hope everyone enjoys the fun ride. This fic was born of late-night giggles and laughter and I hope it shows.

Special thanks to Feli and Vicki for helping Beta this for me. Thanks to Julie for being GE on this one. Enjoy.

Teaser

Three years. It had been three years since she'd stepped foot into Metropolis. It wasn't the shopping or parties or celebrities that brought her back. It wasn't old friends or missed moments and memories. She'd kept up with her old colleagues through the international news organizations during her time in LA and as she worked on developing her own Fashion Line, 'Cat.'

No, none of those things had been something to bring Cat Grant back to Metropolis. What did bring Cat Grant back to Metropolis? The frantic phone call from her cousin, Samantha, begging for her help a week ago had pulled her away from her cocktail parties and store openings to dust off her old reporter's hat and try to help her cousin out of a jam. How she was supposed to help she still didn't know.

"I am not having, nor have I ever had, an illicit affair with Lois Lane." Superman's voice echoed on the television inside the Metropolis Women's Penitentiary replaying the coverage from last week's press conference.

Cat sighed, looking back at her cousin, "I'm not sure what you want from me, Sam. I could be sipping mojitos poolside, but instead, I'm here...in a jailhouse listening to you. This better be good."

"Help me get out of this," Samantha urged, motioning to the other women in the public visitor's room. "I can't go to prison."

"What do you want me to do?" Cat scoffed. "You tried to blow up international world leaders. I'm not an attorney or anything, but I think there's a crime there."

"That wasn't me!" Samantha argued half-heartedly. "That was Mr. Goode. He was obsessed with stopping Superman from negotiating peace between them. Something about an International Peace Prize? I don't know."

"How did you get mixed up in all of this then?" Cat pressed. "I've worked with Henderson for a looonng time, and he's as straight arrow as they come."

"It was that Lane woman. She saw me with Goode when he was kidnapping her," Samantha admitted shyly.

"Oh, this just keeps getting better and better," Cat muttered.

"Lane? As in Lois Lane?"

"Goode needed bait for Superman." Samantha shrugged.

Of course, Lois is involved. Why wouldn't she be? It is a Superman exclusive. Cat recalled how her former rival had fawned over the man of steel when he'd first come on the scene. At the time she'd been convinced something had to have happened up on that space station between the two of them but as time went on it became more apparent Lois' reaction was that of unrequited love. A school girl's crush. Had that changed?

She glanced at the coverage that had been playing on repeat for the last two weeks regarding Superman's 'affair' with a very married Lois Lane. The image was shocking, but was it true? Could Lois really stoop that low to get the love and attention she so desperately sought all those years ago?

If she did, then Cat had misjudged her character profusely. That was one thing Cat prided herself on, judging others and being able to size people up. She'd always assumed Lois put on the act of not caring about anyone who got in her way as a way to protect herself from getting hurt. Had she been wrong? Could she really be that uncaring as to do something like that to her now husband and partner, Clark Kent?

She'd seen the looks Clark had given Lois Lane from the moment he'd been hired and been instantly jealous. He was handsome and had a charming mystique about him that she hadn't been able to put her finger on. She'd offered him opportunity after opportunity to let her 'show him the ropes' around Metropolis, but he'd declined over and over again. After the incident with Nightfall, she'd stopped trying, finally realizing the only woman Clark Kent would ever have eyes for was Lois Lane...even if she never gave him more than a second glance. Obviously, that had changed.

"Of course he did," Cat muttered, shaking her head as she laughed. "So you sit there and do nothing while he kidnaps an innocent woman, plants bombs under unsuspecting world-leaders... Oh, and you ruined your reputation by trying to fake a scandal against Superman, the international goody-two-shoes-boy scout. Does that about sum it all up?"

"It wasn't like that!" Samantha argued.

"Oh?" Cat scoffed, "So someone that looks like you, has your signature, and access to your accounts just hopped on over to Hanks' Photo Lab and billed the fake scandal to Goode International? You do realize he's trying to pin this all on you right, Sam?"

"It wasn't a fake scandal," Sam muttered angrily. "I know what I saw."

"What did you just say?" Cat asked, interest perked.

"I said it wasn't a fake scandal. The real photo got damaged when I was coming out of the airport, but what was printed... that's what I saw." Samantha said slowly. "Lois Lane is having an affair with Superman."

"So you're saying Superman just lied to the world?" Cat asked, incredulously. "Superman doesn't lie."

"Are you sure about that?" Samantha asked, "Look, I know everything else looks bad, but there has to be a way I can beat this. I didn't..."

"You did." Cat cut her off. "I'll see what I can do but don't go running your mouth off in there. You never know who's connected with who. I'd hate to see you get hurt."

Samantha was quiet for a moment. "It was the truth," she repeated.

"Why would he lie?" Cat asked.

"Why wouldn't he?" Samantha countered. Cat grew thoughtful as she contemplated Samantha's words carefully. Why would Superman lie? Was he really capable of doing something as ethically horrendous as having an affair with his best friend's wife? She wasn't sure what the answer was, but she was going to find out.

PEACE TREATY SIGNED*By Clark Kent*

Clark scanned over the morning edition of the Daily Planet as he and Lois headed into the Daily Planet Lobby. “You sure you don’t want to share a byline on this one?” he asked hesitantly. It had surprised him when Lois had refused to contribute to the story on the successful peace treaty negotiations between Latislan and Podansk this past week.

Lois shook her head. “No, I think after last week as much distance as I can put between me and ‘you-know-who’ the better.”

He nodded. “Okay, well I guess I can understand that.” She had insisted that after the scandal the only ‘Superman’ stories she wanted to work on were ones associated with investigations they were already working on.

Last week had been a wake-up call for both of them. Realizing that the close relationship the Daily Planet and by association Lois, shared with the man of steel could be misconstrued as something else by the paparazzi made them both think twice about which Superman stories they turned into Perry and which ones they let other journalists cover.

It had been a close call.

They had been lucky this time.

He had foolishly decided the only way to stop things from continuing to spiral out of control around them was, to tell the truth. It wasn’t until later that he realized how illogical that thought had been. Both his parents and Lois had tried to convince him otherwise, but at the time he’d been too stubborn to listen.

After the press conference, Lois didn’t want to talk about it. She had opted to just continue business as usual as she continued to ignore the snide remarks and digs that continued to flow throughout the newsroom and at press conferences even after Superman’s denial. The reality was the idea had been put out there, and there was no way to take it back.

After nearly a week of ignoring everything, Lois had announced over the weekend that she was no longer covering Superman stories. He’d been shocked, to say the least, but had decided not to press her as he knew she was still dealing with the brunt of a lot of the resentment that had been thrown at her during the scandal.

Cat Grant stared at the numbers on the screen in front of her. “This can’t be right,” she muttered as she looked over the numbers once more. According to her calculations, the Daily Planet had received nearly 90% of all exclusives from the Man of Steel. She’d expected a high number but not that high.

Next, she looked over who had the exclusives. She already had a pretty good idea who was responsible for a lot of those exclusives. Lois was always chasing the Superman lead. Perry had to practically blackmail her to get her to go to Smallville with Clark on that story about the EPA cleanup that turned out to be another big story for them.

Surprisingly it wasn’t Lois that had the most exclusives. It was Clark Kent.

She pulled up the video from the press conference again. “I am not having, nor have I ever had, an illicit affair with Lois Lane.”

Something about the way he had said that...

“If nothing’s going on how come Clark Kent isn’t here?” a voice called out from the crowd.

Where was Clark?

The footage showed Lois standing next to a young man with a camera. She twisted her face, trying to size him up. Could that be Jimmy? She had been gone a long time. Maybe he grew up a little? Lois’ face seemed to have a bit of a panic wash over it when that question was asked. How come?

Superman’s answer wasn’t even an answer.

“He is here.” Everyone scanned the crowd, and there was obviously no sign of Clark Kent in the crowd. “That’s what that ring on her finger symbolizes. Clark and Lois trust each other, and that’s the only truth that matters.”

A non-denial.

Where was Clark? Why wasn’t he at that press conference? And why did Lois get such a panicked look on her face when asked about where Clark was? Her face hadn’t flinched when Superman was being asked about an affair with her. What was so different now?

“That’s what that ring on her finger symbolizes. Clark and Lois trust each other, and that’s the only truth that matters.”

Those weren’t words of a friend...or even a lover. Those were words of someone that shared that trust...that commitment. Realization slowly dawned on her as the pieces began to fit.

“Clark and Lois trust each other, and that’s the only truth that matters,” Cat repeated aloud. “Of course, they do. They trust each other. They work together. They know each other. So why would Clark Kent not be at that press conference? He was already attending...as Superman.” She mused happily as the pieces began to fit into place. It was so simple, and it explained so much, but all she had was a hypothesis. She would need to test her theory out.

Lois sighed happily as Clark wrapped his right arm around her waist, pulling her to him as the doors to the elevator closed behind the remainder of other Daily Planet employees that had joined them on the elevator from the Lobby. “How are you doing?” He whispered in her ear.

“Okay,” she whispered, turning in his arms to face him. She placed a hand on his chest, “It’s just a little hard not chasing down every lead.”

“I know.” He sighed, leaning into her. “But you were right. We got sloppy. We need to put as much distance as we can to protect everyone involved.”

“You’re not mad?” Lois asked cautiously.

“No.” Clark shook his head, leaning in to kiss her, moving his hand to stroke her cheek as he deepened the kiss. She smiled against his lips for a moment then pulled away, glancing at the camera in the elevator for a moment as she tugged her suit jacket tightly around her waist. “Lois...” He sighed.

Before he could continue his train of thought, the elevator dinged, announcing their arrival on the newsroom floor. “That’s us,” she said hurriedly, stepping out onto the newsroom floor and heading for her desk.

He sighed, following close behind her. Ever since the Superman scandal. Ever since she’d realized someone had been watching them with a camera ready when they had been making love at Chateau Roberge Lois had been paranoid about any public displays of affection. Almost as if she was afraid the paparazzi was going to jump out at any moment.

Despite Superman’s denial of the affair at the press conference, they were still dealing with a few unsavory journalists looking to twist the fake scandal back into the raging scandal it once was a few weeks ago. Lois had already caught a few photographers trying to break into their home when he’d been out on patrol.

Despite the successful negotiations Superman had completed with Latislan and Podansk and the numerous scandals littering the news circuit regarding the upcoming election, it seemed all anyone was interested in was looking into Lois Lane’s connection to Superman and press the issue of why Clark Kent wasn’t at that press conference.

Cat stepped out of her cab, looking up at the Daily Planet globe wistfully. “It’s been a long time.” She smiled up at the remodeled Daily Planet building and headed inside, tugging her purse tightly to her slender form as she removed her sunglasses,

hooking them on the collar of her designer dress.

“Well, it’s now or never,” she muttered to herself, heading inside.

“So, what are you working on?” Clark edged cautiously, pulling up a chair to Lois’ desk. Things had been a bit tense the last few weeks. He wanted to get back to his and Lois’ routine of working together. It was hard not seeing her face in the crowd on Superman rescues, but he knew it was for the best. He just missed her.

“Writing up the interview with President Garner on his re-election plans,” Lois said, turning back to him. “How about you?”

He shook his head, “It’s been pretty quiet this week.” Truth be told he’d had a handful of rescues this morning with a car accident on the Metropolis Bridge and a missing child at Metropolis Square, but both incidents weren’t anything that would require news attention. The child was found safely playing a few blocks away on the swing set, and the accident was quickly cleaned up without any injuries.

“Yeah, for a change,” Lois replied softly.

“Well, now that those peace treaty negotiations are done maybe we can take some time and get away for the weekend. I know this really great out of the way place...” he whispered in her ear, moving his chair next to her so he could snake his arms around her waist as he whispered in a barely audible tone, “Clothing optional.”

She smiled back at him, turning her head to look at him, with a throaty whisper, “Barring any federal disasters, that sounds...” She stopped, noticing a commotion by the elevators. “Cat?”

The auburn-haired woman that had left the Daily Planet years ago had been replaced with a sophisticated red-head, sporting a stylish shoulder length style and classy dress suit as she made her way through the wave of old colleagues that had greeted her after she’d exited the elevator.

Clark followed Lois’ gaze and raised his eyebrows when he saw the drastic changes Cat Grant had taken to her appearance. Gone were the skimpy dresses and spandex outfits. They’d been replaced with classy style to match her attitude.

“Lois, you finally found a stylist!” Cat cheered as she approached Lois’ desk.

Sensing the tension in the air, Clark gently squeezed her shoulder, “Don’t.”

“Cat, you finally found a dress that fits you.” Lois shot back, “What happened, Tramps-R-Us go out of business?”

“I see you haven’t lost that sense of humor.” Cat grinned back at her. “I heard you finally got married. It only took what? Four times to make it down the aisle?”

Clark scowled, throwing Cat an annoyed look. That had been over the line.

“Listen here, you...” Lois snapped irritably, standing to her feet.

Clark decided to intervene. “Uh, Cat, what brings you back to the Planet?”

“Hi, Clark.” Cat gave him a once-over, letting her eyes linger on him longer than he felt comfortable. “I see married life is treating you well.”

He wrapped a protective arm around Lois’ waist from behind, pulling her to him. “Always.”

She gave him another lingering glance before winking. “Too bad.”

Lois folded her arms over her chest. “What are you doing here? Don’t you have a fashion empire to run?”

“I’m doing it from here. LA was getting boring. Same old parties. Same old stories. Boring. I thought coming back to Metropolis would help liven things up again.” Cat smiled back at her as she gave her a once over. “Speaking of which you should really check out our Spring Collection. It’ll do wonders for your

complexion... There’s also some very classy lingerie ... I don’t have anything in brown but...”

He could feel Lois seething as Cat spoke and did his best not to react. The claws were out again it seemed. “No way am I taking fashion advice from...you.”

Cat shrugged. “Just thought I’d help you out...”

“Cat, I thought you weren’t getting in till this afternoon,” Perry said, walking up to them.

“Hi, Perry.” Cat smiled toward their Editor-in-Chief. “I was able to get an earlier flight, so I thought I’d surprise everyone.” She turned to Lois and smiled. “Surprise.”

“Don’t tell me...” Lois muttered.

“Perry gave me my old job back!” Cat beamed with a smile as she walked past the couple. “Cat’s Corner is back...”

Chapter 1

“Well?” Samantha asked nervously, looking at her cousin in the visiting room.

“I’m looking into things,” Cat said in a hesitant tone.

“That’s great!” Samantha grinned happily. “You’ll prove my innocence then?”

“I don’t know that I can do that, Sam,” Cat cut her off. “Even if you weren’t the one pulling the strings you were still involved in a federal crime.”

“But that was Mr. Goode, not me,” Samantha argued. “Are you sure there isn’t anything you can do? What about all the connections you used to have with the Senators over the years? You used to brag all the time about being able to make them do whatever you wanted.”

“That was different,” Cat argued. “This is a lot more complicated than giving me a quote on the local Gossip column. This is a conspiracy to murder international leaders. This is a conspiracy to start a war. This is a...”

“There was no conspiracy!” Sam shot back. “It was proving once and for all that Superman wasn’t as good and pure as he tried to portray. And Lois Lane...”

“Let me stop you right there,” Cat cut her off again. “Even if what you’re saying is true that doesn’t help your case on the other charges. The fact of the matter is, you created that scandal from a fake photograph...no matter what it is you think you witnessed or not.”

“I know what I saw,” Samantha shot back. “Put a tail on Lois Lane. I guarantee you she’ll lead you right to Superman.”

“Or to her next story,” Cat said, rubbing her temples. “Look, I get you’re upset about your story, but you can’t use this as a defense when your lawyer gets here. You’ve got to accept your part in this. You’ve got to...”

“I didn’t do anything,” Samantha argued.

“Yes, you did,” Cat snapped back. “The sooner you realize that the better off you’ll be.”

“Unbelievable!” Lois fumed angrily, jabbing the button for the parking garage in the elevator. “Perry has to be out of his mind giving that...no good...”

“Honey, calm down,” Clark tried to soothe, placing his hand over hers to stop her from subjecting any further abuse on the elevator button.

“She can’t just waltz in here like nothing’s happened. I mean, who does she think she is?” Lois continued. “She jumped ship when everything went to hell in a hand basket. No good-bye. No ‘see you later.’ Just disappears in the middle of the night and leaves Perry to fill her position with no budget and...”

Clark leaned in, capturing her lips with his in order to bring an end to her tirade. He knew Cat’s return had upset her. He still wasn’t sure why her response to Cat had been so hostile. Normally, she wouldn’t have allowed herself to get pulled into such a petty argument. After all, Cat’s initial remarks hadn’t been

laced with the usual derogatory remarks she'd thrown at Lois years ago. It hadn't been until Lois had made a snide remark at Cat's clothing choices that the sparring had ensued between the two. He didn't dare mention that to Lois though.

He slowly broke off the kiss, resting his forehead against hers. A small smile spread across her face. "Is this your way of saying I'm over-reacting?"

"That and I really like how cute you get when you're mad," he teased, running a hand through her hair as he brushed a stray lock out of her face.

Lois gave him a half-smile. "Sorry. I might have overreacted with Cat earlier."

"It's been a stressful few weeks," He reasoned carefully.

"It's just that..."

'*You sure this is the elevator?*' his super-hearing picked up on a conversation happening outside the elevator as they arrived on their floor.

"Honey, hold that thought." He said hurriedly, bracing himself for what he was sure would be another barrage of questions on where Clark Kent was during Superman's press-conference. He and Lois had been hounded by the less than stellar journalists over the last few weeks that still clung onto hope they could weasel a scandal out of his absence given that the Lois/Superman affair had been disproven.

"Hold that thought?" Lois echoed, just as the elevator doors opened. "Oh, no!"

"Mr. Kent, Ms. Lane, fancy bumping into you here..." the very loud and obnoxious Barry Dunning said as his cameraman shoved his camera in their faces.

"Not a word," Clark whispered in Lois' ear, pushing past them to make their way into the parking garage where they'd parked.

Unfortunately, Dunning was hot on their tale as they turned the corner to where they'd parked. "I'd love to give you two a chance to set the record straight. I myself have been a big fan for years... I mean, it's amazing how one... I mean, *two* reporters can land so many exclusives with the man of steel in such a short amount of time."

"Give me a break," Lois muttered under her breath, digging in her purse for her keys.

Clark stood between her and the cameraman who was getting too close for Clark's comfort. The camera poked at his arm then moved to his face. "Get that camera out of my face," Clark said firmly.

"We just want to ask you a few questions," Barry continued, ignoring Clark's request.

"Found them," Lois said, holding her keys up in triumph.

"If we could just..." Barry continued, taking a step toward Lois, blocking her entry into the driver's side of the door.

"Move," Lois said in between gritted teeth.

"Ms. Lane." Barry took another step and Clark held his arm out to block him. "If we could just get a few minutes I'm sure..."

Clark heard the sound of the Jeep unlocking from the chirp of the keyless entry remote. Barry Dunning still stood in front of the driver's side door, blocking them entry as the cameraman continued to point the camera in their faces. "She said, move." Clark took a step toward Barry to force him to move back and allow Lois inside the car. Clark crossed his arms over his chest, and took another step forward. "I suggest you move."

Lois' car door slammed shut, and he turned to see her buckling her seatbelt. He moved to the other side of the car to get in on the passenger side of the door.

"Mr. Kent!" Barry called after him as Lois revved her engine. They still stood in front of the Jeep, blocking her from moving. He slammed the door shut and she locked the door.

"Hold on," she warned, shifting into reverse with a hard bump before changing gears.

Normally he would have chastised her for being so hard on the

gears after they'd just replaced the clutch, but given the current predicament with the wannabe celebrity talk show host staring them down he thought it best to keep quiet.

Lois revved her engine once more then slammed on the accelerator. Barry and his cameraman jumped out of the way as Lois swerved at the last second taking a sharp turn toward the exit.

"Lois!" Clark grabbed the handle on the door as the Jeep swerved through the tunnels of the parking garage.

"He'll think twice before trying to block me into a parking spot again," Lois said as she approached the gate, pulling out her parking pass from the Planet for the reader to scan.

"Can we maybe not kill the clutch in less than a month though?" Clark reminded her with a joking smile. It had to be done. He knew it. She knew it. For the most part, the reporters that had been hounding them during the Superman scandal had backed off.

Unfortunately, Barry Dunning was just a few of the ones that hadn't. Where was Clark Kent? That was the story they were after. He and Lois had agreed not to say anything to them. Hopefully, given enough time, they would give up and move on to the next scandal. The next scandal couldn't come soon enough as far as he was concerned.

"The man's sub-human. He'd probably just regrow whatever limbs got injured if I did hit him," Lois spat angrily. "Not that I *would* hit him."

"Are you okay?" Clark asked, placing a hand on her shoulder as she drove.

"Yeah, I didn't lose my temper like last time." She smiled at him. "I thought Perry had banned all non-Daily Planet personnel from using the parking garage. How'd he get in there?"

"I don't know." Clark sighed. "We can try to talk to Perry in the morning about upping the security. At least until this dies down."

"If it does," Lois said softly, staring sadly at the road ahead of them.

Randy Goode stared out the small 2x2 window of his cell door. He was being moved into J-Pod today. No more restrictions. Under Superman's directions, the police had placed him under suicide watch to ensure he would get the 'proper care' and justice was served. He wasn't sure if the man of steel had made the remark out of true concern or if he'd done it to spite him. The restrictions had included being stripped down to his birthday suit and given a thorough cavity search on a daily basis to ensure there was nothing in his cell he could use to harm himself. This also included him losing access to any pens, toothbrush, comb, or shoelaces that could be used to form a weapon to take his own life with.

It had been hell, but it was about to be over.

A hard knock on the cell door startled him. He jumped back and saw the guard he'd come to know from other inmates as 'the enforcer' at his door. "Get packed. Time to move."

Within a few minutes, Randy had his things together, and he carried the wool blanket, change of prison uniform and paperwork with him down the narrow hallways. Every few minutes he had to stop, look up at the camera and smile as the guard held up his badge at each sliding glass door. The doors would slide open, and they would continue.

Finally, they arrived in Block J where he was passed off to another guard that looked to be about three times his size. There was no introduction. Just a passing of the paperwork and a gruff order to follow the new guard. He heard a loud rumble through the cell doors as he was guided up the hallway to his new cell. The guard banged on the door three times before opening it and pushing Randy in.

"Hey, Church, you got a roomie!"

"Church?"

Randy turned around to see none other than the infamous Bill Church Jr. sitting inside his cell as the guard slammed the door shut. Church. He was in the cell with Bill Church Jr. This would not end well. He scanned the luxuries throughout the cell, uncertain how the multi-billionaire had been able to swing the luxury mattress inside the prison.

“Randy, so good of you to stop by.” Bill Jr. smiled with an eerie calm. His fingers tapped on the metal frame of the bed he sat on. “Last I heard you were supposed to be running things.” His head jerked up as he met Randy’s eyes with a sinister stare, “How’d you end up here?”

“I can explain...” Randy began.

“Oh, I’m sure you can.” Bill nodded, standing up to knock on the door.

The door opened, and a very large prisoner with golden teeth and arms the size of a pickup truck stood in the doorway. “Randy, I’d like you to meet Morgan. He’s in prison for mass murder. No chance of parole. No time off for good behavior. He’s done a lot of bad things...”

Randy took a step back, “Nice to meet you, Morgan. Mr. Church, I...I can explain...It was Superman. He...”

“Always with the Superman excuse. Don’t you people ever get tired of using the same excuse for *everything*? Superman stopped me from robbing the museum. Superman stopped me from hacking into the Pentagon. Superman stopped me from running Intergang.” Bill stared at him coldly at the last statement and Randy swallowed hard. “So, explain it to me, Randy.” He took a step toward him, and Morgan closed the door behind him. “Explain how you got every red cent of Intergang’s right under Superman’s nose and in his radar? Please explain. I’d love to hear it.”

“It’s not that simple,” Randy argued. “There were complications.”

“*Complications*?” Bill scoffed with a sneer. “A bad sale is a complication. A one night stand the night before you’re supposed to get hitched is a complication.” Church held up his fist, hitting the side of the bed angrily. “Getting the last of Intergang’s assets frozen by the FBI and the UN? That’s what we call a *catastrophe*.” He motioned to Morgan. “Why don’t you show Randy around? Give him a *feel* for the place?”

Randy felt a lump form in his throat as he watched Morgan approach him. “No, no, no, please...”

“I don’t handle disappointment well, Randy,” Bill said with a look of distaste. He pulled out a cigar and lit it, taking a long puff. Morgan cracked his knuckles as he advanced toward him.

Lois sat on her bed, listening to her sister on the phone. “I’m sorry Luce. I don’t know what else to say.”

“It’s not your fault. It’s just annoying that something like this happened in the first place,” Lucy said on the other end of the phone. “I couldn’t attend classes for a week because I couldn’t get to class.”

“They’re ruthless,” Lois commented with a bitter tone. “I’m sorry.”

“Quit apologizing,” Lucy laughed, “How are you?”

“Okay, I guess,” Lois began hesitantly. “Avoiding paparazzi, chasing down leads...”

“They’re still hounding you?” Lucy asked.

“This time they’re chasing Clark and me. Apparently, they think they need a better explanation for why Clark wasn’t at the press conference,” Lois explained offhandedly.

“Don’t give them anything, Lois. I’m serious. I saw the way you lost your temper on that Barry Dunning character. Every station picked it up and twisted it.” Lucy reminded her.

“Believe me, I won’t be making that mistake again,” Lois said. “I’m trying to avoid saying anything if I can.”

“Now *that* I’d love to see.” Lucy giggled.

“Ha, ha,” Lois shot back sarcastically. “How are things with you? Are you still seeing Dr. Ryan?”

“Actually, Dr. Ryan said I didn’t need to see her anymore. I’m a fully functioning adult now,” Lucy exclaimed through the phone line.

“You’ve always been fully-functioning, Luce,” Lois corrected.

“More or less,” Lucy teased. “Hard to believe it’s been over two years now.”

“I’m proud of you,” Lois said gently, recalling the trouble Lucy’d had after Johnny Corbin’s death. At first, she’d lashed out then she’d gone into denial and then depression. She’d left Metropolis and gone back to California where her roommate finally convinced her to get the help she needed. It had been a long road, but Lucy had finally started to re-emerge from the shell of a woman she’d been after Corbin’s death.

“Thanks,” Lucy said with a satisfied sigh. “I’m thinking about maybe making a trip out to Metropolis soon. Thought maybe we could catch up?”

“I’d like that,” Lois smiled happily.

The sound of voices around her echoed through the phone.

Lucy’s voice raised a few octaves. “Listen, I’ve gotta go. My next class is about to start, but remember what I said. I’ve got two more weeks, and then I’ll have some time off from school. Let’s compare dates and plan some sister time.”

“You’re on. Good luck with class.” Lois hung up the phone, hearing the monotone lull on the other end of the line. She set the phone down and looked around the empty bedroom. Clark had gone out on patrol shortly after they’d arrived home. Neither of them wanted to talk about what had transpired in the parking garage earlier.

It was getting harder and harder to fend off the vultures that tried to pass themselves off as journalists. She hadn’t told Clark about the incident last week with one of the Top Copy reporters trying to climb their brownstone and getting stuck right outside their bedroom window. She had called the police to have him removed from the property and issued a warning to stay away.

It wasn’t nearly as bad as it had been but it was still hard to deal with. She couldn’t be herself in her home. The place she was supposed to feel safe. That had been taken from them. It had been a relief to know the photograph had been a fake, but the aftermath of what had transpired still continued to haunt her.

Someone had been watching her and Clark. She’d seen the images that had been used to create the fake photograph in question. Someone had been there...spying on her and Clark in their most intimate moments. He had arrived at Chateau Roberge in his Superman suit. His arrival had been captured on film.

She and Clark had lived their worst nightmare and survived to fight another day. Superman had been ridiculed in the media. Going so far as to manipulate a young boy in order to boost ratings. The look on the little boy’s face when he’d told the field reporter he didn’t believe in Superman anymore had been heartbreaking. The look on Clark’s face had been even more devastating. She’d done what she could to comfort him, knowing there was nothing she could do to erase the pain that little boy’s words had caused. She wanted to find that Jean Sally for pulling an innocent child into the limelight for ratings. She wanted to give his parents a good talking to for exposing him to the scandal in the first place and allow his hero to be shattered in his eyes. It broke her heart how cruel the world could be.

Clark had had to deal with the aftermath on both ends of the spectrum. One half of him was hated and despised while the other half was pitied. Not a feeling he was comfortable with on either side of the spectrum. It had been hard going into work every day and dealing with the hostile environment that greeted her. It was so surreal. The previous week she’d been missing her husband and wanting nothing more than a few moments alone with him uninterrupted. The next she was being accused of being unfaithful

and had been branded with the scarlet letter by every media news outlet that had gotten a hold of the story.

From the time the ‘story’ had broke she had become the subject of every joke, lewd remark, and innuendo. It had been painful. She had worked hard to build up her reputation as a respectable journalist, and one story had destroyed her credibility among her peers. She had to listen to the snide remarks and innuendos in the office for three days. She had been hounded by reporters and paparazzi that threw lewd remarks at her about her and Clark’s sex life as if they were asking about the weather. She had been kidnapped and strapped to explosives as bait for Superman once again...but this time it had been different.

It had been different because there was no real reason. There was no plot to destroy the world or corruption to uncover. It was just human nature at its worst run rampant with a story that hit close to home. It had given them both a glimpse into what could happen if anyone ever did connect the dots between Clark and Superman. It had forced her to take a step back and make a hard decision about the image they were portraying to the world.

Beating every reporter out of an exclusive was fine when she’d been trying to prove herself as top-banana back in the day, but now that she and Clark were married she needed to create some distance between her and his alter-ego. She and Clark couldn’t continue to be the only reporters grabbing the Superman exclusives without someone putting two and two together.

All she’d heard about for the past few weeks was how many exclusives she’d had with Superman over the years, so she’d decided last weekend to put a stop to all exclusives not related to stories she and Clark were currently working on. Everyday rescues could be covered by other reporters. It would be hard at first, but she knew it was the right decision.

Still, she missed being there in the crowd covering the Superman appearances and sharing a smile with him in the ‘suit’ when he was talking to the press. It felt good to know she could be there for him and help steer the line of questioning among her fellow peers. Those days would be changing. There would no longer be a way for her to protect Superman’s image without putting Clark’s secret at risk—their secret.

Lois turned toward the television. The images showed Superman shaking hands with Latislan and Podansk after the signing of the peace treaty. Yet another thing that had been put at risk from the scandal.

She recalled the lengths Clark had been willing to go to in order to ensure peace among the fighting countries. It still made her furious to think of how he’d put himself and their families at risk by plotting such a hair-brained scheme. In the middle of the scandal—when they’d had reporters camped outside their home—he’d flown to Smallville and brought his parents back with him. All so he could share his ‘idea’ to tell the world Clark Kent and Superman were one and the same. He’d hatched this plan without even discussing it with her first. By the time he’d announced it, there was no talking him out of it. It wasn’t until he’d been presented with proof that the photograph was a fake that he backed down.

She knew it couldn’t have been an easy decision for him to come to. It had taken him two years to tell her, and even then, she’d had to figure it out on her own. The idea that he was willing to put everything on the line for peace was admirable. It was one of the many things that made her love him in the first place. It still made her mad that he thought he could go forward with a plan that affected them both without even trying to talk it through with her. She understood the ‘why’, but it still made her furious that he’d tried to make such an important decision without her. She’d gotten ‘over it’ this past week. She was trying to find the positive spin and focus on the next story, but it was hard. Metropolis seemed to have hit a lull and removing herself from the Superman related stories had slowed down the influx of big scoops to turn into

Perry. He hadn’t said anything yet, but she was sure he’d say something soon if she didn’t find a good lead. It was eerily quiet in Metropolis. Even Clark’s Superman patrols had gotten shorter.

A sharp scratching noise from the window caused her to jump. She moved toward the window, pushing the curtain back to make sure there wasn’t another paparazzi trying to scale her home to ‘catch Superman’s arrival.’ She sighed in relief when she saw the wind rustling in the oak tree by their window. The branches brushed against the window making the sharp scratching noise she’d heard before.

‘Just the wind,’ she thought to herself.

The sound of the door opening behind her startled her. “It’s just me.” Clark gave her a reassuring smile when she turned to the bedroom door.

“Sorry.” She smiled weakly at him. “I guess I’m still a little jumpy.”

“I had Henderson send a patrol car out to do a sweep before I came home. Front yard and back are clear,” he reassured her, wrapping his arms around her.

“Good.” She leaned her head on his shoulder, relaxing against him. “How was your patrol?”

“Quiet,” he said softly. “Everything seems to have hit a lull tonight. Not even a cat in a tree needed saving.”

She grinned back at him, “So, I have my husband all to myself for the evening. I think I like the sound of that.”

He leaned in to kiss her, smiling against her lips. “Me too.”

She sighed against him. “Are you sure there’s no one outside?”

She watched him lower his glasses and give the window a quick look before turning to nod, “No hiding paparazzi.” He gave the bedroom a quick scan and smiled at her. “No peering eyes anywhere. I promise.”

She relaxed against him, toying with the hem of his t-shirt as she walked him back toward the bed. “Then what do you say we take advantage of this quiet evening?” She pulled him with her back onto the bed. He let out a groan of approval as he leaned in to capture her mouth with his.

Cat Grant stared at the list in front of her. Samantha had really dug herself in it this time. She’d made call after call over the last few hours and received the same answer. A resounding ‘no’ had been her answer from all of her old contacts in Washington. No one wanted to come anywhere near this case for fear of making an enemy of a mysterious ‘benefactor’ and after the scandal had been proven a fake no one wanted Superman as an enemy.

Superman.

There was another problem.

She knew she was right.

It was the only way to explain what had occurred. She believed her cousin. She believed she saw what she saw, but she knew there had to be an explanation. Lois Lane was a lot of things but an adulterer she was not.

The question now was, how was she going to prove it?

Given her history with both Lois and Clark, she didn’t envision proving this theory by asking them. She knew they both would work hard to disprove any theory she presented them, so she needed to come up with irrefutable evidence to prove Clark was Superman. Something they couldn’t deny.

What she wasn’t sure yet, but she’d think of something.

Having her old job back would help. She could run her business from Metropolis, reconnect with old contacts and hopefully work toward freeing Sam of the charges against her.

Samantha stared at the unfamiliar woman on the other side of the table, looking around the visitor’s room nervously. “Do I know you?”

The young blonde crossed her legs, tapping her nails against

the table as she spoke, “I don’t believe we’ve met.” She said coolly, leaning back in her chair. “Quite a predicament you’ve gotten yourself into, Samantha.”

“You know my name.” Samantha looked toward the cameras that were unplugged then back at the unknown visitor. “Who are you?”

“That’s not important,” She responded in a syrupy sweet tone. “What is important is what you can do for me.”

“You? What makes you think I’d do anything to help you...if I could?” Samantha looked around the dark room uncertainly.

“Because you don’t want to spend the rest of your life in Federal prison for a crime you didn’t commit.” The woman smiled at her. “Am I getting warm?”

“I’m not going to prison. My cousin will get me out.” Samantha shrugged her off.

“Ah, yes, the infamous Cat Grant.” The woman snickered. “Don’t be surprised when she stops returning your calls. You’ve been set up to take the fall of a very bad man. You can either take my help and get out of here or don’t and take your chances with the federal judges. The choice is yours.” She placed a card on the table, standing up to leave. “Don’t wait too long. My offer has an expiration date.”

Samantha jumped when she heard the hard metal door close behind her. She stared at the white card in front of her with a single cross on it and a phone number. No clue as to who the mysterious woman was.

Chapter 2

“All guards report to J-Pod! We’re on lockdown! Repeat! All available personnel report to J-Pod! Lock it down!”

Clark sat up, pulling himself out of his wife’s arms as he focused on the alarm his super-hearing had picked up on. It sounded like it was coming from the Metropolis Men’s Prison.

He glanced at the clock. The alarm was set to go off in five minutes, and Lois always slept through it. “Lois?” He nudged her shoulder softly.

“Hmm?” Her head nestled against his shoulder sleepily. He hated leaving her like this, especially after last night, but he had to go.

“Something’s going on at the prison. I’ve got to go,” he whispered, peeling himself out of her arms and climbing out of bed.

Her eyes fluttered open, and she gave him a nod. “Be careful.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can.” He leaned in to kiss her before spinning into his Superman suit and flying out the window toward the Metropolis Men’s Prison.

Cat grabbed her to-go mug of coffee, pouring herself a cup from the coffee pot by the door. She looked around the hotel room, trying to find her things. She wasn’t a morning person. Never had been. Never would be. She slipped on her heels, grabbing her purse and keys as she headed out the door.

She needed to find a place. The apartment complex she’d called home for so many years had been sold and converted into a chain of condos filled with rowdy 20-somethings. Not the ideal living situation. She’d grown out of the party-girl phase when she started her clothing line two years ago. It required long and tedious hours, leaving no time for her to stay out all hours of the night.

She unlocked the door, preparing to head out when she heard her phone ring. She struggled to pull her cell phone out of her purse and groaned when she recognized the number.

“Not today, Sam,” she said, shoving the phone back into her purse.

She couldn’t help her cousin if she was constantly going back and forth between the prison and the Planet. She had to get a lawyer hired. She had to look into this Randy Goode and see what

she could find out to help clear her cousin’s name.

Clark stared at the dark wool blanket that had been placed over the prisoner’s body, pacing in the cell, “When did this happen?”

“Lights out he was healthy as a horse.” One of the guards said in a dismissive tone. “Did morning roll call and found him like this.”

“No cell mate?” He asked, looking around the empty 2x2 cell suspiciously.

“Nope. He was supposed to be getting a cellmate later this week, but the paperwork hasn’t come through yet.” The guard responded with a shrug.

“And the riot?” Clark asked uncertainly.

“Broke out right after roll call this morning.” The guard explained. “Never did see who started it.”

Clark looked back at the wool blanket that covered the body of Randy Goode. The man had made his life a living hell. He’d tried to create a war between two countries in order to ruin his reputation as Superman and had subjected his wife and parents to ridicule and harassment. Despite all of this, Clark couldn’t help but feel as if he’d let Randy Goode down.

Why hadn’t he heard a cry for help?

He looked up at the guards who seemed unaffected by the fact that they were standing a mere three feet away from the dead body of one of their prisoners. Something about the first guard unnerved him. The disregard with which he spoke of Goode’s death sent chills down his spine. He knew the guards had a tough job, keeping the prisoners under control, but this guard seemed almost smug about Goode’s death.

He knew from his experience in the past with the warden that no prisoner was without a cellmate in J-Pod. He also knew prisoners weren’t transferred to J-Pod until after their trial date had been set. Randy Goode hadn’t even had his first court appearance yet. Something was wrong here.

Clark glanced at the guard’s uniform, taking note of his name and badge number that was printed on the right breast pocket of his uniform. It could be nothing, but on the other hand, he wouldn’t be a good reporter if he didn’t follow up on possible corruption inside the Metropolis Men’s prison, right?

Lois finished parking the Jeep, clicking the remote lock as she headed toward the elevator to take her out of the parking garage and to the street. She looked around, noting the extra security that was patrolling the parking garage.

“ID, Ma’am?” the guard asked as she approached the elevator. She pulled out her Daily Planet press badge for inspection, and he nodded, turning to press the call button on the elevator for her.

Once the elevator car arrived, she stepped inside and pressed the button for ground level.

The elevator hummed lightly as she waited in silence for the familiar ding. She’d waited as long as she could this morning for Clark to return but whatever was happening at the prison had kept him busy all morning. It was just a quarter after nine. Hopefully, Perry wouldn’t be too upset with her for being late. Now if she could just come up with a good excuse for where the other half of Lane and Kent was she’d make it through the morning without a lecture.

Lois stepped off the elevator, looking to make sure there wasn’t a camera crew nearby. She couldn’t understand why those Top Copy reporters wouldn’t just let it go about Clark’s absence at Superman’s press conference. Her patience was slowly wearing thin with all of them and...

“Guess who?” Two familiar hands covered her eyes.

She grinned, recognizing her husband’s voice. “Give me a hint.”

Her smile spread across her lips as his lips caressed hers,

moving his hands from her eyes to gather his fingers in her hair. "Hi." He grinned at her when she opened her eyes.

"Hi yourself" she whispered, readjusting the crooked knot on his tie.

"We're late," he said, following her to the crosswalk.

"Yes, we are." She sighed, leaning over to press the button for the crosswalk. The light changed, and she crossed the street with him to the Planet. "How'd everything go at the prison?" she asked.

"Not good," he said, walking with her through the revolving doors of the Daily Planet.

"What happened?" she asked in concern, looking back at him.

"There was a riot this morning. Some guards were injured, but everyone's okay," Clark began cautiously. She noticed him looking around the lobby over the top of his glasses.

"What is it?" she asked, reaching over to press the call button to the elevator.

"Just checking," he said with a half-smile, running his hand up and down her shoulders.

She grinned at him. "I told you, you were going to come in pretty handy."

He chuckled, pulling her to him. "Checking for paparazzi is becoming second nature to me these days."

"Don't I know it," she said with a huff, fingering the lapels on his coat. His hands moved to cover hers for a moment. She could tell something was still bothering him. Whatever it was he didn't seem too keen on continuing their conversation in the middle of the lobby.

"They'll stop eventually," he soothed, running his hand up and down her arm once more.

"I hope so," she said softly, looking up at him with a slow smile.

The elevator dinged, announcing its arrival. They pulled apart and stepped inside. Clark reached over to press the button for the newsroom floor. Lois waited for the doors to close before turning to face him. "What did you mean by 'not good'?" she asked.

"Oh." Clark frowned, looking down at his feet.

"You said the riot was taken care of without any fatalities so what was 'not good'?" Lois pressed.

"Randy Goode was murdered in his cell last night," Clark said cautiously.

"What??" Lois gasped in surprise, covering her mouth in shock as the elevator's soft chime announced their arrival on the mailroom floor. She moved to the side as the mail clerk wheeled his way onto the elevator car. She stood next to Clark uncertain how to respond.

"I can't prove it, but I think there's more to the story than what meets the eye," Clark said in a low whisper.

Lois nodded mutely, looking at the elevator doors as they arrived on the second floor. "That's me." The mail clerk said, rolling the cart out onto the printing press floor.

Lois turned toward her husband, looking at him in concern. "Are you okay?"

"No," he said in disgust. "He did a lot of horrible things, but he didn't deserve to die for them."

"I know," she soothed, running her hand up his cheek.

"I want to look into the guard that was on duty and possibly the prison," Clark added. "See if we can figure out what really happened."

"Well, then I guess we better get to work," Lois said, leaning in to kiss him as the elevator doors opened up to the newsroom.

Samantha hung up the phone, letting out a long sigh as she replaced the handset back on the receiver, counting to ten silently. The echo of complaints and disgruntled prisoners behind her rang in the back of her head. It was nearly lunchtime. She'd used almost all of her money on the calling card to try Cat on every free-time break she had and still nothing but Cat's voicemail.

<< "Don't be surprised when she stops returning your calls. You've been set up to take the fall of a very bad man. You can either take my help and get out of here or don't and take your chances with the federal judges. The choice is yours." >>

Samantha pulled out a card from her pocket and began to dial, ignoring the protests behind her.

"Murdered?" Perry looked over Lois' shoulder, peering at the article she and Clark had written on Randy Goode's death. Clark sat in the chair beside her as they relayed what they'd learned that morning. The more they dug into Randy Goode, the more convinced she and Clark became that Randy Goode's death had been an assassination.

"There's no other explanation," Lois said, pointing to the screen. No sign of self-mutilation or suicide according to the report we got from the prison's coroner."

"Superman was at the scene this morning helping out with the riot that took place. He said there was no cell mate for Randy Goode either...which is against the prison's protocol," Clark added.

"What do you mean?" Perry asked confused.

"The prisoners are held in a secluded section of the prison to evaluate them and determine if they can join the general population. After the issues they had with attempted witness tampering and assassination they changed the rules and required all general population inmates have at least one other cellmate. No one in there should have a cell to themselves. No one." Clark explained.

"I thought with the new changes implemented last year they weren't supposed to go into the general population until after their trial date had been set," Perry recalled, tapping his index finger against his chin.

"No, you're right, Chief. After the escape attempts and the attempted assassination of several witnesses in the case against Bill Church Sr., they changed a lot of the rules there. How Randy Goode ended up in a cell alone in general population...it doesn't add up."

Lois nodded. "He hadn't even had his first appearance in court yet. We were supposed to cover that this afternoon."

"Well, now you're on this," Perry said, pointing to her screen. "Find out everything you can and let's get to the bottom of this."

"And the way the guards were acting..." Lois shot Clark a look, and he covered, "I mean, the way Superman described them to be acting was very suspicious. They seemed almost smug about there being a death on their watch."

"What about an autopsy?" Perry asked. "Surely we can get some answers from there."

Clark frowned, "It happened in prison. There won't be one unless the state requests it."

"And are they?" Perry asked.

"No." Lois frowned.

"Sounds to me like the Daily Planet needs to weigh in on this," Perry said solemnly. "Don't get me wrong. I despise what that man did. I don't condone it for a second, but I'd never wish death on him. If there is a cover-up going on, I'm sure you two will be able to sniff it out."

Perry patted Clark on the shoulder before turning toward his office. "Get me what you've got on this and we'll run it in the next edition with an editorial requesting a thorough investigation. 'Corruption Behind Bars'." He held up his hands emphasizing the headline over his head.

"Corruption?"

Lois looked up to see Cat approaching them in an admittedly smart business suit. The skirt was a little higher than Lois would have preferred, but the attire was much different than what she was used to seeing her formal rival in.

"Cat, nice of you to join us this morning," Perry commented

with a disapproving tone.

"I had some last minute errands to run," Cat responded with a smile. "Apartment hunting isn't as easy as it used to be." Perry nodded then Cat turned toward Lois and Clark. "So what's this about corruption?"

"Just a story we're working on," Lois commented, minimizing her word processor on her computer before Cat could have a chance to read it. She still wasn't sure how she felt about Cat's return and giving her any information on the first good lead she and Clark had had on a story wasn't exactly how she wanted to welcome her back.

"Uh-huh," Cat nodded, perching herself on the edge of Lois' desk, simultaneously crossing her legs as she spoke, "You know I've always been the best at digging around and finding dirt on politicians."

Lois pushed her off the edge of her desk, "That was then. You've been out of the game for the last three years, and I don't know if you've noticed, but Lane and Kent have brought down quite a few corruptions in the last few years too."

"Yeah, I was reading up on some of the stuff you guys have written." Cat smiled, smoothing out the wrinkles on her skirt, "*Superman's* been pretty busy, hasn't he?"

Lois frowned when she noticed Cat looking toward Clark as she spoke. "We do cover stories other than Superman rescues." Lois corrected.

"I know." Cat smiled, "but you've gotta admit, that's what you are known for. I mean, people hear the name Lois Lane and think, the first woman to...well you know." She finished with a wink at Lois before turning her attention back to Clark, "I read that piece on the peace treaty being signed, Clark. Great stuff. Your writing style's improved...very *super*."

"Uh, thank you," Clark responded hesitantly. "Lois and I work well together."

"Well, she finally found her *super* guy," Cat added with a smile. "I've got to run. I've got a dinner with Congressman Wallace I need to prepare for. *Ciao*."

Lois watched Cat leave suspiciously. There was something seriously odd about the tone of Cat's voice. Why did she keep using the term 'super' to describe Clark and why was she looking at Clark when talking about Superman? Questions began to race through Lois' mind just as Clark got a familiar expression on his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Bank robbery." He whispered, getting up from his chair. "I'll be back in a few." He leaned in to kiss her before heading toward the stairwell. Lois noticed Cat turn to follow him, and she got up to stop her.

"Cat!"

Cat turned to her with an annoyed expression, "Yes?"

"Where-Where are you going?" she stammered.

"I was going to see where your husband was off to in such a hurry. I needed to ask him about something for my story." Cat said, looking toward the stairwell.

"Oh, he'll be back. He went to get...a...um..." She stammered, trying to think of a good excuse for Clark to use the stairs.

"Yes?" Cat looked at her suspiciously.

"A box of pencils." Lois finished hurriedly.

"There's a supply closet right there." Cat pointed toward the supply closet next to the copy room across the newsroom.

"So there is!" Lois grinned, knowing full well Cat could see right through her. Lois bit her lip, trying to force her mind to focus on the present. "Silly me. I, uh, asked him to go get the supplies from the mailroom and there's a closet right *here*..."

She knew there was a supply closet in the newsroom. She'd drug Clark in there many a times over the last year and a half when she couldn't resist the need to kiss him...touch him in ways

that were inappropriate for the office. She felt a flutter in the pit of her stomach, recalling the small boxes on that back corner shelf that often got knocked down when she and her husband had lost control in that room. Bright red pens. Number two pencils...

"Mailroom?" Cat crossed her arms over her chest. "Why didn't he take the elevator? It's faster."

"That's a *very* good question. And there is a very good answer...You see, he...likes to go to the boiler room to...think." Lois finished lamely.

"Boiler room?" Cat asked in disbelief.

"Yeah, you can only get to it from the stairs." Lois supplied hurriedly, "Didn't you know that?"

"No, I..." Cat tried to reach for the door to the stairwell that Lois was blocking. "What is your deal? Why won't you let me through?"

"You don't want to go down there." Lois shook her head, tugging Cat away from the door.

"I don't?" Cat asked in disbelief.

"No. Rats and bugs and creepy crawly things." Lois shook her head. "You don't want to go down there."

"Yet Clark goes down there to...*think*?" Cat asked.

"Well, he is a farmboy," Lois said weakly.

"Uh-huh," Cat said, pushing past her. "I just have a quick question for him."

"Wait!" Lois tried to stop her, but it was too late. Cat had already opened the door. Lois sighed in relief when she saw her husband standing in the door with a box of #2 pencils in his hand.

"Clark?" Cat looked back at Lois, "How was the *Boiler Room*?"

"Hot," he commented, moving back toward his desk.

"*Thank God for super-hearing.*" Lois thought to herself.

"Here's the pencils you needed," he said, handing the box to Lois.

"Thanks." Lois took the box and placed it in her desk drawer with the other half a dozen boxes he'd used as excuses whenever his disappearance from the newsroom didn't go unnoticed. She looked over at Cat who was watching them suspiciously.

The mysterious blonde tapped her long fingernails on the table as she spoke on the phone through the double-paned glass window. "You've made the right decision Samantha. Allowing that evil man to let you take the fall for what he did is a crime in itself."

"Can you get me out of here?" Samantha asked.

"I can," she spoke with a glint in her eyes, "but first I need you to do something for me."

"Wh-what's that?" Samantha asked, uncertainly.

"Nell Newtrich," the woman began slowly. "She has something that doesn't belong to her, and I want it back."

"What kind of thing?" Samantha stammered.

"A rock," the woman said smugly. "A very special rock. It glows...red. I want it back. Get it for me and freedom is yours." Before Samantha could respond, the woman hung up the phone and got up to leave.

"A *rock*?"

"I think we need to try to call the warden and see if we can get in to talk to him this afternoon," Clark explained, taking a seat on the edge of Lois' desk. "I'm hoping he isn't involved in any of this and can help us out."

"Anything will help at this point," Lois admitted softly. "You need to be more careful with your exits. I looked like an idiot trying to keep her out of the stairwell...looking for you." She sighed. "What did she want anyway?"

"She said she wanted to know when Wallace's divorce was finalized last year," Clark said with a confused expression. He had to admit Cat was acting out of character.

“Can’t she just search the Planet’s archives for that?” Lois asked.

Clark shrugged. “Apparently not.” He smiled, stroking her cheek and whispered in her ear, “Thanks for covering for me.”

“Anytime.” She grinned leaning up to kiss him on the cheek.

Cat Grant sat back watching as Clark took a seat at Lois’ desk, carrying on a conversation as he moved closer to her. He then leaned in to whisper something in Lois’ ear before the young woman turned to kiss him on the cheek. Lois’ behavior might as well have been setting off sirens that yelled, ‘*My Husband Is Superman!*’

She had been trying every trick in the book to keep Cat from going into that stairwell. Then when she finally did push past Lois, Clark had been standing there with a box of pencils. The couple had shared a quick look and Cat had to scramble to come up with a plausible question to ask him for her story. It was lame, and Clark could probably see right through her, but she didn’t care.

Something was definitely up.

Clark Kent was Superman, and she was going to prove it.

She smiled, imagining the look on Lois Lane’s face when she landed the biggest story of the century, ‘*Superman’s Identity Revealed.*’

‘*Let the games begin,*’ she thought to herself.

Chapter 3

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Mr. Baker,” Clark said, taking a seat across from the middle-aged man with a thinning hairline. His large framed glasses were tilted slightly, and his square jaw tightened as he stared back at them. He looked to Lois who was sitting quietly next to him notepad in hand.

“Of course, Mr. Kent.” Baker pasted on a smile, but his tone seemed anything but genuine. “We’re an open book here.” He peered toward Lois’ notepad, trying to see what she was writing as he spoke. “What can I help you with?”

“An inmate was murdered in his cell last night,” Lois said, looking up and meeting the warden’s gaze. “How about we start there?”

“Murdered?” the warden half choked out. “There’s been no *murder.*” Baker’s tone was careful as he continued, “I’m told we had a suicide last night, but...”

“Suicide?” Clark echoed, not sure how the scene he’d stumbled on earlier could have been classified as suicide.

“Yes, suicide.” Baker’s eyes narrowed as he spoke. “Medical Examiner just finished the report. I can have a copy sent to you if you’d like.”

“Please.” Lois tapped her pen on her notepad. He glanced over at her, seeing the same doubts he was having reflected in her eyes. There was no way Randy Goode’s death was a suicide.

“The guards on duty last night,” Clark began, venturing toward his original line of questions he’d prepared. “Do you trust them?”

“Of course.” Baker sniffed. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“So, you have no reason to think any of the guards would do anything to one of the prisoners?” Clark prodded, watching Baker’s face twitch.

“My guards are trained to deal with every situation as they see fit. If a prisoner gets out of line they are allowed to use force, Mr. Kent.” Baker’s tone grew menacing.

“Would your guards ever retaliate against a prisoner?” Lois asked, arching an eyebrow as she spoke. “Perhaps move a prisoner to population where any of the other prisoners that may have a vendetta against him could get to him?”

Baker’s eyes darkened, and he turned to Lois, “You don’t know what kind of scum we have to deal with here. It’s not all roses and sunshine in here.”

Clark met Baker’s gaze and tightened his jaw. “No one’s

saying it is, Mr. Baker, but I can’t help but wonder if there may have been more to last night’s ‘suicide’ than you’re letting on. How did Randy Goode end up in General Population prior to his trial date being set?”

Baker leaned back in his chair, folding his hands over his chest. “I’m not aware of the details of his transfer. I’ll be reviewing them this afternoon.”

Clark exchanged a look with Lois who nodded. “I think that’s all our questions, Mr. Baker.” They stood to their feet. “If you could get us a copy of that medical report?” Lois reminded him.

“Of course,” he called after them as they left. “Always happy to help.”

Perry unlocked the front door to his condo, looking back at the young man that stood behind him warily. “I know it’s not much, but I just couldn’t stay in that old house by myself and well...” He let out a muffled grunt, unsure how to continue.

“Dad, it’s fine.” Jerry placed a hand on his wrist. “Things are different this time.”

Perry turned the final lock on the door and opened the it, revealing the spacious living room. He motioned for Jerry to enter and followed him inside, closing the door behind him. “I haven’t had time to get to the store this week, but I’ll stop by on the way home.”

Jerry looked around the condo, staring up at the high vaulted ceilings with a grin. “I never thought you were one for modern, dad.”

“Well, I figured a little change here and there wouldn’t hurt.”

Perry cracked a smile, then pointed to the hallway that led to the bedrooms. “You’ll, uh, have your own bathroom. There’s clean sheets and a fresh set of clothes on the bed. Your mother will be by later this afternoon with the rest of your things. I went ahead and got you a new toothbrush and, uh...”

“Dad,” Jerry interrupted, placing a hand on his shoulder. “I got it. Just go ahead and head to the Planet. I’ll be fine.” His face fell to a sheepish frown and he added, “I have to go check in with my parole officer anyway.”

“Are you sure?” Perry asked, uncertainly. “I don’t want to just leave you on your first day out...”

“You’ve done more than enough. Taking me in, forgiving me...” Jerry let out a long sigh, “I’m not that person anymore. I’ll prove it to you and I will earn your respect again. I’m going to...”

“You’re going to do exactly what that parole officer tells you to,” Perry cut him off. “Now listen, your cooperation with the Feds is what got you out but you still need to make a living—a *legal* one.”

“I know,” Jerry said, looking down at his feet. “I’ve got a lot to make amends for.”

“Yes, well, I’ve got some thoughts on that subject,” Perry drawled, heading for the door to leave. “Why don’t you swing by the Planet after you meet with your mother? We’ll talk over dinner.”

“Sounds good, Dad.” Jerry flashed him a weak smile.

“Oh, Jerry?” Perry called, turning to look back at him. “I do respect you for what you’re doing. It takes a lot of guts.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Jerry’s smile broadened, and Perry let out a good-natured laugh.

“Good to have you home, son. I’ll see you in a few hours.”

“He’s lying,” Lois said in disgust as they handed their visitor’s badge into the security desk.

“I know,” Clark said, placing an arm around her, walking toward the double glass doors that led to the parking lot. “What we don’t know is why.”

“You think he’s in on it?” Lois asked as the double doors opened and they made their way to the parking lot.

“I think he knows more than what he’s letting on. Whether

he's a part of it, I don't know." Clark sighed, looking behind him at the tall brick building.

"We'll figure this out," Lois reassured, squeezing his hand.

"I know." He gave her a weak smile, leaning in to kiss her. "We always do." The sound of tires screeching on the other side of the parking lot caught both of their attention. His brow furrowed, lowering his glasses to see what the commotion was. "They never give up."

"What is it?" she asked, allowing him to guide her to where the Jeep was parked.

"Get in." He looked over his shoulder, tugging on his tie. "I'll meet you back at the Planet. I think it's time Superman had a little *chat* with 'In-Your-Face-Barry-Dunning' about the laws on harassment."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," Lois began to interject but he had already disappeared in a blur of red and blue. "Great."

"Testing...one, two, three..." Barry Dunning spoke into the microphone, looking back at the camera. "Are we live?"

His cameraman, Mike, gave him a thumbs up, holding the camera on his shoulder. "Rockin' and rollin' Barry."

"Welcome to another exciting episode of In Your Face With Barry Dunning. As you recall, our last episode ended with my cameraman and I nearly being run over by Lois Lane—desperate to escape those of us that are demanding the truth. A deafening silence has come from both her and Clark Kent in regards to the 'alleged' fake photograph that made headlines a few weeks ago. No comment on *where* Clark Kent was during the press conference and Superman—"

Barry stopped mid-sentence, noticing the frantic pointing by his cameraman. He looked behind him only to come face to face with a very familiar red and blue suit matched with a very angry looking Superman. "Uh, Superman." His voice wavered slightly with a pitch too high that resulted in a squeak as he spoke, 'man.' He cleared his throat, trying to find his voice under the furious stare that the Man of Steel was boring him down with. "Ar-Are you a fan of the show?"

"No." Superman's features remained steely as he glared down at Dunning.

He swallowed the boulder sized lump that had formed in his throat, "Well, you should really give it a chance. I mean..." He stopped when he saw Superman's eyes narrow at him. His chiseled arms were crossed tightly across his chest in the infamous pose the Man of Steel had been captured in time and time again. However, unlike those photos where Superman was relaxed and smiling the expression on his face remained fierce. Dunning didn't dare move for fear of making things worse. Instead he chose to remain still, waiting for Superman to make the first move. *'If he tries anything it's all on camera.'*

After what seemed like an eternity Superman finally spoke. "The act of systematic and continuous *unwanted* actions of one party or a group, including but not limited to threats and demands and making someone fearful or anxious."

Dunning stared blankly at him, uncertain how to respond to the legal quote he'd just been given. "I'm not following."

"Harassment is illegal, Mr. Dunning." Superman glared back at him. "I'd suggest you consult with your legal counsel on your actions, but my educated guess would be that they're *very* actionable."

"I thought you didn't watch the show," Mike piped in, earning him a menacing glare.

"There's a very fine line between following a lead and harassment. You've crossed it. Now back off," Superman warned.

"Yes, but we've still yet to..." Dunning rambled excitedly, trying to salvage what he could for the show's sake.

"Yet to what?" Superman's brow furrowed, narrowing his gaze at Dunning.

"Get the whole story!" Mike chimed in.

Superman let out a snort before tensing once more and responding, "There was a press conference. There was an arrest. Maybe you didn't get the message? Maybe you're hard of hearing? I don't know." His shoulders shrugged and he stepped closer, leaning in so he was a few inches away. "You will leave the Kents alone. You will stop showing up everywhere. You will stop camping outside their home and place of business." He turned to look behind him where Mike was fiddling with the battery pack on his camera. Superman smirked then turned back to Dunning with a menacing glare. "If you don't, I will contact every journalist I know and make it my mission to find every piece of dirt I can on you and everyone you work with and shut you down. Are we clear?"

He wasn't given a chance to respond. With that the Man of Steel disappeared into the sky, leaving a pigmented trail of red and blue in his wake. "Crazy, man. Absolutely crazy," Mike said with a snort. "Can you believe that guy?"

"Yeah," Dunning said uneasily, trying to shake off the sense of dread that had washed over him.

Lucille Newtrich was not one to be messed with. The blonde debutante held a certain position among the inmates and the guards. Her sister Nell was always nearby, helping keep everyone in line and keeping her sister protected.

Samantha swallowed hard as she approached the table where they sat, handing out cigarettes as payment to fellow inmates. "Dolores, that's the third time. You're wracking up quite a debt." Nell said, jotting something down in her notebook.

"I'll do better. I promise," Dolores said humbly. "Just please..."

Nell looked to Lucille as she took a long puff from her cigar. Lucille nodded and Nell handed her her rationed cigarettes. "Double duty. No excuses."

"Yes, of course," she stammered before scurrying away.

Samantha steadied herself as she took another step toward the women, uncertain if she could muster up the strength to speak. Fortunately, she didn't have to. Lucille turned her attention to her, wrinkling her nose at her. "Well, well, what do we have here?"

Lois flashed her badge to the security desk, spotting Clark by the elevators with a satisfied grin on his face. "Do I want to know?"

His grin widened as he looped an arm around her waist. "Let's just say Mr. Dunning was reminded of the harassment laws in New Troy." He reached over to press the call button on the elevator and she let out a defeated sigh.

"You shouldn't have done that, Clark," Lois said in a soft whisper. "Weren't you the one that said we needed to just let it die down? How is it going to look if...?" Her rambling was cut short when he leaned in to capture her lips with his, silencing her with a kiss. Instinctually, she ran a hand against his chest, sighing against him.

"You were saying?" he teased, pulling away as he beamed at her, satisfied in his ability to make her speechless.

The elevator pinged and the doors behind them opened, revealing the empty car. "Perfect timing as always." She sighed, fingering the end of his silk tie, walking backward into the elevator with him. He ran his hand up and down her lower back, sending a shiver of delight down her spine. It was really not fair that he had that effect on her. She glanced around the empty elevator and grinned, toying with his tie as she began to ramble, "You ever notice how the crowd in here lightens after lunch? I mean, it's like people go to lunch and never come back and..."

She smiled back at him, feeling the solid frame of her husband brush against her as he leaned over to press the button on the elevator panel behind her. "You're babbling again," he reminded

her, running a hand across her cheek.

“It’s what I do,” she reminded him, staring back at him expectantly.

“I know,” he murmured, leaning in to recapture her lips only to pull away at the last second when the sound of Cat yelling from the lobby rang out behind them.

“Hold the elevator!” a voice called out.

Lois let out a muttered curse, biting her lower lip to suppress the groan of disappointment as she watched Clark reach over to press the ‘*open door*’ button.

Cat Grant stepped inside the elevator with a bright smile, “Thanks, Clark.”

The elevator doors closed behind Cat and a soft hum filled the elevator car as they began to move. “I see they fixed that squeaking wheel that used to drive everyone crazy,” Cat observed with a laugh. “Remember that time Perry sent Jimmy and Mike up the line with hydraulic fluid and he got stuck?”

Lois flashed a half-smile, still not willing to reminisce with Cat about the ‘good old days’ as she seemed to think of them. She, Perry, Clark, and Jimmy had all been through hell and back after the Planet was destroyed. Cat had packed up and left without any warning. No good-bye. The next morning, they found her desk cleaned out and the paper in shambles before Lex stormed through acting like its savior. They’d worked together for three years. Cat abandoned them all. Now here she was back acting like nothing had changed. It wasn’t that easy.

“Yeah, well, they fixed the squeaky wheel when they replaced the elevator I guess. You know, after the Planet got blown up and you abandoned everyone?” Lois said with just enough snark to get her message across. The elevator pinged, arriving on the newsroom floor and she pushed past the dumbfounded Cat and headed to her desk only to come face to face with Jerry White.

“Ms. Lane,” he cheered happily, extending his hand to shake hers. “It’s great to see you.”

Lois glanced around the newsroom still abuzz with activity then glanced behind her where Clark had just stepped off the elevator to meet her. “Jerry, I thought your meeting with the parole board wasn’t until next month.”

Jerry was supposed to help the FBI with their investigation into one of the mob bosses that Jerry had worked for during his misguided get rich quick scheme with red kryptonite a month ago. Thankfully, he’d seen the error in his ways and agreed to testify against Mr. Gadget and his son as well as provide evidence against Little Tony Zarate’s lieutenant—Mac Gambino. That and the glowing recommendation from Superman had helped make him eligible to serve out the rest of his sentence on parole.

Jerry shrugged happily. “Yeah, Dad was able to pull a few strings to get it moved up and they released me this afternoon. I just finished the first meeting.” He shook his head. “Scary. Intimidating. And I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone you know, but it’s good to be out.”

“Hmmm, I love a man with a little danger in his blood.” Cat sauntered toward them, extending her hand for Jerry to take.

He stared at her dumbfounded and Cat awarded him a smile. “Catherine Grant—Cat’s Corner. I’m sure you’ve heard of me.”

“Vaguely,” Jerry began, glancing at Lois and mouthing ‘*I thought she left.*’ Lois shrugged, watching with amusement as Cat began to unwittingly try and make her move on Perry’s son. Due to Jerry’s prison sentence upstate Cat had never been introduced to Perry’s son.

“Shouldn’t we warn her?” Clark whispered in her ear.

“So, I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation. Parole?” She ran a hand over Jerry’s chest seductively and he jumped, startled.

“No way,” Lois whispered back loud enough so only Clark could hear her.

“Yeah, listen, I’m not really interested in ... whatever this is,”

he said, taking a step back and looking pleadingly at Lois and Clark. “It was good to see you two. Tell Dad I’ll catch up with him later. Mr. Stern’s got him on a phone conference right now.”

“Dad?” Cat’s brow furrowed.

Lois allowed a broad grin to spread across her face. “Cat this is Jerry White—Perry’s son.”

Chapter 4

Lucille Newtrich pursed her lips, pacing in front of Samantha. “I’ve heard of you. The photographer that became famous for faking a photograph.”

“I...” Samantha was about to argue but seeing the tense expressions on the women around her she decided not to push her luck.

“So, I didn’t peg you as someone that needs to keep a habit going. Why are you really here?” Lucille countered with an arched eyebrow.

“Protection,” Samantha blurted out hurriedly. “I don’t know my way around here and I know you and your sister run things. I’m willing to do what it takes. Just give me a chance.”

“A chance, huh?” Lucille looked at her with a doubtful expression. “I suppose even the vermin deserve scraps.” She looked to Nell. “Set her up on the left wing.”

“You shouldn’t have done that,” Clark said, watching Lois as she finished getting ready for bed for the evening.

“Done what?” Lois asked, looking back at him expectantly, placing the brush down on the vanity.

“Lois...”

“I didn’t *do* anything.” She harrumphed, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Exactly my point.” He sighed, pulling her to him. “Come on, it’s been how many years since she left. Don’t you think you should cut her just a little bit slack?”

“Like let her discover your favorite place to jet out from when you’re flying around?” Lois pressed with a knowing look.

“You know what I mean,” he said shaking his head ruefully at her. “And seriously? I like hanging out with rats because I’m from a farm? You couldn’t come up with anything better than that?”

“Well...” She shrugged, stepping away from him. “Okay, I was a little off my game.”

“A *little*?” he teased, following her toward the bed and helping to remove the throw pillows.

“Okay, a lot.” she admitted sheepishly. “I don’t know what it is I just feel off balance with her back. Like all of a sudden...” She stopped, trailing off on her sentence and looking away.

“What?” he asked, placing a hand on her shoulder as she took a seat on the edge of the bed.

“She acts like nothing’s changed, Clark. Everything changed. We worked together for years and she disappeared in the middle of the night without a word then after all this time she’s back. Poof. I’m sorry I can’t just forgive her as easily as you and Perry can.”

“It’s been three years, Lois. Give her a chance. She seems to be genuinely trying to turn over a new leaf,” Clark pointed out, taking a seat next to her on the bed.

“Hah!” Lois scoffed irritably. “She is still just as infuriating as she was before.”

“How so?” he asked, looking at her expectantly. Lois fell silent for a moment and he sighed, “Just try and give her a chance. I’ve seen you welcome criminals more warmly than you have Cat.”

“I guess maybe I have been a little unfair to her,” She relented, leaning back on the bed.

“You have treated Kyle Griffin nicer,” he joked, falling back on the bed next to her.

“Fine,” Lois said, rolling on her side to face him. “I’ll give her a chance, but I’m not promising anything.”

“Good.” He leaned in to kiss her. “Now, have you noticed anything?” He directed his gaze to the window.

“No, why?” she asked, following his gaze to the window.

“No more paparazzi,” he murmured, leaning in to kiss her cheek. “Camped outside.” He brushed his lips against her chin.

“How bad did you scare them?” Lois giggled as he moved his attention to her ear.

“Hopefully enough to keep them away,” he whispered in her ear, tugging at the lobe with his teeth.

“My hero.” She gasped in surprise when he ran his teeth against her throat, running his hands against the silk of her negligee, pushing it up her long legs as he continued the pleasurable assault on her body.

“I love you,” he murmured, rolling them over so he was hovering over her. His hands moved up and down her sides suggestively and she let out a soft moan as he moved to capture her lips.

Samantha stared at the box in Nell Newtrich’s cell as she waited for the money she was supposed to deliver. Money she could have only dreamed of seeing a few weeks ago. How her life had become this never-ending web of deception she would never know. She saw a red glow come from the box Nell grabbed a roll of bills from and gasped. *‘The rock.’*

“You screw up and you’re done. You don’t give names. You don’t squeal.” Nell wagged a roll of bills at her as she spoke.

“Of course.” Samantha swallowed hard. “I won’t let you down.”

The next morning, Cat Grant stood by the coffee machine, filling her coffee mug with steaming hot coffee as she kept a keen eye on the reporters around her. Dianne fetched a bagel and hot tea. Jimmy had his energy drink and box of doughnuts for the staff meeting this morning. Then there was Clark, sickeningly close to Lois as the couple exited the elevator together. Cat rolled her eyes, waiting for her chance. She had to wait until he was alone. She needed to find a way to test Clark but right now she was coming up blank. It’s not like she could walk up to him with a gun and start shooting.

What if she was wrong?

Then she would have injured or possibly killed an innocent man and be spending the rest of her life behind bars—just like her cousin. No, there were other ways to test him.

“All right, everyone, staff meeting in ten!” Perry bellowed across the newsroom.

Cat jumped slightly, almost dropping her mug and thought, *‘That wouldn’t have been good.’*

“Careful, Cat. That would have been a bad burn,” Kathy said from behind her, putting the juice back in the fridge.

“Right,” Cat said, looking down at her mug.

“Excuse me,” Clark pushed behind them to grab two coffee mugs and began pouring. Cat looked down at her coffee mug.

‘That’s it.’ Cat thought, watching as he reached for the pot of coffee. Just a gentle shove. That’s all it would take. If he didn’t get burned that would prove her theory.

She prepared to turn and face him, keeping her mug tilted out in his direction when out of nowhere Ralph sauntered up, grabbing the cream from Clark, “Hey just cuz you and Lane got the city beat doesn’t mean you can hog the...”

It was too late. Before she could stop it her mug tilted over, pouring half her coffee all over Ralph’s hand. “Son of a...Geez! Watch it will ya?”

“Ralph, come on, man it was an accident,” Clark chided, handing him a set of wet paper towels from the sink.

“I’m so sorry,” Cat apologized, grabbing a towel to help blot the hot liquid. “Are you okay?”

“Does this look like I’m okay?” Ralph held up his reddened

hand with a scowl.

“She said she was sorry,” Clark interjected.

“Yeah, I’ll remember to tell my doctor that when he’s peeling off my dead skin.”

Clark looked at the hand for a moment and countered, “It’s a coffee burn. It’ll be tender for a few days and that’s it.” He smirked at him. “Unless you need permission to go about your day from your doctor on a daily basis?”

Cat snickered, wiping the side of her cup with a paper towel.

“What are you laughing at?” Ralph scowled.

“Nothing,” Cat said, suppressing an involuntary giggle.

“You should get some ice on that,” Clark suggested, pointing to the fridge as he took a sip of his coffee.

“Nah, really!” Ralph scoffed. “Save it Kansas. I got this.” He turned and opened the fridge, pulling out the spreadable butter.

“I wouldn’t do that.” Clark shook his head.

“Yeah, yeah,” Ralph muttered, taking a plastic knife and dropping a large clump on his hand. He yelped when it hit his sore hand.

Clark winced. “That is not going to be pretty.” He grabbed the other cup and excused himself, “Might want to step back. I know how clumsy you get around hot coffee, Ralph.”

The pounding in her head continued as fist after fist came in contact with her skull. Then a foot. Then another fist. It was like this for what felt like hours. Then an alarm blew and it stopped. She looked up and saw the guard throw the brass knuckle ring to the ground. “Get up!”

Try as she might she couldn’t move. She opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out. “You deaf?” A hard shove in her ribs and she squinted, trying to prepare herself for the inevitable pain that would follow down her spine.

“Get up!”

Lois walked over to Clark who was grabbing a paper off the fax. “So, I had Jimmy run a background check on this Warden Baker. Guess who gave the recommendation for him to get the promotion to warden two years ago?” She fanned the folder in her hand, looking at him expectantly. They’d been hitting the pavement hard since they arrived at the Planet this morning. Prison corruption was one thing but if what she suspected was going on was true then this was bigger than either of them had imagined.

“I don’t suppose it was the meter maid,” Clark joked, following her toward the coffee machine.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she scoffed, handing him the file. “Bill Church Jr. wrote a glowing recommendation when Baker was up for promotion. Then magically the other candidate being considered got pulled over for a DUI.”

“I don’t like where this is going,” Clark groaned, stopping to pour himself a fresh cup of coffee.

“Only problem is when they pulled the guy’s blood there was nothing in his system. Case was thrown out, of course, but not before the charge made him lose the promotion to Baker,” Lois said smugly.

“Really, *really* don’t like where this is going,” Clark pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t suppose this could have been an innocent mistake?”

“Officer that did the arrest disappeared along with the breathalyzer from the evidence locker.” Lois frowned, crossing her arms over her chest.

A loud crash came from the other side of the newsroom. They both turned to see Jimmy on his back in the aisle between their desks with papers scattered around him. “Jimmy, you all right?” Clark raced to their friend’s side to help him up.

“Look out, there’s something on the floor here.” Lois grimaced, running her foot across the wet floor.

“Oh, that was not good.” Jimmy groaned, staring up at the ceiling.

Clark bent down, putting his finger to it and feeling it with his index finger and thumb. “Feels waxy. Like wax and shine maybe.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Jimmy grumbled, allowing Clark to help him up.

“Easy there, Jimmy,” Clark said. He lowered his glasses and looked him over before helping him stand up. “Looks like you didn’t hit anything hard enough to do any real damage.”

“Other than my ego.” Jimmy groaned, looking around the crowd of Daily Planet staff that had surrounded them.

“Hey, what’s going on out here?” Perry bellowed, racing out of his office.

“Might want to tell the cleaning lady to watch the stuff she uses.” Jimmy said with a pained expression, rubbing the back of his head as he eased himself to his feet.

“Cleaning?” Perry frowned. “They only do the floors on Sundays.” He looked at Jimmy in concern. “Here, why don’t you have a seat on the couch in my office and rest for a bit.” He turned to Kathy. “Can you grab the first aid?”

“I’m fine, Chief,” Jimmy began to argue.

He looked down at the papers that had fallen and Lois stopped him before he could bend down. “I’ve got it, Jimmy.” She hurriedly gathered the papers with Clark while a few other staff members helped Jimmy make his way to Perry’s office.

Cat watched as Jimmy was escorted to Perry’s office with a groan. That had not gone according to plan at all. She looked down at the bottle of wax and shine she’d confiscated from the janitor’s closet. It had been a simple plan. She had watched Clark leave his desk to get a fax. It had taken all of two seconds for her to pretend she’d dropped a pen when walking by and dropped a few large drops of the wax and shine from her paper cup. All she had to do was wait for Clark to walk back to his desk.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t that easy. Jimmy chose that very moment to walk by and place something on Clark’s desk. She sighed, closing the drawer to her desk. Hopefully, Jimmy hadn’t been hurt too bad. It seemed proving Clark was Superman would be harder than she originally thought.

She turned back to her computer and saw Lois standing over her. “Yes?”

Lois seemed to be struggling internally with whatever it was she was trying to say. “I just wanted to say that... I think you and I got off to a rough start.”

Cat looked back at her dumbfounded. Was Lois Lane seriously trying to apologize to her? She felt the shock begin to come over her as she did her best to remain calm. This was good. This was *too* good. “I see,” she responded.

“You’ve obviously changed from the last time you were in Metropolis and I’ve changed too.” Lois began cautiously, meeting her gaze. “I’m not the same person I was three years ago, and I’ve been treating you like you were the same person that left us. That wasn’t fair.”

Cat wasn’t sure how to respond. It was true. Lois had treated her just as dismissively as she had in the past. “Well, I appreciate that.” She wasn’t sure what she was supposed to say. She was completely taken off guard with Lois’ admission. “For the record, I didn’t leave because I wanted to.”

“Then why did you?” Lois asked, looking at her expectantly.

“Well, it was a lot of things,” Cat began carefully, uncertain how much she wanted to divulge about her past to Lois. The phone on her desk rang and she sighed. “Just a minute.” She picked up the phone. “Cat Grant,” she answered.

“Ms. Grant? I have you listed as the emergency contact for a Samantha...”

“What happened?” She cut the voice on the other line off.

“There’s been an accident. She’s in the infirmary.”

“I’ll be right there.” Cat set the phone down and looked up at Lois. “I’m sorry. We’re going to have to finish this later.” She stood up, grabbing her things frantically.

“Cat, are you all right?” Lois asked, looking at her.

“I’m fine,” Cat lied.

“You’re shaking,” Lois observed, pointing to her hand that was gripping her keys tightly.

“I...” Cat took a deep breath. “I’ve got to go. I’m sorry.”

“What’s going on?” Lois pressed, blocking her from leaving the confines of her desk.

“I...I need to go. I’ve got a family member that’s been...hurt.” She managed to say.

“Okay,” Lois took the keys from her. “I’ll drive.”

“No, that’s really not...”

“Cat this isn’t up for debate,” Lois cut her off.

Chapter 5

Jerry White waited in the small white room, staring at the cheap dirty tiles on the floor. The room had a stale odor to it and the air conditioner cranking sounded like a jet engine trying to take off while blowing back arctic cold into the already frigid room. The black door on the other side opened and a man in a navy suit and matching tie stood in the doorway. “Jerry White?”

“Yes?” Jerry stood to his feet, looking to the unfamiliar man for guidance.

He clicked his tongue for a moment, giving him a onceover before frowning and motioning with his index finger to follow him. “Let’s go.”

“So, he threatened you, eh?” Barry Dunning’s new executive ran a hand through his golden blond locks and smiled back at him. “We’ll have to make sure the public sees the full story on its favorite caped friend, won’t we?”

Barry felt a lump form in his throat. Too many executives had come and gone here at Top Copy. Too many reporters and most of them had been taken down by Superman or Lois Lane and Clark Kent. He didn’t doubt for a second Superman would follow through with his threat. Dianna Stride and Leo Nunk were just a few recent casualties in the media war against Superman. If he kept pushing he could be joining them, but William McCoy, Top Copy’s newest executive had insisted on continuing to stay on the Kents to discover the story they refused to tell. It seemed like a dangerous game to play given Superman’s recent press conference, but McCoy was persistent.

“What about Superman’s threat?” Barry ventured, pulling McCoy’s gaze back to him.

“You let me worry about that, Barry. We’ll give the Kents a 24-hour break and then come at them full-force. With any luck Top Copy won’t be the only news circuit after them tomorrow.” McCoy responded with a menacing laugh.

‘Wait here.’

Those had been the words Cat had said to Lois when she rushed to the front desk not even letting her park the Jeep before she’d bolted out. Whatever was going on had obviously shaken Cat. Letting her drive wasn’t an option but Cat sure tried to fight her on that. Arguing she was fine despite the physical signs that she was not.

No, something was going on.

Her eyes wandered over the almost empty waiting area. There was a young woman with two children, about four and five, talking with what looked to be her attorney. He sat across from her, handing her a tissue as she sobbed. Then there was a teenager in the other corner with what appeared to be her father, listening to the music with her headphones and drowning out her dreary surroundings. Lastly the three security guards at the desk.

She approached the desk, pasting on her best smile as she

attempted to weasel what information she could from the guards. “Hi, I’m looking for a friend of mine. She came in to check on her cousin while I was parking.”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am, we can’t give out inmate information,” the guard apologized.

“Could you maybe just let me know how long she’ll be?” Lois asked, brightening her smile.

“What’s the name?” the guard asked, motioning for her to approach the side of the desk with the computer.

From her vantage point she could make out the right side of the screen. “My friend’s name is Catherine Grant,” Lois supplied happily.

“Let’s see, checked into the infirmary visiting area about five minutes ago,” the guard said, pulling up a screen. Lois’ eyes widened when she saw the mugshot on the screen with the corresponding name. ‘*Samantha Grady*.’ The guard clicked a few boxes and then turned back to her. “They don’t let visitors stay more than fifteen minutes at a time. Shouldn’t be too much longer.”

“Great,” Lois breathed, doing her best not to react to what she’d just seen.

Samantha Grady. Cat Grant was visiting Samantha Grady. The woman who had faked the photograph of her and Clark to create the scandal that had almost cost them everything. Cat was visiting her. Why? Was she really related to her or was that just a ruse to throw her off her trail? The more she thought about it the angrier she got. Cat’s sudden reappearance made so much more sense. She was working with her.

Lois glanced at the clock. Deciding she couldn’t sit here and do nothing any more she got up to leave. Cat could find her own way back.

“Sam?” Cat nudged her cousin’s shoulder gently. “You gonna talk?”

“Have you found anything?” Samantha croaked out through her bloodied lip and swollen jaw. The left side of her face appeared to be swollen from impact as well and her left eye was red from a burst blood vessel.

Cat sighed, running a hand through her auburn hair. “Sam, you know that’s not going to get you out of here.”

“Such a pessimist. They’ll see. They’ll see I was telling the truth and then...they’ll let me out.” Samantha argued before a coughing fit took over.

“No, they won’t,” Cat said, shaking her head. “I’ve scheduled a meeting for you to meet with your attorney tomorrow morning. Don’t send this one away,” she warned, standing up from her seat next to her.

“Cat...” Samantha argued. “That’s it? You’re just going to give up?”

“I don’t know what else you want me to do,” Cat snapped back at her angrily. “You won’t tell me what’s going on. You got yourself beat up and caught with over a thousand dollars and won’t tell anyone where it came from. I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m trying to do what I have to do to survive,” Samantha shot back. “But what would you know about that?”

“A lot more than you’d think.” Cat snipped irritably.

“Would you two cut it out? Some of us are trying to get our work done.”

Cat looked back and spotted a blond woman in an inmate uniform, emptying the trashcan from one of the rooms across from Samantha’s. The woman’s face looked so familiar...

“I’ve got to go,” Cat said abruptly, rushing out of Samantha’s room.

“Boy, three years certainly doesn’t change much, does it?” the woman called after Cat.

“Do I know you?” Cat asked, staring back at her in surprise.

“We’ve met but I don’t think you’d remember.” She smiled

back at her. “I was working an exhibit at the Daily Planet a few years ago. Sampling some...”

“Perfume,” Cat finished for her, recalling the connection. “Miranda.”

“In the flesh,” she announced proudly. “You know if she keeps messing with the Newtriches she’ll be coming out of here in a body bag. Those two are Intergang’s top dealers.”

“Newtriches?” Cat exclaimed in surprise.

“Hey, this isn’t happy hour. Get back to work,” one of the guards ordered, tapping at the glass outside the lobby.

“The human body is such an amazing thing, isn’t it? Impulsive and damaged yet capable of holding back until it can’t any longer,” Miranda teased, sauntering toward the next room. “At least that’s the story they like to tell.”

‘Impulsive.’

An idea popped in her head and Cat turned to see Miranda moving to the next room. “Yes, I remember. You made a perfume called Revenge and drugged Metropolis for two days.”

“All that labor and it never worked on the one it was intended to,” Miranda grumbled.

“Who?” Cat inquired, watching Miranda shove another trash bag into the large bag in her cart.

“Why Metropolis’ Golden Boy—Lex. Who do you think?” Miranda scoffed. “Labor of love and I’m looking at twenty to life. Fair? I think not.”

“You did drug the city,” Cat pointed out.

“Yes, but sometimes things aren’t always what they seem.” Miranda shrugged, pulling her cart out, “Take your little cousin there? You really think she got beat up for nothing?”

“What do you mean?” Cat asked.

Miranda shrugged, pointing to the glass window with the guard pointing at his watch. “My time’s just about up, Ms. Grant. Till next time.”

Cat made her way through security, contemplating Miranda’s evasive hinting around and the current predicament her cousin was in. She had to figure out a way to help her, but the question was how. She glanced around the waiting room, looking for Lois and frowned. She stepped outside, looking around the parking lot and saw no sign of the familiar silver Jeep Cherokee. “Great,” she muttered to herself.

“It makes sense!” Lois paced in front of her husband in the Daily Planet conference room after updating him on what she’d discovered. “Why did Cat come back to Metropolis? She had a fashion empire and she’s going to go back to writing gossip? No, no, no...”

“We don’t know that’s the reason she’s back here and before you go jumping to conclusions we need to get the facts,” Clark pointed out, stopping her mid-pace and pulling her to him. “Honey, you need to calm down.”

“Do you remember what it was like last week with the paparazzi hounding us every two seconds?” Lois fumed, glaring up at him irritably.

“It could be innocent,” Clark whispered in her ear.

“Yeah right,” Lois grumbled irritably. “If it were innocent she wouldn’t have been trying to hide it.”

Clark let out a breath and said, “True, but jumping to conclusions isn’t exactly the best approach either. Let’s see what we can find out and then confront Cat once we have all the facts.” She still wasn’t sure if she could do that, but it couldn’t hurt to wait. Make sure they had everything when they confronted Cat. Clark nudged her arm, “Lois?”

“Fine.” She scowled, still not happy with the situation. “Just be careful.” He gave her his best *‘Are you serious’* expression and she crossed her arms over her chest. “I’m serious. This is the same woman that helped orchestrate a conspiracy that almost got President Kasparov and General Navance killed. If Cat is working

with her I don't trust her as far as I can throw her."

Jerry White allowed himself to be patted down by the FBI agents as hidden cameras were placed in various parts of his clothing. "So this is a big one, huh?" He did his best not to react as the familiar dark green jumpsuit was pulled out.

"We've got cameras on each layer of clothing and audio recording equipment so that if one goes out there's always a backup," Agent Rollins said, handing him the jumpsuit to put on. "Warden Baker's been working closely with Bill Church Jr to continue the influence of Intergang within Metropolis Penitentiary's walls. We had a deal signed and in less than twelve hours our witness was murdered."

"What do you need?" Jerry asked, buttoning the front of the jumpsuit.

"An admission. Something to connect the two," Agent Rollins instructed.

"I'll see what I can do," Jerry said, taking a deep breath.

"We'll pull you out if it gets too hairy," Rollins reminded him. "Barnes can't know you're an informant, so you'll only have contact on the weekly visitations," Rollins explained. "You understand that, right?"

"Won't be anything I haven't done before." Jerry shrugged. "Let's go."

"Storage locker 931826," the clerk said, setting the box down on a table. He looked to Cat with wandering eyes. "You sure do ask for some peculiar favors, Ms. Grant."

"Thanks, Hank," Cat said, running her index finger down his chest seductively. "I just don't know what I'll do if I can't find that perfume bottle. It was my grandmother's." She did her best 'poor me' expression, watching in amazement as the clerk turned to putty in her hands. After seeing her ride had deserted her curiosity got the best of her and she made her way to the police department to see what she could find out about Miranda's case.

"I still can't believe that Miranda character would take something like that." He shook his head in disgust. He opened the box for her and winked. "Careful. The guys bagged up all the potions from her shop when they arrested her. Had quite an ill effect on some people."

Cat held up a scarf and smiled. "I think I'll be fine." She moved the scarf to her face and began rifling through the box. Hank turned to go back to his desk, seeming to accept that she wasn't up to anything nefarious as she pulled out bottle after bottle until she found the one she was looking for—there sealed in a large plastic bag was the black perfume bottle with yellow tape across it marked 'Revenge' in bold letters. Beneath it was a large file that didn't look like it had been touched since being confiscated from LexLabs.

Cat flipped the file open and found studious notes of test after test titled 'Project Revenge.' In it Miranda referenced orders from 'The Boss' to continue the testing on animals for 'Revenge' and their reactions to different compounds. Throughout the entire experiment each test result was sent up to LexCorp's executive office. "How did Lois Lane miss this?" Cat wondered aloud.

Chapter 6

"I was the one that inspected her family tree when Jimmy made up that dare. I can't believe I didn't put two and two together. She never put the last name. Just 'Sam'... Adopted daughter of Harold Grady..." Lois rambled on as she paced in the conference room, working through the emotions that were rising up inside her.

"Sam could be *anyone*," Clark pointed out, trying to get Lois to calm down. He was just as concerned about Cat visiting Samantha as she was, but he also knew the wild theories Lois was shouting out were just that: theories. There was nothing that

pointed at Cat conspiring with Samantha as Lois was alluding to.

"Or it could be the Samantha that's sitting inside a cell at the Metropolis Penitentiary Infirmary waiting for trial," Lois snipped bitterly.

"Okay, say you're right," Clark tried to reason with her.

"They're related. So what?" Though the idea of Cat and Samantha sharing a bloodline didn't exactly reassure him, he knew from experience that jumping to conclusions wasn't the best approach either.

"So what?" Lois echoed with an aghast expression. "So what? Clark, this woman... She followed me all the way to Chateau Roberge. She was watching and..."

"Honey, honey, honey." Clark grabbed her by the shoulders, forcing her to come to a stop mid-pace. Her voice had already risen three decibels in the last few minutes. "You're doing that manic thing again."

"She's talking to that woman. She's related to her!" Lois hissed out in a panic. "What if..."

"Okay, before you go down this road you need to take a deep breath and calm down," Clark soothed. "We don't know that. All this is, is conjecture and wild theories. I know you're upset but this isn't helping anything."

That seemed to reach her and she visibly relaxed, taking a deep breath. "Calm down. I can do that."

"Good." Clark smiled.

"I need to have Jimmy run a background check on her," Lois stated firmly.

"You're *not* running a background check on Cat," Clark interjected.

"Not Cat. *Samantha*. I need to know what we're dealing with," Lois said, heading out into the newsroom.

Jerry took a deep breath, hearing the loud bang of the prison doors behind him. A loud clank of the metal gears within the lock echoed down the corridor as he prepared himself for the next turn. "Keep moving!" The guard behind him ordered as he picked up the pace.

Jerry didn't react.

He kept his focus on the worn brick ahead of him.

He was in.

Inside the prison.

This time it was on his terms.

There it was.

Cat stared at the familiar perfume bottle bagged up with the label of 'Revenge' and 'Exhibit A' printed on it. The culprit of so many arguments, transfers, and budding relationships within the Daily Planet three years ago. The story had stayed in the headlines well past the normal cycle due to the ramifications that had been left. Two days of people being slaves to their desires.

Jimmy had chased after the actress that had been out of his league: April Stephens.

Perry had gone after the cleaning lady, Rahaelia.

Lois had gone after... Clark.

Cat grinned to herself, recalling the conversation she'd overheard after the story had been filed. Lois had begrudgingly admitted to having a microscopic attraction to him. How times had changed. It was lucky they both hadn't been...

She stopped, picking up the bag of perfume as a memory came back to her. The airport. Superman had been under the influence of the perfume. He'd been just as susceptible to Miranda's perfume...

An idea began to form. If Superman was exposed to the perfume again it would help her prove her theory once and for all. Expose Superman to the perfume and wait to see if there was any change in Clark. It was a good plan. It would prove her theory once and for all, but there was still that small voice that reminded

her it was wrong.

'Are you really going to drug him just to help Sam?'

'He was a good friend.'

'Is it really worth it?'

She grabbed the bag, holding it in her hand as she contemplated her next move. Unable to decide she tucked the bag in her purse, careful to be sure she wasn't being watched and then closed the lid on the box. It was better to be prepared.

Jimmy sat at his desk, writing down the name and information as Lois rambled off the list of information she wanted on 'Samantha Grady.' He recognized the name immediately but didn't say anything. After Superman's press conference Lois had been extra skittish and more self-conscious. He wasn't sure if it was from having her and Clark's private life dissected by the media or if there was more going on than met the eye, but he knew better than to pry.

"Okay, I'll see what I can find out." Jimmy offered her a reassuring smile and Lois relaxed a bit.

"Thanks, Jimmy." She smiled back at him. She pointed to the ice pack he had on his back. "How's the back?"

"Okay, I just gotta take it a little easy." He grinned back at her. "I guess that's one way to make me quit running around the newsroom."

Steve, one of the couriers from the mailroom walked up with a large packet in his hand. "Jimmy, this just came for you."

"Thanks, Steve." Jimmy took the package and looked at it.

"Ah, that was quick."

"What?" Lois asked curiously.

"The public records on Metropolis Men's Penitentiary. Usually, it takes longer to get these things back," Jimmy explained, pulling out the thick brown folder with several rubber bands wrapped around it. Jimmy grimaced. "Oh, I am not looking forward to this."

"Here." Lois took the folder from him. "You've got enough to deal with. Clark and I'll go through it and we can exchange notes later."

"You sure?" Jimmy looked up at her in surprise.

"Yeah." Lois smiled. "Just rest that back and let me know what you dig up on Samantha Grady."

"Will do," Jimmy said grinning back at her. "Thanks."

William McCoy took a long drag from his cigarette, looking around the rooftop. A copy of the latest headline he'd sent to press with the subsidiary markets of Topy Copy was rolled up in his hand.

She'd called.

She never called.

He tapped the ash from his cigarette onto the ground, taking in the afternoon sun as he looked over the city. The hustle and bustle of the streets and mixed scents of food and gasoline gave him a sense of comfort. There was something about the city that called out to him.

"Mr. McCoy," the sweet voice from one of the most deadly women in Metropolis called out to him and he turned to face her.

"Mrs. Church." McCoy gave her a courteous nod, being sure to keep his eyes centered on her face. He knew from experience that wavering even for a second would give her incentive to push the envelope with him and that wasn't something he wanted to get caught up in. He was a professional and this was business.

"I noticed you changed your ads." She frowned, running a hand through her hair. "What happened to the segment on Lane and Kent?"

"It's proving to be more and more difficult to stay on them," McCoy said with a grunt. "There's only so far you can push the envelope before someone yells 'uncle' and I think we're at that point. Our guys have been tailing them and so far, nothing but

arguments and the threat of a restraining order has come out of it. I think we need to move on."

"I think you forget who's calling the shots here," she said, narrowing her eyes at him. "I made you and I can destroy you. Never forget that."

Lois watched as her husband moved at super-speed, reading through the file Jimmy had given her. Thankfully no one appeared to notice the super movements of her husband. She'd learned early on how Clark could discreetly do things without anyone being the wiser. A quick beam of x-ray vision on a camera when the paparazzi had been hounding them in the months leading up to their wedding. A beam of heat vision or blast of freezing breath here or there to deter or move someone or something along. It was remarkable how little people noticed in the day to day.

"Clark, the notepad." She pointed as he came to a stop. The pad of paper next to him was smoking from his super-speed notes and he waved his hand to clear the steam.

"Sorry." He gave her an apologetic smile as he fanned the rest of the smoke away from the pad.

"Anything?" She asked.

"Same story over and over again. Prisoners being moved without any official orders. Next day, the said prisoner is dead or seriously injured. An investigation takes place and no fault on the prison." Clark ran both his hands down his forehead, burying his face in his palms.

"Sounds like a conspiracy if I ever heard one," Lois noted.

"Yeah, that's one way of putting it," Clark said with a sour expression. "One thing that's really odd is the roster of prison guards. We have personnel files on all the guards but on the radio, there's a guard that isn't listed here." He pointed to the transcript. "*Bruno Mannheim*."

"So we need to find who this *Bruno Mannheim* is," Lois said with a determined expression on her face.

The soft whirring of the copier and aroma of ink and coffee hung in the air. 3.4 fluid ounces. That was 100 milliliters. One spray. That's all it would take to test her theory on Superman and prove once and for all...

"Hey, Cat, here's the file you wanted," Jimmy said, walking up to her with manila file in hand. He stopped, waving a hand in front of her. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah," she lied, looking back at Jimmy with a forced smile. She did her best to squash the guilt that was building up inside her over where her mind had been just moments before. The memory of where her train of thought had been headed nagged in the back of her mind as she took the file from Jimmy. "Thanks, Jimmy. Were you able to find anything?"

"Unlike the LexCorp accounts, Lex Luthor set up for most of his less than legal dealings this account doesn't seem to be controlled by Luthor," Jimmy explained with a concerned expression. "Money floats in and out of large corporations in the blink of an eye but the transfers are coming from outside the United States entirely."

"Let me guess, Cayman Islands? Switzerland?" Cat guessed, knowing all too well where the rich and powerful hid their money.

"Australia, Africa, Antarctica..." Jimmy listed off with a confused expression. "All over."

"Are you sure these didn't originate with LexCorp?" Cat asked with a disheartened expression. She really thought she'd found something that Lois had missed in her initial investigation into Miranda.

Jimmy shook his head. "Money that was transferred to Miranda came from outside of LexCorp, outside Metropolis, and likely outside the United States. Whoever's behind this obviously did their homework."

Cat gave an aggravated sigh. "So there's no way to find out

where the money came from?"

"I didn't say that." Jimmy grinned. "I just said they did their homework." He pointed to the file in her hand. The name on the account is Bruno Mannheim. Unfortunately, it seems to be a dummy name. No one by that name exists anywhere but on paper."

"Huh," Cat pondered for a moment. "Okay, thanks, Jimmy." A dead end. She always ended up at a dead end.

"No sweat," Jimmy nodded, moving off and heading back to his desk.

Cat sighed, glancing out toward the newsroom. It was the usual hustle and bustle it always was. Her gaze shifted to the center of the newsroom where she noticed two obvious absences: Lois Lane and Clark Kent. She was still miffed about Lois leaving her earlier. She'd practically forced herself on her then abandoned her without a way back to the Planet.

'Probably busy catching another Superman exclusive she can scoop everyone out of,' Cat thought to herself bitterly.

She'd always felt on uneven ground when it came to Lois Lane. No matter how hard she worked she'd never get the acknowledgment that Lois did for a job well done. Cat's Corner had a worldwide following and Perry still had yet to invest as much in advertising for her return as he did for the team of Lane and Kent. She was jealous. She was a big enough person to admit that. Just once she wanted someone to give her credit for a job well done the way they did Lois. Just once she wanted to be seen as someone capable of doing more than collecting the latest gossip circulating around or being a fixture to sell clothing or accessories. Even in her own business, she knew she wasn't taken seriously by the executives keeping the books. They thought she didn't know any better. They thought her talents were limited to designing and looking good. They were wrong. They were all wrong. She was going to prove that once and for all.

'Is this really the way?' her conscience cried out.

She felt a pang of guilt hit her like a wave and sighed, catching a glimpse of Clark Kent standing in Perry White's office with Lois. Her anger at Lois forgotten for a moment. Was she really that desperate to prove herself? Yes, Clark had lied and possibly stretched the rules of journalism and ethics beyond recognition given the many articles she'd read on 'Superman Exclusives' by Clark Kent. If she did this she'd be losing a friend. If she tried to drug him to prove her point, then what did that make her?

'Just as bad.'

She couldn't do it. She had thought about it and come close but when it came down to it she couldn't justify drugging Clark for the sake of proving her theory. Even if he was lying to everyone and Lois was helping him, he had been her friend. He had seen past the flashy clothes and seen the real Cat—even when she couldn't. Stooping to that level seemed extreme.

They were friends.

She had to find another way.

She glanced back toward the conference room where Lois and Clark were huddled together. She still owed Lois a few words regarding her leaving her at the prison without a ride back but that would have to wait. She had crashed and burned both times in her attempt to prove her theory on Clark by testing his invulnerability. She needed to do something a little more discreet.

She spotted the box of pushpins sitting in the top cabinet and smiled to herself. *'Perfect.'*

The loud clank of the metal doors closing hit a nerve and Jerry did his best not to react. Even with the short time he'd been inside, he'd come to notice things. He noticed the way everyone avoided making eye contact with his cellmate, Morgan during free time. He noticed the disappearances and reappearances on the left side of the cell block at the same time for the last two breaks.

He'd been told his cellmate was someone they thought to be important to the Intergang organization. That idea baffled him. The man hardly said anything and communicated in grunts and muffled snorts. He wasn't sure how connected this Morgan was, but he'd figure it out one way or another.

"Well, that was a waste of time," Lois grumbled with a defeated sigh as she and Clark made their way back to their desks.

"Perry's right," Clark said, placing a hand on the small of her back. "We don't have anything yet."

Lois ran a hand through her hair as they came to a stop in front of her desk. "Well, we can't prove anything until we get more evidence... which we can't get because someone doesn't want to go snooping through the warden's files."

"Superman doesn't break into prisons, he brings the bad guys to the proper authorities." Clark pointed out, leaning in to kiss her.

"Even if the authorities are the bad guys?" Lois asked, smoothing her hand over his shoulder. "We're at a dead end."

"Maybe not," he pondered aloud.

"What?" Lois asked, looking at him quizzically.

"Maybe another visit to the prison isn't such a bad idea,"

Clark said with a grin.

"Really?" Lois beamed at him with surprise. "I thought Superman didn't break into prisons."

"Superman's not going to," he corrected. "With this new information, maybe I can at least identify the guards that know something. It's worth a shot." He glanced at the clock. "I've got a half hour before that ribbon cutting at the hospital."

Lois glanced toward the conference room where Perry was already setting up the room for the quarterly budget meeting. "But what about the oh so exciting budget meeting?"

"Weren't you the one complaining about a dead end?" he pointed out. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I'll bring the tape recorder so you can relive the boring details when you get back." She flashed him a smile and he laughed, heading for the elevator.

Lois scanned the newsroom, preparing to begin the two-hour long meeting when she saw Cat looking at her. Her eyes narrowed. She still didn't know what to make of Cat's visit earlier but remaining quiet on something that continued to eat at her wasn't something she did easily. Clark was right. There was no proof that Cat was doing anything other than visiting a friend...or relative if Samantha was indeed the mysterious cousin Cat didn't provide much information about. Still, her reporter's instinct screamed there was something very mysterious about the visit and Cat's sudden return to Metropolis.

Cat watched from her desk as Lois and Clark exited Perry's office. She glanced back at Clark's desk where she'd set several push pins with the points sticking up on the cushion of the chair. It was perfectly inconspicuous until someone sat down. It still was a bit mean but if Clark was Superman then it wouldn't hurt. It would prove her theory without resorting to Miranda's evil brew.

'This is it.' she thought to herself, watching as Clark lingered with Lois next to her desk. "Come on, come on..." Cat muttered to herself, watching as he leaned in to kiss Lois then pulled away. They exchanged a look and then he turned toward the elevator. *'What was that about?'*

Cat leaned back in her chair with a sigh of defeat. It'd have to wait till Clark gets back before she'd have her answer.

Ralph sauntered toward Clark's desk, reaching for the chair. She stood up and moved to him as fast as her stiletto heels would allow her to move. "Ralph! What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?" Ralph looked at her with an annoyed look, moving the chair back and forth before wheeling it toward the conference room where it was already overflowing with Planet staff.

'Budget Meeting.' Cat recalled Perry's itinerary from earlier. She glanced back at the elevator. Clark had already gone. If Ralph sat down in that chair...

"Ralph, you don't want Clark's chair," she said hurriedly.

"I don't?" Ralph looked at her in confusion.

"No, no, no, no..." Cat smiled broadly, grabbing the chair from her desk. "Here. Brand new."

"Thanks." Ralph took the chair and wheeled it toward the conference room.

She grimaced, looking around the almost vacant newsroom. "That was very generous of you, Cat," a voice spoke from behind her. "But what are you going to sit in...for two hours?"

Cat turned to see Lois giving her a skeptical look as she moved her chair toward the conference room. "Since when do you care?" Cat sniffed, turning away, hoping Lois couldn't pick up on her panic. Anger overtook her better senses and she turned on her heel to confront her, "You know you talk a good game about friends and loyalty but when it comes down to it you're a selfish jerk! What kind of friend leaves someone like that?"

"Friend?" Lois looked around the empty newsroom then narrowed her eyes letting out a soft chuckle. "Oh, are you under the misconception that we're friends?" Lois shook her head, "No, Cat, that ship sailed. You see, friends are people I can trust. I can't trust you. You've proven that time and time again, yet I keep falling for the *'innocent me'* act. I don't know why I thought you might have changed," Lois snapped angrily. "Do us both a favor and drop the pretense."

"Oh, that is rich coming from you," Cat growled angrily, trying to keep her voice down so as not to call too much attention to herself. "Trust? You have done every underhanded thing imaginable to get a story and you want to lecture me about trust. You forget I was here four years ago when you stomped all over everyone to get the big Superman exclusive. Stealing stories, everyone's hunches and ideas all for that front page story. You're no better than the rest of us!"

"Getting a story is one thing, Cat. You're right. I was a jerk back then but I never hid that. I never acted like I was your friend while in cohorts with someone looking to hurt my supposed friends."

"*What* are you talking about?" Cat countered, crossing her arms over her chest. She knew Lois was full of it. She didn't know anything. If she did she wouldn't dare confront her on it, not in public anyway.

"Lois, Cat, move your tails!" Perry called from the conference room.

"This isn't over." Lois warned, moving off.

"Ooh, I'm so scared." Cat sniffed, turning to look around the newsroom for a chair. Any chair she could use. Every one of them were gone...except one.

She sighed, looking at the pins she'd carefully wedged under the cushion. She didn't have time to pull them out. Swallowing her pride, she wheeled the chair inside the conference room, carefully sitting down on the cushion, doing her best not to react to the prickly pins against the back of her thighs.

Jerry did his best not to react when he spotted the familiar face talking with one of the guards just outside the gate where the prisoners had been let outside for free time. His dad was the only one that knew he was working undercover. If Clark Kent saw him or worse saw him and said anything he was a dead man.

"Something wrong?" Morgan asked from behind him.

"No, no, I'm fine," Jerry said turning his attention back to where Morgan was pointing. "You said you knew someone that could help?"

"I'll make a few calls and make sure you check out, but yeah. I got a guy that can get me anything you want." Morgan lifted his chin up in the air and smiled. "Real good stuff."

"What if he gets caught?" Jerry asked, trying to play it as cool as he could. "I'm already in enough trouble as it is. I don't want to go down for someone else's mistakes."

"Foolproof system. No one knows who they're working for or delivering for so no one can rat anyone out." Morgan reassured.

"Is that so?" Jerry asked, catching a glimpse of Clark Kent staring at him for a long moment before turning and walking away. *'Please don't say anything...'* he pleaded silently.

Clark kept control of his facial features, doing his best not to react to the familiar face he'd seen in the outside yard of the men's prison as he'd finished questioning the last guard that had been on duty the night Randy Goode had been murdered. Superman had questioned the guards on Goode's murder. Now, Clark Kent was questioning them on protocols and a name. He watched their reactions and body language as the name was mentioned. Three guards reacted.

He didn't identify the name as a guard but rather approached it as a name that could be heard in passing. Only three knew the name. All three of them had been the first responders when Randy Goode had been found in his cell. That in itself was telling. It wasn't enough to open an investigation into the prison, but it was enough to start a dialogue with Henderson off the record.

Two hours.

It had taken her half an hour to discreetly pluck all the pins out of the cushion so she could sit comfortably through the mundane facts and numbers being thrown at them. Why the CFO thought they cared about the details of how and why the numbers were where they were was beyond her.

She caught a glimpse of news coverage showing Superman at a charity event for the Children's Hospital. *'That's where he disappeared to.'* Cat thought to herself, noting Clark's absence from the newsroom.

<< "*Oh, are you under the misconception that we're friends?*" >>

Cat stole a glance at Lois before grabbing her purse and headed toward the elevator. They weren't friends? Fine. She could be *not friends* with Lois Lane any day of the week. She had the nerve to lecture her on trust? She flipped her hair over her shoulder, stepping inside the empty elevator. A look of determination crossed her face as she prepared herself mentally for what she was about to do.

"My, my, what a predicament you've found yourself in." the blonde removed her sunglasses and tucked them into the low cut top she wore.

Samantha craned her neck, trying to see where the nurse had gone to but found her mobility to be lacking as a sharp pain reminded her why she was in the infirmary to begin with. As if the swollen face and busted lip didn't already send her reminders with every movement she made.

"Oh, don't try to move, Samantha. Most of the staff here is on my payroll. Your nurse went for a little walk." She pursed her lips as her face tightened into a slow smile. "Well, you've had over twenty-four hours to produce some results. Can I assume by your..." She glanced at Samantha's bedridden state and grimaced, "...current circumstances that you were successful?"

"I...I haven't been able to get that close," Samantha stammered, unsure if she bought it. Would she search her? Right now, the red stones sitting in her breast pocket were the only leverage she had to stay alive and get out of here. She wasn't going to just hand them over without some reassurance.

The woman's face fell into a cold stony gaze as she replied carefully, "I see." Before Samantha could respond the woman left and she found herself alone again. She wasn't sure, but she had a feeling she'd just signed her death warrant.

Cat tucked her hair into the baseball cap as she held the water bottle in her hand. She smiled at the seven-year-old boy in front of her. "It's just a harmless prank," She promised, handing the bottle to him. He was a bored little boy left to sit in the waiting area while his parents were talking with the doctor about his little sister.

Cat did her best not to think too hard about the heartbreaking stories the children on this wing had. This was the safest way to do this. Spray Superman and prevent any adults from getting an accidental exposure. She'd diluted the compound so that hopefully it wouldn't last the whole two days it had the first time, but only time would tell.

"All I gotta do is spray the bottle when Superman comes down the hall. That's it?" the red-haired boy asked skeptically.

"That's it." She grinned back at him.

"And I get twenty bucks?" he prompted.

"Yes." She waved the twenty-dollar bill in front of him.

"Twenty dollars. Do we have a deal?"

The little boy laughed. "Sure."

Chapter 7

Lois Lane tapped her hand irritably against the wooden surface of her desk as she stared at the blank screen in front of her. She'd started the same paragraph over and over only to turn around and delete it time and time again. There was something she was missing, but she just couldn't put her finger on it. A guard at the prison had been murdered within the same week that Randy Goode was killed. That couldn't be a coincidence.

Then there was the issue with Cat and Samantha Grady. Could there be a connection? At this point, she wasn't sure what to believe. The Cat Grant she knew many years ago wasn't someone she'd think capable of a conspiracy to commit murder, but after three years she didn't know. There was obviously something going on with her and Samantha but what that was and how nefarious it was remained to be seen.

"Lois?" Jimmy tapped her on the shoulder, pulling her back to the present.

"Hmm?" Lois looked up to see Jimmy looking at her with an annoyed expression. "Sorry, lost in thought."

Jimmy flashed her a quick smile and pointed to her phone, "Line two."

"Right." Lois reached for the handset and answered the phone, "Lois Lane."

"Ms. Lane, this is Officer Davis over at the Metropolis Men's Prison. I spoke with Mr. Kent earlier, and he asked to be updated if anything new happened. I tried the cell he gave me but..."

"Yes, yes, I remember," Lois interrupted. "Clark updated me earlier."

"I'm not sure how important it is, but I thought he might want to know there was another death this afternoon." Officer Davis said in a solemn tone.

"Where are you?" Lois asked, already reaching for her things to head out the door.

"Hey, Superman!"

The sound of the boy laughing before the unmistakable odor filled his nostrils was all he could focus on. Clark took a deep breath, wincing when he smelt the faint odor once again. He needed to get out of here and get changed. There was no way he could go back to the Planet with that odor on him.

He spotted the young boy running down the hall and steadied himself to go after him when a cry for help reached his ears.

"We're not going to make it! Please somebody help!"

Seconds later he was in the air, heading toward the Metropolis Bridge to help the family in distress.

The walls were bleak and covered in grime and dirt. A few drops of blood could be seen on the cement floor from where Lois stood. She craned her neck around the guards that stood at the entrance of the corridor where the body of the bailiff had been found.

"Ms. Lane, this has yet to become public knowledge," Warden Baker argued with her, forcing himself between her line of sight. "I can assure you a statement will be released to the press."

"You've already cleaned up the scene of the crime. Who is investigating this death?" Lois challenged, narrowing her eyes at him. "I'd say you're a bit late on your statement."

Warden Baker's eyes narrowed at her and turned to one of the guards behind him, "Officer Davis, won't you show Ms. Lane out?"

"Of course," he nodded, pointing toward the exit. "Ms. Lane?"

Samantha held her arm close to her chest, allowing the sling that wrapped around her neck to support the weight of it. She still wasn't sure what to think of the latest visit she'd had with the mysterious blonde that wanted the strange rock she'd confiscated from Nell Newtrich. She wasn't sure what the fascination was with the red stones or why she'd been assaulted by that guard the way she had, but she knew she was in trouble. Whatever it was, it was better off in someone else's hands.

There was only one person she could entrust it with.

Three deaths in the last week.

Lois shook her head in disgust as she stuffed her notepad in her purse. She glanced over her shoulder to see Officer Davis behind her as she made her way to the parking lot.

"Unbelievable," she muttered under her breath.

"That's Baker for you," Davis responded, following her to the gate that led out to the parking lot where she'd parked. He glanced over his shoulder, "You'll keep that phone call between us, right, Ms. Lane?"

"Of course," she reassured him with a smile. "We have a strict policy of not revealing our sources at the Daily Planet."

Relief washed over his dark features, and he smiled. "Good. I just...can't afford to lose this job."

"But you can't stand by and do nothing when you see something wrong either," Lois observed aloud. "I get it."

"London was a good guy. He didn't deserve this," Davis remarked. The alarm began to blare in a long hum, growing louder and louder and he looked back toward the prison doors a few feet away. "That's my cue."

"Thank you," Lois replied, watching as he ran back toward the double doors that led to the prison. A frown crossed her features as she stared at the disappearing figure of the officer. Three deaths in the last week could not be a coincidence.

She moved through the gate, walking across the pebbled grounds and to the corner where she'd parked. The familiar figure standing by her Jeep caught her eye. "Finished already?" She asked before scrunching up her nose, catching a whiff from his suit. "What is that?"

"Sorry," Clark apologized, "I've tried just about everything and can't seem to get the smell out of the suit. I changed, but the smell is still lingering."

"Have you tried burning it?" Lois asked, half-joking as she unlocked the Jeep.

"Very funny." He leaned in to kiss her. "What happened with Officer Davis?" he asked, pointing to the prison walls. I saw the note you left at the Planet and came here after Superman stopped an accident on the bridge."

"I got shut down," she said, frowning at the prison behind them. At his questioning expression, she elaborated, "A bailiff was found dead in one of the corridors this afternoon. No screams. No cries for help. Just dead. I didn't even get a look at the corridor's

entrance before Warden Baker showed up trying to forcibly remove me from the property.”

“Sounds like a cover up if I ever heard one,” Clark remarked, opening the door for her and allowing her to step inside. “So, what’s the next move?”

“I think a trip to City Hall is in order. Take a look at the records on the place and see what we can find,” Lois said, tapping her fingers on the dashboard, “After you go home and burn whatever it is that smells.”

He let out a light laugh, disappearing into a blur of red and blue and then reappearing in another suit. His hair appeared damp, and the cologne he was wearing was stronger than the amount he usually wore, but the smell that lingered in the air had dissipated. “Better?”

“Much,” she grinned back at him. “Get in.”

Warden Baker watched through his office window as the second reporter to visit the prison in the last hour left the grounds with one of the officers and let out a groan. Keeping up appearances was proving to be more of a problem than he originally anticipated. He looked to the man in his office with a frown. “I thought we had a deal.”

“My team has a tail on these reporters but, given the close relationship they have with Superman, it’s a slippery slope,” William McCoy said with a menacing tone. “It’s not my job to clean up your mess.”

“No, but it is your job to keep the boss happy,” Warden Baker reminded him. “Don’t forget who’s running things, McCoy.”

Clark glanced over at Lois, noticing the slight rise in her heart rate as they drove down the long narrow road leading back to New Troy. The Men’s prison was about an hour outside the city, and not many businesses were built along the rural road. Much of the scenery was filled with the leafless trees still covered in snow and ice from the recent storm that had come through last week.

He glanced over at the driver’s seat where Lois was driving. Her knuckles were white from how tightly she was gripping the steering wheel. He reached over to place a hand on her right hand. “Honey, you okay?”

“F-fine,” she stammered out, pressing her foot harder on the gas pedal. “Just ready to get there.”

He could tell from her tone of voice she was lying. “Lois?” He removed his hand and looked at her. Before he could continue his thought, the car jerked off the curb and through the gravel road that led to one of the rarely used rest areas.

“What are you doing?” Clark asked as she pulled into the rest area and jerked the car into a hard stop. He glanced at the dashboard, frowning when he didn’t see any lights indicating car trouble. He knew the car had just been filled up last night and the parking lot was all but deserted minus the abandoned vehicle in the corner with its top rusted through.

“I...” Lois trailed off, unable to finish her thought as she jerked the seatbelt off and jumped out of the car, pacing in front of it and waving her hands in an attempt to fan herself.

Confused, he quickly climbed out of the car to follow her, “Lois?” The temperature had dropped at least ten degrees in the last half hour, and he could see his breath as he called her name. She continued to pace in front of the car, seemingly unaffected by the cold and her lack of jacket in the bitter cold. “Honey, you’ve got to be freezing.”

“I’m fine.” Her voice wavered slightly as she stared down at the ground. “I just need a minute.”

His brow furrowed, catching sight of the slight blush in her cheeks. He approached, placing a hand on her shoulder. He felt her shoulder tense from beneath his palm as she let out a low moan.

“Lois?”

“I’m fine. I’m just...” A possessive growl escaped the back of

her throat, and the last thing he remembered was the force of her lips against his.

William McCoy sat at his desk, flipping through the film that Barry Dunning had supplied him of the two reporters that had proven to be a thorn in Intergang’s side for the past three years. A scowl crossed his face when he saw how little he had to offer the boss. No sound bytes. No slip-ups. The footage was hardly usable.

“You call this covering the subject?” He hit the stop button on the screen with the jerk of the remote before throwing it across his desk.

Barry squinted, bracing himself for the verbal lashing McCoy was sure to put on him. “My...my hands are tied at the moment. I can’t...”

“Can’t what?” McCoy challenged, standing up from his desk and slamming his palms against the wooden surface, causing Barry to jump back. “You were given an order. I expect results. No excuses!”

“Ye-yes, sir,” Barry stammered.

“Well?” McCoy stared at him expectantly. “What are you still doing here?”

“Right,” Barry made his way to the exit, slamming the door behind him.

“Idiots. I’m surrounded by insubordinate idiots.” McCoy grumbled to himself.

“I know the feeling,” the sultry tone of a familiar voice echoed on the intercom of his phone.

“Mi-Miss Church!” McCoy stammered, reaching for the handset.

“Don’t bother,”

He turned around to see the young blonde with piercing blue eyes staring at him from the balcony of his office. She moved inside the open door, running her index finger against the leather couch in the corner of his office. “I see you’ve wasted no time moving into Randy’s office, William.”

“Well, business has to be taken care of, right?” McCoy laughed nervously.

“That it does.” She let out an exaggerated sigh, pursing her lips into a tight heart shape before allowing her mouth to relax into a thin line matched with an expression he’d come to know meant trouble for whoever had made the mistake of crossing Mindy Church. “Tell me something, Will, I’m a reasonable person, right?”

“Of course,” he choked out nervously.

“I mean, I give very specific instructions,” she continued.

“Yes, yes you do,” he stammered.

“Then why is it that this woman thinks it’s okay to double cross me?” She laid a copy of the mugshot of Samantha Grady on his desk.

“I...I don’t understand,” he said, looking at her quizzically.

“Ms. Grady has taken something of mine.” She frowned, crossing her arms over her chest. “I want you to get it back...by any means necessary.” Her eyes narrowed. “And then I want a message sent loud and clear that no one crosses Intergang and lives to tell about it.”

Cat set her things down as she made herself comfortable at her desk. She cast a glance toward the television where the coverage of the hospital opening was being played. She sighed, running a hand through her long auburn locks. She’d done it. Now all she had to do was sit back and wait.

She cast a wary glance to where Lois’ desk was. She caught Jimmy by the arm when he walked by. “Hey Jimmy, where’s Lois?”

“Oh, probably chasing down that lead that came in.” Jimmy shrugged.

“And Clark?” Cat asked curiously.

“Haven’t seen him,” Jimmy said, walking off.

Cat sighed, uncertain how she was going to test her theory if the subject hadn’t come back to the newsroom yet. The phone on her desk rang, and she reached for the handset to answer it, “Cat Grant.”

The car door slammed shut behind him as Clark allowed himself to be pushed back against the leather material of the backseat. He let out a low moan, feeling his wife’s hands move up and down the back of his suit jacket. He wasn’t sure what had started it, but all he could focus on was the delicious movements of his wife as she moved against him, helping shed him of the grey suit jacket, tossing it toward the front seat.

Her arms slipped around his neck, bringing her entire body into contact with his as she devoured his mouth with hers. His hands searched beneath the cotton material until he found what he was looking for. She moaned her approval. Everything became a blur as he lost himself in her arms.

The world around him stopped on its axis as her body moved against his. The only sound that he could hear was her. She let out a low moan against him as she cried out his name.

Agent Rollins reviewed the information in front of him, ticking his tongue as he stared back at Jerry White. “No one? Not even a lieutenant knows who they’re working for?”

“No one,” Jerry replied solemnly. “The system is set up so that if one falls, the others can keep about their business. Even the toughest guy in here – Bill Church Jr’s most trusted... ally of sorts is in the dark on who is running things.”

“Keep your head down,” Rollins said with a defeated expression. “We’ll be in touch with a plan to pull you out without drawing attention to anything.”

“You’re pulling me off the case already?” Jerry challenged in surprise. “It hasn’t even been a day!”

“The lead’s dead,” Rollins reported. “It happens. Get over it.” He stood up, walking toward the door. “I’ll be in touch.”

“Cat Grant,” Cat laid the identification card out for the guard to inspect. He checked her picture against the image he saw before him then nodded, turning behind him to pick through the bins behind him. “I was told I have a package?”

“Here you go.” He laid an envelope on the counter for her. “Sign here,” he instructed, passing the clipboard to her to sign.

She scribbled her signature on the line and picked up the envelope and walked out of the lobby with a disgruntled expression. She waited until she got back to her car to open the package.

Inside she found a letter and a red stone with an eerie glow to it.

‘Cat,

I hope you can keep this safer than I could.

I can’t trust anyone.

I know you’ll do the right thing.

~Sam’

The next morning, Lois felt the soft drumming against her head begin to grow unbearable. She cradled her head as she moved to sit up for the first time that morning. Two strong arms looped around her waist from behind. “Honey, you all right?”

“My...Ow!” she winced, slamming her eyelids closed when the light hit her pupils too quickly.

“Lois?” Clark’s hand cradled her face, and she let out a groan.

“What time is it?” she grumbled, running her hand across her eyes and massaging her pupils through the lids.

“About five-forty.” He responded.

“Why does my head feel like it’s been hit with an anvil? I didn’t drink that much wine last night, did I?” she wondered

aloud, hearing the pain echoing from her tone as she spoke.

“Wine?” Clark asked, running his hand down her jawline.

“You refused dinner last night. Don’t you remember?”

She let out a low moan, cradling her head before darting to the bathroom as the pain from her head became too much for her. A moment later she felt an ice cold cloth on the back of her neck and sighed her appreciation after she’d finished emptying her stomach.

“Feeling any better?” Clark asked uncertainly.

“Oh, God, what did I do yesterday? My eyes actually hurt,” she complained, letting out a faint laugh.

“You really don’t remember?” Clark looked at her in concern.

“No, I don’t know.” She shook her head. “Right now, all I can focus on is the pain in my head and...” She groaned, feeling another urge to empty her stomach. She was oblivious to the shocked expression on her husband’s face.

Chapter 8

“You don’t remember *anything* from yesterday?” Clark’s voice slightly wavered as he looked back at Lois expectantly. His mind continued to replay the events of the evening, feeling a hard punch to the gut as realization began to hit him. Something had been amiss with her on the drive back to the prison. He’d completely forgotten about it after she’d launched herself at him and drug him into the backseat of the Jeep. Guilt washed over him as the gravity of what had happened hit him. How had he missed it?

Lois held an icepack to her head, lying on the bed as she massaged her temples. “Bits and pieces. The last thing I really remember was getting kicked out of the prison by Warden Baker.” Her face tensed with a look of distaste as she slowly sat up. “And a few other things throughout the day,” she gave him a wicked grin.

He hung his head in disbelief. “Lois, I’m *so* sorry. I swear I never would have ...

Lois shook her head, “Clark, don’t you dare try and blame yourself for this. It’s not your fault. Believe me, I know if you thought something was wrong I’d have woken up at the hospital.” She placed a hand on his and a determined expression crossed her face. “We just need to figure out what happened and...” she grimaced as she let out a ragged breath. “Boy, this brings back memories.”

“Memories?” he inquired, uncertain what she was referring to.

“Miranda and that pheromone stuff she sprayed everyone with,” Lois recalled, attempting to straighten up on the couch.

“Easy.” He gave her his hand to help her when she placed her feet on the ground and attempted to stand up.

“Just a little unsteady.” She gave him a weak smile and grasped his hand for support then placed her other hand on his shoulder. She allowed her smile to spread across her face and she leaned in to kiss him. “Thanks.”

“You sure you’re going to be okay to go into the office today?” he asked as she stepped away from him.

“Nothing a few aspirin won’t cure,” she reassured him, heading toward the bathroom. “I’ll be damned if I’ll let a little inconvenience like getting drugged with *God-knows-what* keep me from solving this case.”

Clark watched Lois close the door to the bathroom then began moving through the townhome at super-speed, recalling the old case she’d referenced earlier. *Pheromones.*

Cat allowed a scowl to cross her face as she prepared for her day. Neither Lois or Clark had returned to the office yesterday. No one had spotted Superman either until just after nine when he was seen patrolling Hobb’s Bay. So far everything she’d tried to do to prove her theory that Clark Kent and the Man of Steel were one and the same was resulting in more pain than it was worth. She was right, but proving it was becoming more difficult.

The image of her cousin’s face when she’d visited her in the

infirmary ran through her mind, and she shook her head in disgust. Sam had obviously gotten herself into trouble again. She glanced at the small box on the table in front of her. The mysterious package she'd been given told her nothing. She'd requested an analysis by STAR Labs yesterday but didn't hear back until this morning.

Cat looked over the report she'd gotten back from STAR Labs. The report results read, '*Not of Earthly origin. Periodic element 126.*' In parenthesis, there was a note with a question mark, '*Kryptonite element?*' Then the test results showed that the tested rock emitted an extremely high band radiation that was similar to that of Kryptonite. A note at the bottom read, '*See Dr. Klein. Possible new Kryptonite element.*'

She recalled the rumors of different versions of the meteorite being found a few years ago. It appeared those rumors were correct, and she was looking at red kryptonite. She stared at the bottle of perfume she'd used the day before and dropped a single chip of the meteorite inside. She had yet to prove her theory, but she wouldn't make the same mistake twice. She had to keep Clark in a controlled environment so she could see for sure what the results were. Once she had the evidence she needed she would confront them with the truth.

"You don't know that," Clark argued, following Lois into the lobby of STAR Labs. "It could just be a coincidence."

"It's a coincidence that I have that witch's brew in my system after it being locked up for four years?" Lois challenged, the octave of her voice growing with each word. "I'm telling you this is all connected! It all started the minute Cat Grant waltzed back into our lives."

Clark sighed, crossing his arms as he met her hysteric notions with a calm tone, "Okay let's say for argument's sake that you're right and Cat is behind everything. Which for the record, I don't believe." Lois opened her mouth to argue, and he added, "What's the reason, Lois? What could she possibly have to gain from any of this?"

"I don't know." Lois frowned. Her shoulders slumped into defeat, and she added, "Look, I know it sounds far-fetched but just go with me on this. When did all of this start? The weird things going on at the office. The pranks. Then the dead bodies showing up left and right at the prison. It's all connected!"

"You can't possibly think Cat Grant is responsible for conspiracy to commit *murder*," Clark challenged with a light laugh. "Come on, I know you two have your differences but that's a stretch even for you."

"Got any better theories?" Lois challenged.

"Sure, your favorite Warden is covering up his tracks, and you're threatened by Cat."

Lois crossed her arms in mock defiance. "I am not *threatened* by Cat Grant."

"Annoyed. Bothered. Miffed. Irked. Upset..." he began to ramble off the terms one by one, letting out a light chuckle when she gave him a threatening glare. "You didn't start suspecting her until you found out who she's related to. I still think there's more to the story than meets the eye but it's not a murder conspiracy."

"Fine," Lois grumbled. "Just be prepared to hear *'I told you so'* when I prove you wrong."

Jerry eyed the corner of the yard warily, uncertain of what to expect. He'd been assured of his release by Agent Rollins, but so far nothing had happened. Morgan continued to ask about what kind of product he wanted from the boss. He wasn't sure what to tell him. Was he still undercover? What if he was able to get more information between now and the time of his release?

A flood of emotions washed through him as he steadied himself. He wanted to finish this case. At the same time, he loathed being back behind bars where he knew there was only so

much the police could do to protect him.

A hard blow came across his face, and he groaned in agony, turning around to search for the perpetrator and make him pay. He gasped in surprise when he found himself face to face with none other than Bill Church Jr.

"No," the answer came before Lois could even get her question out.

"You didn't even know what I was going to ask!" Lois argued, glaring at Detective Wolfe in surprise.

"Whatever it is, it can't be good," Wolfe retorted, pointing to the clock behind her. "My shift ends in half an hour, and I'm really not wanting to charge into a situation where Superman has to be called, and I'm stuck here doing paperwork for the next three hours."

Lois caught the half smirk that crossed her husband's face and glared at him, shooting daggers. Clark quickly piped in trying to ease the tension between the two of them, "Every favor does not equate to Superman having to be called."

"Mr. Gadget, Professor Cole, and your friendly assassin neighbors..." Wolfe snapped his fingers. "Oh, and your realtor friend that turned out to be an alien from another planet which resulted in the world being taken hostage by Nor and his vigilantes of super-powered thugs."

"How exactly was any of that our fault?" Lois challenged.

"You came in here promising a real quick favor every single time," Wolfe pointed out.

"Fine, you made your point. We make your job so hard by making you look into crime." Lois rolled her eyes at him.

Clark sighed, placing a hand on her shoulders as he spoke, "I understand your hesitation, and I can appreciate your wanting to get home." He glanced at Lois. "We both can, but this really is a quick favor. We just need to take a look at the case file and then..."

"You know we won't leave until we get the information, so you might as well just give it to us now," Lois interrupted.

Wolfe glanced at Clark who was standing behind her, silent throughout the banter between them. He then turned back to Lois who was glaring at him with a scowl. He let out a groan and muttered, "I must have a death wish or something."

Lois grinned happily as the detective moved behind his desk and logged in. "What case am I looking up?"

"The case against Miranda...oh, what's her name?" Lois looked at Clark for help, but he just shrugged. "The Pheromone lady."

"Oh, yeah, I know who you're talking about," Wolfe nodded, as he typed in the search query. "Kind of an old case for you two."

"We're following up on something," Clark explained.

Wolfe printed off a ticket and handed it to them. "Here. Go see Hank, and he'll show you where everything is."

"Thank you," Lois said smugly, grabbing the ticket from him before he could change his mind.

From a distance, Barry Dunning stood with his crew, keeping the camera focused on the couple as they walked through the police station with Detective Wolfe. "You sure we're not going to get in any trouble for this, Barr?" Mike inquired as he allowed the camera to follow.

"We have our orders," Barry reminded him. "You really want to get on McCoy's bad side?"

"No, but man this is more than just chasing down a lead. What's the point in all this?" Mike asked.

"I don't know," Barry frowned.

"Camera's not going to get any further in without drawing attention to ourselves," Mike commented with a frown.

"We'll wait here," Barry instructed. "They have to come out this way anyway."

“You’re the boss.”

“Storage locker 931826.” the clerk said, setting the box down on a table. Lois nodded to him, watching him leave before she opened the box. Clark’s hand moved to stop her, “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“You have any better ideas?” Lois asked, arching an eyebrow.

He sighed, lowering his glasses and staring at the box in front of them for a long moment. “Everything’s double bagged. It should be okay.” He lifted the top of the box and Lois pulled out the file jacket on top, sifting through it as Clark searched through the box. She frowned when she came across the last page in the case report. “That can’t be good.”

“What?” Clark asked, looking over her shoulder.

“The last page to the case report is missing.” Lois pointed out where it had been torn.

“That’s not all that’s missing.” Clark held up an empty bag with the label, ‘Revenge.’

“Now do you believe me?” Lois asked. She frowned when she saw a familiar faraway expression cross his face. “What is it?”

“Prison riot.” He leaned in to kiss her before disappearing into a blur, leaving her alone in the room with what was left of the evidence in the pheromone case against Miranda.

The clerk approached, frowning as he looked behind him. “Strange weather we’re having here.”

“Yes, it is,” Lois agreed, pasting on a smile. “So, tell me do you keep records of who reviews the evidence in cases.”

“Sure do.” He busted his chest out proudly. “I keep the records myself.” He grew thoughtful. “You’re actually the second person to ask about this case this week.”

“Really?” Lois did her best to play innocent. “And who was the other?”

“It was a reporter... from the, uh,” His face scrunched up for a moment as he tried to recall the name.

“The Daily Planet?” Lois prompted.

He shook his head, “No, no, that’s not it. The, uh,” He pulled out a memo sized notepad from his pocket to look. “Ah, here we are. The Planet. C. Grand.”

“C. Grand?” Lois’ eyes narrowed. “Are you sure that’s not Grant?”

He peered at the writing on his notepad and chuckled. “When you get to be my age it’s hard to read your own writing. C. Grant. Real Doll. Nice...uh...smile.” He grinned with a slight blush on his cheeks.

Lois did her best not to react and smiled back at him. “Well, thank you, Hank, you’ve been very helpful.”

“No problem, Ms. Lane. Let me know if you need anything else.”

“What the hell, man?” Jerry scowled, holding his face as he stared back at the former head of Intergang. Church’s face tensed into a look of distaste as he circled around Jerry, seeming to size him up. A foot away, Morgan stood by, watching with a dark look in his eyes.

“I try to do my research on the new guys, understand why they’re here,” Church remarked, taking a step toward him. He grabbed him by the collar and snarled, “But you don’t have a file. Why is that?”

“I...I...”

An alarm sounded, and the doors to the entire block’s prison doors opened. Jerry heard a loud thud just before everything went dark.

Lois exited the police station and made her way to the parking garage where she’d parked. C. Grant. Only one person’s name came to mind. Given the clerk’s behavior when mentioning C. Grant, she was pretty sure he meant Cat. Still, she needed a little

more proof.

She clicked the unlock button on her keyless entry remote. A soft chirp could be heard as she reached for the handle to her car door. She climbed in and closed the door behind her then reached for the mobile phone in her purse, dialing the number she knew by heart.

A few rings later and a familiar voice came on the line, “Daily Planet, James Olsen.”

“Jimmy, it’s Lois. I need you to do me a favor...”

A setup.

Clark did his best not to react as he listened to Agent Rollins recite the protocol on national security and the need to keep Jerry White’s identity as an undercover agent for the FBI protected. That was why a prison riot had erupted at Metropolis Men’s Penitentiary.

That was why there were fifteen men in the infirmary and two guards injured.

A setup.

He shifted his gaze toward Jerry who was none too pleased with the situation either.

“I was getting close,” Jerry remarked in disgust. “I was getting close and you...”

“I did what I had to do to get the job done. End of story.” Rollins responded.

Lois pulled into her parking spot at the Daily Planet’s parking garage, determination covering her features as she prepared mentally for the confrontation that was about to ensue. She’d had Jimmy pull Cat Grant’s phone logs at the Daily Planet and found she’d been in contact with STAR Labs. According to the weekly report she was supposed to be covering the arrival of President Garner on Thursday to campaign his re-run for presidency and cover the victory party for Congressman Harrington. There was nothing that warranted her being in contact with STAR Labs.

She gathered her things and turned to lock the car when she felt two hands cover her eyes, “Guess who?” she heard her husband’s voice ask.

A smile spread across her face, and she reached for his hands to remove them, looking back at him. “That didn’t take long.”

“Yeah, it was really peculiar,” he said, walking with her toward the exit of the parking garage. “Did you know Perry’s son was working undercover?”

“What?!” Lois looked back at him in surprise.

“Yeah, apparently he was a part of a sting operation. I don’t have the specifics, but it may be worth talking to him in regards to Warden Ba—” Clark stopped mid-sentence as they approached the entry to the Daily Planet.

“What?” Lois looked at him with a perplexed expression.

“Just a minute.” He held up his index finger and looked behind them, walking backwards and lowering his glasses until he found what he was looking for...or who he was looking for.

“Clark?” She called after him.

He turned back to her, motioning for her to stay where she was. He took a few more steps back until he stopped in front of the column of the entryway just beside the garden of azalea bushes that had been planted. He narrowed his gaze at the bushes and turned, reaching behind the bush and erecting two unwelcome bodies from it.

“You have got to be kidding me!” Lois let out a disgusted grunt.

“Hey!” Barry called out. “We were rolling!”

“Not anymore!” Clark spat out in an intimidating tone that mirrored the sternness he gave criminals as Superman.

“Easy, man!” Mike admonished as Clark threw him to the ground, turning his attention to Barry who was attempting to make a run for it.

“Oh, no you don’t!” Clark pushed him up against the brick wall behind them, holding him in place with his arm across Barry’s chest, staring him down as he hissed out, “Exactly what about the words ‘harassment’ and ‘lawsuit’ don’t you understand?”

“Camera!” Barry called out to Mike. “Keep it rolling!”

“I can’t get it to turn on!” Mike fumed, jamming his thumb on the camera. “It’s stuck!”

“Oh, for the love of...” Barry groaned angrily.

Lois had to suppress a laugh when she saw her husband holding Barry Dunning against the wall outside the entry of the Daily Planet. His arm laid across the would-be reporter’s chest, pinning him in place. “That’s the volume button,” Lois said, offering a helpful snippet and grinning when Mike looked at her with an embarrassed expression.

“Oh.”

“Mind telling us what exactly you’re doing squatting in the bushes like a cat burglar?” Clark inquired. His face was a mere two inches away from Barry’s making the inquisition of the paparazzi more intimidating.

“It’s a free country!” Barry spat out. “I can cover my stories however I good well please!”

“As long as it doesn’t require things like harassment and invasion of privacy, you’d be right.” Clark retorted angrily.

“How about ‘free press’ and ‘first amendment’?” Barry spat back smugly.

“Last I checked the first amendment still allowed protection against harassment!” Clark growled staring Barry in the eyes with a cold stare.

“Hey, I got it!” Mike grinned happily at his camera.

“Great!” Barry groaned with an eye roll. “Turn it on!” He turned toward Mike before responding to Clark. “You call it harassment I call it reporting. Potato, *potatah*.” Barry shrugged, turning his attention back to Clark.

“Says you. I think there’re plenty of judges that would disagree.” Clark challenged.

“Oh, no, the battery’s dead.” Mike groaned.

“Such bad luck.” Lois commented, crossing her arms across her chest. “Maybe you should be more careful with your things.”

“I swear to God, Mike, you’re killing me!” Barry shot back.

“I’m sorry, Barry! I thought I had the backup attached.” Mike insisted, looking at the camera again. “Hey, the tape is missing!”

“Of course it is,” Barry groaned, turning back to Clark. “You really want to go that route be my guest, Kent. I will have it thrown out in a matter of seconds. I have a close, personal relationship with a lot of the judicial court in New Troy.”

“Because you get sued that much?” Lois prompted, patting her purse tightly where she’d deposited the tape that had fallen on the ground earlier. She did her best to keep it out of sight as she watched Clark continue to confront Barry Dunning. She was used to seeing Clark confront people as Superman but he usually kept his cool as ‘Clark.’ Apparently, he was making an exception in this instance.

“I don’t get sued, Ms. Lane. I stay within the letter of the law.” Lois couldn’t help but laugh at that remark. “And what law is that? Paparazzi 101?”

“And you’ve never pushed the envelope for a lead?” Barry challenged, staring back at the two of them with a smirk.

“We chase criminals. There’s a difference.” Lois sniffed.

“I swear I had it!” Mike insisted.

“Oh, I’m sure!” Barry feigned support and scoffed. “You chase criminals and get the big headlines, and I chase scandals.”

“Except there is no scandal for you to chase. All there is is a creepy guy with his camera crew stalking and harassing my wife and me in our place of business,” Clark shot back with an icy stare.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Barry sniffed.

Mike then turned his anger toward Clark who was still holding

Barry against the wall with a threatening stare, “You can’t just toss this equipment around. It’s expensive! What if you’d broken it?”

“I’m sure the Daily Planet would love to buy you a new camera, Mike,” Barry chided with a glint in his eyes. “What with Mr. Kent here slapping it out of your hands on their property and everything.”

“You stay the hell away from Lois and me, or the next thing I slap you with is going to be a lawsuit!” Clark warned in a menacing tone before he threw Barry to the ground.

Barry quickly gathered himself and motioned to Mike, “Come on, let’s get out of here. We have a story to break.”

“Buh-bye!” Lois gave an exaggerated wave as they scurried toward the end of the block with a slight limp in their steps. Lois turned to Clark. “What happened to ‘no comment’?”

“I lost my patience with it,” Clark responded without remorse. “You heard him!” He motioned to the men that were attempting to cross the street. “They don’t care!”

“Well, you were downright scary when you pulled them out of the bushes,” Lois said, approaching him with a half-smile.

“Not enough to make them stop following us.” Clark shook his head in disgust.

“Maybe we can talk to Perry after the staff meeting and see if there’s something Legal can do,” Lois prompted, reaching over to readjust his tie.

“What was that about his cameraman’s tape missing? I was very careful when I tossed him.” Clark shook his head.

“You were. I wasn’t,” Lois said, pulling the camera’s tape from her purse.

“You swiped it?” Clark chuckled.

She leaned in to kiss him and grinned. “Love you too.”

Cat Grant watched out of the corner of her eye as Lois and Clark made their way to their respective desks. Her gaze shifted to the file in her hand. She’d swiped it earlier when both Lois and Clark had been out of the office and spritzed it with the red kryptonite infused perfume.

The report she had found on Jimmy Olsen’s computer said red kryptonite was suspected to affect Superman mentally whereas green Kryptonite affected him physically. She bit back the surge of guilt that washed over her as she recalled tricking the young man into helping her with her computer while she mirrored his desktop. A simple hacker trick her ex-husband had taught her years ago.

All she had to do was set the file she’d spritzed with red kryptonite and Revenge on Clark’s desk. Once he opened it up and got a good whiff, she could observe the effects and finally have her proof.

‘Here goes nothing,’ she thought to herself, steadying herself as she carried the file in her hand across the aisle that led to the City Section of the bullpen where Clark Kent’s desk was.

“Hey, Cat!” Ralph waltzed up behind her, bumping into her just as Jimmy approached with a stack of files in his hand. She let out a muttered curse as she watched the file fly from her hand and into the pile of files that had fallen to the ground.

“Ralph, look what you did!” she accused, pouncing on her unsuspecting colleague with more force than was needed.

She watched in dismay as Jimmy attempted to grab the files that had fallen, muttering under his breath about his dumb luck. She’d almost given up when she saw Jimmy stop and look at the file folder in his hand, “Huh!” He looked toward Clark and waved him over. “Here’s that file on Warden Baker, CK.”

Cat felt a smile spread across her face when she saw the file exchange hands. A hand waved in front of her and Cat shook her head, “I’m sorry, what?”

“I said are you okay?” Jimmy asked, looking at her curiously. “You spaced out there for a second.”

“Fine, Jimmy, thanks.” Cat said hurriedly, heading back to her desk. She sighed in relief as she watched Clark open the file as he

took a seat at his desk. *‘That was close.’*

“You and I need to talk,” Lois’ voice came from behind her and Cat turned to face her.

“Pardon?” Cat asked, looking back at her colleague in surprise.

“Conference room, now.” Lois pointed to the empty conference room behind them.

“Sorry, but I’ve got a full plate today,” Cat said hurriedly, glancing toward Clark’s desk where he was sitting down with the file in his hand.

“Full plate?” Lois’ eyes narrowed. “Doing what exactly, Cat? Spilling coffee on colleagues? Arranging for people to fall and trip for your amusement? Stop me when I’m getting warm!”

Cat did her best not to react. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Lois. Paranoia really doesn’t look good on you. Bad for the complexion.”

“Paranoia?” Lois scoffed, glaring at her with her hands on her hips. “Ever since you’ve come back there are accidents all over the office. Why is that?”

“Accidents?” Cat feigned ignorance.

“And what is it you’re doing with STAR Labs? Last I looked covering the campaigns of politicians didn’t require a lab report!” Lois accused, her voice growing angrier and angrier with each word.

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe I’m working on something other than gossip?” Cat shot back, her anger and frustrations from the last few days spilling out as she shot back. “You think you’re the only one that can land the front-page stories? Newsflash! I’m back, and I’m here to stay!”

“You’re deflecting,” Lois remarked with a cool expression. “What are you hiding?”

“I’m not hiding anything.” Cat sniffed.

“Nothing?” Lois prompted, her tone full of innocence. “Not even a distant relative that happens to be awaiting trial for conspiracy to commit murder on international leaders of a foreign power?” Lois’ arms crossed her chest as a paper fell to the floor.

Cat glanced at the image on the front. Samantha’s mugshot stared back at her, and she felt a lump in her throat, steadying herself.

“I’m not going to ask again. What are you up to, Cat?”

Cat opened her mouth to respond but stopped when she heard a sneeze from across the aisle. They both turned to see the papers flying across Clark’s desk in a whirlwind effect. Clark was not at his desk but the papers hung in the air for a moment as they ventured down from where they’d been blown.

Cat smirked. “I guess you’re going to tell me that was just the wind?”

Lois’ expression went from shock, anger, and then fear in a matter of seconds. “What did you do?”

William McCoy looked through the jagged footage for the umpteenth time, running a hand across his forehead and wearing a look of disgust. “You call this tailing the subject, Mike?”

“I’m sorry, boss, really,” Mike looked down to his feet, uncertain how to explain the missing tape and their encounter with Kent and Lane.

“You’re sorry?” McCoy scoffed, looking him square in the eye with a threatening glare. “You were given one job. One stinkin’, minute job and this is what you bring me?”

“I can’t keep the tail on them without raising suspicions with Barry. You know how he is.” Mike argued. “He’s asking a lot of questions, McCoy.”

“Just do your part,” McCoy responded. “I don’t want those two setting foot anywhere in this city without us having footage of it, are we clear?”

Lois slammed the phone down on her desk as she let out a sigh

of defeat. She’d left a message with Dr. Klein to let her know if he came across anything out of the ordinary. She wasn’t sure what had happened. One minute Clark had been sitting at his desk and the next he’d been gone. No ‘see you in a few’ or flying signal. Something was definitely wrong, and she had a sinking feeling Cat Grant was behind it. She shot a smoldering glare toward Cat from across the aisle who was wearing a smug expression on her face.

If Lois could prove any of what she’d accused Cat of she’d have had Perry throw the book at her, but she couldn’t. All she had was theories and Cat spinning her accusations into paranoia and insecurities. She had to figure out what Cat was up to but she couldn’t do that with her husband MIA.

“Staff meeting in five!” Perry called from his office, gathering his notepad and walking into the conference room.

“*Crap*,” Lois thought to herself. “How am I supposed to explain this?”

“Explain what?” Cat asked, approaching her with a smug expression. “You keep frowning like that, and you’re going to get wrinkles...or should I say more wrinkles?” An evil grin crossed Cat’s face as she narrowed her eyes at her, “What’s wrong, Lois, Clark keeping you up all night?”

“Don’t you have a congressman or something to harass?” Lois bit back with a glare.

“Report,” Cat corrected. “Just because it’s not the local news doesn’t make it any less important.”

“Of course not,” Clark said from behind them, pulling up a seat next to Lois. She looked over to see his hair was completely windblown from what she could only guess was a flight as Superman. She recalled the reason he’d given for gelling his hair as Superman was to keep his hair from being blown out of place all the time. It was obvious wherever he’d flown he’d forgotten that step.

“Um, hi.” Lois did her best not to react for fear that she’d let on to Cat just how scared she’d been in the last thirty minutes he’d been gone.

“Hi.” His face brightened as he stared back at her, allowing his smile to spread up to his dark eyes that continued to stay locked on her.

She caught a glimpse of his darkened eyes as he stared at her and felt goosebumps rise up on her arms. Normally, she only saw that look at home—definitely not here, at the Planet. *‘God, why does he have to keep looking at me like that?’*

“Clark, nice hair,” Cat commented, pulling Lois’ gaze away from the lusting gaze of her husband. He seemed unaffected by Cat’s remark, keeping his gaze on Lois. She reached up and ran a hand through his hair, combing it with her fingers. His hand brushed against her cheek, and she heard Cat mutter, “Get a room.”

“Um, you left quite a...mess earlier,” Lois said, pulling her gaze away from him.

“I needed to get away in a hurry,” he said, running his hand down her shoulder and leaning in to whisper, “Why don’t we get out of here?”

“We have a staff meeting in...” she felt a tightness in her throat when she saw the look in his eyes once more. Before she could finish her statement, his lips captured hers. A hard jolt ran down her spine as her lips parted.

“Lane! Kent!” Perry’s voice bellowed from the conference room, and they pulled apart.

“Right, staff meeting,” Lois said hurriedly standing to her feet.

Chapter 9

‘Something is wrong,’ Lois thought to herself as she stole a glance at her husband for the umpteenth time. She had removed his hand from her lap at least half a dozen times since they’d taken their seats in the corner of the room. She was doing her best to focus on taking notes but that was proving to be more difficult a

task than usual with her husband deciding now would be a great time to be handsy.

“Stop it,” Lois whispered, knowing full well he could hear her before she shot a glare at him. She caught a glimpse of *that* look and quickly looked away before he could try and tempt her.

‘*Bad idea. Very bad idea,*’ she reminded herself. Her gaze shifted to Cat who wore a smug expression on her face. Something was definitely not right with Clark, and she didn’t know how but she suspected Cat was behind this behavior change.

She suppressed a gasp in her throat when she felt her husband’s hand wrap around hers, guiding her hand up her skirt. She clamped her knees closed, taking his hand and removing it once more. She took in a sharp breath. ‘*Focus.*’

“We need to get out of here,” Clark’s husky tone tickled her eardrums, and she bit her lower lip, feeling goosebumps rise up all over. Her eyes widened as his hand massaged her nylon covered thigh.

She pushed his hand away. “Stop.” Her warning came out less convincing than she intended and she caught a smirk that spread across his face. “We’re in the middle of…” Just to be sure he wouldn’t try the motion again she kept a firm grip on his hand.

She stole another glance toward Cat who wore a satisfied grin on her face. ‘*She is so dead.*’

Cat watched with a satisfied grin as Lois and Clark entered Perry’s office after the staff meeting. Clark was obviously focused on anything but work at the moment as Lois kept swatting his hands off her rear.

“What a waste,” Cat muttered to herself as she made her way back to her desk. It was apparent the mixture of red kryptonite and pheromones had done the trick on Clark Kent. Now all she had to do was wait for Superman to go into action and make sure Lois Lane was around so she could prove once and for all that Clark Kent and Superman were one and the same.

Lois did her best to remain calm and collected, but she was finding it challenging to feign control when her husband and partner kept whispering in her ear and looking at her like that. She took a deep breath as she closed the door to Perry’s office, preparing to discuss what had happened outside the Planet earlier.

Perry wore an amused expression as Lois crossed her arms over her chest. He wasn’t an idiot. She knew he was probably laughing on the inside at her weak attempts to pretend like her husband wasn’t trying to feel her up every two seconds.

“So, this Barry Dunning character was prowlin’ again, eh?” Perry’s face turned sour as he placed a hand on his forehead, the concern on his face masked the amusement that had been there moments ago.

“Yeah, Clark caught them outside the entryway,” Lois explained, keeping a firm grip on Clark’s hand in a weak attempt to stop his wandering hands.

She was in trouble. She knew it. Thankfully Perry remained silent on the very public and overly friendly behavior Clark was exhibiting. She needed to get to the bottom of what was causing him to act like this.

She couldn’t take him to Dr. Klein like this. He was Superman’s doctor, not Clark Kent’s. Still, she had to do something. No way could she let him go on any Superman rescues like this. Not that he seemed focused on his Superman duties at the moment.

“I’ll give the boys upstairs a ring and see what our options are,” Perry responded with a gruff grunt. “In the meantime, just refrain from giving them anything. No need to give them anything to run with if you know what I mean.”

“That may be easier said than done,” Lois shot a glance toward Clark.

“Well, just do your best.” Perry sighed.

‘*Oh, God,*’ she bit her lower lip when she felt Clark’s hand free itself from her grasp and move down her backside once more. She was in trouble.

“We will,” Lois said hurriedly, reaching behind her to grab Clark’s hand by the wrist, stopping it from moving any further. “Uh, thanks, Chief.”

Before Perry could respond she had Clark by the elbow, dragging him out of the office, “You need to practice some of that oh-so-lacking control and patience… You’re going to get both of us fired if you don’t quit it.”

“Perry’s not going to fire us.” Clark leaned in, capturing her mouth with his in a distractingly passionate kiss that made her weak in the knees.

‘*I am going to kill Cat Grant,*’ her mind screamed as his hands moved up and down her spine. Any other time she would have been oh so willing to partake in anything he was suggesting. It would be so easy to take a long lunch and take advantage of the adventurous mood Clark was in, but the problem was she knew he wasn’t himself.

“Let’s get out of here,” Clark whispered, running his hand down her backside.

“We just got here,” Lois argued, feeling a pang in her gut as he backed her into the corridor leading to the supply closet.

“An hour and a half ago,” Clark argued, running his hands up and down her sides. “Come on, we’re not going to get any work done today.”

“Not if you keep doing that,” Lois argued, removing his hands from her sides. “What has gotten into you?”

“Nothing,” he whispered, running his hands down the length of her arms and joining his hands with hers. “God, you’re gorgeous,” he whispered, leaning into her. She could feel her senses go on high alert as he leaned closer.

‘*So not fair,*’ she thought to herself.

“Clark, you’re not making this easy,” she let out a low moan as his lips brushed against her earlobe.

“Making what easy?” he asked.

“We need to continue this conversation somewhere a bit less…”

She let out a moan and Clark reached behind her, opening the door to the storage closet and guiding her inside. “Better?” he asked, closing the door behind them.

“Honey, please stop. We really don’t have time to…” She let out a low moan as his lips moved down the curve of her throat. “Oh, God, that’s not fair.”

“I could fly us home,” Clark suggested, moving her hands up above her head, pinning them against the wall behind them as he stared back at her. “It wouldn’t take more than a few seconds to get us there…”

She let out a low moan as his breath hit the outside of her ear. She felt goosebumps rise on her skin and a jolt run down her spine. She was in so much trouble.

“Clark, honey, look at me…” she attempted to get him to focus.

He lifted his head and looked back at her, “What is it, baby?”

“You are not… yourself,” she managed to squeak out as he leaned closer, releasing his grasp on her hands. She moved her hands to cup both sides of his face, forcing him to look at her. “Something isn’t right here and…”

“I’m fine.” His hands moved down to her waist, down her backside and over the back of her thighs. “I’ve never felt better.”

“Clark,” she groaned, feeling the tension within her growing. This would not end well. “I need you to focus.”

“I am,” he grinned, leaning in to kiss her.

She felt a flutter in her abdomen and groaned. “No, no, no, no that.” She let out a low moan as his hands moved up the back of her skirt. “You started acting strange this morning… before the staff meeting. What were you doing?”

“Not what I want,” his gaze wandered down her body for a moment.

“Clark, please,” she grabbed his wrists, stopping them in place. “I need you to focus on what happened this morning.”

He let out a sigh and moved his hands to her waist, wrapping his arms securely around her torso. “You’re not going to let this go, are you?”

“Nope,” Lois smiled, relieved to see a glimmer of some normalcy from her husband’s behavior. “Now, this morning you were fine ...and then you weren’t.”

“I’m still fine,” he argued.

“That’s debatable,” she shot back, arching her eyebrow at him and giving him the ‘spill it’ expression.

“I don’t know.” He sighed. “I was reading over that report on Warden what’s-his-face and...”

“Then you flew out of the newsroom and left papers flying all over the place,” Lois pointed out in a harsh whisper. “Do you realize how badly that could have ended?”

“I just needed to get out of the office. I went for a flight around the block. No big deal,” he responded.

“You could have blown your...” she stopped herself, realizing she was getting off topic. “Okay, so you were reading a report on Warden Baker.”

“Yeah, so?” he shrugged, unimpressed with the information she was trying to confirm with him. He leaned in closer, running his hands against her sides. “I can think of a lot better use of our time than talking about that old Scrooge.”

“Then you started acting strange?” Lois prompted, doing her best to ignore the effect his touch was having on her.

“What exactly is strange about how I’m acting?” he asked, leaning into her. “I’ve always enjoyed touching you like this...” His hands moved to the back of her thighs, inching his fingertips just past the hem of her skirt. “And kissing you like this.” He illustrated his point by capturing her lips with his, and she let out a low moan. He wore a satisfied grin as he stared back at her, his eyes dark with desire. “I can’t help it if I’m deliriously happy and want to show it.”

“Oh, Clark, that’s sweet, but...”

“No buts...” Clark’s mouth found hers, and his hands moved to her face, tracing the frame of her jaw as he deepened the kiss. “Come on, you know you want to get out of here just as bad as I do,” He murmured against her lips. His hands moved up and down her sides suggestively. “You want me as bad as I want you.”

“That’s not the point,” Lois argued half-heartedly against him. “Just try and focus, please,” She pleaded with him. “Something obviously has affected you. Did you feel any effects from Kryptonite?”

“Nope,” his lips wandered down the curve of her throat, and she let out a gasp.

“Stop.” It took all her willpower to say the single word, and her body was screaming in protest as the word hung in the air.

“Are you sure?” he asked, lifting his head and cupping her cheek.

“Yes,” she whispered, placing her hand over his. “There will be plenty of time for...this later.” She felt a hitch in her throat as she spoke and continued, “But right now we have to figure out...” She reached for the door behind her, turning the knob.

“Figure out what?” he asked.

“Things,” was all her brain could supply her with as she darted out of the supply closet at record-breaking speed and headed toward her desk.

Cat chuckled to herself when she saw Lois Lane bristle past her and head toward her desk. She took note of the rumpled appearance of the ace reporter and couldn’t help but laugh to herself. A few moments later Clark Kent followed, readjusting his tie, returning to his desk.

It was obvious the perfume, and red kryptonite had done the trick but she’d yet to prove Superman had also been affected. Surely something would come up that required the man of steel’s attention. When it did, she’d make sure Lois Lane was front and center to ensure the uncontrollable behavior her husband was currently displaying was captured from the man of steel as well.

“Jimmy?” she heard Lois call for the young photographer.

Jimmy Olsen wore an amused expression as he did his best not to make eye contact with either Clark or Lois when he was called over to Lois’ desk. Lois’ disheveled appearance and Clark’s lopsided grin made it obvious what the two of them had been doing just moments ago...in the supply closet no less.

He stared at the ground for a moment before finally summing up the courage to look Lois in the eye, “Hey guys, what’s up?”

“I need you to run a background check on someone.” She handed him a sheet of paper and Jimmy took it.

His eyes widened as he read the name aloud, “Barry Dunning?” His eyes sparkled, and he prompted, “The talk show host?”

“I’ve got a hunch is all,” Lois said hurriedly, not explaining any further.

Jimmy thought for a moment about asking why but decided not to press the issue when he saw Lois’ expression. “Okay,” he headed back to his desk. “I’ll let you know what I find.”

STAR Labs research department was filled with cubicles of miniature labs. Each quadrant of cubicles had an office leading up to it with a small narrow door. Inside was the head researcher, Irwin Johnson, standing confidently behind his desk, staring at the beautiful blonde and her voluptuous features.

His eyes wandered up and down the heart-shaped ‘v’ of her top, giving him a perfect view of the cleavage that was threatening to topple out of her low-cut top. “I thought you’d like the head’s up. I know you take a personal interest in these kinds of special projects.”

“Yes, Pookie.” She ran a long finger against his cheek. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this little tidbit.” She looked toward the bag with the single glowing red stone in it.

“Oh, I can imagine,” his gaze shifted downward once more, and she smiled, catching his gaze.

“Shall I show you?”

“Uh...” he began to stammer, uncertain how to respond until she pulled out a white pearl revolver. “Wait, wait, no!”

“I never was good at picking out gifts.”

Warden Baker stared at the coverage from the tape William McCoy brought him, listening to what had been uncovered. Lane and Kent were investigating him. It was only a matter of time before they put two and two together.

“I think it’s time we showed Lane and Kent just how deadly it is to come in Intergang’s crosshairs, don’t you, McCoy?” Baker mused, tapping his hand against his chin.

“I’d say that can be arranged,” McCoy responded, taking a long drag from his cigarette.

“Get it done before we have the police show up on our doorstep,” Baker ordered.

Lois flipped through the contents of Clark’s desk, looking for anything that might be a clue for why he was acting so strange. ‘Think, think, think...’ She took a seat and let out a sigh of defeat, “Nothing.”

“I told you I’m fine,” he insisted, taking her hand in his. A sly grin crossed his face, and he whispered, “What do you say we take the afternoon off and ditch this place? We could take a flight out to the Tropics and get some sun and...”

At that moment, Jimmy walked up with a stack of files in his

hands. “Do you have any idea how expensive those flights are, CK? Just one ticket is sure to break the bank.”

Clark opened his mouth to respond, and she quickly cut him off, “Exactly. See? It’s expensive.”

“Oh, come on, since when do you turn down a flight with...?” Clark began to ask, and she reached over to silence him by grabbing ahold of the one part of him she knew wasn’t invulnerable.

“Metropolis Airlines? Never! But you have to admit it’s really not a good time.” She laughed nervously, hoping the distraction was enough. Clark opened his mouth to respond but quickly closed it when her hand ran up his inner thigh, silencing any further protest for the moment.

She turned to Jimmy who was staring at her with a perplexed expression on his face. “Uh, what do you have there, Jimmy?”

“Right, everything I could find on Barry Dunning. Something interesting...” He handed her the file. “Turns out he didn’t even exist until three years ago.”

“Really?” Lois’ eyes widened at the implication. “How’d he end up with his own talk show?” She suppressed a whimper when she felt the presence of her husband’s hand against her inner thigh. *‘Not good. Not good.’*

How was she going to make it through the day with him continually pawing at her like this? She inched closer to the desk, feeling goosebumps rise on her skin as his hand snaked its way further and further up the length of her thigh. She stole a glance toward him, groaning when she saw he looked cool and collected.

“Don’t know,” Jimmy shrugged. “I did find something interesting about his employer though. William McCoy, the media mogul.”

“Wha-What about him?” Lois asked, hearing the slight rise in her voice as her husband’s fingertips moved up her legs, sending a pulsing sensation down her spine. *‘This is bad. And so very good.’* She felt his fingertips brush against her and her eyes widened, crossing her arms over her chest in an effort to hide what her husband’s magical digits were doing to her.

“From what I’m able to gather McCoy’s been rumored to be involved in a lot of shady business. Blackmail schemes, armed robbery heists, you name it. Problem is no one can point anything directly to him,” Jimmy explained with a defeated sigh. “I’ve got a search running to see if I can find anything in our system to match with the rumored dates. Figure if we at least have something tangible it might help.”

“Great.” Lois gave him a broad smile, trying to prevent her husband’s hand from wandering any further up her skirt. She was in trouble. Big trouble.

“No sweat,” Jimmy said good-naturedly. He spotted a file on the floor and reached down to hand it to her. “Here, looks like you dropped this.”

Lois glanced at the file, taking it from him. “Background check on Baker. I might need that. Thanks, Jimmy,” she said hurriedly, feeling a pleasurable haze wash over her. She let out a low moan when she felt herself give in to her husband’s persuasive teasing. Who was she kidding? After six months of marriage, he knew every button to press to make her melt in his arms.

“Let’s get out of here,” her husband’s husky voice whispered in her ear.

She knew there was a reason why not to but at that moment, staring into his dark eyes filled with desire for her she couldn’t think of one. “Yes,” she found herself whispering.

‘Oh, no,’ Cat watched Jimmy hand, Lois Lane, the file that had fallen off of Clark Kent’s desk. She had completely forgotten to take it back. She watched in despair as Lois Lane’s behavior almost immediately changed once the file was in her hand. A few short moments later the couple headed to the elevator, oblivious to everything around them.

Cat groaned, walking toward the desk Clark and Lois had just vacated. She placed a hand on her nose, ensuring the nose plugs she’d put in earlier were still in place. Finally, she spotted the file she was looking for and reached for it.

“Hey, whatcha doing?” Ralph’s loud voice came from behind her, and she let out a groan.

“Oh, nothing,” Cat said hurriedly, heading back to her desk.

“You sneaky little dog, you,” Ralph teased, grabbing the file from her hand. “You know Perry tends to frown on reporters borrowing information like this.”

“I’m just looking for a connection to a story I’m running. I was going to give it right back,” Cat said, watching in despair as Ralph flipped through the file.

“You working on something I’m not aware of?” He gave her a sly grin. “You know politics is supposed to be my turf.”

“I’m sure it is, but this is out of your league, Ralph,” Cat retorted with an irritated growl.

“Am I out of your league?” Ralph asked, handing the file back to her and giving her a leering stare.

‘Oh, no,’

Lois Lane opened her mouth to cry out, and Clark Kent silenced her with a soul-shattering kiss. She moaned against him. Her hands ran down his back, exploring the powerful muscles beneath her fingertips as they lost themselves in one another’s arms.

He felt a piercing pain run through his head as he came back to himself and let out a low moan, “Oh, God.” He felt the intoxicating haze that had been enveloping him for most of the morning lift and let out a soft moan as he buried his face in her neck, cradling her in his arms as he fell to the ground with her in his arms.

“Clark?” he heard her whisper, shaking his shoulder as she hovered over him.

Something had happened. He couldn’t remember how he’d gotten here. His gaze shifted to Lois who was looking at him in concern. “I love you,” he murmured, uncertain what to say. It was obvious what they’d been doing but how they’d gotten here still remained elusive.

“I love you too,” she whispered, running her hand across his cheek.

There it was again, the piercing pain through his eyelids. He let out a low moan. “Clark?” he heard Lois whisper. He wanted to respond, but all he could focus on was the pain in his head as jagged memories rose back up and flooded through his mind.

Samantha looked over her shoulder as she made her way through the corridor leading to her prison cell. She just had to make it a few more days and then she’d have her court hearing. Hopefully, Cat will have found something by then to get her released.

She was innocent.

‘All this for a lousy raise,’ she thought to herself gloomily.

She could swear she heard something behind her. She turned to look but saw nothing out of the ordinary. “Pull yourself together, Sam,” she told herself.

She approached the door to her cell, and a loud buzz could be heard as the door opened. She quickly stepped inside, sighing in relief when the door closed.

“Quite jittery aren’t we?” a voice came from the corner of the small room she was in.

“You!” Samantha accused in surprise, seeing the blonde-haired woman that had offered to get her out of this hell hole. It would have been so easy to do it but from what she’d gathered trusting this woman was not something to be done lightly.

“I’m disappointed in you, Samantha,” she replied coolly. “I thought we had a deal. You give me the red kryptonite, and I set

you free. A win-win arrangement.” Her gaze turned dark. “I don’t like betrayal.”

“I told you, I...”

“Ah, ah, ah,” she cooed wagging her finger in Samantha’s face. “Please don’t lie to me. Now, I’m going to prove to you just how easily I can get you out of here, and you are going to help me get the kryptonite. Are we clear?”

“But I don’t have it!” she blurted out.

“I know,” the woman’s gaze turned dark as she reached over to pull the alarm on her door. “Stay close. If you blink, you’ll miss it.”

“Miss what?”

“Your freedom of course,”

Clark cradled the phone in his hand, letting out a groan. “Okay, thanks Jimmy,” he hit the end button and hung up, turning to Lois who was sipping on a glass of water, holding an ice pack to her head. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I want to hunt down the person we know is responsible for releasing pheromones in the newsroom and pluck every last hair off her head,” Lois muttered vehemently.

“I’m still having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that Cat Grant would try to drug us,” Clark said, rubbing his head. The effects from the pheromone had worn off of him pretty quickly, but Lois hadn’t been so lucky. Shortly after he had come back to his senses, she was soon to follow—with a nauseating headache just as she had before.

“You didn’t see her face when I confronted her, Clark,” Lois shook her head, “She was so smug about it. Like she’s trying to prove something.”

“Prove what?” he asked. “I mean, everyone knows what that stuff did before. It’s not like it’s a big secret how I get when I’m around you.” A smile spread across his face, and he saw Lois blush.

“Well, for whatever reason she wanted you to lose control,” Lois reasoned aloud. “The question is why?”

Clark groaned. “Don’t start with that murder conspiracy again. That’s a stretch way out of the norm even for you, Lois.”

“Well, what do you think is going on then?” Lois prompted. “She wanted us distracted for some reason. The only other case we’re working on is the prison case.”

“I think Bill Church’s son is pulling the strings here. He got Baker the job, and now he owes Church.” He was quiet a moment before adding, “I don’t know what Cat’s reasoning for using Pheromones on us is, but I intend to find out.”

“How are you planning on doing that without getting sprayed again?” Lois asked, crossing her arms at him. “I don’t even remember you getting sprayed...or me for that matter.”

“Well neither did Ralph but by his behavior, it was obvious something was making him act out of character,” Clark remarked with the shake of his head, recalling the details Jimmy had given him on Ralph’s attempt to make a move on Cat.

“Fine, we confront Cat with what we know and pray she doesn’t have a bottle of Revenge in her back pocket,” Lois muttered, standing to her feet. “If she does I am not responsible for anything I do or say that might result in her being injured.”

“Uh-huh,” Clark gave her a smirk. “Come on, let’s go. The sooner we get to the bottom of this the sooner...” The loud piercing of the siren sounded in his ears.

“What is it?” Lois asked.

“Someone’s escaped from the Metropolis Correctional Facility,” he said with a scowl.

Lois reached over to loosen his tie for him, “Be careful.” She leaned in to kiss him before he stepped back, spinning out into the suit, flying out the window and heading toward the penitentiary.

Dr. Bernard Klein turned to the room filled with nervous

interns and research assistants. On the back wall was a line of police officers ready to get the statements from the apparent witnesses to the shooting of Dr. Irwin Johnson.

“Not one of you saw or heard anything?”

The room was quiet as each blue jacket turned to one another and shrugged. Dr. Klein shook his head in despair. “I’ll need a list of everything that’s come in and out of this lab within the hour.”

Jerry White waltzed up the steps to the office he’d met Agent Rollins in. He’d been so close to cracking this case open and then he’d been pulled off. He needed to know why. He needed answers. Most of all, he needed to feel like he was doing something with his life.

He had agreed to go undercover and help bring down Intergang then he’d been pulled from the case. He needed to know why. He approached the door to the room he’d entered before only to find it was already open. He placed his hand on the doorknob, carefully listening as the occupants continued their conversation none the wiser that he was listening in.

“The investigation into Baker is where this stops. Nothing leads back to the boss,” a voice spoke. Jerry scrunched up his nose as he caught a whiff of the nicotine coming from the room.

“I can’t just drop this, McCoy. There are a lot of hands in this.” Rollins’ panicked voice echoed from the room.

‘So that’s what’s going on,’ Jerry thought to himself.

“You let me worry about that,” McCoy’s voice boomed. “The boss wants things handled. You’re going to handle it, are we clear? We both know you’ve got a lot to lose. We don’t want any accidents happening, now do we?”

‘I’ve got to get out of here,’ Jerry thought to himself. He’d heard enough. He didn’t know what he was going to do or where he was going to go, but he knew he had to get out of here before he was caught.

Just as he was about to exit the corridor, he heard one last tidbit of information that made him freeze. “Those reporters are proving to be a problem. A bomb’s set to go off within the hour, leveling the Daily Planet and sending a loud message to anyone that dares to cross Intergang. You make sure the evidence leads to Baker and all those pesky debts you’ve got with the boss will disappear.”

“No, you can’t!” he heard Rollins say.

‘Dad!’ Jerry’s mind screamed as he backed out the same door he came.

Barry gathered up his camera in his arms, setting it up in the corner of the Daily Planet lobby as he prepared to zero in on Lois Lane once more. Mike had disappeared on him...again. He wasn’t sure what was up with that kid always disappearing when he needed him, but he wasn’t going to let that get in his way.

McCoy wanted a tail on Lane and Kent, and that was what he was going to deliver. He would get the story behind the scandal once and for all and provide the real scoop on the questions surrounding Clark Kent’s absence from Superman’s press conference. He’d been given a job, and he was going to do it.

A flood of officers filled the lobby. Barry got his microphone ready, preparing to get the scoop when he had the mic confiscated from his hand by one of the officers. “Hey!”

“Back up! No press!” he ordered.

Barry scowled, watching as his camera and microphone were taken into custody. He quickly grabbed his tape from the deck, “Hey, now that’s private property!”

“You get out of my way, or it’s going to be the property of the Metropolis P.D.” the detective ordered.

“There a problem here?” the stern voice of Superman came from the distance.

Barry swallowed hard, holding the tape to his chest and backing away. “Su-Superman, uh,”

Before he could finish his thought, the detective interrupted, "We need you out of here, sir,"

Barry's face fell when he saw the stern expression on both the detective and Superman's face. "Of course."

Cat let out a long breath as she stared at the screen on the television. Nothing. No sign of Superman. Surely something would come up, right? Something had to happen. Metropolis was never without a disaster of some kind.

"Hey, Kitty Cat!" Ralph's lover's spew called out to her as Jimmy escorted him into the conference room. "I love you... *ba-byyyyy*" he began to sing, and she let out a groan.

"Make it stop," she muttered under her breath.

Perry approached her with a worried expression. "Sorry, Cat, I don't know what's gotten into him, but we'll get him to sleep it off and hopefully get to the bottom of this."

"It's fine, Perry, really," Cat rambled hoping to not draw attention to Ralph's odd behavior. "I just have that effect on men."

Perry frowned. "I don't know. It seems very peculiar for Ralph even..."

"It's fine, really," Cat said hurriedly.

A short man with coke bottle glasses approached with a clipboard in hand. Cat could have sworn she'd seen him before but couldn't place where. He held out a small box, "Delivery for Lois Lane?"

Perry looked around with a frown. "Where is Lois?" He scanned the newsroom and added, "And Clark for that matter?"

"Uh, they had a lead to chase!" Cat shrugged, hoping her editor bought it.

"Uh-huh." Perry looked to the man with the clipboard. "You can leave it with the front desk. She'll pick it up when she gets in."

The man's face tensed and then he shook his head, "No, I need to deliver it to Ms. Lane. See here?" He pointed to the clipboard with the note.

Cat read the note and frowned. Something about the sender's name struck a chord with her. "Bill McCoy? Why does that name sound so familiar?"

"Catherine Grant?"

Cat turned to see a crowd of officers approaching her from the stairwell. "Well, what did I do to get this kind of treatment, detective?" She approached them with a flirtatious smile.

Detective Wolfe frowned, holding up a picture of her cousin's mugshot. "Have you been in contact with Samantha Grady since her escape?"

"Escape?" Cat echoed in shock.

"Escape?"

She turned to Superman staring her down with a look of disapproval on his face.

"I think we better take this in my office," Perry said, motioning for the officers to follow.

Lois Lane approached the Daily Planet, phone in hand. She spotted a man with bottle cap glasses running from the building, throwing his baseball cap and jacket off as he lunged toward the crosswalk, knocking her down in the process. "Hey!"

She bolted up, ready to confront the attacker but found he was already sprinting across the street, darting in between cars as the crosswalk blinked 'do not cross.' She let out a muttered curse and sighed. "I've got bigger fish to fry."

"Ms. Lane! Don't! Don't go in there!" a voice came from behind her.

She turned to see Jerry White, pale as a ghost as he hollered at her from a few feet away. Curious she turned and walked toward him.

"Look out!"

She let out a muffled cry as a white cloth covered hand snaked

around her, silencing her before a sound could be made.

'*Chloroform*' was the last thing that crossed her mind as she fell to the ground, darkness overtaking her instantly.

Chapter 10

"Could you repeat the question?" Cat's face spread into a broad grin and Detective Wolfe's let out a frustrated groan. His face was turning redder and redder by the minute. She knew it was a dangerous game to continue playing but given the cold stares she continued to get from Superman across the room.

'*Clark*,' her mind reminded her. She felt a small amount of doubt creep into the forefront of her mind. He had to be. It was the only answer that made sense, right? Superman hadn't shown himself when Clark had been exposed to the red kryptonite and pheromone mixture. That was proof, wasn't it?

'*Could be a coincidence*,' she thought to herself. '*Or not...*'

"I'm not going to ask again, Ms. Grant. Did you know your cousin was in cohorts with known members of Intergang?" Detective Wolfe's tone was harsh as he continued with the questions.

"Intergang?" Cat's voice echoed from the other side of the room. "No, Sam would never..."

Clark did his best to remain detached as he listened to Cat try and play dumb. After what she'd done—what he suspected she'd done—to him and Lois earlier there was no way he believed she was as clueless as she pretended to be.

"Intergang?" Cat's voice echoed from the other side of the room. "No, Sam would never..."

The referral to the woman that had kidnapped his wife and helped strap her to explosives as 'Sam', like she was some innocent caught up with the wrong people, grated on his nerves. He couldn't hold it back any longer. He folded his arms across his chest and stared her down. "We're talking about someone that thought nothing of blowing a building up and killing at least five people in order to cover up her own crimes. I don't think 'never' is an accurate depiction, Ms. Grant."

She narrowed her eyes at him but didn't say anything. Detective Wolfe piped in, "If you know where she is and you're hiding her you could go to prison. No judge in the world will let that slide."

"I don't know where she is," Cat snapped angrily. "If I did, going back to jail is the last thing she'd be worried about. Trust me,"

"Cat, is there anything your, uh..." Perry's face fell as he let the descriptor roll off his tongue, "cousin might have said or done recently to give these officers a clue?"

"No, Perry," Cat's face softened, turning to Perry. "Sam's done a lot of dumb stuff. A lot of idiotic things, but she'd never plan something like this. She'd never..."

"She attacked three guards and released laughing gas tainted with Miranda's Revenge on a room of unsuspecting people." Clark cut her off. "Some of which were allergic and are being treated at the hospital. Don't tell us she'd never do something like this. The fact of the matter is she *did*."

"A package was delivered to you from Metropolis Corrections. Maybe we can take a look in it and see if there are any clues there?" Officer Wallace suggested, giving Cat a look of disapproval.

"No, no, it was nothing," Cat said hurriedly.

"Seems like something," Detective Wolfe countered.

"Especially when we look at the log for the case against Miranda and find your signature on the books..." he glanced over at Perry. "Among other reporters for the Planet. You running a series on that witch's brew we need to know about?"

"No," Perry shook his head in disapproval. "I can assure you we will get to the bottom of it and the Daily Planet will cooperate

as best as we can.”

“Perry,” Cat gave him a pleading look.

“Cat, I’m sorry darlin’ but this is…” Perry’s phone rang and he hit the speaker button to answer. “Perry White, I’m in the middle of…”

“Dad!” the out of breath voice of Jerry White filled the room. “You gotta get ever-everyone out of th-ere. Get out!”

“Now hold on, son, slow down.” Perry tried to calm his son down.

“There’s a bomb, Dad! Get out now!” Jerry’s voice echoed through the room and Clark immediately went into action, scanning the floor for any sign of an explosive device in the building. He moved at super-speed, flying through the newsroom, trying to find any clue.

“All right, let’s get everyone out of here!” Officer Wallace called out, heading for the door.

“We’ll finish this downtown, Ms. Grant,” Detective Wolfe said, pointing to the door.

“They …took her. I’m tailing the car but…” Jerry’s frantic pleas could be heard through the speakerphone as the officers began corralling everyone to the stairwell.

“Everyone, clear the building. This is not a drill!”

“Took who?” Perry asked as Clark zipped through the building at super-speed.

Then he saw it.

The brown box on Lois’ desk. No name. No label.

“Lois, Dad. They took Lois.”

Clark scanned the box and grimaced when he saw the red blinking digits change from fifteen seconds to fourteen.

“What?!” Perry’s loud bellow could be heard from the office.

“Mr. White, we need to clear the building now!”

“Jerry, where are you, son? Jerry?”

Not having time to do anything else, Clark grabbed the explosive-filled box and flew through the window, shattering the glass all around him, pushing higher and higher as fast as he could go, hoping to get the explosive device as far away from the city as possible so as to keep anyone from getting hurt.

Lois felt the numbness from her face begin to disappear. Slowly but surely the effects from the chloroform-filled haze began to lift and she attempted to open her eyes. It was dark. There was a dim light from the corner.

She attempted to move her arms but found them restrained behind her back. She tried to move her arms against the chair she was sitting in, feeling for a sharp edge. She let out a soft whine, straightening up in the chair when she felt a prick against her skin.

A groan across the room caught her attention and she turned to see another figure on the floor. She sat up in the dimly lit room and Lois squinted her eyes to try and make out the face of the other figure in the room. “You!”

Clark Kent straightened his tie as he approached the crowd outside the Daily Planet. The police held everyone around the building, questioning everyone. Cat stood to the sidelines with Perry and his son, Jerry. He tried to remain calm. Jerry’s words from his phone call earlier, remained ever present. He had been tailing the car the kidnappers had been driving. He must have seen something that could help him find Lois. Clark could feel the tension building inside him and he quickly swallowed it down. He had to remain calm. He had to find out what Jerry knew so he could find who was responsible for the bombing and for kidnapping Lois. In order to do that, he needed information. Something that was easier to come by as Clark Kent rather than Superman.

“Did you see that?”

“A bomb!”

“Where’d Superman go?”

Detective Wolfe was walking away from the trio as he approached the front of the Planet. “I think that’s all the questions we have, but we will be discussing the meteorite your cousin sent you, Ms. Grant.”

“I didn’t know it was Kryptonite until this morning, honest!” Cat insisted as Clark approached.

“Kryptonite?” Clark looked at her in surprise.

“Yes, fine! I’m the bad guy. I get something sent to me with a cryptic note and I must be behind something nefarious, right? Meanwhile, Lois Lane has a bomb sent to her and no one bats an eye.”

“That is not what I said, Ms. Grant,” Wolfe attempted to correct her.

“Would you just let the man do his job?” Jerry growled at him.

“I didn’t see you getting manhandled by the police. I’ll act however I want!” Cat turned to Clark, “What are you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be elbow deep into trouble with your wife by now?”

Perry let out a sigh of relief when he saw him. “Clark, thank God, son. Please, please tell me you know where Lois is.”

Clark did his best to keep his emotions in check as he responded with a tight, “No, I’m not, but Superman did update me on what happened. Is everyone all right?”

“We’re fine,” Jerry cut in. “But some guy in a ski mask nabbed Lois and the police are looking for her.”

“Jerry saw it happen,” Perry said with a sigh, running his hand against his neck.

“I’m sorry. I was trying to keep up and then I lost them,” Jerry explained with a frown.

“Wait a minute, how did Superman have time to update you?” Cat looked at him in surprise. “He just left here fifteen minutes ago.”

“He is super-fast,” Jerry pointed out then turned to Clark. “Clark, I’m really sorry. I…”

“It’s all right,” Clark reassured, placing a hand on Jerry’s shoulder. “Do you remember anything about the vehicle that took her?”

“It was just a plain white construction van.” Jerry shrugged. His face was covered in remorse.

“This isn’t your fault, son,” Perry reassured. “Now, Lois has a knack of getting herself in jams, but she always finds a way out.”

“On a weekly basis, it seems,” Cat cut in with a roll of her eyes. Clark shot her a glare and she shrugged. “I’m right and you know it, Clark.”

“We just need to figure out who took her, for starters, so we can find out where they may have taken her,” Clark said, ignoring Cat’s comment. “Where were you when you last saw the van? Maybe that’ll give us some clue,” Clark prompted, trying not to seem too eager after Jerry had endured the questioning of the police.

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. “I’m sorry, like I told the police I can’t remember. “

Samantha stared at the figure across the room from her. Two hours ago she’d been locked behind bars in the Metropolis Corrections Center. Now she found herself in another prison. One set of bars for another. Only this cell held a roommate she could have done without.

The sound of her occupant’s weak attempts to loosen her binds began to grind on her nerves and she let out a low moan, sitting up.

“You!” Lois Lane accused in recognition.

Samantha gave her a bored expression and muttered, “That’s not going to work. Believe me, I’ve been trying for the last hour.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Lois let out a low moan.

“Afraid not,” Samantha snapped back in disgust.

“Of all the people in this city to be kidnapped with I’m stuck

with the likes of you!” Lois scoffed bitterly, straightening up in the chair when she felt another prick against her skin.

“Believe me, the feeling’s mutual,” Samantha shot back.

A loud snap came from across the room and Lois let out a satisfied cheer, “Ha! You were saying?” She reached down to untie her ankles and Samantha looked over in surprise.

“How did you...?”

“You get through one of these enough times you learn a few things,” Lois muttered with a shrug.

Samantha straightened up, looking to her with a plea in her eyes. “Wait!”

“What?” Lois looked at her in surprise when she crossed the room, looking for the door.

“You’re not going to just leave me here, are you?” Samantha pleaded.

“The thought has crossed my mind.” Lois pointed out. She stared at her for a moment before letting out a long breath, crossing the room toward her. She lifted her hand over Samantha. “Hold still.”

A hard snap against her wrists caused her to cry out. “Thanks,” Samantha mumbled under her breath as she stood to her feet.

“Let’s just get out of here.” Lois shrugged her off, heading toward the blacked-out door that led to their freedom.

The door opened and a familiar figure stood in the doorway. “And where do you think you’re going?”

Samantha swallowed hard, seeing the media mogul in the doorway, “Mr. McCoy, thank God! You wouldn’t believe what happened...”

“Stop talking,” Lois hissed, glaring at her.

“But...”

“No, she’s right.” McCoy flicked his cigarette ash on the floor and took a step through the doorway. “Stop talking.”

Four hours. Clark felt the hard lump in his throat continue to build as he paced in the Daily Planet conference room. Nothing. No sign of Lois and he could feel his nerves wearing down with each waking second. He’d scanned the city and found no sign of Lois. No cries for help. No nothing.

The police continued questioning everyone but were getting nowhere and if he had to look at Cat Grant’s smug face one more second, he thought he would snap. “It’s been four hours. We’re no closer to finding Lois than we were when this started”

“Nor are we any closer to finding Sam,” Cat remarked quietly, staring out the open door of the conference room.

“What were you doing with Revenge?” Clark finally asked, glaring at her with disdain in his tone. He never would have thought Cat capable of stooping so low, but the evidence was damning.

“I didn’t help, Sam!” Cat snapped angrily.

“Sure looks like you did,” Clark snapped. “How else do you explain the bottle going missing from the evidence locker?”

“I wasn’t the only one looking through that locker,” Cat sniffed, narrowing her eyes at him.

“No, but the evidence was missing when Lois and I found the locker. You were the last one to check it out.” Clark shrugged. “And your cousin escapes prison using it. That and your possession of Kryptonite doesn’t really boast a lot of trust from me at the moment.”

“I don’t know how Sam got a hold of Revenge. I know I didn’t give it to her, but my having Kryptonite has nothing to do with any of this,” Cat argued.

“Are you kidding me?” Clark scoffed, doing his best to contain his anger. “It has everything to do with it. I’m not an idiot, Cat. I know what you did to Lois and...”

“I haven’t done anything to Lois,” Cat remarked with a shrug. “You want to be angry at me for whatever reason, that’s your prerogative but don’t try and make me the villain here. Your wife

gets herself kidnapped on a weekly basis!”

“Yeah, you’re innocent, Cat?” Clark snapped at her. “So innocent the police have an officer watching you until they find your cousin.” Clark pointed to the officer by the door. He shook his head in disbelief. “I can’t believe I defended you to Lois.”

“You’re angry and upset. I get that but you’re not the only one with someone you care about missing,” Cat shot back angrily. “I never did anything to Lois.”

He wanted to yell at her further but awarding her any information after what she’d done wasn’t something he felt comfortable doing. The problem was admitting to what she’d done to him and Lois meant opening a can of worms he wasn’t ready to delve into. He knew he was right, but he could tell she was being genuine about her concern for her cousin as well.

“I’ve never been more disappointed in anyone in all my life,” Clark muttered, turning away. He saw the uncertain expression on her face before making his way out of the room. He scanned the newsroom, stepping into the bullpen and spotting Perry talking to Officer Wallace. The elevators behind him opened and out stepped the obnoxious face of Barry Dunning. He let out a groan, catching sight of the familiar face. ‘*Not now,*’ he thought to himself.

“A shocking turn of events unfolds as we see the prestigious Daily Planet brought to its knees by...”

“Hey! Dunning! Get back here!” the sound of Detective Wolfe’s voice come from behind the paparazzi.

Clark’s super-hearing picked up the sound of the conversation taking place. “Detective, to what do I owe this pleasure?”

“What’s in the tape deck, Dunning?” Wolfe asked, pointing to the camera. “You were lurking around here before we showed up. How do I know you’re not involved?”

“I think we both know that’s a bit of a stretch,” Dunning shot back. “I’ve been right here, all along.”

“Then let’s see the tape.” Wolfe pointed to the camera once more. Dunning made a run for it and Wolfe called after him. “Someone grab him! He might have evidence!”

Clark spotted Barry running his way and reached out to grab him by the collar, stopping him mid-stride and hoisting him up in the air.

“Hey! Let go, Kent!” Barry squealed, kicking his legs in the air.

“Don’t even think about it,” Clark hissed slamming him against the column behind them.

“Clark, hold on!” Perry called behind him. “Let him go!”

“Kent, easy there...” Wolfe approached him from behind. “If I were you, Dunning I wouldn’t do anything to rile Kent here up any further. Hand over the tape,” he said, pointing to the camera.

“I know you’re not suggesting I give you my personal property, Detective. This tape is protected by the SHIELD Law,” Dunning stammered from beneath Clark’s grasp.

“I doubt video footage of you stalking your show’s subject matter is what they had in mind,” Clark remarked with a glare. “Hand over the tape.”

“My, my, my how the tables have turned,” Dunning said with a sneer. “No more ‘get lost’ or ‘stay away’ but rather ‘give us something’ eh?” The man’s face lit up with delight and Clark fought the urge to throttle him.

“I swear to God I will snap you like a twig and not think twice about it...” Clark threatened, tightening his grasp on him.

“Did you hear that, detective?” Dunning looked to Wolfe with a sneer. “Threatening violence. Sounds of desperation to me. What are you hiding, Kent? Skeletons in the closet you don’t want anyone to know about? All these weeks of avoiding me and my crew and now I’ve got you right where I want you.”

“Barry, don’t you dare!” Perry cut in, raising his fist in the air.

“You have no idea who you’re messing with...” Clark warned, pushing Dunning further against the wall.

“Boys, boys, boys,” Cat cut in. “Now surely we can come to a compromise?”

“I doubt it,” Clark’s gaze darkened as he stared Dunning down.

“Oh, I think we can come to some sort of agreement. Barry doesn’t want any trouble, do you Barry?” Cat cooed, running a finger against his cheek.

He blushed, letting out a low sigh. “No, of course not, but I don’t give information out for free.”

“Of course not.” Cat smiled. “I mean why would you?”

Clark narrowed his eyes as he watched the scene unfold. He couldn’t believe the fate of his wife was being left in the hands of this maggot. Right now, he wasn’t sure what to make of Cat’s sudden interest either.

“After all, it’s not everyone that can make a comeback the way you have,” Cat added, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Com-Comeback?” Dunning stammered, his eyes widening.

“Oh yeah, I mean if I were you, I wouldn’t be able to get out of bed in the morning let alone face the crowd of supposed fans that were looking for that tidbit of dirt that could end you.” Cat let out an exaggerated sigh and Dunning swallowed hard. “I don’t know how you do it.”

“I don’t know what you-you’re talking about,” Dunning stammered.

“No?” Cat’s eyes narrowed at him. “Dr. Virginia Friedman ring any bells?” It was clear the name resonated with Dunning as he opened his mouth to respond but nothing came out. Cat continued her monologue with a broad smile, “Dr. Friedman is a very close personal friend of mine. She doesn’t normally do shop talk about her high-profile surgeries but well in this one instance she just couldn’t help herself. I mean it was a one of a kind case. She’d never seen anything so tiny in all her...”

“Fine! You win! You win!” Dunning held the tape up, waving it in the air like a white flag in surrender.

“Thank you,” Cat cooed, leaning in to give him a peck on the cheek. “Chin up, Barry. All those wrinkles make you look ten years older.”

Clark lowered Dunning back to the ground and he scurried toward the elevator to get as far away from him as possible. He spotted Cat who wore a smug grin as she held the tape in her hand. Why had Cat helped him?

“How did you...?” He asked, looking at her in surprise.

Cat shrugged. “I have my own style of interrogation. Now, how about we call a truce? Take a look at this tape and figure out who took Lois. As much as a pain in the rear she is to me I don’t want to see anything happen to her.”

“Thank you,” Clark responded, surprised.

“And maybe you can check on your contacts to see who might have gotten Sam out of jail?” Cat prodded. “I know you think she’s all bad, but she really does have some good in her. She’s just been dealt a bad hand. I know she didn’t escape.”

Clark thought about it a moment before nodding his agreement. “Deal.”

The cigarette smoke filled the air as William McCoy let out a long breath, breathing the white smoke in their faces. Lois scrunched up her face as she smelled the nicotine in the air. “Ms. Lane, it seems we overestimated the time on that dosage. You weren’t supposed to wake up for another half hour.”

Lois took a step back. “I always was an early bird.” She looked around the dark room nervously. “Who do we owe the accommodations to? Kidnappers-R-Us?”

“Ah, there’s that famous Lois Lane spunk.” McCoy laughed good naturedly.

“You know the whole city will be looking for me,” Lois warned, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Yes, well, I doubt even Superman will be able to find you

here, Ms. Lane. Given that this entire building is lined with lead and we’re three hundred and sixty feet underground.” McCoy grinned back at her.

“What do you want?” Samantha asked.

“Me? I’m just following orders.”

“Spoken like a true lackey. Can’t you guys ever own up for your own shortcomings?” Lois snapped.

McCoy snorted, looking back at her. “You’ve been a thorn in the boss’ side for far too long. We aren’t taking our chances this time.”

“We?” Lois echoed.

He pointed to the wall behind them. “Might as well make yourself comfortable. The boss doesn’t want any mistakes with this operation.”

“McCoy,” the feminine voice came from behind him and both Lois and Samantha turned to see Mindy Church standing in the doorway. “What have you done?”

Clark sat in the conference room with Detective Wolfe, reviewing the tape. After her save with Barry Dunning, Cat had provided everything she knew about Samantha’s attack in jail and the note she’d received with the red kryptonite. Perry had thankfully been able to take possession of the dangerous meteorite and take it to STAR Labs.

A call into Bobby Bigmouth resulted in some more information on their case against Warden Baker. It seemed the prison wasn’t the only place with Intergang pulling the strings. Who was running things still seemed out of their grasp, but he had more information. Ever since Gene Newtrich’s arrest, the trade of red kryptonite between criminals within the jail cell walls kept business booming. Cat was currently going through the list of names Bobby provided to determine if any of them had been mentioned by Samantha.

The image of Lois walking toward the Daily Planet could be seen on the footage. She stopped and turned as a man came running out of the Planet. Glasses, jacket, and hat all disappeared and he looked to the camera for a split-second before turning away.

“There,” Clark pointed and the technician froze the pane.

Detective Wolfe’s brow furrowed and he stared at the screen. “Is that...?”

“Mike,” Clark finished for him.

“Find him,” Wolfe ordered, looking at Wallace. He turned back to Clark but found an empty space.

Mike looked over his shoulder as he crossed the street. He had one hour before he was supposed to meet with McCoy to exchange the tapes. He still didn’t know why the boss wanted the coverage on the Metropolis P.D. and the Daily Planet but he wasn’t going to question it. The money he was getting paid was more than enough incentive to keep the operation going.

He took a step onto the curb and felt a hard force against his shoulder, lifting him up. He let out a quick cry as he flew up into the sky. ‘*Crap.*’

“Wha...?” he gaped, looking at the very angry face of Superman staring back at him.

“Don’t even bother.” Superman grabbed him by the collar and pointed to the distance between their place in the sky and the cement below. He removed the pair of sunglasses sitting on Mike’s head and tossed them to the ground. Mike winced when he heard a hard crunch a split second later. “Where is she?”

Mike gulped, feeling the tension in the air as he stared back at the angry eyes of Superman. The grip on his collar began to waver and he gasped in shock, staring back at Superman’s stern features. There was no doubt in his mind that Superman would let him enjoy the same fate as his sunglasses if he didn’t tell him what he knew.

“Don’t make me ask again!”

“Mindy,” Lois said the name with venom as she stared at the ditzzy blonde.

“Oh, you do remember me,” Mindy gushed stepping into the room.

“I see you’ve taken over right where your husband and stepson left off. Kidnapping a hobby or are you doing it full-time now?” Lois asked, tightening her arms over her chest.

“Oh, Lois, always were quick with the comebacks, weren’t you?” Mindy’s face grew dark. “I’ve always admired that quick brain of yours.”

“You two know each other I take it?” Samantha looked at Lois in surprise.

“Oh, yes, Ms. Lane and I go way back,” Mindy cooed. “She just has this horrible knack of wriggling out of my traps.” She pulled out a pistol. “Not this time.”

“What’s the great plan, now?” Samantha asked in-between gritted teeth.

“I…”

A loud crash came from the corner of the room and Lois jumped back, yelping in surprise. The familiar red and blue uniform of her husband moved at super-speed through the room, tying up both McCoy and Mindy with a large metal pipe.

“Superman,” Lois breathed a sigh of relief as the dust settled.

“This is going to come out of your paycheck,” Mindy warned, glaring at McCoy.

“I want a deal,” McCoy snapped.

“Are you all right?” Clark looked to Lois in concern.

“Fine,” Lois nodded, keeping control of her emotions with the audience she had.

The sound of sirens could be heard in the distance. “The police are on their way.”

“I..I can’t go back there,” Samantha began to stammer. “They’ll kill me.”

Lois looked at her in concern and Mindy laughed. “You don’t know the half of it.”

Clark glanced toward Lois, meeting her gaze. The tone in Mindy’s voice sent a chill down her spine. If half of what they’d uncovered on Baker was true it wasn’t a stretch to think there were similar things occurring in the Corrections Facility.

The sound of a scuffle from above could be heard and the voice of Detective Wolfe came from the hole Clark had created above them, “Everyone okay in there?”

“Everything’s fine, detective,” Clark called back up. “We have a few new occupants for your jailcell though.”

Clark readjusted his tie as he approached Lois outside the entrance to the underground subway station. Police surrounded the area. Mindy Church was hollering insults toward Officer Wallace as he helped her into the back of his squad car. “You’ll be hearing from my lawyer…”

He let out a sigh of relief as he wrapped Lois up in his arms. “We’ve really got to quit meeting like this,” he whispered in her ear.

“I’m fine,” she reassured, placing a hand on his cheek. He stared into her eyes for a moment, the emotions from the day, threatening to overwhelm him. Without a word, she leaned in and kissed him, stroking his cheek. “Everything’s fine.” They slowly parted and she pointed to Detective Wolfe. “Rumor has it Superman had a lot of people working with him to crack this case open.”

“Yeah, he did.” Clark smiled back at her. “Even Cat helped. And thanks to the arrest of those two…” He gestured to the squad car where McCoy was being led to, “The case on Baker is closed and this time I’m the one that was right.”

“Cat may not have been behind the murders, but I still think

she’s been up to something,” Lois said with a shrug.

“I agree, but whatever was motivating her before seems to have been moved to the backburner after Samantha escaped…err got kidnapped.” Clark flashed a smile at her, reaching over to cup her cheek.

“I guess it takes a big disaster to see what’s important,” Lois remarked. “Any idea what she was doing with the Pheromones?”

“I’m not sure,” he admitted, “but the police are convinced she wasn’t helping her cousin.”

“That doesn’t excuse the fact that she drugged us.” Lois sniffed.

“No, but how exactly do you plan on confronting her on it?” Clark asked. “She admitted to having red kryptonite. She never said what she used it for but given what happened earlier I think we both know *how* it was used.”

“So we can’t call her out without giving away your secret,” Lois realized, shaking her head. “I hate this.”

“She did help us figure out who the bomber was,” Clark pointed out. “Barry Dunning had the tape of the bomber’s face on it and was trying to blackmail an interview in exchange for the tape…until Cat threatened to reveal a *very* embarrassing secret.”

Lois laughed. “I’m sure she did.” She let out a long breath after a moment. “I guess she’s not all bad.”

“Or a murderer,” Clark added.

“That we know of,” Lois pointed out.

“You can’t do it, can you?” He grinned at her.

“What?” she asked.

“Admit you were wrong.” He grinned.

“Yes, I can.”

“Then say it.” He grinned back at her.

“I…” She pursed her lips into a pout. “You’re enjoying this way too much.”

“I don’t hear the words, ‘Clark you were right’ in there at all,” he teased.

“Fine, you were right, are you happy?” Lois asked.

“Very,” he leaned in to kiss her.

<< “I’ve never been so disappointed.” >>

Clark’s words to Cat hung in the air, cutting her like a knife. Reeling from the events and the close call she’d found herself in with the police, she felt numb. After everything she’d put him through she couldn’t blame him. The problem was she could no longer justify her actions to herself, let alone anyone else.

She knew she had to do something to make it right. Despite everything, Clark Kent had always been a friend to her. He had seen her for who she was…beyond the façade of the party girl and Gossip Queen. He had been a real friend to her and she’d betrayed that for what?

Another flood of guilt washed over her. “*What have I done?*”

The elevator doors opened and Lois and Clark stepped out onto the newsroom floor. Cat sighed in relief when she saw Lois was all right. She did her best to ignore the stony expression on Lois’ face as she broke the uncomfortable silence in the air, “Lois, I see Superman found you.”

Lois glared at her for a moment. She expected Lois to try and hit her, yell at her, anything, but instead she just shook her head and walked away. Clark placed a hand on Lois’ shoulder and pointed to the conference room. “I think we need to talk.”

“I’ve got nothing to say,” Lois said defiantly.

“I’m sorry,” Cat blurted out, seeing the disdain on her colleague’s face. “I screwed up. I know I did, but I never meant for anyone to get hurt. I just…” She stopped, noticing the stares from the reporters around them. “Can we talk, please?”

“You’ve got ten minutes. I’ll be timing it,” Lois said, turning and heading toward the conference room.

“That could have gone better,” Cat muttered aloud.

Lois stared at the table in front of her, feeling her anger from the last two days threatening to overtake her. Cat closed the door behind her and took a seat across from Lois and Clark. There was a silent lull between the three of them until Clark finally spoke up, "I just have one question, why?"

Cat crossed her arms, staring back at them. "I was trying to prove something...that I've come to realize doesn't matter at all. I'm sorry."

Lois gaped, uncertain what to make of Cat's admission. "Excuse me?"

At the same time Clark let out a, "What?"

"Prove what?" Lois asked in disbelief. "What could possibly be so important to prove that you would hurt everyone around you and..." Lois clamped her mouth closed, unwilling to divulge what Cat had done.

"Why?" Clark asked, shaking his head. "What could you possibly have to gain?"

"Well like I said I didn't mean for anyone else to get hurt but I needed to prove I was right." Cat sniffed.

"I..."

"Do you realize how much damage you could have done? You could have gone to jail, Cat!" Lois threw her arms up in the air. "I mean, what possessed you to do the things you..."

Cat shook her head, her expression full of remorse. "I know. I know. Believe me I know. I'm sorry. I really am."

"What were you trying to prove?" Clark asked.

"It doesn't matter," Cat said, standing to her feet. "Look, I've done a lot of thinking. Nothing but thinking today, actually. I can't take back what I've done but I can try and earn your trust back and make things right."

"She did help track down the fallout shelter Mindy and McCoy had you in," Clark reminded her, turning to Lois.

Lois still wasn't ready to completely forgive Cat, but she saw the genuine remorse in her eyes. "I still don't trust you."

"I know," Cat said, standing to her feet. "I think maybe a trip back to California is in order. I need to sort some things out and some distance might do us all some good."

"California?" Lois echoed in surprise. "I don't get it. You're just going to run away again?"

"I'm not running away," Cat corrected. "Perry's agreed to let me telecommute for a few months until I get everything in order. I have a buyer interested in Cat's Clothing Line and I need to give closing that deal all the attention it deserves." She let out a sigh and turned to them before leaving. "I really am sorry."

With that Cat left, leaving Lois and Clark reeling from the news. "What do you think that was all about?" Lois finally asked.

"I don't know." Clark shook his head. "But does it really matter?"

"I guess not." Lois glanced toward the door and spotted Cat by the elevator with Samantha. "What's she doing here?"

"Detective Wolfe and Superman decided it might do them both some good to have a talk before he takes her back to jail," Clark explained.

"You're such a softie," Lois said with a shake of her head. She leaned in to kiss him on the cheek.

"Guilty as charged." He leaned in to kiss her.

Cat breathed a sigh of relief when she saw Samantha being escorted inside the newsroom walls. She looked to Detective Wolfe who stood behind Samantha with a reserved expression. "Sam! I'm so glad you're okay."

"Me too," Samantha cheered with a shrug.

"What happened?" Cat asked.

"I got kidnapped," Samantha explained.

"I knew you wouldn't do something like that." Cat tapped her hand on Samantha's shoulder.

"They're taking me back." Samantha let out a sob, shaking her

head. "I thought you were going to fix this. I thought you were going to make this all better. I told you what happened and..."

"And I told you you can't expect to get out of this, Sam." Cat reminded her. "You did something awful, Sam. Really, really awful. You actually convinced me that helping you would change things, but it doesn't. It doesn't change anything. You helped conspire to kill someone, Sam. Do you get that?"

"But Lois Lane..."

"Can be a royal pain in the ass. Believe me I know," Cat rolled her eyes, "but at the end of the day she didn't deserve what you put her through."

"I'm telling you, I saw..."

"I don't care what you saw, Sam. You committed a crime. A serious crime that could have had devastating effects. Don't you get that? Aren't you sorry at all?" Cat narrowed her eyes at her cousin, seeing the look of doubt on her face. "I've spent the last few days doing a lot of things I never would have dreamed I would have done...trying to help you. Trying to prove something that doesn't even matter."

"So, you do believe me?" Samantha countered.

"No," Cat lied, shaking her head. "I think you need to do some serious thinking, Sam, and figure out your priorities before you go to trial. You have an opportunity to do the right thing. I think you should take it and drop this ridiculous vendetta against Lois Lane. At the end of the day I'd rather have her in my corner than anyone."

"So, you're taking her side?" Samantha sniffed. "Of course you are."

"This is about something bigger than sides, Sam. I don't want to lose my cousin. I want you to have a life." Cat let out a sigh, running a hand against her forehead.

Detective Wolfe took that opportunity to speak up, "Superman offered to talk to the DA and help get her get a lighter sentence."

Cat looked down with a shake of her head. "Given everything you did I'd say that's very generous. It's up to you to take it though."

One Week Later...

Lois Lane awoke in the middle of the night, hearing the sound of her husband sleeping next to her. She smiled to herself, turning on her side to face his sleeping figure. It had been a hectic week. She climbed out of bed, wrapping her robe around her and heading downstairs.

She made her way to the kitchen to fix a cup of tea to help lull her back to sleep. Two a.m. was not a time to be waking up when so much had to be done today. The president was coming to Metropolis this afternoon for his re-election campaign. Who knew what to expect from that?

Jerry had been able to provide testimony against both William McCoy and Agent Rollins. McCoy had sung like a canary and given the police everything they needed to connect Mindy to Intergang, something Lois had been all too eager to gloat about given how many times everyone had dismissed the accusation again and again. Mike had been charged with attempted arson and kidnapping, and Warden Baker was now enduring the cruel treatment he'd bestowed on his inmates. Mindy had, of course, pointed the finger at Bill Church Jr. Evidence had been found linking Church to Randy Goode's murder, the smuggling of drugs, organized riots and most likely more they had yet to uncover. It had come out in Jimmy's research that the name Bruno Mannheim was used to cover a hit by Intergang. The guards involved had been charged and a new warden had been hired to clean up the corruption. With the long line of suspects turning on one another Inspector Henderson said it would be the biggest case since Lex Luthor's arrest in 1994.

Of course, every bit of it would be covered by the Daily Planet, as it should be. Lois smiled recalling the look on Perry's

face when he saw their expose on the prison corruption that had been uncovered. It was a bigger case than she'd ever imagined.

It felt good to be back at it. After Cat's threat on Barry Dunning, miraculously all the paparazzi that had been hounding them magically disappeared. If Cat's threat proved anything, it was to never underestimate the gossip queen.

She felt a grin spread across her face as she moved toward the desk where the forgotten paperwork from their to-do list sat unattended. She felt a yawn threaten to overtake her just staring at it. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to work on filling the forms out. After all, what better way to get to sleep than to start filling out tedious paperwork, right?

THE END