Summary

Kal-El is sent to Earth as a rite of passage and meets Lois Lane.

Notes

art by ctbn60

Kal is very much a 'fish out of water'. The question has been asked: why would Jor-El send Kal to a strange planet with so little information? The answer is he wouldn't, except his knowledge is out of date, for one, and two, Kal is supposed to have spent a couple of days learning a few things with the A.I. which would have given him access to more up-to-date information, but he is too impatient and gets ambushed by Lois. This is mentioned in the third chapter.
“Kal-El, my son, this is what every young Kryptonian must do and it is a long tradition which has been observed by our council for a millennia.”

Kal frowned at his father, running a hand through his thick, dark locks.

“But it’s Earth, Father. They’re primitive.”

“And it would do you much good to learn tolerance of other cultures, my son. Do not presume that I have not seen the way you treat those of mixed race.”

“I’m sorry, Father, I know you ...”

“Kal-El, I tell you this for your own good,” Jor-El said, placing gentle hands on his son’s shoulders. “The only way for Krypton to move forward is to learn from the mistakes of our past. We lost many Kandorians in the war with Black Zero; your own cousin’s mother was among them.”

Kal-El nodded. The war had begun almost fifty years earlier when a group of Kryptonians decided to break off from the authority of the council, saying they believed there should only be purity in their blood. Krypton was made up of several different races and the separatists believed those races should be segregated. Kal had learned through his father’s teachings that there were similar battles on Earth.

Still, he was reluctant to leave Krypton knowing there were still rumblings, despite the civil war having been over since just before he was born.

“You must go to the portal, Kal-El.”

“How long must I stay on Earth?”

“Long enough for you to learn about their culture first-hand. At least one Earth year.”
It was longer than his father’s. Jor-El had spent about a month on the planet long before he had met Lara Lor-Van, Kal’s mother. Tragedy had struck after he had fallen for a young Earth woman.

“Now, remember, Kal-El,” his father said as Kal went to step into the portal. “You will be different from them. You will have powers from their yellow sun and you will be stronger than the humans. I have taught you all I can how to control your powers but you must be careful not to reveal them to anyone.”

“I understand Father.”

“What message do you leave for your mother?”

“Please tell her I love her and I will see her in one Earth year.”

The sun was bright as he emerged from the dark cave, blinking. Kal looked around in wonder at the green pasture. His father had told him of the colours but he had never quite believed it.

He left the clearing and wandered through the forest, trying to get his bearings. He found his way out onto the road, wondering which way he should head.

The yellow sun was high in the sky and suffused him with energy. His entire body just seemed to vibrate with power. Jor-El had created simulations to help him learn to adjust but the sensation wasn’t quite the same as the simulation and it felt a little overwhelming at first.

A loud sound had him looking up, startled.

“Hey, get out of the road, idiot!”

Kal-El searched his memory, trying to remember what Jor-El had told him about Earth’s modes of transportation. Clearly the machine which had nearly hit him was some kind of vehicle. It was made of metal, the surface gleaming from the sunlight above. The lines were rounded and smooth. Clear panels allowed the occupant to see out from all sides of the vehicle.

The female was leaning out one side of the vehicle, glaring at him. It rather reminded him of his mother’s expression when he had done something he shouldn’t.

The female got out of the vehicle and stood beside it, arms folded as she continued to glare at him angrily. Kal-El took this as an opportunity to study her.

She was rather lovely, with a slender figure, slim waist and high, rounded breasts. Her face was almost symmetrical with high cheekbones, framed by long, curly hair. The only thing with that was the hair seemed to be the wrong colour for her fair skin. It was too light. He would have rather liked it darker.

Indeed, if this was an example of the females who populated this part of the planet, he could understand why his father still had fond memories of his own visit.

“Are you checking me out?”

Kal-El frowned. What did that mean? He opened his mouth to speak, trying to remember his lessons in the Earth language his father had called English.

“I am sorry,” he said. “I am ...” What was the word? “Just.”

From the female’s frown, it clearly wasn’t the right word.
“Just? Just what?”

“Just.” He felt like a ... well, he didn’t quite know the Earth word for it, and the Kryptonian just wouldn’t make sense at all. Besides, he was supposed to be trying to learn to think in English instead of his native language.

“I think the word you’re looking for is lost,” the female said, her features lighting up as she smiled. She had a lovely smile, he thought. “You’re not from around here, are you?”

“Uh ...”

“It’s all right,” she said. “We don’t get many foreigners. Not in these backwoods anyway. Where are you headed?”

“Kent,” was all he managed, taken aback by the sudden friendliness and the beauty of that smile.

“Is that a place or a name?”

“Um, Hiram Kent,” he said, remembering Jor-El had told him of the couple at the farm.

“Hop in,” she said. “I don’t know where Hiram Kent is, but I can at least help you find out.”

He followed her to the vehicle, getting in the other side and sitting down. His long legs were squashed in the narrow gap. The female turned and grinned at him.

“You might want to adjust the seat. My cousin usually sits there and she’s kinda, well, she’s not short, but she’s not tall either. Here,” she said.

He leaned back in the seat, trying to keep his hands to himself as she tilted her body, laying one hand on his lap before reaching under the seat between his legs. His body reacted to her scent and he breathed it in, feeling an almost dizzying sensation wash over him. His eyes began to feel hot and he squeezed them shut. At the same time, he felt an uncomfortable tightness in his pants.

This was unexpected.

It was over within a few seconds as the female shoved the seat back, giving his legs more room. She didn’t seem to notice anything amiss as she sat upright.

Then again, maybe she had, he thought as she asked:

“Are you all right?”

“The heat,” he said, searching for an excuse that would sound plausible.

“Yeah, I know. I got exiled to this charming cow town by my dad and it’s been the hottest summer on record.”

“Exiled?”

“Yeah, dumped in the middle of Bumfuck Kansas,” she proclaimed.

Kal frowned at her, not knowing what to make of her terminology. His father had tutored him in the language but as far as he knew, the term she had used was a kind of vernacular for some kind of sex.

“Why would he do that?” Kal asked haltingly.
She shrugged. “He’s a general. He has three thousand guys to babysit. He doesn’t need me around, getting in his way.”

Kal was struck by the bitterness in her tone, even though she was clearly trying to keep it light.

“But, hey, enough about me. Where are you from anyway?”

He knew he shouldn’t tell her he was from the stars, but he had no idea what to say.

“I bet you’re from Russia. Your accent’s kind of European. I mean, not totally obvious or anything, it’s just I spent a couple of years in Europe when my dad ... oh but anyway ...”

He smiled as she chattered on.

“You talk a lot,” he commented.

“Yeah, well, I’ve never been comfortable with uncomfortable silences, I guess. I mean, not that you make me uncomfortable. You just ... well, I guess it’s because you don’t really know the language that well, although you’re doing okay so far, aside from the little slip back there ...”

There she went again, chattering away. Kal didn’t really mind since it kept him company, in a way. He watched through the glass shield as their journey continued, gazing with interest as the dusty roads gave way to paved streets and what appeared to be single storey dwellings.

Earth people certainly lived differently. All Kal had ever known on Krypton was the crystal domes. He had never ventured beyond the city to the land beyond, since it was poisoned. At least, according to his uncle Zor-El.

The vehicle turned down another street and Kal saw it was a commercial area of some kind. There were people walking along the paved area, holding something in their hands. He frowned, wondering what it was. It seemed to be a food of some kind as they bent their heads for a few seconds, then lifted them again to show a white substance on their mouths.

“Ice cream!” the female said. The vehicle jolted and came to a sudden stop. He was flung forward and shot out a hand to steady himself, unconsciously doing the same to the female. The vehicle moved again, only it seemed to go in the opposite direction from where they had been travelling.

They came once again to a shuddering halt. Kal heard a crunch and looked around. His companion just grinned and shrugged at him, then got out, moving behind the vehicle. Kal followed her, frowning as she kicked the metal of the vehicle behind.

“Just mashed the bumper,” she said. “I’ll leave a note. My insurance will cover it.”

Kal had no idea what a ‘bumper’ was or what she meant by insurance, but decided he would be better to just go along with it.

She looked at him.

“Funny, I just gave you a ride and I don’t even know your name.”

“Kal,” he said.

“Kal what?”

“Kal-El.”
“Funny name,” she replied. “Well, mine’s Lois. Lane. You can call me Lois.”

“Lo-is,” he said slowly, trying it out. It felt nice.

“So, come on, Kal,” she said, her long hair flying behind her as she turned and stepped onto a raised area where other people were walking. She dodged one young couple who were absorbed in eating their treat.

He followed her inside the building, glancing around. There were tables scattered around the room and a long box-like structure which was topped by a glass shield. She was gazing through the shield.

“Mm, I think I’ll have a sundae,” she said.

Sundae? he thought. Wasn’t that supposed to be what they called a day?

“What’s a sundae?” he asked.

“Oh, I guess you’d call them something else where you come from.” She smiled at the human standing behind the box thing. “My friend is new around here,” she explained. “He’s a transfer student from Russia.”

Kal-El admired the girl’s quick wit as she came up with a story to explain him. She stretched, standing on her toes as she gestured with her hands, telling the man what she wanted. He continued to look her up and down. She had a nice, slim posterior encased in trousers made of a stiff fabric, similar to what he was wearing. The back area was pulled taut over her posterior, emphasising round cheeks.

He blinked rapidly as his eyes grew hot once more and his pants tightened again. He took a slow, calming breath and controlled it. Lois turned and handed him a small cup. It felt waxy on the surface.

“Let’s get a table,” she said.

He followed her as she sat down in the corner on a padded seat. The material covering the seat appeared to be similar to what had been in the interior of her vehicle. It was smooth and soft to the touch.

Lois began eating her sundae with a spoon. Kal-El looked at his own. It was filled with the same white substance he’d seen the other humans eating, with some kind of dark, sticky liquid on top, dotted with tiny, hard chips of something else he couldn’t identify.

“Eat up,” Lois said. “You’ll like it. Trust me.”

He took the spoon and dug it into the substance, taking a little of the dark liquid and the chips with it, then lifted the spoon to his mouth, tasting it. It was like nothing he had ever tasted before. It was sweet, but not too sweet, the white cold mixed with the warmer liquid. The chips added a texture to the concoction.

He closed his eyes in pleasure.

“Good huh?” Lois said.

Kal-El opened his mouth to reply but another voice broke in.

“Lois, hey! Who’s the cutie?”

He looked at the owner of the voice. She was petite, with short, light hair and a toothy grin.
“Hey Chlo. This is Kal. He’s a transfer student from Russia. Kal, this is my cousin.”

“Transfer student, huh? I guess that means you’ll be going to Smallville High this year?”

He bit his lip. His father had told him the best way to learn about the humans was to attend some kind of educational institution. He had no idea exactly how he was supposed to do that, but he would figure something out.

Chloe seemed to be waiting for his reply, so he just nodded dumbly and went back to eating his sundae. Another girl joined her. She was pretty, with long, dark hair, olive skin and brown eyes. Still, she wasn’t as pretty as Lois by a long shot, he thought.

“This is Lana,” Chloe said. “This is Kal,” she added, waving her hand in his direction. “Uh, so where are you staying?”

“Uh, my father told me to … uh, I mean, I came to see Kent. Hiram Kent.”

Lana frowned. “Hiram Kent’s been dead for years. You wouldn’t be meaning his son, Jonathan, would you?”

Kal-El frowned, then nodded.

“Jonathan and his wife Martha live out on Hickory Lane,” Lana explained to Lois. She looked curiously at Kal-El. “Did your dad know Hiram or something?”

He nodded again, feeling like an idiot. It had been more than forty Earth years since his father’s visit. A lot would have changed since then.

“I live with my aunt Nell about a mile from the Kents,” Lana told him. “They never said anything to Nell about having an exchange student.”

Lois shrugged. “They probably didn’t want everyone knowing their business. They’re very private, aren’t they, Kal?”

He looked at her gratefully. She was covering for him again. He had no idea why she would do that, but he was thankful nonetheless.

He was relieved when Lois finished her sundae and announced they needed to get going. He followed her back out to her vehicle and waited while she pulled a small device out of her pocket.

“Let’s see if I can figure this thing out,” she said. She looked at him and grinned sheepishly. “I just got it. It’s got a map and everything. See?”

He glanced at the screen which had some kind of graphic on it. Lois frowned at it.

“Oh, Lane, not Road. There it is. Okeydokey. Let’s go.”

He sat back as she pulled out. He heard beeping sounds and realised she must have cut someone off. She must have caught his expression as she looked even more sheepish.

“My dad can’t understand how I got my licence sometimes,” she told him. “I mean, not that I’m a bad driver or anything. I do okay. I mean, sure, I had this little accident a while ago. Totally not my fault though.”

There was silence for a little while. He looked out at the passing scenery. Most of the land looked
brown. His father had told him that most of Earth’s countryside was green, although there were some areas, like the cities, that had fewer greener zones and some place called the Arctic which was white and cold. Jor-El had taught him a little about precipitation and what it could do to the land if there was not enough of it and he realised this was what his father meant.

“So, how do you know Hiram?” Lois asked.

He glanced at her and realised he had been lost in thought.

“My father knew him,” he said. “Many Ea … many years ago.”

“So I guess he didn’t know Hiram died.”

Kal-El adopted the same gesture she’d used earlier, raising his shoulders briefly.

“I guess not,” he said.

She frowned. “I hope it was okay, telling my cousin that you were an exchange student. I mean, my cousin wants to be a reporter at the Daily Planet so she’s kinda nosy.”

“Daily Planet?”

“That’s our newspaper. It’s like the biggest one in the state.”

He frowned, then recalled something his father had said about the various news media. He had seen some broadcasts of what they called television and his father had shown him a large page which had writing on it called a news-paper.

There was so much to learn, he thought.

The paved road gave way to what he saw was dirt with loose stones. Lois drove a little too fast and he could feel the vehicle sliding on the surface. Clearly her vehicle wasn’t made for this kind of surface; or at least it wasn’t made to go fast on it.

“You should slow down,” he advised.

“You telling me how to drive?” she asked, but slowed down a little.

He watched as a yellow construction came into sight. There was a small area where he could see colourful flora growing. He had studied a little botany back on Krypton and the flora looked healthy and well-cared for.

A human with light-coloured hair emerged from another structure, taking a fabric covering off his hands. He frowned at the approaching vehicle. Lois came to a hurried stop a short distance away and got out.

“Mr Kent?”

Kal-El got out the other side as Lois and the man began talking. His brow creased in a puzzled frown as he looked at Kal-El, then shook his head.

A woman with red hair came out of the yellow building, stepping down and approaching them.

“Jonathan?” she said.

“Martha, these kids, uh …”
“Like I was saying to Mr Kent here, my friend’s dad knew his.”

The fair-haired man shook his head.

“I’m sorry. My dad’s been dead for about twenty years.”

“We can’t just turn them away, Jonathan,” Martha said. “It’s very hot out here. Why don’t you two come in for some lemonade.”

Lois beamed.

“Thank you, Mrs Kent. We’d love that, wouldn’t we Kal?”

He nodded, not sure what ‘lemonade’ was, but if Lois seemed to like it, then he supposed he would too. He followed them inside. The interior of the building looked welcoming.

Jonathan washed his hands and came to join them as they sat down at the table.

“Sorry, I don’t even know your name,” he said.

“Kal-El,” Kal replied automatically.

“That’s an unusual name,” Martha told him.

He looked her over. She was older than Lois, but a very beautiful woman. She reminded him a little of his mother.

“It’s Russian,” Lois answered for him before he could respond.

“So what are you doing so far away from home?”

“My father thought I should learn other cultures,” he said.

“Well, it’s always good to learn a little about how other people live,” Martha said, pouring a liquid into cylinders which were open at the top. “Here you go,” she added, placing one of the cylinders in front of him.

“How did your father know mine?” Jonathan asked, sounding a little suspicious.

“He said your father helped him out of …” What was it he’d said. “Um, a tight spot?”

Martha smiled at him.

“Your English is very good,” she said.

He smiled back at her and picked up the cylinder, tasting the liquid. Like the sundae, it was cool and sweet, but not too sweet.

“So how long are you here for?” Jonathan asked.

“Uh, a year.”

“Where are you staying?” Martha enquired.

“I have no … I’m not sure,” he finished.

“Well, why don’t you stay here? We have plenty of room.”
“Martha, I’m sure he has friends he could stay with.”

“Hush, Jonathan. The boy’s far away from home.”

The couple moved away from the table and began to talk. Kal-El noticed a few times the man sent him a few suspicious looks.

Lois sipped her concoction.

“I have a room at the base,” she said. “You could always stay there. I mean, my father’s usually away on manoeuvres so what he doesn’t know …”

“I would not want to intrude,” he said.

“Better than staying with strangers,” she told him with a shrug, then sighed. “I guess my dad wouldn’t like it anyway. He’s kind of protective.”

“I would not want to anger your father,” he said.

Jor-El had not exactly told him what to do once he arrived. He had a little money which Jor-El had told him was in a bank. He’d said it was in an account he’d opened back in 1961 when he’d come to Earth. All he had to do was go to the bank and tell them the money was his.

There had been no plan beyond that. He’d thought if he’d gone to see Hiram that the man could have helped him find somewhere to stay. Of course, since Hiram was no longer around, he couldn’t possibly ask the same of his son.

He hadn’t counted on Martha’s persuasiveness.

“It’s settled,” she said, smiling at him. “We can’t leave a boy your age to fend for yourself when you don’t know the customs. We have a spare room upstairs.”

“What about your children?” he asked.

A sad look crossed the woman’s face.

“I was unable to have children,” she said.

He bit his lip, feeling he’d said the wrong thing.

“I’m sorry,” he said sympathetically.

“Oh no, sweetie. You didn’t know. It’s okay.”

The matter was clearly settled. Kal-El listened as the couple told him their expectations. He could earn his keep during his stay by helping out on the farm. The couple ran a dairy farm and grew organic vegetables. Since Kal-El had been studying plants on Krypton, the idea of helping them grow their own wasn’t too daunting.

Lois told them she needed to get back to base, but Martha insisted she stay for dinner. Kal-El was reluctant for her to leave, since she was the first friend he’d made, and he was happy she agreed to stay at least that long.

Dinner was something Martha called pot roast. When she served it, he stared at it in fascination. It was a slab of cooked flesh from an animal.
“Don’t they have pot roast in Russia?” Lois asked, grinning at him.

“No,” he said. Most of their food was dehydrated supplements since they could no longer grow anything outside the crystal cities and they certainly never ate animal flesh.

He studied them as they each took helpings of the dishes. While he didn’t recognise them, he could see that some of the food was vegetation. He copied the others, taking his own small helpings. His stomach rumbled as the delicious aroma hit his senses.

Still copying them, he picked up the small eating implements in his hands and took his first bite of the pot roast. The flavour burst on his tongue. It was moist, juicy and completely delicious. Eager to try more of these new sensations, Kal-El tasted the vegetables. He found them to be a mixture of sweet and savoury and just as wonderful as the roast.

“Well, looks like the boy’s hungry at least,” Jonathan said, sounding amused.

Kal-El stared down at the dish, feeling warmth suffuse his face. He had eaten everything on it, barely remembering having done so. Yet he was still hungry.

“Wow!” Lois exclaimed. “You just inhaled that.”

“Please, help yourself to more,” Martha said, patting his hand. “But save room. There’s apple pie for dessert.”

His stomach rumbled again and he carefully helped himself to more. Lois watched him in amusement, but made no further comment.

The promised apple pie was just as delicious as the rest of dinner. Kal-El’s stomach made no further rumblings as he finished.

“Would you like to wash the dishes?” Martha asked.

Not understanding what she meant, he followed her as she picked up the implements and the empty dishes and took them into another part of the room, placing them on top of what she called a counter. He examined the counter, seeing there was a small receptacle with strangely shaped knobs.

“Bet you’ve never washed dishes before either,” Lois said behind him.

He turned and looked at her, not wanting to admit that all this was very strange to him.

“Let me guess. You grew up in a rich household where you had servants to do everything for you.”

“No,” he said, not knowing how to explain his own world. They didn’t wash dishes since there were no dishes to wash. Everything was disposed of after use.

Lois touched the knobs and water ran from the metal tube into the receptacle. He watched as she placed the dishes inside, then took an implement and used it to scrape the remains of dinner from the dishes.

“I’ll wash, you dry,” she said, handing him a cloth.

He watched as she washed one of the dishes, then handed it to him, still wet. He realised he was meant to dry it with the cloth and he did so, putting the dish down on the counter.

Together, they cleaned the room, which Lois called a kitchen, and he followed her outside.
“I should get back to base,” she said.

“Will I see you tomorrow?” he asked.

“Sure,” she smiled. “I’m guessing Mr Kent will have a few chores for you to do, but I can come by about ten or so and I can show you around town.”

“I would like that,” he said.

Lois moved as if to touch him and he looked at her, not knowing what to do. She frowned, then moved away.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she said. She looked up and nodded at Jonathan. “Bye Mr Kent. Thanks for the dinner. If it’s okay, I’m gonna take Kal around town tomorrow.”

“Of course, Lois,” Martha said, standing behind Jonathan.

Jonathan looked at Kal.

“So where did you grow up, Kal?”

“Uh, the city,” he said, using the first phrase he thought was a close match to his upbringing on Krypton.

“Then I’m guessing you’ve never been on a farm before. Come on. You can come and help me with the evening chores.”

Kal-El was introduced to an array of strange customs as he helped Jonathan make sure the animals were secure for the night. He stared in wonder at what the older man called cows, stepping back when one of the animals moved toward him, only to step in something called a cow pat. Whatever it was, it smelled very bad and unpleasant looking on his shoes. Jonathan just laughed.

“You have to learn to watch where you step around here,” he said. “Especially if you’re going to be staying a while.”

The older man clapped him on the shoulder.

“When I was a kid I used to have to help my dad with the milking. On cold mornings, I’d run out into that pasture in my bare feet and stick them in the cow pats while they were still steaming. My mom told me once I tripped and fell face first in one. She claimed that was how I got so tall.”

Kal-El grinned at the older man. Despite his initial reserve, he liked the other man.
Tour

Chapter Summary

Lois decides to give Kal a tour of Smallville, with a side trip to Walmart, but suspicion is already starting to grow.

Lois sighed as she drove past the guarded entry to Fort Ryan and parked outside the small house where she lived with her father. Just as she stopped the car and started for the house her phone rang.

“So Lois, what’s with you and the hottie?”

“Chloe,” she said with a smile. “Nothing. I just gave him a ride into town. He was lost.”

“Uh-huh, and the fact that he was hot had nothing to do with it.”

Lois felt her cheeks warm. Her cousin had hit a little too close to the mark. She’d at first been irritated when she’d almost run him over on the highway, but when she’d got a good look at him, she’d felt an instant attraction.

Especially with those intense green eyes and that dark hair, not to mention the rugged good looks. What she wouldn’t give to be able to run her hands over his torso, feel the definition in his muscles …

“Hello? Earth to Lois?”

“Sorry Chlo, I was, um …”

“Fantasising?” her cousin laughed. “So what’s the deal with him?”

“Like I said. He’s an exchange student.”

“From Russia? C’mon, Lois, you can do better than that. For one thing, he speaks almost perfect English.”

“How would you know?” she said. “He barely said two words to you. Besides, he might have had an English tutor.”

Chloe snorted. Lois continued into the house and slammed the door behind her.

As much as she wanted to believe it herself, Lois knew it had been a bit of a stretch. She had no idea where Kal-El had come from, but he was definitely not Russian. He seemed confused by everything around him, from ice-cream, which she was sure was available in Russia, to the food they’d eaten at dinner.

She’d watched him carefully as he was tasting the food and she’d caught the look on his face, as if he was a little afraid to try it in case it was bad and had been genuinely surprised that he liked it.

Kal-El was an odd name too, she thought. It didn’t sound like a first name and a last name; instead it sounded like one of those double-jointed names. She had never heard of a culture which did the
same thing.

Still, she wasn’t about to question him. He seemed to be far away from home, wherever that was, and had no idea what he was in for. Smallville was a small town and with it came small-town attitudes. They didn’t really like outsiders here.

She went to her bedroom to change her clothes, still lost in thought.

The Kents seemed like a nice enough couple. She was sure that Kal would be fine with them. Martha certainly seemed to have taken a liking to him straight away, while Jonathan had warmed up to him after a while.

“Lois?”

She frowned, then quickly put on a clean blouse, going out to see what her father wanted.

“Daddy. I thought you were out on manoeuvres?”

“They changed the date for the exercise. What have you been up to?”

“Oh, nothing. I just went into town, hung out, the usual.”

“Do you need money for school?”

She frowned at him. “No, I’ve got my own.” She sighed. “I still don’t see why I can’t go to Met U.”

“Lois, you know why. You didn’t have enough credits to graduate.”

“Couldn’t the dean just overlook that?” she asked. “I don’t want to be stuck going to Smallville High.”

He glowered at her. “Lois, you’re whining. School starts day after tomorrow. I expect you to go to Smallville High and I expect to get a perfect attendance record. Is that clear?”

She bit her lip and glared mutinously at her father. She was eighteen years old, damn it!

“Don’t give me that look, Lois. If you had attended all your classes last year, we wouldn’t be having this discussion. So you will go to Smallville High, get all your credits and you can start at Met U next year.”

She wanted to stamp her foot but knew that would look childish. She went to her bedroom and plopped down on the bed, stretching out. She grabbed her laptop from the floor and opened it up, accessing her emails.

She supposed there was one advantage. She would get to see more of Kal.

Lois rested her chin on her hands, thinking about the gorgeous young man. He was like a Greek god, or at least, what she pictured a Greek god would look like.

She sighed, picturing him without clothes, muscles bulging.

She wasn’t usually given to flights of fantasy about guys. The last guy she’d dated had joined the Green Berets a few years earlier. Her father hadn’t approved of the relationship, since Wes had been about three years older than her. As much as she had liked Wes, he had nothing on Kal.

She went to bed that night dreaming of the handsome visitor and woke up from a dream of being in
his strong arms to find herself clutching her pillow.

“Great,” she muttered. She’d known him less than a day and she was already obsessing.

She drove out to the Kent Farm around ten to find him hard at work in the barn, cleaning out the hayloft. He wasn’t wearing a shirt. Lois’ mouth watered as she stared at his back, watching the way his muscles rippled with his movements. She let out an involuntary whimper.

He clearly heard her as he straightened up and looked around.

“Lois,” he said, smiling.

“Hi. You look hard at work.”

“Just finishing up,” he said, then frowned. “Was that correct?”

“Yeah, it is,” she told him, moving forward to pluck a bit of hay from where it had fallen on his jeans. “Hay,” she said, holding it up.

“Oh. Well, I’ll just be a few more … uh, minutes, then I’m all yours.”

“Oh yeah, you are,” she sighed softly, then looked up at him as he frowned. “I mean, you should probably take a shower first. You’ve been working hard.”

The funny thing was, he wasn’t even sweating. Yet she could feel the perspiration on her back, the breeze cooling as it wafted through her damp hair.

He smiled, showing pointed incisors, and nodded.

“I should,” he said.

She followed him into the house and paced nervously across the kitchen floor as she waited. She heard the water running. He’d obviously worked out how to use the shower.

“Lois, good morning.”

She turned and looked at Martha, who was taking off a sunhat.

“I’ve just been working in the garden,” the redhead told her.

“Oh. Well, I’m waiting for Kal. He’s in the shower.”

“Where are you planning on going?”

“M…maybe to the lake. I don’t know a lot of the town. I mean, I know a little bit since I’ve been here about a month and well, my cousin lives here. I just thought it would be nice for Kal to have some company while he finds his way around.” She was babbling. She hated it when she babbled.

Martha nodded. “Of course.”

Lois bit her lip. “So, um, this is a farm, right? Is it just you and Jonathan?”

“Oh, well, we have a couple of farmhands who work part-time. Most of the others decided to take up full-time work at the plant.”

“The plant?”
“The Luthorcorp fertiliser plant.”

“Oh, yeah.”

She’d heard enough from Chloe to know that Lionel Luthor was considered to be the devil incarnate although his son seemed to be a little better. Lex had been installed as manager of the plant three years earlier. He’d come to Smallville with a party-boy reputation. Chloe had tried to find out what had happened to make Lionel send his son to the town, but court records had been sealed and it appeared there had been some kind of cover-up.

All reports said that Lex was behaving himself. He seemed to have settled down and the plant, which had been running in the red a few years ago, was now firmly in the black and making fairly decent profits. It seemed the town, despite its hatred for all things Luthor, had been good for the Luthor scion.

Kal-El came downstairs, dressed in the same clothes he’d worn the day before. Lois bit her lip. It would be rude to ask him if he had other clothes, but she couldn’t curb her curiosity. He’d had no belongings with him when she’d almost literally run into him on the highway yesterday.

She hadn’t told her father about the young man, knowing he wouldn’t exactly approve. Sam Lane had drummed it into her from an early age that she should never trust strangers; never get into a car with a strange man. She’d broken both of those rules when she’d let Kal-El in the car with her but there was just something about him.

“Ready to go?” she said.

He nodded and smiled. Lois said goodbye to Martha and took his hand, leading him out to the car. As she drove away from the farm, she looked at him.

“Uh, so, I, um …”

“Are you all right, Lois?” he asked.

“I’m fine. I’m just curious though. Where are your things?”

“Things?” he said, looking at her curiously, as if he didn’t quite understand what she meant.

“Yeah, you know. Clothes and stuff. I mean, didn’t you have like a suitcase?”

He shook his head.

“No.”

“Well, you have to have different clothes. You can’t wear the same ones every day.”

He looked her over, clearly realising she’d changed her clothes from the day before.

“Oh. What would you suggest?”

“Well, do you have money?”

“Money? Oh, yes, my father has an account at the bank.”

Lois frowned. That seemed a little weird, but she went with it.

“So, did he tell you how to get the money?”
“Um, all he told me was to go to the bank and tell them.”

“Uh, I don’t know how it works where you come from, but these days banks need a little more than your word.”

“Like what?”

“Identification. You know, like a card with your name on it.”

He seemed to be pondering that. It seemed very strange to her that a guy from even Eastern Europe would know so little about banks and how they worked. Even if his dad had been in the US forty years ago, he should know that things were different now. Things like security had drastically changed since the terror attacks three years ago.

Where was he really from, she wondered.

“Okay, well, I have my own credit card, so how about I take you shopping for some clothes. You’ll need them for school anyway. I mean, if you’re going to go to Smallville High.”

He nodded, his brow creased in a little frown. He didn’t seem to understand much of what she was telling him, which only increased her worries. Just who was he, she thought.

She checked the map on her phone. It wasn’t all that sophisticated, but it was better than nothing. There was a Walmart in Granville and she figured that would be the best place to go.

The rest of the drive was completed in silence.

Kal-El looked confused when she drove into the parking lot of the huge Walmart.

“What is this place?” he asked.

“It’s Walmart. It’s kind of like a department store. We can get you some clothes here.”

“Oh.”

Lois parked the car and got out, motioning for him to follow her. Kal-El did so, looking curiously around at the cars in the lot. Lois reached the doors and looked around. He was too busy gazing at the parking lot. She grabbed his arm.

“Come on.”

The automatic doors slid open and he paused, staring up at them in fascination, canting his head.

“Kal-El,” she hissed.

He still continued to stare as the doors opened and closed. Lois huffed impatiently and grabbed his arm, pulling him inside. She kept her hand on his arm, taking a cart, before leading him down the aisles to the men’s section.

“Now, don’t go anywhere,” she told him. “You stay with me. Understood?”

He made a face at her, clearly not liking her bossiness. Well, too bad, she thought. There was no way she was going to let him out of her sight and risk him getting lost.

She searched through the clothing, holding up various shirts to his body and looking at them with a critical eye. Kal-El pulled out a t-shirt in blue.
“I like this,” he said.

She firmly took it away from him.

“No.”

“But I like it,” he said in protest.

She rolled her eyes and picked up the shirt again, holding it up against him.

“Fine!” she huffed.

He wandered away from her and picked up a flannel shirt, holding it up for her inspection.

“No.”

“But Jonathan Kent wears this,” he said.

“No! Seriously, do you want the kids at school to think you’re a geek?”

“What is a geek?” he asked.

“It’s … um …” She frowned. She didn’t actually know what a geek was, but according to the unwritten rule, a geek was someone considered to be a loser. There was no way that Kal-El, odd though he was, could be a loser.

He picked up more flannel shirts and added them to the pile in the cart. Lois sighed heavily. It looked like this was a battle she wasn’t going to win.

An hour later, they took their purchases to the checkout. It was a good thing, Lois thought, that her dad had thought to provide her with a credit card with a high limit, although she had no idea how she was going to explain the bill to him. Kal-El clearly had no concept of money as he didn’t even blink at the nine hundred dollar total.

With the shopping done, Lois drove out to the lake. It was a small lake which Luthorcorp had created when they’d dammed the river.

Chloe and Lana were lying on towels near the water’s edge, clearly taking advantage of their last day of freedom before heading back to school for their senior year. Lois took Kal-El’s hand and pulled him with her to the spot which the girls had clearly reserved for them.

Chloe shaded her eyes and sat up.

“Hey,” she said. “What took you guys so long?”

“Kal needed some stuff for school, so I took him to Granville.”

Lana sat up and eyed him. Lois had made him change into swimming trunks. They were almost knee-length but fit snugly, emphasising his muscular thighs and a bulge in front. His torso was bare, showing six-pack abs. Lana clearly appreciated the look, but he seemed to be ignoring her in favour of staring at Lois, who had also changed into a red bikini with a long gauzy wraparound skirt which emphasised her athletic figure and long legs.

“So, Kal, how old are you, anyway?” Chloe asked.

Kal-El looked at Lois and she guessed he was needing guidance.
“He’s eighteen,” she said, before he could say anything.

Chloe scowled at her. “I was asking him, not you.”

Lois frowned at her cousin. What was with Chloe anyway? Was she jealous? She’d barely known the guy a day and Chloe even less.

Chloe continued to ask probing questions, which made Lois think she was trying to find out more about Kal-El’s background. Kal answered her hesitantly, clearly making things up on the spur of the moment. Lois just hoped he had a good memory so he could remember all the lies he was telling Chloe.

She got up, deciding to swim out to the diving platform and took off the skirt, walking away. She could almost feel the green-eyed gaze of the man behind her back as she walked down to the water’s edge and dived in. She swam out to the platform, pulling herself up out of the water, and walked along to the other end where they’d placed the diving board.

She turned around, facing the end and somersaulted off the board. Suddenly she felt a sharp pain on the back of her head and everything went black.

She woke up looking into the deep green eyes of her saviour. Raising a shaky hand to her head, she tried shading her eyes.

“Lie back and rest,” he said softly.

She shook her head, aware of the pain slicing through it.

“I’m all right.”

“You hit your head and you swallowed some water,” Kal-El told her.

Chloe’s face was a blur above her.

“You should have seen it, Lois. He saw you were in trouble and he just ran. I’ve never seen anyone run that fast before.”

Lana knelt beside her and helped her sit up slowly.

“Drink this,” she said, handing her a bottle of water.

Lois waved her away, not wanting a fuss made of her.

“Should I contact your father?” Kal-El said, sounding concerned.

“No,” she replied hastily. “I mean, he has all those men to babysit. I don’t need …” Her stomach roiled and she felt like she was going to throw up.

“Maybe we should take her to a doctor,” Chloe said. “That did look pretty bad.”

Kal-El nodded. “Yes, a doctor. I will go with you.”

“I don’t think Lois needs …”

Despite the pain in her head and the nausea in her stomach, Lois still had the presence of mind to remember that Kal didn’t know his way back to the farm and was probably not sure what he should do in this situation.
“No,” she said, clutching her cousin’s wrist. “I want him to stay.”

She didn’t want to say anything to Chloe, but his presence did feel sort of comforting.

Kal-El gently helped her to her feet while Chloe grabbed her stuff.

“Lana, why don’t you take my car,” she said. “I’m gonna go with Lois and Kal and get her checked out at the hospital.”

“Sure, no worries. Hope she’s okay.”

Lois wanted to insist that she was fine, but her head was pounding. She was grateful for Kal’s arm around her, keeping her steady, sure she would collapse without that support.

She let him walk her to the car and didn’t resist as he made her lie in the back. She was barely aware of Chloe and Kal getting in or her cousin driving away from the lake. All she could think about was Kal saving her life.

In spite of her misgivings about him, she couldn’t help but think that he had been so attentive, so caring. Maybe he was a little odd, but every instinct in her was telling her that there was something so inherently good about this man. That she could trust him.

She must have passed out as they were at Smallville Medical Centre in what seemed like seconds. Again, Kal-El helped her out of the car and walked with her inside. Chloe followed them, speaking to the nurse on duty.

“My cousin hit her head and nearly drowned,” she said.

“All right. Let’s get her into triage,” the nurse replied. “We’ll have to order x-rays.”

“Nothing is broken,” Kal said. “I checked.”

“Are you a doctor?” the nurse asked.

“No.”

“Then I would leave that assessment up to the doctor.”

Lois felt herself guided onto a bed, her head still swimming. She clutched Kal’s hand, refusing to let go, even as the nurse insisted she get changed into a hospital gown.

She heard Chloe once again speaking to the nurse, who was asking for all her details.

“Her dad’s stationed at Fort Ryan,” she said. “But you don’t have to call him.”

“It’s procedure, I’m afraid. Her father is listed as her next-of-kin on her medical records.”

“No,” she protested weakly. “Don’t call him.”

“Rest, young lady. You’ve had quite a knock on the head.”

She shook her head, still trying to protest. Kal quieted her with a gentle touch of his hand.

“You should listen to the man,” he said.

Lois lay back reluctantly, knowing the nurse and Kal were right. She still felt dizzy and nauseous
and was in no shape to argue anything.

She was taken for an x-ray a short time later and by the time she returned, her father was there.

“Lo,” he said, sounding worried.

“I’m fine, Dad,” she said, feeling much brighter.

“You had me worried. When the hospital called …”

“I said I’m fine,” she repeated firmly. “The headache’s almost gone.”

She closed her eyes to avoid any further arguments, listening to the sounds around her. There were a few people being treated and she could hear the complaints.

Her father seemed to be talking with Kal, who clearly was out of his league when it came to the general. Chloe jumped in once or twice, telling the general that Kal was an exchange student from Eastern Europe and his English skills weren’t up to par. Thank goodness for Chloe, Lois thought. She doubted Kal would have been able to handle her father alone.

The doctor came in shortly after.

“Well, Miss Lane, you’ve got a pretty good bump on the head, and a mild concussion, but nothing’s broken. I checked your lungs as well and they’re clear. I think you’re okay to go home, as long as you have someone to keep an eye on you.”

“Don’t worry, doctor, I’ll keep an eye on my daughter.”

“Of course, sir.”

Lois was left to get dressed and she found her jeans and t-shirt in the bag Chloe had brought in with her. Kal was waiting outside.

“Chloe will drive me back to the farm,” he said. “Are you all right?”

She smiled at him. “I’m fine. A good night’s sleep and I’ll be right as rain.”

He frowned at the expression and she stroked his arm. He still looked a little worried.

“Hey, don’t worry, okay?”

“You could have died.”

“But I didn’t,” she said. “You saved me.”

She stood on tiptoe and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“Thank you.”

Her father returned with the discharge papers, putting an arm around her shoulders.

“C’mon, Lo, let’s get you back to the base.”

She walked with her father, pausing in the corridor.

“I’ll see you at school tomorrow,” she said, feeling almost shy.
Kal nodded and smiled. “Tomorrow.”
Training

Chapter Summary

Kal realises his information about Earth is severely lacking, so decides to use the A.I. to help him make his way.

Chloe drove Kal back to the Kent farm, keeping up a steady stream of questions. Kal just stared out at the passing scenery offering very little in the way of conversation. Without Lois to cover for him, he just wasn’t sure what to say to the blonde.

Chloe slowed down as she reached the turning to the farm.

“Lois will be okay,” she said.

Kal looked at her. “She will.”

“I mean, I know you’re worried about her, but don’t. She’s got a hard head.”

“Hard head?” he said, puzzled at the term.

“Yeah, you know. She’s tough. Well, okay, it actually means she’s kind of stubborn, but it can mean tough too.”

“Oh. Thank you for explaining it.”

“So, um, will you be at school tomorrow? I mean, Lois said so, but …”

“Yes,” he said, although he still wasn’t sure what ‘school’ was.

Chloe stopped in the driveway. Jonathan came out of the barn, a perplexed frown on his face. Kal got out.

“Don’t forget your stuff,” Chloe said, pointing to the bags in the back of the vehicle.

“Oh. Thank you,” he said.

He stood on the driveway as she turned the vehicle around and left.

“You’re back early,” Jonathan commented.

“Lois had … she hurt herself at the lake,” he replied. Jonathan immediately looked worried.

“Is she all right?”

Kal nodded. “The doctor said she has a concussion.” Whatever that meant, he thought, but it didn’t seem too serious, at least.

“Well, why don’t you go put your stuff away and help Martha,” Jonathan suggested. “She’s out tending to the crops.”
“Yes sir,” he said. He went into the house and quickly put the bags away, before returning outside and taking the path to the field where Jonathan had shown him the crops the night before.

Martha was working on what she explained was the irrigation system. She told him there was a blockage but she had been unable to find it. Kal decided it couldn’t hurt if he used his vision and checked along the irrigation line, quickly locating the blockage. He quickly fixed the problem.

Martha had bent down to clear some unwanted vegetation but looked up at him.

“Who was that in the car with you? Weren’t you with Lois?”

“She hurt herself at the lake. Chloe, uh, her cousin Chloe came with me.”

“Is she all right?”

He nodded. “We took her to …” What was the word? “…um …”

"The hospital?"

Yes, that was it.

“Yes ma’am. The doctor said she was fine. She went back with her father.”

“Oh well, I should give her father a call and make sure she’s all right.”

It was one of the things that had made Kal take an instant liking to the older woman. She clearly cared about people. After all, she had taken him, a stranger, into her home.

He hadn’t meant for this to happen. He’d planned on finding somewhere to live for the duration of his stay, knowing he couldn’t exactly live in the caves; knowing also that he couldn’t actually stay with any humans at the risk of exposing his abilities.

Again it was Lois who had made that choice for him. Lois Lane was certainly a special kind of human who seemed to have the ability to talk people into anything. He grinned to himself. She certainly talked a lot.

“So you have school tomorrow?” she said. “I think Lois mentioned something last night about you attending school.”

“Yes,” he said.

“Well, good. An education is always important.”

She stood up and threw the vegetation she’d pulled out into a large receptacle.

“I need to go and make a start on dinner. Would you walk up and down the rows for me and check the crops?”

He nodded. That he could do. He watched her leave, then walked up and down as she’d asked, checking the crops for general health. At least that was something he was reasonably familiar with.

While he’d been sleeping in the small room Martha had shown him to the night before, he’d realised there were an awful lot of things he needed to learn if he was going to fit in, otherwise he ran the risk of exposing his secret.

He supposed he should have waited a day or two, taken some time to learn the things he’d needed,
but he’d been too impatient to see this strange world. Then of course, he’d met Lois within such a short time of coming through the portal, which hadn’t exactly been convenient. She had meant well, but he had felt like an idiot or to use an Earth expression he’d picked up from the other girl, Lana, a fish out of water.

It appeared that his father’s tutoring on Earth customs had been somewhat outdated. He had no idea that it was going to be that difficult to get money from the bank. Even if it was his father’s money. He thought he could have just taken it, but he gathered that was against Earth law.

As he continued to inspect the crop, pulling out what could not be revived, he considered the problem. He would have to go back to the cave tonight, he thought, but not until the older couple were asleep.

He was called in by Martha a short time later.

“Dinner’s almost ready,” she told him. “Wash up and set the table would you? I’m just going to call the army base and check on Lois.”

He nodded and washed his hands before getting out what Lois had told him was silverware, recalling what had been set out the night before. He heard Martha on the phone.

“I’d like to speak to General Lane. I don’t have his number I’m afraid.” There was a pause in which she was clearly listening. “Actually, his daughter had a little bit of an accident today and I just wanted to check on her. Thank you.”

There was another long pause. She leaned on the counter top, the phone to her ear as she waited. Kal glanced at her but said nothing. She smiled back at him, drumming her fingers on the counter surface. Then she brightened.

“General. This is Martha Kent. Our boarder is a friend of your daughter’s. We heard about her accident and I just wanted to see if she was all right.” Another pause. “Oh, you’re welcome, general. Sorry, Sam. I’m very glad to hear that. Will you please tell her we called? Yes, I will certainly tell him.”

She hung up.

“Lois was asleep, but she asked her father to give you a message. She’s going to pick you up tomorrow morning for school.”

“Okay,” he said.

“Lois seems like such a lovely girl,” Martha observed. “She certainly seemed very taken with you.”

He frowned, not sure what Martha meant by ‘taken’, but just nodded and finished setting the table.

Not knowing what else to do after dinner, he sat and watched television with the older couple. There was some kind of news broadcast, focusing on trouble in some place called the Middle East. Kal recalled his father’s lessons on the planet’s geography and remembered the Middle East was well away from America.

The piece was talking about suicide bombings. Kal heard enough to know it was a common occurrence. It saddened him to think that people would go to such extremes.

“Why do they kill each other this way?” he asked.
“Well, most people believe it’s all over religion. Do you know about Muslims?” Martha asked.

He shook his head. Martha explained that there was a movement in the Middle East which believed western culture was corrupt and thought nothing of killing civilians in order to further promote their cause. Yet most Muslims were actually peaceful people.

It reminded him a little of the separatist movement on Krypton, which was still simmering. He understood now why his father had wanted him to come here. If only Earth could learn a little of what they had already suffered on Krypton, he thought, they would be less inclined to fight over such philosophies.

He had no idea what time it was but figured it was late when Jonathan yawned and stretched.

“Well, we’re going to bed. Don’t stay up too late. You have to be up early to help me with the chores and then you have school.”

Kal nodded. “Yes sir.”

He watched as the couple went upstairs, then switched off the television with the little device Jonathan had left on his chair. He listened for a few moments, hearing the couple in the bathroom before they closed the door to their room. He went to the door and opened it quietly, hoping they didn’t hear him as he left the house and sped to the caves.

Kal took a small octagonal disc from his pocket and used it to activate the opening in the cave wall. The panel opened and he stepped through, making sure it closed behind him, before circling the stone table in the centre of the chamber. Holding the disc in his hand, he read the inscriptions, then inserted the disc in the slot.

He was suddenly bathed in a bright light and a voice, rather like that of the Brain Interactive Construct his father had created, spoke in Kryptonian.

“Why are you here, Kal-El?”

“In order to make my way in this world, I must correct a few things. This world is a far different one from that which my father left forty years ago. I need you to access all media to give me the information I require.”

“Very well, Kal-El. It will take a little time to download the information.”

“I do not have long. The humans I am staying with may discover I am not in their domicile and will grow concerned.”

“Then I suggest you come here for one hour every night to complete your training.”

“That is acceptable.”

He explained how he had met Lois, his problem with the bank account and his lack of knowledge of the educational institution. The artificial intelligence accessed the network and created files which Kal could use. The construct also advised him to create a name for himself.

“The humans call me Kal.”

“Then I advise you to use this name. Humans also use what is called a family name,” it said, quickly explaining what that meant.
“The humans I am staying with use the family name of Kent.”

“I believe that would not be appropriate, given the circumstances of your meeting with Lois Lane.”

It suggested a name which Kal was happy with, choosing one which was from the region Lois assumed he was from. As improbable as it sounded, he decided it was the best option to let her continue assuming that. He allowed the construct to download the information he required into his mind, feeling more confident as he returned to the farm, promising he would be back the next evening.

It wouldn’t teach him about humans and their culture, but at least he wouldn’t look like a complete idiot. The last thing he needed was to stand out.

Next morning, he was roused early by Jonathan and went out to help him with the early morning chores. Jonathan began explaining a little more about the farm. They only had about a hundred cows although there used to be more when his father was alive. Times had been pretty tough for farmers, especially in isolated rural areas like Smallville, and with the fertiliser plant being the biggest employer, not many people wanted to work on the farms for lower wages.

Kal noticed the sour expression from the farmer as he talked about the plant and wondered what the reason was. He’d learned enough about the planet’s economic structure to realise that all was not equal and there were some humans far better off than others.

“If the plant pays more …” he began.

“The plant is owned by Luthorcorp. And Lionel Luthor is responsible for everything that’s wrong with this town.”

Kal frowned. “What do you mean?”

“We had a neighbour Jack Guy. Luthor promised to cut him in on a deal. Sent him flashy gifts so he would sell his property. The deal supposedly fell through and he lost everything.”

Kal shook his head. He could understand the farmer’s anger, but it seemed a little unfair to blame this Lionel for another man’s decision. Then again, he realised he wasn’t getting the full story.

They finished the early chores and returned to the house for breakfast. Kal was beginning to enjoy the food, amazed at the selections available and the different flavours. It was a shame they couldn’t do this on Krypton, he thought, but with the land so toxic they couldn’t grow anything outside the crystal cities and there was not enough space to be able to have anything like the farms on this planet.

He went upstairs to shower and dress, marvelling at the way the water steamed in the shower. These people may be primitive, he thought, but there were some pleasures to be had. A shower was definitely one of them.

He thought about the way Lois Lane would look with her hair wet and cascading down her shoulders, water in droplets on her naked body, her lips red and swollen from his kisses. His eyes began to grow hot as he went deeper into the fantasy, arousal causing his skin to flush, the blood gathering in one part of his anatomy.

A knock on the door had him looking up.

“Kal, Lois is here. You need to get a move on, son.”

Kal swallowed hard and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. He’d been caught having an
erotic fantasy about a human girl. His father had sent him here to learn about Earth culture, not to bed them. Still, Jor-El was hardly one to talk, since he himself had fallen for a human.

He quickly rinsed himself off then turned off the shower and dressed, using a little super-speed, before going to his room to change into some of the new clothes Lois had bought for him. He would have to pay her back, he thought.

He chose the blue t-shirt and jeans, along with a black and white plaid shirt which she’d vetoed, but he’d won anyway. As he dressed, he found himself thinking about the girl. She was unlike any female he had ever met and he’d known a few on Krypton. Since he was the son of a renowned scientist, not to mention an heir to the royal bloodline, the females did their best to attract him. Kal had felt nothing but annoyance at the way the females fawned over him, knowing that the only thing they wanted from him was his bloodline.

Sooner or later, he knew his father would tell him to choose the female he would bond with, but he refused to make that choice. He knew part of the reason for his father’s sending him to Earth was so he would return to Krypton ready to embrace his destiny.

Kal bounded downstairs and smiled at Lois, who was sitting at the table drinking coffee. She smiled back.

“Hi.”

“Hi. How’s your head?” he asked.

“It’s fine. We should get going,” she said, getting to her feet. “We don’t want to be late for the first day.”

He nodded. “You’re right. We should go.”

“Thanks for the coffee Mrs K,” Lois said, picking up her bag and putting the strap on her shoulder.

“You’re welcome Lois. I’m glad you’re all right.”

Kal followed her out, quickly checking her over. She seemed to be fine. Lois turned to look at him.

“You’re doing it again,” she admonished.

“Doing what again?”

“Worrying.”

“Lois, I …”

She opened the door of her car. Chloe must have driven it back to the army base.

“Kal, I promise, I’m fine. No headache, no dizziness.”

He nodded and got in beside her. Lois smiled at him.

“So are you nervous?”

“Nervous?” he asked.

“Your first day.”
“Oh,” he said. “No.”

“I used to, when I was little. I mean, my dad would be reassigned every couple of years or so and that meant we’d all be moving to a new army base and I’d have a whole new school. The kids would look at you like you were from another planet, but you get used to it. I learned a long time ago not to care what people said behind my back because you know, at the end of the day, they’re just jerks who can’t think of anything better to do.”

Kal grinned to himself as she chattered on. He was already liking this part of her. He listened, staring out the window at the scenery, eager to see this educational institution. He was surprised at how big it was, considering what the artificial intelligence had shown him the night before.

There was a slight crunch and a lurch as Lois clearly slammed on the brakes.

“Oops,” she said with a grin.

Kal chuckled. Lois seemed to be a little accident-prone.

“Hey, you made it!”

Lois got out and hugged her cousin. Chloe smiled at Kal as he joined them.

“So, welcome to Smallville High,” she said. Lois made a face and Chloe laughed at her.

“Socially divisive cliques and hall passes aside, this place really isn’t all that bad.”

“Please! It’s like the varsity version of Dante’s seventh ring.”

Kal made a note to get the A.I. to look up those few references later. He had no idea what a ‘clique’ was, or what Lois had meant by the seventh ring, but he was sure the A.I. could help him figure that out later. At least, he thought with a grin, he now knew what a geek was.

Chloe was laughing and rolling her eyes.

“A lot of people would kill to relive their senior year in high school.”

“Yeah? Well, I’m not one of them.” Lois turned and looked at Kal, who was stragglng behind. He’d been watching three girls in matching tops and very short skirts out on the field waving some kind of strange round objects around. The skirts were so short he could see their underwear as they pranced about.

“Hey, farmboy, get those eyes back in your head and keep up.”

Farmboy? he thought, arching an eyebrow at her.

Lois just scoffed at him.

“Ugh, what is it with men and cheerleaders? I swear, one look at a short skirt and it’s like nothing else exists.”

He frowned at her. He had no idea what a ‘cheerleader’ was but that hadn’t been why he was staring at all. In truth, he thought their strange ritual to be a little silly. The girls themselves were certainly not as attractive as Lois.

Chloe began chattering once again about school, trying to convince Lois to work with her on … a Torch? Kal sighed. The A.I. could teach him a lot of things, but it couldn’t teach him the oddities of
Earth languages. This was going to be a lot tougher than he thought.

Lois grasped his arm, pushing him in the opposite direction to her cousin.

“Where are we …”

“We have to get our class schedules, idiot. We’ll see you later, Chlo,” she called back.

“Sure. Don’t get lost.”

Lois’ grip on his arm would have hurt, if he had been human.

“Are you upset with me?” he asked.

She snorted. “Me? Upset? What would I have to be upset about? Except for the fact that you were making eyes at the pom-pom brigade.”

“I don’t …”

“Seriously, do they have a shortage of women where you come from? Because it’s like you haven’t seen pretty girls before.”

They had a plethora of beautiful women on his planet, but not one of them held his attention like the beautiful young woman standing before him. Even if she did talk almost non-stop and was bossy and …

Lois huffed noisily and pushed him in front of her. Kal couldn’t help but notice the young men in the hallway staring at them. Or rather, staring at Lois. It seemed like he wasn’t the only male who was attracted.

He suppressed the urge to move closer to her and block their gaze. He had a feeling she would not welcome such a move.

“Well, here we are,” Lois said. She approached the desk. “Lois Lane. I just started here today. I need to pick up my class schedule.”

The older woman made a sour face, but turned and typed something on a keyboard. Kal knew from his studies that she was using a computer. Earth technology was at least a thousand years behind Krypton.

“Lane, Lane. Here ya are. One moment please.”

She turned away and Kal observed her enter another room, coming back out a minute later with a slip of paper, handing it to Lois. She glared at Kal.

“And you?”

“Kal … Novak,” he said, using the name he’d chosen the night before. He kept his gaze steady, hoping the A.I. had done its job and his name was on the system. The woman turned back to the computer and nodded, then returned to the other room, bringing back his schedule.

They each still had some paperwork to fill out, the woman explained, but that could wait until they had a free period.

“You two better get to class,” she said.
Kal followed Lois out, reading his schedule.

“So, what did you get? AP English, American History, Biology. Hey, looks like we got most of the same classes,” she said.

Kal had instructed the A.I. to access Lois’ records as well, thinking it would be easier for him if he and Lois were together. He knew she’d noticed a few oddities, but so far, apart from the clothes, she hadn’t mentioned it. He had the feeling that she understood what it was like to be in a strange place.
Jealousy

Chapter Summary

The green-eyed monster rears its ugly head.

Lois tried to keep a sharp eye on Kal during the day. There were a few things that were bothering her, but nothing too major, and Kal seemed harmless enough. She supposed she could have put all her doubts down to cultural differences but there were just some things she couldn’t explain away.

Not that she was actually planning on confronting him about it, she decided. Kal obviously had enough strangeness to deal with and she figured if she called him on it it would alienate him even more.

The thing was, she knew what it was like to be in a strange place with no idea of what you were getting into. Not long after her mother had died, her father had been seconded to a base in Germany. It had been a few years after the Berlin wall had come down and many people were still trying to get accustomed to the new socio-politico-economic status. It had been tough for her, just seven years old, not knowing exactly what to do, not knowing the language.

She had been sent to a school run by the Department of Defense. Most of the kids who had families in military installations were sent to similar schools. There they were taught English and German as well as some of the cultural differences of the country.

When Lois had gone out into the city, she had often noticed other children staring at her. She had never been particularly shy and that had got her into trouble more often than not.

Over the years, she had changed schools at least once every two years, which didn’t make for successful long-lasting relationships. Chloe was about the closest she had to a best friend.

So she knew all about being in a strange place and not knowing the customs. That at least stopped her from telling Kal she knew there was something off about him. She figured if he wanted her to know, he would tell her. She just had to give him time to learn to trust her.

As they were both new, the teachers paired them up with other people so they could share textbooks. Lois was dismayed to note that a girl with long blonde hair was paired up with Kal in their American History class. She kept smiling at Kal, flirting with her eyes. To his credit, Kal didn’t flirt back, glancing back at Lois with a slight frown.

She was forced to follow behind after class as the girl, Alicia, began telling Kal about Smallville. She felt a hand on her arm.

“Hey,” Tim said, smiling at her. He’d been sitting with her in class and had shared his own book with her. He seemed nice enough although a little intense with the way he kept looking at her. He was certainly not as good-looking as Kal, but then, no boy at the school was as good-looking as Kal.

“So, I thought I saw you at the Beanery a couple of times over the summer.”

“Yeah,” she said. “My dad got transferred to Fort Ryan a few weeks ago.”

“Well, welcome to Smallville. We’re a pretty small town.”
“Hence the name ‘Smallville’,” she quipped.

Tim flashed her a wry grin. “Yeah. You know, my dad is kinda an amateur historian. He knows a lot of stories about the early settlers here. Maybe you’d like to, I dunno, get a cup of coffee or something and I can show you some of the stuff he’s collected.”

Lois glanced at Kal. He had his head cocked as if he was listening to their conversation and trying to pay attention to Alicia’s prattle at the same time. She got the impression he didn’t like Tim flirting with her any more than she liked Alicia flirting with him.

“You know, that sounds nice, Tim, but, uh, I’m kind of involved with someone. From back East.”

“Oh. Well, that’s a shame.”

She glanced once more at Kal, who looked a little annoyed. He abruptly said goodbye to Alicia and strode off quickly down the hallway, disappearing around the corner. Eep, Lois thought. She’d thought a little white lie would be harmless but not where Kal was concerned, obviously.

Oh come on, her inner voice told her. You’ve known the guy two days. How do you know it’s about you?

He didn’t speak to her when they met up again for AP English, or AP maths. Again they were sent to vacant seats in different parts of the room. Lois watched curiously as Kal was called on to solve a problem on the board and he did so within seconds, with no hesitation. Even the other students looked at him with WTF expressions.

Kal didn’t seem to notice anything amiss, bless him, she thought.

By the lunch period, Lois was starving. She found her way to the cafeteria, grabbing a tray and getting in line. Chloe came in behind her and Lois waved to her cousin, moving back slightly so Chloe could join her. The line wasn’t moving and Lois looked around, wondering what the problem was.

Kal was ahead of her, staring at the food in confusion. He’d clearly seen enough to know he was supposed to get in line, but he didn’t seem to know what the food was or what he was supposed to do with it.

Lois bit her lip. He probably didn’t know what a cafeteria was, so didn’t know the protocol. She glanced at her cousin, who shrugged and gave her a ‘don’t look at me’ expression.

A few of the jocks behind him started to look annoyed that he was holding up the line. Lois knew she couldn’t leave him floundering and started to leave the line, only to spot a blonde girl in a cheerleading uniform worm her way in between Kal and the guy in front of him. They exchanged a few words and Kal nodded before letting the girl pick up some packages before guiding him further.

It wouldn’t have been so bad if Kal hadn’t been smiling at the girl. It got worse. Lois watched in quiet fury as the girl helped him fill his tray, paid for the food, then guided him to sit with her and her cheerleader friends, her arm wrapped possessively around his.

Unbelievable, she thought.

She managed to get her own lunch and sat down with Chloe.

“What’s with you?” Chloe asked.
“Nothing,” she replied, a little snippier than she intended.

“Yeah right. I suppose it has nothing to do with tall, dark and dreamy, does it?”

“I’m not interested in Kal that way,” she quickly denied.

“And the fact that you immediately think it’s about him speaks volumes.”

“Shut up,” she said, crinkling her nose.

“Come on, Lois, you have that ‘if looks could kill’ expression on your face and it’s directed right at
the pom-pom brigade.”

“Well, look at them. They’re all over him, like … like …”

“Cheap sl …” Chloe began before cutting herself off to stare up at the newcomer to their table. “Hey,
Lana,” she said.

“Speaking of cheap,” Lois murmured under her breath, but smiled up at Lana. “Hi Lana.”

Lana was also wearing a cheerleader uniform in the school’s colours of red and gold.

“So, looks like somebody’s a fast worker,” Lana commented as she sat down. “I can’t believe
Mandy. She’s all over him.”

“I would have thought you would have been over there,” Chloe mused. “I mean, aren’t you captain
of the cheerleaders this year?”

“So?” Lana enquired. “Can’t I spend time with my friends?”

Except they weren’t exactly friends, Lois thought. She’d only met Lana about a week before as Lana
and her aunt had been away for a month travelling Europe.

Lana had been born in Smallville and lived with her aunt not far from the Kent farm. Her parents had
died in a car crash when she was three. Fortunately, Nell had been babysitting her niece at the time,
so she hadn’t been in the car with Lewis and Laura Lang.

Nell had inherited some land from her parents and then the Lang’s estate. While she wasn’t as rich as
the Luthors, she was certainly a very wealthy woman and had no problem letting everyone in town
know it.

Lois had to give Lana props though. She didn’t act like the poor little rich girl. At least she was nice,
if a little self-absorbed.

“So how come you’re not sitting with Kal?” Lana asked Lois.

“Because he’s been ignoring me most of the day.”

“That’s kind of rude, since you’ve been showing him around town.”

Lana crinkled her pert nose. Lois had to wonder why Lana wasn’t over at the cheerleaders’ table also
trying to wrap herself around Kal although she got the impression the other girl was only interested
in boys who devoted all their attention to her. The other day when she’d met Kal, Lana had made
eyes at him but all he’d done was acknowledge her politely and hadn’t showed an iota of interest in
her.
“I think he heard something that made him mad at me,” Lois said with a shrug. She looked down at her tray, deciding she didn’t want the rest of her lunch and stood up. “I’ve kind of lost my appetite.”

She glanced once more at Kal surrounded by the cheerleaders and sniffed. Kal looked up and frowned at her, but was quickly distracted by another cheerleader tugging on his arm to make sure his attention was on her.

“Jerk!” Lois muttered.

She walked away, wishing she had something in her hands she could tear up, so she could picture Mandy’s face on it. She managed to find the Torch office and sat in front of the computer, just staring at the blank screen fantasising what she would do to that smarmy …

“You know, I’d think you were jealous,” Chloe said, coming into the room.

“What?” She scoffed. “I’m not jealous.”

“Right. So you’re not picturing Mandy’s face in that piece of paper you’re screwing up?”

Lois looked down at her hands, confused. When had she picked up the slip of paper, which she realised was a fax Chloe had received about something she was investigating.

She hastily put it down before she could do worse damage to it.

“So, why would Kal be mad at you?”

“I don’t know.”

Chloe huffed. “Come on, Lois. You can do better than that.”

“Okay, okay, enough with the third degree already! He might have overheard me tell Tim that I had a boyfriend back East, which is a complete lie, but I just wanted to get rid of the guy.”

Chloe’s lips twitched.

“Wait, wait a second. He’s ignoring you because you told someone else you had a boyfriend? Oh my god, he’s totally jealous! You realise that, don’t you?”

“I’ve known the guy two days, Chlo.”

“What’s your point?”

“Um, I don’t know,” she said.

That was the problem. Did Kal have a right to be jealous of her just because she’d told another guy a total white lie? Come to that, did she have the right to be jealous because some bimbos were monopolising his attention?

She glanced at the clock. Damn, she was going to be late for her chemistry class. As much as she wanted to skip classes altogether, she knew her father wouldn’t be too happy. She said goodbye to her cousin and ran down the corridor, looking for the classroom.

The chemistry teacher had already started checking names and pairing students off. Kal sat at a desk alone, looking around him.

“You’re late,” the teacher told her. “What’s your name?”
“Lois Lane.”

He nodded and checked her name off the roll.

“Go sit next to Mr Novak. Since you two are the new students you can be lab partners.”

She did as instructed, noticing the dark looks from Mandy in front.

“Mr Davison, I can sit with Kal,” she said, fluttering her eyelashes at the teacher. The man had to at least be in his forties, Lois thought. The man remained unmoved. “No, you stay with Tiffany, Mandy. The two of you need to get your grades up this year and I want you both where I can keep an eye on you.”

Her plan foiled, Mandy glowered in Lois’ direction and sat back, arms folded, looking like a petulant child.

As Lois sat down, Kal looked at her, then frowned, looking away.

“What’s with you?” Lois asked.

“Nothing,” he replied.

“Whatever!” she snapped back. He turned and sent her an odd look but didn’t reply, turning back to focus his attention on the lesson.

Since this was their first day back from summer, most of the teachers had gone relatively easy on them, with mostly introductions and going over the course syllabus. Not this teacher, obviously, she thought. Davison seemed to have high expectations and didn’t fool around.

Immediately he started them on testing the combining of various acids and analysing the reactions. As Lois got up to get a small amount of the chemicals they would be using in their test, Mandy bumped into her, spilling the liquid in the beaker. Somehow, Kal managed to get the acid spilling on his hand rather than hers.

“I’m so sorry,” Mandy gasped but Lois immediately realised she had done it deliberately. The look of malice in the girl’s eyes was enough to convince her. Of course, she hadn’t expected Kal to be the victim of her malicious ‘accident’.

“Mr Novak, go and wash that off immediately. Miss Raymond, next time please be more careful.”

Kal went to the sink at the back of the classroom, washing his hand. Davison went with him and checked him over.

“Well, you either have very tough skin Mr Novak or you were incredibly lucky. There’s not a mark on you.”

Lois bit her lip, watching. She had seen the acid drop onto his skin, she was so sure of it. She looked up to see Kal watching her warily, but he returned to their table without saying a word.

As soon as class was over, Kal grabbed his books and walked out without looking at her. Lois grabbed her own books and started to run out after him, only to be tripped by Mandy.

“Oops, sorry,” the blonde said.

Lois got to her feet, glaring at the girl, curling her hand into a fist.
“I know you spilled that acid on purpose,” she hissed.

“Prove it,” Mandy sneered. “Back off, bitch. He’s mine.”

Lois smirked at her.

“Isn’t it amazing what an ability to rhyme and a short skirt will get ya? Here’s a question for you. How many cheerleaders does it take to get the hottest guy on campus?”

“One,” Mandy replied.

“How about none?” she returned. “Let me tell you something about guys like Kal. They actually think with their brains, not their … other brain.”

“Yeah? Well maybe you wouldn’t be so confident if you had seen him after lunch with his tongue down my throat.”

“You’re lying,” she said, narrowing her eyes at the girl.

He wouldn’t, she thought. She picked up her books from the floor and ran out of the classroom, not caring that she was late for her last class of the day. She quickly made her way to the Torch office. Chloe frowned at her.

“Skipping class already?” she said.

“Oh, who cares about that!” she returned, waving her hand. “Have you seen Kal?”

“No. But then I’ve got a free period. What’s going on?”

“What class is he supposed to be in now?” Lois asked.

“Do I look like I know his schedule?”

“Can’t you look it up in the computer?”

Chloe sighed and rolled her eyes. Lois tried to push her cousin out of the way so she could get in to the computer herself. Chloe shoved back.

“First you tell me what this is about.”

“Mandy says he kissed her.”

Chloe did a double-take, snorting with laughter.

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s what she wants to believe.”

“But he …”

“I’m guessing you still think he’s mad at you. Even I get mad at you, Lois, but I’m not about to do something that stupid. Let me tell you something about Mandy. She has what is called delusions of grandeur. She thinks she’s hot shit but even the jocks wouldn’t touch her.”

She turned back to the computer and quickly accessed the school records, looking for Kal’s schedule.

“He’s in gym.”
“Great, thanks.”

She ran out, ignoring her cousin’s call and began searching for the gymnasium. She found Kal sitting on the sidelines, still wearing the jeans and shirts he’d been wearing all day. Lois glanced at the coach, who was busy putting the rest of the students through their paces, and grabbed Kal’s hand.

“Lois, what are you …”

“We need to talk.”

“About what?” he asked, letting himself be pulled out of the building.

“You and Mandy.”

He frowned. “Mandy who?”

“The cheerleader?”

He still looked confused. “What cheerleader?”

She rolled her eyes at him.

“Agh. Cheerleader. Short skirt, blonde, spilled the acid in Chem.”

“Oh. That Mandy,” he said.

“Tell me it’s not true.”

“What’s not true?”

“You and her, after lunch.”

He shook his head. “Lois, I am not understanding you.”

“She told me you kissed her.”

He looked shocked, which told Lois everything she wanted to know. Mandy had been lying through her teeth. She punched his shoulder lightly.

“I knew that little … I knew she was lying.”

Kal cocked an eyebrow at her.

“Are you jealous, Lois?”

She snorted. “Jealous? Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“No!”

“Well, then you wouldn’t mind if I went with Mandy to have coffee.” He frowned, clearly still not sure what ‘coffee’ was. “She asked me to go with her to something called The Beanery after school. I told her no, but I could change my mind.”

“Don’t you dare!”
“Then admit you’re jealous.”

She shook her head and huffed. He got confused about every other thing but this he got?

“You know, you’re not exactly scoring points here,” she told him.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You barely spoke to me all day. Like you were mad at me or something.”

“Why would I be mad at you?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe you heard something you didn’t like.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were seeing someone?”

She scowled at him. “I’m not, idiot. I just said that so I could let Tim down gently.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m not interested in him, jerk!”

“What is a jerk? And why did you not just tell him the truth, that you weren’t interested in him?”

“A jerk is … oh never mind what a jerk is. And I told him that because guys don’t take rejection too well. Some guys like to think that girls will just fall down at their feet and worship them.” She looked at him slyly. “So you were jealous.”

“Yes,” he said simply.

She punched him again. “Good.”

He frowned at her in confusion.

“Why is it good?”

She shoved him good-naturedly.

“Go back to class Kal. I’ll pick you up in about an hour to drive you home.”

“Actually, I’d like to walk. See a little bit of the town.”

“Walk? It’s five miles!”

“I have no doubt I can handle it,” he said.

She shook her head. “You’re a weird one, Kal. Works for ya though.”

She flashed him a cheeky grin and walked away. As she rounded the corner, she heard him give a sigh of exasperation.

“Women! Earth women!”

Now what the heck did that mean?
Kal quietly fumed the rest of the day. Lois Lane could drive a man, even a Kryptonian man to do something crazy. His eyes widened. He had heard the expression ‘driving me crazy’, now he understood what it meant. That certainly described the young woman known as Lois.

When she’d told the other boy she was seeing someone from ‘back East’, whatever that meant, he had been instantly jealous. Even if he had realised that he really had no right to be. It wasn’t like they were actually a couple, he thought.

Still, Lois had seemed to revel in the fact that he was jealous when she had told him the truth. What he didn’t understand was why was she jealous when he had spent his lunch period with that Mandy girl. He had caught the angry looks she’d shot his way when she’d been sitting with the other girls.

He quietly laughed to himself thinking that if she had been Kryptonian and equipped with Kryptonian abilities, Mandy would have been a pile of ashes.

He couldn’t understand why Lois would not just admit it, however. Why did Earth women play these games, he wondered. His father had told him a few stories of the things women did. Not that Louise had done, Jor-El had assured him. Still, in the short time Jor-El had been on Earth, he had seen women acting coquettish, pretending to be shy when flirting with young men or flirting with others in full view of the young man they were trying to make jealous.

He hadn’t liked Mandy. He thought she was too forward for a girl and more aggressive than he liked. He also hadn’t liked what she had done in chemistry class. Kal had seen the way she had deliberately spilled the acid and he’d moved quickly to stop Lois from being burnt with it. He hadn’t failed to catch the vicious smirk on the blonde girl’s face, nor missed the way she had cursed under her breath when he had taken the brunt of her attack instead.

He had one more class, which was economics. Lois wasn’t in the class but then he remembered in her schedule she was down for a journalism class. He was also taking a government class so he could learn more about the way this strange world worked.

Both Mandy and Alicia were in the economics class with him and they began a tussle over who would get to sit next to him. Mandy seemed to win by tripping Alicia up. Kal chose to ignore her and helped Alicia to her feet, glowering at Mandy, who had turned away in a huff. Good, he thought as he followed Alicia to a pair of desks. He hoped the cheerleader had got the message that he didn’t like girls who played such games.

As soon as class was over, he packed up his books and headed out the door. Mandy got there first, smiling up at him.

“So, coffee? The Beanery?”
“I’m sorry, but I must decline,” he said, inwardly wincing at the way it sounded. Wouldn’t a simple ‘no’ have sufficed, he thought.

“But …”

“Mandy,” he said politely, “I am sure you’re a very nice girl, but I am not interested.”

“You bastard!” she hissed.

Had she been one of those odd reptiles he had seen an image of in one of his books, he was sure she would have risen up and bit him or something. Instead she turned, her long hair flying behind her.

Alicia tapped him on the arm.

“Don’t worry about her. Mandy’s one of those girls who likes to think the world revolves around her.”

“I did get that impression,” he replied, walking out with Alicia.

The girl glanced at his books.

“You really should put those in your locker, instead of carrying them home.”

“They are not that heavy,” he assured her.

“Still, there’s kind of an unwritten rule about homework. We leave it until the last minute.”

Kal frowned at her. “Wouldn’t it be better to do your homework first so you have time for other activities?”

“Where’s the fun in that?” she laughed. “What’s your locker number?”

He bit his lip, then recalled what the woman in the office had given him.

“Oh, it’s 312.”

Alicia showed him a row of narrow metal doors installed neatly along the corridor wall. There were about twenty in each row, with one row below. The doors all had some kind of security device.

“Here’s yours,” she said, standing beside one which had the numerals he’d given her painted on it. She frowned at him as he stared at it, confused. “Don’t you know your combination?”

“Uh … we don’t have these where I come from,” he told her lamely.

“That’s okay. I’m sure Mrs Brodie must have given it to you along with your schedule. Here, let me help.”

She took his books from him and began looking through the pile, coming up with the class schedule.

“Here it is,” she said. She showed him how to unlock the security lock and opened the door. “Shove your books in there.”
“Thank you,” he replied, smiling at her.

“No problem. Hey, are you going to the Beanery?”

“Oh, that’s right. You’re staying with the Kents.” She frowned. “It’s funny. My dad’s in the farmers’ union with Jonathan and he never said anything about them taking in an exchange student.” She bit her lip. “The Kents kind of keep to themselves anyway. I guess it’s one of those things they don’t talk about.”

Kal nodded in agreement, not that he really understood what she was talking about.

“Well, I can give you a ride home if you want,” she said.

“That’s okay. I was going to walk.”

“It’s a long way,” she told him.

“I like to walk.”

She shrugged. “Well, okay. See you tomorrow?”

He smiled and nodded. “Thanks, Alicia.”

Kal had memorised the journey from the farm on the way to school that morning and felt fairly sure he could find his way back on foot. He walked at a normal pace for the humans, still being cautious about using his abilities. He decided he needed the time to consider what had happened that day.

He couldn’t help thinking about Lois and the way she had been jealous of him. He was definitely attracted to the girl, but could he really act on these feelings? He was only supposed to be on Earth for a year, in which time he was supposed to make up his mind what he wanted to be on Krypton.

Jor-El had wanted him to study the sciences. While Kal enjoyed his lessons in botany, he wasn’t sure he wanted to be the kind of scientist his father was. It looked like more than he was prepared to handle. Not that he was lazy, he told himself. It just wasn’t something that interested him.

He liked the stars and the planetary constellations, but that was something Jor-El frowned upon. While there was no actual rule on Krypton that said he had to follow the same path his father had done, the El bloodline was considered to be one of the highest orders on the planet and therefore they must set an example to others.

He sighed as he reached the river and began crossing the bridge. He didn’t understand why his father was being so rigid about this. Why couldn’t he make his own choices about the work he wanted to do?

He stood on the bridge looking out over the water, brooding. He felt sure Lois would not be so pressured into doing what her father expected of her. Whatever it was her father did, he was absolutely certain she would not follow the same path.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a truck passing behind him, heading north. Something seemed to slip from the bed of the truck. On the opposite head, heading toward the item that had fallen onto the...
road, was a smaller vehicle, very similar to the one that Lois was driving. Kal straightened up, wondering whether he should warn the driver of the smaller vehicle, but it seemed the man was going too fast and it was too late for the warning.

The car hit the obstacle on the road and Kal heard what sounded like a loud bang, guessing that the rubber covering the wheels had burst. The car careened out of control, heading straight for him. The driver looked terrified, his face white with shock, his eyes wide in fright.

Kal hesitated. If he used his powers to try and stop the vehicle, the driver would see, but if he didn’t, the man would surely crash into the barricade and his car would fall into the river. If the impact didn’t kill him, Kal thought, the fall into the shallow water would do it instead. As much as Jor-El had cautioned him about using his abilities, he couldn’t just let the man die.

He stepped aside, moving fast enough to be a blur, grabbing the back of the car and shoving hard enough to turn the out-of-control vehicle so it was no longer aiming at the barricade, in the same direction the man had been wrenching the steering wheel, then used his strength to aid the man, who was frantically pressing on what Kal now knew was the braking system. The engine whined in protest, but came to rest in a ditch at the end of the bridge.

The driver got out, visibly shaken, shivering with shock. Kal ran toward him at normal speed as the man removed the leather covering on his hands, tossing it inside the car, gazing in disbelief at the vehicle.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

The man lifted a shaking hand, combing his fingers through tousled red hair.

“I could have sworn I was going to hit you.”

“Lucky for both of us you didn’t. You would have gone straight into the river. You might have been killed.”

“I don’t even know how I managed to get out of it intact,” the man said.

Kal nodded. “I saw it happening and I just … I didn’t know what to do.”

The redheaded man shook his head looking perplexed.

“I just … I don’t know what happened.”

Kal sighed in relief. At least the man didn’t appear to have seen what he’d done. He glanced at the metal. There didn’t seem to be any marks to give any indication that he’d done anything except stand there watching in horror as it unfolded. Hopefully the man had been in too much shock to have seen anything.

“Are you okay? I mean, do you need me to stay? Or I can contact someone?”

“I have a phone in my car,” the man said. “But I would appreciate it if you would stick around.”

Kal nodded. “Yes, I will.”

The man smiled at him. “By the way, my name’s Lex. Lex Luthor.”
“Kal Novak,” he said, deciding to stick with the name he’d given at school. If the A.I. had done its job, any background check would not reveal any anomalies.

He watched as Lex went to the car and took out a small device, pressing some buttons on it. This must be the phone he’d been talking about, Kal thought, realising it was a communication device of some sort. It was different from the one Martha had used the day before.

Lex walked around his car, inspecting the damage. The front two wheels were damaged beyond repair. Kal saw him sighing, then talking on his phone before returning to sit beside Kal on the riverbank.

“Somebody will be by shortly,” he said. “Thanks for sticking around.”

“You’re welcome.”

“So, where are you from, Kal? I don’t recognise the accent.”

“Eastern Europe,” he said automatically.

“Where in Eastern Europe?” Lex smiled. “It’s a big continent.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter really.”

He could see Lex filing the information away, knowing full well the man would be running some kind of check on him later.

“What brings you to Smallville?”

“My father thought I should learn about other cultures,” he said truthfully. “I’m staying with some friends of his. The Kents.”

Lex frowned. “I don’t know them, unfortunately. I moved to Smallville three years ago, but I don’t really see a lot of the locals. My father sent me down to oversee the plant.”

“Plant?”

“The fertiliser plant. My father’s Lionel Luthor.”

Kal frowned at him. He remembered what Jonathan had said, but apart from the fact that Jonathan’s friend had supposedly been swindled, Kal didn’t feel he should judge the son by the father. Kal didn’t think it was fair to judge someone firstly based on their parent, and secondly, on someone else’s opinion. So he played it safe. “I’ve never heard of him.” It did occur to him to wonder how Lex had spent three years in Smallville but didn’t know that many people.

Lex laughed suddenly. “Well, I find that rather refreshing. Especially since, according to people in this town, Lionel Luthor is like the devil incarnate and I’m the son of Satan.”

Kal frowned at him, puzzled by the reference, but didn’t comment, not wanting Lex to think he was completely lacking in intelligence. It was something he would have to ask the A.I. about later.

He found himself liking the rather brash young man, who couldn’t have been more than six or seven
years (in Earth terms at least) older than him. Lex seemed highly intelligent although Kal had to wonder if the other man hid behind his intelligence as he also seemed very closed-off. He appeared to be very interested in Kal’s background, however, asking very personal questions, and didn’t seem to like it when Kal turned those questions back on him.

Lex was in the middle of a story about partying at some club in Metropolis, which Kal guessed was the city, when another vehicle arrived. Kal immediately recognised it as Lois’ car.

“Lois,” he said, rising to his feet.

“The Kents called asking where you were,” she said, sounding perturbed.

Kal nodded. “I didn’t mean to worry them,” he replied, gesturing to Lex, who had also stood up. “Lex was in an …” He tried to remember the exact wording, “…accident, and I was just staying with him until his, uh, people arrived.”

Another vehicle turned up, stopping behind Lois’.

“And it looks like they’re here,” Lex told him. “Thanks for waiting with me.”

“Oh, you’re welcome,” Kal said. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Feel free to stop by the mansion,” Lex said. “I’d be interested to hear more about Eastern Europe.”

He nodded, watching as the older man went to speak to the driver of the other vehicle. Lois huffed impatiently.

“Well come on. Get in. I’ll take you home.”

She was silent as she drove to the farm. Jonathan and Martha came out to greet them.

“Oh good, you found him,” Martha said as Lois got out of the car. Kal followed uncertainly. “We thought you might have gotten lost.”

“I found him talking to Lex Luthor,” Lois told the couple. “Appears Lex was in a minor accident and Kal was staying with him to make sure he was okay.”

“Oh, well, that’s good of you, Kal,” Jonathan said, “but we’d prefer you to stay well away from the Luthors.”

“Why? I do not understand. I mean, I know what you said about Mr Luthor and your friend, but ...”

“You don’t need to understand, son,” Jonathan replied. “Just stay clear of them.”

Kal frowned at him. Jonathan seemed so adamant, but he would rather know more. Lex hadn’t seemed like a bad person; certainly not enough to warrant that sort of reaction.

“But why …” he began.

“You’ve got chores to do before dark,” was all Jonathan would say.

Kal looked helplessly at Lois, who just shrugged and waved her hand impatiently. She still seemed
to be angry with him, which he supposed he could understand in some respects, but he didn’t understand why she was so dismissive. Had something happened since she’d come to find him in the physical education class?

He immediately set to work, doing his chores, wishing he could use his super speed. He decided not to spend time worrying about what couldn’t be changed right now and became absorbed in the work.

He looked up a short while later to see Lois watching him. She seemed almost mesmerised. He glanced down at himself. He’d removed his shirt, not wanting to get it dirty. He didn’t feel the heat or cold so the temperature didn’t bother him at all.

Lois approached him, her gaze raking over him, her face carefully blank, but he could tell from the look in her eyes that she appreciated what she saw.

“Uh, I brought you some lemonade,” she said.

He realised she was holding a glass in her hand with what he recalled was the same beverage he’d been served the day he’d come to the farm.

“Thanks,” he said, taking the glass from her and sipping the cool, refreshing liquid.

“It’s, uh, hot out,” she commented.

He nodded. She seemed to be struggling for words.

“Uh, so, I should get back to the base,” she said.

“You’re not staying for dinner?” he asked her.

“Would that I could,” she replied quietly with a sigh. He frowned at her.

“I don’t understand.”

“Probably not.”

“You are a very strange hu … woman, Lois Lane.”

She frowned at him and he mentally kicked himself. She was too sharp not to have caught that.

“I should go,” she said, still standing in the middle of the barn, gazing up at him. She seemed to be contemplating something.

He put the glass down on the shelf containing the tools Jonathan used in his work.

“I should get back to work.”

Lois seemed to make her mind up, grasping his arm and standing on tiptoe, capturing his mouth with hers. Startled, Kal didn’t respond at first, but her lips were so sweet and soft and she smelled so good he returned the kiss, his hand going to her waist to pull her closer. He opened his mouth under hers, gently thrusting his tongue in her mouth.
Lois pulled away with a gasp, staring up at him with wide eyes as if she couldn’t quite believe what had just happened.

“I need to go,” she said, turning and running out. Kal started for the door but was too slow, hearing the car start up a few moments later.

What had just happened?

***

Lex strode into the library, pulling off his suit jacket. His houseman, Raines, followed him.

“Have the car towed and then I want every inch of it gone over.”

“Is there anything in particular you’re looking for, sir?” Raines asked.

“I don’t know.”

He sat at the glass table, opening up his laptop and accessing his contacts list, before picking up the phone. The other end was answered after a few rings.

“Phelan, it’s Lex. I have a job for you.”

“What do you want?”

“I want you to dig up everything you can on a Kal Novak.”

“Who?”

“That’s what I want to know. He's very cagey for some reason. He’s from Eastern Europe but wouldn’t give me specifics.”

His computer beeped, letting him know he had an email. Lex completed the call, telling Phelan to contact him with an update within forty-eight hours. He looked at the email. Instructions to call a number. He dialled it and waited.

“Joe’s Deli.”

“This is Agent Lima. Do you have something for me?”

“You have the wrong number, sir.”

Lex hung up, leaning back in his chair, steepling his fingers, staring into nothing. The phone rang a minute later.

“40 degrees, 45 minutes, 25.47 seconds north, 73 degrees, 58 minutes, 19.12 seconds west. 10pm.”

The phone was hung up with a loud click.
Confusion

Chapter Summary

Lois isn’t sure what she wants but she doesn’t want Kal to want anyone else. Anyone else confused?

Lois drove home in a daze, touching her mouth. She couldn’t help recalling that kiss, the way he tasted, the way her lips tingled afterward. Why had she done it? All she could remember thinking was he looked so hot, so sexy and she wanted to feel that hot body on hers.

Wake up, Lane, she told herself as her car started to drift over to the other side of the road, barely missing another vehicle approaching. The driver blared his horn at her and she shook her head, trying to clear it.

She’d been mad at him. Not just about Mandy. She’d seen him talking to Alicia and then walk away from her. From a distance, it had looked like they’d been flirting. Alicia was clearly trying but poor, dense Kal hadn’t even noticed. Lois had had a quiet laugh as the blonde had walked away, disappointed. Still, even the laugh couldn’t make up for the fact that she’d caught him talking to another girl when they’d already had this discussion.

Oh damn it, she thought. Why can’t you just admit you’re jealous? Why can’t you just admit you like him and not in a platonic way?

But where would the fun be in that, she thought. She had to admit, she did like the thought that she was driving him crazy. He was weird, that was a given, but the fact that she could push his buttons more than made up for any weirdness on his part.

She made it home without incident, noticing with a sigh of relief that the general wasn’t there. He was probably still out on whatever secret mission he was undertaking this week. Unlike most generals who preferred to sit behind a desk pushing pencils or something, her father was very ‘hands-on’.

She flopped on her bed, eating cookies which were dry and tasteless. Her father had clearly got them from the mess. She much preferred Martha Kent’s cookies. The older woman had treated her to a few of her specialty oatmeal raisin cookies after she’d brought him home. Martha had called her asking if Kal was with her, since he wasn’t home and she’d pleaded for Lois to go looking for him, hoping he hadn’t got lost.

Her book bag sat on the floor and she sighed. She had reams of homework already and it had only been the first day. Typical, she snorted. Teachers all seemed to want to make up for the weeks of summer vacation by overloading them from the first day. None of this ‘easing into it’ philosophy.

She shifted on the bed, grabbing the strap of her book bag and pulled it toward her, feeling too lazy to actually get off the bed and pick the bag up. Her notebook from English class beckoned and she pulled it out, turning to the first page as if to start reading her notes. She took a pen from the bag and chewed on the end absently as she read, then began idly doodling in the margin.

Lois was no artist but she could draw passably, she supposed. As she continued to doodle, it began
to take shape in the form of one Kal Novak, or whatever his name really was. Lois huffed and started
to scribble it out with her pen, tearing the page.

“Damn it,” she cursed.

She had Kal on the brain. She wondered if there was an actual medical term for it. Other than, of
course, infatuation.

She dumped the notebook on the floor and lay back on her pillow, thinking about Kal and his
kissable lips, his gorgeous thick wavy hair that she just itched to tangle her fingers in, his eyes as
blue-green as Crater Lake. She pictured his muscular chest, the dark nipples, running her fingertips
over them, feeling them rise and harden with her touch.

God, she wanted to kiss those nipples, taste them, feel the hard buds under her tongue, hear Kal
moan in arousal. He would run his hands up and down her arms, holding her as she traced every
contour of his gorgeous Greek god shaped torso, feeling the play of the muscles as he moved in
response to her caresses.

His hands would move down to her ass, cupping the cheeks, pulling her up so she would have to
stand on tiptoe just to stay upright. He would take her mouth in a hard kiss, thrusting his tongue in
between her lips, their mouths moving in the dance of lovers as their bodies pressed together.

Lois’ body began to throb with arousal and her hand slipped down to her sex. She cupped herself
through her jeans, applying pressure with her thumb, thinking about Kal pressing his own arousal
against her. She could imagine the pressure from his hard cock, the thick length of his shaft as he
humped her.

Suddenly he was there with her, stripping her naked. Lois looked up at him, wondering how he had
found his way to her but not wanting to question it. She would have thought she'd be feeling
vulnerable, wondering how he managed to get in a locked door. Maybe he had climbed through the
window. She didn’t care. All she cared about was they were naked and she was so hot and ready for
him.

He kissed her again, pressing her down into the mattress as he settled over her. She felt the play of
his muscles under her hands as she stroked him, letting him slip a hand between her thighs as he
gently coaxed them apart. He was so gentle for such a big guy.

Lois glanced down, feeling wetness pooling at her thighs and licked her lips as she saw just how big
he was. She’d had only one lover before him and that one hadn’t been nearly so well-endowed.
Well, she assumed from what she could feel, since she'd never actually gone 'all the way' with him.

Kal wrapped a hand around his shaft and slowly began to breach her. Sweat broke out on her
forehead as she realised she had seriously under-estimated her own ability to take a man his size. A
burning pain shot through her sex and she cried out, but still, she did not ask him to stop. Kal
continued carefully pushing inside her. Lois’ muscles screamed in protest.

Their eyes met and they held each other’s gaze. His own gaze held concern as she winced in pain
and he frowned. Lois shook her head. It was okay, she told him. The pain was slowly receding. He
began to move inside her, slowly and gently, anxious not to hurt her and her body responded in kind.
His movements gathered speed until he was thrusting hard and deep, the tip of his cock brushing the
top of her cervix. He adjusted the angle slightly so his body brushed her engorged clit on the upward
stroke and she screamed at how good it felt.

Lois opened her eyes, then groaned, looking over at the curtain blowing gently in the breeze from the
opened window. Damn it, she thought. She’d fallen asleep thinking about Kal and her body was still feeling the after effects of the dream. She’d had fantasies like that before, but never had anything been so erotic, or felt so real.

The next day when she drove to the farm to pick him up, it was awkward. She couldn’t stop thinking about the dream and kept glancing at him, wondering if he really was as ‘endowed’ as the dream seemed to indicate. Kal seemed to notice her discomfit, but, bless him, didn’t comment on it.

As she pulled up in the parking lot, just missing the car parked beside the vacant spot, he gazed at her for a long moment, then got out, stretching his long legs. Lois grumbled, glowering at the car next to hers, muttering about people who parked too close, even though the car was well inside the white line.

Kal stopped her as she started for the entrance.

“Are you angry with me about something?”

She blinked at him. “What?”

“You were very quiet in the car. I was wondering if you were angry with me.”

“No,” she said shortly. “Why would I be?”

“After what happened yesterday,” he reminded her.

“What exactly are you referring to? The times when you were flirting with every girl in a short skirt, or ...”

“I meant what happened last night. In the barn.”

She felt herself growing warm and knew she was turning bright red.

“What?” she said, trying to cover herself. “Nothing happened.”

“You kissed me.”

It was too late for denial and she knew that, but she tried anyway. Kal rolled his eyes.

“You know what, Lois? You are just like all the girls back home. They like to play games too. I thought you were different.”

He began walking away in a huff. Lois stared after him, cheeks flushing in shame.

“But ... I ...” she began, knowing she was in the wrong but not knowing how to fix it. “Motor mouth Lane strikes again,” she sighed.

Kal had already disappeared inside the school by the time she gathered her wits and was nowhere to be seen. As she started for her locker and wrestled with the locker combination, Chloe leaned against the door of the locker beside her.

“Crashed and burned huh?”

“Chloe, I’m not in the mood.”

“I saw the whole thing, Lois. Why won’t you just admit to the guy you’re jealous as hell?”
Lois pulled on the lock but it still wouldn’t budge. “Stupid damn lock,” she muttered. She tried breaking it in frustration. Chloe grasped her wrist then took the lock from her, dialling the combination and succeeding in unlocking it.

Lois made no comment as she grabbed what books she needed for the morning and slammed the door closed. Her cousin took her arm before she could walk away.

“Come with me,” she said.

She had no choice but to follow the blonde, letting her lead the way to the Torch office.

“All right, you want to tell me what’s really bothering you?” she asked.

“No,” she said, blushing. There was no way she would ever live it down if she told her cousin she’d had an erotic dream about a certain exchange student turned farmboy.

“Lo, c’mon, I know when something’s upset you.”

“I can’t. It’s too embarrassing.”

“More embarrassing than the time in third grade when Billy Schneider pulled up my dress and showed my underwear to practically the whole class?”

“Way more.”

“Does it involve a certain hot exchange student?”

She chewed busily on her lower lip, trying to avoid her cousin’s gaze. Chloe smiled knowingly.

“Are we talking PG-13 or NC-17 stuff?”

“Chloe!” she said, her tone shocked.

“One, I’m almost eighteen. Two, I have read one or two erotica. And three, it’s not like I haven’t had those same dreams.”

“You … you have?” Lois stared at her, surprised.

“Oh yeah. There was this guy back in freshman year. Well, it was after, since it was during my internship at the Daily Planet. I went along with a reporter to interview the guy. Now he was hot.”

“How hot are we talking?” Lois asked, curious.

“Well, remember that episode of Friends where Monica was talking about this hot guy she met. I think her exact words were: ‘hummina, hummina, hummina’.”

Lois frowned at her cousin. She’d never watched the sitcom, but she understood the reference. Hot enough to make even her cousin speechless.

“Potential?”

Chloe sighed. “Oh yeah. But he was like way, way older than me. By about six years, I think.”

Lois wrinkled her nose. Six years didn’t sound like a lot, but when you were a teenager it might as well be a hundred.
“So you didn’t answer my question.”

Lois told her what had happened the day before, leaving out the gory details of the dream. Chloe looked thoughtful.

“Well, I kind of hate to be devil’s advocate but you are kind of playing with him a little. I mean, first you tell him not to flirt with other girls, but you refuse to tell him you’re jealous, then you kiss him and act like nothing happened the next day. It’s gotta be confusing for the poor guy, I mean, cultural differences notwithstanding.”

“What do I do, Chlo? I like this guy. I mean I really like him, but the thing is, I’ve only known him, what, four days?”

“Well, I don’t believe in it myself, but I have heard there is such a thing as love at first sight.”

Lois didn’t believe in it either, but when she was little, her mother had told her the story of the day she and Lois’ father had first met. For her, it had been love at first sight.

Still, it had only been four days. Plus there were the little things she’d noticed about him that were off.

“But, don’t you think he’s a little weird?” she said.

Chloe frowned. “Well, without specifics, I couldn’t comment, but social ineptness aside, is this weirdness something you can live with?”

That was half the problem. She didn’t know. Not until she figured it out. Not until she figured him out. The trouble was, would he tell her what was really going on with him?

It was something that had been bothering her all night, apart from the crazy dream. She’d gone over and over things in her head, the way they’d met, the way he didn’t seem to know much about anything, and then the way he’d said ‘Women! Earth women!’ Why would he say it in that exact way?

She had to know more or it was going to drive her crazy, but how was she going to find out, she thought as she went to her classes. She couldn’t follow him around. He would start to get suspicious.

There was also the problem of what had happened earlier. He thought she was mad at him when the truth was she was too embarrassed by the dream to face him. Lois wasn’t a shy girl by any means, but the thought of Kal knowing she had even had an erotic dream about him, let alone the fact that it wasn’t just a dream but had felt so incredibly real … well, she had no idea how he would react to that.

From the moment she’d met him, she’d felt as if something momentous had happened. Almost as if they had been fated to meet. She’d read or watched enough science fiction to know that people thought alternate universes existed. What if there was some alternate universe where a guy called Kal-El and Lois Lane had met under different circumstances and were already a couple?

She could just imagine the possibilities. Maybe Kal-El had come to Smallville as a child, been living with the Kents and they’d met on a stormy night and fallen instantly for each other. Or what if another universe’s Lois and that universe’s Kal had hated each other on sight but eventually fell for each other?

Oh god, stop it, she thought, trying to knock some sense into herself. She was just going to drive herself nuts if she kept thinking about …
“Lois.”

Oh god! Lois pasted on a bright smile and turned to look at him.

“Kal, hi.”

He shot her a confused look. She knew what it looked like. One minute she was Lois Lane, the next she was Lois’ evil twin. Or something. She glanced at her watch. Lunch period.

“Oh, so you wanna have lunch?” she asked.

He nodded, still looking puzzled, but began walking with her along the corridor to the cafeteria.

“Um, about this morning. I’m sorry if it came off sounding like I was mad at you,” she babbled. “I’m not. I just didn’t sleep very well last night, that’s all.”

He nodded again. “You did seem a little tense. Is there anything I can do?”

Oh, she wished. “No, but thanks for the offer. Here we are. So, what are you hungry for?”

As she lined up for food, helping him get his own, she breathed a sigh of relief. Crisis averted. For now. Of course, heaven help her if Chloe opened her big mouth. She would never live it down.

***

Lex circled the Porsche, trying to figure out exactly what had happened the day before. He was sure if Kal hadn’t been at the bridge at that time, he would have been killed. As it was, when he played over the incident in his mind, he could see himself heading for the barrier, and the way the car had suddenly turned just didn’t seem right.

There was no damage, other than the tyres, that he could see. Not even any marks to give him any possible explanation. Lex hated mysteries. When he’d read mystery stories as a child, he’d always read the last page. That way if the solution didn’t fit with what he thought was a logical conclusion, he didn’t waste his time reading it.

He supposed he could have just managed to wrench the wheel and turn the car out of the skid in time, but he didn’t think so. He’d already consulted an expert and hired them to create a simulation of the accident using all the physical evidence they could gather. The man had been a forensic analyst with Metro PD and was now a freelancer. Lex was sure the man could figure it out. Even if was going to take weeks, or even months. Lex could be patient.

His employer in the agency, however, was not so patient. He sucked in his bottom lip, nibbling on it, as he recalled the meeting he’d had the night before. It hadn’t been with his employer. No, she was far too busy to meet with one of her so-called minions.

The man he’d been called to meet with just offered a glare in response to Lex’s greeting, handing him a package.

“What’s this?” Lex asked.

The man didn’t reply, getting back in his car and driving off without a word. Lex glanced inside the manila envelope and found a file. He decided to wait until he was able to sit down and thoroughly peruse the contents.

Thinking about that now, Lex was reminded of the file sitting unopened in his locked desk drawer.
While he trusted Raines, he couldn’t be sure his father wouldn’t drop in unexpectedly. Lionel had sent him to take over the plant as what Lex assumed was one of his many tests and it was not unusual for the man to conduct a surprise inspection. Of course, his inspection was supposed to be the plant, not Lex’s private papers, but since when had that ever stopped Lionel, Lex thought.

He sat at his desk and took the file out of the drawer, opening it up. There was a copy of Time Magazine from the late seventies with a photo of renowned scientist Virgil Swann on the cover. As Lex continued to peruse the contents, he found a note.

*Dr Swann has been seeking signs of intelligent life in the universe for at least two decades and claims to have made a breakthrough. Find out what he knows and if such knowledge is a threat to us.*

There was no signature, just an image of a white queen chesspiece at the bottom.
Chapter Summary

Lex gives Kal some advice on how to deal with Lois

Kryptonians couldn’t read minds but Kal would have given anything to know what Lois was thinking. He’d been in Smallville a month and he still couldn’t figure her out. One minute she was acting like they were the best of friends, the next she was … Kal couldn’t describe it, but in many ways she was like a character in a novel he had read. Yes, Lois was exactly like that Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

She hadn’t kissed him again since that first time, which was a pity. Kal rather liked kissing Lois. He would never admit it to her, but he’d been dreaming about doing more than kissing her.

He wondered if her behaviour had something to do with the fact that he had steered clear of the likes of Mandy and barely talked to Alicia, although the girl was nice enough. She clearly understood that Kal was not interested in her romantically.

Kal sighed heavily, trying to concentrate on the lesson.

“Kal-El, you are distracted.”

He stared at the Brain Interactive Construct. It had chosen to configure itself as a human, albeit a shorter male of the species. It also spoke with an accent similar to those Kal had heard from the young men in the town. Kal wondered if the construct had left the cave while he was in school so it could learn how to assimilate the culture. It certainly seemed far more knowledgeable than he was about the idiosyncrasies of American teenagers.

“I want to know about women. Earth women.”

Brainiac adopted a smirk.

“I am afraid, Kal-El, that is a subject I am unable to assist you with. I can give you facts, but I cannot help you delve into the female mind.”

“Great,” he said sarcastically.

“Since your mind is elsewhere, Kal-El, I suggest we end the lesson for the evening. Perhaps it would be best if we were to end the lessons in assimilation and return to recording data. That is, after all, the purpose of your visit to this primitive planet.”

“They’re not that primitive,” Kal defended. Perhaps technologically speaking they were thousands of years behind Krypton, but their ideas were certainly on a par with his own planet. They too wished to find ways to save their civilisation using peaceful methods.

The artificial intelligence adopted a derisive expression, wrinkling the human nose. Brainiac had no use for human emotions. Or humans in general.

Kal left the caves, making sure the secret chamber was sealed with the tiny crystal his father had
given him. The crystal could only be activated by someone with Kryptonian DNA and was safe from detection. He still didn’t want to take any chances.

As he left the cave, a light flashed on the entrance.

“Kal? Is that you?”

Kal shielded his eyes and the light was lowered.

“Lex?”

“I had a guard checking the area,” the older man said, smiling at him as Kal approached. “He told me someone was down in the caves. I thought I’d better come and see what was going on. The last thing either of us want is another rave.”

According to what Kal had learned, the caves had been discovered a couple of years earlier by a girl who was descended from the local Kawatche tribe. Her grandfather was a professor in Native American studies at Central Kansas and they had been searching for the caves for longer than Kyla had been alive.

The land had belonged to Luthorcorp, and Lionel had had full intentions of building an office park, but of course with the discovery of the caves, the land could no longer be developed. Lex had apparently convinced his father there would be better PR in them preserving the caves as a heritage site than bulldozing them and the state government had given them full conservatorship.

About six months after the caves had been discovered, several students had decided to hold a rave which had had tragic consequences. No one really knew what had happened but three students had been killed in terrible accidents not long after the rave. Luthorcorp had decided to have guards patrolling the area to prevent another incident.

“I’m sorry, Lex,” Kal said. “I was studying for a term paper.”

The lie slipped smoothly off his tongue. He had been studying in some respects, although, of course, it hadn’t been for a term paper.

Lex shrugged. “I appreciate that Kal, but you can’t just go into the caves when you feel like it. These caves are a valuable asset to the Heritage Council and if it were discovered that Luthorcorp was allowing you free rein …”

He nodded, trying to seem understanding, even though the constant security presence would hinder his efforts to make his reports through Brainiac. He should have known not to come while there was still daylight. At least when it was dark he had less chance of being detected. A cold wind blew around them and Lex shivered.

“It’s freezing out here,” he complained. “Come on, Kal, I’ll give you a ride home.”

“Thank you, but I …” He’d been going to say he could get there faster on his own but remembered in time that it would be dangerous for Lex to know about his abilities.

An idea came to him and he looked at the older man.

“Actually, I wondered if I could talk to you about something.”

Lex arched an eyebrow at him. “Oh?”
Kal pretended to shiver as the cold wind blew around him.

“You’re right, it is freezing. The mansion is closer, isn’t it?”

Lex studied him thoughtfully, then nodded. He led the way to his Porsche, a model similar to the one he’d been driving when Kal had met him, and they got in.

Once at the mansion, Lex ordered some hot chocolate for Kal and poured himself a small amount of liquid in a glass. Kal remembered from the few visits he’d had to the mansion that Lex preferred to drink a beverage he called alcohol. Scotch to be exact.

He’d talked about the process to create the Scotch, something to do with fermenting and aging and Kal had tuned out very quickly. Lex had made some remark; something to do with Kal’s people preferring something he called ‘Vodka’, but Kal was too young to drink anyway, according to the American drinking laws.

“How about a game?” Lex asked, indicating the pool table.

It was another thing his new friend had introduced him to on his infrequent visits. Pool was a strange game. Each player took a long stick and hit a white ball, which would collide with a coloured ball and the object was to get the coloured ball into a pocket. Kal had slowly realised the game was not just a matter of skill as it seemed to involve a little bit of physics and geometry, or knowing at what precise point to hit the ball to send the next one on the right trajectory and knowing just how hard to hit it.

Lex set up the table as a man came in with a cup of hot chocolate on a tray. Kal took it. Hot chocolate was one of many things he was coming to enjoy about this culture. Kryptonian food was nothing like this. Their dried supplements were ingested like the humans would ingest various medications. It was rather boring.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

“Women!”

Lex was leaning over the table as he took a shot but looked up at him.

“Are we talking women in general or one in particular?”

“Um …”

“Who is she?”

“You’ve met her. Lois.”

“The tall one with the mouth?” Lex nodded. “Yes, I’ve met her. Not my biggest fan,” he grumbled.

Kal nodded. “Yeah, Mr Kent’s kind of …” He decided the rest was better left unsaid. “Anyway, she’s kind of …”

“Contradictory?”

“The thing is, she, uh, she kissed me like a month ago and now it’s like she’s doing her best to stay far away from me.”

“Let me guess. She’s got you wondering which way is up and which is down?”
Kal frowned at the reference.

“I hate to say this, Kal, but none of us understand the fairer sex. That’s why we’re so captivated by them.”

“It’s not just that. She’s always, I don’t know, we always seem to be arguing.”

Lex stood up, his hand on his stick. He grinned.

“Well, I don’t know, Kal. It sounds like love to me.”

Kal rolled his eyes. “That’s not funny. And I don’t think it sounds like love.”

Lex frowned at him. “Haven’t you ever heard the saying: ‘you always pull the pigtails of the one you love’?”

“What are pigtails?”

“Girls, little ones, usually, put their hair up into what looks like tails, one on each side.”

“I still do not understand.”

Lex sipped his scotch. “Well, pulling hair is supposed to hurt.”

Kal frowned. “Why would someone want to hurt the person they love?”

“Well, sometimes love is painful.”

“Have you ever …”

“Loved someone? I was dating this woman a couple of years ago. Helen. She was a doctor. I wanted to get married. She didn’t. She took a research grant at Johns Hopkins instead.”

“But did you love her?”

“Sometimes it’s not about love, Kal. It’s about mutual benefits.”

That sounded rather cold to Kal. He wasn’t sure if his parents loved each other but he knew they loved him, even if his father could be rather distant at times. Then again, he was a scientist and often absorbed in his work.

“What do I do, Lex? I like her and I know she got jealous of me talking to another girl, even if she won’t admit it. I just wish she wouldn’t play games with me all the time.”

“Then maybe it’s time you put all your cards on the table,” Lex said simply.

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“Have you ever played poker, Kal?”

“No,” he said, wondering what ‘poker’ was.

“Back in the days of the wild west, a lot of the men would make their money from playing poker with their fellow cowboys. A few had the talent to become what they used to call card sharps. These were people who made a living off knowing how to bluff. There used to be a television show called Maverick which featured one such character. Anyway, like I said, these were in the days of the wild
west when as they say, men were men.”

“I have seen something like this. Jonathan watches old movies on a Sunday.”

“Then you know the kind of situation I’m talking about. Well, these games could often get rather violent, especially if it was suspected that one of the card sharps was cheating. So, to prevent this, they would tell the players to put all their cards on the table.”

Kal considered this for a moment.

“So you think I should just tell Lois. I’ve tried though. I told her I preferred to be direct.”

“Then perhaps you should try another tack.” Lex walked over to the desk and opened the drawer, taking out two small slips of cardboard. “Here. If this doesn’t work, nothing will.”

Kal looked at the slips Lex gave him. The name Maroon 5 was typed across the top in bold font. He frowned at it.

“Maroon 5?”

“I may not know everything about women but I do keep up with the Billboard charts. They’re apparently the hottest music act around at the moment. Trust me. Take her to the concert and she’ll be putty in your hands.”

“What if she says no?” Kal asked.

“Then you’ll know where you stand with her and you can move on to the next girl. Kal, if Lois is jealous of you even talking to another girl, even if she won’t admit she’s jealous, then she has feelings for you. I guarantee it.”

Since the next day was Saturday, Kal spent the morning doing his chores before heading out to the Beanery. Jonathan had begun teaching him to drive and while it certainly seemed a much slower process than running, it was at least a way for him to get to and from town without anyone detecting his abilities.

Kal listened as Jonathan lectured him about the road rules, his hands on the steering wheel.

“Always keep your eyes on the road when you’re driving. Sometimes it’s not about you being a careful driver but about knowing what the other driver is going to do.”

“So you have to anticipate their actions,” he nodded, recalling one of Jonathan’s first lessons.

“Exactly. You’re doing great, son.”

Kal glanced at the older man, then returned his focus to the road. He often wondered why Jonathan and Martha never had children as they seemed such a loving couple and would have made wonderful parents. Jonathan was kind but firm. They’d had a few little clashes here and there, mostly over his visits to Lex, but when they were working together on the farm, Jonathan would tell him stories about growing up on the farm and about his parents.

Martha had been teaching him to cook and he rather loved baking cookies with her. It was funny, he thought, that most of his pleasures on this planet revolved around food. Then again, since their diet was rather boring, it probably wasn’t that much of a surprise that he would love the food the best.

Kal pulled up beside the coffee shop and put the truck in neutral, turning to Jonathan.
“Why did you and Martha never have children?” he asked.

Jonathan looked a little taken aback, but inhaled and let it out slowly.

“Well, you know Martha couldn’t have children.”

“Why? I mean, couldn’t the doctors fix it?”

“Unfortunately it wasn’t something the doctors could fix.”

“But there had to be another way,” Kal insisted. “I just … I think it’s a shame the two of you were never parents. You would have been good parents.”

Jonathan smiled. “Thank you, son. That’s nice of you to say. I suppose we could have adopted, but the process can be complicated and sometimes expensive. We put everything we had into the farm.”

He glanced out the front windscreen. Chloe and Lana were watching them, clearly having seen them pull up.

“There’s your friends,” he said. “Have a good time and call me when you want me to pick you up.”

“I can get a ride back,” Kal told him. “Thank you for the lesson.”

“You’re welcome Kal,” the blond smiled.

He got out of the truck so Jonathan could slip into the driver’s seat and approached the two girls. Lana smiled at him.

“Hi Kal. Another driving lesson?”

He nodded and smiled at her. “Jonathan thinks I’ll be ready to get my licence soon.”

While driver’s education was taught at the high school, Jonathan had decided it couldn’t hurt if he gave Kal extra lessons. If he’d grown up on the farm, he would have learned much earlier, the older man had told him, as farm kids had to learn to drive various farming vehicles, like tractors.

He followed the two girls inside the coffee shop. Lois was already inside, sitting in their usual booth. Chloe slid in next to her, while Kal had to sit opposite Chloe so Lana could slide in to sit beside the window.

The waitress came over and took their orders. Kal slid his hand behind him to check his back pocket where the tickets sat. Still, he wasn’t going to ask her in front of Chloe and Lana.

She was avoiding him again. He’d tried to catch her gaze but she quickly looked away, flushing. He just didn’t get it. Either she liked him or she didn’t. Why did she have to keep playing these stupid games?

The conversation was nothing very stimulating. Chloe and Lana talked about movies they had seen and an English paper, which Kal had already completed, even though it wasn’t due for another week. Lois would probably leave it until the last minute. He’d noticed that about her. She usually rushed to do her homework and asked Lana to look it over for her. Never him.

Finally about an hour after they’d eaten, Chloe and Lana decided to go to the bathroom. Kal refrained from rolling his eyes. It was another thing he’d noticed about women on this planet. They all seemed to want to go to the bathroom at the same time. What exactly did they do in there anyway? he thought.
Lois continued to avoid his eyes as he settled back in his seat after letting Lana out.

“Uh, Lois?”

She finally looked at him. “Yes?”

“I was wondering … I was given tickets to a concert. Would you like to go?”

“Who’s playing?”

“Maroon 5.” She snorted, looking amused.

“I don’t think so.”

“Why not?”

“Do I have to give a reason?” she asked sharply.

“I guess not,” he said, sighing, humiliation at being soundly rejected burning his face. “And I guess I have my answer then.”

She frowned at him. “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing. I’m gonna go.”

“Wait a minute,” she said as he stood up to leave. “Kal …”

He ignored her, dropping some bills on the table to pay for his share of the food before leaving. He heard her scrambling after him as he left the café but he began walking along the street, his shoulders hunched, hands in his pockets. He thought about running off at super speed but there were too many people on the street.

A hand caught his arm. “Kal!”

“Forget it, Lois. You made your feelings pretty clear.”

She frowned at him, seeming genuinely puzzled.

“What feelings? You just said a concert. You never said anything about feelings!”

“Well, then tell me why you don’t want to go to a concert with me.”

She huffed and chewed on her lip.

“Well, if you must know, it’s because I don’t like Maroon 5. If you’d said Whitesnake I’d have been all over you like a rash.”

He frowned at her, not understanding the reference.

“Then why have you been avoiding me?” he asked. “You’ve gone out of your way to avoid talking to me for weeks.”

She pulled his arm and he let her pull him into the alley rather than fight her.

“I’m not avoiding you on purpose,” she said.

“That’s funny, because that is exactly what it looks like to me.”
She huffed again. "You are such a jerk sometimes, Kal."

"Me? Why won’t you just tell me what’s going on instead of avoiding the issue?"

She bit down on the corner of her bottom lip, as if she was contemplating something, then fist his shirt, pulling him closer and pressing her lips against his. Kal was startled for a moment but began to get into the kiss, thrusting his tongue forward to meet hers. Lois whimpered, her arms sliding around his neck, fingers tangling in his hair.

Kal found himself suddenly pressed up against a hard surface, realising she’d pushed him up against the brick wall. He curled his arms around her waist, holding her close. Lois whimpered again, then pulled away slightly, panting for breath. Her gorgeous hazel eyes were wide.

"Uh …" She was turning red, but it was hard to tell whether it was because she was out of breath or it was something else.

"Lois?"

She continued to pull away, breaking the embrace.

"I’ve gotta go," she said.

"Lois!"

She turned and ran without another word, past Chloe and Lana, who were staring open-mouthed in shock.

"Holy …" Chloe said, for once seeming completely speechless.

"I have to go after her," Kal said, trying to brush past the two girls. Chloe stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"Let her go," she said. "You and I need to have a little talk."

"But she …"

He sighed and followed Chloe away from the alley and down the street to a bench. Lana followed silently, her cheeks flushed and eyes appearing slightly glazed. Chloe made him sit down.

"Look, Lois has what I like to call a tightly wound bolt reflex. Don’t ask me where it comes from, I mean, I’m no shrink, but I think it has something to do with why she’s never really had a steady boyfriend. The thing is, Lois … she and her dad have issues."

"They don’t have to be ours," he pointed out.

"No, you’re right, they don’t. But she scares easily. Especially when things start to get hot and heavy like they were just now."

"She kissed me," he said.

"Maybe she did, but from the looks of things you two were about ready to take a rocket to the moon."

He frowned at the blonde.

"What are you saying?"
“You want to know the real reason Lois is avoiding you? Because she’s afraid she’s going to do something stupid like she did just now. Look, Lois is my cousin and I love her, but when it comes to you, she doesn’t exactly think or act rationally. Trust me, you’re the first guy I’ve ever known her to ever lose her cool over and it takes a lot for my cousin to lose her cool.”

He knew it. He could sense it when she’d pressed him against the wall. He thought he’d imagined it, but he felt her temperature rising, her heartbeat quickening with desire. He may not know a lot about Earth women, or women in general, but he knew enough. If Lois had been an animal, or rather a different kind of animal, he would have said she was in heat.

She wanted him, and he wanted her just as badly.

He left the girls, telling them he needed to clear his head and wanted to walk back to the farm. He’d done it before and they didn’t question it.

Despite Chloe’s warning to give Lois some space, he found himself heading to the army base. Figuring it would take Lois about fifteen minutes to get home, he walked for a few minutes then ran at super speed, passing the gate at a blur. He’d been a couple of times to Lois’ father’s house and knew where it was.

Lois’ car was in the driveway. Kal glanced at it as he walked up the path to the door.

She opened the door to his knock.

“Go away, Kal,” she said, trying to close the door on him.

“No,” he said. “I can tell you’re upset.”

She ducked her head, clearly trying to avoid looking at him.

“I’m not upset. I’m embarrassed. Now go away.”

“Not until you talk to me.”

She glared at him. “I don’t know what it’s like in your country, but when a girl says ‘no’ in this country, she means ‘no’.”

“I just want to talk,” he told her.

“What part of leave me alone do you not understand? I know you don’t have a problem with understanding English, Kal-El!”

“I’m not going away until you talk to me. What are you afraid of, Lois?”

“I’m not afraid,” she said.

He softened his tone, one foot inside the house.

“Then why are you shaking?” he asked.

She stepped back, looking up at him, her eyes wide with … he wasn’t quite sure what it was, but it definitely wasn’t fear. Her hand trembled as she lifted it to her lip, as if remembering the kiss they’d shared. He could still taste her on his lips, remember the sweetness of her mouth, the delicate scent of her perfume.

“Kal,” she said, sounding almost as if she was about to cry. “Please! Don’t.”
“Don’t what, Lois?”

“I can’t.”

“You’re not making sense,” he said.

She seemed to make a decision, raising her hands and laying them flat on his chest, trying to shove him out the door. He stood still, refusing to let her push him. She continued to try, wailing when her efforts were in vain.

He wrapped his arms around her and held her close. She pressed her face into his chest, not uttering a word. Kal kept holding her.

After a few minutes, she pulled away. He smiled down at her.

“Feel better?” he asked.

She punched his shoulder. “Jerk!” she said with affection.
Love

Chapter Summary

Kal and Lois sleep together for the first time

Chapter Notes

This chapter was done as a birthday present for TeamClois on KSite

Lois was sitting on the couch in the Kents’ living room, controller in hand as she watched the action on the screen.

“Die! Die! Die!”

Kal laughed as he came in with lemonade for them both. He was also holding a plate with a huge slice of Martha’s apple pie. Lois smirked at him. He clearly loved pie.

“You know they don’t talk back. Not that I know of.”

He sat next to her, sprawling casually on the couch. Lois scowled at the screen, having bombed out of the competition.

“Now see what you made me do. You distracted me.”

He snorted at her. In revenge, Lois grabbed the fork from his hand and snagged a bite of pie. He pulled the plate away as she chewed the morsel, sighing contentedly at the combination of spices and apple, as well as the pastry which melted in her mouth.

“Hey! Get your own!” he protested as she tried for another piece.

Lois laughed and tried to make a play for the plate, even as he held it out of her reach. She leaned over but still wasn’t close enough, then decided to go all out, straddling his lap. Kal just smirked at her and lifted his arm so the pie was high above his head. Of course, that meant he couldn’t eat any of it either.

Time to try another tack, she thought.

“Kal,” she said, slipping a hand between the buttons of his shirt. “C’mon just a little bite. I’ll give you a kiss if you give it to me.”

“That’s blackmail, Lane.”

She shook her head. “Not blackmail. Blackmail would imply I have something to hold over you. This is more like bribery.”

“It’s still bad. And I’m still not giving in. This is my pie.”
She stuck out her lower lip and he laughed at her.

“Nice try.”

“Pooh! You’re no fun!”

He shoved her off his lap. As she slid off, she felt what could only be arousal through his jeans.

They’d been dating, officially at least, for over two months, but Kal had yet to make any moves on her, other than exchanging kisses. She guessed he was taking it slowly with her knowing how gun-shy she was. She liked him, really she did, but growing up without a mother, especially during her teens, hadn’t made it easy for her to form relationships.

She wasn’t shy, per se, but having an over-protective father didn’t help matters. It wasn’t his fault, she supposed, but there were only two ways she could really go. Rebel, or push her own desires down deep, which she had. It wasn’t her father’s fault. He clearly had no idea how to raise two daughters, resorting to using military discipline. She knew her father loved her, but it still bugged her that the man really had no idea how to be a loving father.

God, a therapist could have a field day, she sighed.

Having said all that, she was actually getting kind of impatient with Kal. She wanted to go further, even if it scared the heck out of her, but he was still not willing to cross that line.

She watched him under long eyelashes. He was pretending to be absorbed in the game, which was just your average Warcraft type game, but she could tell he wasn’t paying it that much attention. She chewed on her lip and crawled over, running her hand over his thigh in what she hoped was seductive, before deliberately brushing his crotch.

Kal immediately grabbed her hand.

“You’re not getting my pie,” he told her. “And you can pout all you want, but it’s not going to work.”

She blew out in frustration, her fringe puffing up.

“You’re mean!”

She sat back crossing her arms over her chest and adopted an even bigger pout, glaring at him crossly. Kal ignored her, a smirk playing over his lips.

God, he was so annoying, she thought.

Things had certainly changed in two months. It was almost as if he was getting some kind of coaching in assimilating the culture or something because she hadn’t seen him slip up in a while. He not only appeared to be fully versed in the nuances of American culture, but all the funny things he did in the beginning when he confused one thing with another just wasn’t there anymore. She had liked that about him.

“Kal …”

“No.”

She scowled at him. “You don’t even know what I’m going to ask, yet.”

“If it’s anything to do with food, then the answer’s no.”
“You’re such a jerk! Why do I put up with you?”

“I’m the jerk?” he said, finally looking at her with an incredulous expression. He studied her for a moment, then huffed. “Fine. What is it?”

“Why don’t you … you know … make a move?”

“Move? What move?”

“You know. A move!”

He frowned at her, clearly not understanding. She huffed.

“Augh, you are so annoying!”

“I’m annoying?” he asked, raising an eyebrow. “Whenever we go out to the Beanery or whatever, you steal food off my plate. I take you to the movies and you talk all the way through. I mean, geez Lane, do you ever shut up?”

Wounded, she glared at him. “Fine! Whatever! If that’s the way you feel, then maybe we shouldn’t go out anymore!”

He rolled his eyes. “Do what you want. You usually do.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” she growled.

“You want to know why I don’t make a move? Because every time I try you run fast in the opposite direction!”

“No, I don’t!” she denied.

“You don’t? Well, what about last week? When we were watching a movie at your place?”

She frowned at him. Her father had gone away for a couple of days as he had some stuff to take care of in the capitol so Kal had come over to do some homework with her. He’d helped her with some maths homework a few weeks earlier and it had become a sort of habit with them. They’d finished their work and were watching a movie together. Kal had his arm around her shoulders and began pressing kisses to her neck. His hand had slowly crept up her thigh until … Oh god, she thought. She’d jumped up, muttering something about popcorn or a soda or something and had dashed out to the kitchen.

“Oh god!” she said. “I guess I did run in the other direction.”

“Lois, I really don’t know what you want. I mean, is it me you’re afraid of?”

“No. I … it’s just … Kal, you know my dad.”

Kal had been over for dinner a couple of times although she’d ended up ordering takeout both times because she wasn’t exactly the best of cooks and her father had never really bothered to learn, relying on the mess.

Her father had practically interrogated Kal the first night, asking what his father did and whether he was planning on staying in America. The conversation had basically gone downhill from there. Kal had grown increasingly uncomfortable until Lois had glared at her father and told him to leave Kal alone. He looked a little taken aback at first, but had backed off.
She sighed and laid her head against her boyfriend’s chest. Could he really be called her boyfriend since they hadn’t really acknowledged it?

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I guess I have been giving mixed signals.”

He nodded, wrapping an arm around her.

“Lois, I know. I mean, Chloe did tell me you haven’t had much experience with relationships. It’s not like I’ve had that much either. I mean, the girls back home, they’re silly and giggly and … I don’t know. When I go back home I know my father will want to match me up with a girl and I won’t have a choice.”

“You could just say no,” she said. “Besides, arranged marriages? They went out with the Dark Ages.”

“Not in some cultures,” he reminded her.

That was true. They’d just been studying some Middle Eastern cultures and Lois had been disgusted by the stories of little girls being made to marry older men.

“I wish you could stay,” she sighed. “I mean, it’s nearly Thanksgiving and it just reminds me that you’ll be gone in a few months.”

Kal sighed in return. “Maybe we shouldn’t do this,” he said. “I just know that you’re nothing like the girls back home. It sounds weird but I feel connected to you in a way that I’ve never felt with any of them.”

“That doesn’t sound weird,” she told him. It wasn’t. It was exactly the way she felt. That was why she had become jealous when girls like Alicia and Mandy flirted with him.

She understood what he was trying to say. He would return home in a few months and the likelihood of them seeing each other again was fairly small. Still, she couldn’t change how she felt. She just knew she liked being with him and wanted more than just brief kisses.

Kal looked at her, pushing her hair back off her face. He kissed her gently, slipping his tongue in her mouth. She wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him back, sighing softly. He was a great kisser. It was the kind of kiss that sent tingles all through her body.

She crawled into his lap, her arms around his neck. Kal held her close as he kissed her deeply. Lois moaned softly, eager for more. There was just one proverbial fly in the ointment.

“The Kents …”

“Aren’t here,” he told her softly. “They’re in Metropolis. Something to do with their anniversary.”

Lois looked at him, a grin playing over her face. “Really?”

He nodded. “They were having dinner in the city and were spending the night at a hotel.”

She chewed on her lip. “So we could do pretty much anything we want?” she asked.

“What about your father?”

“He’s in Washington. Again.”

“So you’re not expected home?” Kal asked with a sly expression.
“Nope.”

“That’s great,” he smiled, kissing her again. Lois let him pull her even closer so her body rubbed up against his.

His hands cupped her breasts through her shirt, his thumbs stroking her nipples. She could feel his heat through the thin fabric.

“That’s great,” he smiled, kissing her again. Lois let him pull her even closer so her body rubbed up against his.

“‘You can do more than just cop a feel,” she told him.

She shifted back in his lap and pulled at the hem of her shirt, lifting it over her head. Kal’s eyes seemed to darken as he saw her exposed skin, the twin mounds of her breasts in the lacy bra. He once again began massaging her breasts.

Lois felt a tingling sensation in her nipples. Kal bent his head, at the same time pulling down the lace. She gasped softly as his mouth closed over her breast, his tongue lapping at her nipple. God, she thought. The sensation was like an electric shock which she felt through her entire nervous system.

This had been nothing like the fantasy she’d had a few weeks earlier.

Kal’s other hand fumbled with the fastening for her bra, clearly trying to get it open. Lois took pity on him and was about to undo it for him when he managed to unfasten it, letting her breasts fall free of the suddenly tight binding.

With one hand behind her back, supporting her, Kal bent her slightly backwards, so he could get a better angle, his mouth closing over her breast, just wide enough to take in the slightly darker pink patch of skin of the areola, while he nibbled and sucked and generally teased each nipple.

Deciding he’d had enough of his own fun, Lois pulled his t-shirt out of the waistband of his jeans and he obliged by taking it off. She pressed her own mouth to his muscular chest, licking and sucking his nipples until they appeared to be standing at attention.

She could feel his cock hardening beneath her ass. Just the thought of what those tight jeans held caused tingles up and down her spine and her sex to throb.

She had only had one boyfriend in the past, but that relationship hadn’t lasted very long. A couple of months at best. Lois might have wanted to rebel against her father, but she at least had some self-respect and she had refused to let her boyfriend go past ‘second base’. He’d dumped her like yesterday’s news when another girl he liked had let him go further.

At least Lois had enough self-confidence to realise that he clearly wasn’t good enough for her. Of course, it had helped in the end that he had been completely intimidated by her father.

Kal might not have liked the general, but he had never been intimidated by him. He’d mentioned something about his father knowing a guy who was also in the military … and why was she thinking anything when she could be doing something with the hottest guy in Smallville. Hell, the hottest guy in the state, as far as she was concerned.

“Kal, make love to me,” she whispered.

He smirked at her. “I thought that’s what I was doing.”

“I mean …” she blushed. He nodded.

“I know what you meant. Are you sure?”
“Yes. Just … it’ll be my first time, you know, doing that.”

“It’s okay,” he said, stroking her hair. “It’s mine too.”

Kal laid her on her back on the couch and got up. She looked up, watching as he toed off his shoes and undid his belt, pushing his jeans down. He did the same with her jeans, then lay beside her.

Lois was conscious of his size but tried to relax.

“Lois, we don’t have to do this,” he said, clearly sensing her uncertainty.

“I want this,” she said.

Kal kissed her gently, holding her close. They continued to kiss as they slowly moved together. She felt the head of his cock nudge her entrance. Her body was throbbing, eager for his intimate touch, even when she knew that no matter how prepared she was, it was not going to be easy.

Kal moaned as he slowly guided himself inside her. Too slowly. Lois had to move, too impatient to let him take his time.

God, it hurt! She cried out and he stopped moving.

“I’m hurting you,” he said.

She shook her head in denial, even though it felt like she was being torn apart. Was it really supposed to hurt this much? she wondered.

Kal looked at her, his expression full of concern. Lois clung to him, rocking her body against him as he filled her. Thankfully the pain faded the more they moved together and she discovered her own rhythm.

Afterward they lay together, just stroking each other. When Kal had pulled out they both saw blood and he looked even more worried.

“I hurt you,” he said.

“I’m okay,” she assured him. “I don’t think I bled that much.”

“But I …”

She kissed him. “Kal, I promise you, it’s fine. You probably just broke my hymen, that’s all.”

He frowned at her. “Hymen?”

She punched his shoulder. “Don’t you remember your sex education classes? Girls have a hymen and it gets broken when they have intercourse for the first time.”

“But what is it?” he asked.

“It’s just skin. That’s what causes the bleeding in some girls.”

“Do all Ea … women have the hymen?”

“I guess they do. I think they said that sometimes it gets broken naturally. But that’s supposedly why it’s painful for girls their first time.” She scrunched her nose at him. “Of course, not all girls have to deal with a boyfriend who has a monster cock.”
He seemed mortified until she grabbed a pillow and hit him with it.

“Don’t you know when I’m messing with you, Kal-El?” she laughed.

He growled but looked relieved, but didn’t explain. He lifted her in his arms and carried her up to his room. Lois had to chuckle when he gently laid her in his narrow bed and made sure she was comfortable before laying down with her.

She had just about dozed off when he lifted his head.

“So, am I?”

“Are you what?”

“Your boyfriend.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “That’s what you take from that conversation? That you’re my boyfriend?”

“Well … so am I?”

“You’re pushing it, Kal.”

“Well, I call you my girlfriend, so …”

“Oh my god,” she sighed. “Why do we have to put a label on it, anyway?”

“I notice you’re not answering my question.”

“God, you can be such a pain in the neck sometimes,” she told him.

He rolled on top of her. She tried to shove him off, only for him to take hold of her wrists and push them above her head.

“If anyone’s a pain in the neck, Lane, it’s you,” he said. “You steal my food, help yourself to my coffee, try to cheat off my homework, finish my sentences …”

“Ahh you love me,” she replied, giggling.

“Like a hole in the head,” he retorted.

“Well at least I’m willing to overlook your personality,” she told him.

“My … why you little …” he said with a growl. She laughed, but it was quickly cut off with a deep kiss. She looked up at him.

“Is that how you plan on settling every argument?” she asked. “By kissing it out of me?”

“Hey, you started it,” he replied. “You kissed me first.”

“You kissed me back.”

“Then you kissed me again.”

He jabbed her lightly in the ribs. She laughed and squirmed.

“Hey, no fair. I’m ticklish!”
He laughed back at her. “What’s your point?”

Since he had let her wrists go, she was free to use them to push him onto his back. She straddled his hips.

“I am sooo going to make you pay for that,” she threatened.

“Bring it on,” he laughed.

She pondered the situation. Kal probably thought he had her right where he wanted her but she wanted to do something that would drive him clear out of his cotton-pickin’ skull.

She wriggled her butt, ignoring the way he groaned in response, and moved further down. Kal’s cock was already at half-mast, which meant he was getting turned on by the mock argument. That wasn’t hard to believe, she thought. It was kind of weird but funny at the same time that they were teasing each other while they were both naked.

Lois had never given a blow-job in her life before but she had sneaked a look at her friend Wes’ porn collection around the time he had been packing for boot camp. She figured he would be too embarrassed to discover she not only knew about his collection of porn videos but had watched a couple of them.

One of the models, or actress, whatever, had given the guy she was with a blow-job. Lois was no shrinking violet. She knew about the act, but hadn’t really figured out what it entailed. The phrase ‘blow-job’ was kind of a misnomer though, she thought, since there wasn’t really any ‘blowing’ involved from what she’d seen.

Kal raised his head and looked at her as she wrapped her hand around him.

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t know what they call it in your hometown, but here, we call it a blow-job. Don’t know why it’s called that actually, but eh,” she shrugged. “Whatever.”

“Lois …”

She ignored him and lowered her head, licking the tip of his cock. It tasted kind of weird. She had half-expected it to taste salty or something, but this wasn’t salty. It wasn’t totally unpleasant, but was so hard to describe.

Her technique was probably really lousy, she thought as she began licking him, tracing the vein from the tip to his balls and back again, one hand on the bottom of his shaft while the other stroked and caressed each nut. Still, Kal didn’t seem to mind, his moans clearly indicating he was enjoying himself.

Kal sat up, picking her up and laying her back on the bed. She frowned at him, then realised what he was about to do as he moved down. As he licked her, she felt the same tingling sensation as before. Kal’s technique was probably as bad as her own had been but her body didn’t seem to notice the difference.

She fisted the sheet, arching her back as he continued to suck on her, gasping at the rush as she climaxed.

Kal moved back up toward her and grinned.
“Don’t even say it,” she muttered.

He just shook his head and kissed her. Lois smiled up at him, her arms around his neck. She felt the hardness of his cock against his belly and nodded.

“Kal …”

“I know,” he said.

That was the funny thing with them, she thought. It was like they knew each other’s innermost thoughts. He knew what she wanted before she even voiced it.

This time when he entered her, there was no pain. Her body seemed to open up to him as if he’d always belonged there. Like her body was made for him.

Lois snorted to herself. What stupid claptrap, she thought. It was probably because he’d already made her come and had nothing to do with whatever connection she felt with him.

They fell asleep in each other’s arms, only waking again when they were hungry. Kal kissed her and called the local takeout place for food. They ate in bed. Kal teased her by pretending he was going to feed her a bite then taking it away and eating it himself. She got him back by doing the same thing to him.

Stomachs full from dinner, they lay talking, exchanging little kisses. They made love late into the night.

Kal fell asleep long before she did. Lois lay awake gazing at her boyfriend. She found herself wishing there was some way he could stay. Some way they could work things out so he could be with her always. She just knew that when the day came for him to leave, it would be like ripping her heart out.

Now she understood why it had been so difficult for her father all these years. Her parents had loved each other so much, she knew now that losing her mother had all but destroyed her father.

The same way it was going to do to her to say goodbye to Kal. Her boyfriend. Her lover. The only man she would ever love.
Lex glanced around as he got out of the car. His contact had told him to wait by the railroad tracks but this was a poor part of town and he felt uneasy. A few yards away, some of the city’s homeless had congregated around what appeared to be an oil drum. Someone had obviously managed to grab some wood scraps, setting them aflame as they had a good fire going.

“You have a report for me?” a female voice said.

Lex’s head snapped around and he stared at the African American woman in the backseat of the sedan. He hadn’t actually met the White Queen in person until now. She was older than him by at least twenty years. Attractive, he supposed, with a face that was softened by age and, if he was honest, more than a few extra pounds on her body.

“You're report?” she snapped.

He nodded, handing her a thick folder.

“I’ve had people go over the cave. They came to the conclusion there is something there … a hidden chamber. We have yet to discover the entry.”

Amanda Waller opened the file and slipped a photograph from the paper clip attaching it to the top of the pile.

“And the boy in this photograph?”

“I’m not sure what he is. All I can tell you is he’s been seen by my security team coming from the caves more than once. There is something rather unusual about him. I have some stills from surveillance cameras which my team swear are genuine where he is there one moment and a millisecond later he’s not.”

Waller frowned but didn’t comment. She still didn’t seem all that interested.

“I’ve had an investigator on his background for two months,” Lex told her. “The biographical information seems to check out but it just seems too perfect.”

“I still do not see anything that merits an investigation,” she told him. “What exactly are you expecting to find?”

“I don’t believe Kal is who he says he is. As for what he is … let me remind you of our mission statement.”

Waller glared at him, but didn’t comment. Lex went on.

“I had my scientists create a simulation of the accident. There is no way I could have wrenched that steering wheel. Everything they’ve managed to come up with has me crashing into the railing and
over into the river.”

“And you think this Kal might have pushed the car? Where is your evidence?”

Lex shook his head. There wasn’t any. At least, nothing conclusive. The scientists had gone over every inch of the car and found nothing.

“You need more than this, Agent Luthor.”

“I have a team on him night and day. If he makes a mistake, they’ll catch him.”

She scowled at him. “Let’s hope your faith in your team isn’t misguided, Agent Luthor.”

***

Kal walked in to school hoping to see Lois before they had to start classes for the day. He looked around, frowning when he didn’t see her, then went to his locker, thinking he would grab his books and stop by the Torch office to see if she had gone there.

“Hi Kal,” a voice purred.

Kal looked over the locker door and frowned at Mandy. She reached out and stroked his arm.

“You know, the Sadie Hawkins dance is this Friday,” Mandy said, smiling at him, still stroking his arm.

Lois had already told him about the dance, which was where girls asked the boys to go.

“I’m already going with Lois,” he lied. Lois hadn’t asked him, but he had no doubt she would.

Mandy scowled. “What do you see in her, anyway?”

How was he going to answer that, he thought. Lois might have had her issues in the beginning, but she had never tried to pretend to be something she wasn’t. There was just something so … fake about Mandy. It was as if all she cared about was her popularity, and having a good-looking guy on her arm would make her the envy of every girl in school.

He didn’t like the fact that she seemed to have it in for Lois. He still remembered the incident with the acid in chem class.

“Lois doesn’t pretend with me,” he told the blonde.

“Oh please,” Mandy scoffed. “Don’t tell me you buy into her act.”

Kal grabbed his books and slammed his locker shut. He was just going to have to be blunt with the girl.

“Mandy, I am not interested in you. I will never be interested in you. You are far too much like the girls back home. You are completely vapid and I cannot even begin to understand why you think you are better than anyone else. As for what I see in Lois, she is smart, gorgeous and I care about her. She is worth ten times a girl like you, so do me a favour and go try your luck with some other poor sap who falls for your, uh, charms. Whatever they may be.”

Mandy’s face turned red and not just with humiliation. She was enraged.

“You bastard,” she said. She looked over his shoulder at someone. “You’re welcome to him, bitch!”
She flounced off, turning her head with almost a snap so her long blonde hair flew behind her, hitting his arm. Kal felt Lois touch his arm.

“So, I’m worth ten of her, huh?” she said.

He turned and smiled at her. “Probably more than that but I thought her head might explode.”

Lois laughed, standing on tiptoe to give him a quick kiss. He took her books from her and carried them as they walked together down the hallway.

“Missed you the last couple of days,” he said.

“Yeah, my dad had to go to Washington and he decided to drag me along with him. I hope he’s not transferring again,” she sighed.

Kal frowned at her, feeling an odd lurch in his stomach. Almost like some of the humans described the sensation on a roller coaster when it dropped suddenly.

“Is that a possibility?” he asked.

“I hope not. Not with college next year. That’s if I can get in. My grades haven’t been that great,” she said, with an odd look.

“You’re smart,” he assured her. “You’re just not applying yourself.”

“Speak for yourself, Mr Genius,” she complained.

He stopped walking and pulled her into an alcove.

“Lois, you know I don’t say these things lightly, and you are smart. When you’re passionate about something you put all your energy into it. It’s one of the things I … I like most about you.”

She smiled at him. “You really think so?” she asked.

“I know so.”

They began walking again.

“So, you wouldn’t want to, I don’t know, help me study for the chem test next week, would you? You could come over on Friday, after the dance and we could, uh, create some chemical reactions of our own.”

He looked at her. “Miss Lane, you wouldn’t be suggesting what I think you’re suggesting, would you?”

“Mmm-maybe. So you wanna? I mean, the dance and … everything.”

“I would like that very much, Lois,” he told her.

They stopped outside her class. “Great,” she replied. “My dad won’t be home on Friday night, so we’ll have the whole night to ourselves.” She grinned. “I can’t wait for the dance. I bought a killer dress. It’s gonna knock your socks off.”

He frowned at her. What did she mean by that?

“It’s an expression,” she told him. “It just means you’re going to love the dress.”
“Lois, it won’t be the dress that makes you look beautiful.”

She blushed, then punched him in the arm.

“There you go, being all charming to little ol’ me,” she said in an exaggerated drawl. “Mister Irresistible, that’s you.”

He laughed. “That’s me.” He kissed her cheek, conscious of the other students watching from inside. “See you later?”

She grinned slyly. “Play your cards right.”

He returned home in a good mood. Martha had baked cookies and they were still warm and fresh from the oven. He could smell them as he entered the house.

“It’s bad enough that you ride that thing, but why do you have to work on it in the kitchen?” Martha was saying.

“Well then you wouldn’t have anything to be mad at me about,” Jonathan replied cheekily.

“Hello citizens,” he said cheerfully.

The older man looked at him, nonplussed. Martha frowned as she arranged the cookies on a plate.

“I'm not familiar with this child. Where's the moody one, lives upstairs?”

Okay, so he had moped all weekend because Lois was out of town, but moody? Kal went to grab a couple of cookies and she smacked his hand with the spatula. He pretended to recoil, still hiding his abilities.

“One, Kal. And don’t go giving me the puppy dog look either.”

He just continued grinning at her. She cocked an eyebrow at him.

“What’s got you in such a good mood, son?” Jonathan asked.

“Lois asked me to the dance on Friday,” he said.

“So she’s back from her weekend away?”

Kal bent down to look in the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of milk, tipping it to drink from it, earning himself a slap on the backside.

“Use a glass!” Martha scolded.

“Just checking you were watching,” he returned.

“I'm sure,” she replied with a snort. Kal grabbed a glass from the cupboard and poured himself some milk.

“So Friday night, hmm?” Jonathan said. “I take it Lois will be picking you up?”

He nodded. “We’re going back to her place afterwards.”

Jonathan shot him a knowing look. “As long as you’re being careful, son,” he said. Kal frowned at him. “We both realise you are old enough to make your own decisions about these things, and we
can’t stop you having sex. We’re not your parents.”

“Having said that,” Martha added, “we are still concerned. Does her father know you plan to stay the night?”

“Uh, he won’t be there,” Kal said, suddenly feeling guilty. “Lois says he has to go to Washington again.”

“Sweetie, I really think you should both at least be honest with him. Especially if you two are sleeping together.”

Kal looked at the older woman. He supposed he could understand. They had been concerned when they learned that Lois had stayed the night at the farm while they had been away. Kal had been honest with them and told them when they had asked. The couple liked Lois, but didn’t hide their worries that he and Lois were a little young to be getting so deeply involved. Particularly because Kal would be returning home at the end of the year.

He had been thinking about that. The truth was, he didn’t want to go back to Krypton. He had found a place here. He liked to think that he belonged here. It wasn’t the people, no matter how good they were. It was Lois. He loved her. He was in love with her.

He had mentioned it to Brainiac when he was giving a report and the artificial intelligence had acted shocked and rather bemused at Kal’s assertion. He had no choice, Brainiac told him. Krypton was his home and that was where he belonged. He knew he couldn’t take Lois with him. For one thing, she would miss her family. For another, he just didn’t know how she would tolerate the Kryptonian environment.

He decided the safest thing to do would be to broach the subject with Lois before the dance. She had taken on a voluntary role in the Torch, working with Chloe, to earn some extra credits, hoping it would boost her grades. Kal grabbed them both some lunch and took it to the office with him.

Lois greeted him with a smile and kissed him absently, looking at the sandwiches he had brought.

“Umm, roast beef. You are my hero,” she said, turning back to the computer.

“What are you working on?” he asked.

“Just an article on some of the football players. I don’t know why the teachers cut them so much slack on their grades.”

“Unfortunately,” Chloe said from the filing cabinet where she was digging for something, “it’s called favouritism. Plus there’s big money in it, like sponsorship deals for some of the games. Why do you think more scholarships are offered to athletes than they are to academics?”

“Is that really true?” Kal asked, massaging the knots out of his girlfriend’s shoulders. She moaned in appreciation.

“Ooh, babe, you really know how to treat a girl,” she commented.

Chloe looked at him, grinning at her cousin who was leaning back with an expression of utter bliss on her face.

“You know, I’m surprised you didn’t try out for the football team. You look big enough.”

“I’m not interested in sports,” Kal told her, covering up the fact that he wasn’t sure he could control
his abilities on the field. It wasn’t fair to the rest of the team either, he thought.

“There’s only one sport you’re interested in, right?” Lois replied with a wink. He poked her in the ribs until she squealed. “Don’t you dare!”

He began tickling her anyway and she rose from the chair, trying to get away from him. He chased her around the office, tackling her and pulling her down onto the couch with him. Lois burst into giggles, turning and trying to look sternly at him.

“You scored points with that massage, but I have to call penalty on the tickling. That was not fair!”

“Fair schmair,” he returned. “Time you took a break anyway.”

He got up and grabbed the sandwiches, handing the roast beef one to his girlfriend. Chloe was watching them as they unwrapped and began eating together.

“You two are so cute,” she said.

Lois poked her tongue out at her cousin.

“Oh, nice,” Chloe retorted.

“So how did that date go with that guy you met?” Kal asked.

Chloe had been asked out by a boy she had met in the city when she had interned at the Daily Planet. He was a photographer and also a senior in high school.

“Oh, it went fine,” she said. “Thanks for asking,” she added, shooting her cousin a look. Lois had obviously forgotten about it. “I don’t think I’ll get a second date with him, but it was nice.”

“Why not?” Kal asked. He liked Chloe. She was smart and pretty, if a little intense sometimes, but like her cousin, when she believed in something she put all her energy into it.

The blonde shrugged. “I dunno. I mean he was nice, and sweet, but there just wasn’t that spark. You know?”

Kal did know. It was that feeling he got when he looked at Lois. Like suddenly everything was brighter, as if the sun had come out. Like the sizzle of electricity when he was around her. Brainiac had told him it was a chemical reaction in his body. Kal didn’t care what it was called, he just knew he liked it.

“Anyway, I’ve gotta go. I’ve got a meeting with Principal Reynolds. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” Chloe added as she left the office.

Kal settled back and Lois took the opportunity to climb into his lap, kissing him.

“You know, you’re distracting me from my work,” she murmured.

“You have to eat,” he told her. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I wanted to talk to you about something. The Kents sort of mentioned it last night and I … well, they kind of had a point.”

“About what?” she asked, leaning into him with her head on his shoulder.

“About your dad. How come you haven’t told him about us?”

“He knows we’re dating,” she said casually.
“We’re doing more than that,” he reminded her gently.

“And you know what the general’s like. He wouldn’t understand.”

“Still, don’t you think he would rather know that we’re … well …”

“Having sex, you mean?” She sat up and looked at him. “Are you regretting it?”

“No,” he told her hastily. “Of course not. You know how I feel about you.”

She frowned. “I guess.” She ducked her head. “I don’t know.”

He touched her jaw, tilting her chin to make her look at him.

“Lois, I really care about you. I mean I lo … like you a lot. If there was some way for me to stay instead of leaving at the end of the year, or for you to come with me, I would jump at the chance.”

She looked at him. “You would?”

He nodded. “I would. Lois, when I think about the future, all I see is you.”

Her eyes seemed to mist over. “Oh Kal, that’s how I feel too. I can’t imagine being with anyone else.”

There had to be some way, he thought. Some way he could stay.

“No, absolutely not,” Brainiac told him later that night.

“Why not?”

“Your father would never allow it.”

“But can’t I … I don’t want to go back,” he said. “I want to stay here.”

“So you can be with this human female?”

“I love her.”

“You do not belong here, Kal-El.”

Kal scowled at the Kryptonian intelligence.

“That sounds like my father talking.”

“It is. I communicated with your father when I became concerned you were becoming too close to this female. Kal-El, your mission on this planet was to learn about its culture, primitive though it is, so you could learn to appreciate others on Krypton. When you return, you are to be matched with a female who is more suitable.”

“In other words, Kryptonian,” he grumbled. “The girls there are … they don’t care about things like love. All they care about is the bloodline.”

“That is how it has been on Krypton for the last one thousand years, Kal-El. You are Kryptonian and your destiny lies with your people.”

“But Lois is my people, can’t you see that?”
Brainiac remained unyielding. Kal sighed, realising he should have known better than to try to argue about emotions and his feelings with a machine. No matter how advanced the brain interactive construct was, when all was said and done, it was a machine.

It was depressing, but he did his best to put it out of his mind and focus on making the most of his time with Lois, continuing to learn everything he could about Earth, as per his instructions from his father.

Friday seemed to take a long time to come. Kal had managed to get a suit to wear to the dance, since Lois had told him while it wasn’t like the formal wear they used for senior prom, it was still more than casual.

He’d opted not to wear a tie, sticking instead to a blazer and cotton shirt – not flannel, he thought with a grin. Lois would never forgive him if he’d worn flannel to the dance. Black pants completed the ensemble.

“Kal,” Martha called up the stairs. “Lois is here.”

He quickly checked his reflection in the mirror, then went downstairs, walking at an easy pace. Lois stood talking to Martha. She was wearing a strapless silk dress in charcoal grey which went perfectly with her complexion. The fabric was dotted with sequins which sparkled in the light. Three inch high heeled sandals completed the outfit.

Her long hair was softly curled and flowing down her back.

Kal smiled as he looked his girlfriend over. He’d been right the first time. It wasn’t the dress that made her beautiful, although the dress was nice. It was her.

She turned and looked at him.

“Well, you clean up nice for once,” she said, winking.

“You look amazing,” he told her.

“Told you I would knock your socks off,” she replied.

“You did, and you did.”

Jonathan grinned at them. “You both look great.”

Martha came out from behind the kitchen counter.

“Wait, before you go, I have to get a picture.”

They waited patiently while the redhead grabbed her camera and took a photo of them together. Kal took his girlfriend’s hand and led her out to the car, helping her into the driver’s seat.

“Have a great time,” the older couple told them, smiling as they waved them off.
Chapter Summary

Lois doesn't want Kal to leave at the end of the year but doesn't know how she can get him to stay. The general discovers them.

It was a perfect night. Maybe Kal wasn’t the world’s greatest dancer, but then, neither was she. Lois didn’t care. She was in the arms of the boy she loved, dancing with him.

He smiled down at her.

“Did I tell you you look beautiful tonight?” he said softly.

She smiled back at him and laid her head on his shoulder. He pulled her close, swaying gently with the music. If anyone were to ask her later, Lois wouldn’t even be able to remember what was playing, her mind completely on Kal.

The music stopped and another song began playing.

“Would you like something to drink?” Kal asked.

She looked at him, then nodded. “You know, since it’s ladies’ choice tonight, I think I’m supposed to be asking you.”

Kal shrugged. “Does it matter?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No.”

He grinned at her and led her off the dance floor in search of the punch. Chloe was at the table with her date, a tall blond who looked a few years older than them.

“Lois, you look amazing!” her cousin gushed.

“So do you,” Lois told her. Chloe was wearing a strapless dress with what looked like a sash on one shoulder. The dark red suited her creamy complexion perfectly, making her eyes sparkle.

“This is Oliver,” she said.

Lois looked the man over. He was handsome, chiselled features with a cute dimple in his chin.

“Oliver Queen,” the man said, shaking Kal’s hand and smiling at her. “Uh, I was in town on business.”

Lois frowned at her cousin. She remembered something Chloe had said about a guy she had interviewed back when she had interned the first time at the Daily Planet freshman year. Or rather, a reporter had interviewed. Chloe had just been along for the ride.

Oliver and Kal were chatting so she pulled her cousin aside.

“What are you doing? He’s like twenty-five or something.”
“So?” Chloe frowned at her. “I’m eighteen. What’s the point? Besides, we’re not … I mean, he’s not my boyfriend. He … well, we’ve been emailing back and forth.”

“Since freshman year?” Lois hissed. Kal looked up and frowned at her, clearly concerned, but she waved her hand.

“Well, yeah. Like Ollie said, he was in town on business and I was going to come stag, but he said he could stay for like an hour and we’d go somewhere afterwards. Just to talk. It’s not like I’m gonna have sex with the guy.”

Lois chewed on her lip. She wasn’t sure if her cousin was being serious, but she did catch an odd note in Chloe’s tone. As if she was admonishing Lois for having sex with Kal.

“I’m just … you know what? Never mind. It’s none of my business.”

“Thanks cuz,” Chloe smiled, leaning forward to kiss her cheek. “Gotta go. Love ya.”

Lois watched as Chloe dragged the man away. Kal tapped her shoulder and gave her a cup of punch.

“What was that all about?”

“I think she’s dating him.”

“What about that Jimmy guy?” Kal asked. “I mean, didn’t she go out on a date with him recently?”

Lois shrugged. “I guess she knows what she’s doing.” She turned to him. “You know what? I don’t feel like dancing anymore. Do you wanna go?”

“Sure,” he replied.

Lois put her cup down on the table and started for the main door. Before they could go any further, Lana stepped in front of them. She looked a little annoyed.

“Lana. We were just leaving.”

“Well, I wanted to talk to you. Well, Kal.” She looked at him. “Mandy said you were horrible to her the other day.”

Kal rolled his eyes. “Lana, it is not my problem if Mandy doesn’t like being told the truth. She’s just mad because I told her I wasn’t interested in her. I’m with Lois and if you or Mandy don’t like that, well that’s your problem. Not mine. Now if you’ll excuse us, we were just on our way out.”

Lana sighed. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Mandy’s the type of girl who thinks everyone should bow down and worship at her feet.”

“Yeah, no kidding,” Lois replied.

It was cold outside, and Lois shivered, so Kal wrapped an arm around her shoulders. She smiled at him. It was one of the things she loved about him. He was always so considerate.

They walked quickly to the parking lot and Lois began digging in her bag for her keys, grumbling at the difficulty of trying to find keys when it was so dark. Kal smiled and took her bag, taking her keys out and unlocking the car doors, before opening the driver’s door.

“You hungry?” she asked as she started to pull out.
“I could eat,” he replied. “Wanna get pizza or something?”

“Sure. Pizza sounds good.” She kept an eye on the road while she dug in her bag and took out her cellphone, handing it to him. “How about you call in an order and we can pick it up on the way home. No olives and no anchovies though.”

He grinned. “Got it.”

After they had eaten, Kal pulled out her chemistry texts. Lois grimaced.

“When I said come over to study, Kal, I didn’t really mean study.”

“But we do have a test next week,” he told her. “You need to pass if you want to get into a good college.”

She sighed. “I know, I just … I don’t see why we need all this stuff.”

“Well, it’s important to get a well-rounded education,” he explained.

She wrinkled her nose at him. “You get that from the college handbook?”

“My father,” he said.

She chewed her lip as she studied him. In the four months they’d known each other he’d never once really given her any details about his parents or his home, other than the kind of information she could get by looking up his name and his home on Google. Most of it was fairly vague. He never told stories or anecdotes. She had no idea what his home life was like. The little he had told her made her wonder if his parents were kind of cold.

“You never really talk about your family. I mean, I told you about my mom and stuff. What does your dad do?”

Kal looked at her and his eyes did a sort of dance, as if he was trying to avoid the subject without making it look like he was avoiding the subject. She continued to look at him hopefully and he seemed to give in.

“He’s a scientist. He wants me to work with him when I go back home.”

She felt a flutter in her stomach at the thought of Kal leaving. She didn’t want him to go, but she didn’t see how she could get him to stay. He looked at her and must have known what she was thinking as he cupped her jaw in his hand, his thumb stroking her cheek.

“Lois, if I could stay, you know I would, but it’s impossible.”

“Why?”

“My father won’t allow it.”

“But maybe we can talk to him, tell him how you feel,” she said. “I bet if I just talked …”

He shook his head. “It’s not possible. He’s so far away.”

Lois frowned at him. Surely they weren’t so far behind the times where he came from that they couldn’t communicate with his father via Skype or something? Or maybe his dad didn’t know about Skype. No, that wasn’t right. He was a scientist, so of course he would know.
“I don’t get it. Why isn’t it possible? Kal, why do you avoid talking about your family and your home? Are you ashamed of it or something?”

“No,” he said vehemently. “You just … you wouldn’t understand.”

She stared at him. “What wouldn’t I understand? Kal, please, I know there’s something you’re not telling me. I need you to be honest with me.”

He looked at her and he seemed to be thinking it over.

“Lois, I can’t.” He pulled away from her and stood up, running a hand through his hair. She got up and went to him, touching him tentatively, trying to coax him to look at her. He turned and looked at her, his eyes darting from side to side as if he was struggling with something.

“Kal, please. I love you,” she said. “But you keep telling me we can’t be together and I don’t understand why.”

“You love me?” he asked quietly.

“I do. God help me I do,” she confessed. “Being around you, it’s like … like nothing I’ve ever felt before. The thought of you going away, it hurts so much that I can’t breathe.”

She was surprised to see tears in his eyes. “I know,” he said, “because that’s how it feels for me too.”

She couldn’t help it. The tears began to fall. Kal wrapped his arms around her and she could sense he was trying to hold back his own emotions. He looked down at her, his hand brushing the tears from her cheek.

“Lois, please don’t cry. I can’t bear it if you cry.”

She looked up at him, tears clouding her vision.

“Love me?” she said softly.

He kissed her gently. Lois kissed him back, tasting the salt from his own tears. She felt him lifting her up in his arms, carrying her to her bedroom. He laid her down on the bed, kissing her as he slowly unzipped her dress.

She watched as he stripped off his own clothes, his muscles rippling with his movements. His body was so perfect, so strong. She reached out a hand to his muscular chest as he joined her on the bed, her fingertips tracing every muscle, feeling the smooth skin beneath her.

She loved him so much. Before him, she had dated exactly one guy who had tried to get her to have sex with him but she had never felt anything even remotely to what she felt with Kal. There had been another boy, when she was fourteen, but he had been sort of a best friend, a guy she hung out with but hadn’t been attracted to. They’d been fooling around in one of the armouries at the base where she and her father had been living at the time and Wes had tried to kiss her. She’d pushed him off the crate they’d been sitting on and he’d sliced his head open in the fall. It had been an accident and she’d felt guilty every time she saw the scar, but it hadn’t changed her feelings for him.

Kal was different. Everything seemed brighter around him. No matter how hard life could get, just being with him made it all better.

Maybe all they had between them was chemistry. Maybe this was all just a physical thing, she thought, but she didn’t think so. It went somehow deeper than that. It was like every time he touched
her, her body felt alive. Like the time she had accidentally touched an electrical fence. It was a mild shock, but she had felt the sensation through her whole body.

When he looked at her, the way he was doing now as she explored his body with her hands, it felt like he could see right through her, right into her soul. Okay, that was kind of sappy, she thought, but she didn’t care.

Kal shivered as she stroked him, pulling her on top of him. Lois placed a kiss on his chest before tracing the dark skin of his nipple with her tongue. He moaned softly, his hands tangling in her hair. She kept kissing his torso, her arousal building as he groaned in response.

She could feel his arousal beneath her ass, his cock slowly hardening as it filled. She ground down on him, eliciting a gasp. Kal lifted her up, his hands on her waist and she grinned down at him.

“Impatient,” she tsed, shaking her head.

“I want you,” he replied. “Lois, please!”

“I’ve got you,” she soothed, knowing teasing was not what he needed now. She reached her hand back to wrap it around his shaft, aware of the aching in her own sex. “I’ve got you.”

She lifted her hips, then slowly lowered them as he filled her. Kal held her, guiding her as she rode him, her movements increasing in intensity as they drove each other on to climax.

As Lois tried to fall asleep, his arms tight around her, she couldn’t help wishing there was some way she could convince him to stay. Maybe they could run away together, she thought. Somewhere his father could never find them and make Kal return.

It wouldn’t solve anything, she thought. As much as they loved each other, running away was never going to change the situation. They would always be looking over their shoulders.

Kal shifted, lifting his hand to stroke her face, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

“You’re not sleeping,” he said.

“I know.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t help thinking … wishing …”

He sighed and closed his eyes for a second.

“I wish there was some way I could stay too, but I can’t.”

“Why? Couldn’t we just run away …” No, she’d already resolved this in her own head, knowing running away would be useless.

Part of her wanted to use some kind of emotional blackmail. Accuse him, something, say he didn’t love her enough or else he would tell her the real reason he couldn’t stay, but that would just end up with them fighting and she couldn’t bear fighting with him.

He kissed her gently. “Lois, I would run away with you in a heartbeat, but that won’t change anything. My father could still find us and your father would never forgive you.”

She began to cry, which was not something she did easily. She was a Lane. She was supposed to be
tough. Yet when it came to Kal, it was like all the walls she had around herself to protect her just came crumbling down.

Kal held her as she cried, whispering soothing sounds. She finally fell into a deep sleep.

She wasn’t sure what time it was when she woke, hearing noises in the house. Kal was still in the bed beside her. Lois turned her head to glance at the clock on the nightstand behind her, wondering if she should wake him up or go to investigate the sounds.

No sooner had she decided to get up herself when her bedroom door opened. She stared in dismay as the form of her father appeared in the doorway.

“Lois?”

Kal came awake with a start at hearing the general’s voice. There was just enough light for Lois to see the ‘oh shit’ look on her boyfriend’s face.

“Get up. Both of you!”

Lois swallowed hard. When the general spoke in that tone, he meant business. She glanced at Kal and he nodded. Her father turned away, leaving them to scramble out of bed and find their clothes. Or at least, Kal to find his clothes. Lois grabbed some pyjamas from her drawer and hastily put them on, while her boyfriend picked up his shirt and pants and put them on, forgoing his underwear.

Lois followed him out to the living room. The general had poured himself a glass of bourbon and was standing looking out at the darkened street. She chewed on her lip, waiting for her father to say something. Anything.

“Uh, we weren’t, um, expecting you …”

“My plane was cancelled. Mechanical problems,” he said tersely. He turned and looked at Kal. “Want to tell me why I found you in bed with my daughter?”

“Uh, sir, we … I … I love your daughter, sir.”

“You love her? You’re eighteen! How the hell can you know about love?”

“Daddy …” she began.

“I’m talking to your boyfriend here,” he snapped. “I come home to find a mess in the living room and you two in bed together. I expected better from you, Lo.”

“Daddy, I’m old enough to know what I want.”

“Are you now?” he said coolly. “Well, while you’re living under my roof, you live by my rules.”

She huffed at him. “There was nothing in your rules about me not having sex,” she retorted.

“Don’t get smart with me, missy.”

She hated it when he called her ‘missy’. She didn’t mind the ‘Little Lo’ he sometimes called her but the ‘missy’ just felt like an insult.

Kal remained silent, but that just seemed to set the general off.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” her father barked.
“Sir, with all due respect, I’m not sure what you want me to say. I love Lois. If you think I’m wrong to want to be with her, then I’m sorry that you feel that way, but I’m not going to apologise for feeling the way I do about her.”

“Did you two even consider the consequences? What about protection?”

Lois was on the pill. At least, she had been the first time they’d made love. Tonight, however, was a different story. She’d forgotten to take it. Not that it would have made any difference to the general.

“Dad, we’re both eighteen. That means we’re old enough to understand the consequences and we’re old enough to have sex.”

His glare was enough to freeze the fires of Hell.

“I thought I taught you better than this, Lo.”

“So what are you gonna do? Lock me up until I’m thirty? I’m not a child! I get it, okay? Don’t come down on Kal because you wanna be over-protective father! I’ve been taking care of myself since Mom died, so it’s a little late for you to pretend to care about what I do with my boyfriend.”

The general stared at her, clearly shocked by her words. Even Kal looked stunned by it.

“Is that what you think?” her father asked quietly. “That I don’t care about you?”

“No, I …” Of course he cared. She knew that. She still couldn’t help hitting back at him. Maybe he had never said it, but she had often wondered if he wished he’d had sons instead of daughters. Sons were less trouble.

“Lois, I just want what’s best for you. I want you to finish high school and get into a good college. I want you to do what makes you happy.”

“And being with Kal makes me happy,” she said. “I love him.”

She felt her boyfriend’s hand curl around hers, squeezing as if in reassurance. The general seemed to notice the gesture, but didn’t comment. He sighed.

“It’s late,” he said. “You should go back to bed.”

“Dad …”

He shook his head. “Lo, I’m tired. I’ve been sitting in an airport for six hours and I really didn’t expect to come home and see this. You just have to give me time to adjust to the fact that my little girl isn’t a little girl anymore.”

Kal bit his lip. “I guess I should head home,” he said reluctantly.

“No, you might as well stay,” the general replied. “It’s one in the morning and I doubt the Kents would appreciate you waking them up at this time of night to come and pick you up.” He looked at Lois. “That does not mean, young lady, that I’m giving you two my blessing. It means I’m well aware you’re eighteen and as such, I cannot stop you from doing what you want.”

Lois nodded sombrely at her father, glad at least for the small reprieve.

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Lex was sitting at the computer, running the simulation over and over, trying to figure out what was
going on. He was so engrossed in it he didn’t hear the footsteps of the man entering the study. He was unaware anyone was there until the man coughed politely.

He looked up and frowned at Steven Hamilton.

“What is it?”

“Sir, we’ve been over every inch of those caves but we can’t seem to figure out how where the chamber is or how to get into it.”

Lex wanted to curse and scream at the man, call him incompetent, but he wouldn’t have hired Hamilton if he hadn’t been the best, notwithstanding the little incident with a student that had lost him his tenure at Metropolis University in the first place. Hamilton was a first-rate geologist and if he said they couldn’t do something, it couldn’t be done.

Yet there was still something about those damned caves that bothered Lex. He wouldn’t have spent millions of dollars on the most up-to-date equipment, trying to get some kind of blueprint of the caves, if he thought there had been nothing to find.

From the little Hamilton had been able to glean from his studies, there had been something in those caves that seemed to be actually stopping them from getting what they needed. As if there was some kind of shield or force field.

Waller was not happy with his report, but it seemed she had at least looked it over and decided there was something worth her time.

“I sent an agent to Eastern Europe to investigate this Kal Novak. The boy does not exist. Yet his paperwork would seem to suggest otherwise. Bring the boy in.”

“And if he resists?” Lex asked.

“Find a way to make him co-operate.”

Lex knew just how he would start. Kal had at least one vulnerability. Lois Lane.
Missing

Chapter Summary

Lois is missing. Has she run away or has something more sinister happened? Kal and Chloe investigate.

Lex contacted a man who had worked for Checkmate before. The man had once been a colonel in the army until he’d been dishonourably discharged. Waller had recruited him for the Suicide Squad, to lead a group of people she called metahumans; people with remarkable abilities. He had disappeared for a few years after a mission had gone badly wrong in a Jihad stronghold in the Middle East. It had been thought that the squad leader was dead, but he had been taken prisoner and tortured.

There was a file on him at least two inches thick in the archives of Checkmate on the things he had done both before and after joining Checkmate. Things which would get him life imprisonment should it get out.

His experiences in that prison had made him hard and even malicious. Just the kind of man Lex needed to carry out this particular mission.

Rick Flag stood in the middle of the floor, glowering at Lex. His posture was erect, the bearing of a man who hadn’t left the military behind him. He had a long, jagged scar down one side of his face, close-cropped dark hair peppered with grey and ice blue eyes.

“You want me to do what?” he growled, his voice low.

“I think you understand my orders. The girl is not to be harmed, but I warn you. She will not come easily.”

“Given who her father is, I would not be surprised in the least. Why do you want her?”

“It isn’t your job to question me, Flag,” Lex said coolly. “Let me remind you that Agent Waller has a file on you which she could release on my say-so.”

The man’s cold eyes narrowed at him. Flag clearly didn’t like him, which was fine with Lex. He dismissed Flag before the man could continue to voice any more objections or questions on the mission.

As the other man walked out, Lex’s housekeeper walked in.

“Phone call,” the woman said tersely, handing him the cordless handset.

The staff didn’t like him either, but Lex could live with that. He wasn’t out to win any popularity contest. What did rattle though, was that whenever Kal came around the staff would drop anything just to get a smile out of the young man. The cook would always make sure she had sugary snacks, saying he was a growing boy.

As much as Lex genuinely did like Kal, it pissed him off that here was someone who was a stranger in town yet seemed to be accepted as if he had lived here all his life, but Lex, who employed more
than twenty five hundred people in this town that progress seemed to have passed by, was considered a pariah.

He lifted the handset to his ear.

“Yes?”

“Lex.”

Oh great, he sighed. His father.

“Dad, how …” he hesitated, “… good of you to call. I was wondering when you were going to darken my doorstep.”

“I’ve been hearing some disturbing reports, Lex. It seems you have let your work slide and cultivated other interests.”

“And what would those be, Dad?”

“Don’t be obtuse, Lex. It doesn’t suit you. What is this project you have already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of my money on?”

“Come on, Dad. First of all, it’s my money. My salary from working for your company.”

His father was silent, as if waiting for Lex to launch into a tirade. One thing he’d learned about working for someone like Waller was to keep his temper. She didn’t tolerate agents who let their emotions get the best of them. Of course, she had never been raised by someone like Lionel, who seemed to make a sport of rousing tempers.

“It drives you crazy doesn’t it? I’m not out clubbing until six am, spending your money. I’m on track, and that bothers you. The only thing you should be concerned about is whether the plant is making a profit. What I do on my own time is my business and has nothing to do with the company.”

He ended the call, wanting to throw the phone across the room. His relationship with his father could be difficult at best. He’d once wanted to become a scientist, but Lionel had made it clear in no uncertain terms that he was to work for Luthorcorp.

He’d met Amanda Waller through one of his professors at Princeton. Lex supposed that was how she recruited agents. When he’d first met her, she had ordered him to be taken through rigorous tests including physical and mental, as well as intelligence. Lex had learned she had been keeping an eye on Luthorcorp for some time, due to some of the side projects Lionel was involved in. It seemed his father had been taking an interest in meta-humans himself.

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Kal was working with Jonathan in the field, helping to ensure the crops were protected from frost for the winter. Some of the crops needed to be covered, and the animals in the pasture also needed to be taken care of.

It had been three days since the dance and he hadn’t seen Lois or talked to her since Saturday when she had dropped him home. At breakfast that morning, her father had again lectured them about being careful. While he had said he understood that his daughter was old enough to get into a sexual relationship, he still wasn’t happy about it. Kal wondered if the reason he hadn’t been able to talk to Lois was because of her father.
Kal was worried about her. She had seemed a little upset when she’d dropped him off at the farm, not even staying for coffee. She’d kissed him goodbye and let him out of the car, turning it around without another word.

“Kal?”

Frowning, he turned to look at Martha. She looked a little nervous as she stood at the fence. He glanced at Jonathan, who shrugged and waved for him to drop what he was doing and see what was up.

The redhead seemed worried.

“There’s someone to see you,” she said.

Kal frowned again, wondering who would have come to see him. He went to the gate and opened it, making sure it was secure behind him as he followed Martha back to the house.

He was surprised to see his visitor was General Lane.

“General?” he said uncertainly.

“Kal. I was looking for Lois. I thought she might be here.”

Kal shook his head. “I haven’t seen her or talked to her since Saturday. She seemed kind of upset when she left here.”

“I haven’t seen her since yesterday.”

Kal could see the man was very worried. Normally, from the little time he had spent with the older man, the general was a rather stern man, although even Kal could tell he loved his daughter deeply. In many ways, the man reminded him a little of his own father, despite their occupations being completely disparate.

“She wasn’t at school today either,” Kal admitted.

He wasn’t going to tell the general that Lois sometimes skipped class, but for her to skip an entire day was very unusual.

The older man ran a hand over his head and sighed.

“I had an argument with her yesterday. Over you. She left the base not long afterward. I can’t help but worry that she might have run away, but the only place she would run to would be here.”

Kal thought that too. Lois had mentioned running away on Friday night, but he didn’t think she would actually do it. The general looked pained.

“Look, it’s no secret that I’m still not happy about what the two of you have been doing behind my back, but my daughter is eighteen and I can’t stop her. I just wish you’d both talked to me about it.”

“Sir, we can’t help how we feel,” Kal tried.

“I’m aware of that, son, but the point is, you’ll be going home in a few months and what is Lois going to do then? I’m not completely ignorant when it comes to my daughter. It’s very unlike her to get so serious about someone. Maybe part of that is my fault,” he said with another sigh. “She’s grown up without a mother and I haven’t exactly been there to help ease her over the worst of things.”
“I’m sure you did your best,” Martha said quietly, reminding Kal that she had been there in the background.

It was one thing he liked about Martha. She was always willing to try to see both sides of an issue.

“If it helps, I can go talk to Chloe,” Kal offered.

“It would. Thank you. In the meantime, I’ll keep trying her cell.” He took a slip of paper from the counter and wrote a number down.

“This is the number of my personal cell. If you hear from her, call me immediately.”

Kal nodded, promising the general he would call. Even if Lois objected. He watched the general leave. The man was clearly worried. For someone who Lois often said was rather stoic, Kal wondered if the man was on the verge of breaking down. If it hadn’t been obvious before, it was more so now. He loved his daughter dearly.

“I’m going to go talk to Chloe,” Kal told Martha.

She nodded, knowing his missing girlfriend was more important than farm chores. She handed him some keys.

“Take the truck,” she said.

Kal nodded his thanks. Martha also handed him a phone.

“She might call here. If she does, I’ll call you on the cellphone.”

“Thank you.”

He went out to the truck, a little nervous, since he hadn’t driven the truck beyond the farm gates alone, although he did have his learners’ permit. Jonathan was by the fence, checking some of the posts to make sure they were sturdy.

“What’s up?” he asked as Kal rattled the keys in his hand.

“It’s Lois. She’s missing. The general thought she might be here.”

His guardian frowned. “That doesn’t sound like Lois.”

“I know. Chloe will still be at school working on the Torch. I figured I’d go there and talk to her, see if she’s heard from her.”

Jonathan nodded. “Go, but drive carefully son. We wouldn’t want you to get into an accident.”

Kal got in the truck and started to drive slowly out of the gate. Once he had managed to get used to the gears and get a little more comfortable with the driving, he was able to accelerate.

He had thought about using his super-speed, but the last thing he’d wanted to do was reveal his abilities to the Kents.

He drove to the school and hurried into the building, along the corridor to the newspaper office. Chloe was working at the computer as usual, laying out the paper. She looked up when he came in.

“Kal? What’s wrong? You look upset.”
“Have you heard from Lois?”

She shook her head. “No. Why?” She frowned. “Come to think of it, she wasn’t at school today. She wasn’t answering her phone either.”

“I know. Her dad came by the farm looking for her.”

“So you haven’t seen her either?”

Kal shook his head. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Okay,” she said, rolling her chair back from the computer. “Let’s think about this for a minute. Did anything happen?”

Kal told her what had happened Friday night and then repeated the general’s story.

“Well, okay, you’re right. No matter how bad things are between her and her dad, she wouldn’t run away. Maybe she was on her way to the farm to see you.”

“Then her car would be on the highway somewhere,” Kal guessed.

Chloe nodded. She turned and grabbed her keys from the desk.

“Let’s go.”

Kal tried to hide his frustration. It would have been a lot quicker if he’d been able to run, checking along the highway, rather than have her accompany him. Chloe must have sensed it anyway.

“Kal, she’s my cousin. If something’s happened to her, then I want to help.”

“Okay, you’re right. Let’s go.”

“Better let me drive. I know these roads better than you.”

Kal felt cramped in the little Yaris Chloe drove. He’d pushed the seat back as far as he could get it, but it still didn’t give him enough room for his long legs.

“Sorry,” Chloe said, clearly noticing his discomfort. “Guess this car isn’t made for tall guys.”

“I guess not.”

“So, you said something about maybe Lois being upset with you too.”

“Well, I don’t know. I mean, we talked about things on Friday night. I guess she finds it difficult knowing that I will be going home at the end of the year.”

“Well of course she would. I mean, Lois and I are pretty close, but I’ve never seen her fall so hard for someone.”

“This isn’t easy for me either, Chloe. I don’t want to go back, but I don’t see any way to make it work.” He glanced at her, but didn’t voice what he was thinking. Chloe seemed to understand anyway.

“You really love her, Kal, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do.”
It was getting dark, which was going to make their task more difficult.

“Can’t you just, like, track Lois’ phone?” Kal asked.

“Okay, you watch way too many procedural cop shows,” Chloe joked. Jonathan was fond of watching procedural dramas on the television. “Tracking a cellphone isn’t as easy as it looks. First, the phone has to be switched on. Then there’s a whole lot of other hoops you have to jump through just to start tracking.”

“It was just an idea.”

Chloe slowed the car, pointing to the woods.

“There’s Palmer Woods. Lois would pass by on her way to the farm from the base. Maybe we should check there.”

“Good idea,” Kal said.

She stopped the car on the side of the road, making sure it was far enough to the side that other vehicles had plenty of room to pass, and they got out, starting to walk toward the woods. Kal glanced at her, making sure she wasn’t watching him, then focused on the woods. His vision allowed him to see through solid objects.

He was surprised when something did show up. Something in the shape of a car. He started running toward it, ignoring Chloe’s call.

He cried out as he reached the car. It was Lois’. There was no sign of her.

Chloe ran up to him, panting.

“What are you, part bloodhound?” she asked.

He stared at her in confusion. She shook her head and sighed.

“Never mind.”

She opened the driver’s side door of the car and began searching. She emerged a minute later with a bag. Lois’ bag. As Kal watched with growing anxiety, she pulled out Lois’ cellphone.

“Battery’s dead.”

Kal searched the car himself, moving around to the passenger side.

“Chloe!” he said.

She came to his side, gasping at the dents and scratches on the side of the car. Lois was not the best of drivers but this …

“This looks like someone forced her off the road, Kal.”

“Who would do this?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. But whoever did it must have forced her out of the car, then drove it into this clearing.” She pointed. “This looks like it was scratched by a tree branch. Plus the seat was pushed back. Definitely someone taller than her.”
It seemed pretty clear what had happened. Lois had been kidnapped. Kal stared at Chloe in dismay.

“We need to call the police,” he said. “And the general.”

“I guess,” Chloe replied, looking uncertain.

“Lois didn’t run away,” he told her.

“I know that, Kal, but don’t you think this is awfully odd? I mean she gets involved with you and she’s suddenly kidnapped.”

“What are you trying to say?” he asked.

“Well, look, I’m not trying to imply that you had anything to do with this, but I do think there’s something weird going on. I mean, Lana lives like a mile from the Kents and they never said anything to her about knowing a kid from Eastern Europe, or his family. I still don’t get why they let you stay with them.”

“For someone who’s not trying to imply anything, you’re sure implying a lot.”

“I wouldn’t be a good reporter if I wasn’t a good observer of human behaviour, Kal, and you have to admit that there are some things a little off about you. I mean, for one, how did you speak such perfect, or almost perfect English but know nothing about ice cream, or high school. I mean, at first. And then it was suddenly like you’d absorbed every John Hughes movie in existence.”

Kal looked at her oddly, confused by the reference.

“We’re wasting time. Lois could be hurt, or worse, and you want to question me about my background? Lois is missing, Chloe. Why don’t you save the interrogation and help me find my girlfriend!”

“Fine,” she said. “But we are going to talk about this.”

He rolled his eyes and sighed. “So how do we figure out who might have kidnapped her?”

“Well, we could scrape paint chips off her car. We could have them analysed, see if they’ll tell us what kind of vehicle they were driving.”

“We don’t have time. What else?”

Chloe sighed. “I don’t know. Can you think of who might have a reason to want to kidnap her?”

Kal stared at her helplessly. “No. Not unless the general’s been involved in some secret project. He has been going to Washington a lot.”

She lifted her shoulders then let them go with a heavy sigh.

“Okay, I guess we should start there.”

They called the police from the road and discovered the general had already reported Lois missing. The sheriff seemed deeply concerned when he heard about the car in the woods and brought a couple of deputies with him.

The general arrived shortly after the sheriff. Kal and Chloe quickly told him what they’d found.

“Is there anything you might be involved in?” Chloe began. He turned on her.
“You think this is my fault?” he asked.

“Uncle Sam, I’m just trying to …”

“You know me better than that, Chloe. I would never get involved in anything that would cause harm to come to my daughters.”

“I’m just saying … besides, from what Lois keeps saying, you’ve always put your work before them.”

The general looked pained, grief and guilt marring his expression. Chloe started to say something else, but Kal nudged her to shut up.

“Sir, what about your trips to Washington?”

“That’s nothing. It’s just work. I promise, there is nothing that would give anyone a reason to kidnap her.”

Sheriff Miller approached them.

“General Lane,” he said. “I promise we’re going to do everything we can to find your daughter.”

“Thank you, Sheriff.”

The sheriff looked at Kal and Chloe. “I don’t think there’s anything more you kids can do tonight. I suggest you both go home and wait by the phone.”

Kal couldn’t do that. There had to be something else he could do. The thought that someone might be hurting the girl he loved was something he couldn’t bear.

Chloe dropped him back at the high school so he could get the truck and left, promising she would do what she could. Since they had so little to go on, he didn’t think there was much she could do.

He debated what to do himself. He didn’t want to risk going to the cave – not driving, anyway, since the security team Lex had hired to keep an eye on the caves would most likely spot the vehicle. The only other person he could think of to help him was Lex.

His friend seemed surprised to see him.

“Kal, what brings you by?”

“Lex, I need your help. Lois has been kidnapped.”

A strange expression crossed Lex’s face but it vanished as quickly as it had appeared. He spoke slowly.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Kal. What … uh, do you know who might have done this?”

Kal shook his head. “No. That’s why I came to you. I mean, you have contacts. I thought you might be able to help me figure out who took her.”

“I really don’t know what you think I can do, but I can certainly try a few of my contacts.”

Kal watched him. Lex was still speaking slowly, deliberately, as if he was carefully weighing his words. Kal narrowed his vision on his friend’s pulse. His heart rate had risen slightly. Not enough to be noticeable, but certainly enough for him to be concerned. Did Lex know something?
The older man approached him, hands on his shoulders.

“Kal, I promise, I will do everything in my power to get Lois back. In the meantime, I think you should go home. I don’t think there’s anything more you can do.”

“I – I guess you’re right, Lex.”

Kal left the mansion and drove the truck back to the farm. The Kents were concerned but agreed with the sheriff that there wasn’t much more he could do. Kal didn’t want to wait by the phone. He wanted to be out there looking for his girlfriend.

He told the couple he was going to go for a walk. As soon as he was clear of the farm, he began running at super speed, making his way to the cave. He entered the main cavern and activated the key to open the hidden chamber.

“Brainiac.”

The Kryptonian artificial intelligence emerged.

“What is it, Kal-El?”

“Lois Lane has been kidnapped.”

“I see. And you want me to do what? Leave it to the authorities, Kal-El. It is not your concern.”

“What if she was kidnapped because of me?” Kal asked.

The construct remained cool, the tone impersonal.

“It is not your concern. Your primary directive was to observe human behaviour.”

Kal stepped forward and stared down at the construct, speaking in a firm tone.

“Maybe I didn’t make myself clear, Brainiac. You were sent here to guide me in my learning, but you were also to obey my orders and I am ordering you now to help me find my girlfriend.”

The human face of the Brain Interactive Construct took on the expression of someone who wanted to challenge the order, but it looked away instead.

“Very well. Where do you want me to start?”

“Start with Lex Luthor. I want a complete background on him. Contacts. Affiliations. Everything you can find. Whoever he has come into contact with in the past few years. Find out who they are and who they work for and see if anything stands out.”

“You are asking a lot, Kal-El.”

“I feel certain you can process this information within hours, Brainiac. Get it done!”

If the thing had been human, Kal would have guessed the expression on its face to be resentment at being given such orders, but it said nothing.

There was a sudden noise from the outer cavern. Kal whirled, peering through the darkness.

“Who’s there?”
Crap, he thought. If a guard had come to investigate he could be in for a lot of trouble.

***

Lex was checking the monitor of his laptop. Lois Lane was pacing the floor of a small room, no bigger than a six foot by ten foot cell. At least Flag had followed orders. Apart from a small bruise on her forehead, she appeared unharmed. Not that he really cared, but the last thing he wanted was to bring the wrath of not only Amanda Waller down on him for involving a civilian, but also General Lane.

“Mr Luthor.”

He looked up, quickly closing the laptop and stared at the security guard who was standing in the middle of his study, panting as if he had been running a hundred yard dash. The man was at least a hundred pounds overweight.

“What is it?” he asked.

“The perimeter alarm at the cave went off. The guard called it in on his radio. There was someone in there, talking. The guard said he heard them say the name Brainaic.”

Lex smirked. After Kal’s visit earlier, he knew the younger man was anxious over Lois’ disappearance. It looked like his plan was working. Kal had just made a fatal mistake.
Kidnapped

Chapter Summary

Lois tries to figure out why she has been kidnapped while Kal orders Brainiac to help him find her.

Lois paced up and down the small room where she’d been taken to after being basically dragged from her car, dazed and confused from being run off the road. She touched the sore spot on her forehead and was relieved to discover it wasn’t bleeding.

Just what the hell was going on, she wondered.

The two men who had brought her here hadn’t spoken a word to her. They hadn’t even responded to her questions. She’d been here well over twenty-four hours, from what she could tell. Someone would have noticed she was missing by now.

Kal must be going out of his mind, she thought.

She chewed on her lower lip, trying to think of a way out. She could barely think for the pounding migraine, but she still went over the past few hours in her mind. For an army brat, she had a pretty bad sense of direction and didn’t think she had a hope of figuring out where they’d taken her, but she had to try.

“Come on, Lois, think,” she said to herself.

They’d come up behind her as she was driving out to the farm. Why was she going there? Oh, yeah, fight with her dad.

What were they fighting about?

She rubbed the heel of her hand on her right temple. She was lucky that she didn’t get migraines. Usually. When she had been around ten or so, she had been friends with a girl who got terrible migraines, but their teacher would never let her go to the nurse. As far as the teacher was concerned it was just a headache, even though the girl was white as a sheet and was a complete mess. One day Lois’ friend had such a bad one that she had vomited all over the teacher and then passed out. The girl’s parent were so angry that the teacher was fired.

Still, now Lois knew exactly what her friend went through because it was so hard to think for the jackhammer pounding at her temple. She probably had a mild concussion, she thought.

“Okay, Lois, focus.”

Her father had been kind of upset most of the weekend. She supposed she could understand, in some respects. It couldn’t have been easy for him to have walked in and realised she was not only sexually active, but that she’d slept with Kal under her father’s roof. While he hadn’t been too strict on her growing up, he did have certain rules.

As soon as she’d returned home from dropping Kal back at the farm, he’d made her sit down.
“Lo …”

“Daddy, don’t start. I’m eighteen and I’m an adult.”

“An adult wouldn’t be sneaking around behind my back,” he replied. “Be honest with me. How long have you been sexually active?”

“Kal was … is my first. Daddy, we didn’t mean to act like we were sneaking around behind your back. It’s just … I love him.”

“You’re eighteen years old. You’re far too young to understand about love. Besides, how are you going to have a relationship with him when he goes home at the end of the year?”

“We’ll work out something.”

She didn’t mention Kal’s own worries about what would happen once he went home, or that he was adamant that when he went home he couldn’t return. Lois wasn’t usually optimistic, but she had to believe that there was something they could do to stay together.

“I don’t know, Lois,” her father sighed. “I’m not happy about all this.”

“I’m not a child, Daddy. I know what I’m doing.”

He’d dropped the matter then, but the next day it had started all over again. She’d finally had enough of his lecturing and stormed out.

She had been so upset she hadn’t noticed the SUV coming up behind her and had been taken by surprise when the vehicle moved to overtake her on the right hand side, then swerved, crashing into the passenger side. She’d slammed her foot on the brakes, hitting her head, then wrenched the steering wheel but the driver of the SUV hit her again and her engine stalled. Before she could get it started again, a man with dark hair mixed with grey, cut in a military style crew cut got out of the vehicle and pointed a gun at her.

“Get out of the car,” he barked at her.

Biting her lip, Lois did so. Another man got of the SUV. This one was tall and lean with dark blond hair. He reminded her a little of an actor she had seen on a tv show. The man took her arm. She tried to pull away but the first man glared at her.

“Co-operate Miss Lane, and you won’t get hurt.”

So he knew who she was. That didn’t bode well, she thought. She wondered if they were kidnapping her because of her father, or if the reason was more sinister than that.

“What do you want with me?” she asked, but got no reply. She wasn’t expecting one.

The older man gestured with his head and the younger man pulled her toward the SUV, while the other one got in her car. She guessed he was going to drive it off the road. As he started the car and drove toward the woods, she turned on the other man, hoping to use some of the tactics she had learned in martial arts classes, but he was clearly prepared for that. She felt a blow to the back of her head and passed out.

When she came to, she slowly started to realise she was lying on the backseat of the SUV, her wrists tied firmly. She opened one eye cautiously. Her vision was slightly blurred but she could see the two men in the front of the vehicle. She tried turning her head without being seen but the angle was
impossible. She had no idea where they were heading.

She calculated they drove for another hour as it was just starting to get dark when the car came to a full stop. She was pulled out roughly from the vehicle and made to walk toward what appeared to be a warehouse of some description. From the fishy smell that hung in the air, she guessed they were near the docks.

She was pushed up a set of steps which appeared to be made out of galvanized steel mesh. They squeaked as she put her weight on them, not at all sturdy, making her uneasy.

Lois stumbled and almost fell. Her captor clearly didn’t care if she was hurt, practically dragging her inside the building, along a very narrow corridor, and thrusting her into a small room. There was a bunk on one side. It appeared to have once been a small office, but it reminded her of a prison cell. Which was probably what it was now, she thought. The window was boarded up.

The younger man untied her wrists, still without having said a word to her, while the older man stood guard, his gun in his hand. There was no escape.

At least they didn’t seem to be starving her, she thought later as the younger man brought in a tray. Lois looked at him, then slid her gaze past him to the door. He smirked at her, clearly realising what she was looking at and shook his head. He placed the tray on the bunk beside her then backed away.

They’d given her soup and a couple of bread rolls. The soup was vegetable and was at least palatable, although clearly from a can and heated in a microwave. Part of it was just tepid while the outside was a little hot. She’d had vegetable soup at the Kents and Martha had made it herself. The bread was better, fresh and soft. The only real downside was they’d given her a plastic spoon. She had hoped they would have given her a metal one so she could have tried to prise the boards off the window.

She sighed as she shook off the recollection, still trying to analyse what she had learned thus far. She had no useful information apart from a general idea of where she was, but even if she did manage to escape, she had a feeling she wouldn’t get far. Not without drastic measures.

“Time to go to defcon one,” she muttered.

As Lois resumed pacing her cell, she wondered again why they had kidnapped her. They still hadn’t spoken to her, yet they hadn’t done anything horrible to her either. Apart from keeping her in this small room.

She’d spotted the camera in the corner as she’d lain awake on the bunk. Someone was watching her.

She couldn’t figure it out. Who was watching her and why? Who were the two men? The older one was definitely military. She hadn’t grown up with a father who was a general without learning a few things.

The door opened and she looked up. Feeding time again, she sighed. The man gestured for her to sit on the bed, clearly wary of her trying to get past him. She shrugged and turned as if to do as she was told, then shoved him, aiming a hard punch at his jaw before running out the open door.

She ran along the narrow corridor trying to remember which way they’d come in. There was a shout from behind her but she kept running. She saw a doorway and hoped it was the outer door, trying the handle. To her dismay it was locked. Lois ran further up only to come to a sudden halt, staring in shock at the man she had punched less than a minute ago. How had he got in front of her?

The man grabbed her and began dragging her back along the corridor. The older man, clearly the
boss, appeared from another room.

“I warned you, Miss Lane,” he growled.

She was shoved back into the cell. A pair of handcuffs were produced. One was snapped around her wrist, the other secured to the end of the bed.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked. “Who are you?”

“It doesn’t matter who we are. As soon as the boss has what he wants, we’ll let you go.”

She blinked at him. “Your boss? Who’s that?”

He smirked at her, then backed out of the room, slamming the door shut. Lois was left to contemplate her situation.

They wanted something, but what? And who was their boss?

Tears threatened, but she refused to give in to the urge to cry. She was a Lane. She was raised to be tougher than this. She sighed and tried to pull at the cuff around her wrist. The chain clinked against the metal frame of the bed. At least the cuffs weren’t police issue, she thought as the chain gave enough for her to lie down on the mattress which was so thin she could feel the metal slats. She’d already tried breaking them the first couple of hours she’d been left in this room, to no avail. Macgyver she wasn’t.

She stared at the tiny gap in the boarded-up window where daylight peeked through and watched as the light grew darker. Another night in her prison. Another night away from Kal.

She realised she had fallen asleep at some point as she woke with a start from a dream which had her heart pounding. The memory of the dream faded away, leaving her alone in the darkness. The only thing she could remember was that it involved Kal somehow, and he was calling for her.

“Kal,” she murmured.

She wished he could hear her, but that was silly. He was miles away, in Smallville. How could he hear her from this distance?

Still, talking to him as if he was right beside her comforted her somehow.

“Kal, if you’re there, find me. Please.”

***

Kal sat up with a start. He had gone back to the farm, knowing there was nothing he could do except wait it out until Brainiac finished analysing the information about Lex.

For a moment, he imagined Lois was calling his name. She had sounded frightened.

Frowning, he tried to focus his hearing. It was the one power he hadn’t quite been able to master. Nothing. Yet it had seemed so real.

Looking around the darkened room, Kal sighed. He probably needed to be out in the open. As quietly as possible, he left the room and sped downstairs and out the front door. Pausing in the driveway, he glanced up to the second floor of the house at the darkened window of Jonathan and Martha’s bedroom. Relieved that they hadn’t heard him, he bent into a crouch, gathering his energy, then shot into the air.
The tallest structure in Smallville was the windmill in Chandler’s field, but it wasn’t high enough for what he needed. Kal flew further up into the sky, until he could see the lights of the city in the distance. Hovering in the air, he let the sounds of the night wash over him. Closing his eyes, he took a few deep, cleansing breaths and began to filter out those sounds.

“Kal, if you’re there, find me. Please.”

His eyes shot open and he tried to focus on the direction of her voice, but it had been too brief. He tried again to zero in on her, but without hearing her voice again, he knew the situation was hopeless.

He flew back down, hovering a few feet in the air above the Kawatche caves, checking for the security detail, before landing at the cave entrance. He activated the crystal to allow him entry to the secret cavern.

“Brainiac?”

The artificial intelligence emerged from the cave wall.

“Kal-El.”

“Have you done what I asked?”

“I have.”

“Well?”

“Are you aware there are humans patrolling this area? You may have set off some primitive alert system.”

“I don’t care, Brainiac. Tell me what I want to know. Now!”

“Your Lex Luthor has been meeting with someone in the city. I believe she is called the White Queen.”

“How is this relevant?”

“I have searched the databanks, and analysed the information, as ordered.” Brainiac sent him an oily smirk. Kal huffed in annoyance. “The White Queen is a human by the name of Amanda Waller. She is an agent with an organisation called Checkmate.”

“What are they?” Kal asked.

“They are an agency run by the United States government, however their existence is not common knowledge. It took some time for me to access these records. Checkmate’s mandate is to ensure that all metahumans are registered and controlled.”

“Metahumans?”

“Those who have undergone some metabolic change and possess some superhuman abilities. Kryptonians are not human, therefore they do not fall under this category.”

“Is it possible that Lois has been taken by agents of this organisation?”

Brainiac raised an eyebrow at him, but didn’t comment. Kal knew what the construct was thinking. That he was wasting his time and energy worrying about a human, but he loved Lois and he wasn’t going to stop until he found her.
“I heard her tonight. I’m sure it was Lois, but I couldn’t figure out where she was. She didn’t talk long enough for me to zero in on her location.”

“How is this relevant to Lex Luthor?” Brainiac enquired.

“I think he has something to do with who took her. The general’s heard nothing. No ransom demand. Not yet.”

“From what I understand, if a kidnapping victim has not been found within twenty-four hours of their abduction, the odds of finding them …”

“I don’t want to hear the odds, Brainiac.”

“You have been around these humans too long already, Kal-El. You are growing emotional.”

“As opposed to you? You’re just a machine.”

“You are even beginning to sound like these primitives,” the construct smirked. Kal glared at his father’s creation. For something that continued to criticise the way he had adopted human expressions, its own use of human facial expressions was rather hypocritical.

“I don’t want to hear any more of your opinion on humans or how I sound. Let me remind you, Brainiac. My father built you and sent you to help me. Now help me find Lois, damn it!”

The construct huffed, squaring its shoulders. Kal rolled his eyes, wishing it hadn’t chosen to take on human form.

“Very well. I will contact the authorities and see what I can learn. Return to the human domicile and I will report to you there. I do not think it is appropriate for us to meet here in future.”

Kal nodded. “Agreed.”

Brainiac sped away from the cavern. Kal waited a few seconds, then sped out as well.

The lights were on at the farm when he returned. As he stepped inside the house, he stopped short, staring at the three adults at the kitchen table.

“Kal, where have you been?” Jonathan asked.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I went for a walk.”

“At two in the morning?” General Lane barked. Kal stared at Lois’ father for a moment.

“Kal, sit down,” Martha said. “General Lane has had some distressing news.”

Now he understood why some writers suggested their character's heart stopped for a couple of beats, because his did the same thing.

“Lois?”

“Her captors say she’s fine. For the moment.” The general sipped the cup of black coffee. “They called around midnight. They told me they’ll release her, on one condition. That I exchange you in her place.”

Kal frowned. “What? What do they want with me?”
“I have no idea,” the older man sighed. “And normally I wouldn’t respond to something like this, but they have my daughter, Kal.”

“When do they want this exchange to take place?” he asked.

“At dawn. In Metropolis. I’ve just spent the last two hours with the sheriff and Metro PD trying to come up with a solution, but … I need your help, Kal. They said they’ll kill her if we’re not at the specified address at dawn.”

Kal shook his head. It had to be a trap. If the people who had taken her were from Checkmate, as he suspected, there was no way they would let Lois go. Not if they learned exactly who and what he was. She would be in more danger than ever.

“Kal, you cannot be thinking of giving in to them,” Jonathan said quietly. “They could kill you both.”

“I don’t think we have a choice, Jonathan,” the general cautioned. “We have to leave by four at the very latest.”

Kal wasn’t listening. He had heard something in the barn. He rose to his feet, ignoring the odd looks from the three around the table.

“Where are you going?” Martha asked.

“I need to think for a minute,” he said, going back outside. He quickly made his way to the barn. He could see someone standing up in the loft and sped upstairs.

The figure turned and he saw it was Brainiac. The construct was wearing what appeared to be some kind of suit, similar to what Kal had seen federal agents wearing on television. The suit was ill-fitting and not very well made.

“If you’re here about the kidnapper’s demands, I already know. General Lane is here.”

“There is more you should know, Kal-El. About a month ago, Lex Luthor travelled to New York city to meet with a scientist by the name of Virgil Swann.”

Kal frowned.

“Who’s Virgil Swann?”

“According to the data banks, Dr Swann is a reclusive genius who has dedicated his life to seeking out life on other planets. About six months ago there was an article in one of the Earth media organisations in which he claimed he had discovered a new planet, approximately fifty light years from Earth.”

“Krypton,” Kal breathed.

“Yes.”

“Why was Lex visiting him?”

“For the same reason. If these humans should discover you are not of this Earth … I believe the human term is a ‘witch-hunt’. You must not allow them to discover your abilities, Kal-El.”

“I know that, but Lois will never be safe. I have to find her and get her away from these people.”
“And then what?” Brainiac argued. “You must return to Krypton, Kal-El.”

“Not until I know Lois is safe,” he replied stubbornly. “Help me find her.”

While he doubted Lois would be left alone if he did return, he knew there was no other way now. As much as he hated the idea of leaving her. He was sure the general could sort out something with the government. He could at least do something to stop Checkmate.

“It would seem logical to me that the men are close to the area in which they have ordered the exchange.”

Kal nodded. That made sense.

“Help me get her back and make her safe, and I will leave Earth.”

“Very well. I will go with you to Metropolis.”

They sped away from the farm, unaware that someone had been listening to the conversation.

General Lane stepped out of the shadows, staring up at the loft with a stunned expression.

The location of the exchange was the city market, located near the docks. Kal had visited it once with Jonathan and Martha as they had taken some of their organic produce to try selling it at a stall. At this time of the morning, Kal doubted anyone would be working, but within a couple of hours it would be teeming with people busy setting up stalls. It was the perfect spot for the exchange, since the men who had Lois could just disappear.

He looked at Brainiac.

“We’ll start checking the local buildings for any sign of activity. You take the east side, I’ll take the west side.”

They began searching. Kal used his vision to inspect every building for any people inside. As he thought, most of the warehouses were empty. He thought about taking to the sky, but figured he could concentrate better on the ground.

After half an hour of searching he still hadn’t found anything. Brainiac, however, seemed to have had better luck.

“There is an old warehouse about half a mile from here,” it said. “The structure is unstable, but one part of it has been reinforced. The fittings are fairly new.”

“Show me,” he said.

***

Lois had been sleeping fitfully since the dream. The bed was uncomfortable enough as it was, but part of it was she had been afraid if she went back to sleep then something bad might happen.

There was the sound of a crash and she sat up, her heart pounding. She started to swing her legs around off the bed when one of her captors appeared in the room. He unlocked the cuffs and pulled her up, grabbing her arm. She started to say something then it felt like the wind was knocked out of her. There was the oddest feeling, as if she was being pulled apart, then they were out in the corridor.

The man began pushing her along the hallway, which was lit up. The older one of her captors was shooting at something, looking unnerved. Lois gasped as she recognised who he was shooting at.
“Kal!” she cried.

She felt a hard tug on her arm, then something cold biting into her neck.

“Don’t come any closer!” her captor yelled. “I’ll shoot.”

He gave a sudden squawk and the pressure on her arm suddenly disappeared. Lois whirled and stared as a man only a couple of inches taller than her had grabbed the other man’s gun and crushed it as if it was just tin.

“Who are you?” Kal was growling at the man. Lois turned to look. Her boyfriend had the man in a stranglehold, his feet dangling in the air. She stared. She’d known Kal was strong but had no idea he was strong enough to lift a man in the air.

“I’ll ask again,” he growled. “Who are you?”

“Flag,” the man choked.

“Who hired you?”

Flag refused to talk. The other man had been knocked out by Kal’s friend. Kal turned to look at him.

“Go back to the farm,” he said. “Stay out of sight until I come for you.”

“Kal-El …”

“You heard me, Brainiac.”

Lois frowned at him. What kind of name was Brainiac? She watched, stunned as the other man seemed to disappear in the blink of an eye. Kal dropped Flag, who was barely conscious. He practically ran to her and wrapped his arms around her, hugging her.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

She nodded. “I’m fine. Now.” She looked up at him. “Kal, we should call the police,” she said.

He nodded, keeping his arm wrapped around her as they walked out of the warehouse. They quickly found a payphone and called the police, then Lois called her father to tell him she was okay. He sounded strange on the phone.

It was light by the time they were allowed to go. Flag and his partner, who Lois learned was named Emil LaSalle, were taken into custody. Flag stared at Kal as he was escorted to the police van.

Lois shivered.

“Did they tell you why they took you?” Kal asked.

She shook her head. “No. I thought it might be because of my dad, because of something he might have been working on, but I just don’t know now.”

“I think it might be because of me, Lois,” he said.

She stared at him. “What?”

He bit his lip. “Let’s get back to the farm and I’ll tell you everything, okay?”
She sighed and nodded, then frowned at him. “Uh, Kal, how did you get here without a car?”

He grinned sheepishly. “Uh, that’s one of the things I need to tell you,” he said. He looked around with almost a furtive expression. “Hold on to me, okay?”

“Kal, what are you …”

She gasped as he suddenly rose into the air.
Truth

Chapter Summary

Kal tells Lois the truth and leaves Earth.

Chapter Notes

I know what I do to Lex is a bit of a cop-out, but it was the best solution. Lex is the far bigger threat than Checkmate.

Kal was flying over Smallville, with Lois in his arms. She clung to him tightly, as if afraid he would drop her. It was not the way he had wanted her to find out the truth about him, but he’d had no choice. She had seen him get shot by one of her captors and he didn’t have a single scratch on him. That alone would have probably frightened her.

He was almost to the farm when she looked up at him. Her face was pale, but otherwise she seemed unhurt, although clearly more than a little perturbed by the fact that he could fly. She was trying to speak, but with his speed, he could see she had some difficulty in doing so. He slowed his flight and hovered in the air.

“Lois?”

“Do we have to go back now?”

“Your father’s waiting for you,” he said.

“I know. It’s just … Kal, please. After everything that’s happened, I need …”

She didn’t voice it but he understood immediately. From the kidnapping to finding out he had strange abilities, it had to be more than a little overwhelming.

“Okay,” he said. “Hold on.”

He wasn’t sure where to take her, apart from school or the caves, but after Brainiac had warned him about the alarm, and the way Lex seemed to know when he was visiting the cave, he didn’t want to take the chance that someone would try to recapture him.

He decided the best place would be the top of the windmill in Chandler’s field. They could talk without anyone overhearing them and he would spot anyone coming for them. He changed direction and flew toward the field, landing gently on the platform. Lois still clung tightly to him, her eyes shut.

“It’s okay. You’re safe,” he said.

She opened her eyes and looked around, then gasped.
“Kal!” She reached for him again, alarmed.

“It’s all right. The platform can hold us both and I promise I won’t let you fall.” He grasped her hand. “Come on, come and sit here.”

He pulled her down to the edge of the platform and sat. She nervously sat beside him.

“Kal, what are you …”

He glanced at her, about to tell her everything, then his super hearing picked up Lex’s voice. He didn’t know what had made him tune in at that moment, but he was glad he did.

“What do you mean you failed? All you were supposed to do was capture Kal! Are you telling me …”

“The boy has powers,” the other voice was saying. Kal couldn’t identify the speaker. “Flag shot him but it didn’t even slow him down.”

“What about the girl?”

“I don’t know, sir. All I know is the Metropolis police took Flag and his man into custody and they assumed the girl’s father came to pick her up.”

“Check the farm. I want him found!”

“Kal, are you listening to me?” Lois said, sounding irritated.

“Lois, I’m sorry. I was listening to something else.”

“Typical,” she snorted. “I’m about to say something important and you’re ignoring me.”

He looked at her. “Lois, I wasn’t ignoring you. I just heard Lex talking to someone. About us. He knows. He’s sending someone to the farm to look for us.”

She stared at him, completely nonplussed.

“What do you mean you just heard Lex? How could you hear him? The mansion’s at least five miles away!”

“Uh, I have the ability to hear from certain distances.”

She shook her head. “I don’t understand. I don’t understand any of this! Who were those people? What do they want with you? With me?”

“I think I should start from the beginning,” he said. “Lois, you’ve always sensed there was something different about me.” He took a deep breath. “I’m not from around here.”

“No kidding, Kal. You’re from another country.”

He took her hand. “I don’t mean that, Lo. I mean, I’m not from around here.”

She gazed at him, still not understanding.

“I’m not from Eastern Europe, or any other continent.”

“If you’re not from … here,” she said, speaking slowly, “then where are you from?”
He used one finger to point up. Lois scoffed.

“Are you telling me you’re an … you’re a …”

“Intergalactic traveller,” he finished.

He could tell Lois wanted to get up and walk away, but considering they were about twenty or thirty feet above ground, on a fairly narrow platform, that wasn’t easily achievable.

“You’re upset,” he said.

“You lied to me.”

“Technically, I didn’t lie. Not in the beginning. You just assumed I was from Eastern Europe.”

“Don’t split hairs with me!”

“Do you want to hear this or don’t you?”

“If you’re from outer space, where’s your spaceship?”

“I don’t have one, Lo. Our people have the ability to travel through portals.”

“So where is this portal, exactly?”

“The Kawatche caves. One of them, anyway.”

She blinked rapidly, clearly trying to make sense of it all.

“So, that day I picked you up on the side of the road, you …”

“I had just arrived on Earth, through the portal.”

“Is it true, what you said about the Kents?”

He nodded. “My father visited Earth in the early 1960s. There was some trouble. Hiram Kent helped him out. When he sent me here, he told me to see Hiram, only he was dead.”

She still looked confused. “You spoke English when you got here. How do you do that? Do you monitor our transmissions or something?”

“No. It’s not like that. We’re … Kryptonians …”

“Kryptonians. That’s your people?”

“Yes. Our people have been coming to Earth for over a thousand years, Lois. Our technology is maybe two thousand years ahead of Earth.”

“Well, that’s comforting. We must all look like primitives to you.”

“Yes, and no. Lois, when I first came here, I was expecting to hate it, but I found something, or someone that changed all that for me.”

“That’s no way to score points, Smallville.”

He shook his head. “What I mean is, I fell in love with Earth. So much that I don’t want to go back, but even if there was a way for me to stay, it wouldn’t be safe. For either of us.”
“What do you mean?”

“Brainiac …”

“Oh, him.”

“It’s not a ‘he’, Lois. It’s a machine. Well, not what you would call a machine. It’s a brain interactive construct. It has the ability to adapt to its surroundings.”

She sighed as she looked at him.

“You know, this isn’t really helping my stress levels. I mean, in the last forty-eight hours I’ve been kidnapped, held by god knows what, and found out my boyfriend is an E.T.” She bit her lower lip.

“Um, you’re not going to, you know, shed your skin like a snake or something.”

He stared at her. “What?”

“Well, you know, like that movie. Independence Day.”

“I’m humanoid, Lois. The majority of Kryptonians look exactly like humans. That’s why our visits tend to be overlooked.”

She nodded in understanding, although she still didn’t look very happy at this revelation.

“So what happened this time?”

“Lex, is what happened. Brainiac told me he works for an agency called Checkmate. They work for the United States government, recruiting metahumans – people with certain abilities. I don’t know if they were wanting to recruit me or study me. My guess would be the latter if they find out I’m not from Earth.”

“Oh,” she said. She was silent for a few moments. “What were you going to say about Brainiac?”

“It’s going to work on a way so when I leave, you’ll be safe.”

“Oh, great! So my safety depends on a machine.”

“It has been given direct orders from my father to obey my orders, Lois.”

“That doesn’t help.” She frowned. “What’s your real name, anyway? What’s your dad’s name?”

“My real name is Kal-El,” he told her. “My father’s name is Jor-El and he is a scientist on Krypton. My mother’s name is Lara Lor-Van. She helps my father. She’s also a brilliant scientist, although her field of expertise is more along the lines of what you would call botany.”

“Is that why you like the farm so much?”

He nodded. Being on the farm did remind him of his mother.

“So, if you had all this prior knowledge, why did you act so weird in the beginning?”

“I didn’t know everything, Lo. My father was the last Kryptonian to come to Earth, until about a year ago.”

“Why?”
“Remember what I told you about the trouble he got into? The ruling council on Krypton forbade interstellar travel for a few years. At least until they could be certain the Earth authorities were not going to pursue Jor-El.”

She was again quiet for a few moments. Those moments dragged out into minutes, and he finally had to say something to break the awkwardness.

“Lois?”

“You have to give me a minute, Kal. This is a lot to take in. It’s …”

“I know it’s overwhelming, Lois, but I’ve never lied about how I feel about you. I promise.”

“Then why are you leaving?”

“Because it’s not safe. For me or you. Lex has already sent someone to the farm looking for me.”

She gasped. “Kal, my dad’s there!”

“I know.”

“Take me back. Now!” she said, getting to her feet.

Kal got up, picking her up in his arms and flying to the farm. He quickly checked the outbuildings. Jonathan was out in the barn and there were two figures inside the house. There was someone in a vehicle on the road, clearly waiting for something.

Storm clouds had gathered in the short time they had been at the windmill and he felt the first spots of rain as he descended. Kal landed in the field, far enough away from the vehicle that the man wouldn’t have seen him, then took Lois’ hand and walked with her across the field, arriving at the barn in a couple of minutes.

Just as they started to step inside the shelter, the general came out, holding a shotgun.

“You get the hell away from my daughter,” he growled.

“Daddy?”

“Lois, get away from him.”

Jonathan came out of the barn. “Sam, we talked about this!”

Kal kept his expression neutral, even though his heart was racing. The older man couldn’t hurt him, at least, not with the shotgun, but he could have called the authorities or done anything in their absence. Clearly something had happened in the time he was gone from the farm. The general knew something about him.

He faced the angry father, palms up as if in surrender, and spoke in a quiet, calm tone.

“Sir, you need to calm down.”

The older man jerked the shotgun in his direction, obviously refusing to listen to reason. Kal could understand how the man felt. He knew how terrified the general had been in learning his eldest daughter had been kidnapped.

“Calm down? My daughter could have been killed because of you.”
“Daddy, put that gun down, right now!”

Sam looked at his daughter, raising an eyebrow in mild confusion, clearly wondering why she was still refusing to come to his side and staying by Kal. Despite her own ambivalent feelings about all he had revealed to her, she at least was prepared to defend him.

“There’s a man outside. I think he works for the same people Lex does.”

“Lex?” Jonathan asked. “What does he have to do with all of this?”

“I think he hired the men to kidnap Lois, to get to me.” He turned and looked at Brainiac, who nodded and went to the door.

“Who is that man, Kal?” Martha asked, gesturing to Brainiac as he opened the door and left the house.
“He’s not a man, he’s a machine,” Lois said.

Kal shot her a look. “Lois …”

“What?” she replied, turning her glare on him.

“What do you mean a machine?” Jonathan asked.

Kal sighed. “I’ll start from the beginning. I’m not from Earth. My father sent me here to learn about other cultures.”

“If you’re not from Earth, then where …”

“It’s called Krypton. It’s approximately fifty light years from Earth, a planet with a red sun. Like Earth, the majority of the people are humanoid. My father has a theory that our people have a common ancestry, except Kryptonians evolved faster than humans. There are a few non-human species on Krypton.” He smiled ruefully. “I’m afraid I was a little, uh, prejudiced toward those other cultures. And Earth. Before I came here, I considered you all to be primitives, and well, beneath Kryptonians.”

Brainiac came back in. “I have taken care of the matter, Kal-El.”

Lois stared at him. “What did you do? You didn’t kill him or anything, did you?”

Brainiac shot her a derisive look, which she clearly didn’t appreciate. Then again, Brainiac was an artificial construct which generally followed most Kryptonians. It might have the ability to think for itself, but its opinions were based on facts, not emotions. The truth was, humans were more primitive in terms of their technology, but that didn’t have to be a bad thing.

“Brainiac …”

“I merely modified his memory, Kal-El. He will not remember his purpose here or anything he has overheard when he wakes up.”

Kal sighed and shook his head. Typical, he thought.

“Anyway, as I was saying, I guess my opinion was pretty arrogant. Then I came here, and as I experienced Earth culture, I began to realise that there are some things about this planet that are lacking on my own.”

“Like what?” Lois asked.

“Like green grass,” he said.

It was true. On Krypton, thanks to the strip-mining, the planet’s surface had been flooded with radiation and the land outside the cities was harsh and cold. Here on Earth they had wide open spaces, which he envied.

“What you lack in technology, you make up for in so many other ways. Kryptonians have become so arrogant, so superior, that I think they’ve forgotten what it’s like to live as freely as you do. To love,” he added, looking at Lois.

He glanced at Lois’ father. The man had sat stony-faced. Kal could tell from the man’s expression that not all of this was new to him. He wondered if the man had called the authorities.

“So what are you going to do now?” Jonathan asked. “If Lex is behind Lois’ kidnapping …”
“I have to go back,” he said. “I don’t want to, but I don’t know any other way.”

“Lois still won’t be safe,” the general pointed out.

“No, I know. But I hope to fix that somehow.”

Lois looked at him and he could see tears in her eyes.

“I don’t want you to go,” she said.

“I can’t stay,” he replied, a hand on hers. “I would have had to go back to Krypton after the year was up anyway. My father would never have allowed me to stay here.”

“But what am I supposed to do?” she wailed.

He wrapped his arms around her and held her.

“Lois, I love you. As long as I live I will never love anyone else.”

“You’ll go back to Krypton and forget all about me. Your parents will make you marry some other girl and …”

“Lois, look at me.”

She lifted her head and he brushed the tears from her cheeks.

“I will never, ever forget you, Lois Lane. I promise you that. If ever in the future there is a way for me to come home, I will be here.”

She smiled at the way he said ‘home’. He wasn’t lying about that. Earth, to him, felt more like a home than Krypton would ever feel.

“That still doesn’t help keep Lois safe.”

He nodded. “I know.” He looked at Brainiac. “Tell me what you know about Dr Virgil Swann.”

Brainiac frowned at him, clearly wondering what he was thinking, but did as ordered. He was clearly accessing some databanks.

Virgil Swann was a billionaire philanthropist who had been paralysed from the neck down in an accident fifteen years earlier. He’d graduated from M.I.T at age nineteen with a doctorate in maths and applied physics, starting his own company, Swann Communications, as the world’s largest producer of satellites.

Shortly after his accident, he sold his company and created charitable foundations. Sources had suggested he was obsessed with searching for signs of intelligent life in the universe.

“You cannot trust this human, Kal-El,” Brainiac replied.

“I know of Dr Swann,” the general interjected. “He’s reclusive but not a complete shut-in. He’s published several papers stating his case for putting more funding into the space program rather than spending more on military technology.”

“Sure,” Lois said. “Of course the government is more interested in spending more money on finding new and better ways to kill people.”
“Lois …” her father cautioned.

“What are you thinking, Kal?”

“We need someone we can trust. Someone who has some influence within the government. Someone who can stop Checkmate.”

“Dr Swann isn’t your man,” General Lane replied. “Among my circles, he’s known as an eccentric. They are even less likely to listen to him.”

“We can’t go to Lionel,” Kal told him.

“Lionel Luthor is not a man to be trusted, Kal-El,” Brainiac answered.

“I know that …” he began, but the construct put up a hand.

“When I was accessing information on Lex Luthor, I also accessed information on Lionel. He is studying metahumans. He possesses several small laboratories dedicated to studying metahuman abilities. It is my assessment that he is trying to harness these abilities for himself.”

“What about Lex? Why do you think he’s working for this … what did you say this organisation is?” Martha asked.

“Checkmate.”

“They recruit people with abilities to work for the government,” Sam Lane told the farm couple.

Kal stared at him. “How do you know?”

“I have my sources,” he replied.

“Daddy, you didn’t …”

“I thought about it, but Jonathan and Martha talked me out of it, suggesting I waited until I heard you out. I’m still not happy at this. You have put my daughter in danger, Kal.”

“I know, sir, and I’m sorry. This is all my fault.”

“No, it’s not,” Lois told him quietly. “You didn’t know this was going to happen.”

“May I suggest I modify Lex Luthor’s memory,” Brainiac replied.

Kal didn’t like that idea, but at least it would keep Lex from pursuing Lois. It didn’t stop Checkmate, however.

“I will take care of Checkmate,” the general said. “I do have some influence and I know of a couple of senators who are not exactly happy at the way the agency operates outside the law.”

“Thank you, Daddy.”

It was decided, Kal thought. Lois would announce at Smallville High that Kal had to return home due to a family emergency and wouldn’t be back.

As promised, Brainiac took care of Lex, making sure to wipe all the security tapes at the mansion so all existence of Kal’s so-called friendship with the billionaire’s son would be erased. At least, anything digital. The staff, on the other hand, would still remember. Although, considering their
dislike for their employer, Kal doubted there would be much said about it.

He still wasn’t happy at Brainiac’s solution, but his primary goal was to keep Lois safe. As promised, the general had contacted people in the senate, who started making noises about Checkmate. It was enough for others in the senate to begin demanding an investigation into Checkmate’s activities. The agency’s directors would soon find their funding drastically reduced, the general reported.

A week later, Kal knew it was time to go. Rather than take the risk of being discovered at the caves, Brainiac had plotted a course to one of the other portals. Kal would fly in the dead of night. The Kents had driven him to a remote part of town, about ten miles away from the farm, where they were meeting Lois and her father.

Martha hugged him.

“Twill miss you, Kal,” she said. “Especially your expertise on our produce.”

Kal had drawn on his mother’s own knowledge of botany and had helped the couple increase their yield on their organic produce. Not that that was all that mattered to Martha. He knew it was her own way of telling him just how much she valued his time with them.

“Thank you for everything,” he said.

Jonathan clapped a hand on his back.

“I hate that you have to leave, but I understand why. Be safe, son. If you ever have to return, you’ll always be welcome here.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Lois stood waiting with her father and Brainiac. Kal looked at the general.

“Please take care of her, sir,” he said.

The older man nodded. “Kal, I have to admit, I didn’t like you at first, but you’re a good kid, and you’ve been good to my Little Lo.”

Lois rolled her eyes and snorted. Kal didn’t dare tease her on the nickname, knowing she wouldn’t like it.

He wrapped his arms around her, hearing her heavy sigh.

“I don’t want you to go.”

“It’s the only way,” he said. “I can’t take the chance that someone might find out who I am.” He kissed her gently. “I love you, Lois. I’ll always love you.”

“I love you too,” she said, beginning to cry as she pulled away. Her father wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“Time to go,” Brainiac murmured, and he nodded. He took a small crystal from his pocket.

“Lois, take this,” he said.

She looked down at the crystal, which was shaped like a diamond with what appeared to be an ‘S’ etched in the centre.
“What is it?”

“It’s a crystal,” he told her. “Think of me, and it will show you my image.”

She gasped as she saw the hologram within the crystal. Kal pulled another from his pocket. He’d attached a chain to it. The hologram on this one was an image of Lois.

“See,” he said, smiling. “This ensures that I will never forget you.”

“You better not,” she muttered, punching him in the shoulder. He laughed, then glanced up at Brainiac, who had slowly risen into the air and was hovering above them.

“Kal-El, we must go now or the portal will close.”

Kal rose into the air, looking down at the girl he loved.

“I’ll come back one day,” he told her silently. “I promise.”

With that, he flew into the night sky, disappearing in the darkness, leaving the love of his life behind.
Fourteen and a half years later

Clark Kent sighed as he lay in bed, staring up at the ceiling. Life was so boring sometimes, he thought. He wished he could be travelling around with his mom, going to exotic places, but no, he was stuck here on the farm.

He supposed it could be worse. At least his foster parents were good to him, if a little strict at times. They could be a little over-protective, but he supposed that had everything to do with the meteor shower that had rained on Smallville about six months ago.

As he rolled over in the bed, punching his pillow to try to make it more comfortable for him, he heard a strange ringing sound. Clark rolled over again, looking for the source of the sound. Something inside the drawer of his nightstand was glowing.

He reached over and opened the drawer carefully. A couple of times he'd forgotten he was stronger than most kids and had accidentally pulled too hard, sending the drawer flying across the room.

Jonathan hadn’t been too thrilled at that and had made him fix it himself.

As he reached in the drawer, he saw the crystal his mother had given the Kents for him. It was a weird kind of diamond shape with a stylised ‘s’. The crystal was somehow glowing. He’d been told there was a hologram, but he’d never been able to get it to work.

“Clark, you’re gonna be late!” a woman’s voice called up the stairs.

Clark scrambled out of bed and dressed at super speed, picking up his backpack before running down the stairs and skidding on the polished wooden floor, just managing to come to a stop before he crashed into the table.

His foster mother grinned at him and shook her head, sighing in exasperation.

“Honestly, how can you be as fast as lightning and as slow as molasses at the same time?”

He said nothing, since the question was rhetorical, and went to the fridge, pulling out the bottle of juice, tipping it up to drink from it. Martha slapped his backside.

“Clark, use a glass!”

“It tastes better from the bottle,” he said reasonably before getting a glass from the shelf and pouring the juice.

“'Morning sleepyhead,” Jonathan said, coming in the door behind him and tousling his hair.

Clark chewed his lip. He was supposed to have been up early to help Jonathan with the chores. His foster father had just turned fifty-eight and while he still claimed he was healthy as a horse, the doctor
had told him he had to slow down.

“What’s that you got there, son?” Jonathan asked, pointing to the crystal Clark was still clutching in his hand.

“Oh, it’s the crystal,” he said. “It was doing this weird kind of glowy thing.”

The couple exchanged a look and he frowned at them. What was that all about?

Martha glanced out the window.

“Here comes your bus, honey.”

Clark finished his juice and ran out the door, just catching the bus in time.

Martha sighed and looked at Jonathan.

“The crystal was glowing? I wonder what that means.”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should call Sam. See if he can get in touch with Lois.”

Martha bit her lip. “I think we need to tell Clark the truth about his parents.”

“Martha, sweetheart, we don’t even know if Kal will ever come back. And with Lex back in town . . .”

“Jonathan, there is such a thing as being over-protective.”

“Lois wouldn’t have left him with us if she didn’t think we could protect him,” he said reasonably.

“Meanwhile, she’s goodness knows where chasing down any lead she can find on Checkmate.”

“Sweetheart, what do you want me to do?”

She sighed. “I don’t know. But I do know he needs to know where he comes from. He’s not a child anymore, Jonathan. He’s old enough to know the truth.”

Clark was fourteen and was bound to start asking questions about his parents. He clearly missed his mother, whom he had last seen about six months ago when she had come to Smallville to investigate the meteor shower. It wasn’t that Lois didn’t want her son with her, but knowing what the government would do if they learned her son was half-alien, her father had thought this was the best way to protect him.

About two months after Kal had returned to Krypton, Lois had dropped out of school and suddenly vanished. It had been a shock when they’d received an email from Dr Virgil Swann nearly seven months later asking them to come to New York.

When they’d arrived, the billionaire’s assistant, Bridgette Crosby, had asked them to follow her. They’d been taken to a small room and stared in stunned silence at Lois, who was cradling a tiny baby in her arms.

A man in a motorised wheelchair came in.

“Mr and Mrs Kent, thank you for coming. I am Dr Virgil Swann.”

Behind him stood Sam Lane.
“Martha, Jonathan, I know this is a shock, but Lois insisted you were the only ones who could help.”

Martha frowned. “I don’t understand,” she said.

Lois looked up at her. She was pale, her whole demeanour lacking the youthful exuberance and the energy she always had when she came to see Kal, where she would walk into a room and it would suddenly seem to come alive with electricity. Martha had known that feeling all too well, since it was the same energy she felt when she looked at her husband.

Lois’ heart was clearly broken by Kal’s absence. Her saving grace was the child she now held in her arms. Martha could see the look on the young woman’s face as she gazed down at the infant’s little face, a loving smile playing about her lips.

She had clearly given birth only a few days earlier as her body still showed some baby weight. She gently handed the baby over and Martha cradled her arms protectively around the child.

“This is Kal-El.”

“Kal …” Jonathan began. “So he’s Kal’s.”

Lois nodded, tears in her eyes. “I found out about a month after Kal left. It took a little time, but Daddy had some people look into Dr Swann and when we contacted him, he insisted I come and stay here. At the foundation.”

“I thought it best,” Dr Swann said. “For years I have been studying the stars, trying to find some signs of intelligent life in the universe. Almost nine months ago my satellites picked up a strange phenomenon in the night sky over Kansas.”

Martha frowned, then it occurred to her. Kal’s artificial intelligence, the thing he called Brainiac, had told them of a portal which would have taken it and Kal back to Krypton. That must be the phenomenon Dr Swann was talking about.

“Ordinarily, I wouldn’t have even asked it of Dr Swann,” Sam said, “but I had word that Amanda Waller had continued her investigation, even without the funding, and when Lois told me she was pregnant with Kal’s child, I knew I had to do everything I could to protect her and the baby.”

Martha nodded in understanding. Clearly Sam had done his homework and decided that the former scientist could be trusted with Kal’s secret. If Checkmate were still looking for Kal, they could have tried kidnapping Lois again to try to get information out of her.

“How can we help, Sam?” Jonathan asked, smiling down at the infant, who had grasped Jonathan’s big finger with his little hand.

“I want you to adopt the baby.”

“Daddy …”

“Lo, we have talked about this. You cannot support the baby, not without help.”

“He’s all I have left of Kal,” she said sadly.

“He’s still your son, Lo, but this is the only way we can protect you both.”

“I don’t follow,” Martha said. The baby began to squirm and make sounds as if it was going to cry.

“Allow me to explain,” Dr Swann said, watching as Lois took her son and began rocking him. “I can
arrange it so the adoption appears legal and will hold up under scrutiny.”

“I’m sending Lois to study at Cambridge University in England,” Sam told them.

From the expression on Lois’ face, father and daughter did not seem to be in agreement over his chosen university. Sam explained that he wanted Lois to have the best education and not be hampered by worries that her son could be kidnapped by Amanda Waller or anyone else in the Checkmate agency.

Not wanting Lois to miss out on seeing her own child grow up, the couple had agreed to taken in little Kal-El. As foster parents.

They had decided to give him Martha’s maiden name as his middle name. His first name, his Earth name, would be Jonathan. On his birth certificate, his last name was Kent. Lois had at least agreed to that. As far as she was concerned, Kal was a Kent. To her it just had always seemed like he had belonged on the farm.

Dr Swann had arranged matters so the official story would be the boy was the grandchild of a friend of Martha’s from college. Anyone who asked would be told that the friend’s daughter had gotten pregnant at the age of sixteen.

Martha could tell being parted from her son hurt Lois deeply, but she assured them she knew it was the only way to keep him safe. At least until Kal returned. Lois never gave up hoping that he would come back to her one day.

Lois would return to Smallville for the occasional visit, although little Clark was not told the truth about his real mother until he was old enough to understand. They’d decided between the three of them, however, that Clark shouldn’t know about his father until they were sure he could handle it.

Lois now worked as a foreign correspondent for the Daily Planet, moving from one place to the next, never settling down long enough to establish roots. She’d told the couple she figured it was better that way and she could still spend time chasing down leads on Checkmate. That way if Kal ever did come back, she could keep him safe from the agents still attempting to force metahumans to work for them.

Martha looked at her husband now. His hair was a sort of grey-blond now, but he was even more good-looking than when she had first met him at Met U.

“I guess you’re right, Martha,” he said finally. “It’s time.”

He kissed his wife. “I better get moving. I have to go into town to get some parts for the tractor.”

“You know, maybe it’s time we replaced the tractor,” Martha said. “It is getting rather old.”

Jonathan’s grin was mischievous as he wrapped his arms around her.

“I’m getting old too. Does that mean you want to replace me with a newer model?”

“Never in a million years, Jonathan Kent.”

He chuckled and kissed her again.

“Glad to hear it.”

Martha waggled her eyebrows at her husband, her smile soft and loving.
“There is something to be said for experience,” she told him softly.

He arched an eyebrow at her. “You trying to seduce me woman?”

She laughed. “Yes. Is it working?”

He took her lips in a deep kiss. “Hold that thought.”

Martha got to work cleaning the kitchen as Jonathan picked up the keys to the truck and left the house. She was surprised a few minutes later to hear a knock on the door. Thinking Jonathan had forgotten something, she dropped the rag she’d been using to clean the counter and went to the door. She stared in shock at the visitor.

“Hello Martha.”

“Kal!”

***

Kal gazed at the older woman. She had more grey in her hair now and a few more lines around her face but she was just as beautiful as he remembered.

It had taken him too long to get back to Smallville. Not just the fourteen or so years he was gone, but the weeks it had taken after his ship had crashed.

He had been stunned to learn how long he had been away from Earth. Leaving Lois had been hard enough, but to realise that more time had passed than he’d calculated had been devastating. Kryptonian days seemed to be much longer than Earth ones.

When he’d first gone back to Krypton, his heart had been broken. His parents had tried to bring him out of his depression, but he was despondent. How could they understand that he had left the most vital part of himself on Earth?

A few weeks after he’d returned, his mother had come to him.

“Kal-El.”

“I don’t want to talk, Mother.”

She sat down beside him as he stared at the red sunset. He had no powers on Krypton, unlike Earth. Jor-El had explained that it was the energy from the yellow sun which had given him those abilities. As much as he had wanted to fit in on Earth and pretend he didn’t have those powers, flying with Lois had been wonderful. The week before he’d left Earth for good, he had taken her flying many times. While she had been a little unsure of herself at first, she had grown to love it as much as he had.

His parents’ living quarters had a small structure which Kal supposed humans would call a greenhouse, as it was designed to maximise exposure to the solar energy to promote growth in the vegetation. This structure had become his sanctuary of late.

“Do you think I do not understand how you feel being separated from your Lois?” Lara asked.

He looked at her. When Kal had been a child, his mother had been his guiding light, his shining spirit. Her blonde hair and her fair skin glowed with health and vitality. He had read some of the Earth lore on gods and angels and in many ways, she had reminded him of that lore.
Now that he was separated from Lois, his girlfriend, no, lover, had become the angel.

“I know it may not seem so, Kal-El, but the pain will ease.”

“You don’t know how this feels.”

“I do, Kal-El. Before you were born, your father was sent on a scientific expedition to the other side of the planet. He was gone many months, unable to contact me, and it felt like I was being torn in two. It may not seem like it, and I know you think Kryptonians are cold compared to humans, but your father and I love each other deeply.”

“I never wanted to go to Earth in the first place, now I’d give anything to be able to return.”

“I’m afraid that is impossible, Kal-El,” Jor-El advised, coming in to the structure.

Kal looked at his father. “Why? Has the council …”

In his absence, there had been an uprising of sorts. The constant mining had destabilised the planet’s core. Jor-El was convinced that the planet was dying, yet the ruling council had continued to deny the validity of Jor-El’s findings. General Dru-Zod, once Jor-El’s closest friend, had begun working with Kal’s uncle, Zor-El, who had been gradually stripping the mines of all their minerals, using them to create weapons to help them fight in the civil war currently raging.

Jor-El had learned that Zod had become the leader of a group of separatists; a group which considered other cultures unworthy of their status as equal citizens. There had been rumours of mass genocide as the separatists fought to assert dominance over these so-called lesser beings. It rather reminded Kal of the wars he had studied in Earth history. He had mentioned this to his father on learning of the war and Jor-El had agreed. Kryptonians, it seemed, were not so unlike humans after all.

“What has happened, Father?” he asked.

“Zod has attempted to take control of the Kryptonian council. I am afraid, my son, that matters have become more dire than even I anticipated. The council has closed all the portals to off-world and forbidden any kind of interstellar travel.”

Over the next few Kryptonian months, the situation worsened. Kal-El worked tirelessly beside his parents, hoping to somehow discover a way to stabilise the planet’s core, but the damage was too great. Jor-El tried to alert the Kryptonian council of the danger, but his fellow councillors refused to see reason and would not allow Jor-El to inform the rest of the population.

Zod, meanwhile, had become drunk on power and in a night of terror, murdered each member of the council. Jor-El, the one surviving member of that ruling body, gathered those who would become the new council, and called for Zod and his followers to be captured and imprisoned. That alone made Jor-El the target of his former friend’s rage.

Jor-El called his son to his side late one afternoon. Kal was aware his father had been working on a secret project, but had always refused to allow Kal to see it.

“Father, what did you want to see me about?” he asked.

“This, my son,” Jor-El said, inserting a crystal key into a lock and opening heavy doors. Kal stared, for beyond the doors was a spaceship.

“Father?”
“I want you to go to Earth, my son. Krypton is dying and if I am not mistaken, Earth may eventually follow.”

“I don’t understand.”

Jor-El put his hands on his son’s shoulders.

“You have worked alongside me these many months, Kal-El, but we both know we cannot save Krypton. There is still a chance to save Earth.”

“But the council …”

“The council is foolish if it thinks it can continue to turn a blind eye to what is happening to our planet. Kal-El, I know your heart still yearns for your beloved on Earth. Go to her. You can still prevent the same disaster on Earth that is destroying Krypton.”

“I won’t be one of them.”

“You can live as one of them, Kal-El. You will discover where your strength and your power are needed. They can be a great people, my son. They only lack the light to show them the way. You can be that light.”

As much as it clearly broke his father’s heart, he had opted to stay on Krypton, hoping he could get the council to see reason. Lara also chose to stay by her husband’s side. As Kal watched them working together to complete the construction of the ship, he understood what his mother had tried to tell him so many months earlier. She knew only too well how he felt about Lois.

Their efforts to save Krypton’s people were in vain. The ship was almost ready when Zod and his followers broke into the citadel which housed the new ruling council and brutally murdered each member, including Jor-El. Kal had been completing the final stage of the ship when Lara rushed in, her face white with shock and grief.

“Kal-El, your father …”

“Mother?”

“He has been murdered. By Zod.”

A tremor shook the chamber, far more violent than those which had been plaguing them for weeks. Lara reached for the wall of the chamber, trying to regain her balance. She looked around, fear marring her beautiful face.

“You must leave Krypton, Kal-El. Find your Lois.”

“The ship isn’t quite ready, Mother.”

“There is no time left. If you do not leave now, I am afraid Zod will set his sights on you.”

“But I have done nothing …” he said, frowning, wondering why Zod would come after him. Not that his father had deserved his fate either. It was fairly clear that the general was unhinged.

“You are the only son of the House of El. Our family has ruled Krypton for a thousand years, my son.”

He realised the import of her words. As the only son of the ruling house, he alone could take over the council. That made him a threat to Zod.
Since no one else on Krypton knew of the ship his father had been building, Kal was able to seek sanctuary within the chamber, while his mother did her best to divert attention from him. As he continued to work, completing the ship, it became clear that Zod’s efforts to take over the planet would be in vain. The planet was breaking apart, the tremors becoming more destructive by the day.

On the day the ship was finally ready, Lara rushed into the chamber.

“Kal-El . . .”

“Mother.”

“Zod,” she said breathlessly. “His followers have discovered your sanctuary. You must go now.”

Kal looked at his mother. “Come with me.”

She shook her head. “My place is here, my son.”

“Mother . . .”

“Krypton is my home. Your father . . .”

“Father is gone.”

“His body, yes, but his spirit remains.” She pressed a small object in his palm. It was a crystal, shaped like a diamond. “We will always be with you, Kal-El,” she added.

Alarms began to ring out and he knew time was up. Lara knew it as well.

“Go, Kal-El. Return to your beloved Earth.”

“I love you, Mother.”

“I love you, my son.”

Kal ran to the ship, powering it up, watching through the window of the cockpit as Lara stood, sad and forlorn. She ran to the console and inserted the crystal to open the bay doors. He continued to watch her on the monitor even as his ship left the docking bay. He watched, helpless, as the doors to the chamber opened and Zod strode in, confronting Lara. He cried out in despair as Zod brutally impaled her with his sword, then shook his fist at the departing ship.

Despite their best efforts to stop him, Kal made it out into the lonely and cold bleakness of space. As he prepared to place his body in stasis for the three-year journey to Earth, Krypton slowly imploded.

Kal only became aware of the destruction of his planet when he came out of stasis to find the ship had been knocked off course by debris. Instead of landing in Kansas, he had ended up crashing in what seemed to be dense jungle. With the ship damaged beyond repair, surrounded by radioactive pieces of Krypton, Kal had been knocked unconscious. When he’d come to, he realised he had no powers.

He’d managed to get to his feet and had walked for what seemed like miles, until he encountered what seemed to be a militia group. They had immediately assumed he was an aid worker and taken him hostage. Sick with what he believed to be Kryptonite poisoning, beside himself with grief over the deaths of his parents and the millions of lives lost, Kal had lain in the makeshift prison, unwilling and unable to move.

Several days after his capture, the militia group captured another human. A female this time. Kal had
overheard the men talking about a ransom. They clearly thought she was more valuable to them since she was healthy, albeit with a few minor injuries.

They had shoved her inside the wire enclosure. Kal, his eyes hot with fever, his body aching, looked up at her with blurred vision.

“You’re sick,” she said.

He nodded, shrinking away from her. The men had beaten him, trying to get information out of him, but since he was not an aid worker, he had nothing to tell them.

“I’m a nurse,” the woman said. “I can help you.”

Not strong enough to resist her, Kal let her examine him. She frowned at him.

“You seem to have some debris embedded in your skin,” she told him.

He knew that. When he’d crashed, some of the Kryptonite had embedded itself in his body, but he hadn’t been able to get it all out. The men hadn’t bothered.

“You seem to have a few mosquito bites as well. I think you have malaria.”

That wasn’t possible, he thought, unless the Kryptonite had somehow suppressed his natural immunity to Earth diseases. Still, he did remember being surrounded by flying insects. It was possible he’d been bitten at one point.

He lay still, drifting in and out of a doze as she worked. The men ignored them, deep in discussion about some mission.

Kal slowly began to feel better. His powers were still out, but the fever seemed to be dropping and he was more self-aware. He could feel the Kryptonite in his body, like a low-range energy thrumming through him.

She seemed to be working on getting out one particularly large piece as pain ripped through him.

“Sorry,” she said. “This one was deeper than the rest.”

Trying to distract himself from the pain, Kal turned his head to look at her, watching as her brow furrowed in concentration.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Gemma,” she said. “I work for a charity organisation, giving aid to refugees.”

“Kal,” he said. “What happened here?”

“The same thing that’s been happening for about thirty years, I guess. Civil war. A lot of innocent people have been caught in the crossfire.”

Kal grunted as a burning pain spread through his body. Suddenly the pain was gone.

“There. It’s all out.”

Power surged through him. He quickly pulled away from the girl, knowing his wounds were healing rapidly. Gemma gasped.
“I’ve never …”

He fought for breath, trying to regain control. It was like the first time he had stepped through the portal.

Gemma gasped again, but he quickly realised she wasn’t looking at him. Instead, the men in the militia group had seen what was happening. Glancing uneasily at the guns they held, Kal knew there was no other option. He rose to his feet and easily broke the wire. The men had no time to fire as he sped toward them, taking their guns and knocking them off their feet.

Gemma stared at him from the hole in the fence, her mouth open.

“You cannot tell anyone,” he said as he sped back to her.

“Those men were going to shoot you,” she replied, sounding shocked.

“Gemma!”

She blinked rapidly, then nodded slowly.

“I understand. Well, not really, but … you’re amazing!”

“Gemma, we have to get out of here before they wake up.”

“Can you take me to the aid station?”

“I can take you as far as I can, but they cannot see me. They cannot know I’m here.”

“Why? I don’t follow.”

“There are people here who will be hurt if some others knew I was here.”

He picked her up in his arms and started to carry her out of the camp. Pausing, he glanced at the meteor debris on the ground. It was not the green he had been expecting, but blue. He’d known, of course, that the mineral had existed on Krypton, but he hadn’t thought it would come with him.

Kal sped through the jungle to the aid station Gemma directed him to, putting her down about a hundred metres from the station, watching as she made her way back. She paused and gazed at him for a moment, then nodded her thanks.

He was tempted to return to the militia camp and destroy all evidence of his presence, but knew that would not help the situation. He couldn’t wipe their minds, so he decided he would have to take the chance that no one would believe them.

Kal sped away to a safe distance, then took off into the air, flying high above the continent to get his bearings. He flew in a north-west direction, using his vision to zero in on the surface below. It was a while before the familiar farmlands of Kansas came into view.

Making sure there was no one around, he landed near the caves, stunned to see the caves were no longer open. There was a huge barrier around them, keeping people out, and a sign warning people to keep out with a LexCorp logo.

As he headed in the direction of the farm, he was dismayed to see various changes in the land. As if the land itself had been decimated by some unknown force. He bent to examine one of the craters, struck suddenly by a feeling of nausea. He reached for one of the small rocks to pick it up, but his hand began to cramp up and his blood felt as if it was boiling. He looked down at his hand to see that
the veins were popping and his skin had turned a ghastly green.

Kryptonite. The debris from the planet must have come down here.

A few minutes later he was knocking at the farmhouse door.

Martha set a cup of coffee down in front of him.

“Then my ship must have been more damaged than I thought. I got out just before the explosion.”

“What about your mother and father?”

Kal shook his head. “They died before it happened. Zod killed them.”

Martha wrapped a hand around his.

“I’m so sorry.”

“I was trying to get them to come with me but my father knew the council would have sent him to the Phantom Zone.”

The older woman looked puzzled. “Phantom Zone?”

“Oh, it’s sort of an inter-dimensional prison.” He sipped his coffee. “What has happened here? So much seems to have changed.”

“Kal, it’s been over fourteen years.”

He stared at her. Fourteen years? Lois must be …

“Lois.”

Martha looked pained. “I’m sorry, sweetie. We don’t know where she is. She keeps moving.” She gasped. “Clark gets an email from her occasionally.”

He frowned at her. “Clark?”

“Your son,” she said. “Lois named him Jonathan and I suggested Clark for his middle name. He lives with us.”

“I have a son?” he said, blinking at her.
Lois makes a discovery and encounters an old enemy.

Lois hung on for dear life as the landrover made its way through the jungle, her hand locked tightly around the frame as the rough terrain had her practically bouncing from side to side. She consulted the map on her phone, but it ended right at the edge of the dense growth. The driver of the landrover brought it to stop with a squelch.

The tall and skinny chocolate-skinned man sitting beside her gestured for her to follow him. Lois got out of the vehicle and instantly stepped in slimy mud, her foot almost slipping out from under her.

“Great,” she muttered.

“We walk from here,” the man said in a heavy accent.

Wonderful, Lois thought, glaring up at the darkening sky. It looked like it was going to rain again. This would happen in the wet season. Okay, so it only averaged fifty millimetres in one month, but combined with the average eighty something degree heat it made for a very uncomfortable trip.

The guide, Abuukar, looked at the smart phone in her hand.

“No signal,” he said.

“I’m aware of that,” she told him dryly.

She hadn’t managed to survive for thirty-three years without learning a few things. Still, over the years, she had also made some pretty great friends who had access to the latest gadgets which were far superior than those that could be found in the average store. Her phone was equipped with a handy little gadget that could boost a signal from anywhere except the most remote areas.

It was a bitch that the jungle of Somalia just happened to be one of those areas.

Abuukar looked her over, reminding her to make sure the long woollen socks she wore were tight over the bottoms of her pants. There were all kinds of things in the jungle, from leeches and snakes to insects as big as her hand. Still, Lois was an army brat. She had learned her survival skills from a four-star general.

She pressed the ‘back’ command on her phone. Her screen saver showed her a photograph taken about a year ago of her boy. Clark was growing like a weed and looked so much like his father. She swallowed the lump in her throat as an image of Kal-El popped without warning into her head. As much as she liked to pretend she was tough, and to her colleagues in the Planet she did have a reputation for being something of a bitch, the thought of the love of her life still somehow managed to break through those walls she’d erected around her heart.

God knew, other men had tried to break through. There had been a man in Gotham – a good, if somewhat taciturn man, who had tried, but she hadn’t been interested. Somehow he just couldn’t seem to measure up.
She had long ago told herself not to be so fanciful. She had tried to avoid creating a picture of Kal-El as some kind of paragon and try to look on her memories with a more judicious view, but then she would remember the nights they made love and know that for as long as she lived, she would never find anyone who had loved her as much as Kal had.

As she followed the guide through the jungle, only half her awareness on what might be ahead, she couldn’t help wondering what her former lover was doing now. He would probably be married, she thought. His parents would have matched him with some Kryptonian girl and he’d be on the council, or working alongside his father on some scientific project.

Abuukar called out in his language and she stopped, looking up, inwardly berating herself for her lack of attention. She had almost walked into a huge nest of … she wasn’t sure what they were, but they still made her shudder.

The man took her arm. “Come,” he said.

She continued following him, taking a sip of water now and again, knowing she needed the hydration as rivulets of sweat trailed down her body. She’d secured her long, chocolate brown hair into a loose ponytail, wearing a cotton scarf over it, less out of a need to keep the sun off and more to keep out insects which might crawl in her hair.

The guide had warned her it might take a few hours to get to their destination, walking through dense jungle, crossing rivers and such. She had the impression the man didn’t think much of her fitness. While Lois jogged every day she wasn’t trekking to far off locations, and thought her stamina was up to scratch, walking for several hours in almost a hundred percent humidity wasn’t really what she had in mind.

The insects which swarmed around them, or the threat of snakes wasn’t all they had to worry about. There was still a civil war going on in the country and she had been warned there were militia groups patrolling the area. They would no doubt see her white skin and mistake her for an aid worker. There had been reports of several aid workers taken hostage by some of these groups and held captive for ransom so the group could buy more guns.

Lois calculated they had been walking for about three hours when the guide held up his hand. She stopped walking and looked at him. He gestured for her to move up to join him, then pointed to something in the distance. She could see a glint of something metal. Whatever it was, it was big. Lois calculated it to be about a half mile away.

Something had come through the trees at speed, she decided. There were several deep gashes in the branches and more than a few of them had been lopped off a few feet above the ground. She pulled out her binoculars and focused on the object ahead of them. Suddenly it was as if the heat and humidity and the aches in her legs didn’t matter. She wanted to run ahead, but Abuukar stopped her and cautioned her to continue at a slow pace.

Which was just as well, she realised, as a few yards away they encountered a huge African rock python. This one was probably a juvenile, no more than about ten feet in length, but it still looked pretty strong. It clearly wasn’t happy at being disturbed either. Lois backed off, putting some space between her and the snake.

Her guide mumbled something and she frowned at him. He gestured toward the trees. The vegetation was so thick they would need to go around to get to the location. He walked on, not looking to see if she was following. Lois trudged behind him, eager to get a closer look at whatever it was. If it was what she suspected, she could have the story of the decade.
That was, of course, if any of the militia groups didn’t find it first.

They had to cross a river to get around. It wasn’t deep but it was dirty. Lois had no doubt there were all kinds of ‘life’ in the river that she didn’t want to think about. She made a point of getting across as quickly as possible, mentally thanking her father’s training for giving her the common sense to wear clothing that covered almost every part of her skin. She’d seen a movie once where a character had been covered in leeches. That had given her nightmares for weeks.

The rain had started to come down again, drenching them both as they reached the spot. Lois could see the damage was more extensive here as she started to pull at the brush covering the metal object.

She stood back, critically eyeing the shape. The thing was huge. About ten feet in length and six feet high. One end was triangular, while the rest … Lois gasped. She knew that shape. It was the same shape as the crystal she had left for her son. The same crystal Kal had given her before he’d left.

Darting forward, she began pulling off more of the vegetation and took her phone from its protective cover, snapping off pictures. As she did so it became clear it was a ship. Had it come from Krypton, she wondered. If so, who had been the occupant.

She didn’t dare think it might be Kal.

As she stepped back to get a wider shot, something crunched underfoot and she moved her booted foot to see what she’d stepped on. It seemed to be crystals of some description, embedded in rock. Lois looked around the ship and saw more of them. Abuukar jabbered something but she wasn’t listening, taking a plastic baggie from her backpack and gathering up as many of the coloured stones as she could carry.

“We must go,” the guide said urgently. “Men are coming.”

He grabbed her hand and pulled her into the undergrowth, telling her to hide. Just in time, she thought, as about half a dozen Somalians entered the clearing and began talking in their own language, gesturing toward the ship.

Abuukar looked concerned, clearly listening to the conversation. Lois kept still, one hand on the backpack. She had brought a nine millimetre handgun with her, but it would be pretty much useless against six of them. Especially as they were armed with semi-automatic rifles.

They must have stayed hidden for about half an hour before the armed men moved away, still talking among themselves. Her guide pulled her up and gestured quietly for her to walk in the opposite direction, back where they had come from. As much as Lois wanted to stay and investigate the ship further, she couldn’t take the chance the men would come back again.

When they had managed to put at least a mile between them and the militia, she turned to Abuukar.

“What were they saying?”

“They have a camp, other side of the ridge. There was a man. White man. He was wounded. Then he wasn’t.”

She frowned at him. “What does that mean?”

“Do not know,” he said, shaking his head. “Only know what they say. Man was in camp three, four days. Very sick. Maybe dying. They think shoot him in head.”

He went on to explain that the men had considered killing the hostage, since he was of no value to
them if he was sick. One of the other men had been out patrolling and had taken a woman, an aid worker. They had assumed she had had some medical knowledge as she healed the sick man.

The next thing they knew the man was charging them at speed, giving them no time to fire, knocking them unconscious. By the time they woke, he was gone. So was the woman.

Lois considered this as they walked back. She had half expected they would meet more militia, but most of the fighting was about twenty miles further north and Abuukar assured her that it wasn’t that likely. It was probably coincidence that the militia at the ship’s location had encountered the wounded man by chance and had decided to investigate where he had come from.

The sun was low in the sky by the time they made it back to the landrover, which the driver had hidden beneath the dense brush. Apart from a few scratches, and some spots of blood on the socks protecting her feet, Lois had come away fairly unscathed.

It was another two hours’ drive back to the aid station. Lois spent that time going through the photos she had taken, but without closer examination, she couldn’t really see anything. There were some symbols on the hull, but she hadn’t been able to get enough close-up shots to see what she was dealing with.

The aid station was little more than a couple of old huts from a village that had once stood in the spot. The village had been abandoned years before as the fighting grew worse. The station was run by a British doctor, assisted by a couple of nurses, one from Australia and the other from Canada. A small marine unit was also stationed there, keeping the natives from stealing the medical supplies. Lois knew from her father’s experience that a lot of supplies from M.A.S.H units tended to get stolen, then sold on the black market.

Lois managed to get together a small meal of rice and vegetables from the meagre rations they had and sat down at a rickety table outside one of the huts, sighing. She wanted a nice hot bath, a massage, a steak dinner, and to sleep for a week.

Her phone rang and she picked it up.

“Lois Lane.”

“Hey Legs.”

“Oliver. Guess you got my message.”

“Yeah. We got the pics. Chloe’s looking at them now. We should have something for you by the time you get back. You are planning on coming back to the city, right?”

“For a couple of days,” she said.

“Good. Because I think we might have something. How are you doing otherwise?”

“Fine. I’m fine. Why do you ask?”

“You sound a little down.”

“Ollie, I’ve just trekked like six and a half hours through the jungle. I’m hot, filthy and I stink. I’m going to get a semi-goodnight’s sleep so I won’t pass out on the plane tomorrow.”

“Well, good. Sleep tight little cuz.”
She rolled her eyes. “If you weren’t married to my cousin, I’d smack the hell out of you, Queen.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, you love me.”

“Like a hole in the head,” she retorted.

She hung up, putting her phone down and leaning back. She couldn’t help the little smile at the teasing.

She recalled that first meeting with Oliver Queen hadn’t been all that remarkable, except for the fact that he’d come to the Sadie Hawkins dance with Chloe. That alone seemed out of the ordinary.

Chloe had later told her that Oliver had been shipwrecked about a month after he’d graduated from Excelsior Academy and marooned on an island for two years. When he returned he had decided to use the archery and survival skills he had honed on the island to try to help the city of his birth, becoming known as Green Arrow.

Her cousin had started seriously dating the blond in her first year of college. While her father had been a little concerned at the six and a half year age gap, Chloe had fallen hard for the man.

Lois couldn’t help but wonder what would have happened had Chloe not been fired from her job as a reporter at the Daily Planet. Ever since she’d been a child, her chief ambition had been to be a reporter at one of the world’s most famous newspapers.

Lois had kept in touch with her cousin even after she’d dropped out of Smallville High. That had partly been her father’s idea and she had gone along with it, knowing if Lex ever recovered the memories of Kal that Brainiac had taken from him, he could very well turn his sights on her. So Lois had told her cousin the truth about her boyfriend, making her swear absolute secrecy.

Chloe being Chloe, she had decided to try to investigate Lex and see if she could keep abreast of his activities, particularly where Checkmate was concerned. Whether Lex had been on to her or not wasn’t clear, but when he had taken over the Planet, he had fired a number of staff in what he said was a cost-cutting measure. Both Lois and Chloe had known very well that the man was really getting rid of those he thought could be a threat to him.

When Lois had graduated from Cambridge, she had taken a job as a reporter with the Blackpool Gazette. An encounter with one of the men who had kidnapped her six years earlier prompted her to call her cousin and see if she could get her an interview with another newspaper. Chloe had excitedly told her that Lex had sold the Daily Planet to Bruce Wayne and that they had an opening for a foreign correspondent.

The job was perfect, Lois thought as she’d walked out of the interview with the new editor-in-chief, Perry White. He’d looked over her resume and her portfolio and while he hadn’t said much, she had learned a little about body language.

She knew she had the job from the moment he stood up and shook her hand.

Lois had taken the opportunity to visit the farm in Smallville. Little Clark was in the garden, showing some of his father’s talent for botany, even at five years old. Martha was out on the porch with some cool lemonade, watching the little dark-haired boy. Lois felt a little pang of loneliness as she looked over at him.

“How long can you stay?” Martha asked.

“Not long,” she said regretfully. “After I saw Emil LaSalle in England, I don’t want to take the
chance that he’ll tell Checkmate about me.”

“It’s been six years, honey, don’t you think …”

“Dad says they’re pretty relentless. And Waller doesn’t give a damn.”

The redhead nodded.

“You know what’s best, of course.”

“I miss it here,” she sighed, but that wasn’t entirely true. What she really missed was Kal. She supposed she always would.

Clark wandered over with a flower in his pudgy little hand and held it out for her.

“Is that for me, baby?” she said, her eyes prickling with love for her son. For his own safety, she was never able to publicly acknowledge it, but Martha had told her that they were planning on telling the boy when he was old enough to understand why it needed to be kept a secret. At five, he was still too young to know what that meant.

He nodded seriously. She lifted him up to her lap and hugged him, fighting tears, hating the fact that they had to be separated like this. Still, he was in the best place possible. Martha and Jonathan had done a wonderful job raising him. Clark was a sweet and loving child. She continued to hold him, breathing in that scent that reminded her of fresh, country air and the laundry detergent Martha always used. One day, she swore as she held her son. One day they would be a family. If only Kal would come home.

Lois managed to get a couple of hours sleep at the camp before she had to leave. It wasn't enough but she was so used to it now she couldn't remember when it had been any other way.

Lois left the aid station by jeep an hour later. There was a small airport where she had a charter plane waiting to fly her to Mogadishu. From there, she would fly to Metropolis. It wouldn't be a direct flight. She supposed she could have asked Oliver to have his private jet pick her up, but this way didn’t attract so much attention. She needed to stay under the radar in case Checkmate came after her again. Given what she had just seen, it could happen.

At the airport, she looked at her guide.

“Tell no one what you saw,” she told him. He nodded.

When she had sent the photos to Oliver, she had told him of the militia group’s interest in the ship. She hoped he would send someone from the team to investigate. She would have done it herself, but she’d already taken a huge risk going out there in the first place.

Through the Swann Foundation, and now thanks to Queen Industries, Lois was advised every time there was some kind of suspicious activity in space. She’d been on alert since the meteor shower six months earlier. While Dr Swann had been dead for ten years, he had a small staff who were absolutely loyal to him who continued his work.

The scientists at the foundation were unable to pinpoint the origin of the meteors and she didn’t want to assume the worst, but Kal had mentioned there had been wars on Krypton. What if the rock were actually pieces of Krypton?

Lois had managed to keep luck on her side for the last fourteen years. It was inevitable that her luck would run out some time. As she was heading to the temporary accommodation in Singapore, she ran into someone.
“Lois Lane.”

Lois looked up and gasped. Rick Flag. She hadn’t seen him since the night Kal had rescued her.

The older man grabbed her arm.

“You certainly have a way of leading us on a song and dance,” Miss Lane.

“Go to hell, Flag.”

“Good, you remember me. That will make this much easier. There’s someone who wants to talk to you.”

Lois had learned a few things in the past fourteen and a half years. Rick Flag had been a colonel in the army, discharged. His record hadn’t exactly been exemplary. He was known as a vicious and cruel man, rumoured to have beaten prisoners picked up by his unit.

As strong as the man’s grip was, however, she knew how to fight back, kneeing him hard in the groin before kicking him in the gut. She used his grip on her to balance herself as she shoved him back.

The click of a gun had her looking back over her shoulder. Emil. Damn!

“Miss Lane,” he smirked.

As she was led away, she looked around. Not even airport security had come to help her, which made her wonder if someone had somehow paid them off. Knowing what she knew about Amanda Waller and Checkmate, it was a pretty good bet.

She chose not to struggle as she was taken to what seemed to be an unused part of the airport, which was unusual for Singapore. La Salle shoved her through a doorway and she was confronted by a woman in her late fifties. The woman gestured toward a chair, a clear message for her to sit down.

The woman was of African-American descent, with long black hair that had clearly been professionally straightened. While not obese, she was definitely overweight for her height, which seemed to be a little taller than Lois.

“Well, Lois Lane. I have to admit, I admire you. You certainly have picked up some superior skills to have avoided us all these years.”

“Amanda Waller,” she said coolly.

The woman’s perfectly sculpted eyebrow shot up an inch.

“You know me.”

“Let’s just say that my father works in similar circles to some, uh, friends of yours. Friends meant sarcastically, of course,” she added. “Word is, you have no friends, just people you can dictate to.”

Waller didn’t take the bait, looking down at the folder in front of her. It was about an inch thick.

“General Sam Lane. Decorated war hero. I wonder, Miss Lane, what your father thinks of your career.”

“It doesn’t matter what he thinks, now does it? It’s not his life.” Although, if asked, he often said he was proud of her for doing something she believed in.
She chewed her lip, desperate to see what was in the second folder under hers. Waller seemed to read her mind as she pulled out the folder and opened it. There were photographs of the ship.

“Do you know what this is?” the Checkmate director asked.

Lois shook her head. “Should I?”

“It’s a spaceship.”

“Yeah right,” Lois replied, faking a laugh. “And I’m Madonna.”

“A curious sort of analogy, don’t you think?”

Lois glared at her mutely, pressing her lips together, knowing what the woman was implying, but not biting. Kal could be seen in some circles as a god, or at a stretch, a messiah. She still wasn’t going to play the woman’s game. Waller inhaled and let it out slowly.

“Tell me something, Miss Lane, where is your boyfriend?”

“What boyfriend?” she asked.

“The one who called himself Kal Novak.”

“Don’t know and I don’t care. Far as I knew he went home. Family emergency. I haven’t heard from him since.”

She tried to project anger, hoping Waller would interpret it as her being pissed at Kal for not contacting her.

“I see. I find that rather … unusual. From all reports, you two were extremely close.”

“Things happen,” she shrugged.

“Yet, you dropped out of school two months later. Why is that, Miss Lane?”

“My father was reassigned. I chose to go with him.”

The woman’s expression was unreadable. “Yes, I’ve heard that story. I have a theory, however. Would you like to hear it?”

Lois folded her arms. “No, but I’m sure you’ll tell me anyway.”

“I think your boyfriend was not from Eastern Europe at all. In fact I don’t think he was even from this planet. And I think it has everything to do with what’s in these photographs.”

Lois smirked at her and leaned forward, speaking in a low voice.

“Think he’s an alien? I’d keep that to yourself, unless you wanna end up with one of those funny jackets.”

Waller glared at her with a gaze that could freeze the fires of Hell. Lois had heard Waller was a bitch of the first order. Lois had garnered the same reputation, and she was proud of it. She stared back at the woman with an equally ice-cold look.

“I would watch my mouth, if I were you, Miss Lane. You’re smart, I’ll give you that. How else have you managed to avoid my agents for all these years?”
“I haven’t been avoiding anyone. I work as a foreign correspondent for the Daily Planet.”

“Yet somehow you still manage to avoid them.”

“I don’t know what to tell you, Ms Waller.”

She had to figure a way out of this. She couldn’t fight off both Flag and La Salle and it was clear Waller was never going to just let her walk out of this airport. She wasn’t about to let herself be taken prisoner again either. She had had enough of that fourteen years ago.

She doubted Waller would see reason either, even if she did point out the illegality of the woman’s actions.

As she contemplated her options, her phone began to vibrate in her bag. Waller stared at her.

“I would suggest you answer that. I wouldn’t want your family thinking something is amiss.”

What a beeyatch, she thought, taking the phone from her bag. Oliver. She slid her finger across the screen to pick up the call.

“Hey cuz,” she said.

“Everything okay?” Oliver asked. She never called him cuz and always hated it when he teased her with the term, even though technically he was now her cousin by marriage.

“Everything’s fine. I’m in Singapore on a layover. Listen, do me a favour and let Perry know I might be a little late filing the story. Figured I’d get a few hours shut-eye first. I’m beat.”

“Of course. Don’t worry. I’ll make sure he gets the message.”

“Thanks. Owe you one. Hey, save some bubbles for me for when I get home, okay?”

She ended the call, hoping Oliver picked up on the clues. She hated ‘bubbles’, or any kind of sparkling wine, since it had a way of getting her drunk very quickly. Oliver knew that. Just as he knew her preferred alcoholic beverage was a nice cold glass of beer.

Waller didn’t seem to notice the signals she’d been giving Oliver, thankfully. She continued to go through the folder, asking Lois questions to which she didn’t have the answers. Lois remained silent, glaring at the woman who was clearly used to interrogations.

The woman finally rose from the chair and spoke to Flag, who nodded. Lois was hauled to her feet and made to follow the ex-army Colonel, La Salle behind her.

It happened without warning. There was a ‘woosh’ sound and suddenly Lois was on the other side of the airport, the wind knocked out of her. She found herself breathing heavily as she stared at her saviour.

“Bart! Thank God!”

“No problemo mamacita.” She’d long given up trying to get Bart not to call her ‘mamacita’. He seemed to love running to Mexico for the burritos and thought that made him an expert in the language. He was thirty, but he still acted like a teenager. Lois supposed that had everything to do with his powers.

“Bart,” she sighed.
He grinned at her. “Wanna hitch a ride?”

“Thanks, but I’d rather not,” she said. “Ollie sent you?”

“He got the message, loud and crystal clear.”

“Good. Great.”

“Good thing he put that GPS in your phone or else you would have been toast.”

“I know,” she replied. “I owe you one, Bart.”

“Who were those guys anyway?”

“Checkmate. Listen, when you get back to Metropolis, tell Ollie I’ll try to call him as soon as I find a place to hunker down.”

“You’re not going back to Metropolis?” he asked.

“I can’t. Not now. Tell Chloe and Ollie I’m sorry.”

Bart stopped her before she could walk away.

“You can’t keep running.”

She sighed and shook her head. “I don’t have a choice, Bart. Checkmate won’t stop until they get what they want. I have a child to protect.”

It occurred to her to wonder why Checkmate hadn’t gone after her son, but she had to believe that Dr Swann had set it up so well that they had bought the story that Clark was someone else’s child. As much as that had hurt, she had known it was the right thing to do. She couldn’t have dragged her son around the world with her. That was no way to protect him.

God help her if Checkmate ever learned the truth about her son.
Jonathan entered the house and put his keys down on the counter before turning to pour himself a cup of coffee. He didn’t seem to notice the visitor, so used to only seeing Martha at the table.

“Hey sweetheart, I think we might have to go into the city to get that part for the tractor. Old Hickey at the store said he can’t get it unless he orders it special.”

“Hello Jonathan.”

The older man’s hand shook and he put the coffee pot down very slowly, then looked around, staring in shock.

“K-K-Kal?”

Kal smiled. “Yes sir, it’s me. I’ve come back.”

Jonathan dropped his coffee mug on the counter and crossed the kitchen floor. Kal rose from the table and the older man embraced him.

“Damn, Kal, are you a sight for sore eyes.”

Kal shrugged, not understanding the expression, but let it go as Jonathan held him at arms’ length.

“Let me look at you. God, Kal, you still look like a teenager.”

He just smiled at the blond man. “It’s good to see you.”

“So what happened? You did go back?”

He nodded. “Yes, I did. I’ve just been telling Martha.”

“Where are your parents? Did they come with you?”

Kal sighed. “No. They … they’re dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s okay. You didn’t know. Everyone on Krypton is dead. It’s a long story, but essentially the planet imploded. I think I may be the only survivor. The Kryptonian council didn’t want anyone going offworld and they closed all the portals, so my father built a ship. He knew how much I missed Earth and decided I should be the one to return.”

He didn’t say it, but from the expressions on the older couple’s faces, they understood. It hadn’t been just Earth he missed. It was Lois.

“Uh, did Martha tell you …”
“About my son?” He nodded. “She’s told me everything. I just hope that I can find Lois and we can finally be together. How we should have been.”

“We don’t know where she is, Kal. She keeps running, trying to keep ahead of Checkmate and its agents.”

“I know. Martha explained.” He grinned. “So it looks like I have a few hours to kill until Clark gets home from school. How about I go take a look at that tractor with you? See if we can’t get it going?”

Jonathan chuckled. “No offence, Kal, but I doubt you could figure out what’s wrong with Ol’ Betsy.”

Kal laughed. “Hey, I did help my father with the final stages of building a spaceship. I do know a little about mechanics. Couldn’t do any harm, could it?”

The older man slung an arm across his shoulders. “No, it couldn’t. All right, kid, you talked me into it. Let’s go take a look.”

A couple of hours later, Kal had to admit defeat.

“Yeah, afraid Ol’ Betsy’s a bit beyond even me.”

“Well, it was worth a shot. Tomorrow I’ll go into the city and see about getting that part.”

Martha entered the barn, smiling at them.

“I made some sandwiches for the workers. If you’re hungry that is.”

Kal didn’t actually need to eat, considering he absorbed all the energy he needed from the sun, but he remembered Martha’s sandwiches.

“Starved,” he said, following the older couple into the house and washing his hands before sitting down at the table.

Martha smiled at him as he practically inhaled the sandwich. Jonathan looked at him then at his wife, raising his eyebrow.

“Sure looks like he missed your cooking, sweetheart.”

“You have no idea,” he replied.

He still had some time before Clark came home so offered to help Jonathan out on the farm. The couple had sold some land, but still kept the organic crops going. It was clear that Kal’s advice had helped them a lot as their produce always sold well at the market.

He talked to Jonathan about Krypton as they worked side by side, telling him what had happened with his parents and Zod. Shortly after three thirty a yellow school bus stopped on the road and a tall boy with unruly black hair stepped down and slung a backpack on his shoulder before walking up the driveway.

Jonathan looked at him and he nodded. It was time. Together they headed for the house, quickly washing their hands at the spigot before entering the farmhouse. Clark was already at the table, eating a cookie which Martha had clearly just baked, a glass of milk beside his plate.

“Hey son,” Jonathan said. “How was school?”
Clark shrugged. “It was okay. Hey, did you …” He looked up and stared, clearly shocked at the man standing behind his foster father.

“Hello Clark.”

“Who are you?” the boy frowned.

“I’m … a friend. Of the family.”

“Whose family?”

“Well, yours. Your mother, and Martha and Jonathan.”

“How come I never met you if you’re such a good friend?”

Kal glanced at Jonathan, who shrugged. There was no easy way to do this.

“Clark,” he said, sitting down at the table. “What do you know about your real mom and dad?”

“Just that my mom travels a lot. I never knew my dad. Mom told me he went away before I was born. I think he died.”

Kal shook his head, looking the boy over. They shared some of the same facial characteristics, but Clark also had a lot of his mother in him. He had her hazel eyes, and the same delicate upturned nose.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Clark asked, appearing a little disconcerted.

“Clark, there is no easy way to tell you this. Rao knows it was hard enough telling your mother.”

“Rao?”

“It’s the name we give to our sun where I come from. It’s also like a deity.”

“I don’t get it,” the boy said, frowning. “Where are you from? I never heard of any god called Rao.”

“That’s because it’s not an Earth god, Clark. I’m from a planet called Krypton.”

Clark got to his feet, his glass tipping over. The teen reached for it to catch it before it could spill, but Kal grabbed it first, moving at super speed. His son stared.

“How did you do that? I thought I was the only one who could do that!”

“No,” Kal said, shaking his head. “Not the only one. You got your abilities from me. I’m your father, Clark.”

The boy stared at him, mouth open in complete and utter shock.

“You’re lying,” he said.

“No, I’m not. I’m your father.”

“No, it’s a lie. You’re a lie.” Clark ran out the door before anyone could stop him. Kal got to his feet, intent on going after his son, but Jonathan put a hand on his arm.

“Let him go,” he advised kindly.
Clark ran fast enough that he was across town in seconds. He stopped running only to find himself outside the locked gates of the big mansion on Beresford Road. The mansion had been empty for years, but not long after the meteor shower, the owner had come back to town and taken up residence again. Clark had never met Lex Luthor, but he had heard the man was sort of reclusive.

When he had been little, he had often squeezed through the bars and wandered the grounds. He’d always been fascinated with the huge house which reminded him of the castles of old from stories that Jonathan had read to him.

He was much bigger now and couldn’t exactly squeeze through but there was a gap in the brick wall where some of the stone had crumbled. Clark squeezed through that gap and ambled through the gardens, which clearly needed some decent maintenance. A lot of it was overgrown.

“You do realise this is private property,” a voice said.

Startled, Clark whirled and stared at the man standing on the path. He was about six feet tall, around forty years old. The most striking thing about him was that he was bald.

“Uh …”

“What’s your name, son?” the man said.

Instantly that put Clark’s back up. He didn’t like anyone calling him son that wasn’t Jonathan.

“Clark,” he said, since he was brought up to be polite.

“Clark what?” the man asked, trying for a disarming smile. It seemed false.

“Clark Kent?”

“Is that a question?” The man seemed amused. “I’m guessing you’re Jonathan and Martha Kent’s boy.”

Clark didn’t bother to correct him. He knew on paper they’d adopted him but they’d always told him he had a biological mother and father who loved him. Father. He snorted to himself. Some father. If he wasn’t dead, then where had he been all this time and why did he have to come back now?

“Forgive me. I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Lex Luthor.”

“Um, hello. Look, I’m sorry. It’s just, this place has been empty for years and I used to come here a lot when I was little. It’s … well it’s peaceful.”

“I imagine so. Perhaps we should go inside and call your parents.”

Something about the man’s demeanour felt off to Clark. Unnerved, he backed away from the man’s outstretched hand.

“Oh, I think maybe I should just get out of here, Mr Luthor. Again, I’m sorry for trespassing. I won’t do it again.”

He continued backing away until he reached the wall, then ran back to where he had come in. Feeling the man’s gaze on his back, he began walking in the direction of the main road. Clark glanced back at the iron gates. Lex was standing just inside, watching him. Clark’s skin crawled.
He was so intent on putting as much distance between himself and the other man, he didn’t see his father until he crashed into him. Literally.

A hand reached out to steady him.

“Easy, Clark.”

He looked up and glared at the man.

“What do you want? How did you find me?”

“That can wait for a minute.” He looked over at the mansion. Clark followed his gaze. Lex was still watching them. “When did Lex lose his hair?” his father murmured.

They began walking toward the main road together. Clark frowned at him.

“How did you get here? I don’t see the truck anywhere.”

His father shot him a look which pretty much asked: ‘did you really just ask me that?’.

“Oh, yeah,” he said.

Once they were out of sight on the mansion’s gates, Clark looked at his father.

“Okay, so?”

“I heard you talking to Lex.”

“How could you? The farm’s like miles away.”

“I have enhanced hearing abilities. Listen, about Lex …”

“He didn’t seem like a bad guy,” Clark said, ignoring his own nervousness around the bald man.

“There is a lot you don’t know. You need to stay away from him.”

“You don’t tell me what to do. You’re not my father.”

“I am your father,” the man said firmly.

Clark scoffed. “I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s Kal. Or Kal-El. Look, let’s just go back to the farm and we can sit down and talk about this. Calmly.”

“I don’t have to go anywhere with you.”

“Oh yes, you do,” Kal told him, clearly annoyed at his petulance. “You are coming with me right now!”

Clark tried to pull away but Kal had taken both of his arms in a firm grip. He again tried to pull away then gasped as they rose into the air.

“What are you …” He looked down to see his feet dangling ten feet in the air. “How are you doing that?”

“I told you.”
Clark rolled his eyes. “Fine. You’re an alien from Krypton. Big fricking deal. Put me down.”

“Fine,” Kal replied, descending. Clark looked around and realised to his surprise that they were back at the farm.

Jonathan and Martha came out of the house. Clark glared at them angrily.

“Did you know about this?” he demanded.

“Yes. We were going to tell you.”

“When? How about never?” he spat.

With that, he strode angrily to the barn and disappeared inside.

Jonathan grinned at Kal.

“Well, he’s a chip off the old block.”

Kal stared at the older man, confused. Martha nudged her husband.

“It’s an expression, sweetheart,” she explained. “He just means Clark is very much like you. You both have that tendency to brood.”

“He’s just so … angry,” Kal sighed.

“Give him time to calm down. Meanwhile, I think we should give Sam a call. He might know where Lois is.”

Kal nodded, following Martha back into the house. He waited as Martha connected the computer. It seemed everyone communicated by either text or video these days. A lot had changed in the time he had been gone.

Sam Lane picked up immediately. Kal could see the man had grown older since he’d last seen him. His thinning hair was almost all grey now and he had a few more wrinkles. His body, tending toward stocky, was even more misshapen.

“Sam.”

“Martha. I don’t have much time to talk. I have a meeting to go to in a few minutes.”

Martha beckoned for Kal to step in front of the webcam.

“Hello sir,” Kal said. The general looked stunned to see him.

“Kal. When did you get back?”

“A few days ago. I only got back to the farm today. It’s a long story and I see you don’t have time. Where’s Lois?”

The man frowned. “Uh, honestly, I don’t know.” He glanced at something beyond the camera. “Listen, stay at the farm tonight. I have to go to this meeting but I can rearrange my schedule for the next couple of days. I’ll catch the earliest available flight tonight and hopefully be there by morning. We have a lot to talk about.”

Kal wanted to ask him what he meant about Lois, but he guessed the man didn’t have time to get into
it. He let him go and looked at Martha and Jonathan. The couple looked worried.

“I hope Waller hasn’t caught up with her,” Jonathan murmured.

Kal frowned at them. “Checkmate?”

Martha nodded. “Unfortunately nothing has changed there. They’ve been after her for years. So far, she’s managed to avoid them, but …”

Kal looked out the window toward the barn. “Clark?”

“As far as we can tell, they haven’t cottoned on. Dr Swann did a pretty good job at hiding the truth, we think,” Jonathan explained.

“That doesn’t mean we should be complacent either,” Martha cautioned. “Amanda Waller may have her reasons for staying away.”

Kal considered this. Waller might have thought Clark was too young to get any information out of, but now that he was back on Earth, he had a feeling that wouldn’t last long.

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Amanda Waller fumed as she left the arrival gate at Dulles International Airport. Flag and La Salle followed behind. Flag was clearly just as pissed off as her at how Lois Lane had managed to escape. One thing she did like about the ex-Colonel was that he never offered excuses. He thought actions spoke louder than words anyway.

“Go to Kansas and get the boy,” she ordered Flag, who raised his eyebrows.

“The Kent boy? He’s a minor.”

“At this point, I couldn’t care less,” she replied.

While her agents had given her a complete background on the boy, and everything had checked out, she wasn’t sure she believed it. The timing of the Kents’ adoption of the child had been too much of a coincidence.

She had page after page of notes from interviews with staff at the Swann Foundation, which had arranged the adoption. They’d even gone so far as to try to track down the birth mother, to no avail. Every piece of information ticked all the boxes, yet there was something about it that had always bothered her.

After the debacle with Lois Lane fifteen years earlier, Waller had been firmly rapped over the knuckles for her agents’ actions and told to work within the confines of the law. That didn’t normally stop her, but the threat of her permanent removal as director of Checkmate had stopped her from taking the boy from the Kents to see if she could appease her own doubts.

Of course, now that they had what she was fairly sure was a spaceship, the rules had changed. Thanks to the militia group in Somalia, who had offered the information to the highest bidder, she was able to send some agents to retrieve the ship. The only problem was it was deep in the jungle and it was not going to be an easy task to remove it.

She glanced at Flag. The leader of the Suicide Squad was the only one of her agents who knew what had transpired fifteen years ago, and while he had voted firmly in favour of taking the child anyway, Waller was nothing if not pragmatic. If she was ousted as director, someone else would take her
place, and she wasn’t going to take the chance that it might be someone who didn’t have the balls to cross the line.

On second thought, she decided, she still had an agent, albeit inactive, in Kansas. Since Lionel Luthor’s death, Lex had taken over Luthorcorp, renaming it LexCorp. The man had even fewer scruples than Flag, which wasn’t saying much.

She contacted Luthor.

“I want you to get me more information on the Kent boy,” she said.

“Funny you should say that,” Lex replied. “The boy paid the mansion a visit today.”

“I see.” Clearly he had had some thoughts of his own along the same lines as her.

“When he left, he was met by a man. I’m not sure who he was, but I could swear he looked familiar.”

“Get me photographs, if you can,” she ordered.

“Will do,” Lex promised.

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Kal decided he had given his son enough time to get over his tantrum and went out to the barn. Nothing had changed there. Clark was up in the loft, sitting on the dusty floor, bouncing a rubber ball against the wall.

Kal remembered doing the same thing when he had been brooding over Lois, trying to figure out her behaviour. Of course, that was before they had begun dating.

He mounted the steps to the loft. Clark ignored him, but got up and went to flop on the couch, sending clouds of dust in the air. It was clearly a while since he’d cleaned. Kal couldn’t help but notice the picture frame lying face down on the desk.

He picked it up, chuckling at the face Lois was making in the set of photographs. They’d gone to a carnival in Granville and Lois had dared him to go into the photo booth. He hadn’t known at the time what it was, until she’d teased him about his lack of cultural knowledge.

They’d spent several hours at the carnival, playing games, eating cotton candy and corn dogs until Lois swore she was going to throw up, then they’d gone up in the Ferris wheel. That had been the first time he’d kissed her, rather than Lois kissing him.

It was that day he’d fallen deeply in love with her.

“My mom looks happy,” Clark said.

“It was a nice day,” Kal agreed. “You ready to talk to me?”


“You really are my dad, aren’t you? I mean, no one else but my dad would look that annoyed with me.”

Kal snickered and sat down beside his son.
“You have to give me a break. This is all very new to me too, you know. I didn’t know about you. I left before your mother found out she was pregnant.”

“Why did you leave?”

“We’ll get to that,” he said gently.

“Okay, then tell me about Krypton. What’s it like?”

“Krypton was … cold. Not like Earth.”

“Was?” Clark had clearly picked up on that.

“It’s gone, son.” Kal took a deep breath, the pain of loss still so new. “It’s gone.”

“But … what about … did you have a mom and dad?”

“Oh yes. Your grandparents were scientists. Jor-El and Lara. They loved each other very much, and they loved me. They knew how I felt about your mother so when they realised Krypton was dying they built a ship, so I could return to Earth.”

“How do you know what happened to Krypton?”

“My ship. It basically recorded the event.”

“Jor-El?”

“He and your grandmother died before it happened. They were murdered.”

“But all those people,” Clark said, sounding grieved. “Couldn’t they save themselves?”

Kal shook his head. “I’m afraid Kryptonians were a rather arrogant race. Even me, until I came to Earth and met your mother. She taught me so much about humanity. About the value of human kindness. It was one of the things that made me fall in love with her.”

Clark sighed. “Why didn’t you come back before Krypton died? Why didn’t they come with you?”

“There was a civil war,” he explained, giving his son the short version. “The ruling council forbid any offworld travel. Jor-El would have been arrested if they even knew about the ship he was building for me. My mother wouldn’t leave him. Even after he was gone.”

“That’s so sad.”

They sat silently for a few minutes. Clark took the photos from him and traced his mother’s face with his finger.

“I asked my mom once about you, but she was so sad she wouldn’t tell me anything. She didn’t even want to talk about it.”

“Leaving her was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I broke her heart.”

“Why did you?”

“Some people found out about me,” Kal explained. “They’re an agency, working for the government.”
“They knew you were an alien?”

Kal shook his head. “I don’t think they did, but then again, I’m not sure how much they did know. They tried to capture metahumans to force them to work for the government.”

“Metahumans? Like people with powers and stuff?”

“Exactly.”

“So maybe they thought you were a metahuman?”

“It’s possible. Anyway, they kidnapped your mom and sent the general a message that they wanted to exchange me for Lois. Instead I tracked her down and rescued her.”

“Pretty cool, Dad.”

Kal couldn’t help the little smile as the boy called him ‘Dad’.

“I realised then that I couldn’t stay on Earth. Not if I wanted to protect your mom. She wasn’t happy about it, but neither of us figured we had a choice. Well, then you came along and things got more complicated.”

“Sorry,” Clark said, sounding a little sheepish. Kal wrapped an arm around his son’s shoulders.

“No, none of this is your fault, Clark. Don’t ever think that your mom didn’t want you or that I’m not happy to have found you. Believe me, I am.”

“I know my mom loves me. I guess I know now why she couldn’t take me with her.” Clark looked thoughtful. “So are you gonna go look for her?”

“That’s part of the plan. I just spoke with your grandfather and he’s flying out tonight. I imagine he’ll be here tomorrow.”

Clark nodded. “So, Dad, what kind of powers do you got?”

Kal rolled his eyes at his son, who grinned unrepentantly.

“Speed, flight, hearing …”

“Yeah, you showed me those. What else?”

“Strength, heat vision, micro-vision.”

“Wait. Heat vision? What does that do?”

“Basically I can heat things with my eyes. You should have seen your mother’s face when I did that the first time,” he chortled. “She was so surprised, then when I told her how it activates she couldn’t stop laughing.”

“So, what does it?”

“Well, I’ll give you a hint. What happens in puberty?”

“Uh, I get a … Ricky calls it a boner.”

“Ricky?”
“He’s kinda my best friend. He’s a junior at school.”

Kal nodded. “Anyway, your, ah, boner, is basically sexual desire. And that’s what causes the heat vision.”

“So you were thinking about sex with my mom?” Clark made a face. “No offence Dad, but that’s not something I wanna be thinking about. I mean, not that you look old or anything …” he backpedalled hastily.

Kal laughed at his son’s expression. Clark was quiet for a moment.

“So will I get these powers? I mean, I’m fast and I’m strong …”

“I’m not sure how many powers you will have, or whether you’ll get something different. You were born under a yellow sun, not to mention the fact that you’re half-human.” He quickly explained about Krypton having a red sun and his powers coming from the yellow sun. He looked around and saw an old basketball in the corner, remembering the times he had played hoops with Lois. “How about we test some of them with the basketball hoop outside.”

Clark eagerly followed him outside and they played one-on-one for a while until Jonathan came out to watch them. Kal dodged his son and dribbled the ball, but Clark came up behind him and snatched the ball, jumping in the air and shooting for the basket. Kal whooped.

“He shoots, he scores!”

Clark grinned at him and held up his hand for a high-five.

“Hey you two,” Jonathan said. “Almost dinner time. How about you go wash up?”

They followed him back inside. Clark quickly washed up and set the table while Kal helped Martha carry the food to the table.

“So, what was the food like on Krypton?” Clark asked as they sat down to dinner.

“Well, you know how soldiers have rations when they’re out in the field?” His son nodded. “Sort of like that, only ours were sort of dried up. We did have some vegetables, but they were nothing like what you have. To be honest, because I get my energy from the yellow sun, I don’t actually need to eat, but I like to. Especially Martha’s cooking.” He grinned. “Martha makes the best apple pie.”

Clark grinned back. “Yeah, she does.”

Jonathan sighed, then chuckled and murmured: “Like father, like son.”
Running

Chapter Summary

Lois seeks help from a friend

Knowing the moment she tried to catch another flight out of Singapore, Waller’s agents would be on her tail, Lois decided she had to try another route. She opted for crossing the causeway into Johor.

The only problem with that was her passport was in her name and it was more than likely to be red-flagged.

In the course of her career as the Daily Planet’s top foreign correspondent, Lois had met a few people who tended to walk the fine line between legal and illegal activities. She knew of one such person who had made Singapore their base of operations.

The man had a bar and casual restaurant near the mall in Tampines, which was a short distance from Changi Airport. Lois managed to catch a bus from the airport with the little change she had. Thankfully, she had thought to keep some cash with her, along with her identification, although she was still fuming about having to abandon her suitcase after being grabbed by Waller’s people.

It was hot and she was sweating profusely by the time she made it to the bar. There was an Asian man on duty. He looked at her, scowling, then mumbled something in his language. Lois ignored his attitude and approached the bar.

“I’m looking for Joey,” she said.

The man shook his head. “No Joey here.”

She had no patience for jerks. “Listen, bub,” she said, putting on her best ‘bitch’ tone. “I’m hot and I’m tired and I’m pissed off. Now Joey owes me a favour, so don’t dick around and go tell him Lane is here to see him.”

“Lane?” the man said, cocking an eyebrow.

“Yeah, that’s right. Go get him. I don’t have all fricking day.”

The man disappeared out the back. Lois saw the stares from the half dozen or so men in the bar, a couple of them white. She stared back at them, in no mood to put up with this kind of nonsense. The two white men continued to stare while the rest hastily bowed their heads, pretending to become absorbed in their meals.

The bartender came back out, followed by a short, skinny man in his late thirties with thinning dark hair. He wore what passed for the local version of the Hawaiian shirt. Joey. He glared at her.

“Lane. Never thought you’d darken my doorstep. Did you have to do that to Chang?”

“Cram it, Joey. We gotta talk.”

He let her through, opening the back door for her and ushering her inside.
“What’s got the stick up your ass?” he asked.

She glared icily at him and he raised his hands in surrender.

“Fine. Be like that. What’s going on?”

“Remember how you owe me that favour?” she asked.

“What favour?”

She rolled her eyes at him. He’d been called a lot of names over the years, but the one she liked best was Joey the Snitch. He had a lot of friends in low places and wasn’t above passing on information to the authorities, for the right price. About a year or so ago, the authorities had tried to pin the theft of a shipment of liquor on him and Lois had provided him with an alibi. She knew he’d done it, since the liquor had ended up in his bar, but she had figured she could let him go on this and collect on it later. Especially since the liquor had been stolen in the first place by someone much worse. Joey was usually harmless.

She reminded him of this.

“Oh, yeah. That.” He took a bottle of whiskey from the shelf and poured some into a tumbler. “You look like you could use a stiff drink.”

“Yeah, it’s been a lousy fucking day,” she sighed, taking the glass and downing the contents in one swallow. “Listen, I need a guy.”

“You’re looking at one,” he smirked.

“Funny, Joey. I need a forger. I’ve gotta get out of Singapore, but …”

“But you don’t want anyone knowing it’s you. Gotcha. I know a guy, but it’s gonna cost ya.”

“I don’t have any money, Joey. It’s all tied up in investments.”

One of the things Kal had done before he’d left was to sign over the contents of his bank account to her. She had been shocked when she realised just how much money had actually been in that account. She had taken most of it and invested it so it was now a tidy little nest egg. The rest she had used to pay for her tuition at Cambridge and given some to the Kents for Clark.

Joey sighed. “I s’pose you expect me to fork out my hard-earned money for this?”

“What hard-earned money?” she retorted. “You sit on your ass and watch the pennies grow while the grunts do all the hard work.”

“Cynical, Lane. Very cynical. All right, fine. I’ll set it up, but you’re gonna owe me big time for this.”

Lois was relieved Joey didn’t ask for any explanation as to what was going on. Not that she would have told him anyway.

Joey made a couple of phone calls while she poured herself another shot of whiskey. The alcohol helped her relax a little. She sat back, rubbing the crick in her neck, then grabbed her phone from her bag, quickly sending a text.

Chloe, can’t talk. Can’t tell you where I am. Just know I’m ok, but on the run. I’m gonna have to dump this phone. I’ll call you when I can. Love u.
Chloe wouldn’t be happy, she thought, but it wasn’t the first time she’d dumped a phone and disappeared on them. There had been a scare a few years ago where she thought someone was following her. They probably were. Lois had learned to watch for signs.

The ambush at the airport pissed her off. Normally she had at least a couple of days’ grace, but it looked like Waller had stepped up her harassment campaign. It was more than likely she had red flagged Lois’ name on any airport manifests so she would know when and where Lois was flying. Still, even if her name had shown up on the manifest, it begged the question. How did Waller get to Singapore so fast? Even with the fact that it hadn’t been a direct flight from Mogadishu, it was still a shorter flight than flying directly to Singapore from DC.

Someone had to have talked, she thought. Someone who knew her flight schedule. She would give anything to know who and give them a lesson on how not to betray someone’s trust.

Joey finally got off the phone and looked at her.

“He can see you in an hour. You sure about this Lane?”

She shrugged. “Got no choice. Where will I find this guy?”

“I’ll take you to him.”

“One more thing,” she said. “Where can I get a wig?”

“A wig?”

“Yeah. Blonde maybe, or redhead. Don’t care which. By the time I get over the causeway and through security, I can disappear.”

“Just how are you planning on getting across the causeway?” Joey asked.

“Got a car?” she asked, grinning. Joey smirked.

“Not exactly,” he said.

She followed him out into the back alley where she saw something covered by a large plastic sheet. “You ride, Lane?” he asked, uncovering what Lois saw was a 250CC motorcycle.

“There’s always a first time,” she muttered.

“It’s all I got. Take it or leave it.”

She had no choice and she knew it. Joey gave her a quick lesson. Lois had driven a motorcycle only once in her life, back when she was living at the army base with her father. She’d been sixteen then and hadn’t been able to handle the powerful cycle, crashing it and breaking her arm in the fall. The general had been furious when he’d found out what had happened.

Once she had her transport sorted, Joey took her to see the forger. He was clearly of Asian descent, but spoke perfect English. Joey murmured that the man had been educated in England. She quickly explained her situation. He looked at her passport and eyed her critically.

“Hmm, come back tomorrow. I can have it done for you then.”

“No, not tomorrow. I need it now,” she told him.
He rolled his eyes at her. “You want a piss poor job that ain’t gonna cut the mustard, fine. I can do it in an hour. You want a good job, you come back tomorrow.”

Sighing, Lois realised he was right.

“Come back to my place,” Joey told her. “You look like you could use a decent night’s sleep.”

She chewed her lip. He was right about that. She was exhausted, having had almost no sleep since leaving the camp. God, was it really only sixteen hours ago? “All right, fine. But no funny business, Joey.”

The man tried for an innocent look and failed. Lois shot him a look and he shrugged and smiled.

Back at the bar, he poured her another shot of whiskey. She tried to refuse but he gave it to her anyway.

“You got other plans, Princess?”

“Don’t call me that,” she snapped.

“Chill, sister. I’m just trying to get you to relax a bit, that’s all. No ulterior motives.”

Lois snorted. Practically everyone she ever met had had ulterior motives. Except for Kal. Even when he had been lying to her about where he came from, he had always been honest about his feelings for her.

God, she missed him.

Part of her wanted to blame him for her being in this whole mess with Checkmate, but she knew that would be unfair. She wanted to scream, cry, rage at the unfairness of it all. To Jor-El for giving Kal no other choice than to go back to Krypton. Or Lex, for nosing into things that weren’t his concern.

She would never regret meeting Kal. After all, he had given her Clark, her beautiful boy. Even though they were forced apart, again by Checkmate. Assholes, she thought. Her life had been turned upside down by Waller and her cronies.

“Hey, Lane,” Joey said, snapping his fingers next to her ear.

She glared at him. “Do that again and you’ll lose a finger,” she growled.

He scowled at her. “You know something Lane, you’re a class-A bitch.”

“Hardly a newsflash,” she quipped.

“Why are you such a bitch?” he asked.

“Why are you asking? It’s none of your business!”

“Still, dame like you …”

“Dame?” she said, cocking an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah,” he replied, clearly not realising he’d pissed her off once again. “I mean, look at you. When you’re not a mess, you’re fucking hot. You’re a mess, but you’re a hot mess,” he kept rambling. “I mean …” He trailed off
She grabbed the bottle from him.

“You’re drunk.”

“No, I mean, you’re f*cking gorgeous, Lane. When you aren’t being a total b*itch, that is. Can’t believe no one’s ever managed to tame you.”

“Who says I need taming?” she asked.

“C’mon, you can tell me. You got a guy?”

“I don’t have time for relationships, Joey. Not now.” Not ever, she thought. At least not while Checkmate was still after her tail. Besides, she thought, none of them will ever measure up to Kal.

God, why did everything seem to revolve around him? She hadn’t been able to have a relationship since he’d gone. They hadn’t made promises to each other when he’d left, even though he had promised he would come back.

She was forgetting one thing. The ship she saw in the jungle. She was certain it was Kryptonian, but without closer examination of the photos, she would never know for sure.

Who had been the man taken prisoner by the militia? If he was the Kryptonian, how had he got hurt? Where was he now?

Lois sighed and shook her head. She wouldn’t find answers tonight, not while she was so exhausted she could barely stand upright.

Joey had a pull-out couch which he’d told her she could sleep on. She didn’t need a blanket as it was a hot night. Not that that mattered anyway. As soon as her head hit the pillow, she was asleep.

Next morning she was up early doing push-ups on the floor, grumbling at the thought of having to do such exercise, but still knowing it was necessary. It was so much easier for guys like Bart, whose abilities gave them a higher metabolism. Not that she would want powers, knowing what Checkmate usually did to those who had them.

Over the years, she had managed to talk to a few people who had come across members of what Waller apparently liked to call the Suicide Squad. It was obvious she didn’t give a damn about the welfare of those who worked for her as the squad was sent into increasingly dangerous situations and told they were expendable. There had been a guy, Floyd Lawton, who had been nicknamed Deadshot because of his deadly accuracy with long-range shooting.

Lawton and several others had been sent on a rescue mission which had turned out to be bogus. The ‘hostage’, a senator, had planned the entire thing himself, hoping to get a boost in his political ratings. He hadn’t counted on the men he’d used turning on him. Lawton had been killed in the melee that had followed. When the squad had reported to Waller, she never said a word about Lawton, even though he had sacrificed himself to save the lives of several innocent people caught up in the senator’s scheme.

It was a good thing Waller had no political ambition of her own. She seemed to like doing what she did.

Unlike Lex Luthor, she thought. He was another one who seemed to be targeting metahumans. While he had ostensibly been working for Checkmate, Lois had heard the man had his own agenda when it came to metahumans and their abilities. From all reports, he was following in Lionel’s footsteps. Lionel had been conducting secret experiments for years, but as far as Lois knew, the elder
Luthor hadn’t thought beyond using the metahumans for personal gain.

Lex’s scheme was on a grander scale. Through her father, Lois had learned that Lex had made a proposal to a senate committee which approved funding for the military. The billionaire, who had inherited Luthorcorp when Lionel had died, from liver disease, or so Lois had heard, had proposed experiments to either recreate or extract the metahumans’ abilities and create super soldiers.

She wondered if he was still working for Checkmate. If so, Waller wouldn’t be impressed with his scheme. As far as the director was concerned, the only agenda her agents should be following was hers.

Lex Luthor had left Smallville some years earlier, not long after Kal had returned to Krypton. Lois doubted there was anything to it, since Lionel had died about a month or so later. The town had been glad to see the back of Lex, who was considered the town pariah, despite the fact the Luthorcorp plant had kept the town afloat.

A couple of months ago, there had been a short article in the Daily Planet, stating that Lex had been involved in an accident. He’d been experimenting with an unnamed substance and it had turned out to be volatile. Lex had spent two weeks in the hospital and when he was discharged, he announced his return at a press conference. There would have been nothing remarkable about it except for the fact that he had come away from the accident with no hair, and according to his doctors, it would never grow back.

Lois was glad she wasn’t working in Metropolis. It would have been too tempting to confront Lex and rip his guts out.

She had moved on to sit-ups when Joey came out wearing just drawstring pants. He gazed at her for a moment, then shrugged and carried on into the small kitchenette of the apartment, scratching the back of his head.

She stopped exercising and looked over toward the kitchenette as Joey replaced the filter on the coffee maker and put in fresh water.

“Shower’s free,” he told her over his shoulder.

“Don’t have anything clean to wear,” she replied. “Kind of had to leave most of my stuff behind.”

He turned, rolling his eyes.

“Jesus, you’re a high maintenance chick. I got something you can wear. Might just fit you.”

“Not yours, is it?”

“No,” he said, his voice almost a whine. “Belonged to my ex. She left ‘em here when she split.”

Lois cocked an eyebrow at him.

“What girl would want to date you?” she asked. He shot her a look which was unreadable.

“Now that hurt,” he replied.

She realised she had offended him and quickly apologised. Joey was at least doing her a favour. He might be a crook, well, sort of, but he was a good man who she instinctively knew wouldn’t betray her. He seemed to have a high code of honour.
An hour later, showered and in clean clothes, Lois felt better than she had in weeks. Joey had cooked bacon and eggs. He wasn’t a bad cook. Far better than she was. Lois was so hungry she wolfed it down.

“Hey, whoa, slow down. You’re gonna give yourself indigestion.”

“Sorry. It’s the first decent thing I’ve had to eat in weeks. Hard living off rations.”

He frowned at her. “It can’t be good for you.”

“Appreciate the concern, but I can take care of myself.”

“Right. When does it stop, Lane? You’ve been running for how long? Ten years? Whoever’s after you sure as hell ain’t gonna stop chasing you. Not like this.”

“Yeah? And what would you suggest, genius?”

“Make ’em stop. Sooner or later you have to stop running.”

“You don’t know anything about my life, Joey. Don’t presume you do.”

He looked at her. “Way I see it, you’re always gonna be looking over your shoulder, unless you actually do something about it. Like maybe turning the shit on them instead. You’re a damn good reporter, and you know me. I don’t say things I don’t mean. So expose them. If these people are as bad as I’m guessing they are, they sure as hell wouldn’t like bad publicity.”

She frowned at him. Maybe Joey didn’t know the whole story, but he had made a damn good point. Maybe it was time she stopped running and gave Checkmate exactly what they dished out.

First things first, however, she had to get out of Singapore. It was too small an island and she felt vulnerable. She wasn’t going to expose the likes of Amanda Waller from inside one of their labs, or whatever they used to keep the metahumans imprisoned.

True to his word, the forger had her fake identification ready when they returned to his little store where he fixed computers for a living. The man assured her the identification was indistinguishable from the real thing and it would get her across the border.

Joey took her back to the bar and gave her the key to the motorcycle. He handed her a packet. Lois frowned as she looked inside the packet. There was at least a thousand American dollars in it.

“What? I can’t take this.”

“Just take it, Lane. What? You think I give a lot of money to random chicks? Take it and get out of my hair, what’s left of it anyway,” he added with a rueful look.

“Thanks Joey. You saved my neck.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he grumbled. “Get out of here before I change my mind.” He sobered. “You take care of yourself Princess.”

Lois started the bike and tucked the packet into the leather jacket he’d given her, then rode away without looking back.

It took roughly forty minutes to get to the causeway, and another hour to get across. The border guards just glanced at her identification and waved her on. Once she was away from the border, she let herself relax. She would still need to find somewhere to stay, but at least she wasn’t being chased.
Today, at least. Tomorrow might be a different story.
Clark was late getting up for school. Kal grinned at Martha and Jonathan. He’d had the same trouble. If it hadn’t been for Lois picking him up, he probably would have missed the bus. Not that he would have had to worry about that anyway, he thought.

Martha was stirring the scrambled eggs in the pan and listening for any movement upstairs.

“Clark!” she yelled.

“Why don’t I go and get him up?” Kal suggested.

Jonathan nodded. “Lord knows I try.”

Kal went upstairs. He’d slept on the couch the night before. Or rather, he’d slept floating above the couch, since it really wasn’t long enough for his height. They’d all been rather late getting to bed as they’d sat up talking most of the evening, discussing what they were going to do. Kal wanted to immediately set out in a search for Lois, but the older couple suggested he wait and see what the general had to say.

He knocked on the door to his son’s bedroom, then quietly opened the door. Clark was burrowed under the blankets, feigning sleep, but Kal could tell from the way he was breathing that he was wide awake.

It was a typical teenage boy’s bedroom, from what he remembered. Clothes in messy piles everywhere. Martha had informed him that she had given him trying to get the kid to clean up his pigsty of a room and had gone so far as to refuse to do his laundry. Not that that did any good, she claimed.

Kal pulled at the blankets, but Clark clung on to them.

“Come on, son,” he said. “You need to go to school.”

“Why? Not like I’m gonna need maths or history, or you know, English.”

Kal sat down on the bed. “Your education’s important, Clark.”

“Says you.”

“Yes, I do say so,” he said, refusing to give in to his son’s petulant mood. It was amazing how he had quickly adapted to the role of being father to this sulky child. Martha had assured him that this was a part of growing up for humans. Kal certainly didn’t recall being like this on Krypton. Then again, he wouldn’t have been allowed to get this far. Not that he was criticising the Kents’ parenting. It was just different on Krypton. Clark was a happy-go-lucky kid, who loved both his foster parents dearly, although he clearly missed his mother.
“Clark, come on. Get up.”

“I don’t want to go to school,” Clark said, his voice muffled through the blankets. “I want to help you find my mom.”

“You will, I promise, but not at the expense of your education. Look, your grandfather’s probably going to be here around noon, so I very much doubt I’ll be doing anything before you come home from school.”

“I hate school,” Clark mumbled. “I’m such a loser there. I mean, it’s not like I can use my powers or anything.”

“I know,” Kal sympathised. “I know it’s not easy when you’re not like everyone else, but you’re only in your first year of high school. Things can change.”

“I bet you were popular,” his son sighed.

Kal grinned ruefully. “Let me tell you something about my first days at Smallville High. I didn’t know what I was doing. Things like getting in line for lunch and cheerleading was all very strange to me. If it hadn’t been for your mom, I don’t think I would have got through as much as I did. Of course, I did have some lessons on Earth culture from Brainiac.”

Clark lifted the blankets and frowned at him.

“Brainiac?” He thought for a second. “Oh yeah, the robot thingy.” Kal had told him about Brainiac the night before.

“Brainiac wasn’t a robot,” Kal explained patiently. “We can talk more about this when you get home, all right?”

“Okay.” Clark sighed heavily, then got out of bed, zipping to the bathroom. He was back a minute later, dressed for school.

Kal ushered him downstairs. Martha served the scrambled eggs and Clark ate quickly.

“Whoa, slow down, son,” Jonathan said behind the newspaper he was reading. Many news publications were online now, but there were still a few older readers who preferred to have the physical thing in their hands.

Kal glanced at the page and saw the byline: ‘Lois Lane’.

“Could I see that?” he asked.

Jonathan looked at him over the paper, frowning.

“What is it, Kal?”

“The story on the page. It’s Lois.”

Jonathan put the paper down on the table and unfolded it, spreading the pages out.

“Well, I’ll be,” he said. “I never even noticed.”

They gathered around, reading the story. Lois had been in Africa just a day earlier. Kal quickly read the story. She’d discovered what seemed to be a spaceship. His spaceship. He frowned. How would Lois have known about the ship landing?
According to the story, a militia group had also found the ship. Lois had mentioned the group had taken a man who had been hurt near the landing area. She was a good writer, keeping to the facts rather than suppositions and letting the reader make up their own mind.

Kal quickly thought over the events of the last couple of days. When he’d taken Gemma to the aid station, it had been night. It had taken a little time for him to fly back to Kansas, considering he hadn’t really known the territory. Normally he could have flown around the world in maybe an hour, but he’d needed to get his bearings.

Somalia was a few hours ahead of Kansas, but even so, how could she have known about the ship, unless someone had told her?

“How did Mom know where the ship was?” Clark asked.

“That’s what I’d like to know,” Kal said, ruffling his son’s hair. Clark squirmed.

“Dad, cut it out.”

Martha glanced at the clock. “Clark, honey, you should get your bag. Jonathan’s going to drive you to school.”

“I’ll come with you,” Kal said as Jonathan got up from his seat and grabbed the truck keys.

“I call shotgun!” Clark called as he grabbed his backpack and was out the door before anyone else could move.

Kal raised an eyebrow at Jonathan. “Shotgun?” The older man grinned.

“It means he gets the passenger side. You’ll have to sit in the middle.”

As Jonathan drove, Kal talked to his son.

“Now what are you going to say if someone asks about me?”

“That you’re a cousin visiting from out of town. I get it, Dad. Don’t sweat it.”

“This is important, Clark.”

“I know already! Geez!”

“Hey, calm down,” Jonathan said. “We know you can keep a secret, son, that’s not the point. You just need to remember that there are some dangerous people out there who could come after your dad.”

“And you,” Kal added. He didn’t voice his own concerns for the older couple. If Checkmate should realise the truth, they could very well do something to hurt the Kents as well.

Clark went off happily enough and Jonathan drove back to the farm.

“I know you’re worried about us, son, but don’t. If Checkmate does come after us, then we’ll deal.”

“I don’t want you getting hurt because of me.”

“None of this is your fault, Kal. You know that. As for us taking on Clark, once we knew he was yours and Lois’ we couldn’t turn our backs on him. The risk was worth it. He’s a good kid.”
“Because of you and Martha,” Kal told him.

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Clark found his locker and opened it quickly, thrusting his backpack inside. As he grabbed his books for his first class, he heard his best friend at a neighbouring locker.

“Hey, where were you last night?” Ricky asked. “We were going to meet at the Beanery, remember?”

Clark nodded and smiled apologetically.

“Yeah, sorry, guess I should have texted. I’ve got a cousin visiting from out of town. Was sort of a surprise visit.”

“A cousin?” Ricky asked, frowning. He knew, of course, about Clark’s adoption, although he didn’t know the real truth. “From what side?”

“Uh, mine. My real family.”

“Oh. Guess that must have been some surprise.”

“Yeah.”

They began walking along the corridor.

“So, is he that guy that was with your dad when they dropped you off this morning?” Ricky asked.

Clark hesitated, then remembered that everyone else assumed Jonathan was his dad. It was only at home that he called them by their first names. He nodded.

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“Wow, you two look a lot alike. Except your nose is different and stuff.”

“Hi Clark.”

He grinned at the blonde girl, who fell into step beside them. Amy was his other best friend. They’d tried going out once in junior high but had decided they were better off being friends.

“So,” Amy said, looking at Ricky. “Where was he?”

Clark quickly explained again about his ‘cousin’. Amy shrugged and took it philosophically. There were times when Clark wasn’t able to make it to their nights at the coffee shop, as he worked on the farm to earn his allowance.

He went off to Civics class, but didn’t pay much attention to what the teacher was saying, too absorbed in the things his father had told him the day before. He’d always wondered about his father. He would often sit up in the loft and stare at the photographs of his parents, wishing he had a chance to meet his dad.

Now that he had, it was so much better than he had ever dreamed it would be. Even with the added problem of Checkmate.

At lunch, he decided to do a little snooping of his own. Along with Amy and Ricky, he helped run the school newspaper. It was mostly digital, but they worked out of a little office. Clark managed to
get to the office before his friends and began looking up information on the computer.

“What’s that?” Amy asked, entering the office.

“Nothing. Just, uh, research for a paper.”

She frowned as she peered at the screen. Amy was very near-sighted and no matter how high the prescription, it never seemed to be enough.

“Checkmate?”

“Yeah, some kind of government agency.”

“How did you find out about them? They seem kind of obscure.”

“Just something I came across.” He found a blog written by someone who clearly had a grudge against Checkmate. “Hey, it says here they don’t like to operate within the confines of the law.”

Amy again looked over his shoulder.

“That guy’s a known conspiracy theorist, Clark. He’s a crackpot.”

Clark continued to read. Crackpot or not, the man was definitely on to something. He had to wonder why Checkmate hadn’t shut him down, but then again, if most people thought he was talking conspiracy theories, they probably didn’t think they needed to do anything about it.

“So you don’t think there’s anything to this guy?”

Amy laughed. “Come on, read what he says about them going after aliens. I mean, really. Aliens? There’s no such thing.”

Clark choked, trying to hide it, not wanting his friend to discover the truth. That he had a real, honest-to-goodness alien for a father.

He kept reading the blog. Maybe this guy had been dismissed as a crackpot but some of the things he said were a little too close to the truth for comfort.

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Kal was working with Martha on the crops, checking the irrigation system, when a car pulled up outside the Kent home. He looked over toward the driveway, frowning, then realised it was General Lane. The man had not aged well. The stockiness he had nearly fifteen years ago now tended toward fat, especially around his middle.

He glanced at Martha, who was now leaning on the rake she’d been using to clear weeds from the rows, and she nodded, propping the tool up against the water barrel. Together they went to greet Lois’ father.

Sam Lane hadn’t been happy with learning the truth about Kal. Despite the fact Martha and Jonathan had talked him out of going to the authorities, he still had shown considerable unease with it. From the expression on the man’s face now, Kal guessed he still wasn’t all that thrilled.

“Kal,” he said shortly.

“Why don’t we go inside and talk,” Martha suggested gently.
Kal looked at her and nodded, his hand out as he ushered the older man inside the house.

“Jonathan’s out in the field,” Martha told the general. “I’m sure he’ll be here shortly.”

Sam nodded. “That’s fine. It’s Kal I came to talk to.” He looked Kal over. “You haven’t changed much.”

Kal didn’t want to get into any long-winded explanation about the Kryptonian life span or the planet’s rotations of the sun. Nor did he want to explain, for the third time, what had happened to his home planet.

“What are you doing back?” Sam asked.

“Krypton’s gone.”

“Gone?” the general said, raising an eyebrow. Kal nodded.

“Dead. As in imploded.”

“Your parents?”

“Dead. As are about a hundred million Kryptonians. The council forbid any warning. My father risked arrest to get me off the planet.”

“Why Earth?”

“Because he knew what I had waiting for me.”

The man nodded. Martha handed him a cup of black coffee and the general took it with a murmur of thanks before sitting down at the table. Kal joined him. Martha set another coffee down in front of him and he smiled his thanks to her.

The screen door opened and Jonathan came in. The general immediately got up as Jonathan offered a handshake.

“How’s Clark?” Sam asked.

“He’s a teenager,” Jonathan replied, putting on the exasperated look that Kal was beginning to feel himself.

The general rolled his eyes and laughed. “Just like his mother.”

Having anticipated Jonathan’s entry, Martha handed him a coffee as well. He kissed her cheek.

“Thank you sweetheart.”

“We need to find Lois,” Kal said quietly, not wanting to waste time with small talk. “I saw the article in the paper this morning. That was my ship. I’m still not sure how she managed to find it so fast …”

“I do. Chloe. Or rather, her husband. Oliver.”

Kal frowned at the general. “Oliver? As in Oliver Queen?”

“They got together when she started college, but didn’t get married until she graduated. They run something called Watchtower in the city.”
The general explained that Oliver apparently had been contacting metahumans all over the world in a bid to create an organisation which was a little like a counterpoint to Checkmate. He’d called it the Justice League.

“Speaking of Checkmate …” Kal prompted.

“Still in operation, I’m afraid. Lois took on a job as a foreign correspondent for the Daily Planet so she didn’t have to stay in one place for too long. From what I hear, Checkmate is still pursuing her.”

“I thought you’d taken care of that when I left?” Kal asked.

“Unfortunately Amanda Waller isn’t the type to follow orders, even with strict sanctions in place. The woman’s relentless.”

Kal looked at Jonathan and Martha, who frowned and exchanged worried looks.

“It begs the question, why hasn’t she come after Clark?”

“As much as I would like to think Dr Swann’s foundation has helped where that is concerned, I think it’s more the threat that she will lose her position if she attempts to take Clark. I’ve done my best to keep making noises in Washington, so her superiors know Checkmate is under close scrutiny …”

Kal sighed. Now that he was back things were going to get more complicated.

“There must be some way to stop them for good,” he said.

“Short of arresting Waller, there isn’t. I suggest you talk to Chloe and Oliver first. I’ll be a lot happier when I know where Lois is.”

“Do you know where this Watchtower is?”

The general shook his head. “I only know of the existence of it. I’m sorry Kal.” He gave the details so Kal could reach Chloe.

They talked about other things for a while. Mostly about Clark and the farm. Kal glanced at the older couple who nodded and continued chatting with Sam while he got up and hooked up the computer. He initiated the connection, waiting until Chloe picked up.

Instead of Chloe, a tall blond appeared on the monitor. The man frowned at him.

“You’re not Jonathan Kent,” he said. His frown deepened. “Wait, I know you.”

Chloe appeared on the screen, also frowning. She gasped.

“Kal! My god! So the ship’s yours?”

“I need to find Lois,” he said. “Do you know where she is?”

“Oh, that might be a problem,” the man, who he realised was Oliver, replied.

“I’m guessing Uncle Sam told you about Watchtower. Do you know where fifth and Grand is in Metropolis?” Chloe asked.

“No, but I can look up the information.”
“How soon can you get here?”

“Five minutes?” Chloe nodded, telling him Oliver would meet him on the corner.

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“Hurry. We have a lot to tell you.”

Kal looked up the map and memorised the location. Martha looked at him.

“You’re going to the city?” she asked.

“Oliver’s going to meet me and take me to Watchtower.”

Sam frowned. “If I remember my geography, there’s a huge domed building near there. You can’t miss it.”

Kal smiled at him. “That helps. Thanks. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

He flew to Metropolis, quickly searching the location. He’d memorised the satellite image of the city layout so knew the general direction. He spotted the domed building, which was clearly a few decades old, but had been restored.

As promised, Oliver was waiting on the corner, looking around. Kal landed a few feet away and approached him.

“Oliver,” he said.

The blond turned. “Wow, you are fast,” he said.

“Where’s this Watchtower?”

Oliver pointed to the domed building. “You’re looking at it. Come on.”

Kal followed him inside and up to the top floor of the building. Oliver leaned forward at the entry and something scanned his eye.

“Retina scan,” he said. “For security.”

Kal nodded. “Understandable.”

The older man opened the double doors. Chloe was standing at a table, looking down at a screen. She looked up as they entered and approached him.

She still wore her blonde hair short, although in a sleeker style than Kal remembered. Her clothes were of a different quality and style than he remembered. Clearly being married to a rich man had given her an air of sophistication that she hadn’t had before.

“Are you a sight for sore eyes,” she said. “When did you get back?”

“A few days ago. It’s a long story, and we don’t have time.”

Chloe nodded. “You’re right. Honey, show Kal what we found out.”

Oliver touched the screen and flicked it to a monitor on the wall.

“About a week ago one of my satellites picked up an object barrelling down toward Earth. It wasn’t like the meteors which came six months ago. We calculated its trajectory and figured out it crashed
here,” he said, pointing to an area on the screen. “Somalia.”

“Africa,” Kal stated.

“We alerted Lois, since she was in Africa at the time, hunting down a story on gun runners for the Daily Planet. She got a guide to take her to the jungle and sent us some photos back. She was supposed to have been coming back to Metropolis for a couple of days, but in Singapore she ran into trouble.”

“Checkmate,” Chloe added.

“We tracked her GPS to a disused part of Changi Airport and I sent Bart.”

“Bart?” Kal asked.

“We call him Impulse,” Chloe said. “He’s a speedster. We’ll explain about that later.” She sighed. Lois told Bart she was going on the run and wasn’t coming back to the city. He tried to talk her out of it, but she was adamant. A couple of hours later, we got a text from her phone saying she was okay but she wasn’t coming back and she was going to abandon her phone. She obviously switched her phone off as she didn’t reply to my text. We think if she had known the ship was yours, she wouldn’t have run.”

“You don’t know that,” Kal said.

“Yeah, we do. She doesn’t talk about you, but she’s never stopped hoping you would be back one day.”

Kal sighed. Part of him was relieved that she still believed in him, but the other was worried.

“How will I find her if she’s abandoned her phone?”

Oliver looked at him. “Every phone I had designed for our guys is equipped with an independent remote tracking system. We can track it even if the phone’s switched off. All we can tell you is where the phone was last. As for where Lois is, we can’t help you with that.”

“Tell me.”

“It’s a bar,” Chloe said, showing him the address on the satellite image. “Be careful, Kal. Checkmate will no doubt still have agents on her.”

Oliver handed him a phone.

“Keep in contact. In case Lois calls we can tell her you’re back and looking for her.”

Kal nodded, thanking the man. He turned to go.

“Kal?” Chloe said.

He looked at her.

“Welcome home,” she smiled.

“Thanks.”

Kal flew to Singapore, careful to land in a back alley, although since it was dark, there weren’t that many people around.
The bar was closed. Great, he thought. He walked around, finding the back alley which led to the bar, and tried the doors. There was another door which he saw from looking through it that led to some stairs. Probably up to the apartment he guessed was above the bar. There was a light in the window.

The door to the apartment was locked and he couldn’t see any kind of doorbell anywhere. Kal continued looking around the alley, wondering if he should try getting in to the apartment through the fire escape.

As he was looking around, there was a sharp click.

“You know, most people wait until a decent hour to go disturbing anybody.”

Kal looked around and saw the man in the doorway, holding a shotgun. He held up his hands.

“I’m not here to cause trouble,” he said.

“Yeah, well looks like trouble sure found you, buddy.”

“Please, I just want to find my girlfriend.”

The man snorted. “Do I look like Match.com?”

“Her name’s Lois Lane.”

The man blinked for a moment, then shifted. “Never heard of her.”

Kal had already noticed the man’s pulse had quickened.

“You’re lying,” he said.

“Yeah?” the other man sneered. “Prove it!”

“I know Lois was here,” Kal told him. “Some friends of mine tracked her phone here.”

The two men stared at each other, neither of them prepared to give way. Finally the other man put his weapon down.

“How do I know you’re her boyfriend?” he asked. “You could be the guy she’s running from.”

“Because I know Lois. She’s strong, and smart, and … a force of nature.”

The man canted his head, clearly capitulating. “She is that. She’s gone. Left today. Why don’t you come on up?”

“Thanks, but I just need to find her.”

“Can’t help you there. All I can tell you is she crossed the causeway under a different name.”

“What name?”

“Lara Ellison.”

Kal stared at the man. “What?”

“That mean something to you?”
Kal could only blink. Lois had chosen a name very close to his mother’s. Had she chosen it deliberately, he wondered. Was she still hoping he would come for her?

“What’s the causeway?” he asked.

“It’s a crossing between Singapore and Johor.”

“Thank you,” he said. He frowned. “What’s your name, anyway?”

“Joe. And you?”

“Kal. Thanks again.”

“Good luck, man.”

He called Chloe. “See if she’s used the name anywhere,” he told her.

She came back with an answer in a couple of minutes.

“She used the name to check into a hotel in Johor. But Kal, you can’t exactly go barrelling into a hotel at this hour of the morning, no matter where it is.”

“I have to try,” he said. “Does it say what room?”

“Yeah, room five twenty-two. What are you going to do?”

Kal didn’t reply, taking off into the air and flying to Johor. He quickly located the hotel and flew around it, calculating which floor was the fifth, before using his vision. He remembered a conversation he’d had with Lois the week before he’d left. She’d asked about his powers. When he’d told her he could see through walls, she’d frowned at him.

“You mean like an x-ray?” she asked.

“What’s an x-ray?”

“It’s something hospitals use, so they can see your bones. It’s done by radiation.”

“Oh, well, I guess,” he’d replied uncertainly. “Only I can pull it back if I need to.”

“Well, that makes sense,” she had said.

Kal found the room, but there was no sign of anyone in the room. He landed on the balcony and broke the lock into the room. Someone had searched it. They’d completely torn it apart.

“Lois,” he murmured.

The trail was cold. Chloe told him according to the hotel records, Lois was still checked in. No one had seen her leave. If agents had come in and dragged her away, someone certainly would have noticed, or heard something.

Dejected, he returned to the farm to find that Clark was home from school. His son frowned at him.

“Why didn’t you wait so I could go with you?” he asked.

Kal had no answer. He’d promised his son they could search for his mother together, and he’d already broken that promise.
He sighed as he told the three adults what had happened. Sam looked just as lost as he was.

“I don’t know what to do next,” Kal admitted.

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“What if we …” Clark piped up, but everyone else began talking at once. The boy sighed, half in annoyance. His father had promised him he could help search for his mother and he’d already gone off without him. Okay, so he guessed there had been some urgency in it, but still, he wanted to help find her.

Huffing noisily, Clark stomped out, practically slamming the screen door, and walked over to the barn. He climbed the steps to the loft and flopped down on the floor. He took the crystal out of his pocket, where he’d been keeping it since it had glowed, and began studying it.

It wasn’t long before Kal came out to look for him.

“Why did you disappear?” he asked.

“Not like anyone noticed I was there,” he replied.

His father sighed, his face taking on a look Clark knew very well. It was the same look Jonathan had when he got exasperated.

“Why didn’t you wait for me?” he complained. “You promised we could go look for Mom together.”

“I know I did, son, but when Oliver and Chloe told me about the bar, I couldn’t wait. I hoped I could catch her before she ran again. It doesn’t matter anyway, since she’s gone again.”

“But Aunt Chloe’s gonna tell her you’re back, right?”

“That’s if she calls,” Kal told him. His gaze fell on the crystal. “That’s the crystal I gave your mom.”

“Yeah, she left it for me. They didn’t tell me it was yours.”

Kal smiled and reached into his shirt. Clark frowned at him, wondering where the clothes had come from, since they were just normal clothes. He asked his father, who grinned.

“I guess Martha always knew I’d come back one day,” he said. “She kept them for me.” He laughed. “Your mom took me shopping for clothes my second day here. I suppose you could say we had a little battle over flannel.”

“What happened?”

“Well, I’d pick up a shirt that looked like Jonathan’s and she’d say no, I’d tell her I liked it and eventually she’d give in. Your mother never could say no to me. She used to say I looked like a puppy dog that had been kicked.”

Clark laughed. “Yeah, Martha tells me I do that when I want to get my way.”

Kal pulled out a necklace with a crystal pendant which looked identical to Clark’s crystal.

“Your mom is so beautiful,” Kal said, looking down wistfully at the crystal. Clark could see there was some sort of hologram. “I would look at this on Krypton and it would be like she was with me.”
“You really miss her, don’t you?”

Kal nodded. “Your mother was my world, Clark.”

“We gotta find her, before those people from Checkmate do. You really think she got away from that hotel?”

“I hope so.”

“Clark, Kal, dinner!” Martha called.

Kal stood up and reached out a hand. “Come on. I’m starving!”

Together they went back into the house, unaware that someone in a car on the road was snapping photos with a telephoto lens. As they disappeared, the man pressed a couple of keys on the camera, then dialled a number on his phone.

“Mr Luthor, I have the photos. I’m sending them to you now.”

“Good,” the voice replied.
Lois is forced to leave the hotel and goes in search of someone who knows more about Checkmate.
already tried to do and short of becoming a federal agent herself, she rather liked the idea of writing exposés.

She supposed that was why when Emil LaSalle had run into her in Blackpool, Checkmate had decided to set its sights on her again. She had already been making waves, even though it was a newspaper that was nowhere near on par with an internationally renowned publication like the Daily Planet. Lois’ occasional forays into ‘conspiracy theories’ made her a threat. As much as the so-called experts wanted to dismiss her stories as just stirring the pot, there was always a small element that believed it. That was the kind of thing which had probably caught Waller’s attention.

Now that a ship had crashed in the jungle, and Waller probably knew Lois had seen it, it made her more of a threat. Maybe the woman couldn’t connect it to Kal’s people, but then again, the woman was paranoid enough to see a threat when there probably wasn’t one.

She just hoped Clark was safe on the farm. God help the bitch if she ever decided to go after Lois’ son.

She quickly showered, wrapping a towel around her wet hair and putting on the glasses to answer the door when the room service waiter knocked. She thanked him and gave him the equivalent of a couple of American dollars. They didn’t normally get tips, but she still did it out of courtesy. He looked surprised and went away with an odd smile on his face.

Lois ate the chicken salad she’d ordered, then got ready for bed, donning the t-shirt and leggings she’d picked up in a small shop before she’d left Singapore. In case she had to leave in a hurry, she thought.

She had been asleep about an hour when she heard steps in the hallway outside. Lois sat up, her heart pounding, wondering what was going on. The door opened quietly, as if whoever was out there was trying not to wake her up. Pity for them that she’d learned how to sleep light so the slightest noise would wake her. She practically leapt out of bed, facing the intruders, who jumped back in surprise.

One of them, she saw, was the room service waiter. He was saying something in his own language to his friend. Lois couldn’t catch what it was, but their intentions were fairly clear. They were breaking in to her room for her money. Not that she had much.

Well, that pissed her off. This was by no means a classy hotel, but it certainly wasn’t a dump either. How dare they try to steal from her?

Lois had heard of it happening before, but never thought it would happen to her. Some rich tourists would go to a hotel and would be robbed in the middle of the night.

They had picked the wrong day and the wrong woman, she thought, blocking the first man’s attempt to hit her with a heavy iron bar. She reached up, grabbing the bar, then brought her knee up, kicking him in the groin.

His friend tried to grab her from behind, but she used the man in front of her for balance, then aimed a back kick at his stomach.

The pair fought back, shoving her against the wall, smashing the lamp on the nightstand. Lois managed to grab what was left and smash that over one man’s head. Dazed, he shook his head and stood back, giving her enough room to punch him hard enough to knock him down.

The second man tried to launch at her when he saw his friend down, but she managed to shove him
against the wall, cracking the plaster as he hit his head. The impact stunned him just enough for her to grab her bag. She fled.

Before she’d gone into her room, she had made sure it had a secondary exit, in case she needed to leave in a hurry. Lois hadn’t thought she’d actually have to use it, she grumbled to herself as she ran down the back stairs and out the fire exit of the hotel.

She was sorry for the destruction the fight had caused, but there had been no other choice. She fumed as she ran the darkened streets, annoyed that she’d had to abandon her one mode of transport. Bastards, she thought. As if she didn’t have enough on her plate without being attacked in her room. It looked to her like the room service waiter had taken the job so he could rob the tourists. Damn it, had she looked like a goddamned tourist?

Johor in the middle of the night wasn’t exactly a hive of activity and it wasn’t safe for her. Knowing she needed to find shelter, and fast, she searched the streets for another hotel, one that would allow her to check in, without any luggage, other than the bag she had managed to snatch up, and not ask any questions.

The hotel she did find was hardly three star. She wouldn’t even call it one star. Still, it was the best she could do under the circumstances and they had an empty room. She didn’t dare tell them she had left the other hotel because someone had tried to rob her.

Once she got to her room, she securely locked the door and tilted a chair under the handle, then sat on the bed, sighing. The stress was getting to her. All she wanted to do was go home to her family.

She spent the night on top of the bed, not daring to sleep under the covers, not wanting to know what the condition of the mattress was, falling into a light doze.

Next morning she left the hotel and went in search of an internet café. She accessed the ‘net, hoping to find some information she could use against Amanda Waller. When she began to search for information on Checkmate, she came across a blog written by someone who claimed to know an awful lot about him. Yet some of the comments below called him a crackpot and crazy.

Lois read through the blogs. The man did seem to know what he was talking about. One of the articles talked about an organisation called the Justice Society, saying that several members were unmasked, then framed for various crimes because they refused to work for Checkmate. The members were of course cleared, but chose to disappear.

The blogger lived in Ho Chi Minh City, from what she could tell from his posts, but she would need to do a little more research to find out exactly where.

“Great,” she muttered. That was more than just a hop, skip and a jump from her current position. She didn’t have enough money to fly and it could take her several days by bus. There wasn’t a choice. If he knew as much about Checkmate as he said he did, he was her only hope at getting her life back.

Her research found a bus service from Johor to Kuala Lumpur. It wasn’t ideal, being stuck eight hours in a bus, but she had no other choice. She couldn’t hire a vehicle, even with the fake i.d. she’d procured. She would have to figure out another way to get to Vietnam.

She supposed she could have paid someone to take her by boat, but since she didn’t know the language, that was another problem. She would still have to deal with the authorities on the other side and they would want to know what she was doing and why she had chosen to enter the country that way.
Why the guy had to live in Vietnam she didn’t know.

Lois stopped at a store and bought a cheap wig in a blonde. It was synthetic, which was going to be worse than the other wig she’d worn to get through the causeway, but she didn’t have too many options.

An hour later she boarded the bus to the Malaysian capital. She sat quietly at the back of the bus, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses. She pretended not to notice anyone else in the bus, or the curious glances from some of the locals, but her eyes missed nothing.

She was relieved when they reached the capital without incident. She found another internet café and checked the Daily Planet website before doing some quick research on getting to Vietnam. She decided she would have to take another bus from the capital to Chumphon in Thailand, another eighteen hour journey. Unlike the US, the transit system was still behind technology.

Luck seemed to be with her as three days and several buses later, she arrived in Ho Chi Minh city. The blogger lived in an apartment in the central city. Lois had managed to find his information by hacking into the blog site and tracking him down. She had learned a few things by watching her cousin the few times she had visited Watchtower.

As she sat in a café, eating the first decent meal she’d had in four days, while reconning the area, she thought about her cousin. Knowing Chloe, she would be frantic by now, wondering when Lois was going to get in touch. She couldn’t think about that now. The safest thing for her would be to stay incommunicado until she had enough on Checkmate to force Waller and her people to back off.

She had no idea if Checkmate was still following her. Either the forger’s work on the passport and other identification had been so good it had fooled the border authorities, or they had something else keeping their attention off her. Lois hated to admit it, but it was more than likely the latter. Especially with the ship crashing in the middle of the jungle.

Lois finished her coffee and left the café, crossing the road to the building. The apartment was above a little shop which sold souvenirs, which to her looked more than a little tacky. She climbed the steps to the apartment and knocked on the door.

“Yeah?” a voice called gruffly from inside.

“Mr Donnelly?”

“Who wants to know?” he called out.

“My name is Lara Ellison,” she said. “I’d like to talk to you about your blog.”

She heard thumping footsteps, then the door was flung open. A man in his late sixties glowered at her.

“How the fuck do you know about my blog?”

She tried for a disarming smile.

“The same way I know Donnelly is not your real name, Mr Grant,” she said quietly. So quietly even he had to strain to hear her

He peered at her.

“Who the fuck are you?”
“Let me in and we can talk. I’d rather not talk where we can be overheard,” she replied.

He looked her over. She knew she looked a mess. She’d done her best to tidy herself up a little, but considering she had only the clothes she had been wearing when she left the first hotel and had spent most of what Joey had given her on bus tickets out of Malaysia and to get through the borders of Thailand and Vietnam, there hadn’t been much she could do.

He let her in the apartment, limping to the counter to pour himself a drink. He studied her as he leaned against the counter.

“So?” he said.

“I hacked into the blog’s servers and tracked your address,” she told him.

“Why’d you go and do a thing like that? How do I know you’re not going to turn my ass over to the authorities?”

“I’ve known who you were for four days, Mr Grant. Trust me, they would have been on your doorstep before I left Malaysia. And I don’t think you were meaning the police either.”

His grin was crooked. “Yeah, who’d you think I was talking about?”

“Oh maybe some people with certain, uh, abilities? Like a guy who can apparently teleport anywhere he wants? Or how about a guy who can freeze anything with his touch?”

He nodded. “Okay, you know your stuff. So what do you want with me?”

“I want to know about the Justice Society. Everything you write about in your blog. I want to know everything you have on Checkmate.”

He scoffed. “Practically everyone who reads the blog calls me a goddamned crackpot. Why should I trust you?”

“Because I’m going to trust you, Mr Grant. You see, fifteen years ago I met someone. Someone who was literally out of this world. And Checkmate came after us. They wanted him for his abilities.”

“Where is this guy now?” the older man asked.

“I don’t know. The last I saw him, he was going home.”

Grant smirked. “What is he? Some kind of E.T.?”

“Exactly.”

She sighed and pulled off the wig and glasses, scratching her head.

“God, that’s better,” she said.

He didn’t look surprised at her change of disguise. Given the little she knew about him, she guessed he was used to this sort of thing.

“Why is Waller after you?” Grant asked, confirming what she already knew.

“Honestly? I’ve been trying to figure that out myself. I’ve been basically running for fourteen years, trying to avoid her agents, but now I think the stakes are much higher.”
“Why?”

“Because nearly two weeks ago a ship landed in Africa. If I’m right, the ship comes from the same place as my friend.”

The man looked at her steadily.

“Lois Lane.”

She nodded. “Yes sir. So, tell me what you know so I can get this bitch off my back for good.”

Grant poured himself another drink and offered one to her. She took it gratefully. He limped over to an armchair and sank down.

“What happened?” she asked, indicating the limp.

“Waller,” he said briefly. She nodded.

“So, what’s your story?” she asked.

Grant began to talk. About forty or so years earlier, he had been part of a group of people with certain abilities calling themselves the Justice Society. He had been called Wildcat, a heavyweight boxer who used his fighting talents to help those in need.

That all came crashing down around them when Checkmate, or rather, Amanda Waller’s predecessor, tried to recruit them to work for the US government. Their leader, Carter Hall, otherwise known as Hawkman, refused, so agents planted information framing them for various crimes. They were arrested and then let go for lack of evidence.

The members went underground, breaking almost all contact, until ten years earlier when the son of one of their former enemies was brought in to force them out of retirement.

It was around the same time that the Justice League was gaining a name for itself. Waller had heard of the League and was trying to do the same thing her predecessor had done. Carter, who had been known for his volatile temper, had dismissed the League as children playing at being superheroes, never taking them seriously.

“Why was Checkmate so keen to recruit you guys?” Lois asked.

Grant shrugged. “I’m guessing they didn’t like anyone working unsanctioned by the government. The thing about the JSA was, we tried to stay out of anything political. If we worked for the government, it would be like saying we were taking sides.”

Lois nodded. That was the same for the Justice League. When Oliver had first proposed it, he’d made a point of saying they were neutral. In their normal guises they could do whatever they wanted, but if they wanted the general public to look up to them, they had to be seen as non-partisan.

Grant also told her that Waller would go to any length to get what she wanted, including kidnapping and murder. Two members of the JSA had been murdered by one of her agents. Lois immediately worried about her son. If Waller ever found out her son’s true parentage, there was no telling what she would do.

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Waller studied the photos Luthor had emailed to her. She had wondered why the man had dropped
his investigation on the Kent farm years ago. He clearly had no idea now just what he had.

She called in Flag.

“Get a team to Kansas,” she ordered when he came in. “Bring them in. Bring them all in.”

Flag frowned at her.

“Even the Kents?” he asked, studying the photos she handed him.

“Even them.”

The man scowled at the photo of Kal.

“I remember I shot this guy. It didn’t even touch him.”

“I’m sure you’ll find a way,” she smirked. “Just get them. Co-ordinate with Agent Lima.”

She glanced at the clock. It was five in the afternoon. By the time Flag got his team together and got them to Kansas it would be late. A midnight raid would catch them off guard. Then she would get the answers she wanted, she decided.

Kal had disappeared fourteen years ago. Now he was suddenly back at the Kent farm. Where had he been all these years? And who was the boy? Especially considering the strong resemblance between them.

She sat back, analysing what she already knew. It seemed a bit of a coincidence that less than two weeks after the ship landed on Earth, a man who had not been seen for fourteen years suddenly showed up. No, she thought. I don’t believe in coincidence.

She opened the file and looked at the photographs of the ship, then lifted up the photograph of Kal with the boy taken at the Kent farm. The two were connected. She was damned sure of it.
Checkmate raids the farm

Kal had made sure everything was locked up for the night before going upstairs to check on his son. Clark was sleeping on his stomach, his pillow scrunched up, his feet half out of the covers. Kal grinned, but let the boy be.

He returned downstairs, ready to sleep on the couch. Martha and Jonathan had offered to borrow a bed from a neighbour, rather than force him to sleep on something that was too small for him, but he’d assured them he could float just fine. He had control over his abilities, even while he slept. It had been something he’d been taught by Brainiac when he’d first come to Earth, since any movement he made in his sleep without subconscious control could have resulted in disaster.

Sam had returned to Washington. Kal hoped the general was going to be able to do something to curb Checkmate so that Lois could come home.

There was still no message from her and Chloe and Oliver were both getting very worried. Kal had tried listening for her, but while he knew her voice, singling out her heartbeat among the billions of others was no easy task. The trouble with humans was they could be very difficult to tune out, especially when there were so many distractions.

Kal hadn’t been able to help hearing the voices of the people in trouble. As tempted as he was to go to their aid, he was more worried about staying closer to home in case he heard from Lois. She and their son were his main priorities.

As he prepared for bed, he heard what sounded like a scraping noise coming from the barn. Kal quietly opened the screen door, wincing as it squeaked a little, then used what Lois had called his x-ray vision to check the barn. He stepped back in surprise. Someone was in the loft. He could see their skeleton. They were also holding what appeared to be a weapon of some kind.

He moved quickly, forgetting caution in his haste to stop whoever it was, and sped to the barn. Starting up the stairs to the loft, he was tackled by someone bigger in size than he was. Although strong, the figure still wasn’t quite strong enough to beat him. Kal grabbed the man by the throat and hoisted him in the air with one hand.

“Who sent you?” he growled.

The man struggled in his grip, but didn’t reply. His legs dangled in the air. Kal could hear him choking, his struggles futile as he tried to break Kal’s grip.

“It’s no use talking to him,” a voice said. “Afraid he isn’t capable of saying anything intelligent.”

Kal x-rayed the man who had spoken. He was wearing what appeared to be goggles of some kind, but behind the goggles was a man he recognised from fifteen years ago.

“Flag,” he said.
Flag took off the goggles and smirked at him.

“Knew you’d recognise me.” He spoke in a low voice, clearly into a transmitter. “Get the others.”

Kal grabbed Flag.

“Don’t you touch them!”

The other man looked at him coolly. “What’re you gonna do, Kal? I don’t think you can be in two places at once.”

“Watch me,” he said, shoving Flag hard. The other man was stunned for a moment, but struggled to his feet. He smirked at something behind Kal’s shoulder. Kal turned and glared at the man behind him who was aiming some kind of weapon. It seemed to have an electrical charge. The man shouted as the electricity had no effect on Kal at all.

He grabbed the weapon and pushed it up, one hand crushing the end. The electrical charge travelled back down the weapon, electrocuting the other man, who appeared wide-eyed before falling to the ground.

There were shouts coming from the house. Kal again shoved Flag out of the way with enough force to knock him unconscious and ran to the house. Clark was yelling.

“Dad!”

As Kal made it inside, he saw two men holding weapons on Martha and Jonathan.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” one of them was saying.

Jonathan was trying to get Clark to leave. Kal nodded at his son and they both moved at speed, knocking the two men off their feet. They both fell to the floor, unconscious.

“There are three more in the barn,” Kal told Jonathan. “One of them is the man who kidnapped Lois.”

“**He** kidnapped Mom?” Clark said, clearly angry.

Kal glanced at his son and shook his head, telling him to keep his voice down. He quickly searched for the phone Oliver had given him and pressed the keypad.

“Hello?” a sleepy voice answered after a few rings.

“Oliver, it’s Kal.”

“What’s going on?”

“Checkmate. They invaded the farm.”

“Shit! You guys all right?”

“We’re fine, but I need to get the Kents and Clark somewhere safe.”

Oliver sounded like he was getting out of bed. He murmured something to his wife. Kal could hear the man’s bare feet padding across a carpeted floor.

“Okay, how long will it take you to get to the city?”
“I’m not sure. I can probably fly one of them, but …”

“Dad, don’t worry. I can run pretty fast.”

Kal nodded. “All right. What’s the address?”

Oliver gave him an address a couple of blocks away from Watchtower. Kal had been studying a little of the city’s geography and realised it was the Metropolis clocktower. He ended the call and looked at the older couple.

“Take Martha,” Jonathan said.

“I don’t know if there are others,” Kal told them.

“Doesn’t matter, son. Just go. Clark and I will follow. I know where to go.”

Kal nodded. “All right. But if you’re not there in ten minutes I’ll be coming back for you.”

“I’ll be there in less than that,” his son assured him. “Go, Dad.”

Kal looked at Martha and she shrugged in resignation, following him outside. She clearly wasn’t keen on the idea, but it was the fastest and safest way to get her to Metropolis without being chased by Checkmate’s agents, who, thankfully, were still knocked out. He wrapped an arm around her, telling her to hold tight, then floated up into the sky.

He arrived at the clocktower within about a minute and that only because he didn’t want to scare Martha too badly. As he landed, he noticed she had her eyes squeezed shut.

“Martha,” he said quietly. “It’s okay. We’re here.”

She opened her eyes and looked around.

“Oh my goodness. I haven’t done anything like that since Jonathan took me on the rollercoaster at Coney Island.” She smiled shakily at him. “Please don’t be offended when I say that it’s an experience I don’t wish to repeat.”

“It’s all right,” he said, smiling back at her. “I don’t mind.”

“Kal?”

He looked around and saw Chloe at the double doors of the terrace.

“Chloe.”

“Come inside, quickly,” she said. “It’s cold out here.”

He glanced at Martha and realised she was shivering. He put a hand on her back to usher her inside.

“Clark should be here any minute with Jonathan,” he told the blonde.

She nodded. “Martha, you look frozen. Ollie’s making hot cocoa.”

The older woman smiled then went to what must be the kitchen. Kal heard the grinding of metal gears. Chloe frowned, then picked up a remote.

“It’s Clark, with Jonathan,” she said. “They’re coming up in the elevator.” She pointed to a steel
door.

Kal waited anxiously for his son, pulling up the steel door as soon as he saw them both inside.

“They didn’t see you?” he asked.

“Dad, it’s fine. No one saw anything.”

Jonathan nodded. “We’re fine son. Now, why would Checkmate come after us?”

“I don’t know,” Kal sighed, sitting down on the couch. Clark sat beside him, while Jonathan took an armchair. Chloe sat on an ottoman.

“It’s more than likely Waller has considered the possibility that Clark is Lois’ son, but as for the rest …” Oliver said, coming out of the kitchen with a tray of hot drinks, Martha following behind. He handed one to Jonathan. “Careful, it’s hot.”

He sat in a chair next to his wife, while Martha sat on the arm of Jonathan’s chair.

“Mommy?”

Chloe looked around. At the bottom of a spiral staircase was a little boy aged about six, and a girl aged four, sucking her thumb.

“What are you two doing out of bed?” Oliver asked.

“What’s going on Dad?”

Chloe sighed. “That’s our son, Connor, and our daughter Laura.”

The two children ran to their parents. Chloe picked her daughter up and held her in her lap.

“You should be sleeping,” she admonished gently.

Connor was looking at his father, clearly expecting an answer. Kal recognised that expression. It was the same one as Chloe when she was hunting down information for a story. He smiled to himself.

Oliver introduced the children to Kal. Clark knew them, although it wasn’t clear whether they knew they were his cousins.

“I think my coming back to … Smallville,” Kal said, glancing at the two children. Oliver nodded, appearing to be pleased with Kal’s quick thinking. “I think that might have precipitated this.”

“How do you know?” Chloe asked, rubbing her daughter’s back.

“Lex,” he told her simply. “I think he may have seen me with Clark the other day.”

“Do you think he recognised you?” Oliver asked.

“It’s hard to say.” Kal frowned. “By the way, when did he lose his hair?”

“Oh, that,” Chloe said. “There was an accident at one of his labs two months ago. Rumour has it he was experimenting with meteor rock.”

Kal was immediately alarmed. Given his own experience with the meteor rock, he knew how dangerous it was.
The two children fell asleep as they continued to discuss the problem. There was no way the Kents could go back to the farm. Not while Checkmate agents were still after them.

“I know someone in Gotham,” Oliver suggested. “We can drive you there in the morning.” He grinned sardonically. “I’m guessing you’d rather not use the Kal express if you can help it.”

Jonathan grinned back. “No offence boys,” he said, looking at both Kal and Clark.

“None taken,” Clark returned.

Kal nodded. “Who is this person?” he asked.

“I guess you could say he’s a non card-carrying member of the League. We’ve been trying to get him to become a full member, but he hasn’t made up his mind yet. I warn you though. He and Lois had kind of a thing.”

Kal frowned. “What kind of thing?”

“I don’t think it was anything serious,” Chloe assured him. “I mean, he tried, but Lois wasn’t interested. Even though she didn’t think you were ever coming back, her heart wasn’t in it.”

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Waller did not look happy on the screen as Lex reported what had happened.

“Are you telling me that once again you have failed to get me what I want?” she asked, growling.

“Agent Waller …”

“I want a full report,” she barked.

Lex sighed. “There is one thing you should know. Flag was knocked unconscious. Before he passed out, he heard the boy calling ‘Dad’. From what the other agents were saying, the boy was calling for Kal.”

Waller’s demeanour suddenly changed. She smirked.

“Well, this certainly changes things, and confirms a suspicion I’ve had.”

“Which is?”

“The boy is Lois Lane’s son. Where are they now?”

Lex shook his head. “I have no idea. However, I can take an educated guess. Lois Lane has a cousin who lives in Metropolis. She’s married to a former classmate of mine.”

As he gave Waller the information, he thought about Oliver Queen. They hadn’t exactly been friends at Excelsior. Oliver had been a lazy, good-for-nothing bully. Lex had had as little to do with Oliver and his cronies as possible.

He’d heard that Oliver had been stranded on a deserted island over twenty years ago after the yacht he’d been partying on had been hijacked. He’d returned from the island a changed man, according to all reports. Lex found that hard to believe.

He had a feeling that if Kal had turned to anyone, he would have turned to Chloe Sullivan-Queen. In fact, he would bet on it.
Waller absorbed this without comment, then ordered him to send Flag and the other agents to Metropolis.

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To say that Kal felt a little threatened by the huge manor was an understatement. Knowing that it was owned by a man who had once dated the woman he loved and the mother of his child, was just as threatening.

“Nice place,” Jonathan said, whistling as a man who introduced himself as Alfred, the butler, led them to the library where their host was apparently waiting.

“It’s been in the Wayne family for about three generations, Mr Kent,” Alfred said quietly.

“I see,” Kal replied coolly.

Clark rolled his eyes at him. “Dad, come on. Just because he’s rich, doesn’t mean he’s a bad guy.”

“That remains to be seen,” Kal told his son. “And I’ll reserve judgement.”

Martha smiled at him. “Kal, sweetie, maybe you need to get rid of that chip on your shoulder.”

He frowned at her. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, you’ve been gone nearly fifteen years. You can’t be angry at other men for dating Lois.”

He chewed his lip as he nodded, knowing she was gently telling him he was acting like a jealous lover. He knew that, but it still didn’t make him feel any better about the man who had tried to replace him in Lois’ heart.

He worried more and more about where Lois could be. Maybe Checkmate had found her. Maybe someone else had hurt her.

Oliver and Chloe had followed them inside with the children, who were running up and down the huge hallway, giggling.

“Guys, this is not a playground,” Oliver admonished them.

“I’ll get them,” Clark offered, going to grab the two children. Kal watched as his son bent down to the children’s level and spoke softly to them. Kal didn’t bother to tune in on the conversation.

“So this is the love of Lois Lane’s life?” a voice said gruffly.

Kal looked at the tall man who had emerged from what was apparently the library to greet them. He frowned. The man was a couple of inches shorter than Kal, although not short by any means. Yet he looked taller, with a powerful build, very similar to Kal’s own.

He could understand now why Lois had considered a relationship with this man. Physically, they appeared to be similar, although the other man’s hair was a lighter shade and his eyes were blue.

The man looked him up and down with a look that suggested he found Kal wanting. As if he hadn’t been good enough for Lois. Still, he held out his hand.

“Bruce Wayne.”

Kal took the proffered hand and shook it, gripping it hard enough for Bruce’s bones to crack.
“Dad, be nice,” Clark scolded clearly knowing what he was doing.

Bruce stared back at him, not showing any sign he was in pain. Kal could see the challenge in the man’s gaze.


Clark shrugged. “I guess.”

Oliver shook Bruce’s hand. “Bruce, we can’t thank you enough for taking them in.”

“Well, when you told me Checkmate was involved, of course I wanted to help. I’ve had a couple of run-ins with Checkmate agents myself. Please, come in and make yourselves comfortable,” he said.

“Perhaps some tea or coffee, Master Bruce?” Alfred suggested.

Bruce looked at them. Martha smiled.

“Some tea would be lovely,” she said.

“Coffee?” Jonathan asked.

“Me too,” Chloe replied. “Oliver likes lapsang souchong tea. Do you have it?”

“Indeed madam. Mr … uh …” Alfred frowned, clearly not knowing what to call Kal.

“It’s just Kal,” he said. “Black coffee will do just fine.”

“Very good Master Kal. And for the young master?”

“Um, do you have soda?” Clark asked.

“No,” Kal told him. “Juice is better.”

“Dad, I’m not a kid,” his son whined.

“Juice,” he repeated.

“Fine!” Clark sighed, rolling his eyes. “Juice.” Chloe nodded at Alfred’s query for the younger children, who were at least behaving themselves.

“Would you like some help Alfred?” Martha offered.

It looked for a moment like he was going to refuse, but Bruce shot him a look and he nodded.

“Thank you most kindly, madam. If you’ll follow me.”

She followed him back out into the hallway. Clark wandered over to the bookshelf.

“Have you actually read all of these?” he asked Bruce.

Jonathan coughed. “That’s a little rude, son.”

Bruce shook his head. “It’s fine, Mr Kent. He’s just curious. And yes, I have read all of them.”

“Cool,” Clark said. “I have a lot of books at home but nothing like this.”
“Well, if you see something you like, I don’t mind if you’d like to borrow it while you’re here.”

Kal glowered at Bruce. First the guy dated Lois, now he was sucking up to his son? Bruce smirked at him, obviously having read his expression. Clark began looking through the library, ignoring the tension between the two men.

“So tell me something, Kal, if you cared about Lois so much, why’d you leave?”

Kal thinned his lips.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business,” he replied coolly.

“All due respect, Kal …”

“You know, when someone says that, they don’t mean respect at all,” Kal returned.

“Touche,” Bruce said. “As I was going to say, you came here for my help. I think that makes it my business.”

Kal really didn’t like the way the man was goading him. Jonathan immediately stepped in between them.

“Kal, stop it,” he said. “This isn’t helping the situation. And Mr Wayne, I appreciate all you are doing for my family, but Kal has a point. What happened between him and Lois fifteen years ago is between them.”

“You’re right, Mr Kent,” Bruce replied. “I apologise Kal.”

Alfred returned with Martha, both carrying trays of drinks. They settled down in the chairs.

“So what’s next?” Bruce asked.

“I’m going to look for Lois,” Kal told him.

Clark immediately looked up. “I’m going with you,” he said.

“Clark …”

His son frowned. “Dad, you promised I could.”

“You have school …”

“And what am I going to learn that I can’t learn out there?” Clark pointed out. “Besides, it’s not like I can enrol in a school in Gotham when we don’t really know how long we’re going to be there.”

Oliver suddenly got to his feet, pulling out his phone, frowning at the screen.

“Honey, what is it?” Chloe asked.

“Alarm at the clocktower,” he said. He looked at Bruce. “You have somewhere Chloe can hook into the surveillance?”

Bruce nodded. “I’ll show you,” he said, getting up and leading the couple out of the library.

Kal remained seated, figuring if he was needed they’d tell him. He still had no idea why Oliver had suggested coming to Bruce, but he didn’t like the man.
Clark put down the book he was looking through. Kal saw it was a collection of photographs, but didn’t bother to look further.

“Dad, why are you going back on your promise now? You said I could help you find Mom.”

“It’s too dangerous,” he replied.

“It’s not fair!” the boy pouted.

“Clark, don’t sulk,” Jonathan admonished.

“He said I could,” Clark replied, raising his voice a little.

“I know he did, son, but your father’s right. Especially after what happened at the farm. He’s just trying to keep you safe.”

“I can use my powers …”

“Absolutely not!” his father and foster father told him.

Martha had been quiet all this time, but she spoke up.

“Kal, sweetie, I don’t think you’re listening to Clark.”

“Martha …”

“Jonathan, the boy just wants to find his mother. I know it’s dangerous but you can’t just lock him up. He’s fourteen years old. He’s not a child. Sooner or later, you have to let him go. Otherwise you’re basically telling him you don’t trust him to know how to keep himself safe.”

Jonathan nodded and looked at Kal.

“It’s up to you, son, but I think Martha has a point.”

Kal sighed. They were both right. He was treating his son like a child. He couldn’t protect him forever.

“All right, Clark. But you have to promise me that you will do everything I say. If something bad does happen, you’re to come back here immediately. No matter what. Even if they somehow capture me.”

“Dad …”

“I mean it, Clark. No heroics.”

Clark nodded. “Okay, Dad. I get it. No heroics.”

“I think that’s a good compromise,” Bruce replied coming back into the room, followed by Oliver and Chloe. They both looked upset.

“What’s wrong?” Jonathan asked.

“Flag. He and his agents broke in to the clocktower. They trashed the place.” Oliver looked at Chloe. “Good thing I kept everything at Watchtower.”

She nodded. “I would say they know everything about Clark now. Which means if you’re going to
go looking for Lois, you’re going to need to be even more careful.”

“I’ll be with Dad,” Clark assured her.

Kal still didn’t feel all that reassured. If anything, he felt Waller and her agents would be doubling their efforts to capture both of them. The question was, did they know about the meteor rock? As far as he knew, that was his only vulnerability.

Bruce was studying him, a deep frown marring his face.

“Any idea where Lois is?” he asked.

“She was in Singapore a few days ago,” Chloe told him. “Before that, Somalia.”

Bruce looked at her. “Somalia? That’s strange. I received a package postmarked Somalia a couple of days ago.” He looked at his butler. “Alfred, where is that package?”

“I’ll fetch it, Master Bruce.” The older man left the room.

They continued to talk about Lois’ possible whereabouts. Kal figured Lois would have left Malaysia by now. The question was, where would she have gone from there?

Alfred returned a short time later with a small box. It hadn’t been opened. Bruce turned it over in his hands, as if trying to guess its contents. Kal swallowed the sudden nausea he was feeling. Bruce looked at them then opened the box, pulling out a small baggie.

Kal groaned, his stomach cramping. Clark also began to look pale.

“Dad?”

“Meteor rock,” Kal said, gasping for breath.

Bruce stared at the bag, which contained small pieces of coloured stones. Mostly green.

Martha gasped. “He’s right. There was a meteor shower in Smallville six months ago. This is what came down.”

“I think I’m gonna be sick,” Clark said, groaning.

“Bruce, get that stuff away from the boys,” Jonathan instructed. “Now!”

“What the hell? Alfred, get it out of here.”

“Indeed Master Bruce.”

The baggie was stuffed back in the box and Alfred took it.

“Take it down to the lab,” Bruce told him.

Alfred nodded and went out. As soon as he was gone, Kal felt relief. Bruce looked at him with concern.

“Are you all right?”

“I am now.”

“What is that stuff?” Bruce asked.
“Pieces of my homeworld,” Kal told him, glancing at the two children, who were happily playing in the corner and didn’t seem to hear the conversation.

“Homeworld?” Bruce echoed, before whistling. “Jesus, no wonder Waller wants you so badly. You’re not even human.”

“Hey!” Clark said. “That’s my dad.”

Bruce looked at him, but Jonathan wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

“It’s okay, son.”

“What happened to you?” Bruce asked. “Is this why you left Lois?”

“I had to. I thought if I went back, she’d be safe. I was wrong.”

“So why did you come back?”

“The rock … it’s all that’s left of the planet. My father had a theory that with all the mining it caused radiation to leach out into the soil, poisoning everything. Our people had to retreat into the cities, but the mining irreparably damaged the planet’s core.”

“Causing a chain reaction,” Bruce murmured. “God! I’m so sorry, Kal.”

“My parents built a ship for me, to send me back. To save me. Hoping I could also stop Earth from suffering the same fate.”

Bruce nodded. “Only for some of your planet to follow you here.”

“Lois must have found the meteor rock around the ship,” Chloe mused. “Sent it to you thinking it would be safer than sending it to us.”

“She was right,” Bruce replied.
Chapter Summary

Lois leaves Vietnam on a cargo ship but there are still some surprises waiting for her.

“So, what happened to the members of the JSA?” Lois asked Grant.

She’d spent the night at a small hotel a few doors down from his apartment and had returned the next morning after getting some clean clothes and feeling much fresher for it. Ted Grant was still a little prickly, but he understood they had a mutual enemy and was at least willing to help her figure a few things out.

He shrugged as he poured juice into a glass from the pitcher. “We split.” He sighed. “There were problems long before Checkmate. Truth is, Hawkman crossed a line when he went after the guy who killed his wife.”

“Shayera.”

He nodded. “He refused to listen to reason and well, none of us could really deal with it. Then Checkmate tried to recruit us and when we wouldn’t …” He picked up his own glass of juice. “Far as I know, Carter’s still in Metropolis. He created a museum, housing artifacts from the Society. I did try to contact him after Sandman and the Star-Spangled Kid were killed but he never replied to my messages.”

Lois couldn’t really blame Carter. After his friends were killed, it was little wonder the man had chosen to disappear. She got the feeling, however, that that wasn’t the full story.

She remembered reading about the death of Sylvester Pemberton, otherwise known as the Star-Spangled Kid. Chloe hadn’t said much but it sounded like the League had gone after the killer themselves and were almost killed in the process.

“I need to get back to the States somehow,” she said. “But not as Lois Lane.”

“I can’t help you with that, but I might know someone who can get you on a ship. No questions asked.”

“I don’t know,” she said slowly, not willing to face the thought of being stuck on a ship for even two weeks, knowing anything could happen. “A ship would take time to get to port. If Checkmate found out where I was, they could be waiting for me at the port.”

“You could walk out that door now and they could be waiting for you. What’s so urgent about getting back to America?” he asked.

“My son,” she told him.

Grant raised his eyebrows. “Your son?”

“Mine, and uh, the friend I told you about. If Waller finds out the truth about him …”
“He’d be a target. Look, it’s the best I can do, Lane. Just how are you planning on forcing Checkmate to back off?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “I don’t know if I can think that far ahead.”

“Well you better think fast, girl, because if your friend is what you say he is, and your kid is his, the kid’s going to be in a hell of a lot of trouble.”

“Why does Waller want us so badly?” she sighed.

“Let me tell you something about Amanda Waller. She’s as cold as ice and twice as hard. She does not value human life and will send someone to their death without blinking an eye. She’s also paranoid as hell. If your ex is what you say he is, she will think nothing of locking him in a lab and dissecting him like a lab rat.”

“I don’t even know if that ship I saw was his,” Lois protested, shuddering at the thought of Kal being opened up for dissection. She had never told him, but for most of the week before he had left she had had nightmares about that very same thing. When she found out she was pregnant, she had had nightmares again, only this time it was both Kal and her baby.

“For all I know he could have gone back and forgotten all about me.”

Grant shook his head. “If he’s anything like you describe Lane, there’d be no way in hell he could ever forget you. I’ve only known you a day and I think you’re a hell of a woman. If I were thirty years younger …”

Lois considered her options over the next few days. She needed to get back to the States, but there was no way she could fly. The identification papers were good but not good enough to pass inspection by US customs officers.

There was still the option of the ship, which she supposed would be a lot quicker than trying to travel through China and Russia.

She could try contacting Chloe and Oliver at Watchtower, but she didn’t want to take the chance that Checkmate would somehow manage to intercept any communications. She knew they would still be worrying about her. It was a week since she had left Singapore.

She returned to Grant’s apartment the following day.

“All right,” she said, sighing. “I’ve been weighing up my options and it looks like the ship’s the only way to go.”

“Well, you’re in luck. Buddy of mine has a container ship leaving at four tomorrow morning. I already told him you might be coming.”

She frowned at him. How had he known she would say yes? He smirked at her.

“I may have only known you a few days, Lane, but I know your reputation. You’re like your old man. Tough as boots and twice as stubborn. I never said this was going to be the easy option Lane. My buddy’s condition is your passage ain’t free. You’ll have to work your ass off but in return you get about two dozen guys who will do their utmost to protect you.” He scratched his lip. “Listen, when you can get to Metropolis, look up Carter Hall. If he’s still around.”

She nodded. “Thanks for everything.”
He shrugged as if it was nothing. “Just make that bitch sorry she was ever born and we’ll call it even.”

Lois found herself grinning for the first time in she didn’t know how long.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I will.”

She was up early the next morning. Ted had contacted his friend, who was the ship’s captain, and he had told her he would pick her up and drive her to the port. The only catch was she would be leaving at three in the morning, as the ship needed to get under way by five. Lois didn’t want to tell him that she had been woken by reveille every morning as a child so this was no hardship.

The men had obviously been warned she was coming, but while there were a couple of crew members who stared as she came on board, nothing was said. She was shown to the crew quarters, given a tiny room with only a bunk and a small table. It would be cramped for the two weeks or so they would be sailing, but she didn’t care.

She was given a job keeping the galley clean. Fortunately, she wasn’t asked to cook anything. Grant had obviously told the captain, Alan, that she was not the best of cooks. She could manage, sort of, but not for a crew of twenty or so hungry men.

Her other job was helping to clean the deck when necessary. Alan had already warned her that they would be stopping at other ports on their way to Los Angeles and she was to stay below deck in her cabin at those times, out of sight. He clearly understood the necessity of keeping her presence on the ship under wraps and every crewman had been ordered not to speak a word either.

When she was called down to the mess for dinner, she noticed a tall man with dark blond hair working in the galley. He smiled at her.

“You must be Lois,” he said. “I’m Jay.”

“Hi,” she said.

“Listen, the men can get kind of raucous, but don’t pay any attention to anything they say. They like to blow off steam, but they’re a good bunch of guys.”

“Oh don’t worry,” she assured him. “I grew up around Navy Seals and Green Berets.”

“Yeah,” he replied. “Alan told me about that. Just FYI though. Some of these guys haven’t seen a woman in months. Their language can be, uh, colourful.”

Jay was not wrong, Lois thought later as she sat with the crew. Some of them, like Jay, were around Ted Grant’s age, but a few others were her age, or younger. As the night wore on and the drinks got lower in their bottles, they forgot to watch their ‘ps and qs’. It seemed that Alan had warned them not to make any kind of pass at her as they otherwise seemed to be on their best behaviour.

She studied them as they continued to drink. A couple of the men were only drinking coffee, having been assigned to night watch. Most of them had that camaraderie that she would have expected to come from those used to spending hours with only each other for company, but there appeared to be more to it than that.

She decided to watch them closely over the next few days, just to see if her suspicions about the men were right.

It had been a few years since she had seen Kal working at super speed, but there was no mistaking it
when she observed Rick Tyler working at more than twice normal speed. He also seemed to be stronger than most normal people, able to heft loads which would be too much for an ordinary man, even a power lifter.

Then there was Jay, who not only seemed to be very skilled at chopping up vegetables, but his hands seemed to be a blur as he worked.

Thirdly was the ship’s doctor. Charles McNider was both Jay and Alan’s age, and he was blind. What seemed stranger still was that she had bumped into him one night in the corridor. While she had had trouble seeing, he had no problem at all, and she didn’t think it had anything to do with his being blind.

She finally had to speak up. Lois decided to help Jay one night in preparing the meal.

“Jay, I need to ask you something.”

He looked at her. “Uh oh,” he smiled. “That’s the intrepid reporter’s face.”

“I guess you’d be used to reporters wouldn’t you?” she said. “I mean, you haven’t always been a sailor on a cargo ship.”

“What are you getting at, Lane?”

“Who are you, really? For that matter, who is Alan, or Charles, or Rick?”

“Who do you think we are?” he asked.

“I think you’re with the Justice Society,” she said. “Or you were.”

He was silent as he studied her.

“How much did Teddy tell you, anyway?”

Teddy? she thought. Ted Grant had never been less like a ‘teddy’. He was prickly and bad-tempered, certainly not a ‘teddy’ kind of person.

“Enough for me to put two and two together. So, who are you? Or who were you?”

“They used to call me the Flash,” Jay admitted. “Alan was a Green Lantern, Charles was Doctor Mid-Nite and Rick’s father used to be known as Hourman. He died not long after Checkmate had some of our members arrested.”

“So you’ve been hiding, all this time? Why?”

“For the same reason you’ve been running around, never staying in one place, for the past fourteen years. We know all about you, Lois. We know who you’re hiding from and why. I have to say, what you’re doing to protect your son is noble, but it’s hurting both you and your son.”

“I didn’t have a choice. I couldn’t protect him and look over my shoulder at the same time.”

“Still, you had to know that Waller wasn’t going to buy the story about your son.” He canted his head at her look. “We did some research too.”

Lois had always had the feeling Waller wouldn’t buy the story.

“If that’s true,” she asked, “then why has Waller left him alone all this time?”
“Because like it or not, she doesn’t want to risk jail time for kidnapping a minor. Even if the kid is what Ted told us he is, he’s still a kid and Waller’s bosses wouldn’t take kindly to being implicated in a felony. Checkmate would be shut down for good.”

“She didn’t seem to have any qualms about kidnapping me,” Lois said bitterly.

“You were just a pawn in her game to get your boyfriend,” Jay explained gently. “She probably figured you wouldn’t be able to tell anyone without revealing the truth about him.”

“That’s the whole point. I didn’t know the truth. Not then.” She sighed. “But I guess Waller didn’t care about that either.”

“Ted’s right. There’s no length the woman won’t go to to get what she wants.”

“And what does she want?” Lois asked. “Why does she keep hunting me down? I mean, just when I think it’s safe to start my life again …”

“Because she wants power. Not the power of authority.”

Lois nodded in understanding. Amanda Waller was just greedy enough to want the power someone like Kal had. Like Lex Luthor, who saw only the threat that Kal’s power represented and never saw the humanity in him that stopped him abusing that power.

“Why you?” she asked. “Why here?”

“Because Ted likes you and he thinks you have it within you to shut someone like Waller down for good. And because maybe it’s time we all stopped hiding.”

He smiled at her and gestured toward the vegetables.

“Come on. They’ll be yelling for dinner soon and you know what twenty men are like when they’re hungry.”

Lois grinned at him and nodded, setting to work.

Over the rest of the journey she began to see the crew in a new light. The men were all fiercely protective of her. She wondered if all of them had abilities or whether it was only a few of them. Not that it mattered, she thought.

Alan approached her as she stood out on deck late one night, unable to sleep.

“We’ll be in Los Angeles tomorrow,” he said. “I have to tell you, Lane, you’re one hell of a hard worker.”

“I figured I owed it to you. I’m grateful for everything you have done.”

“At the risk of repeating what Ted told you, I believe you can take Waller down for good. You’ve got guts, Lane. I guess that’s what makes you the reporter you are.”

“I don’t know about that,” she said wryly. “Considering I’ve spent the last ten years on the run.”

“Most of us have spent the last thirty odd years doing the same thing. We all deal with it in our own way.”

“Thank you,” she said. “Thank you for helping me.”
He smiled and walked away. Lois continued to stand out on the deck until it became too cold to do so.

As they sailed in to the port the next day, Lois prepared to leave. While it was highly illegal, the men had decided she couldn’t take the chance with customs, knowing her name would be red-flagged and she would very likely be detained by officers. Jay was the only one capable of moving fast enough so they could get across the bay to Huntington Beach before the ship reached port.

She picked up her bag and reported to the galley. Jay was waiting, jacket in hand.

“Ready?” he asked.

She nodded, a little nervous about being taken at super speed.

“It’ll be fine,” Jay assured her. “Just hang on tight and don’t let go.”

“Easy for you to say,” she muttered.

The crew were waiting for her on the deck when they went up top. All were eager to see her off.

“You take care of yourself kid,” Alan told her.

“I will,” she said.

She quickly said her goodbyes and stepped into Jay’s arms, feeling them tighten around her, then closed her eyes, thinking it would be easier if she couldn’t see them moving.

They had arranged it that Jay would take her to a famous restaurant on the beach, or at least fairly close to it, knowing if there were too many people around they might see her appear out of nowhere. This time of year, early fall, there were fewer people hanging out at the beach but Jay still didn’t want to take chances.

It seemed like only a couple of minutes before Jay was gently telling her to open her eyes. Lois looked around, realising they had stopped in a parking lot, which was almost empty. She could see the restaurant about a hundred yards away.

“You okay?” Jay asked softly.

“Yeah, it’s just … I’m back on home soil. It feels good.”

“I know it’s not Metropolis …”

“No, this is good. I spent about a year near here when I was a kid. I’ll be okay.”

Jay scratched his upper lip. He looked up, watching something in the distance, but Lois didn’t turn around.

“I better get back to the ship,” he told her. “But if you need anything …”

“I’ll contact you, I promise.”

“Take care of yourself kiddo,” he said.

“Thank you Jay.”

She watched him disappear, then shifted her bag on her shoulder before turning in the direction of
the restaurant. As she started walking, she frowned at two figures approaching from the other side of the restaurant. One of them looked like …

The closer they came, the more familiar they looked. Lois stopped walking, staring at the two men … no, not men, she thought. One of them, yes, but the other one was a teenager. Both had dark hair. The man was about six foot three, with a muscular body. The boy was only a couple of inches shorter and leaner. Other than that, they were almost identical in looks.

The man was staring back at her as he continued to approach. Lois felt her heart jump, almost paralysed in shock as she watched him get closer and closer.

“Oh my god!” she gasped. “Kal!”
Two weeks earlier

“General Lane, you have a visitor.”

Sam frowned, wondering who would be visiting him so late in the afternoon. He glanced at the pile of paperwork on his desk and sighed. He had been trying to catch up on the work for days and just didn’t seem to be getting anywhere.

If there was one thing he hated doing, it was pencil pushing, but he was no longer considered fit for active duty. He was supposed to have taken mandatory retirement months ago, but he’d refused. So they’d made him a pencil pusher.

He pressed the button on the intercom.

“Who is it?” he asked gruffly.

“A Mr Luthor.”

What the hell? he thought. What was Lex Luthor doing visiting him in Washington? This could not be good.

He sat back and tried to look relaxed as the bald man stepped into the room. Lex held out his hand.

“General,” he said, pleasantly enough, which only made Sam more suspicious.

“Luthor. What can I do for you?”

“I was hoping you could help me contact Mr and Mrs Kent. I understand you’re a friend of theirs.”

“I don’t know where they are,” Sam lied. He knew they were in Gotham, under the protection of his niece’s friend, but he wasn’t about to tell Luthor that, since it was more than likely the man had been sent on a fishing expedition by Waller.

Lex smirked. “I find that a little odd, General, considering you have been a frequent visitor for some time.”

“Keeping a log, Luthor?” he asked. “I’ve never denied the Kents are friends. My daughter became very close to them a few years ago.”

“How is your daughter, by the way?” Lex asked smoothly.

“Fine. Doing well, actually.” He bit down on the urge to ask Luthor what he was up to, knowing it would just put the man on the defensive.

“Oh, really?” The man looked surprised. “I haven’t seen any of her articles in the Daily Planet"
recently.”
Sam huffed loudly. “As you can see, I’m a very busy man,” he said, indicating the papers on the
desk. “I don’t have time to chit chat.”

“Of course not. I just thought the Kents would appreciate knowing that while they are away, there
have been people at the farm.”

Sam was curious in spite of his utter loathing for the younger man.

“What kind of people?” he asked. “Surely it’s the sheriff’s job to investigate such things?”

“You would think,” Lex replied, “but it seems she’s far too busy to investigate a simple break-in.”

He knew damn well it was Luthor’s own people, or someone from Checkmate at the farm. The
question was, what were they looking for?

He smiled at Lex, with the kind of smile that his men would have said had them humming the theme
from Jaws. A smile like that from Sam Lane, four star United States Army general was lethal.

“Well, I appreciate you letting me know. If the Kents get in touch, I’ll be sure to let them know.”

“Just doing my civic duty, General.”

I’ll bet, he thought as the other man turned to leave. He took out his phone and quickly typed out a
text, letting Jonathan know Lex had come around snooping. He sat back again, sighing, worrying
about his daughter and his grandson, who was now with his father in Asia, trying to figure out where
Lois could be.

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“Dad, how are we supposed to find Mom?” Clark was saying.

Kal grabbed his son’s arm and manoeuvred him around a crowd of people walking the streets of
Kuala Lumpur.

“Well, your aunt Chloe did manage to find out that your mom took a bus from Johor to here,” he
said.

“Yeah, I know Dad, but that won’t tell us where she went.”

Kal nodded. He’d gone back to the hotel where Lois had registered under the name Lara Ellison and
asked to speak to the manager. The man had been courteous, although rather nonplussed. When Kal
had dug deeper, he had learned that two men, one a room service waiter, had attempted to rob Lois
in her room. Security had advised him that it appeared Lois had defended herself against the two men
before running off.

Kal had been relieved to learn that the two men hadn’t been from Checkmate, but just as concerned
when he realised it meant Lois was still alone out there. On a hunch, he’d called Chloe, who had
accessed the city’s public transport records. Lois might have been able to disguise herself but there
weren’t that many white women using the coach service.

They’d been asking around, waving Lois’ photograph, but no one in the bus company seemed to
recognise her.

It was taking time for Chloe to access the public transport system and track any buses going out of
Kuala Lumpur. Even with Bruce using his own sophisticated equipment. They were trying to access systems that were a good few years behind American networks.

Clark’s eyes widened and he put a hand in the pocket of his jeans, pulling out his phone.

“Dad, it’s Bruce.”

Kal took the phone, looking around. Even with his super hearing, in this crowd it was going to be difficult to hear a conversation. He spotted a local fast food restaurant and ducked into the lobby. Clark stood guard.

“Bruce. Anything?”

“Not yet,” the Gotham dark knight told him. “It’s taking a little longer than we thought.”

Kal had not been surprised when Bruce had revealed he was the Batman. He had been the protector of Gotham for the past fifteen years and had taken on an apprentice, a boy whose parents had been trapeze artists with Haley’s Circus. Bruce had taken the boy in when his parents had been killed. Dick Grayson had been in school when they had arrived at the manor.

Clark had taken an immediate liking to the boy, who was only two years older than him. Kal had left his son playing some kind of game with Bruce’s ward while he worked with Bruce and Chloe in what he was told was the Batcave.

It was Bruce who had suggested going back to the hotel, adding that if Waller had Lois in custody, they would have had some kind of demand from the woman telling Kal to turn himself in.

“Listen, Kal, there’s something else. Lex has been sniffing around. He went to see the General, asking how to get in touch with the Kents. He pretended to be very concerned about a break-in at the farm.”

Kal snorted. Sure he was, he thought. Just as he was about to ask Bruce another question, Clark’s hand tightened on his arm. He looked at his son.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Two guys. One of them’s Asian. The other one’s African, I think. I can hear them talking and they’ve both got pretty strong accents. They’re over by the fountain.”

Kal nodded, and relayed the information to Bruce. He could hear someone tapping on a keyboard.

“Got ‘em,” Chloe said in the background. She’d obviously accessed the street surveillance network.

“I’m running a check,” Bruce confirmed. “Stay put.”

“I think they know we’re here, Dad,” Clark warned.

“Bruce?”

“Hang on. Don’t move.”

Kal watched the two men through the reflection on the glass doors. The men were walking toward the restaurant with a purposeful stride.

“Come on, Bruce,” he said. “They’re coming this way. We can’t superspeed our way out of here.”
“Shit! Kal, whatever you do, don’t do anything stupid like reveal your powers.”

Kal rolled his eyes. He knew that much.

“Call me back if you find something,” he said, ending the call. He looked at his son, who shrugged. They both began walking casually out of the restaurant lobby.

“Excuse me,” a heavily accented voice said.

Kal turned and looked at the dark-skinned man who had spoken. The man was tall and skinny, taller even than Kal, and dwarfing his companion, who had the smaller stature and features characteristic of most men from an Asian country.

“Can we help you gentlemen?”

“We would like a quiet word with you and your son,” the smaller man said.

Kal knew there was no point in denying it, but he wasn’t going to confirm anything either.

“I’m afraid we don’t have the time to stop.”

“I suggest you make the time,” the African man replied, drawing back his jacket a little so Kal could see the gun on his hip. “I don’t think you would like to see people here getting hurt.”

Damn, Kal thought. Waller must have had their images distributed around the world, or else how would the authorities have found them so quickly. He glanced at his son. Clark was fidgeting, hopping from one leg to the other.

“I don’t think I should have eaten that crab thing,” he groaned.

Crab thing? Kal thought, then realised. Clark was faking feeling sick, hoping to use the distraction to help them get away.

“I think I’m gonna throw up,” the teen groaned loudly, clutching his stomach and bending over.

There were still a few people milling around but looked at Clark in alarm as he continued to act sick. The two men began looking around as if not knowing what the hell to do.

“Hey, uh, kid, don’t be sick okay?” The Asian man was looking panicked.

Clark began groaning even louder, as if in pain. Kal pretended to be concerned about his son, bending as if to comfort him, using his peripheral vision to check no one was watching before tapping the taller man on the head. Clark did the same with the other man, then straightened up as both men fell to the ground.

“Hey, what do you know? The pain’s gone.”

Kal smiled. “Nice going, Clark.” He looked at the two men on the ground. Anyone who had been watching the little show would, with any luck, think they had the same sickness as Clark.

They quickly began walking toward one of the shops, as if going for help for the two men. Kal x-rayed and saw one of the shops had a back door, pulling Clark into the store. The shopkeeper said something in his language, which Kal didn’t understand.

“We just need to use your back door,” he replied, leading his son to the back where he now saw an alleyway. As soon as they were free of prying eyes, Kal gripped his son’s arm and sped them away.
They stopped at another fast food restaurant in another district of the city to get something to eat. Kal didn’t exactly approve of his son eating so much junkfood but they were in a foreign country and he wasn’t sure about eating anything he wasn’t familiar with.

Clark looked down at his tray, sighing. Kal frowned at him.

“We could go somewhere else,” he suggested.

“No, it’s not the food Dad. It’s Mom. I’m really worried about her. What if they do have her?”

“They would have said something by now,” he assured his son. “Look, your aunt and Bruce are trying to see if they can get any more leads. If we have to go to every public transport service in the whole country to find out where she went, we’ll do that.”

“I don’t know.”

“Your mom is smart, plus your Grandpa taught her how to take care of herself.”

Kal couldn’t help the note of pride in his voice. That was one of things he’d always loved about Lois. She was independent and self-sufficient. Not to mention tough.

“You still love her, don’t you, Dad?” Clark observed.

“Yes, I do, Clark. She was all I could think about.”

“How come it took you so long to come back then?”

Kal frowned at him. “I thought I explained all this?”

“Not really.”

He studied his son. “All right, well, eat up and then we’ll go somewhere quiet and talk.”

“Okay.” Clark began to eat quickly until Kal put a hand on his wrist.

“Slowly,” he instructed. “Just because you have my constitution it doesn’t mean you can forget your manners.”

Clark looked at him sheepishly. “Sorry.”

Neither Chloe nor Bruce had called by the time they had finished eating. They left the restaurant, relieved no one had even paid them any attention, and began walking along the street. It was getting late, the sun dropping below the horizon as Kal searched for a good place for them to sit. The streets were still fairly busy between the tourists and the workers anxious to get home.

After thirty minutes of walking he found a small park and sat down on a bench.

“So?” Clark asked.

“Okay, well, you know the reason I left was because I thought it would protect your mom. I would have found a way to stay, even with your grandfather’s protest, if I had known about you.”

“So we would have been a real family?”

“Son, we are a real family, or we will be, I hope, once we find your mom. Besides, the Kents are your family too.”
“I know. It’s like my friend Amy told me. Just because someone’s your biological parent it doesn’t make them your mom or dad.”

“Amy?”

“She’s one of my best friends. She has two dads, and well, she has a mom too, only she’s not really in her life.”

“Oh, I see,” Kal said, frowning.

“They didn’t have gays on Krypton?”

Kal thought about that for a second. He couldn’t remember knowing anyone on Krypton who was in that kind of relationship, but that didn’t mean anything. The ruling class tended to keep to itself.

“If they did, it wasn’t talked about among our community. We had different species on the planet though, and some Kryptonians did have relationships with other species …”

“Well, that sort of counts,” Clark smiled. “Okay, so getting back to Mom.”

“The thing you have to understand is time works differently there. So a year there is like maybe eighteen months here.” He frowned again. “I think. Jor-El explained it but I wasn’t much interested in that area of science.”

“So is that why you look so young?”

“I suppose so. It probably didn’t help that the three and a half years I was in space I was in what you would call suspended animation.”

“So no hyperspeed?” Clark asked.

Kal raised an eyebrow. “Hyperspeed?”

“It’s from a movie,” his son explained.

“Oh, I see. No, no hyperspeed. And the portals were closed off.”

“So you wanted to come back sooner, but you couldn’t,” Clark replied, nodding in understanding. “Because of the war and everything.”

“Exactly.”

The phone in Clark’s pocket vibrated. He took it out, glancing at the screen, then pressed the button.

“Aunt Chloe?” Kal tuned in on the conversation.

“I tracked your mom to another bus. She left Kuala Lumpur six days ago. On a hunch I checked the security at the borders. It took a while but we think your mom went to Vietnam.”

“How are we supposed to figure out where she went from there?”

“I’m working on that, sweetie. Listen, tell your dad to get a room for the night. He can use the credit card your uncle gave him. Don’t worry about the cost. I’m guessing it’s already pretty late there.”

Kal nodded in agreement. Clark turned back to the phone.
“Dad says okay.”

“Good. Don’t worry, okay? We’ll find your mom.”

Kal frowned, remembering the two men.

“What about those two men?” he asked softly. Clark nodded and relayed the question.

“We couldn’t find them on any known database, but most of the Checkmate agents aren’t identified anyway,” Chloe replied. “We’re pretty sure they were Checkmate.”

Damn, Kal thought. He hoped the two men didn’t catch on to the fact he’d used a little bit of his strength to knock one of them out, despite Bruce telling him not to.

They checked in to a hotel for the night. The man on the desk looked at them curiously, clearly wondering why they didn’t have a lot of luggage. Kal had only brought a small duffel bag, not wanting to take any chances by going back to Gotham each night.

Clark was up early the next morning and went downstairs to breakfast while Kal took a shower. As he emerged, the phone was buzzing on the nightstand. He quickly dressed and grabbed the phone.

“Bruce?”

“Yeah, where’s the kid?”

“Downstairs, probably eating everything in sight. Why?”

“No reason. Listen, there was a report in a newspaper in Ho Chi Minh city. A westerner charged with disturbing the peace. Thing is, he claimed two guys tried to force their way into his apartment.”

“Okay.”

“The guy’s name is Donnelly, but it’s not his real name. Chloe managed to find out that he writes a blog. He doesn’t name names but it’s fairly obvious it’s about Checkmate. So some further checking revealed his real name is Ted Grant.”

Kal frowned. “Is that supposed to mean something to me?”

“Well, I suppose not, since you know nothing about the Justice Society.”

“The what?”

“Never mind that. We’ll explain later. But get the kid and go see Ted Grant in Ho Chi Minh. I have a hunch Lois has been there.”

Meaning the two guys were most likely from Checkmate, Kal thought. He grabbed their gear and went downstairs. Sure enough, Clark was eating a stack of pancakes. He’d already eaten a plateful of bacon and eggs by the look of it. There were other people in the dining room staring as if they had never seen a teenager eat so much before.

“Manners, Clark,” Kal admonished lightly.

“I was hungry, Dad.”

Kal just shook his head. “Bruce just called with a lead. After we check out, we’ll get going to Ho Chi Minh city.”
Clark ate quickly, while Kal just drank coffee, not wanting to waste too much time. If Lois had been talking to Ted Grant, or Donnelly, or whatever he wanted to call himself, she might even still be there.

An hour later they were in Ho Chi Minh, heading to the apartment. Kal x-rayed the building. Grant was at home. Clark ran up the steps to the floor above the shop. Kal noticed the door was damaged, probably having been kicked off its hinges.

His son knocked on the door, which rattled with the impact.

“Not so hard,” Kal whispered.

“Sorry,” Clark replied, sounding sheepish.

“Who’s there?” a gruff voice called out.

“Mr Donnelly?”

“Who wants to know?”

“I was hoping you could help me,” Kal called through the door.

“Please, we just wanna find my mom,” Clark begged.

The door opened abruptly and they were greeted by a man in his sixties, holding a shotgun pointed at them.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Mr Grant, please put the gun down,” Kal said, trying to calm the situation.

“How do you know that name? Who are you? You’re not American. I can tell by your accent.”

“Let us in and we can talk.”

“Yeah?” He glared at them. “Why should I do that? You know what happened to the last guys who tried to force their way in?”

“I know about the arrest Mr Grant. Please, we just need your help.”

“Get out of here.”

“No.”

Grant glared at him, then punched without warning. Kal caught his fist before the man could break his hand and stopped the punch. He squeezed just hard enough to warn the man who he was up against.

Clark pushed his way in. Kal pushed the older man backward so he had no choice but to move. He pulled his hand away, flexing it while Kal closed the door.

“Jesus, what the hell is that?” Grant peered at him curiously. “Just who the hell are you?”

“My name is Kal. This is my son, Clark.”

The man looked between the two of them.
“Yeah, you look alike. Would have thought you were brothers though.”

“Trust me, we’re not,” Kal replied.

“Where’s my mom?” Clark blurted.

Kal looked at his son, who subsided.

“How do I know you’re telling the truth?” he asked.

He could see the other man was thinking things over. He still seemed sceptical.

“Your mom?” Grant asked.

“Lois Lane,” Kal said. “A friend of ours had a hunch she was here.”

“Lois Lane,” Grant asked. “Dear god, it’s true! What she told me.” He shook his head. “You’re too late. She’s on a cargo ship, bound for Los Angeles. She left four days ago.”

“Where?” Kal said urgently.

“What are you gonna do? Jump onboard in the middle of the ocean?”

“If I have to.”

“Look, I know you’re anxious to find her, but so are a lot of other people.”

“Checkmate, I know. It’s because of me they’re chasing her.”

“You jump on that ship and you’ll have to go through about two dozen other guys. I know most of them and they’re good men. She’s safe. Trust me on that.”

“I don’t even know you.”

“She trusted me. That’s gotta be enough.”

“All right. What do you suggest?”

“I can contact the captain. They’ll be in Los Angeles in ten days. I can get someone to drop her at a safe location.”

“By drop … what do you mean, exactly?”

“You’re not the only one with strange abilities, Kal.”

“That’s what you meant by her being safe, isn’t it? Bruce mentioned something about a Justice Society.”

“Bruce?”

“He goes by the name Batman. I have a friend who is called Green Arrow.”

“I see.”
“Mr Grant, I don’t think it’s safe for you here. If the men who came here were from Checkmate …”

“Don’t worry. I can hold my own. Besides, I’m old. What can someone like Waller do to me now? You just go find your girl.”

“How will I contact you?”

Grant went to the counter and wrote something on a slip of paper. Kal looked at it, realising it was a phone number.

“Ten days, Kal.”

“Thank you,” he said, taking the paper.

“Good luck.”

The others were sceptical when they returned to Gotham and told them what had happened. Chloe and Oliver had set up a temporary base for themselves, since their apartment had been trashed by Checkmate.

“Are you sure?” Chloe asked, clearly worried about her cousin.

Kal nodded. “He really believed she was safe.”

He spent the next few days helping Chloe and Bruce research Checkmate, trying to find something they could use against Waller to end this once and for all. He was still concerned about Lex’s activities, but there was little he could do about that.

The other problem was getting the ship back. His father had equipped the ship with a failsafe device, so if anyone tried to tamper with the mechanism, it would self-destruct. Oliver had sent one of his team to Africa to find the ship, but it had been somehow moved from the crash site. It was now a matter of finding where it was hidden by, Kal assumed, Waller’s team.

Clark insisted on going with him to Los Angeles when Grant gave him the meeting location. Chloe had showed him exactly where it was on a satellite map and he’d memorised the landmark.

He was nervous as he waited with his son. His vision had picked up the boat sailing into port a few miles out to sea.

“Dad, there she is,” Clark said, pointing to a parking lot about two hundred yards away. He could see Lois with a tall man with brown hair.

God, she was still beautiful. Older, definitely, a little sadder. She smiled at the older man, but it seemed to be a sad sort of smile. The man had clearly seen them, but hadn’t pointed them out to Lois. He turned and ran off back to the water, disappearing.

Clark sucked in a breath. “She’s beautiful, isn’t she Dad?”

“Yeah, she is. Come on,” he said, beginning to walk toward her.

Lois spotted them and stopped walking, staring at them open-mouthed. He saw her lips moving but the only word he recognised was his name.
Lois reunites with Kal, but it's not all sweetness and light.

Clark could see his mother was startled as she stood in the parking lot, staring at them. They approached her, but before his dad could say anything she exploded.

“What … how did you …” Her eyes narrowed. “I knew it was you, but I told myself I was wrong. That it couldn’t have been you in that ship.”

His father’s eyes darted to and fro as he looked around nervously. Clark could understand why. A couple had just come out of the restaurant. While they hadn’t heard the exchange, it was probably best not to take any chances.

“We should get out of here,” Dad said. “This isn’t the best place for this.”

Mom nodded. Clark followed his parents as they walked the streets, not even touching. This wasn’t the reunion he was hoping for. Okay, so he hadn’t really expected his mom would jump into his dad’s arms and everything would be hunky dory, but they could barely look at each other. She was clearly upset.

They quickly found a hotel a block away, with a small suite available and his father paid for their stay using the credit card Uncle Oliver had given them. Clark didn’t see the bill, but he imagined it was expensive. He guessed his dad had picked the expensive hotel for its security.

Mom stood in the middle of the room, her arms folded over her chest. Clark now knew what people meant when they described the air being so thick with tension you could cut it with a knife.

“How long have you been back?” she asked.

“By my calculations, a month,” Dad said. “It’s taken that long to find you.”

“You know why that is?”

“Checkmate. I know they’re still after you. After us.”

She nodded. “You knew this and yet you bring him here?” she said, pointing to Clark.

Oh boy, he thought. She was pissed. Definitely pissed. And it looked like this was going to be a humdinger of a fight.

“Mom,” he began, trying to explain it had been his decision, but she silenced him with a look that he knew only too well from Martha. What was it with moms that they seemed to know how to just look at a kid?

“How could you bring him here? How could you put him in such danger? You are unbelievable, Kal! Fifteen years, Kal. Fifteen! I left him with the Kents so he’d be safe. You come back after fifteen years and immediately put him in danger.”
Clark bit his lip. She didn’t know, but then how could she, that he hadn’t been all that safe. It had only been the threat of Waller losing her position that had stopped her from taking him, a minor, knowing the Feds would have had her thrown in jail. Maybe she wouldn’t have stayed there, but it was good to know she had some morals.

Or maybe Mom did know, but she was angry enough not to care.

His father tried to explain the situation to her, but she clearly wasn’t in the mood to listen. He could see his dad getting more and more frustrated with his mother, trying to get a word in edgewise, to no avail as she went on and on, yelling at him, flinging barb after barb.

“Mom, could you shut up for a minute?” he blurted.

She stared at him. “Excuse me? Did you just tell me to shut up?”

“I only …” he began, but she started in on his dad again.

“What the hell have you been teaching him, Kal? I would never have taught him to talk back to me like that.”

“That’s because you haven’t been around,” Dad shot back.

Ooh, that was sooo not the right thing to say, Clark thought.

“And where have you been?” she accused. “I bet you’ve been partying it up for the past fifteen years, probably laughing at poor, naïve Lois.” She huffed noisily. “I don’t know why you came back but it would have better if you had never come back at all.”

A look of pain crossed his father’s face. She couldn’t have hurt him more if she’d stabbed him with a blade made of Kryptonite. He knew how his dad felt about his mom. How she could even think that he never felt that way … Clark knew she was just hitting back the only way she knew how. God knew, she’d been hurt by this just as much as his dad, but to say the one thing that was guaranteed to hurt him…

His father stared at her, tight-lipped. Clark stared at him. Was he really just going to accept it? He wasn’t even going to fight? Clark thought.

“Well, if that’s the way you want it,” he said quietly. “The room’s yours for the night. Clark, take care of your mother.”

Clark unfroze as his father walked to the door.

“Dad, wait!” he said, but his father just looked at him sadly and shook his head. The door closed gently behind him.

Clark turned and looked at his mother. She was pale, the hurt clear on her face. She obviously hadn’t expected his dad to just walk out. He was torn between going after his father and taking care of her.

“You had to do it, didn’t you?” he accused. “Just push him away like that.”

“Clark, you don’t understand.”

“No, I don’t understand!” he yelled. “I don’t understand how you can be so mean to him after everything that’s happened. I came with Dad because I wanted to. He tried to make me stay in Gotham but I refused because I wanted to help find you. I’m fourteen, Mom, I’m not a goddamned
“Don’t swear at me! You have no idea what I’ve been through. And what do you mean Gotham? Why didn’t you stay in Smallville?”

“Well you don’t know what he’s been through! He wasn’t partying it up, if you must know. And we had to leave Smallville because Checkmate raided the farm. Aunt Chloe figured we’d be safer staying with Mr Wayne.”

She sighed heavily, raising her hands. “Fine. Whatever. I’m not in the mood for this.”

“I guess you just stopped caring, huh, Mom?” He turned away from her.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“I’m going to my room.”

“What about dinner?”

“I’m not hungry.”

He strode to the adjoining bedroom, opening the door, then decided she should hear it anyway, even if she didn’t care.

“By the way, everyone on Krypton’s dead. Except for him.”

Mom stared at him, startled. “What? What do you mean, dead?”

“My grandparents were murdered. The planet blew up. Ask him, if he ever comes back.”

He went into his room and slammed the door shut.

Lois stared at the closed door, wondering if she should ask her son to explain what he meant. Krypton blew up? How was that possible?

She sank down in the armchair, thinking over the situation. All the things she’d accused Kal of and he’d just stood there and taken it. How could she have been so cruel, she thought. Clark was right. She had pushed Kal away, unable to deal with the shock of actually seeing the man she’d been dreaming of since he’d left Earth, unable to deal with the pain of losing him.

Well, you’ve done it now, she berated herself. You’ve lost him for good. Nice work, Lane.

She thought about going and getting some food, but the thought of eating anything just made her nauseous. She’d been selfishly thinking about what she had gone through the past fifteen years, never once thinking that life hadn’t been easy for him.

She really had become a bitch, she thought, if she could push away the one person she’d always trusted. The one man who had loved her. She knew that, even if her hardened heart tried to tell her differently. She knew how hard it had been for him to leave.

Curling up in the chair, Lois began to cry quietly. Some time later, she fell into a light doze.

She was startled awake by a noise outside the room. She looked up, hearing footsteps and someone trying the door handle, then frantically searched the room for something she could use. The only thing she could find was a serving spoon on the counter-top in the little kitchenette.
Lois flung open the door and stared in surprise. Kal stood there, gazing back at her with a puzzled look. She quickly dropped the spoon, but not fast enough to stop him noticing it.

“Were you planning on beating me with that, or were you just going to yell at me some more?”

It took her a few moments to find her voice.

“I … I didn’t think you were coming back.”

Kal closed the door and entered the room.

“I thought about it. I considered flying back to Metropolis, but I decided I couldn’t leave you at the mercy of Amanda Waller and her Suicide Squad.” He raised his hand as if to stop her from saying anything, although she had no intention of doing so. “I know, you can take care of yourself, you’ve been doing that for fifteen years, but here’s the thing, Lois. I don’t know what’s been going on for those fifteen years, other than what the Kents and Clark have told me. And you don’t have the right to sit here in judgement of me when you have no idea what I’ve gone through.”

“Kal, I …” She chewed her lip. “You’ve every right to be angry with me,” she said quietly. “What I said was … was inexcusable.”

“Let me guess. Clark.”

“He told me a little. Kal, please …”

“Please what? Please don’t be angry? Why, Lois?”

“I didn’t know,” she said. “You should have said.”

“You didn’t give me a chance. You just assumed. Do you think my leaving was any easier for me than it was for you? I fucking loved you, Lois. The whole time on Krypton, it was like I’d lost a huge piece of me. I tried to get over you, but I would look at all those other … ‘suitable’ girls and not one of them could ever replace you. Finally my parents gave up on me settling down and by then we were too busy trying to save a planet from extinction. We failed.”

“What happened?” she asked.

“A warrior named Zod, is what happened. He bled the planet dry, until there was nothing left. He and my uncle stripped the mines of all the trillium and it destabilised the core. My father tried to warn the council, convince them to let the people go offworld, but they were too damned arrogant, too sure of their fucking superiority. They told Jor-El if he tried to warn anyone or tried to leave the planet, he’d be arrested.”

Lois could hear the bitterness and grief in his voice. She’d never heard him swear before but she could understand why. God, she thought. He’d lost nearly everything. An entire planet.

“I’m sorry,” she said, the tears rolling unbidden down her face. “I’m so sorry, Kal.”

He looked at her. “You know what the worst part was? I loved my parents, but Krypton didn’t feel like home anymore. The only place I ever felt like I belonged was with you. And you just … all those things you said. Do you really think I would have wanted any of this?”

“I know you didn’t,” she said. “Clark told me, about the farm. I … Kal, please, I’m so sorry for what I said. It was selfish. I’m selfish. I never once thought about what you might have suffered through all of this.”
She approached him slowly, taking his hand. He looked down at her, the pain clear in his eyes. She gently lifted his hand to her face, half-closing her eyes as his thumb wiped the tears from her cheek.

“Kal,” she whispered, opening her eyes again to look into his beautiful green-eyed gaze.

She needed him. It had been too long since she had felt safe. Too long since she had been in his arms. As she held him, the anger slowly left him, replaced by a desire that seemed to have always been simmering beneath the surface. By a need as powerful as her own. By a love that had never died in all the years they’d been apart.

He dipped his head and gently kissed her, his lips barely tasting hers. It was only a ghost of a kiss, but it left her wanting more. She clung to him, a soft moan escaping her lips as she begged with her eyes for his kiss.

He kissed her again, harder, his arms around her waist to pull her closer and all the memories from those days fifteen years ago came rushing back. She’d never been with anyone else. Had never wanted anyone else. She might have considered it with Bruce Wayne, but only because in many ways he resembled Kal. Except the similarity was superficial. He was darker, harder than her Kal.

She felt the years of loneliness in his kiss, the grief of losing an entire race of people. He’d lost so much, and all she had lost was time. She still had her father, her sister, her cousin. And Clark. Maybe she had been in and out of their son’s life, watched him grow up from afar, but she still had more than Kal.

“Please,” she begged. “Love me.”

He nodded, then lifted her, his arm beneath her knees, supporting her as he carried her to the bedroom.

He laid her down on the huge bed, gently stripping her, before taking off his own clothes. She studied him as he joined her on the bed, running her hands up and down his powerful arms. How was it possible that he had become even more beautiful than she remembered? He was more muscular, stronger, yet just as gentle as the first time they’d made love.

He seemed to hesitate and she looked up at him.

“Lois, I … I haven’t …”

“No other man could ever measure up.”

He smiled back, kissing down her body. She had stretch marks on her belly which had faded over time, but would never completely go away. He kissed every one, as if worshipping them.

She moaned softly as he took her nipple in his mouth, catching it in his teeth, nibbling gently. She arched her back, desperate to feel him closer, her body remembering his touch, eager for the one thing she had denied herself for so long.

They couldn’t get enough of touching each other, using their hands to relearn each other’s bodies all over again. Lois could feel the power in his muscles, the way they flexed when he moved. She kissed him and he still tasted the same, still smelled the same.

She remembered the last night they’d spent together, before he had left. It had been raining. She had gone out in it, upset, crying because he was leaving and she couldn’t bear to be parted from him. Kal had come after her, holding her in the rain, telling her he wished things could be different. That if he
had a choice he would stay but he was afraid. Afraid she could get hurt.

He’d taken her back to the farm, to the loft in the barn. They’d stripped each other’s wet clothes off slowly and made love while the rain stopped and the stars came out. He’d held her, watching the night sky through the windows.

“Which one’s your star?” she asked.

He’d taken her hand and showed her, tracing what looked like a wolf’s head. His star had been one of the eyes. She’d looked for it many times since, oddly comforted by it.

“Lois,” he moaned softly.

“Love me,” she whispered. “Kal, please …”

He kissed her again, softer this time with lips that seemed swollen from kissing. He slowly stroked her body, as if trying to memorise her with his touch, then his fingers worked, parting the coarse hairs guarding her sex. She tensed a little and he soothed her.

“You know I would never hurt you,” he said.

“I know,” she said, letting him drop a kiss on her bare shoulder. “It’s just been a long time.”

“For me too,” he told her. “There was never anyone else. I just couldn’t.”

He continued to talk to her as he stroked her sex, slowly inserting a finger. She gazed up into his beautiful eyes and knew everything he had told her was the truth. He had always loved her.

“Kal!” she cried, arching her back as he penetrated her with another finger. “Oh god!”

With that she became lost in his touch, her body aching with need, desperate for more but unable to voice that desire. He seemed to know anyway, like he always did, speeding up his thrusts until all she could do was cry out, the fire within threatening to engulf her as her ardour grew and finally she came out the other side, gasping.

Kal rolled over onto his back, his hands on her waist. He was hard, so hard she thought it must have been painful for him. Lois offered him a grin as she straddled him, lifting herself up despite legs that suddenly felt as if they were jelly. He sent her a look that could only be a challenge. Lois reached back with her hand, grasping his hard shaft and holding it firmly, experiencing a tiny spasm as she guided it to her opening.

The strain was beginning to tell on his face. He wanted her to go faster, but Lois refused, slowly taking him in until she was fully seated on him. He tried to take control as she lifted herself up, then slammed down on him. He lifted his hips, reaching once more for her and they slowly began to move together in rhythm.

Her body once again began to tingle and she moved faster, chasing the climax. Kal cried out, then stiffened. Lois cried out, forgetting her teenage son probably sulking in his bedroom and clung to her lover as she climaxed.

She settled with her head on his chest, feeling his arms wrap protectively around her. He kissed her forehead. For the first time in she didn’t know how long, she finally felt she could sleep deeply.

“I never stopped loving you,” she said sleepily.
He kissed her lips gently.

“I know,” he said. “Go to sleep, my love.”

She was woken a short time later by a knocking on the bedroom door.

“Mom? Are you okay?”

She lifted her head and frowned at Kal who had also been woken by the sound. Clark might not have realised his father had come back.

“I’ll go,” Kal offered. He got up, wrapping the cover around his waist, and opened the door.

Clark looked startled.

“Um, Dad, I didn’t know you were …” He looked into the room. Lois had pulled the sheet up to cover her nakedness, but it was fairly clear what had been going on. Clark turned bright red.

“Um, sorry, I’ll just …”

He turned and fled. Kal looked around at Lois, raising an eyebrow, then shrugged and closed the door before coming back to sit on the bed beside her. Lois couldn’t help laughing, hiding her face in his chest as she giggled.

“I think we embarrassed him.”

Kal returned the laughter, kissing her forehead. “Guess so.”

Lois’ stomach rumbled. “We should call room service and order some dinner.”

He nodded. “It’s on Oliver’s tab,” he said.

They picked up their clothes and dressed, going back out into the main room, where Clark was curled up in the armchair, pretending to watch television. He refused to look at them. Lois ordered some dinner through room service and they sat together on the couch. Kal put his arm around her shoulders and she leaned back against him.

Clark eyed them with trepidation, although clearly relieved they had made up.

“You guys aren’t gonna get all mushy on me, are you?”

Lois shot her lover a look and hid a giggle.

“We might,” Kal told their son.

“Well then you better give me some warning. I’m an impressionable teenager you know.”

Lois picked up a pillow from the couch and threw it at him.
Lois slipped her top over her head and pulled it down while Kal sprawled lazily in the bed, watching her. She spied him watching.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she said.

“Like what?” he asked.

“Like that. It makes me want to reverse the process and get right back in bed with you.”

“Is that a hardship?” he asked.

She laughed. “No. But we have things to do.”

He sighed. She was right. Of course.

Clark knocked on the door. “Mom, Dad, we gotta get moving.”

“Whose idea was it to bring him along?” Lois asked, smiling wryly.

“His,” Kal told her.

She crinkled her nose. “Oh, yeah. Damn kid. Martha’s always telling me he likes to do things his own way.”

“Takes after his mother,” Kal replied.

She picked up Kal’s shirt from the floor and threw it at him. It landed on his face and he laughed, plucking it off.

“He does not,” she answered. “Come on, lazybones. Get dressed.”

He sighed heavily. “If I must,” he replied, getting up. He was dressed within a second.

Lois’ eyes widened as she stared at him.

“All right. Show off.”

He dropped a kiss on her shoulder as he passed, going to the bedroom door to open it. Clark looked at him.

“I know you guys are busy with whatever, but we gotta move. If Waller’s goons figure out you’re back …”

Kal raised an eyebrow, turning to Lois.
“When did our son become the boss of this outfit?” he asked. “That he definitely gets from you.”

Lois glared at him, hands on her hips.

“Are you calling me bossy, Kal-El?”

He grinned cheekily.

“I wouldn’t dare,” he replied.

She mock scowled at him. “You’ll get yours, Smallville.”

His grin widened. She hadn’t called him Smallville since he’d left Earth. It felt good to hear it again.

Lois finished dressing, making sure everything was packed in her bag before joining him outside the bedroom. Clark picked up the room keys, which were really just plastic cards, and led the way out of the hotel room.

“So, should we have breakfast first or just head back?” Kal asked.

“Breakfast,” Clark replied.

Kal shot Lois a look. “Yeah, how did I know that would be his answer,” he said.

“I’m hungry Dad.”

Lois sighed. “Breakfast it is.”

They made their way downstairs to hand in their keys.

“Did you enjoy your stay, sir? Ma’am?”

Lois made a face. Kal nodded to the receptionist and guided Lois out of the hotel.

“What was that all about?” he asked.

“I never considered myself a ma’am,” she said. She looked at him, frowning slightly. “I still hate it that you look younger than me.”

He shrugged. “I told you why that is. I explained all this last night. Besides, you’re only thirty-three. You’re not old.”

“Try telling our teenage son that.” She sighed. “It’s just weird.”

After dinner the night before, they had left Clark watching television and gone back to the bedroom. Kal had explained everything that had happened on Krypton, while Lois had told him everything that had happened the past few years. She had again apologised for the way she had basically yelled at him.

Now that he thought about it, he supposed he could understand why she had got so upset. The men on the ship had clearly not warned her he would be there. Perhaps they hadn’t wanted to get her hopes up, or worry her. She had just managed to avoid the Checkmate agents by a day or two in Vietnam, so he realised after everything she had been through it was natural for her to have got upset.

They still were no closer to deciding what to do about Checkmate. Lois had gathered quite a bit of
information from Ted Grant, but how she was going to use it against Amanda Waller to get her to
back off, she hadn’t decided yet.

They left the hotel, deciding to walk to the restaurant near where they had met the day before. Clark
walked ahead of them, pretending to be embarrassed by their ‘mushiness’, although all they were
doing was holding hands.

The restaurant had just opened for Sunday brunch. Of course, Clark wanted to order practically
everything on the menu. Kal shot his son a look.

“Party pooper!” Clark muttered.

Lois reached across the table and gave him a light smack on the back of his head which basically
only ruffled his hair.

“Mooom!”

“Behave!” she told him.

“Aww, do I have to,” he said, pretending to pout.

“Hi folks. What can I get you?” the waitress asked breezily as she put a pitcher of water and some
glasses on the table.

Clark perused the menu.

“Mm, French toast looks good to me,” he said. “With lots of bacon.”

“We’ll have the same,” Kal told her.

The waitress smiled and went off to put the order in. Clark leaned across the table.

“So, I have a question to ask you guys.”

“Oh oh,” Lois replied, grinning. “This doesn’t sound good.”

Clark rolled his eyes. Kal laughed. “Ask your question,” he said, picking up the pitcher of cool water
and pouring some into each glass.

“Are you guys gonna get married?”

Kal’s hand shook slightly. “Uh … well …”

Lois turned and looked at him. “Yes, Kal, are we?”

It was more than likely she hadn’t considered the ramifications of what Clark was asking. While
Brainiac had set up the identity years ago when he’d first realised he would need some kind of
identity to hide the fact he wasn’t from Earth, Kal wasn’t sure just how well that would stick.
Especially since Waller probably knew enough to expose him.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to marry her. He had told his father long ago that if it was possible he
would have joined with Lois in a lifebond, or the Earth version of one. But it wasn’t that simple. He
couldn’t legally be married to her without an identity, even though they could still marry the
Kryptonian way.

He knew enough about women to realise that there was no right or wrong answer, and there was no
way he could predict how she would take his reply, but Lois was still looking at him expectantly.

“Never mind,” she said, sighing when he didn’t reply. “I get it.”

“No, Lois, I don’t think you do. I would marry you in a heartbeat, but … we need to get things sorted out before we can consider sharing our lives together. I love you, you know that.”

She nodded. “You’re right. First things first, we need to get back home and figure out where to go from there.”

The waitress returned with their brunches and they ate quickly, eager to get back to Gotham. As they finished eating, Kal noticed Lois was distracted by a couple with two young children. He watched her look down at her plate, then at Clark, who was busy mopping up maple syrup on his plate and didn’t see. His heart broke as he realised why she had such a sad look on her face.

“Hey, you okay?” he asked softly, nudging her.

“Yeah,” she said, sighing. “I just … I look at them and I wish …”

Clark looked up at her and frowned, then followed her gaze to the young family. He looked stricken for a moment.

“Mom, it’s okay,” he said. “Please don’t feel bad.”

Lois was clearly upset. Kal bit his lip. She needed to clear her conscience, but the restaurant had become busier and he decided this wasn’t the best place for them to have this conversation, not knowing what people would think if they overheard. He gave the waitress the credit card and the bill.

They left the restaurant and began walking along the road until Kal found a place on the beach for them to sit and talk. Clark sat beside his mother, clearly not sure what to say as she stared out at the waves.

“Lo?” Kal said.

She was crying, but clearly trying to hide it. Clark put his arms around her.

“Mom, don’t cry.”

“I feel so guilty, leaving you. I’ve missed so much.”

“Mom, I know you did what you did to protect me. Martha explained it all. I mean, I didn’t know about the whole alien thing until Dad came back, but I guess they figured it’d be safer that way. Mom, please don’t be sad. I’m not mad at you for leaving me there, because I know you only did it because you love me and you wanted me to be safe. It’s not like you could have dragged me around the world with you. Not with people like that guy Flag after you.”

She looked at him, her eyes glistening with tears, but with a glimmer of a smile. Kal squeezed her shoulder gently. Clark grinned and shrugged.

“It’s not like you can’t have more kids anyway. It’s not like you’re, you know, old or anything.”

“Jonathan Clark Kent!” she said, half laughing in exasperation.

“Just don’t get too mushy around me, okay? I really don’t need the trauma of seeing my parents macking on each other.”
Lois glared at him. Clark made a face, then got to his feet, taking off running. Lois ran after him. Kal laughed as he watched them chasing each other up the beach. Lois tackled the teen to the sand. The pair wrestled on the sand, giggling.

It was good to see Lois happy. She’d been through so much the past few years, that he could see why she was so serious. It was nice to see her acting so carefree.

They had stopped wrestling and were sitting on the sand. Clark was practically draped over his mother’s back, arms around her. Kal got to his feet and walked over to them, holding out his hand to pull them up.

Lois had sobered. “We should get going to Gotham. I’m sure Chloe and Ollie will be worried about us.”

Kal nodded. “Yeah.”

“So, how exactly are we going to get there?” she asked.

“Don’t worry, I can fly both of you,” he told her.

“Dad, do you think I’ll ever be able to fly?” Clark asked.

“I don’t know. I think that’s something we can ask your grandfather, if I can get the crystal from the ship.”

“How are you going to find the ship?” Lois asked. “I mean, if Waller’s got it locked up in a lab somewhere …”

That was a very good question, Kal thought. Even with all the information they’d gathered so far, they had nothing on any facilities owned by Checkmate. The only person who would know where the ship had been taken was Waller.

Kal hoped it was still somewhere in Africa, unless they’d used a military plane to fly it from that continent to the United States. Given the size of the ship, it wouldn’t be easy, but still doable.

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Smallville, Luthorcorp Plant No. 3, Level 3

Lex watched from above as the craft was lowered onto the concrete floor. He could see scorch marks on the metal where the ship had begun to burn up in the atmosphere. It had clearly been damaged prior to crash landing in Africa. Some parts had broken off in the crash, but all considered it was in surprisingly good condition.

A technician joined him, holding a tablet.

“What’s the verdict?” he asked, glancing at the screen. They’d taken three dimensional scans of the craft, including the odd markings etched in the metal.

“The metal is like nothing we’ve ever seen before. Surprisingly resilient, given what must have been a particularly violent entry into Earth’s atmosphere.”

“I’d like to get inside it,” Lex replied.

“Ah, yes, well therein lies the problem. We have been all over the craft and so far have not been able to figure out how to open it. As I said, it’s surprisingly resilient. We would have thought the crash
landing might have damaged some of the mechanisms, but it appears to have some sort of failsafe against any tampering.”

“I see,” Lex said icily. He was not at all happy about this.

As he watched, he could see a couple of the technicians trying to use anything from drills to laser cutters, to no avail.

“What about the symbols?” he asked.

“We’re working on that sir.”

Lex scowled at the technician. “You’ve had the ship for five days. What’s taking so long?”

“We’re doing our best, sir.”

“Well, your best isn’t good enough,” he barked. “I want results, doctor, not excuses!”

The technician shot him a look, but said nothing. Lex knew exactly what the man was thinking. They all hated him, but he didn’t care. They were paid to do a job, not be his best friends.

Lex left the scientists to their studies and drove back to the mansion, entering the study, making sure the double doors were closed tightly before picking up the remote to activate the monitor.

Just as he was about to make the call he was dreading, his intercom buzzed. He pressed the button on the remote.

“Yes?”

“Your ex-wife on line one, Mr Luthor,” the houseman said coolly.

“Tell her I’m busy,” he snapped.

“I’m afraid she is rather insistent. Sir.”

Lex huffed noisily. Bitch, he thought. Still, he shouldn’t be surprised. The woman had become quite the harpy since she’d been married to him.

The only reason he had married her in the first place was because it had suited his ambition. After all, who wouldn’t want a pretty wife on their arm, especially when he had designs on becoming president of the United States. He had seduced her, manipulated her, pretended to love her, played on her vulnerabilities. She had lost her parents when she was very young and Lex supposed that made her a little needy, and so easily manipulated.

It helped that she had been close to Lois Lane, especially when Amanda Waller had been so insistent on keeping a close eye on the woman. Which was the only reason he chose to stay on at least civil terms with his ex, despite the fact she’d walked out on their marriage after finding out about some of the less ethical things he had done.

He told the houseman to put her through.

“Lex.”

“What do you want, Lana?” he asked.

“A favour.”
“We’re divorced, Lana,” he told her.

“It’s not like I’m asking for the world, Lex. I just need an endorsement.”

“For what?”

“I’m hosting a charity fundraiser at the Talon. Need I remind you that we’re still technically business partners on the coffee shop?”

Part of his campaign to seduce the woman was to help her refurbish the town’s old movie theatre and turn it into a coffee shop when her aunt had decided to sell the building.

“And as your business partner, I would think you would have consulted me about any fundraiser.”

“Oh go screw yourself, Lex. When I started this little venture there was nothing in the contract about me needing to ask permission, especially from my silent partner,” she added, emphasising the ‘silent’.

“So why do you need my endorsement?”

“Duh! To pull in the big names. Why do you think?”

“Why do I even ask?” He agreed, sighing heavily. “Have you heard from the Kents? Or Chloe?” he asked, as an aside.

“No. Why?”

“They haven’t been back to the farm. I went to see General Lane, but he hasn’t heard from them either. I’m rather concerned about them,” he lied.

He’d known the general was lying about that, but short of outright accusing the man of doing so, Lex decided it was more prudent to let matters lie and hope the truth would reveal itself.

“I did speak to Chloe a couple of days ago. She and Ollie decided to take a vacation with the children. And no, she hasn’t heard from Lois.”

He was tempted to ask her if she knew the truth about Clark, but doubted she would tell him anyway. Lana was a lot of things, most especially a pain in the ass, but stupid she was not.

“Well, give her my best,” he said.

Lana snorted and hung up without saying goodbye. Lex turned back to the monitor and connected to Washington DC.

Waller did not look happy.

“What’s your report?”

“My scientists have not been able to access the ship as yet.”

“Why not?”

“The metal …”

“I don’t want excuses, Luthor. I want results!”

“I’m aware of that,” he replied. “My people are doing their best.”
“Their best isn’t good enough!” she snapped. “What about the Lane problem?”

“I rather thought …”

“Handle it!” she told him. “Find out where the Kents have gone and find the boy!” With that she shut off the connection.

Lex fumed. He hated the bitch, but didn’t feel he had any other choice but to continue working for her. Because of the work he’d done through Checkmate, and the intel he’d gathered, he was slowly collecting enough information to convince the military leaders they needed his army. He sat back in his leather chair, thinking of the side project he’d been developing. Sooner or later the world would know about 33.1.

Another call came in. A man with Asian features gazed at him, almost timidly.

“Uh, sir, we, uh, we lost him.”

Lex sighed. He’d sent Chan and his partner, Makena, to Malaysia to track down Lois Lane. Instead they’d run into Kal and the boy. The fact that father and son had managed to get to Malaysia without flying was a mystery in itself. When Chan had failed to capture the boy, Lex had instead sent them to talk to a man who had been writing a blog on Checkmate’s activities. Lex had managed to learn the man was a former member of the Justice Society. Only someone else had managed to get to him first.

“What do you mean you lost him?” he asked.

“Uh, we followed Mr Donnelly, I mean, Mr Grant, but I think he was on to us.”

Well, that was just great, Lex thought, only half-listening to the man’s explanation that Grant had left Vietnam and evaded them at the airport, so they had no idea where he had gone.

***

“Lois?”

Chloe ran to her cousin and wrapped her arms around her.

“God, we’ve been so worried about you!” the blonde exclaimed.

“I’m fine,” Lois said, glancing at Kal and giving a half-smile.

“Are you back to stay?” Oliver asked.

She nodded. “As long as we can get Checkmate off our backs, yeah. I still have to call Perry. I’m sure he’s just as worried.”

Martha and Jonathan came in, having clearly heard Chloe’s shout. Martha hugged Lois.

“Hi sweetie. I’m so glad you’re all right.”

Kal grinned at the older couple. Lois had told him how they’d kept in touch over the years. The Kents had treated her almost like a daughter and he was grateful for how they had looked after her.

“Your father’s been calling Bruce almost every day,” Jonathan told Lois. “He’s been very worried about you.”

“It’s good that you’re okay,” Bruce replied from the doorway. “But next time you decide to drop out of sight … well, there better not be a next time.”

Lois snickered. “Yes, sir! Besides, that won’t be a problem if we can figure out how to get Amanda Waller to leave us alone.”

“We’re working on that,” Bruce told her.

“I’m hungry,” Clark announced.

Kal frowned at his son. “You just had breakfast an hour ago,” he pointed out. “How can you be hungry?”

Clark shrugged. “I’m a growing kid,” he said, grinning at Dick, who had come in behind Bruce. “I’m gonna go raid the kitchen.”

Kal groaned as the two boys went out. Lois laughed at him.

“Now that, he definitely gets from you.”

“What are you trying to say, Ms Lane?” he asked as the others laughed. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her before she could reply.

Arms around each other, they followed Bruce into the library. Alfred supplied them with coffee as Lois began telling the others what had happened since Africa.

“This is all very useful information, I’m sure,” Bruce said when she had finished, “but it doesn’t tell us how to stop Checkmate.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Lois returned. “But from what Ted told me, Waller’s been crossing lines for years.”

“There is the problem of the ship,” Kal added. “If Waller’s team has got their hands on it …”

Chloe nodded. “We’ve considered that possibility. What we can tell you is your theory about using a military plane is right. Uncle Sam found out that a large cargo left Somalia about a week ago.”

“So where did they take it?” Kal asked.

The blonde sighed. “You’re not gonna like this. It was flown to an air force base just outside of Metropolis and the cargo was taken by truck. To Smallville.”

“Luthor,” Kal muttered.

“Afraid so.”

“How badly was the ship damaged?” Bruce asked.

“From what I saw,” Lois replied, “bad enough.”

“I was too out of it from the crash to make any kind of assessment,” Kal explained. “The Kryptonite didn’t help.”

Lois looked at him. “Kryptonite?”

“It’s what we called the meteor rock,” Bruce told her. “I ran some tests on the rock you found at the
crash site. It gives off a level of radiation that is toxic to Kal. And Clark.”

Lois gasped. “Kal, you didn’t tell me about that.”

“I’m sorry, honey, I forgot all about it. All I remember was that I had some of it embedded in my skin and it made me sick.”

“Are you saying this stuff could hurt you?” she asked, looking very worried, squeezing his hand for reassurance.

“It could kill him if there was enough of it,” Bruce explained.

“Honey …”

“I’m fine,” he assured her. “As long as I’m nowhere near it, or it’s shielded by lead, I’m fine.”

“Apparently, lead is the one substance the radiation can’t penetrate,” Bruce added.

“Well sure, that’s what they use in hospitals,” Chloe pointed out. “But getting back to the ship …”

“The ship was equipped with a failsafe. While it couldn’t repair itself, the entry was designed to lock unless activated by a key,” Kal told them.

Chloe looked pensive.

“There would be another way though, wouldn’t there? I mean, if Lex does have the ship at Luthorcorp …”

“No Earth tools would be strong enough to cut through the metal,” Kal replied.

“But something from Krypton might?” Lois asked.

Kal looked at her, then thought about the Kryptonite Bruce had been studying. Nothing on Earth would, but if Luthor thought to use Kryptonite … Even if he did manage to break through the outer shell, the ship would still try to protect itself against intrusion. The problem was, that defence mechanism would cause an explosion that could flatten an entire city, and then some.

He had to find the ship and get it back before that happened.
Lois rolled over in bed to find Kal’s side of the bed was empty. She blinked her eyes and lifted her head, looking around for him. The bedroom door opened and he came in, carrying a tray of fresh croissants and two mugs. From the aroma, she realised it was coffee.

“You’re awake,” he smiled. He approached the bed and put the tray on the nightstand before sitting on the bed and placing one hand on her waist. “How did you sleep?”

“Mm, great,” she said. “I haven’t slept like that in a long time.”

Kal leaned over and kissed her. “Good morning,” he murmured.

“It’s looking good so far.”

“Alfred figured we’d be hungry so there are fresh croissants. Apparently there’s a bakery that delivers them from town.”

“Well, why not,” Lois returned. “Bruce is rich enough he can have anything he wants delivered.” She reached for a croissant and bit into it, tasting the ham and fresh tomato. The croissant was buttery and delicious, but was still missing something.

“You know,” she said, “I spent a couple of months in Paris a few years ago and I used to get croissants from this little bakery. I mean, don’t get me wrong, this is really good, but it’s not quite the same as the one from the bakery.”

Kal smiled. “Maybe I can take you back to Paris one day,” he said.

“I’d love that,” she said. “I think you’d really like Paris.”

“I remember reading about the Eiffel Tower. Is it true it is considered one of the most romantic places on Earth?”

She bit her lip. “Well, I guess, but there are other places that are way more romantic.”

“Then I guess I have some studying to do,” he said.

Lois looked at him coyly through her long lashes, wondering if he meant what she thought he meant. The months they had dated, he had certainly tried to make the dates memorable, but she was older and wiser, and probably way too cynical to fall for any of that stuff. Then again, this was Kal.

From the things he’d said that night in Los Angeles, she had realised that he had gained a new perspective, especially of his parents, on Krypton. He’d told her that once they’d realised he was serious about his feelings for her, they had backed off on their requests that he find a Kryptonian girl and marry her.
She watched him as he ate his own croissant. He’d put on a shirt and loose pants to go downstairs to fetch the breakfast, but he’d left the shirt unbuttoned, and she could see glimpses of his expansive chest. How was it possible that he’d put on more muscle in the time they’d been apart?

God, how had she survived fourteen years without seeing his handsome face, feeling his touch? The one thing that had kept her going for so long was her son, knowing she at least still had a part of Kal that no one else could ever touch. She’d never considered for a second giving Clark up fully, knowing that although they’d never planned it, he had been conceived in love. She’d loved him the moment he’d been placed in her arms as a baby. No, before that, she thought, remembering the days she had talked to the baby inside her, telling him about his father, and her hopes and dreams for the future.

“What are you thinking about?” Kal asked softly.

“You. Clark. Wondering how I managed all these years. I missed you so much, Kal. You have no idea.”

“I think I do,” he returned. “When I returned to Krypton, it felt like my heart was broken into a million pieces. I …” He looked down. “I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you, Lois. When I got back to Krypton, all I wanted to do was go back through the portal, come back to you and find a quiet place somewhere where no one would ever find us. Not even Jor-El. I thought I was doing the right thing by leaving. I thought you would be safe. I’m sorry.”

“No,” she said, clutching his hand. “Don’t. We both thought it was the right thing to do, no matter how much it hurt. Kal, baby, please, don’t ever think I was mad at you for leaving. I could never be mad at you. What I said the other day …”

“Some of it was justified.”

“No, it wasn’t. Things were bad on both Earth and Krypton, but none of that was your fault. It wasn’t mine either.”

“No, you’re right. It’s not our fault. It’s Waller. And Lex. We have to figure out a way to stop them, Lois. So we can be a family. You, me, and Clark, and whoever else comes along.”

His smile was soft and gentle as he placed a hand on her stomach. Lois wondered if that was reflex more than anything.

“You wouldn’t mind?” she asked. “Having more children?”

“I would love more children with you, Lois. Especially if we had a little girl who was just as beautiful as you.”

Lois had been told she was beautiful before. By Bruce, by other men. But somehow their flattering words had been just empty. None of it meant anything because it hadn’t come from love. From Kal.

Kal took her cup and placed it on the tray on the nightstand.

“I should take this back downstairs,” he said.

She grasped his hand. “No, stay. Come back to bed.”

“Lo …”

“Please. I just want you to myself for a while. Chloe said it might take a couple of days to figure out
Kal grinned. “You, Ms Lane, are a bad influence.”

She giggled, wrapping her arms around him.

“Am I? You going to punish me?” she taunted.

“I might,” he laughed, pressing a kiss to the top of her breast.

“Mm, I think I like your idea of punishment,” she murmured as he rolled over onto his back, pulling her on top of him.

***

Clark sighed and rolled his eyes heavenward as he passed by his parents’ bedroom door, then laughed softly, hearing his mother giggle. At least she was happy, he thought. Lord knew, she deserved it. They both did.

Dick came out of his room, his hair wet, obviously having taken a shower.

“Wassup?” he asked.

“Nothin’. Mom and Dad getting all mushy.”

Dick laughed. “Yeah. When my mom and dad got all lovey-dovey I scarpered. It’s kind of nice though, that they could still feel like that about each other.”

“My mom feels kind of bad for not being around,” Clark said as they made their way downstairs. “She got all upset.”

“Yeah, I guess I can see why.”

“I know she was only doing it to keep me safe. I mean, yeah, there were times when I wished she was around, but I’m not mad at her for it. I’m mad at people like that Waller for making her make that choice, you know?”

Dick nodded understandingly.

“Yeah. I bet Bruce and your aunt will come up with something though. Bruce is really smart.”

“He’s cool. I like all his toys in the Batcave.”

“Yeah, they’re pretty awesome,” Dick said, grinning. “He didn’t want me going out on patrol with him at first but I really like it. What’s your dad going to do, now that he’s here to stay I mean?”

“I dunno. It would be kind of cool if he could be a superhero too, like Batman and Green Arrow, but we still have to get Waller to leave us alone.”

“Good morning boys,” Chloe said. She was sitting at the table with a cup of coffee in her hands. Clark’s two cousins were sitting between their parents, eating cereal and making a mess. Oliver and Bruce were poring over some documents, their breakfasts untouched.

Jonathan and Martha were also at the table, talking quietly. Jonathan looked up and smiled at him.

“Where are your parents?” he asked.
In their bedroom,” Clark said, feeling himself turning red. “Um…”

The older couple exchanged knowing grins. Chloe laughed.

“Well, let’s leave them to it. Goodness knows they deserve a little time to themselves.”

Alfred came in. “There are croissants fresh from the bakery if your breakfasts are not to your satisfaction, sirs,” he said, aiming a pointed look at Bruce and Oliver.

“Honey,” Chloe admonished gently. “You’re not eating.”

Oliver looked up. “Huh? Oh, sorry Alfred.” He offered a sheepish look and began eating his bacon and eggs. Bruce looked apologetically at the butler and ate his own breakfast.

Clark grinned at his aunt, who just shrugged and smiled, then turned to the children, scolding them for their mess.

“Sorry Mom,” they chorused.

“If you’ve finished your breakfast,” Oliver told them, “why don’t you two go and play.”

Giggling, the two children ran out. Chloe sighed and began picking up their plates, trying to clean up the mess left behind. Alfred shook his head.

“No need, madam, I will take care of that.”

“I’m sorry, Alfred. I taught my kids better manners than that.”

He just smiled at her and told her no apology was necessary. The children were just being children.

Alfred began clearing the mess off the table. Dick scoffed his own breakfast, which was bacon and scrambled eggs, while Clark pulled apart a croissant and ate quickly.

“Clark, sweetie, eat nicely,” Martha scolded.

He flushed, but did as he was told. The adults stayed at the table, discussing the problem of Checkmate.

“You know, we should talk to Carter,” Oliver said. “Maybe he will have some better insight. I mean, he did manage to keep Checkmate off his back for thirty years.”

Chloe nodded at her husband. “That’s true, but then again, the Justice Society basically disbanded and weren’t doing anything which would attract Checkmate’s attention. Kal’s different. I mean, he’s an alien, so I’m guessing that makes him more of a threat.”

Clark looked at her. “My dad’s not a threat.”

“I know that sweetie, but I’m just guessing that’s what Waller’s thinking.”

“Well, maybe we should talk to her. Tell her he’s not a threat.”

“It’s not that simple, Clark,” Bruce began to explain. “For a start, there’s your dad’s powers. Anyone who didn’t know him might see him as something to fear.”

“But that’s stupid!”
“I’m afraid that’s how some people in this world think, son,” Jonathan said. “They see someone who is different from them and they’re afraid. Unfortunately, we cannot change attitudes overnight.”

“I just don’t get how people can be so mean,” he said. “It’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not fair,” Chloe said, “but with everything else that has been going on in the world the past twenty or thirty years, it’s not surprising.”

“So how are we ever gonna have a life if there are people like that?” Clark replied, sighing.

“Well, it’s not people in general you need to convince. It’s Amanda Waller,” Bruce said. “Look, she backed off before. Maybe we just need to give her an incentive to stay away.”

“How? Queen Industries might do a lot of business with the government, but we don’t have any political clout. And we are talking politics.”

“But with all the information Lois has been gathering on them, she has enough to write a very scathing editorial which could prompt an investigation,” Chloe replied. “I mean, if there’s one thing the current administration doesn’t like, it’s a scandal, and it would be a huge scandal, especially when people learn about Checkmate targeting innocent kids. Kidnapping a minor is a very big no-no, no matter who their parents are.”

“I still don’t like it,” Clark grumbled. “My dad never did anything wrong. It isn’t fair,” he repeated.

“I’m afraid people aren’t going to see it that way.”

Clark turned in his chair and stared up at his grandfather.

“Grandpa!” He got up and launched himself at the older man, throwing his arms around him.

General Sam Lane smiled and submitted to the exuberant hug.

“Watch your strength there, son,” he said, as Clark nearly knocked him over.

Bruce looked at the older man.

“I see you got my message. We weren’t expecting you so soon.”

The general nodded. He had clearly been anxious about Clark’s mom and it was unsurprising that he would come to Gotham as soon as he heard the news that she was back.

“I caught the earliest flight I could. Want to catch me up? Where’s Lois?” he asked, looking pointedly around the table.

“Uh, she and Kal are in their room,” Chloe replied, looking a little embarrassed.

The general chuckled knowingly. “Well, I’m sure they’ll be down soon. So, how about Clark tell me what’s been going on.”

Clark nodded and recounted the search for his mother. The general listened quietly, accepting the coffee Alfred brought him. The two Queen children ran in and out while Clark talked, wanting someone to play with. Dick shrugged and went out to join them, if only to keep them out of trouble he told Chloe, who smiled happily and mouthed a thank you.

Once Clark was finished, Bruce and Oliver told the general where things were thus far.
“So you still have nothing to use against Waller?” he asked.

“Not without fear of reprisals.”

“I still think we should just tell her to leave us alone,” Clark said, grumbling.

His grandfather looked at him.

“Clark, I wish it was that easy, but it isn’t. You’re up against a lot of prejudice.”

“But …”

“If I didn’t know your father, I would be thinking the same thing as a lot of people. A man with that much power could be dangerous. If he were anyone else, I would have to follow with the company line that says he would need to be locked up and studied to see how much of a threat he was.”

Clark narrowed his eyes at his grandfather, getting to his feet.

“I knew you didn’t like him. Dad said …” He bit his lip. “Dad said you weren’t happy about him and my mom being together.”

“That isn’t exactly what I said, Clark,” his dad said behind him. He sat down beside the general. “Sorry. We heard you were here.”

“But you did say that, Dad,” Clark argued, his voice rising.

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Lois looked at her son as she joined them at the table, not happy with the way he was yelling and generally being disrespectful to her father.

“Clark, we don’t shout at people.”

“But Mom … He just said …”

“Kal-El,” she said sharply. “You will sit down and listen to what your grandfather has to say. Now calm down!”

Clark looked taken aback. She’d never used his birth name in such a way before. He looked at his father, clearly hoping he would back him up.

“You heard your mother,” Kal said. “Calm down.”

Clark sank down in his chair and glared mutinously. Jonathan and Martha looked a little uncomfortable with his outburst. Lois bit her lip. She felt like she was overstepping her bounds a little, despite the fact she was his real mother. After all, they had raised him.

“I’m sorry,” she began, but Martha shook her head.

“No, sweetie, you have nothing to apologise for. You’re his parents and if he needs to be chastised then it’s appropriate that it comes from you.”

Jonathan nodded, squeezing his wife’s hand. “We’ve always maintained that we’re Clark’s guardians, not his parents. We haven’t minded raising him, because we knew you wanted to keep him safe, but you’re his mother and that’s how we’ve always felt.”
Lois smiled at them, filled with a warmth she couldn’t describe. God, how amazing were these two people who had taken Kal in fifteen years ago and then taken her son in.

Kal squeezed her shoulder and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

“Please, Sam. Continue with what you were saying.”

The general nodded. “I’m only playing devil’s advocate here. The truth is, the government, and the military, has its own precedents for dealing with aliens. I’m not saying I agree with it, but this is an entirely different situation. Frankly, if I had the power, I would have Waller arrested. From what I’ve heard, kidnapping is the least of her criminal activities. However, because she works for a government agency, there are certain lines she can cross.”

“And some she can’t,” Chloe pointed out.

“The problem is getting someone to listen long enough to investigate her activities,” Kal replied.

“That’s why we need to write the story,” Lois told them. “God knows it can help us make enough noise about it that someone will have to listen.”

“That’s if they’ll print it,” her cousin replied. “I mean, don’t get me wrong. Perry White is a damn good editor and I’m sure he’ll try to publish the story, but she could stop it before it goes to print.”

Lois shook her head. If there was one thing she knew about Perry White, he wasn’t about to let anyone stop him from printing an article, no matter how subversive it was, as long as they had the evidence to back it up.

“Speaking of Perry,” she said. “I should really give him a call and let him know I’m okay.”

Chloe nodded. “At least give him a heads up on the story,” she said. She looked at her husband. “Ollie, where are we at on the ship?”

“I called Victor in and asked him to hack in to LexCorp files. We should have something from him tonight, with any luck.”

Kal nodded. “We have to get to the ship before Lex’s scientists find a way to get in.”

“You really think they could?” Lois asked Kal.

“It’s hard to say. If they used Kryptonite, made some kind of cutting tool out of it, it might weaken the metal.”

“That would be bad wouldn’t it Dad?” Clark asked.

“It would be very bad,” he agreed.

“So, what’s the strategy folks?” Lois’ father asked.

“Kal and Lois need to stay here, so do the Kents. At least for now.”

“We’re going to head back to Metropolis in the morning,” Oliver told them. “We can’t pretend we’re on vacation forever and the kids have school.”

“What if Checkmate’s agents come after you?” Lois asked.

“We’ll deal with that. I’ve got every member of the League on stand-by, watching out for any
member of the Suicide Squad.”

Kal looked at the blond. “Before you leave tomorrow, there’s something I want to discuss with you. And you too, Bruce.”

Lois frowned at him, but didn’t ask what that was about. She smiled at her father.

“How long can you stay, Dad?”

He smiled back. “How long do you want me to stay? The brass have been nagging me to retire for months.”

“You can stay as long as you need, General,” Bruce replied.

“Call me Sam,” he said. “I would like to stay a few days, to spend some time with my family.”

Lois hugged her father. “I’ve missed you, Dad.”

“I missed you too, sweetheart. I’ve been worried about you.”

“I know, Dad, but I’m okay. Safe and sound.”

While Clark, clearly as an apology, offered to show his grandfather around the manor and grounds, Lois asked Bruce to show her how to contact her boss without letting him know where she was. He had the technology to scramble the signal so no one could track the location. Lois had made doubly sure that Perry was alone in his office and no one could overhear the conversation. She’d already talked it over with Kal and he’d agreed the editor could hear the whole story, if only to explain his sudden return. She knew she couldn’t explain why Checkmate was after her without explaining the truth to Perry. Her boss was smart enough to know when she was keeping something from him.

Perry broke out into a broad grin when he saw her face on the monitor.

“I knew there was no way Mad Dog Lane would get captured by the Suicide Squad.”

She looked at him in surprise. “You know about that?”

“Hell, I’ve had a couple of visits from one of their agents. The name Rick Flag mean anything to you?”

“Yeah,” she said, nodding. “He’s a cold bastard.”

“Exactly what I thought. Where are you?”

“I can’t tell you that, Chief. All I can tell you is that I’m safe, I’m with friends and family. But I have one hell of a story for you.”

She told him everything. Perry listened without interruptions, sitting back with a stunned look on his face.

“An alien? Wow!”

“You can’t tell anyone, Perry. Not about Kal, and not about our son. I only told you because I trust you.”

“And I appreciate that, honey, but how are you going to write the story if you don’t include them?”
“I have enough on Checkmate without including Kal,” she said. “Ted Grant told me enough. If I can get Carter Hall to corroborate everything, then I don’t need to explain my part in this whole mess. It should be enough to get some kind of investigation rolling on Capitol Hill.”

“You’re right. I’m not sure about Carter though. The man is prickly at best.”

“So am I,” she replied.

“You’re also one hell of a tenacious woman. If you can get this mess sorted out, what next? You going back on the road?”

“Actually, I was kind of hoping I could settle down for a while.”

“I’ll have a seat warmed for you on the eighth floor, kiddo.”

Lois looked up as Bruce and her father came in, staying just out of range of the web cam.

“Listen Perry, I gotta go. But I’ll get that story to you asap.”

“I know you will, honey. Take care of yourself and that man of yours.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow as she signed off.

“You told him about Kal?”

“I trust Perry, Bruce. He’s gone into bat for me so many times.”

Her father nodded. “Perry White is a good man. When Lois first took the job at the Daily Planet I had a look into his background.”

“Daddy!” she said, pretending outrage.

He shrugged and looked unrepentant. “Hell, I just wanted to make sure my little girl was looked after.”

“I didn’t need you to go and investigate my boss,” she scolded.

When she had first gone for the interview, she had done a little research herself. Perry White had been very much an old-school reporter who had been known to push the envelope a little from time to time. He had also been an alcoholic at one point, but a near-death experience a few years before she had met him had given him the wake-up call he’d needed and he’d given up the sauce for good. Since then, he had earned a reputation as a tough but fair editor.

Alfred entered the library.

“Master Bruce, there are two people at the gate, demanding entry. One of them claims to be Amanda Waller.”

Lois’ eyes widened. “How the hell did she …”

“Looks like they might have been tracking me,” her father replied. Bruce just nodded.

“I was expecting this. Lois, go find Kal and the others and go down to the Batcave. You’ll be safe there.”

She nodded and went out, finding Kal and Oliver talking quietly in what she guessed was the room
Bruce often entertained guests when he didn’t want anyone in the library.

“Amanda Waller’s here,” she said.

Oliver looked a little worried, but grabbed the papers he had been checking over.

“Where’s Chloe?” he asked.

“I think she was in the solarium with Martha and Jonathan,” Kal replied. "I’ll go and get them."

It took a couple of minutes to find the children and they ushered them down the hall and through the alternate entrance to the cave. One was in the library, behind the bookshelves. Another was in the grounds of the manor.

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Amanda Waller looked coolly at Bruce Wayne. She had heard the man was something of a playboy, who spent more money in a day than she earned in a month. As far as she was concerned he was nothing but a spoiled rich boy. Which made her curious, wondering what Sam Lane would be doing visiting the man.

Bruce seemed very relaxed for her impromptu visit.

“You’re with whom?” he asked.

“It’s a government agency. Covert operations.”

“Checkmate,” General Lane replied, sending her a glare.

“Like in chess?” Bruce asked.

Waller glanced at her assistant. Stuart Campbell was an expert hacker she had placed within Luthorcorp, ostensibly to report on Lex Luthor’s activities. She was well aware of Luthor’s own ambitions and of his hatred of her, hence the extra eyes and ears in his company.

When it seemed that Luthor was getting too close to Stuart’s real purpose at the corporation, Waller had pulled him out and replaced him with another of her agents. A woman by the name of Tess Mercer. Mercy was highly intelligent, having graduated from Harvard University at only fifteen and as cold as she was beautiful. The added bonus was she was Luthor’s half-sister.

“So, why are you here, Ms Waller?”

“I was about to ask General Lane the same thing. It’s unusual for him to leave Washington. Even more unusual for him to be visiting Gotham’s most notorious playboy.”

Bruce smirked. “Notorious, hmm? It seems I’ve earned quite the reputation.”

“Yes, so it would seem.”

“The answer is very simple, ma’am,” General Lane replied. “The brass have asked me to retire and I was considering my options. I knew Mr Wayne through his company’s work on various projects for the military, so I contacted him to discuss employment.”

“So this has nothing to do with your daughter?

The general frowned. “You are the second person in the last few days to question me about my
daughter. Even if I knew where she was right at this very moment, Ms Waller, I wouldn’t tell you. You have harassed my family enough.”

“Harassment? Mr Lane …”

“General Lane. I haven’t retired yet, Ms Waller.”

“Fine. General. Did you know your daughter was harbouring a dangerous alien?”

“An alien?” Bruce laughed. “Really, Ms Waller, I think you’ve been reading far too much science fiction.”

Waller narrowed her eyes at him. She was sure they were covering up the truth, but they were both clearly very skilled at lying.

“This is not science fiction, Mr Wayne,” she said coolly. “I have proof.”

“And what proof would this be, Ms Waller?” the general returned, just as coolly. “I doubt the proof is anywhere but your imagination. And I would not be so quick to judge when we both know you have people working for you who are far more dangerous.” He glared at her with a look that was glacial in its frostiness. “Or are you forgetting a man named Floyd Lawton, who, from what my own people tell me, was convicted for at least two murders? A man you apparently sent to his death.”

He was a fine one to talk, since he had led several men of his own to their deaths.

“I’m sure you of all people appreciate the sacrifices we must make in a time of war. And we are at war.”

He raised an eyebrow at her. “Are we? Funny, I don’t seem to recall any recent stories about a fleet of ships entering our atmosphere.”

“This isn’t a movie, General.”

“No, this is a complete farce and a waste of my energy. Let me make myself very clear, Ms Waller. If you and your agents continue your campaign of harassment against my family, I will make you very, very sorry.”

Wayne raised a hand and the butler came in.

“Ms Waller, Mr Campbell, I believe you have worn out your welcome,” the old man told her.

“You haven’t heard the last of this, General.”

“Oh, I am sure.”

“Alfred,” Wayne said as they were ushered out the door. “Ms Waller and anyone working for Checkmate are not to be allowed entry to Wayne Manor.”

“Of course sir. Madam,” the butler said, indicating the foyer.

Waller had no choice but to leave, fuming. As they walked along the driveway to the main gate, Stuart fiddled with his glasses.

“There’s a secret passageway behind the bookshelves. I don’t know what it leads to, but I can find out.”
“Do it,” she said.

This wasn’t over, she thought. Not by a long shot.
Break-in

Chapter Summary

Bruce calls on Kal to pretend to be Batman when someone breaks in to the manor.

Metal fragment is similar in composition to that of the meteor rock which landed in Smallville seven months ago.

Lex scratched at his upper lip as he studied the report. The scientist had done a fairly indepth report, including complete molecular work-up of the tiny sliver of metal they had managed to get from the damaged part of the ship. It still wasn’t quite enough for them to have been able to get in to the ship itself, but enough for Lex to have ordered an analysis by his scientists in Metropolis.

He considered the report. If the two elements were similar, it stood to reason they came from the same place. He wondered if the meteor rock might have some effect on the ship.

When they’d first begun studying the rock at the lab in Metropolis, the scientists had discovered that it gave off a low-level radiation. They had figured it wasn’t dangerous, until there had been an explosion in the lab. Two lab assistants had been killed and Lex had lost his hair. Doctors had been unable to come up with a theory as to why it had happened, only that he had had a massive dose of radiation. Too much, apparently, as it had destroyed the hair follicles on every part of his body that hadn’t been protected by the safety equipment he’d been wearing at the time. Unfortunately, the radiation had also made him sterile.

Lex opened the drawer of his desk and took out the small sliver of meteor rock he kept. It looked innocuous, just a sliver of space rock. Who knew that such a small thing could cause so much damage.

He picked up the phone and dialled a number, connecting him to the scientists still working on Level Three.

“Have you had any success?”

The technician sighed. “No, sir. We’ve tried everything.”

“You haven’t tried meteor rock.”

“Meteor rock?” The woman sounded confused. “How would we use it?”

“I’m sure you’ll work it out,” he said. “You are supposed to be one of the most brilliant minds to have come out of Harvard.”

Tess Mercer sighed. “I’ll see what I can do,” she said.

“Good. Do that.”

He hung up, shoving the meteor rock back in the drawer. The sooner they learned all the secrets the ship held, the more he could learn about the mysterious Kal, and the boy, Clark.
He was fairly certain they were in Gotham, staying at Wayne Manor. Stuart had contacted him and told him Waller had gone to see General Lane, clearly fishing for answers. She’d been certain the general had gone to visit his daughter. Of course, they had no proof that Lois Lane was back in the country, but Lex’s contacts had turned up nothing after Ted Grant had somehow vanished from Vietnam.

Lex smirked. Waller thought she had been so clever, placing Stuart Campbell on his staff, and then pulling him out when Lex had got too close. He’d already been on to the hacker long before Waller had recalled the agent.

Thanks to some tech Lex had had developed, Stuart had been able to detect a hidden passage on the visit to Wayne Manor. The glasses had been equipped with a scanning device which then sent readouts to an app on his mobile phone. It wasn’t quite x-ray, since it only worked by scanning for anything electrical.

Lex wanted to get a closer look at the passageway and try to figure out what Bruce was trying to hide. Since he doubted Wayne would welcome his visit, he decided to call on an acquaintance in Gotham. One whose entry into tightly secured premises was their specialty.

He dialled another number.

“It’s Lex,” he said, when the phone was picked up. “I need you to do something for me. I’ll pay you handsomely, of course.”

“How much?” the person on the other end replied.

“I’ll have ten thousand transferred to your account by the end of the day. Another ten thousand when the job is done.”

“Sounds intriguing,” they laughed.

“All you have to do is get into Wayne Manor.”

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Bruce sighed as he surveyed the city from atop Gotham Tower. All seemed quiet, which was unusual for Gotham, but he wasn’t fooled. Ever since the Batman had become more visible, so to speak, many of the criminal factions had taken their work underground. Bruce had to rely more and more on his detective skills as those who were easily intimidated had become more adept at hiding.

All seemed quiet at the manor as well. Dick had reported as he had come down to change for patrol that Oliver and Chloe were sound asleep in their room, their children also asleep in the smaller bedroom down the hall. The Kents and the general had retired even earlier while Clark was still up watching television in his room. Kal and Lois had been awake, judging from the moans Dick heard.

Bruce chuckled to himself. Clearly Kal and Lois were in the ‘honeymoon’ period, but he couldn’t really blame them. He’d always known, the first time he’d met Lois and tried to get her to go on a date with him, that she had never stopped loving Kal, and from the way the Kryptonian looked at Lois, it was mutual. After nearly fifteen years apart, they were clearly making the most of their time, although Bruce imagined the way they were going, Clark would soon have a little brother or sister.

Dick flew across the rooftops and dropped down beside him. Bruce checked him over, but all seemed fine. The former circus acrobat, who had taken the name of Robin when he patrolled, was wearing a leather and spandex outfit, similar to Bruce’s, also with armour plating on the chest. It could be uncomfortable, and definitely hot in summer, but it was better than getting shot in the
chest. That had happened a couple of times when Bruce had been out patrolling.

“Looks pretty quiet out there,” Dick observed.

“Snitches aren’t saying anything either. That usually means the local factions are gearing up for something big.”

“Kinda think we have enough to deal with, what with Waller on our tails.”

“We’ll work out something,” Bruce promised.

His communicator beeped quietly and he glanced at Dick, who frowned beneath his mask, then touched his ear.

“Sir, it appears we have an intruder on the grounds.”

“All right. We’re on our way.”

“Might I suggest you do so with some haste, sir?”

Bruce acknowledged and looked at Dick, who ran to the edge of the tower and jumped off, using the aerodynamic capability of his cape to ease his descent. Bruce followed him, running to the Tumbler, a large armoured vehicle which Dick had dubbed the Batmobile. Dick was already on the Batcycle, heading out of the city.

Knowing it would still take at least twenty minutes to get to the manor from the central city, even at speed, Bruce decided to try an idea. He made sure the signal was scrambled before he used the Batmobile’s communicator and called the manor.

“Hello?” Lois didn’t sound sleepy, but she clearly was trying to pretend she was.

“Lois, it’s Bruce. Put Kal on the phone.”

Kal sounded puzzled as he picked up the phone.

“Kal, I don’t have time to explain, but I need a favour. There is apparently an intruder on the grounds. I’d ask Oliver, but he’s the wrong build.” Oliver had an athlete’s body, rather than a muscular one, but while Kal was slightly taller than Bruce, their builds were more similar.

“What do you need?”

“Go down to the Batcave. I keep a spare costume. Find the intruder and keep them there until I can get there. Whatever you do, don’t let them in the library.”

“Understood.”

Bruce ended the call, thinking about Waller’s visit earlier that day. When the agent had left and the others had come back up from the cave, Kal had told him he had overheard Waller and her assistant talking about a hidden passageway. Bruce had a feeling the intruder had been sent, either by Waller or someone else working for her.

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Kal got out of bed and began putting his boxers on. Lois rolled over, sighing.

“Sorry,” he said, bending to kiss her. “Bruce wouldn’t have asked me if it wasn’t important.”
“I know,” she said. “It’s just …” She pulled at the sheet covering her nakedness.

He smiled at his lover. “I know. We’ve got fifteen years to make up for. But as much as I love you, even I’m not a machine, Lois.”

They’d already made love three times that night and it seemed Lois still wanted more. The woman was insatiable. Kal might have super powers, but even he had his limits.

“Well you better be careful. Whoever they are …”

“Don’t worry, okay. Bruce said to wear his spare Batman costume.”

She frowned. “Huh, that’s kind of funny.”

“What?”

“Well, you and Bruce are physically similar. Except you’re a little taller than he is.”

Kal sat on the bed.

“Is that why he’s the only man you’ve ever let get close?”

“I guess maybe, yeah,” she said, looking down. He gently touched her chin, coaxing her to look up at him.

“I’m not mad that you found Bruce attractive. Jealous, yes, but not mad. I’ve been away a long time.”

“You know you don’t have to be jealous,” she told him.

“I know,” he replied.

He kissed her again, then sped downstairs, through the passageway in the library and down to the cave where he quickly found the Batman suit and put it on. He left the cave, checking the communicator in his ear.

“Alfred?”

“Master Kal,” the old man said, making it clear he understood exactly what was going on. “The intruder is trying to get in through a window on the main wing.”

“Thanks,” he replied. He ran at superspeed, quickly locating the main wing of the manor. Just in time, he thought, as the black suited intruder had managed to open a window to what he supposed was the ballroom. He could see the intruder was female, but chose not to try to see under the mask she wore.

“Something wrong with the doorbell?” he quipped as she stood poised, one leg over the window frame.

She appeared startled, looking around at him, then relaxed.

“Batman. It’s just you.”

Kal looked her over, but didn’t say anything. The suit she wore was skintight, showing a very slender figure. Even thinner than Lois. Kal preferred Lois’ curvier body.
“Aren’t you going to ask me what I’m doing here?”

“Clearly you’re breaking in to the Wayne residence. The question is why.”

She shrugged. “Seemed like a good idea at the time.” She frowned under the mask. “You don’t sound like yourself.”

“It keeps people off guard,” he replied.

“Well, you sure caught me. Thought you were out patrolling tonight. You must have been close by since you got here so fast.”

Kal again chose not to reply. His super hearing alerted him to the sound of the Batmobile entering the caves beneath the grounds of the manor.

He grasped the intruder by the arm and pulled her along the terrace and around to the main door. She struggled to get away, but he refused to let go.

“You been working out, Batman? You sure are strong.”

Alfred was already waiting at the door.

“I have alerted Master Wayne, Batman. I am certain he will be downstairs shortly. In the meantime, perhaps you and the young lady would care to wait inside?”

“I’m not goin’ anywhere with you,” the woman said, still trying to get away.

Kal held her firmly, pushing her inside the house and leading her to the small study Alfred showed them to. He made the woman sit down in one of the armchairs and stood guard at the doorway. He could see her eyeing the window from time to time as they waited for Bruce.

“Don’t even think about it,” he told her.

She glared at him, as much as was possible beneath the leather mask she wore.

“How can you do this? I’m a woman.”

“You’re a thief,” another voice said, sounding tired, almost as if he’d just been woken up. Selina looked up, surprise showing in her expression.

Kal looked at Bruce. He had changed into sweats, but had tousled his hair, clearly trying to make it look like he’d just crawled out of bed.

“Mr Wayne,” Kal said.

“I appreciate your assistance, Batman,” Bruce said, then looked at the woman. “I’m rather surprised at you, Selina. This isn’t your usual m.o.”

“Yeah, well, a job’s a job,” she said with a shrug.

Kal looked at his host, surprised. Bruce looked mildly amused.

“Selina and I are … old friends.”

Selina snorted. “Some friend.”
“I don’t steal from my friends.”

She huffed loudly. “Okay, fine. You caught me. I’m sorry. Can I go now?”

“Perhaps we should wait for the police,” Kal suggested.

“Thanks, but I can take care of it,” Bruce replied. Kal recognised the casual dismissal and left the room, pretending to leave the manor, instead going back down to the cave to strip off the uniform.

Lois was pretending to be asleep when he finally went back to bed. He spooned up against her, his hand on her waist, listening to her breathing.

“Faker,” he said softly in her ear, chuckling.

Lois rolled over, looking up at him.

“What was that all about?”

“Some woman named Selina. Bruce knows her, apparently.”

She frowned. “Hmm, I think I remember something about this. Selina Kyle. She and Bruce go way back. Around the time his parents were killed, I think. She’s also known as Catwoman.”

“Catwoman?”

“Mm, she’s a cat burglar.”

Kal rolled his eyes. Who would have come up with that moniker, he thought.

Lois yawned. Kal pulled her on top of him and she settled with her head on his chest. He gently stroked his lover until she fell asleep. He lay awake, wondering why Selina would have tried to break in to the manor. If she knew Bruce that well, surely she had to know the house was well-secured. Someone must have sent her. That was the only explanation.

Bruce was up when they went down to breakfast the next morning, despite the late night. He was telling Oliver what had happened.

“It’s not like Selina,” he said. He looked up and smiled at Kal. “Thanks again for last night. I didn’t want Selina to catch me coming in as Batman.”

Kal nodded. “I understand. Did she say anything about who sent her?”

Bruce shook his head. “Unfortunately, no. Selina can be stubborn.”

“Do you think she was planning on getting in to the library?” Oliver asked.

“It seems more than likely. Alfred said she was trying the windows on that wing first.”

Kal wondered about that. If Selina was a professional cat burglar, it made no sense for her to try the window, unless she knew something about Bruce’s security. Then again, Bruce had said they knew each other very well. Still, why had she opted for a window? Why not the second floor, or the third floor?

“Don’t you find it rather odd that she let herself get caught so easily?” Kal asked. Lois looked at him, then nodded her agreement.
“Kal’s got a point, Bruce.”

Bruce scratched his upper lip.

“Uhh, yeah, I would imagine she had an ulterior motive.”

“Which would be?” Chloe asked.

Bruce looked a little embarrassed.

“I believe she was hoping I would make a counter-offer.”

“What kind of counter-offer are we talking? More money?”

Dick shot Bruce a look. “Why don’t you just tell them that you and Selina have a ‘history’?”

“What kind of …” Chloe stared at him. “Oh. I see.”

“Selina would see the job as a challenge. She enjoys playing cat and mouse games with me.”

“Does she know that you’re Batman?” Lois asked.

“I think she suspects. Hopefully last night put those suspicions to rest.”

That explained Selina’s look the night before, Kal thought.

Oliver started to get up. “Honey, we need to get our stuff together and get on the road.”

“Uh, Kal wanted to talk to you and Bruce, remember?” Chloe reminded him.

“Oh, yeah.” He looked at Kal. “What did you want to talk about?”

Kal glanced at Lois, who shrugged.

“I’m gonna give Chloe a hand with the kids,” she said. She didn’t seem put out that he wanted to talk to them alone.

Bruce smiled. “We can go to the library,” he suggested.

Kal followed the two men to the library and sat down with them.

“What’s bugging you, Kal?”

“Nothing, really,” he said. “It’s just … I’ve been thinking about my future. I don’t know what I’m going to do with my life but I know I can’t hide forever. Not if I want my life to include my family.”

Bruce looked thoughtful.

“Didn’t you have an Earth identity when you were enrolled at the high school?”

“Yes, but … it’s all very complicated.”

“Because of Clark,” Oliver said.

“Yes. Once we stop Waller for good, Lois and I want to get married. I mean, getting married the Kryptonian way is easily taken care of, but the Earth way …”
“And you both still have your son to consider. I believe his legal name is Jonathan Clark Kent?” Bruce asked.

“It’s going to look odd. Me suddenly being around.”

Oliver shook his head. “Not that odd,” he said. “Trust me on that.”

“The thing is, I don’t want to lose the Kents either. They’ve been more or less his parents since he was only a few weeks old, and they’ve always been more than that to me.”

“Well, the only way I can see this working is by coming up with a whole new identity for you. One that will allow you to be with your family, but also keep the Kents close, is that about it?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Let me think about it, Kal,” Bruce said.

“On that note, what are you planning on doing with your life?”

“Well, on Krypton, I rather enjoyed working with plants. My mother was interested in botany. When I stayed with the Kents before, I liked helping them on the farm.”

“A farmer?” Oliver raised his eyebrow with a questioning look. “Somehow I just don’t see you as a farmer. You could be doing so much more with your powers.”

“Oliver has a point. You’d be wasted just working on the farm.”

Kal looked at both men. “I have to admit, I did like pretending to be Batman for a few minutes, even if it was as a diversion. I hear people sometimes. People in trouble. I do want to help, but …”

“Right now your focus is Checkmate,” Oliver finished. “That’s understandable. But if you ever want to be part of a team, you know where to find me. Of course, that goes double for you, Batman.”

“I’ll join, officially that is, when I feel the time is right.”

“You’ve been saying that for ten years, Bruce. I know you’re not a team player, but don’t you think having an extra hand in Gotham now and then would be useful?”

“I suppose. I’ll think about it.”

Oliver stood up. “I better go find the two little monsters and get moving.”

Kal laughed. Oliver’s two children were good kids, really. Kal had missed out on that stage with Clark, but maybe, just maybe, when he and Lois were married, they could think about having more children.

Lois was in the foyer, chatting to Chloe. They were surrounded by suitcases. She looked up and smiled at him.

“Everything okay?” she asked as he kissed her on the temple.

“Everything’s great,” he said. “Do you want to go for a walk in the garden?”

“Sure. I want to see Chloe and Ollie off first.”

Oliver came in with two giggling children under each arm.
“Say goodbye to Aunt Lois and Uncle Kal,” he told the boy and girl.


Kal laughed as Oliver rolled his eyes in exasperation. The children were instructed to also say their goodbyes to their Uncle Jonathan and Aunt Martha, and Mr Wayne and Alfred, who refused to be called Mr Pennyworth. Chloe followed her family out to the car, laughing at her children’s antics.

“You know they get that from you, Hero,” she said.

“I beg to differ, Sidekick,” Oliver responded.

“Daddy, why do you call Mommy Sidekick?” Laura asked as he strapped her into her car seat.

“Cause Mommy helps Daddy with work,” he told his daughter. “You all set?” he added.

“Where’s Bunny?” she asked.

“Right here, baby,” Chloe said, handing her daughter a stuffed rabbit. She turned to her husband. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

“All right,” he replied. He made sure the back doors on the car were shut properly before he went to the driver’s side. He paused and looked up at them. “Take care of each other.”

“We will,” Lois said, a hand on Kal’s arm.

Oliver smiled at Kal. “I’ll call you once we’ve talked to Carter and Chloe will let you know when she’s found out where they’ve taken your ship.”

“Thanks for everything Oliver.”

They watched until the car left the gates and turned onto the main highway. Lois squeezed his arm.

“You mentioned a walk in the garden?”

He nodded. “Come on.” He took her hand and led her to the huge landscaped garden. This time of the year, the flowers were beginning to lose their blooms, but there were still some perennials to give it much needed colour.

A gazebo had been built in the middle of the pathway. Kal stepped inside. It was cool outside, but not too cold. The sun was out, lending a little warmth to the morning cool.

“Lois …”

“What is it, honey?”

“I know I’ve already said this, but … leaving Earth, and you behind, was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I was so unhappy on Krypton. The only times I felt a glimmer of happiness was when I thought about you. My parents told me a story. You see, on Krypton, marriage was never about love. Most of the time it was a match decided by the Kryptonian council. When my mother’s father, Lor-Van, told her she was to marry someone of high standing, she was devastated. You see, she had met someone long ago; someone who felt the same way she did, that love was worth waiting for. She fell in love with that man.”

“So what happened?”
“Her father told her she had little choice. That it had been decided and she was to meet with her prospective husband the next day. Imagine her surprise when the man she was destined to marry was the man she had fallen in love with as a young girl.

“Jor-El and Lara loved each other deeply and they were happy for many years, Lois. The one thing that could have increased their happiness was children, but with each passing year without one they began to lose hope. Then one day, Lara’s wish came true.”

“You?”

“Me,” he smiled. “But they never dared flaunt their happiness, knowing the council frowned on such a thing. I never knew how they felt about each other, until the day they realised that I too had found my one true love.”

“Me?” she said.

“You.”

“They risked everything, didn’t they? To send you back.”

He nodded. “They knew Krypton was dying but they couldn’t watch me die with it.”

“They sound like amazing people, Clark,” she said with a sigh.

“One day I’ll take you to meet them.”

She frowned. “How? I mean …”

“It’ll just be a hologram, but I’d like you to see them. When I find the ship, there will be a crystal which I can use to build a fortress.” He lightly stroked her hand. “There’s one other thing I’d like to do when we visit the fortress Lois. I want to marry you. The Kryptonian way.”

She sucked in a breath.

“Kal …”

“I know it’s not the Earth way, but I asked Bruce and Oliver to help me figure out a way to do it legally. In the meantime, we can still join together in a lifebond.”

She flung her arms around his neck. “Oh Kal. Of course I will. I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said.
Lex's scientists try to open the ship, triggering the defence mechanism

It had turned cold outside. The one disadvantage of these old manors, Lois thought, squinting at the moisture on the windows, was they were a bitch to heat. She snuggled under the blankets, curling close to Kal, who sleepily wrapped his arm around her and snuffled.

“Mm, please don’t tell me we have to get up,” she sighed.

“We don’t have to get up,” he said.

She wrinkled her nose. “I wish.”

Kal grumbled. “I’d stay like this forever if I could.”

“You and me both,” she murmured. She peeked out from beneath the blankets. It looked like it was raining out. Another reason to stay in bed, she thought.

There was the sound of footsteps in the hallway. They couldn’t be quiet footsteps. No, these were giant thuds on the parquet floor.

“Mom, Dad …”

Lois rolled her eyes. Of course. Only a teenager would make as much noise as humanly possible.

“I know you guys are awake,” Clark called out. “Uncle Bruce wants to see you in the library after breakfast.”

The footsteps moved away, sounding like Clark was going back along the hallway, rather than going downstairs.

Lois frowned at her boy … no, fiancé. Okay, so he hadn’t actually given her a ring, but who cared? They were going to get married. No ifs, ands or buts about it. She didn’t care if it was the Kryptonian way or the Earth way. They were committed.

“When did he become ‘Uncle Bruce’?” she asked.

Kal shrugged and yawned. “ Beats me.” He sighed. “Guess we better get up.”

He shoved back the blankets and rolled over, getting up on his side of the bed. Lois shivered.

“Nooo, it’s cold. Come back to bed and snuggle.”

He grinned, taking her hand, half-pulling her out of bed. She knelt on the mattress, wrapping her arms around him, giving him an open-mouthed kiss.

“Good morning, gorgeous,” he said.
“That’s you,” she replied.

He shook his head and kissed her nose. “Nope. Definitely you. Even with your bed hair.”

“I do not have bed hair,” she said, putting a hand up to check her hair. It was frizzy. “Oh damn it.”

He grinned. “That’s okay. I think it’s cute.”

“You think everything about me is cute,” she told him, her hands on his delectable naked ass. She squeezed the cheeks, making him laugh.

“I cannot tell a lie,” he said.

“What else do you think about me?” she asked.

He caressed her body. “Mm, I love your sexy ass. You put on a couple of pounds there, right here,” he said, his hand squeezing her butt cheek just a little. “Just enough for me to get a good squeeze.”

“You guys stop getting mushy and get dressed already,” Clark whined from outside the door, making it clear he was still waiting for them.

“Go downstairs then, brat!” Lois called. She heard the thumping footsteps going down the stairs, which indicated he had done what he was told. She kissed Kal again and got off the bed, grabbing the freshly laundered top and jeans from the closet. She’d gone shopping with Chloe the day after Kal had brought her to Gotham and Alfred had kindly laundered everything she’d bought so it was fresh and clean. “And you want to have more of him?”

Kal snorted. “It’s not like we’re making out in front of him. If the kid’s that traumatised by his parents showing affection for each other what’s he gonna be like when he’s eighteen and old enough to be dating?”

“He’s old enough to be dating now,” Lois replied, pulling up the jeans and buttoning them. “I mean, just because you didn’t date until you were eighteen …”

“Now who said I didn’t date?” Kal asked, pulling up his own jeans, which Lois had also bought him. “It’s just we have different ideas of dating on Krypton. There weren’t any malls or bowling alleys.”

Lois looked at him, canting her head.

“So these Kryptonian girls, are they, um, I mean, were they, uh, attractive?”

“Beautiful, actually,” Kal admitted. “At least, on the outside. Most of them were shallow though. The only thing they really cared about was that I was descended from the ruling family.”


“I guess. We didn’t have a king or queen like they do in some places here, and we hadn’t had anything like that for about a thousand years. Those who were descended from the ruling family were automatically given a seat on the Kryptonian council, which was sort of like the government. They ruled by majority though.”

“So, in Earth terms, you’d be like a prince?” she asked.

“Maybe,” he said. “Anyway, the point is, none of the girls I ‘dated’ on Krypton could ever hope to match up to you.”
She wrapped her arms around his neck. “Mm, good answer.”

He nuzzled her cheek. “I mean it, Lo. I knew from the moment I met you there was something very special about you. I mean, don’t get me wrong. You could be overwhelming at first. You talked a lot and you could be loud and bossy …”

She wrinkled her nose at him. “I knew you thought I was bossy.”

He seemed to ignore that. “But deep down, I saw a girl who was sweet and funny and passionate and who would never hesitate to help someone in trouble. I saw someone who had strong moral convictions and didn’t care what anyone else said about her. She knew who she was and wasn’t going to let anyone else tell her otherwise.”

Her heart swelled with love for this man who seemed to have been able to see right through into her soul. That was why they were so perfect for each other, she thought.

They finished dressing and went downstairs, holding hands. Martha and Jonathan were at the table, as was Lois’ father. The older adults grinned when they saw their hands joined. Bruce looked at them but didn’t comment. Clark pretended to look annoyed, but Lois caught the little grin.

“Good morning,” she said.

“Good morning sweetheart,” her father replied.

They took their seats at the table. Alfred smiled at them.

“Good morning Miss Lane, Master Kal. There are pancakes if you would like.”

Lois smiled at the older man.

“Pancakes sound great, Alfred. Thank you.”

Dick came in, yawning. “‘Morning,” he mumbled. Alfred looked at him over the rims of the spectacles he wore.

“Master Dick, you are late. You have school.”

“I don’t wanna go to school,” the sixteen-year-old whined.

“Sorry, but you have to go whether you want to or not,” Bruce told him. “Or do you want me to get in trouble with Child Services?”

Dick made a face. “I’m not a child.”

“But in the eyes of the law you’re still considered a minor and while you’re still young enough to be considered under my guardianship you have to do what I tell you.”

The teen looked mutinous, but sighed.

“What about Clark? He’s missing school.”

“There’s a perfectly good reason for that,” Bruce replied. “But he’s not missing out on an education either. He’s at least doing some studying.”

“Bruce is right,” Martha said. “It’s important to get an education.”
Dick shrugged but began scoffing down his breakfast. Even Kal raised an eyebrow at how quickly the boy was eating.

“Easy,” he cautioned. “You don’t want to give yourself indigestion.”

The teen shrugged again and continued eating as if he was afraid someone might take it away. He was done within a few minutes, leaving a mess on the table as he rose, running out toward the foyer. They heard the banging of the front door.

Kal looked at Clark, who sent his father an innocent look, then carried on eating.

Bruce looked at them and nodded his head toward the library. Lois wiped her mouth with the napkin and got to her feet. Kal followed. Her father looked at her questioningly as she passed him, but sipped his coffee without a murmur.

Bruce closed the door to the library.

“Victor managed to get into LeXCorp files,” he said. “It’s not good. He found the ship at the old Luthorcorp plant in Smallville. They have a secret testing facility on Level Three of the plant. According to the log Victor found, the techs are planning on using Kryptonite to try to open the ship.”

“When is this supposed to happen?” Kal asked.

“They’re testing it today. They apparently figured out a way to modify a laser cutter.”

“That’s not good, honey,” Lois said, touching Kal’s arm. He shook his head.

“I know. What’s the plan?”

Bruce nodded. “Oliver’s planning on raiding the facility. Unfortunately, it looks like we’re running out of time. If your ship has the failsafe device you’re talking about, any attempt to break in to the ship will activate it. We can’t wait until tonight.”

Lois bit her lip. Bruce was right. Then again, raiding the facility in broad daylight wasn’t exactly the safe option either.

“I don’t think I can go as Batman,” Kal said. Lois shook her head at him.

“You can’t go as yourself either. You don’t want to take the chance of them seeing you.”

“I can move pretty fast,” he told her. That was true, she thought. Kal could move faster than most people could blink.

Bruce shook his head. “I don’t think that’s wise,” he replied. “Given the amount of security in the plant, not to mention the technology Luthor has, the security feed could still pick you up.”

While Bruce did make a good point, she knew she had to trust that Kal knew what he was doing.

Lois frowned. “I don’t know, Bruce. I mean, even if they did manage to slow the frames down to an nth degree, the picture still won’t be clear.”

“I don’t want to take any chances,” he said.

“I’m not wearing a mask,” Kal said stubbornly.
“Kal, don’t be an idiot. If Luthor figures out …”

Kal glared at Bruce. “Why are we standing here arguing when they could be breaking into the ship as we speak? I don’t have time for this. You know what will happen if that device activates. I don’t think even you would like to see Smallville go sky-high.”

Lois looked at Bruce.

“He has a point.” She turned to him. “Go, but please, please be careful.”

He kissed her quickly and was gone with a whoosh. Lois sighed as she looked at Bruce, who appeared annoyed.

“Look, I know you don’t like it, but there’s no other choice. You heard him. There are forty thousand people in Smallville.”

“I get that, Lois, but how is he going to protect his family if he lets himself be seen doing whatever it is he does?”

Lois patted her friend’s shoulder.

“You need to trust him, okay?”

“If Luthor catches him …”

“If Ollie’s with him, he can help him.” Lois looked pleadingly at Bruce. “You’re saying you don’t trust him to know what he’s doing.”

“Lois, I’ve been doing this a long time. There’s a reason why I chose to wear a mask.”

“Yeah, so you can scare the bejeebers out of people. Kal doesn’t need a mask to do that. It’s like Dad was saying the other day. They’d be more scared of the fact that here’s a guy who can light fires with his eyes.”

“That’s what I’m worried about, Lois. If Luthor’s people see him doing it, and if they have Kryptonite … Plus he just went off half-cocked. I don’t think he’s going to wait for Oliver.”

She bit her lip. If Kal was vulnerable to Kryptonite, and broke in to the facility without protecting himself somehow, or without waiting for Oliver …

“Call Ollie. Now!” she instructed.

Bruce nodded and accessed the network, dialling the communications for Watchtower. Chloe picked up the call, frowning at them. From what Lois saw on the screen, she didn’t think her cousin was physically in Watchtower. It looked like she was working remotely.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“Where’s Ollie?” Lois asked her cousin.

“He’s on his way to the plant. He figured he couldn’t wait until something bad happened with the ship, so he left about thirty minutes ago.”

“Kal’s probably there right now,” Lois told her. “You need to warn Ollie and the others.”

“I would imagine he already knows Kal’s there.”
“Chloe, you’re not listening. The scientists have Kryptonite. Kal’s vulnerable to it. If he goes in …”

“Is Dad in trouble?”

Lois turned and looked at her son. “Clark, honey.”

“Is he?” the teen asked.

“Well, I would hope your dad is being careful,” Chloe replied from the screen, before disappearing for a moment, presumably to warn Oliver of Kal’s presence.

“Maybe I should go and help,” Clark said.

“No,” Lois told him. “You’re vulnerable to Kryptonite as well.”

“But, Mom, I can help.”

“Uncle Ollie is already there,” Chloe said, reappearing on the screen to reassure her nephew. “I just told him to watch out for Kal.”

Clark had adopted a stubborn expression. “So not fair. I don’t get to do anything.”

“You need to listen to your mom and your aunt, Clark,” Bruce advised kindly. “If things go bad at the plant, then the last thing your dad would want is for you to get in trouble as well.”

Lois wrapped an arm around her son’s shoulders. He was almost six foot, or at least three inches taller than her.

“Honey, I know it’s hard for you, thinking you’re missing out on something, but Bruce is right. I would hate for anything to happen to you.”

“I can be careful, Mom,” he told her.

“So can your dad, but that doesn’t stop me worrying about him either,” she said. She squeezed his shoulders. “Come on, how about you and I go team up against your Grandpa and Jonathan for a game of basketball.”

“Mom, you don’t even know how to play basketball,” he said, snickering.

“I can learn,” she said, trying to silently convey that she needed the distraction so she wouldn’t sit there chewing her nails worrying about her husband-to-be. Clark got the message.

“Okay, Mom,” he said. Lois glanced at Bruce, who nodded, clearly understanding as well, and walked out of the room with her son.

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Tess Mercer stood on the catwalk above the ship, watching as one of the techs used the laser cutter. They’d managed to adapt it using the meteor rock. If Lex was right about the metal’s vulnerability to the rock, this should be easy enough.

There were days when she didn’t know whose side she was on. She didn’t like Lex. It wasn’t just the fact that he treated her like crap. He treated every one of his employees like that. However, Tess wasn’t just an employee, not that Lex had ever acknowledged the fact she was his half-sister.

She’d found it out when she’d hacked into Checkmate’s files, wanting to know why Waller had
been so keen to recruit her. She trusted Waller as much as she trusted Lex, which was very little.

She’d accepted the assignment, only so she could learn Waller’s purpose for recruiting her. She was sure it had something to do with the fact Lex was working for her as well. Waller had needed a spy in LeXCorp and Tess’ connection to the Luthors seemed to give her the perfect opportunity. Tess knew she was being used, by both the woman known as the White Queen, and by her half-brother, but so far she hadn’t found a way out.

Still, she had a job to do and she was going to do it, even if she hated it. One day, she thought. One day she was going to get out of here. Get as far away from her psycho brother and Waller as possible.

Distracted by her thoughts, Tess hadn’t noticed anything was wrong until she saw the other techs scrambling in a panic. She stared down at the floor, wondering what was going on.

“What is it?” she called, but the question turned out to be unnecessary.

The ship, or whatever it was, had suddenly activated, lifting a couple of feet into the air. As she continued to watch, it was as if a shield had formed around the craft. It appeared it had some kind of defence mechanism. A light emanated from the interior, slowly brightening.

Tess ran to the stairs and started making her way down to the ship. Just as she reached the bottom, she heard what sounded like an exterior alarm. She was used to fire drills, which Lex instructed the security team to hold once a month, but this was different. This was like someone had broken in to the facility.

An arrow embedded itself in the concrete wall, making her look up in alarm. Green Arrow, she thought.

Meanwhile the techs on the floor were still running around, trying to figure out how to stop whatever was happening with the ship. As she moved closer, she clapped her hands over her ears. While she couldn’t hear anything, she could feel something reverberating against her ear drums, like an ultrasonic frequency.

Her eyes watering, she turned, trying to locate the source of the sound, or whatever it was, but could barely see. Something blurred past her toward the ship.

Lex’s security team entered and began firing on Green Arrow and the other two with him. One looked to be a woman with long blonde hair, wearing what seemed to be a mask over her eyes, making her difficult to identify. Her costume appeared to be a leather tunic with fishnet stockings. She clearly had learned martial arts as she performed some kind of somersault.

The third person was a dark-skinned man, wearing a silver tunic. The three managed to avoid the shots and rushed the security team who were forced to drop their weapons and engage them in hand-to-hand fighting.

Tess stood, paralysed by indecision. If she managed to somehow get the information Waller needed, she might earn a promotion within Checkmate. Or if she gave that information to Lex … Yet deep down she was a good person who had had a few bad breaks in life. She knew the right thing to do and it wasn’t helping either of them.

Her eyes had stopped watering enough for her to see what was going on. There was someone at the ship, clearly trying to shut it down. She bit her lip, glancing at Green Arrow and his friends but they were occupied with the security team.
She approached cautiously, glancing up, but it seemed the surveillance cameras had been shut down. Good, she thought.

“Is there something I can do?” she asked the man at the ship.

He looked up, frowning at her.

“Unless you know how to stop a nuclear explosion, no.”

She stared at him, eyes wide. “Did you say nuclear?”

He didn’t reply, moving around to the other side of the ship.

“You people,” he was grumbling to himself. “Messing with things that don’t concern you.”

He continued to work, pulling out what appeared to be pieces of crystal and metal of various shapes. Tess watched him, unsure what to do.

The next thing she knew, the man cried out in pain, staggering. Tess looked up, staring at her half-brother. He must have been upstairs in the plant, she thought. He was holding a large chunk of meteor rock.

The man fell, his face pale. He looked sick. Tess stood helplessly by as Lex approached him. She doubted whether he had seen the man’s face yet. She couldn’t let that happen, she decided.

Spotting a gun on the floor where one of the guards must have dropped it, she picked it up, aiming it at her brother.

“Drop it, Lex,” she said. “Drop it and back away.”

He stared at her, clearly wondering if she had lost her mind to turn on him this way. He still had the rock in his hand. Suddenly an arrow flew through the air, hitting him in the shoulder, forcing him to drop the rock. The other two with Green Arrow grabbed Lex and shoved him back. Tess grabbed the rock and threw it across the room.

Suddenly the ship emanated a high-pitched scream. Everyone covered their ears, their faces screwed up in pain. All except the strange man. Tess stared at him as he got to his feet and once more began working on the ship which was now shuddering.

“It’s going to blow,” she cried out.

The man looked at her, then at Green Arrow.

“Get everyone clear,” he told her. “I’ll try to contain the blast.”

Green Arrow looked worried.

“You going to be able to stop it?” he asked, his voice disguised.

“I’ll do what I can,” the man said. “Get everybody out of here,” he repeated.

Tess hesitated, still hoping she might be able to do something to help. Green Arrow grabbed her arm.

“You heard him. Get everybody out of the building.”

Tess turned to the security team, even knowing it couldn’t do much good.
“Get everyone out.” She looked at the man who was still frantically trying to shut down the ship. “How long?”

“Minutes. Go!” he yelled.

Tess followed Green Arrow up the stairs and watched as the security team evacuated all personnel. The sound of the ship could be heard even as she ran toward the emergency exit. As she reached the evacuation area, her arm was grabbed. Lex.

“Come with me.”

She shook him off. “I’m not going anywhere with you,” she snapped.

He glared at her. “Yes, you are.” He reached for her again. Tess saw the furious look in his eyes and knew if she went with him she might not make it back alive. She shot Green Arrow a pleading look and he nodded to his two friends, who quickly moved in between them.

“Move away from the lady, Luthor,” Green Arrow growled.

“She’s my employee . . .” Lex began. Tess glared at him.

“Not anymore,” she told him. “Consider that my resignation.”

She let herself be led away by the blonde woman, glancing back anxiously at the facility.

“Is he going to be able to stop the explosion?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” the blonde said. “That was pretty brave.”

Tess shrugged. “Not really.”

“No, I mean it.”

“Lex was using me, but then I shouldn’t be surprised. He uses everyone.”

The other woman frowned. “Seemed like it was more than that, the way he was looking at you.”

“Yeah, I guess he gets like that when he’s betrayed by his family.”

“Family?”

She nodded. “He’s my half-brother, only he’s never actually acknowledged my existence.”

The woman looked at her with sympathy.

“Well, you’re away from him now,” she said.

Tess nodded again. For the first time in the five years she’d been working for LeXCorp, she finally felt free.

“I’m Tess,” she said.

“Dinah.”

She continued to watch the building, not sure what was going on. The high-pitched sound had stopped, but there had been no explosion. At least five minutes had passed. Even Green Arrow was looking nervous.
“It’s safe now,” a deep voice said.

Tess whirled, relieved to see the man from the ship was okay. A little dishevelled, perhaps, and a few rips in his clothing, but alive.

“The ship?” Green Arrow asked.

“Gone.”

“So there was an explosion?” Tess asked, confused.

“I contained it.”

“How …” she began, then mentally kicked herself. Of course. He had been the ship’s occupant. Which meant he was …

Green Arrow spoke to a man whom Tess recognised as the security chief. The exchange was brief, before the other man told the staff they were allowed back in. Presumably they would think it was another drill, never really knowing how close they had come to disaster.

Dinah guided her away from the plant, following Green Arrow and the other man, whom Dinah told her was named Cyborg. She laughed when Tess shot her a puzzled look.

“It’s a long story,” she said. “But let’s just say that you’re not the only one your brother has used in the past.”

Tess nodded. She was beginning to find that out.

She followed Dinah to an SUV and got in beside Cyborg, wondering why the other man hadn’t joined them. Green Arrow got in the driver’s seat and looked around at her. He made no comment but she guessed he was trying to figure out her true allegiance. How could she tell him that up until thirty minutes ago she had believed she had no choice but to do as her brother ordered?

He turned back to the front and started the vehicle. Tess sat quietly, not asking questions. She had no idea who these people really were, other than the fact they were with the Justice League, and she wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

She sat back, half closing her eyes and sighing. Part of her couldn’t believe what she had done, but another part of her knew she’d done the right thing.

The SUV pulled up outside what appeared to be an old movie theatre a short time later. Tess got out and followed the others inside, staring in surprise as the man from the ship greeted them, along with a blonde she recognised as a well-known reporter and the wife of Oliver Queen.

“Hello Ms Mercer,” a voice said behind her.

Tess looked around and stared at the brunette. The former Mrs Lana Luthor.

“Mrs Luthor,” she said.

The woman made a face. “I prefer my maiden name,” she said.

Tess felt herself growing hot. “I’m sorry.”

Lana shrugged, giving her a wary look.
“Tell me, what were you hoping to gain from your little act today?” she asked coolly.

“Lana, she was trying to help,” the man from the ship told her.

“She’s Lex’s half-sister, Kal,” Lana told him.

Tess stared at her. “How did you know that?”

The brunette snorted. “Please, I was married to the man for a little over a year. He might have thought I was stupid enough to keep falling for his tricks, but I did learn a few things.”

Tess bristled. “At least with you he pretended to care when all he’s ever done is use me.”

“You got that right,” Chloe Sullivan-Queen replied. “But he’s not the only one, is he?”

Tess shook her head. “Checkmate.”

Chloe looked at Green Arrow. “You shouldn’t have brought her here.”

“She’s not lo-jacked,” Kal told Chloe. “I checked.”

Tess stared at him. “What? I don’t understand any of this.”

Lana nodded. “That’s Lex’s m.o. all right. Give his techs the most basic of information to do their jobs and keep their true purpose from them.” She looked at the others. “She can’t go back. Lex will kill her.”

Kal nodded, then looked at Tess. “She’s right.”

“I have no intention of going back to work for Lex anyway,” Tess assured him. “The further away I can get from him, the better. And Checkmate. I know why they recruited me. I’m just a pawn in Amanda Waller’s eternal chess game with Lex. She thought by recruiting me she could use me against Lex, but it turns out he doesn’t give a damn.”

“You’re better off,” Kal agreed kindly. “But we need your help. We need everything you know about Checkmate, and about Lex’s activities. Will you share that with us?”

She nodded. “Yes, on one condition.” She glanced at Green Arrow. As much as she didn’t want to know who he was, she already had an idea. Why else would Chloe be here, she thought. “Help me start over. I’ve got enough money saved up that it will last me a while, but I don’t have the resources to create a new identity for myself. I’m assuming you do.”

Green Arrow nodded. “We accept your terms.”

Lana smiled. “I don’t know about you, but I think we could all use a coffee.” She looked at Kal. “And you better call your better half before she decides to call out the marines.”

Kal swallowed visibly. Tess almost laughed at him. No doubt whoever Lana was referring to was going to be pretty upset when she learned the risk he’d taken today.
“Boy are you in big trouble,” Clark chuckled as he greeted his father. Kal grimaced.

“Let me guess. Your aunt Chloe told her.”

“Yup.”

“Is she mad?”

“Define mad. You know how Grandpa told that story about the Cuban missile crisis and how the military went on full alert?”

Kal nodded. “He said they almost went to defcon 1.”

“Yeah, what’s above one, Dad?”

He winced. That meant she was pretty upset. He patted his son’s shoulder.

“Okay, I’m going in,” he said. “If I’m not back in say thirty minutes …”

“Don’t worry. I’ll tell the others to take cover from the megaton explosion.”

Clark was clearly getting a big kick out of the situation, but Kal felt like he was walking to his doom as he went out into the garden and walked over to the gazebo where Lois was sitting, gazing out over the property.

He stepped up underneath the shelter. Lois still hadn’t turned her head to look at him.

“Uh, Lois?” Still no response. “Honey?”

He moved to sit beside her and she turned her head slightly.

“Don’t even think about it,” she said.

“Think about what?” he asked.

“Don’t pretend you don’t know what I’m talking about, Kal-El.” She turned to look at him, her gaze direct. Her eyes were blazing with fury. “A nuclear explosion! I could forgive you going off half-cocked and almost getting yourself caught, but you could have been killed!”

“Lo, I know you’re mad,” he began.

“Mad doesn’t even begin to cover it. It’s a good thing Chloe waited until it was over or else I would have had a goddamn heart attack! And don’t think the puppy dog eyes are going to work, mister. Do you know what it would have done to me if you hadn’t survived that explosion?”
It had been a danger, but Kal had gambled that his powers would have protected him.

“I know,” he said, “and I’m sorry. Lois, I took a risk that I could contain the blast and my powers would withstand it. Honey, please don’t be upset. I’m fine. And now that the ship is gone, there’s nothing for Lex or Checkmate to prove.”

Lois frowned, looking confused.

“What do you mean, the ship’s gone?”

How was he supposed to explain Kryptonian technology to her? The ship’s defence systems had activated when they’d used the Kryptonite on the laser cutter to open the hatch. Knowing he needed to stop the imminent explosion, he’d flown above the ship and used his body as a shield against the blast of energy, the ship had imploded, as it had been designed to do, leaving only a crystal behind.

The crystal was the heart of the craft, and what he would use to create the fortress where he could access the vast library of knowledge of Krypton. His father had created this failsafe himself, fearing the ship might fall into the wrong hands once it landed on Earth.

“It’s difficult to explain, but it’s part of the failsafe my father built in.” He took the crystal from his pocket. It was blue and shaped a little like a diamond, the same shape the ship had been. “This is all that’s left.”

Lois frowned, reaching uncertainly to touch it. “It’s so small.”

He nodded. “But it contains a library of Kryptonian knowledge. Tomorrow I’m going to take this north, to the northernmost reaches of the planet.”

“The North Pole?” she asked.

“I need the energy of Earth’s magnetic field but it must be placed at a central point.”

She chewed on her bottom lip. “Okay, but I’m still mad at you.”

“I know, honey, but I’m fine. See?” he added, touching the shirt. “Not a scratch on me.”

She pulled at the shirt, looking at the scorch marks and the torn fabric.

“Not on you, maybe, but that shirt,” she sighed. “Oh well, I guess this way I have an excuse to get rid of those flannel shirts you like so much.”

“What’s wrong with flannel?” he asked, looking down at the red flannel shirt he was wearing.

She glowered at him. “Did you forget the little shopping trip on your second day on this planet?” she asked.

He grinned at her. “Nope. I remember that trip. You tried to veto everything I liked. I still won though.”

She huffed. “Yeah, you can be smug, Kal-El. One of these days I’m gonna burn those shirts and you can forget trying the puppy dog eyes thing. It won’t work on me.”

“I bet I could still getcha,” he said with a grin.

“Wanna bet?” she asked. She poked him in the chest. “You, Smallville, are trouble.”
“Who? Me?” He grinned and wrapped his arms around her, relieved she was calling him ‘Smallville’. “Are we okay?”

She pretended to ponder the question for a few moments, then nodded.

“Yeah, just don’t ever scare me like that again.”

They sat in silence for a while. Kal thought about what had happened. He had been surprised when Tess had asked if she could help, but he understood now why she had offered to do so. She seemed to be a good person who had learnt she was being used.

Lana had been sceptical at first, but then she knew just how much Lex could manipulate people. Kal had been surprised when Chloe had told him Lana had been married to Lex. He’d worried that Lana had done it to pass on information to the Justice League, but she had actually married him because she thought he had cared about her. It was only after she discovered that he was using her that she had decided to help the Justice League.

Even though she and Lex were now divorced, she pretended to be on civil terms with him, if only to keep an eye on his activities. Chloe had warned the brunette what would happen if Lex found out what she was up to, but she was prepared to take the risk.

Lois sighed softly.

“So, what’s this about Lex’s half-sister?” she asked.

“Tess. She offered to help me in the facility, not that it would have done much good. She’s at Watchtower now, being debriefed by Oliver and Chloe.”

His fiancée frowned.

“Did it never occur to you that this might be a trick? I mean, how do you know she hasn’t pretended to come over to our side so she can take what she’s learned back to Lex? Or Waller?”

“You didn’t see the way Lex looked at her. If he could have killed her, he would have.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. I mean, from what I know about Lex, he knows how to put on a good act.”

Kal nodded. “That is true,” he conceded. “The few months we were friends, he was investigating me. But I heard Tess’ heartbeat. She was genuinely afraid of him.”

“Or afraid her ruse might be discovered.” Kal shot her a look and she raised her hands. “Okay, okay, I get it, I’m a cynic. But so would you be if you’d been chased by the likes of Amanda Waller and her cronies for the better part of fourteen years.”

Kal could understand that, but instinct told him that Tess was telling the truth. She wanted to help.

He heard footsteps approaching and looked up, frowning at Bruce, who looked worried.

“What is it?”

“Dick isn’t home from school yet,” he said. “The kid can handle himself, but … I tried his phone but he’s not answering.”

“Given what’s been going on lately, you’re worried,” Lois replied. “Have you called any of his friends?”
Bruce shrugged. “I don’t really know who his friends are.”

Kal glanced at Lois, then stood up, walking with Bruce back to the house.

“Maybe Clark knows,” he suggested.

They found the teenager playing a game in the entertainment room.

“Clark?”

He looked around. “Yeah Dad?” He paused the game and stood up.

“Would you know if Dick was planning on going anywhere after school?” he asked.

Clark shook his head. “Far as I know, Dick was coming straight home. Why?”

“Would you happen to know any of his friends?”

“Yeah,” the boy nodded. “He hangs out with this girl Cassie, and his girlfriend Kory.”

“Where can we find Kory?” Bruce asked.

Clark shrugged. “Um, I dunno. I just know she goes to the girls’ prep school.”

Bruce looked at them. Kal bit his lip.

“Look, let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Perhaps he decided to spend some time with his girlfriend.”

“Then why isn’t he answering his phone?” Bruce asked. “He knows he’s not to go anywhere without telling me.”

Kal sighed. That was true, especially given that Checkmate had already been to the manor.

“Well, why don’t we see what we can find out about this girl?” Lois asked.

Bruce nodded. They followed him down to the Batcave. Kal watched as Bruce accessed the school’s records. He glanced at them.

“This is, uh, not exactly legal,” he said.

“Doesn’t matter,” Lois replied.

Kal read an address from the school records.

“She lives with her guardians in East Gotham.”

Bruce stood up. “I’ll go talk to her.”

“As Batman, you mean?” Lois said as he started toward the cabinet where he held his Batman costume. “You want to talk to her or interrogate her?”

Bruce flushed. “Well what would you suggest?”

“Kal and I can go talk to her.”

He frowned. “Now I thought we agreed you were to stay here where it’s safe. If Checkmate …”
“Look, we’re making assumptions,” Kal pointed out. “We don’t know what’s happened until we talk to Kory.” He didn’t want to be an alarmist, but it wasn’t like Dick to just disappear without a word to anyone, but the last thing they needed was for Bruce to start panicking. He was clearly worried what Child Services might think if Dick failed to show.

Lois was clearly feeling a little cabin fever and Kal thought it might do her some good to actually be able to get out and do a little digging herself. As she had told him a couple of times, she was through running from the likes of Waller.

Kal flew with her to East Gotham, landing a short distance from the brownstone where Kory lived with the couple who had taken her in. From the little they had learned about Kory, she was an orphan, her parents having died when she was a toddler.

Kal took Lois’ hand, squeezing it gently. They walked together to the house. Lois rapped on the door.

A woman in her fifties frowned at them.

“Yes? Can I help you?”

“My name’s Lois Lane,” she said, showing her press badge. “I’d like to speak to Kory, if she’s home. It’s about a friend of hers.”

The woman smiled. “Oh, yes, of course.” She turned her head. “Kory?” she called.

About a minute later a girl aged about seventeen stepped out. She had red hair that reminded Kal of an Earth sunset, framing a young but extremely pretty face.

“Hi,” she said. “Is there something I can do for you?”

“We’re friends of Dick’s guardian,” Lois told the girl. “Have you seen Dick at all today?”

Kory bit her lip. “Uh, yeah, we had coffee after school, but he was supposed to be headed straight home.” She gave them the location of the coffee shop, which was about a block away from the prep school Dick attended.

“He’s not there. How long ago did he leave?”

“Um, a couple of hours ago. Is he in trouble?”

“We don’t know yet,” Kal replied. Kory looked at him, her brow furrowed with worry lines.

“Uh … I don’t know if this is anything, but there was a guy outside Dick’s school today. I overheard him asking questions about Dick.”

“What did this guy look like?” Lois asked.

“Well, he had really short, grey hair and a scar down one side of his face.”

Lois’ eyes widened as she turned to look at Kal. ‘Flag’, she mouthed.

“Thanks Kory,” he said.

They flew back to the manor. Bruce accessed the city surveillance and searched through the footage until he found an image of Dick outside the coffee shop two hours earlier. As they watched, a man with grey hair approached him and began talking with him. It seemed fairly clear he was trying to get
Dick to go with him. The teen had fought, but had been quickly overpowered by the stronger Flag.

Dick was shoved into a car. Bruce noted the licence plate and contacted the police commissioner who promised to put out an alert.

Kal bit his lip. “I should go out looking for the car,” he said.

“It could be anywhere in the city by now,” Lois told him.

“I know, but I have to do something.”

Bruce shook his head. “Dick can take care of himself. Look, clearly this is just another attempt by Waller to get both of you into the open. This is what happened before when Flag kidnapped Lois fifteen years ago.”

“I’m aware of that, Bruce, but where does it end? She’s gone after our son, she’s gone after the Kents, not to mention Chloe and Oliver. Now she’s involved you.”

“I hate to point out the obvious, Kal, but I was already involved when Chloe asked me to provide you and your family with shelter.”

Kal had had enough. He wasn’t going to take this anymore. Not from Waller, or Flag. He wanted his family to be left alone.

“Contact Waller,” he said. “Set up a meeting.”

Lois stared at him. “Honey, what are you going to do? You’re not planning on letting her …”

He shook his head. “I’m going to show her that no one messes with my family,” he said.

He left the Batcave, hearing Lois’ footsteps chasing after him. Bruce was also following.

“Kal, baby, think about this. If she knows about Kryptonite, she could hurt you.”

He turned to her. “What do you want me to do, Lois? She’s going to keep coming after us. It’s never going to stop until she gets what she wants, and what she wants is me.”

Lois’ face was screwed up in misery.

“She’ll kill you.”

“That’s a chance I have to take.”

“And what about us? Damn it, Kal, I didn’t go through the last fifteen years only to watch you sacrifice yourself for us. Besides, what then? If she knows Clark is half-alien, she’ll take him too. You know she will.”

Jonathan and Martha, along with the general, had clearly heard the commotion and came out.

“Kal, you need to listen to Lois,” Jonathan advised.

“Jonathan’s right, son,” Sam said. “Surrendering to Waller is not the way to resolve this.”

“Then what would you suggest, General? I want Lois to have a life. I want my son to be able to go to school and grow up like a normal teenager, not to have to look over his shoulder the rest of his life.”
“Sweetie, we get that, but surrendering to Checkmate won’t achieve that.”

“Unless you make her think she’s won,” Sam replied, looking thoughtful.

“Dad?” Lois asked, frowning.

“Think about it, honey,” he said. “Some of the best military strategies came out of situations like this. Listen …”

Kal listened. The more he heard, the more he liked it. It would take a few hours to get it all together, but it just might work.

Bruce nodded his agreement, then went to make a few phone calls.

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Amanda Waller smirked. It looked like she had won. Taking Dick Grayson had been Flag’s idea. She hadn’t been sure of it at first, but he’d told her that from what he had learned, the alien, Kal, wouldn’t appreciate his friends being used. After all, he had come after them when Flag had kidnapped Lois. Flag was banking on the same thing.

Of course, this time Flag was prepared. He had brought in as many of the Suicide Squad, metahumans included, as reinforcements.

Waller had received a message an hour earlier telling her to set up a meeting with Dick’s captors. There hadn’t been a name, but from what she had read, it appeared Kal was surrendering. They were to meet at sunrise, ironic, really, since Flag had ordered the same time when he’d arranged the exchange with Lois Lane.

Waller was going to be there this time, she decided. She didn’t want to be left out of her final triumph.

Luthor was not going to be there. After the debacle with the ship, less than twenty-four hours earlier, she was terminating his services with the agency. She had had enough of his schemes, all designed to generate profits for LeXCorp, and to aid in his political ambition, rather than protect the American people.

She waited on the island known as The Narrows, in the middle of Gotham river, the chilly westerly whipping her coat. It was freezing, but she didn’t care. The sun was just coming up over the horizon, the light still grey, slightly tinged with orange.

A man in black stood on the other side of the bridge. He was tall, with dark hair. Waller squinted a little. She really needed glasses, but refused to wear them, less out of vanity and more out of not wanting to show any kind of weakness. She still couldn’t tell for sure at this distance, but he did seem to resemble the photograph she had seen.

She glanced over at the waiting car. Flag was inside with the boy, Dick. Flag knew from the look that it was a signal for the Suicide Squad leader to get out and bring the boy with him.

Flag approached her, one hand on the boy’s arm. Waller turned and looked toward the man coming across the bridge. Closer, closer, she thought, glancing once more at Flag. As soon as the man stepped off the bridge, Flag signalled for the Suicide Squad to surround them.

Waller turned back to look at the man and stepped back in surprise.
“Bruce Wayne?”

He smirked at her. “I believe you have something that belongs to me.” He tsked. “You know, kidnapping a minor is a federal offence.”

She scoffed, pissed that her brilliant plan had been foiled.

“You would never be able to make it stick,” she said. “I have very powerful friends in the Senate.”

There was a sudden whoosh and the boy disappeared. Flag appeared startled, clearly not sure what had just happened.

“You might have powerful friends in the United States government, Ms Waller, but there are varying degrees of power,” Wayne told her.

Suddenly, Waller was surrounded by a ring of fire. She tried to escape, but the flames were too high. Flag and others in the squad darted forward, but she realised they were under attack. Arrows came flying from two directions, taking out two men, while a blonde woman engaged in hand-to-hand combat with another squad member.

Emil LaSalle was attacked by someone who moved faster than Waller could see, giving the teleporter no chance to use his ability. Then a man with wings on his back swooped down and attacked Icicle, knocking him off his feet.

Carter Hall, she thought. She whirled, hearing sounds of two men engaged in a fist fight. Ted Grant, otherwise known as Wildcat.

“What …”

A man hovered above, glaring down at her from behind a domino mask, covering half his face. She stared up at him, awed by the sight of a man who appeared to be able to fly without any kind of mechanism. He added one more glare for good measure, then flew away.

Unable to move, Waller watched as one by one the Suicide Squad was defeated and rounded up by men she recognised as soldiers, led by General Lane.

Out of nowhere, a cold wind blew out the flames surrounding her. Then a man in his sixties moved forward, along with three uniformed police officers.

“Ms Amanda Waller, you are under arrest for kidnapping and conspiracy. I’m sure there will be other charges. Read her her Miranda rights.”

She didn’t move as the officers handcuffed her and began reading her rights.

“I have something to say,” a woman’s voice said. Waller stared. Lois Lane was standing in front of her, along with a man she realised was Kal and a teenage boy, who glared back at her.

“Lois Lane,” she said. “You know it won’t stick.”

“Oh, trust me, it will,” Lois replied. “Because thanks to a few friends of ours, we have enough to make sure the government puts you away for a very long time.” She stepped forward. “You have made my life a living hell the past few years, pursued me to the ends of the Earth, kept me from my family and for what?”

“You don’t understand. There are aliens among us.”
“Where is your proof?” Lane asked.

“A space ship,” Waller told her. Except the space ship was gone. She might have had photos, but anyone could say they were doctored. She was royally screwed and she knew it.

She didn’t struggle as she was led away by the Gotham police officers.

***

Kal grinned at his friends in Watchtower, his arm around Lois. It had been a week since Waller’s arrest and the fallout was still continuing. With the help of some of the former members of the Justice Society, those who were still living, the federal authorities were investigating every part of Checkmate. A senator had even called for compensation for those who had been victimised by Amanda Waller.

Lois had gone back to work for the Daily Planet and had written up the full story, leaving out the part where Kal was an alien. They were going to keep that quiet for now, until Kal decided what he wanted to do. Along with Oliver and Bruce, Lois was encouraging him to go out and help people and he was still trying to work out a way to do so without compromising his identity.

Clark was back living at the farm with the Kents, already complaining about all the homework he had received in his time away from school.

Sam Lane was back at work, but only for another month. After that, he would officially retire from the army, but he’d already been offered a job as an adviser to a senate committee.

Now, of course, they were celebrating. Commissioner Gordon had sent down word that not only would the kidnapping charges stick, but Waller was facing a few more charges, including murder. It turned out one of her agents had refused to obey orders and she had shot him.

Kal smiled at Carter Hall and shook the older man’s hand. Carter didn’t look like a man in his sixties, but the man known as Hawkman had explained he’d been imbued with energy by an old enemy which retarded his aging.

When they’d decided on the strategy to rescue Dick, Carter had stepped forward, telling them that Ted Grant had also returned from Vietnam. They’d both relished the opportunity to stop Waller for good, providing enough evidence to convince the federal authorities to pull the plug on Checkmate.

Jay Garrick and the others on board the ship which had brought Lois back to the States had also decided to come out of hiding. They were going to use their knowledge and abilities to help teach the younger generation.

Lois looked at Kal. He grinned at her and kissed her gently. There was nothing stopping them from being a family now. Speaking of which, he thought, glancing over at his son, who nodded, giving his aunt a quick hug.

“Ready?” Kal asked Lois.

“I’m ready,” she said.

They quickly said their goodbyes. Kal had promised all their friends that when they’d sorted out the little matter of his Earth identity, they would have an Earth-style ceremony. This time, however, was just for them.

He took Lois in his arms, holding her firmly as he flew north. Clark would take a little longer, since
he didn’t know if he could fly yet.

The journey took no more than about thirty minutes, considering it was thousands of miles. Kal touched down on the snow. The Arctic was dark, but he could see the glow emanating from the crystals, which drew the magnetic energy from the North Pole, creating an illumination from within.

Lois held on tightly to his hand as they approached the fortress.

“Oh Kal, this is beautiful,” she said. “Is this what your home was like?”

He nodded. “This is what one of our cities would look like. It is beautiful, Lois, but nothing compares to Earth.”

He guided her inside, making sure she didn’t slip on the ice as they stepped down into the structure itself. It was brighter here, the crystals glowing with energy. He walked with her through the various rooms, stopping at a crystal console, picking up a long crystal rod and inserting it into the console.

“Jor-El,” he called.

“I am here, my son.”

Kal felt a brief pang as he heard his beloved father’s voice. While he knew it was just an artificial intelligence representing the true form of his father, he couldn’t help remembering all his father had done.

“Father, I come to you today as a Kryptonian. As a member of your house. As your son.”

The console glowed and a hologram appeared. Jor-El smiled.

“You have brought the human, Lois Lane.”

“I have, Father. There is someone else we would like you to meet.”

Another hologram appeared beside Jor-El. Kal-El smiled at his mother.

“Mother, this is Lois,” he said, an arm around his wife-to-be.

“Um, hello,” Lois said uncertainly.

There was the sound of ice falling and Kal looked around, frowning at his son.

“Clark …”

“Sorry, Dad,” Clark said sheepishly. “I’ll be more careful.”

The teen approached them, staring at the holograms.

“Is that …”

“Clark … Kal-El, this is Jor-El and Lara, your grandparents.”

For all that he was just a hologram, Kal thought he could see pride on his father’s face.

“Kal-El, you have a son. And you have given him your name.”

“Actually, I chose that,” Lois replied. “I didn’t know if I’d see Kal again, and I …”
“We understand, Lois Lane,” Lara said quietly.

“Actually, it’s just Lois.”

“Earth customs are different from Krypton’s,” Kal explained. He took a deep breath. “Father, Lois and I wish to start a lifebond.” He smiled at Lois and raised her hand to kiss it. “We would like your blessing and we would be honoured if you would join us in this bond.”

“We are truly honoured, Kal-El,” Jor-El replied, smiling. “Please, step forward.”

He began speaking in Kryptonian. Kal had already taught Lois and his son the words so they could follow the ceremony. It was short, and similar to the vows at a wedding where Kal promised to honour the bond for all his life. Lois was asked to do the same.

There was a brief flash from the console and a bracelet made from the same crystal that had built the fortress appeared. Etched on the surface was the symbol for the house of El. Kal took it and placed it gently on Lois’ wrist.

Jor-El and Lara smiled. “Kal-El, Lois Lane-El, we wish you many years of happiness in your bond.”

“Thank you,” Lois said quietly, with a smile.

Kal kissed her gently as the holograms faded away. Clark smiled.

“So, guess that means you’re married,” he said.

“I know it’s not an Earth ceremony,” Kal said, almost apologetically, “but…”

“Baby,” Lois said. “It was beautiful. It was perfect.”
Weekend

Chapter Summary

Kal takes Lois away for a weekend.

Clark was complaining to his foster parents while Lois packed some things in a bag. She had no idea where Kal was taking her, but she still wanted to take some extra clothes with her anyway.

“Why can’t I go?” he asked.

“Because your parents want some ‘alone’ time,” Jonathan was saying.

Lois grabbed a negligee from the drawer and held it up to inspect it. She’d bought it just a couple of days earlier, after Kal had told her his plan of taking her and their son to the fortress for the bonding ceremony. He’d told her he was planning on taking her away for the weekend once the ceremony was complete.

She felt his hands on her waist as he nuzzled her.

“You won’t be needing that,” he said. “As sexy as it is.”

She turned in his arms and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Hmm, sounds like you’re planning on having your wicked way with me, my darling.”

“You bet I am,” he said with a grin.

She dangled the negligee so the satin fabric brushed his back.

“You know, there is something to be said for preserving the mystery. I’m sure you’ll have as much fun taking this off.”

“Mmm, but I much prefer seeing you naked,” he murmured, his mouth against hers, tempting her with an almost kiss.

“Where is this place you’re taking me, if you plan on keeping me naked all the time?”

“That’s a secret,” he said.

“You realise we’re going to have to do this again when we have an Earth wedding,” she reminded him.

“I’m not seeing a problem with that,” he told her.

She tapped his nose. “You, my darling, are incorrigible.”

He looked unrepentant as he grinned. Lois leaned forward and kissed him.

“Let me finish packing,” she said.
“I’ll go downstairs then,” he replied, letting her go.

Lois grinned and watched him walk out the door. Clark had offered to sleep on the couch so they could have his bedroom when they’d returned to the farm after Amanda Waller and her agents had been arrested and all Checkmate activities suspended.

They still had to figure out a way to deal with Lex, but with the ship gone, he had no tangible proof. He seemed to be suspiciously quiet over the whole affair, refusing to be drawn by the media on what had caused the emergency evacuation at the plant.

Lois had no doubt the man was planning something, but what that would entail was anyone’s guess.

She zipped up the bag and glanced around, making sure she hadn’t forgotten anything. The bedroom was still decorated for a teenage boy, with high school pennants and posters pinned to the walls. She sighed. If they were planning on living at the farm, she would need to redecorate the bedroom.

Kal and Jonathan had been talking about extending the farmhouse. Maybe building another floor on top, so Lois and Kal could have their privacy. It was fairly clear the Kents loved having them here. Kal had remarked long ago how sad it was that Martha and Jonathan had never been able to have children, but Martha had told her in Gotham that having her and Kal together, along with Clark, more than made up for that.

Lois hoped one day their family could include more children. They’d talked about it, in passing, and even Clark was enthusiastic about being a big brother. Maybe on this weekend, she thought.

“Lois? Sweetheart?”

“Coming,” she called.

She picked up the bag, the Kryptonian bracelet catching the rays of the afternoon sunlight. She smiled as she looked down at it. The ceremony had been so simple, so beautiful. Maybe Kal’s parents had only been holograms but she could swear she had felt the love Jor-El and Lara had for each other, and for their son.

Clark looked as if he was sulking as she made her way downstairs. The bag wasn’t heavy, but Kal took it off her hands anyway.

“I still wish I was going,” her son pouted.

“Honey,” she said, “there will be plenty of vacations we can take as a family. Besides, it’s only for the weekend.”

“Considering how much you hate the ‘mushy stuff’, Clark, be glad you’re not coming,” Kal told the teen. “I plan on getting very ‘mushy’ with your mother.” He wrapped an arm around her waist and kissed her passionately.

Clark blushed. “Okay, okay, I get the picture. You don’t need to draw me a diagram.”

Lois grinned and kissed her son on the cheek.

“Be good for Martha and Jonathan and we will see you Sunday night, all right?”

Clark nodded. “I promise.”

She turned to the older couple. “You know you can call us or anyone in the League if anything
happens. Ollie promised he’d have the guys stop by, just in case.”

Jonathan smiled. “You two just go and have a good time.”

Martha hugged them. “Don’t worry about Clark. He’ll be fine.”

Lois kissed the redhead on the cheek. “Thank you, Martha.”

Kal squeezed her hand. “Let’s go, sweetheart.” He had used the long strap to hold the bag on his shoulder, his other hand pressed lightly on the small of her back. Lois let herself be guided out the door and wrapped her arms around her husband. Could he technically be called her husband if they weren’t married in the Earth sense? She didn’t care. As far as she was concerned, and as far as Kal was concerned, they were married.

She felt him lift the into the air and wrapped her arms around him, pressing her face against his chest. Kal held her securely as he flew toward their mystery destination. She was still curious as to where it could be, but was content to wait until he revealed it. She couldn’t help thinking of the whispered conversations between Kal and Oliver. Honestly, she thought with a grin. Sometimes men were even worse gossips than they accused women of being.

It was difficult to describe the sensation as they flew. She could feel the wind whipping around them, but safe in Kal’s arms, she was protected from it. They were probably at least a thousand feet in the air, but again, she felt nothing. Kal’s own body temperature kept her warm.

Lois had been on a lot of planes, although she certainly hadn’t been on one which was capable of flying at speeds that could almost break the sound barrier, but Kal was more than able, she thought. Still, he seemed to be flying at a little slower speed out of deference to her.

Her stomach roiled slightly as she felt Kal beginning to descend, but didn’t complain. He landed quickly on a fairly even surface.

“We’re here,” he said.

Lois looked up, still clinging to her husband as she steadied herself, feeling a little light headed from the flight. Her legs were a little wobbly, but he clearly had anticipated that as he kept a firm grip on her.

After a few seconds, she was able to look around her to find they were on sand, standing beneath a tall tree that sheltered them from the hot sun, which was high in the sky. About a hundred yards from where they were standing was an ocean so blue it almost looked unreal.

Kal pointed to what appeared to be an old country home a short distance away. He’d clearly made sure their landing wouldn’t be observed.

“What is that?” she asked.

“That is the La Meridiana Hotel and Spa,” he said. “Oliver suggested it.”

She looked at him, wide-eyed. “The Italian Riviera?”

He smiled. “I considered taking you to Paris, but since you have already been there, I thought this would make a good compromise.”

“Oh, this is wonderful!” she exclaimed. She leaned forward and kissed him. “This is beautiful.”
Holding hands, they made their way down the hill to the resort, which was indeed an old country home converted into a resort hotel. The staff were friendly and welcoming, but not gushing, despite the fact Kal had obviously used Oliver’s name and reputation to get them the best suite in the hotel.

They were swiftly led to the suite. A bottle of champagne was already waiting on a glass table on the sunny terrace, sitting inside an ice bucket. The bellhop or whatever they called them on the Riviera smiled and left the room, clearly not even expecting a tip.

Kal put the bag down on the floor and took her hand, leading her out to the terrace. He stood behind her, his chin on her shoulder, wrapping his arms around her waist.

“What do you think?” he asked.

She turned her head and kissed him.

“What do I think? I think this is beautiful.” She’d already said that, but she didn’t care.

He kissed her shoulder, then let her go, moving to the table to pour champagne into crystal glasses. She stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“I don’t want to cloud the moment,” she said.

He looked at her, frowning slightly, until she put her arms around his neck and pressed her mouth against his, her tongue darting between their lips. He followed suit, their tongues duelling in an intimate dance.

Lois pulled away with a mischievous smile, leaving Kal looking a little confused. She reached up and began unbuttoning her blouse, giving him just a glimpse of the creamy mound of her breast.

“You want it baby,” she said, shooting him a coy look under long eyelashes. “Come and get it.”

She heard a soft growl as she turned and ran for the door to the bedroom. Before she could even reach the handle, he had grabbed her hand and turned her around, lifting it in the air. His lips crashed on hers in a deep, passionate kiss. She flung her arms around his neck, kissing him back.

He lifted her up and she wrapped her legs around his waist. His hand pulled at the band of her skirt, pushing it down. She moaned softly as he squeezed her butt cheek, the movement doing odd things to her insides.

“Kal,” she moaned.

“Lo,” he began, not even finishing what he was going to say as she slid one hand down to his chest to pull at the buttons of his shirt, while his hand pulled her skirt down and slid over her thigh, sending a frisson of desire up her spine.

Lois felt behind her for the door handle, but Kal’s hand got there first, twisting it. Had he not been supporting her with his other hand on her waist, she would have fallen backwards. Kal kissed her again, carrying her to the huge bed, which had already been turned down. He set her gently down on the mattress, kissing her once more before moving his lips to her throat, kissing the juncture between her neck and shoulder, his lips following the line.

Meanwhile his hands were busy unbuttoning her blouse. He was clearly being careful not to tear the fabric as he unbuttoned it slowly, pressing kisses to her naked skin as each part was revealed.

Lois loved the gentleness with which he undressed her, the loving touch of his hands, the sweetness
of his kisses. They’d made love many times since their reunion but somehow it seemed as if this time was all the more special.

Maybe it was because they were married now, she thought. Maybe it was because the life bonding ceremony in the fortress had provided something tangible to say that they really belonged to each other.

She could remember all those times in the past, fifteen years ago, when she had been so afraid he would leave without promising her that he would return. She knew part of it had been her insecurities coming through. An absentee father, a long dead mother had caused those insecurities. Even knowing that Kal loved her hadn’t changed that.

Now they were bonded, she knew nothing could ever take him away from her.

While she had been distracted by her thoughts, Kal had managed to pull her skirt and underwear off. She looked at him and frowned.

“Hmm, something doesn’t seem right here,” she said.

He cocked an eyebrow at her. “Something’s wrong?”

She nodded. “One of us appears to be naked and the other one isn’t.”

He grinned. “Well, let me remedy that right now,” he said, quickly stripping off his clothes. Lois giggled.

“Show off,” she replied.

Kal laughed and got on the bed, laying on his side, pulling her into his arms. She tilted her head for his kiss, combing her fingers through his thick hair. She crooked her leg over his hip, pulling him closer. Her body gave a tiny spasm as his cock, already hard, brushed against her sex.

With a moan, she flung her head back as Kal’s lips traced the curve of her throat, just below her ear.

“Kal-El,” she murmured.

He brushed her hair back, sucking on her skin, murmuring something she couldn’t quite understand. When he did it again, she realised he was speaking Kryptonian. One of the words had sounded very like one she’d spoken in the ceremony.

Lois knew a few phrases in French, and having spent about eighteen months in Germany she knew some German, but as lyrical as some of their phrases could be, they just didn’t match up to the language Kal was speaking.

He rolled them over so she was now on her back, one hand cupping her breast. Lois lay back, surrendering to the wonderful sensations as his mouth did incredible things to her body, almost as if he was worshipping her.

She cried out as he suckled on a nipple, feeling the skin of the areola puckering as her arousal grew. She began to feel feverish as the arousal built almost to the point of her losing control.

Now she understood why in that old song it was often referred to as a ‘fever’, she thought. Or getting ‘hot under the collar’.

Lois looked up to find Kal gazing lovingly down at her.
“What are you thinking about, my love?” he asked.

“Strangely enough, Fever.”

He cocked an eyebrow. “Fever?”

“It’s an old song. I got tonsillitis a lot when I was about three or four and they finally had to take them out when I was five. Anyway, Mom would sing the song to me to take my mind off how sick I was. I never really understood what it meant. I mean, I realised she changed things around. I heard it a few times after she died and it sort of brought me comfort.”

“How does the song go?”

It should have felt weird, singing to Kal while they were lying naked on the bed, but the song could sound sensual and rather seductive if done the right way.

Never know how much I love you  
Never know how much I care  
When you put your arms around me  
I get a fever that’s so hard to bear  
You give me fever  
When you kiss me  
Fever when you hold me tight  
Fever  
In the morning  
Fever all through the night

As the last notes of the verse died away she looked at her husband. He was gazing down at her with an expression that was unmistakeable. The iris of his eyes had turned gold.

“I understand,” he said. “It’s like when I look at you and I have to control the heat vision. I feel warm, all over.”

“Fever.”

“When you kiss me,” he sang off key.

Lois giggled. “Exactly.”

He laughed and rolled over so she was now on top. Her hair fell over them and she brushed it aside. Kal shook his head and gently ran his fingers over her face, brushing the curls behind her ears. She took his hand and turned her head to kiss his palm. Kal cupped her jaw, his thumb gently stroking her lips.

“Make love to me,” she whispered.

“I thought that was what I was doing,” he responded.

She laughed softly, kissing him. They rolled over once more and she felt his cock nudge her entrance.

“Kal,” she moaned.

“Lois, I need you,” he said.
“You have me. Now and forever.”

She cried out once more as he entered her, wrapping her legs around his waist to take him in deeper. They moved together, joined in the age old intimate dance.

Kal was dozing in the bed when Lois got up and grabbed the bathrobe which the hotel staff had thoughtfully provided, slipping it on and walking barefoot out to the terrace. She leaned over the balcony, watching as the sun began to dip below the horizon. The ocean was still the most incredible shade of blue she had ever seen.

Arms wrapped around her waist and she leaned back against her husband’s chest. He dropped a kiss on her shoulder.

“Come back to bed,” he murmured.

She let herself be led back to the bedroom, standing quietly as Kal slowly undid the sash and dropped the robe from her shoulders. She ignored it as it fell to the floor, gently pushing Kal backwards until his knees hit the bed and he had to sit down or lose his balance. She straddled his lap, kissing him.

His big hands stroked her naked back, holding her steady as he nuzzled her breast. She moaned softly as his tongue traced her nipple, making it once again peak with arousal.

She didn’t object as he lifted her up and laid her on the bed, then began kissing his way down her body. She became lost in the sensations as his mouth traced her navel, before his lips brushed her sex. Lois cried out, an unintelligible sound as he gently traced her clit with his tongue.

“Smallville! Don’t tease!”

She felt the vibration of his laughter against her sex, which just made that sensitive bundle of nerves even more sensitive.

Lois swore she was going to get him back for his teasing even as he continued doing so, her state of arousal at fever pitch by the time he decided he’d played with her enough and brought her to climax with just his mouth.

She gave herself a few moments to come down from her high before she rose up, glaring at him.

“Okay, you’ve had your fun. Now it’s my turn.”

“Oh oh,” he said, grinning, not in the least sorry.

She pushed him down on his back and went right for the source, wrapping her hand around his thick shaft before taking the head in her mouth. He was only half hard, but she liked that, knowing she could tease him until he was so hard he would be begging for it.

She licked around the head, then took as much of the shaft she could in her mouth, before pulling off and licking in one long stripe from his perineum to the top of the head. Next she took a nut in her mouth and teased that, turning to the other one, making sure that Kal wouldn’t know what she was going to do next.

Sure enough, it wasn’t long before Kal was practically growling in frustration. Lois grinned, giving herself a virtual pat on the back for having driven him as crazy as he had her. Kal moved fast enough that she was sure he’d used super speed, pulling her up and practically impaling her. She took him deep, moving up and down, still wanting to tease him, even as her own body began to climax once
He cried out and she felt him spurt inside her, her own climax causing her muscles to contract around him.

She lay beside him, unable to stop touching him. Kal pressed a soft kiss on her lips.

Lois leaned on one elbow, gazing at her lover. He laced their fingers together and lifted her hand to kiss it.

“Kal?” she asked.

“Mmm?”

“What do you think about having more kids?”

“Do you want to?”

She nodded. “I do. I missed out on a lot when Clark was growing up. I mean, I know he understands, but …”

“As did I,” he reminded her gently. “Please don’t feel guilty for any of this, Lois. You did what you had to do under the circumstances. Clark doesn’t hate you for that.”

“Still,” she said, biting her lip. “I’d really like to have another child. Maybe even two.”

He smiled. “I have to admit, I’ve thought about it too. But …”

“What?”

“What about your career?”

“Women can have children and a career too,” she told him reasonably.

“You’re right,” he said. “Then let’s do it. Let’s have a baby.”

Lois kissed him, letting him pull her closer. She traced an ‘S’ on his chest.

“You know, that means we’re going to have to get in lots of practice,” she said, pretending to be coy.

He frowned slightly, then it clearly dawned on him what she meant.

“You’re right,” he said, nodding. “We’ll have to get in a lot of practice.”

“No time like the present,” she murmured against his lips as she rolled on top of him.
Kal and Lois return from their weekend away and have a bonding moment with their son.

Clark was working with Jonathan, putting hay bales in the truck when he heard a car pull up, the tyres crunching on the gravel. He frowned at the older man and walked around the corner of the barn to investigate, grinning when he saw who had turned up.

“Uncle Bruce!” he said.

Dick was just getting out of the car to join his guardian. He didn’t look all that impressed with the farm.

“This is where you live?”

Clark shrugged. “I like it.”

Bruce smiled at him. “I can see why your parents love it,” he said, his smile widening as Martha came out of the house, wiping her hands on a towel.

“Hello Bruce,” she said. “You made good time.”

“Thank you Mrs Kent.”

“If you’re looking for my mom and dad, they’re still on their ‘weekend’,” Clark told him, making air quotes with his fingers.

Martha ruffled his hair, teasing him a little. He’d complained most of the weekend about his parents going to the Italian Riviera without him.

“Never mind, sweetie. There’ll be plenty of time for you to take a vacation with your parents.”

Bruce smiled. “Kid, it’s what they call the ‘honeymoon phase’. Just be glad your parents are around.”

Clark bit his lip, remembering that Bruce had lost his parents when he was very young.

“I’m sorry,” he said, ducking his head. “I guess I am pretty lucky.”

Martha smiled. “Why don’t you show Dick around the farm. I just put a batch of cookies in the oven so you have about twenty minutes.”

He grinned. “Cool.”

Dick smirked and followed him to the barn. Clark grabbed his basketball and went around to the hoop.

“So, how is it, really?” Dick asked as they began to play one-on-one.
Clark shrugged. “It’s okay. I mean, Mom and Dad get kinda … well, you know, but it’s not like they’re old or anything.”

“Yeah, I hear ya. Still, I’d give anything to have my parents around. I mean, Bruce is great. Don’t get me wrong. It’s just, I miss them sometimes.”

Clark nodded. “Guess you would.” He bounced the ball and shot the basket without really trying.

“My mom sort of mentioned she’d like to have another kid. I think it would be pretty cool, being a big brother.”

She’d said something about talking to his father about it that weekend, while they were away. Truth be told, while he was happy at the prospect of being a big brother, part of him was glad that his mother wanted another child. Maybe then she would feel less guilty about having left him with the Kents. He loved her, but he wished she would stop punishing herself.

Of course, now that his father was back, things were definitely looking up. He could see how happy she was with his father. He had often seen the sad look in her eyes when she’d come to visit, and now it was like she glowed, especially around his dad. His father looked the same way. He might roll his eyes when they made eyes at each other, but it was really kind of cute.

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Kal picked up the bottle of champagne and poured the wine into each glass. He strolled out to the terrace where Lois was sitting enjoying the view as the sun began to drop below the horizon. He handed her a glass and sat beside her. Lois leaned back against him, her head on his shoulder, sighing. She sipped her wine.

“I almost wish we didn’t have to go back,” she said.

“I know, darling, but we can’t stay here forever. Now that Checkmate’s gone …”

“There’s still Lex,” she reminded him. “He may not know everything but I imagine he suspects …”

“As long as the memory wipe Brainiac used continued to work, I don’t think he’ll make the connection.”

She turned her head and looked at him. “Well, yes, but what about Checkmate’s records? If Lex was investigating you fifteen years ago …”

He’d considered that, but he wasn’t about to let that stop him from creating a life on Earth, with his family. Given Amanda Waller’s own need to keep everything close to the chest, so to speak, he was willing to bet she hadn’t shared much with Lex at all.

Even if Lex did try to tell people the truth about him, thanks to Tess, they had enough on the LeXCorp CEO that would ensure no one would believe him. Maybe not enough to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, but it would at least make people aware that Lex was not all he seemed to be.

He reminded Lois and she nodded.

“You’re right. I’m being silly.”

He squeezed her slightly. “No, you’re being understandably cautious. Especially after everything you’ve gone through the past few years.”
She finished her wine and turned to gaze thoughtfully out over the ocean. A young couple was walking along the beach as the sun set. Kal could see them talking, totally wrapped up in each other.

Lois turned to look at him again.

“So, what are you going to do? Now that everything’s started to settle down.”

He hadn’t really given it much thought beyond working on the farm alongside Jonathan. He hated to say it, even to himself, but Jonathan wasn’t a young man anymore and he couldn’t run the farm by himself. Besides, he thought, a farm was a good place to raise a family.

“You could always come and work with me,” Lois said. “Be a reporter.”

“That’s a nice idea, sweetheart, but not exactly practical.”

It was another thing he had considered. Oliver had talked to him over the week since they’d taken down Checkmate trying to convince him to join the Justice League. Kal had had lengthy discussions with his father back on Krypton about the environmental problems on Earth, something his father had told him had been experienced at least two hundred years earlier on his own planet. When he’d mentioned this to Oliver, the older man had told him it was a noble ambition, but most humans would object to being ‘preached to’ by someone who was clearly not of Earth.

Oliver had suggested Kal might want to think about helping in other ways, like stopping local criminals. Kal had thought very carefully about that option. He liked the idea but wondered how he could do it logistically if he was working a full-time job somewhere, like an office, or even with Lois.

“What do you mean?” Lois asked, frowning slightly. “Don’t you want to work with me?”

“Of course I do, but think about it. What happens if there’s a crime happening and I have to go out and stop it? How am I going to cover my absence? Tell people I need to return a library book?”

She chewed on her lip. “Well, when you put it that way …”

“At least if I’m working on the farm, I can get through everything quickly and have time to patrol the streets or just drop what I’m doing and go out and help someone. Without having to worry about making some kind of excuse. Besides, Lara taught me a lot about botany and I feel like I’m needed on the farm.”

“Okay, you’re right. So, are you really going to join the League?”

“Oliver thinks it would be a good idea and I think he’s right.”

“Hmm, then you’ll need some kind of outfit. Maybe even a mask.”

“I don’t know,” he said slowly. “I don’t see myself wearing a mask.”

“But won’t people recognise you?” she asked. “I mean … I’m not trying to … it’s just, well, you can’t exactly blur into a crime scene and then just disappear. That’s not the way to get people to trust you.”

That sounded logical, he thought. Lois had clearly been thinking about this a lot.

“Why don’t we talk it over as a family,” he said. “When we get home.”

“With Clark?”
“And with Martha and Jonathan,” he said. After all, they were family.

Lois began to get up.

“We should pack,” she said.

“We don’t have to go yet,” he told her. “Italy’s about seven hours ahead of Kansas.”

She bit her lip. “I know. But I miss the farm, and …”

He smiled at her. She didn’t want to say it, but she clearly missed their son. He got to his feet and wrapped his arms around her. She stayed in his embrace for a few moments, before going back into their room. Kal followed her, watching for a moment as she busied herself with packing her clothes. Not that she had unpacked very much. They had done a little bit of sightseeing, but had spent most of their time in bed.

“We could make this a regular thing,” he suggested. “Take a weekend and go somewhere for a family vacation. You, me, the kid, or kids, if we’re lucky enough to have more.”

She turned to look at him. “You really mean that?”

He nodded. “Of course I do. Maybe this weekend was just about us, but Clark is our son and I know how much he wants to spend time with us. We can go anywhere you want. I mean, it’s not like we would need to buy plane tickets.”

She straightened up and came back to him, giving him a kiss that could have easily escalated into something else.

“Mm, you have such wonderful ideas, my darling.”

She went back to packing quite happily. Kal continued watching her as her expression showed her thoughts drifting, as if she was thinking about the places they could go. As much as she had wanted this time with him, to consummate, so to speak, their lifebond, to affirm their commitment to each other, he knew she had felt a little guilty that they were leaving their son for a weekend.

Clark and his complaints hadn’t helped, even if he was just trying to be facetious. Not that that had come off very well, Kal thought. If anything, it had made his mother feel even more guilty for having left him as a baby.

He decided he needed to sit down with his son and have a long chat with him about Lois’ feelings.

It wasn’t that Kal didn’t feel guilty either, but he didn’t see any reason for it. After all, he hadn’t known about his son until he’d returned to Smallville, so how could he be blamed for that? The only thing that still bothered him was the fact that he’d left Lois to face such hardship alone. He’d been convinced that leaving was the best thing to do for both of them, but it had just left a mess.

Never mind, he thought. It’s all behind us now. We’re all together now, as a family.

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Clark and Dick had gone back to playing basketball when another car pulled up. Clark paused in the middle of bouncing the ball, holding it in his hands as he turned to see who had decided to visit them so late in the day. He scowled as a bald man alighted from the expensive looking vehicle.

“Nice car,” Dick whistled. “Maserati, isn’t it?”
Lex Luthor nodded and smiled, although the smile didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I don’t believe we’ve met,” he said.

“Probably not. You might have met my guardian though. Bruce Wayne.”

Luthor nodded. “Yes indeed. Bruce and I have known each other for years. I’m guessing you are Dick Grayson then. I heard he had adopted a boy.”

Dick’s expression remained bland while Luthor’s gaze swept over him, a slight frown on his face as if he had found Dick wanting. The bald man turned to Clark.

“I wanted to talk to your parents.”

“They’re in the house,” he said, nodding to the yellow farmhouse.

“I meant your real parents, Mr Kent. Lois Lane and Kal … whatever his name is.” Clark glowered at the older man.

“They went away for the weekend,” Jonathan said, having come out of the house. “What can we do for you, Mr Luthor?” His tone was cool but even Clark could sense the searing hatred underneath Jonathan’s polite exterior.

“I’m here to serve notice on Mr … on Kal, and Ms Lane. For trespassing on Luthor property.”

“How do you figure that?”

“Two weeks ago some members of the so-called Justice League broke into my facility. I believe Kal was with them. Unlike others in the community, I am no fool, Mr Kent. The members of the Justice League are criminals, costing hard-working businessmen like myself thousands of dollars in property damage in their so-called crusade.”

“I think, Luthor, you would find that a very difficult charge to make stick,” another voice said. Clark fought to keep his expression neutral as Luthor and Bruce faced off. “As for Kal and Ms Lane, they were in Gotham with me two weeks ago. Lois Lane is a long time friend of mine and I was happy to lend assistance when I learned someone had invaded the farm trying to kidnap young Clark.” He glowered at the bald man, who took a step back. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

Luthor frowned at him. “Why would I?”

“Since we know for a fact you were working for Checkmate until very recently. In fact, we have direct testimony.” Bruce looked at him smugly. “I would suggest you be very careful about casting stones, Luthor.”

It looked to be a stand-off as the two men faced each other. Only a noise on the gravel behind them made Clark look around to see his parents watching the proceedings. They had clearly landed far enough away so they wouldn’t come in undetected. His father was holding the bag they’d taken with them, although it looked a little fuller than when they’d left. “Mom, Dad, you’re home. We didn’t hear the car.”

“We got the taxi to drop us off on the highway and walked over the field,” his mother said. “What’s going on?”

“Luthor here was making unfounded accusations. And he’s outstayed his welcome.”
Clark pointedly ignored the bald man and hugged his parents.

“So how was the weekend away? Did you get me anything?” he asked, making them laugh.

An hour later, as his mom was helping Martha prepare dinner and Dick and Bruce had gone out for a run together, Clark decided to head up to his loft to read. He was surprised to find his father sitting on the couch, looking through one of Clark’s books from school.

He looked up and smiled, showing Clark the front cover of the book.

“Physics. It seems that humans and Kryptonians aren’t so different in how they look at science.”

“I guess,” Clark said.

“I wanted to talk to you. Sort of a father-son chat.”

“What about?” he asked, feeling a little awkward.

“About your mom. And … well, about family stuff.”

“I already know Mom wants to have another baby. I’m cool with that.”

His dad smiled. “It’s great that you’re cool with that, but while that’s part of it, that’s not the only part.”

“Dad, I think I know where you’re going. I mean, I know Mom feels bad about leaving me, but she shouldn’t. It’s not like I ever felt neglected or unwanted or anything. The Kents told me that Mom loved me so much she decided the best thing to do would be to leave me with someone she trusted and loved as much as she loved you.” He smiled. “Besides, she’s here now and I mean, I know I say stupid things sometimes, but I just want her to not feel bad. So I make jokes about it. I’m not trying to be mean to her or anything.”

“I know you’re not,” his father told him. “I’m glad she felt she could trust Martha and Jonathan. There aren’t two people I could have chosen better for you. I know my mother and father would have loved them too.”

Clark looked at him, sensing the slight sadness.

“You really miss them, huh?”

“I do,” he replied. “Every day. But I have you and your mom, and Martha and Jonathan. I will always miss Lara and Jor-El, but you and your mom remind me that I have a place where I belong.”

“So, what are you going to do? Now that you, you know …”

“Your mom and I talked about this, and I plan on helping Jonathan on the farm, while also helping people in Metropolis. As much as your mother would love for me to come and work with her, it just isn’t practical.”

“I guess you would need a college degree or something,” Clark said.

“More than likely.”

The steps creaked and Clark’s mother appeared at the top.

“Hey you two,” she said with a smile. “Dinner’s almost ready.”
Clark went over to her and hugged her.

“Hey Mom,” he said. “Did you enjoy your weekend away?”

She reached up and ruffled his hair. Clark wasn’t quite as tall as his father, but he was getting there.

“I did, but I missed you and your constant complaints though.”

“Well, someone’s gotta yank your chain, Mom.”

She mock growled at him. “Why, you little …”

He grinned and took a step back as she advanced on him, laughing as she pounced and proceeded to tickle him.

Clark sat between his parents, not minding at all when they sent each other mushy kind of looks. He took his mother’s hand, squeezing it a little.

“You know, in case you didn’t get it the first time, I think it would be cool to have a little brother or sister. It’s not like you’re, you know, old or anything.”

“Well, thanks, I think.”

“What I mean is, if you were like, over forty, then it would be kind of icky, but you’re not, so it’s okay.”

“Icky?” His father raised an eyebrow.

“It means …”

“I know what it means you little …”

Clark grinned at his parents. Gotcha, he thought. He just loved teasing them.
Discussions

Chapter Summary

Bruce comes up with a way for Kal and Lois to be legally married.

Dinner was a noisy affair between Clark and Dick chattering away to each other and Bruce and Kal talking animatedly. Lois watched her men for a few minutes, pleased to see that Bruce and Kal seemed to be building a friendship. It was kind of ironic, she thought, that Bruce was the one man who had most resembled Kal, although he still tended to be broodier than her husband.

Martha smiled at her and Lois resumed eating, knowing whatever the two men were talking about Kal would share it with her later.

She looked at Jonathan.

“So what was Lex doing here earlier?” she asked. They’d been too busy relating the details of their weekend to even ask about the bald billionaire.

“He claimed he was serving notice,” Bruce piped up. “Against Kal especially for the break-in at the Luthorcorp plant.”

“Uncle Bruce was awesome!” Clark said. “Gave it right back to him. He told Lex you guys had nothing to do with that and maybe he shouldn’t be throwing stones. You should have seen his face.”

Lois smiled at her son. “I’m sure we saw enough,” she said.

“I have no doubt Lex will have some counter-measure,” Bruce said. “But I wouldn’t let it worry you. Lex has no proof, since Oliver disabled the security systems. Tess was the only one who managed to get close enough to you, and she’s not talking. Not about that, anyway.”

“How is she doing anyway?” Jonathan asked.

“She’s fine. I believe she’s in Star City at the moment working with Oliver on a new project for Queen Industries.”

Martha’s eyes crinkled in sympathy.

“That poor girl,” she said. “Imagine finding out that your boss is actually your brother.”

“Well, I can’t say I’m surprised,” Bruce told them. “My research has dug up quite a few skeletons in that family.”

“Oh?” Kal said.

The Gotham dark knight nodded somberly.

“It appears Lionel covered up his past by pretending his family came from Scottish nobility. The truth is, his father was an abusive drunk and a thief and his mother … well, she was just a drunk from all reports. Lionel grew up in Suicide Slum in Metropolis and hung out with a man named
Morgan Edge.”

Lois frowned. “Why do I know that name?” she asked.

“Edge ran Intergang until he retired,” Bruce explained. “After Lachlan and Eliza died in a tenement fire, and Lionel used the insurance he collected to start his own company, the two men fell out. Some believe it was because Lionel had chosen to build a business empire, while Edge was still nothing more than a two-bit hood, but rumour has it they fell out because Lionel and Edge planned the deaths of the senior Luthors and Lionel then held it over Edge.”

“I guess I can see why Lionel would go to such lengths to hide his past,” Lois replied. “Still, you can dress it up, but at the end of it all, Lionel was still just a hoodlum in a three-piece suit. At least Edge doesn’t pretend to be anything else.”

“Lionel was power-hungry, and his son is even more so. According to my sources, Lionel had been studying meta-humans for years. He came across several members of the Justice Society and that prompted the studies.”

“And Lex is following in his footsteps,” Kal mused.

“I think it’s more than that,” Lois told him. “I think it’s why Lex was so interested in Checkmate.”

“Tess told me Lex was studying the meteor rocks, hoping to learn their mutagenic effects, when he was caught in an explosion.”

“She’s been able to reveal a few other things since then,” Bruce told them. “Lionel had another child. Lucas. He’s apparently some kind of con artist in Edge City. Been in and out of prison a few times. Lex tries to pretend he doesn’t exist.”

“What about Lionel?” Martha asked.

“My theory is he deliberately abandoned the two other children in some kind of contest. Survival of the fittest. Lucas to the foster child system, and Tess to abusive parents. They each learned to survive in their own way. I’m guessing Lex decided Tess came out the winner.”

Lois glanced at her son, then at Kal, thanking small mercies that her father had supported her enough to not abandon Clark to the child welfare system. Lord only knew what would have happened if her son had been raised by anyone other than the Kents. She shuddered to think of her baby locked up in some kind of institution.

She bit her lip, then excused herself to go outside, feeling an uncomfortable knot in her stomach. She stood out on the porch, leaning against the railing, lost in thought.

“Mom?”

Lois looked around at her son. He seemed concerned.

“Mom, you gotta stop thinking like that.” She frowned at him. Could the kid really read her thoughts?

“Like what?”

“Like you’re punishing yourself for stuff that wasn’t your fault. You’re right though. If Grandpa hadn’t gone to Dr Swann and then fixed things so the Kents could adopt me, I could have ended up in a lot worse places. You did good, Ma.”
She raised an eyebrow at him. “Ma? Since when are we in Podunk?”

“Just checking you were hearing me,” he grinned. She rolled her eyes, realising he was teasing her again.

“You’re a brat, kid, you know that?”

“I take after my mother,” he replied smartly.

She decided not to comment on that, knowing he could go all night if he wanted to.

“How do you know about Dr Swann?” she asked.

“I asked Grandpa,” he told her, shrugging his shoulders. “What? C’mon, what else was I gonna do while you and Dad were off getting some ‘alone’ time.”

“All right, all right,” she said, wrapping an arm around his neck and squeezing affectionately. “Brat.”

“Amy thinks I’m obnoxious.”

“Amy huh? Something I should know about?”

“We’re just friends, Mom. Really good friends.”

“Uh-huh,” she said, walking back inside with him.

Bruce didn’t comment on her sudden exit, too busy clearing the dishes from the table and putting them in the dishwasher. Lois smirked at her son, then shook her head, telling him silently not to make jokes about Bruce and KP duty. There was only so much the man would tolerate.

“I should get upstairs and do my homework,” Clark said.

Lois looked at him incredulously.

“You mean to tell me you didn’t do it on Friday?”

“Moom, no one does their homework on Friday night. ‘Sides, not like I couldn’t do it in seconds flat.”

Kal shook his head at his son.

“Just because you can, son, doesn’t mean you should. If you want to blend in, you can’t take advantage of your abilities.”

“But Dad, it’s not like I’m cheating or anything!” he protested.

“That’s not the point.”

“Your father’s right, sweetie,” Martha said. “Having abilities like yours doesn’t mean you get to take shortcuts whenever you want.”

“But it’s just homework!” Clark whined.

“And if we let that slide, we’d have to let other things slide and then you’ll be abusing your abilities.”

“Geez, Dad, it’s not like I’m planning on going all super villain-y on you.”
“Listen to your parents, Clark,” Bruce said, weighing in on the argument. “They’re speaking from experience. Besides, by giving you limits, they’re teaching you a valuable lesson.”

“Like what?”

“Like just because you have these abilities, it doesn’t mean you’re allowed to do anything you want. There are certain rules in life you have to stick to.”

“People like Lex don’t,” Clark pointed out.

“No, you’re right about that,” Bruce conceded. “But let me give you a different perspective. Would you rather be judged on what you can do, or on who you are?”

Clark frowned. “I’m not following.”

“Say you meet someone who learns your secret and asks you to do something which, while perfectly legal, amounts to some kind of parlour trick. And that’s all they want you for. They’re not interested in you personally.”

“You mean, like people are only interested in you because you’re rich?” he asked Bruce.

“Exactly.”

“Okay, I get it. I guess you’ve got a point. Still, how does this relate to someone like Lex?”

“Think about it, honey,” Lois said. “People only see what Lex wants them to see, so they believe him when he says he’s trying to help humanity, when really he’s only helping himself. If people saw Lex the way we do …”

“They wouldn’t want anything to do with him,” he finished, then sighed. “Okay, I get it. He takes the easy way out.”

He kissed his mother on the cheek, before doing the same to Martha and went upstairs. Lois looked at her husband, who just grinned.

“I seem to remember you also left your homework until the last minute.”

“Yeah, yeah. Call me a hypocrite.”

He kissed her. “Why would I do that?”

Bruce cleared his throat.

“Time to get down to business.”

Martha had told them Bruce had something to discuss with them when they got back from Italy, which was the reason he had decided to come and stay for a couple of days.

They sat down in the living room. Dick sat next to his guardian on the couch while Kal pulled Lois down to sit on his lap in the big armchair. Martha and Jonathan sat next to each other on the loveseat.

“I’ve given a lot of thought to your situation and I’ve come up with something which I think can be workable. I’ve already discussed this with Oliver and he agrees.” Bruce leaned forward. “So, here’s what I think we should do. We start with your original story, Kal.”

Lois looked at him, wondering what he meant.
“When you first came to Earth, you had your machine, Brainiac, I think you called it, come up with a story of you being born in Eastern Europe. As far as I can tell, the work the machine …”

“A.I.,” Kal corrected. “It was an artificial intelligence.”

“What happened to it?” Lois asked.

“I don’t know,” Kal said. “It was meant to be helping me and my father build the ship, but it didn’t.”

“Well, whatever,” Bruce replied.

Jonathan frowned. “How is this going to help Kal and Lois?”

“I was getting to that. One of the things that wasn’t so believable was the Kents’ willingness to take you in so easily. So, what I’ve come up with is this. Your ‘father’ was actually a friend of Hiram’s, but was not your ‘real father’.”

Lois frowned. “Bruce, I don’t get it.”

“Let me explain. Let’s say that there was a cousin of Hiram’s who fathered a child while living in Eastern Europe – say he was with the military, but abandoned the mother when she was pregnant. The mother meets another, much older man and marries him before the child is born. That child is the spitting image of his real father.”

“So, then I come to town, the Kents recognise me as the son of Hiram’s cousin and take me in, not knowing I don’t know the truth of my birth.” Kal nodded, looking pensive. “Okay, that sounds workable. But how does that help Lois and I have a legal marriage? Legal by Earth standards at least.”

“Simple. You change your name … legally … to Kent. You could say you had a falling out with your parents after you learn the truth about your real father. This happens at the same time Lois is kidnapped.”

“We could still use the story of a family emergency, like say my father was admitted to the hospital with some kind of illness which is hereditary.”

“That could help explain how you learned the truth,” Martha agreed.

“That doesn’t explain why Kal was gone for fourteen years though,” Lois pointed out, wondering what kind of story Bruce could come up with that would believably explain Kal’s absence from her life.

“No, not unless Kal spent those years in the military.”

Kal nodded. “I think that could work.”

Lois thought about this for a few moments. Serving in the military could be hard enough for Americans, but it had to be ten times worse for those in countries that forced young men into service.

“How would we work that?” she asked. “Wouldn’t the American government look for Kal’s service records?”

“Not if we say he served in an army that doesn’t maintain their records,” Bruce told her. “It’s been known to happen.”

“So, how do you figure I would have got out?”
Jonathan looked pensive. “Would they let someone go who had some kind of medical condition?” he asked.

Bruce looked at him. “What are you thinking?”

“My father did have a cousin who died of a heart attack at forty. They found in the autopsy that he had congenital heart disease.”

“Yes, I do think they would let someone go for that. Some prefer their soldiers healthy.”

Lois didn’t want to think about the countries whose military leaders would care so little for the welfare of their soldiers that they would cheerfully send sick men out into the field.

“And some people don’t discover these conditions until they’re fully grown adults,” Lois added, feeling a nervous sort of buzz through her body. This could work. This could really work.

“That’s true,” Martha agreed.

“That’s the first part,” Bruce went on. “The second part is Clark. If you want my honest opinion, I think you should stick to the truth for that. At least where his childhood is concerned. Simply that Lois feared for her son’s life and figured the Kents could protect him.”

“Sure, but how would we explain Checkmate’s involvement?” Kal asked.

“Here’s the part where we depart from the truth a little. We say that Checkmate targeted Lois because of her father’s military career.”

Lois nodded. That could be just as believable, especially since the story she’d written and published hadn’t explained why Checkmate had been after her. Of course, she had told Perry the whole truth, but he’d agreed not to publish any of it.

They continued to talk over the details. Clark came downstairs an hour later and they explained everything to him. He seemed to like the idea and thought it could work.

By the time they had managed to get it all straight, Lois was exhausted. Bruce suggested they call it a night and left the farm for the Smallville Inn. Lois let her husband take her hand as they went upstairs. They quickly got ready for bed and snuggled under the covers.

Kal nuzzled her as he spooned up behind her, his arm around her, holding her close.

“So, what did you think of Bruce’s idea?”

“I think it’s great, honey. That way it’s not all a lie.”

He nibbled on her ear lobe.

“Stop that,” she said, snickering. “That tickles!”

“That’s why I do it,” he said with a chuckle.

“You are very bad, Mr Kent,” she told him.

He murmured something which she couldn’t quite understand, but he sounded happy.

“Mr Kent. I like that. It makes me feel like I belong here.”
She rolled over, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“You do, baby. I mean, I watch you with Martha and Jonathan and I can see you really care for
them. Like I do.”

“As soon as Bruce has managed to sort out the paperwork, let’s do it, Lois. Let’s get married the
Earth way.”

She kissed him. “You need to ask?” she said.

Bruce had more for them the next day. He had clearly given a lot of thought to how Kal could help
people without revealing his true identity.

“I do think you should create some kind of costume,” he said.

Lois nodded in agreement. While she liked the costume Bruce had come up with for Batman, she
didn’t think it was right for Kal.

“I think you should have something that’s not so dark,” she told him when Bruce suggested
something in black.

“Like what?” Kal asked.

“I don’t know, but … well, what did the soldiers on Krypton wear?”

“They had some kind of battle suit.”

“Couldn’t we base it on that and just … I don’t know.”

Dick looked up from where he was helping Clark with some algebra homework.

“I bet I could design something. If you describe the battle suits, I could probably draw it.”

Bruce smiled at his ward. “That sounds like a good idea, Dick.”

The teenager beamed at his guardian. Lois had once asked Bruce why he had chosen to take on a
teenage boy and he’d told her he’d known what it was like to lose his parents at such a young age.
Of course, he’d had Alfred to take care of him and since he felt it was partly his, or rather Batman’s
responsibility that Dick’s parents had died, after an enemy of his had caused the accident, he had
chosen to give the boy a home.

It was not to say it had been easy. Dick had been wary at first, a little shy, and more than a little
intimidated by Bruce, who had not always been the easiest man to get along with. Bruce had become
too immersed in what he considered his duty as Gotham’s protector, even if by day he was
pretending to be a playboy billionaire. Still, at home, he couldn’t hide behind either mask.

Lois had to admit when Kal and Dick were finished, the design looked pretty good. It looked as if it
would fit Kal’s body snugly. Dick had coloured it blue with white on the sleeves and the bottom half
of the leggings, along with a red cape, obviously thinking of the colours of the American flag, the
flowing cape probably representing the flag flying.

“I’m not sure about blue and white,” she said. “Don’t get me wrong. I love the design, but I think
maybe we need a different colour.”

Dick looked at his design critically, then nodded.
“Okay, let me work on this a little,” he said.

Bruce watched his ward walk away with the sketch pad, then turned and smiled at the others.

“He’s a great kid,” Jonathan observed.

“Yes, he is. All credit to Alfred.”

Lois shook her head. “And you had nothing to do with it, I suppose?”

Bruce shrugged, pretending to be coy. Lois could see the pride in his expression, but didn’t call him on it.

“Uh, anyway, I pulled a few strings and the paperwork should be complete in a few days. I guess that means you two will be getting married. The Earth way, anyway.”

Kal nodded, his arm around Lois’ waist.

“As soon as it can be arranged.”

“Have you had any thoughts of where you want to have the ceremony?” Martha asked.

Kal grinned at Lois, who turned to the older woman.

“Actually, we discussed it, and we want to have it here. With our family. If that’s all right with you.”

Jonathan smiled and hugged his wife. “That’s perfectly all right with us.”

Lois went to hug them both. She had already called her father, who would be officially retiring from the army in about ten days. He had been thrilled to learn she and Kal would be able to get married, officially.

A second call to her sister Lucy hadn’t been so successful. Lucy hadn’t understood Lois’ constant moving over the past few years and had been stunned to learn she was an aunt to a fourteen-year-old boy. At best, it could be said Lois and her sister were not close. Lois had been hurt by her sister’s attitude but had still invited her out of family loyalty.

Even after the paperwork was completed and Kal was officially a ‘Kent’, it was still another month before they could get the ceremony organised.

Kal and Jonathan had been working on plans for an extension to the farmhouse and had set to work building the third floor, which would include two bedrooms and a separate bathroom. The new floor was close to completion when the day of the ceremony arrived.

Lois had gone shopping with Chloe and Lana and had found a dress in a cream that was informal, since they’d both decided they didn’t need a big to-do. They had both felt the Kryptonian ceremony was the more important one and the Earth one was just to make it real on paper. Her dress was sleeveless, with a v-neckline and a long skirt tucked in at the waist. Lana and Chloe helped her get dressed. They were both already dressed in the outfits they had chosen as her bridesmaids. They’d both picked out dresses in a floral pattern with a light grey background, which suited their colouring.

Lana frowned as she pulled at the zip.

“It, uh, seems to be kind of … stuck.”

Lois twisted and looked at her reflection in the mirror as she tried to see the zipper. It did seem to be
stuck at her waist. She bit her lip. She’d put on a couple of pounds since she’d been living at the farm, but Kal hadn’t noticed.

Damn, she thought.

“I don’t think the zipper’s stuck,” Chloe observed. “I think it’s Lois. You’ve put on a little weight, right here at your …” Her eyes widened. “Oh my god!”

“What?” Lana asked.

Chloe pulled her away and the two girls began whispering. Lois stared at them, continuing to work on the zipper, managing to get it fastened, but not without some effort.

“Okay, what’s going on?” she asked.

“Uh, don’t get mad, okay, but how long is it since you’ve had your …”

She frowned at her cousin. “My what?”

“Your period,” Lana said, blushing. Lois almost rolled her eyes at the brunette. She’d been married to Lex but still blushed when talking about natural bodily functions? Come on, Lois thought, then looked from Lana to Chloe and back again, considering the question.

“Uh,” she said. The last time she’d had her period was a couple of weeks before she and Kal had gone to Italy.

“You mean I’m …” she said, feeling that slight tingle of excitement.

“When I discovered I was pregnant again, the first thing I realised was that I’d put on a little around the abdominal area.”

“We should get a test,” Lana told her.

“But we don’t have time,” Lois replied.

The brunette nodded. “You’re right. We don’t have time. But as soon as the ceremony’s over, we’re going to make sure. Don’t you dare say anything to Kal before then, okay?”

Lois didn’t ask her how they would make sure, since her friend seemed to have something planned, but still didn’t see why she couldn’t tell Kal.

“Why not? He’ll be so excited!”

Chloe smiled. “I’m sure he will, sweetie, but then again, until you confirm it, wouldn’t you rather not get his hopes up?”

She nodded. “You’re right. Duh!”

Still, she couldn’t help feeling excited herself. The thought of having another baby, being able to raise a child with the man she loved, of Clark being a big brother …

They made it to the farm for the ceremony with very little time to spare. Lois was dreamily thinking about the potential baby, who it would look like, family trips they could all take together.

Kal appeared to notice her distraction as he leaned forward as the celebrant was making a speech about commitment to ask her if she was okay.
“I’m fine, honey,” she assured him.

She glanced at Lana, who smiled and nodded. Bart appeared beside the brunette as Lois and Kal exchanged rings. Lois noticed the speedster handing Lana a small paper bag. So that was Lana’s little plan, she thought.

She managed to get away for a few minutes, telling Kal she needed to use the bathroom, which wasn’t a lie. Lana and Chloe met her at the door. Her cousin handed her the test.

“Good luck,” she said.

Lois went into the bathroom and removed the stick from the box, groaning quietly at the thought of having to pee on the stick.

She’d barely finished when she heard Kal’s voice, talking to the girls.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

“Everything’s fine, Kal,” Lana could be heard assuring him. Lois sighed as her son called.

“Hey, where’s Mom? Jimmy wants to take some photos.”

“I’ll be right out,” she called, glancing nervously at the stick. “Come on, come on,” she urged quietly. She leaned on the countertop, staring at the stick. Slowly but surely a symbol appeared in the little window.

Lois went back out. Lana and Chloe had clearly decided to distract the rest of the family as they were both talking animatedly to Kal and Clark, with Oliver hovering close by. Jimmy stepped in front of her, camera dangling from a strap around his neck.

“Um, you ready, Miss Lane, I mean, Mrs Kent?”

She snickered. “You can call me Lois, you know,” she said. She led him in the direction of her husband, who smiled and kissed her.

“You okay?”

“Everything’s great,” she said.

Jimmy guided them out into the sunshine so he could take photos of the happy couple with first her father, then Martha and Jonathan, Chloe and Oliver and their two children. It seemed to be an endless round of photos with bridesmaids, guests and family. Finally, Jimmy decided to take more intimate shots of them together.

Lois knew it was now or never. As Jimmy snapped away, she cuddled close to her husband in an intimate embrace, kissing him on the cheek before whispering in his ear.

“We’re pregnant,” she said.

It was no surprise to see when the photos came out that Kal was grinning ear to ear.
Clark wondered what his mother had whispered in his father’s ear as he watched his father’s stunned look before breaking out into a broad grin as the last shot was taken. Whatever it was, he could see his parents were really happy.

There was little chance for him to talk to them as the family quietly celebrated the official union with a dinner. Martha had outdone herself with the feast she had offered. There was roast chicken and lamb, with homemade mint jelly and gravy. She had cooked sweet potatoes and steamed vegetables. For dessert there was apple pie and cherry cobbler. Not to mention the three-tiered wedding cake. Chocolate, of course, with white frosting.

Clark’s cousins made a mess on the table, but no one seemed to mind. He sat next to his best friends, watching as everyone enjoyed the food. Grandpa Sam laughed with Jonathan as the two men began a lighthearted debate, while Martha talked with Aunt Lana. Aunt Chloe and Uncle Oliver were also talking quietly, smiling at each other, even as Aunt Chloe tried to prevent Laura and Connor from dropping more food on the floor.

His parents of course only had eyes for each other. His mother looked … Clark didn’t know exactly how to describe it but she looked beautiful. Radiant. That was the word, he thought.

Clark bit his lip as he watched them whispering and laughing together. He knew there was something they weren’t telling him. His mom looked happier than he had ever seen her, but there was something else. He turned back to his meal, clearing his plate before Aunt Chloe declared it was time to cut the cake. Martha suggested they clear the table first.

As he got up to help Martha, he happened to glance at his parents, watching as his father gently rubbed his mother’s stomach. Clark’s eyes widened. Was she?

He had little opportunity to talk to either of them about it later after the cake was cut and the wedding presents opened as he was volunteered to help with the dishes. Amy and Rick also came in to help. Clark watched the adults gather in the parlour, talking quietly, then went back to his work.

“So, explain all this to me again,” Amy said. “Martha and Jonathan aren’t actually your parents?”

Clark sighed. “No, Amy, I told you that. They adopted me to protect me.”

“From that Checkmate thing?” Rick asked. “Sorry, Clark, it’s just gonna take us a while to get used to.” He looked toward the parlour, his expression pensive. “Your mom and dad look really great together.”

Clark smiled. “Yeah, they are. They really love each other.”

“So you don’t think it’s kind of weird?” Amy asked.
He bit his lip. “Well, I did, sort of, at first, but I mean I always knew I had a real mom and that. I just didn’t know about my dad until he came back to Smallville.”

“What’s your dad gonna do, now that he and your mom are married?” Rick said.

“Dad’s gonna work on the farm with Martha and Jonathan and Mom’s gonna keep working at the Planet.”

“Are they gonna have a honeymoon?” Amy asked, ever the starry-eyed one.

Clark nodded. He’d talked about it with his parents and it had been decided that they would wait until he would have some time off school for the winter break, which was a little over a month away and take a family vacation. Clark had always wanted to see the sights of the southern hemisphere and since it would be summer there, it was a good time to go.

It was hard to believe it had been almost three months since his dad had come back from Krypton. So much had happened since then, but as far as Clark was concerned, their lives had changed for the better.

The general came in to the kitchen.

“How’s it going, kids?”

“Going great,” Rick said.

“Just about finished, Grandpa,” Clark said.

He studied his grandfather, wondering if he’d seen the same behaviour between his parents at the table, but Grandpa Sam hadn’t said a word. The one thing Clark had noticed, however, was the conspiratorial looks between his two aunts.

“So, what are you going to do, General Lane? I mean, now that you’re retired from the army?” Amy added.

“Why?” he asked in a teasing tone. “Are you looking for an interview for your paper?”

Amy giggled. Clark grinned at his grandfather. Since he’d officially retired, Grandpa Sam was looking more relaxed. He watched as the former general filled the coffee pot with water. Amy and Rick finished putting the dishes away and went out to the parlour.

“When do you have to go back to Washington, Grandpa?”

“Sunday,” he replied.

“Do you have to?” Clark pouted. He’d barely got to know his Grandpa, since he’d rarely spent any time with him growing up.

Sam ruffled his hair.

“Sorry kid, I have to. I start my new job on Monday.” He smiled. “I tell you what. If it’s all right with your parents, how about you come and spend a weekend with me now and then?”

“That would be cool,” he said.

Much to Clark’s disappointment, his aunt and uncle had to return to Star City early the next morning, as Oliver had business to take care of with Queen Industries. He hugged his aunt, sighing.
“Wish you could stay,” he told her.

“I know, sweetie, but we have things we need to do at home. You can always come and visit us.”

He grinned at her. “I’ve got a feeling that won’t be for a little while,” he said. “I think Mom and Dad are gonna be a little busy.”

She sent him an odd look, but didn’t call him on it.

At school the next day, Clark overheard the kids talking about his new situation. Apart from the incident with Checkmate, Clark hadn’t told anyone at school what had been happening and with his parents’ marriage, it was all out in the open, so to speak. As far as he was concerned it was no one’s business but theirs, but of course the jocks seemed to think it was an opportunity to give him an even rougher time than usual.

It wasn’t that Clark was considered a total loser at school. Being a member of the Smallville Torch staff gave him certain dispensations, but there was always at least one jock who thought he could bully everyone and that included Clark.

As Clark was putting his books away in his locker for the day, ready to go home, Stephen, the bully, also the captain of the football team, tried to shove him against the lockers. Clark stood his ground, glaring up at the boy, although there wasn’t much difference between them in height.

“Don’t tell me you went and grew a pair, Kent.”

“What do you care, jerk?” he said.

The jock smirked. “Don’t even think it, freak. Just because things have changed at home, doesn’t mean it’s changed here. You’re still a loser, just like your loser dad.”

“My dad isn’t a loser. You don’t know anything about my parents so why don’t you just back off?”

“Your old man is a loser. Who takes off and disappears for fifteen years?”

Clark wished he could use heat vision or any kind of power on the guy, but his dad had warned him about using his powers. Having learned the lesson from Checkmate, Clark could understand the need for caution. Still, he was sure Stephen was unaware that he knew the circumstances of the other boy’s home life. Stephen’s father had walked out on his mother when he was five and hadn’t been seen since.

Much as Clark wanted to use that information against the older boy, he wasn’t wired like that. As Stephen shoved him, clearly looking for a response, Clark shoved back, just hard enough to knock the boy on his butt. He slammed his locker shut and looked down at the senior.

“Say what you like about me,” he said, “but don’t ever trash talk my mom and dad. You don’t know the full story and I’m not gonna tell you, because it’s none of your business.”

With that, he slung his backpack over his shoulder and walked off, leaving the football captain still staring in surprise, clearly not sure how Clark had managed to knock him off balance.

Clark was still fuming when he entered the Talon twenty minutes later. He nodded at his friends sitting at a table in the corner and went to order a coffee. He saw Lana in the office, talking to someone whose back was turned to the shop. She didn’t look happy. Clark bit his lip, but started to order his coffee, surprised to see his father and Jonathan at the counter.
“Hi son,” his dad said.

“Hey Dad.”

“How was school?”

He shrugged. “The usual.”

He heard yelling and turned, spotting Stephen coming in with a few of the guys from the football team. Obviously they didn’t have practice today. The captain shot him a look which told him that their little brawl wasn’t over.

Jonathan clearly noticed the looks.

“What’s that all about?” he asked, reaching for the takeout cup of coffee and hissing, shaking his hand. “Ow, that’s hot.”

“Nothin’,” Clark said. “Just bullies. Don’t worry, I’m not scared of him.”

“But you are being careful, right?” his father said, a look of concern in his expression.

“Yes, Dad. It’s cool.”

Stephen was watching them with a scornful look. His expression immediately changed when one of the cheerleaders walked by, putting on a flirtatious smile at the girl. She was pretty, with long, honey blonde hair and a cute, dimpled smile. She ignored the jock and smiled at Clark.

“Hi Clark,” she said shyly.

“Hi Trina,” he replied, blushing. He heard a snicker and saw both Jonathan and his father grinning at him. “Shut up,” he murmured at the two men.

He turned back to the counter to get his own coffee.

“I hear congratulations are in order;” a smooth voice said.

Clark looked up and scowled at the bald man who was standing beside his father. He hated Lex.

“And where is your lovely bride?” Lex was asking.

Clark fought a shudder. Why did it have to sound so slimy when Lex said it?

“I imagine she’s on her way home from work,” his father said coolly.

“What? No honeymoon?” the unpopular billionaire asked, his tone full of derision.

“Lois couldn’t get time off from work. We’re planning on taking our son on a family vacation after Christmas.”

“Well, when I married Lana, I took her to Aruba.”

“And you spent more than half of the time there on the phone or brokering business deals,” Lana retorted, coming out of the office. She had a smile on her face, but Clark could see the ice in her eyes. Clearly the honeymoon wasn’t as happy as Lex would have people believe. Nor the marriage.

Clark rolled his eyes and walked away.
“Don’t forget you have chores,” Jonathan reminded him quietly.

“I know. I’ll be home before dark. Promise.”

The older man smiled. “I know you will. Have fun,” he said, chuckling as Trina went to sit with Amy and Rick, clearly waiting for him.

Clark took his coffee to the table. Trina again smiled shyly at him. The cheerleader was pretty and popular, but had always been a little shy. Clark had known her since kindergarten and they’d always got along well. He had considered asking her out, but with jocks like Stephen thinking they owned the cheerleaders, Clark had not wanted to tempt fate.

His friends began to talk about their day at school. Trina soon had them laughing as she related a funny thing that had happened during gym. Clark had begun to relax when he heard the sound of footsteps behind him. A fist came out of nowhere, aiming for his face. Less out of wanting someone to hurt their hand and more out of self-preservation, Clark grabbed the fist and turned.

“How many times do I have to tell you, Kent? Losers like you don’t hang with the cheerleaders.”

Trina shot out of her chair and stood up, facing Stephen. She was barely five seven, but still managed to look scary.

“Let’s get one thing straight, jerk. I’ll be friends with whomever I want. You’re not the boss of me just because you’re the captain of the football team. You’re a jerk and I don’t like you. As for Clark, he’s my friend and if you don’t like that, well tough. At least he doesn’t walk around school acting like a bully.”

“He’s a loser …” Trina put her hands on her hips and glared the bully down, who actually did look suitably chastened.

“The only loser I see here is you,” Clark told him. “Take a hike, jerk.”

Lana came out from the office and added her own glare.

“I have had it with you, Stephen Bailey. You are banned from the coffee shop.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” Stephen began, trying to face the petite brunette.

“Yes I can, since I own the place,” she hissed. “Now get out before I call the sheriff.”

“This isn’t over, Kent,” the jock spat.

Clark sighed, looking at Trina. She shrugged.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I hate that he thinks the whole world revolves around him.”

He shook his head. “It’s okay. I should get home anyway. I have chores.”

Jonathan was working on the tractor when Clark got home. He tossed his backpack on the steps, sighing.

“Hand me that wrench, will you son?”

Clark did so, giving another long sigh.

“What’s up?” Jonathan asked.
“It’s n … well, no, it’s that guy in the Talon. He’s mad because Aunt Lana tossed him out and banned him from the coffee shop.”

Jonathan turned and looked at him. “Oh?”

“He probably thinks it’s my fault. He’s always been a bully, but now he’s saying mean things about Mom and Dad and I don’t know what to do. I mean, I get that I have to hide what I can do and stuff, but the thing is, I can beat him every time.”

“Son, I’m probably not the best person to give you advice on this, but if this guy is bullying you, then maybe you should talk to the principal?”

He’d thought of that, but he didn’t want to seem like a narc. It felt like this was something he needed to handle himself.

“You played football in high school, right?”

“Sure I did, but that’s not to say I didn’t have my share of issues. We had bullies then, too, but not like they are today. It sounds to me like kids have gotten a lot worse over the past forty years.”

Clark shrugged. “I guess.”

“Maybe you should talk to your dad about it,” Jonathan suggested. “Speaking of whom, your parents wanted to talk to you anyway.”

“What about?” he asked.

“Beats me,” the older man shrugged, although Clark got the impression he did know but figured it was up to his parents to tell. “Your mom came home early from work, so whatever it is, I guess it’s important.”

“But what about my chores?”

“I would say this is more important than your chores. Go on, son.”

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Kal kissed his wife as they sat on the couch, talking about her day. He’d spent most of his day getting the farm ready for winter, helping to protect the crops from the early morning frosts. Maybe it wasn’t exciting work, but he was happy.

Lois’ colleagues had of course been curious about her sudden marriage, but as she’d told him, it was really none of their business. She’d only been full-time at the Planet for about a month, having been given her own office. A few detractors had been bitter about her ‘promotion’ but Perry had quickly shut them up, saying she had earned her position and if they didn’t like it they could quit.

The screen door slammed and they both looked up to see Clark coming in. Kal saw the curious look on his son’s face as he spotted them both on the couch.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“Come and sit down honey,” Lois said. “We’ve got something to talk about.”

Clark did so, plopping down in the armchair. He frowned and looked around.

“Where’s Martha?”
“Over at the Hubbards’,” Kal told him. Martha had gone to help Ben’s wife Sheila with sorting out some things for a charity fundraiser.

“So, what did you want to talk to me about?” Clark asked.

“Well,” Lois said, looking at Kal. He squeezed her hand lightly.

“We’re having a baby,” he told his son.

“Well, I knew that,” Clark said.

He frowned. “You knew?”

The teen shrugged. “I saw you and Mom on Saturday at dinner. You were rubbing her stomach.”

“I’d only just told your dad,” Lois replied. “How did you figure it out?”

“‘Cause I’m smart,” Clark said with a grin.

“You’re a smart aleck,” his mother retorted. “Anyway, I went to see a doctor who works for the Justice League and he confirmed it. He calculated I’m about six weeks.”

“So, do Martha and Jonathan know?”

Kal nodded at his son. “As do your aunts and your Grandpa. But we’re not telling anyone else yet.”

Clark shrugged again. “That’s cool.” He looked thoughtful, as if he was making calculations in his head. “So the baby’s due about July?”

“Emil thinks so.”

Kal wondered why his son was being so calm about the whole thing, but clearly since he’d realised it the day they’d got married, he’d had time to get used to it.

“So, what happens now?” Clark asked. “I mean, I’ve never been around anyone who’s pregnant, so …”

“Well, I’ll have a scan in a few weeks.”

“So when will you know if it’s a boy or a girl?” the teen queried.

“Does it matter?” Kal asked him.

“I guess not. I mean, it would be cool to have a little brother. Rick says little sisters can be a pain in the butt sometimes, but …”

Lois snickered. “I hear that,” she said. “Lucy used to follow me around everywhere when I was a kid.”

Clark frowned. “How come Aunt Lucy didn’t come?” he said. “To the wedding I mean.”

Kal looked at his wife, seeing her crestfallen expression. He squeezed her hand again.

“We invited your aunt, but I guess she had other plans.” Of course, there had been far more to it than that. Kal had been with Lois when she had made the call to her sister. The response hadn’t been positive.
“So, how are you feeling Mom? You okay?”

She nodded. “A little tired, but that comes with the territory. Thank goodness I haven’t had any morning sickness,” she added with a smile at Kal.

“Did you have that with me?” the teen asked curiously.

She nodded again. “It was one of the first signs that told me I was pregnant with you. I was hardly able to keep anything down the first couple of months. But not every pregnancy’s the same.”

“No, I know,” Clark returned. “I have had sex ed, so I know about pregnancy and stuff. I mean, they only tell you that so you don’t do something stupid like get a girl pregnant. I mean,” he added, flushing, “not that I’m ready to uh … you know what, let’s talk about something else.”

Kal chuckled at his son, relieved to know that Clark was still a virgin at fourteen.

“So who was the young lady in the Talon?” he asked.

“That was Trina, and we’re just friends,” Clark replied, then frowned. “Not that that jerk Stephen thought so.”

“He plays football at school?”

His son nodded. “He likes to think because he’s captain of the team he can bully everyone else.” He bit his lip. “He was saying mean things about you and Mom.”

Kal studied his son, realising Clark was upset about the matter. Lois glanced at him, then turned back to their son.

“Honey, I know it’s hard, but you just have to ignore what people are saying, even if they are horrible. We know the truth and that’s all that matters.”

He sighed. “It just bugs me. I mean, that I have to just turn the other cheek.”

Kal nodded. “I know, son, but whatever you do, you cannot use your powers to hurt people. Even if they deserve it.”

“But aren’t you going to use your powers to stop criminals?” Clark asked.

“Stop them, yes, but not hurt them. There’s a difference. I’m not saying you shouldn’t defend yourself, Clark, but just because you’re stronger than them, it doesn’t mean you should lash out. The thing about bullies is, they do what they do because they are looking for a reaction. If you refuse to give them what they want, sooner or later they lose interest.”

Lois turned to him. “Remember Mandy? Remember when she tried to throw acid on me?”

Kal did remember. The cheerleader had been insanely jealous because he’d chosen Lois over her and had tried everything to either break them up or hurt Lois. It had finally taken Kal telling her point blank that he wasn’t interested and would never be so before she backed off. Lois had told him that Mandy had eventually found someone else to torture. More to the point, not long after Kal had left for Krypton, Mandy had found Lois crying in the girls’ bathroom and had comforted her. They had become if not friends, frienemies at least.

Clark still looked dubious.

“I don’t know,” he said slowly. “I doubt the jocks are gonna back off. Bailey tried to punch me, and
then Aunt Lana banned him from the Talon.”

“Then as much as you don’t want to be a narc,” Clark’s mother replied, “I think you should at least talk to the guidance counsellor. If he’s attacked you in a public place, especially in the Talon, then I’m sure Lana’s already reported the matter. It will get back to the school.”

“No doubt Lex will do something about it,” Kal replied sourly. If there was one thing he knew about Lex, he could be vindictive when he wanted to be. He’d more than likely do something to punish the boy. Especially if he was still trying to manipulate Lana into keeping him apprised of Justice League activities.

Clark stood up. “I should go do my chores,” he said. He leaned forward and hugged his mother. “I’m really happy about the baby,” he added. “I think it’s awesome.” He broke out in a huge grin. “It just better be a boy though.”

“Afraid you don’t get much choice in the matter kiddo,” Lois replied, laughing.

Clark flashed her a mega-watt grin and ran back outside to start on his chores.

Lois turned to Kal, grinning. “Kids.”

“Well,” he said, rubbing her belly gently. “And I can’t wait to have more of ‘em.”

“Sap,” she said with a snort.

“Your sap,” he replied, kissing her. Lois wrapped her arms around him and pulled him down to her, practically purring in contentment.
Vacation

Chapter Summary

The family takes a vacation in Australia

Lois watched as her son attempted for about the twentieth time to master the surfboard. When he’d been told they had planned a week’s vacation in Australia, he’d been keen to learn to surf off Bondi Beach.

She laughed as he once again fell off the board and was dumped in the surf. He emerged, spluttering, but grinning madly, clearly having the time of his life.

“Your drink, madame,” Kal said, handing her a cool soda. Lois grinned up at her husband, taking the soda. Ever since she’d realised she was pregnant, she’d been craving sodas like crazy.

“Thank you kind sir,” she replied, laughing softly. He sat beside her, reaching over to kiss her lips gently. He picked up the bottle of suntan lotion and squeezed a dollop into his palm, rubbing it over her bare shoulders.

“Don’t want you to get burned,” he told her. Lois moaned softly as he massaged her shoulders at the same time.

“You missed a spot,” she said when he was done.

“Where?” he asked.

She pointed to her lips and grinned. “Right here.”

He leaned forward and kissed her again. As much as she wanted to slip away and make mad, passionate love with her husband, Lois elected to stay on the beach, watching her son play in the surf.

While she knew he had just been trying to yank her chain when he’d been complaining about being left behind the weekend they’d spent in the Italian Riviera, she didn’t want her son to miss out on what she felt was important family bonding. Even if he did spend half of the time acting like a typical teenager, more interested in doing his own thing than in being seen with his parents.

They’d spent a couple of days in Melbourne not long after they’d arrived in Australia and had travelled around the city centre by tram. Lois had lived for about six months in San Francisco, or at least the army base out at Oakland, so she was familiar with the idea of trams. Kal and Clark, however, hadn’t seen one before and they were entranced by it.

Clark had spent a good part of their journey chatting to a teenage girl, practically ignoring his parents. The pair had been oblivious to the passing scenery, so intent on each other. Clark had clearly been practicing his flirting skills, such as they were.

Kal, of course, thought it was funny that their teenage son was spending all his time on their vacation chasing girls, after all that whining about not being able to go on their weekend away.
Still, with Clark occupied, they had more time to themselves to enjoy just being together. Lois was happy to get as much time alone with her husband as possible, especially since in about six and a half months they would be experiencing the joys of parenthood.

“What are you thinking about?” Kal asked.

“Nothing really,” she said. “Just how glad I am to have this time with you.” She glanced out at the water and laughed. “Look at that. Clark actually managed to stay up this time.”

Kal followed her gaze and laughed. For a few moments, Clark had managed to balance on the surfboard and was riding the wave. Until a bigger wave came in and upset his rhythm. Clark once more emerged from the water, spluttering.

Kal frowned. Lois wondered if he was worrying about their son getting hurt but he’d cocked his head as if he was listening to something.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Somebody’s talking about a shadow in the water,” Kal said. As she watched, he focused his gaze on the waves. No more than thirty feet from where Clark was trying to get back on his board, Lois spotted something in the water. It looked like a fin.

Suddenly someone screamed and the lifeguard whistle blew shrilly.

“Shark!”

Clark was oblivious to the imminent danger behind him. Lois was sure he was strong enough to fight the animal, but she didn’t want to take any chances. Kal looked at her wordlessly, then took off running down to the water.

Lois stood, watching her husband dive into the water. He disappeared beneath the waves. He’d learned to swim the day she had hit her head at Crater Lake. She shaded her eyes, continuing to watch anxiously for his dark head.

The shark, obviously attracted to the noise as people rushed to get out of the water, began to swim closer.

“Clark, get out of the water,” Lois said frantically, knowing her son would never hear her.

Suddenly a dark head emerged from the water beside Clark and his father said something to him. The teen nodded and began paddling quickly toward the shore, yet Kal dove once again under the water.

“What are you doing?” Lois asked, to no one in particular.

Then she saw it. A young boy had also been surfing nearby, but with her attention so focused on her son’s antics, she had never noticed him. The boy was in trouble, his hand waving. The duty lifeguard was already swimming toward him, but it was clear the shark was going to get there first, its fin popping up, moving closer and closer.

Had Lois been just any other onlooker, she would have been just as confused as the rest of them to what happened next. Kal had clearly done something to the shark as the fin once more disappeared beneath the waves, about two feet from the boy, and didn’t re-emerge. Then Kal’s head popped up beside the boy. He placed an arm around him, helping him swim back toward the shore. The lifeguard, having seen Kal come to the boy’s rescue, got on the boy’s other side.
Lois ran down to the water’s edge, hugging her son.

“Are you all right?” she said.

“Yeah,” he replied, looking a little pale. “That was scary. I really thought that shark was gonna come for me.”

“You and me both, honey,” she returned.

Kal and the lifeguard had managed to get the boy back to shore. He was very white, on his knees in the sand, coughing and spitting up water. Another lifeguard had draped a blanket around the boy’s shoulders and was now shaking Kal’s hand.

“Mate,” he was saying. “that was the bravest damn thing I ever saw. How did you get the shark to leave?”

“Made it an offer it couldn’t refuse,” Kal said, chuckling at the groans from some of the onlookers, including Lois, who ran up to him and put her arm around his waist.

“Forgive my husband’s sense of humour,” she said. “He watches way too many old movies.”

It was true, in a way. Kal was trying to improve his cultural knowledge by watching old movies on cable. He’d been particularly fascinated with the Godfather movie series.

“You American?” a woman asked Lois.

She nodded. “From Kansas. Actually, we just got married a few weeks ago and decided to take our son on a family vacation in lieu of a honeymoon.”

“Oh, well, congratulations. You make a lovely couple.” The woman looked at Clark, who was hovering near the boy still being tended to by the lifeguards. “Is that your son?”

Lois nodded again. “Yes, that’s Clark.”

“I’m Wendy. That’s my son, Jevon.” She nodded her head toward the boy Kal had rescued. “My daughter Amber is around here somewhere,” she added with a frown. “We live in Melbourne but we decided to take a holiday.” She looked at Kal. “Thank you for saving my son. He loves to surf but when he’s out there, it’s like nothing else exists.”

“You’re welcome, Wendy,” Kal said. “Will he be all right?” he asked the lifeguard.

“He swallowed a little bit of water, so we’re going to let him rest at the lifeguard station for a bit, keep an eye on him. I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

Jevon already looked a little brighter. He smiled at Kal.

“Thanks mister,” he said. “I woulda been fish food if you hadn’t helped me.”

Kal ruffled his hair. “Glad you’re okay, kiddo,” he replied.

Wendy accompanied her son up the beach. A man and a teenage girl also joined them, looking worried. She spoke to them and turned, smiling and waving. The man also waved and nodded his thanks.

Lois flung her arms around her husband and kissed him.
“You are a hero, my love.”

“Yeah, Dad. You’re a hero.”

Kal shrugged and smiled. “I did what anyone else would have done,” he said.

“True,” Lois agreed. “But you had an advantage. Speaking of which …”

“Maybe this isn’t the best place to talk about it,” Clark said, looking around. The crowd had started to disperse, but some were still hanging around.

“You’re right, honey,” Lois said. “Why don’t we grab our stuff and head back to the hotel? We can order something to eat on the way.”

“Ooh, can we get pizza?” Clark asked.

“How did I know you were going to ask for pizza?” Kal groaned, his arm around Lois as they walked up the beach to pick up their stuff.

“Hey, I’m a growing boy, Dad,” Clark said.

He continued to chatter as they donned shirts and shorts and walked along the road. Lois smiled at her son’s energy.

The pizza was duly ordered and was promised to be delivered within the hour. They caught a taxi back to the hotel.

“I’m gonna hit the shower,” Clark said.

“Well, don’t stay in there too long,” Kal told his son. “Your mom and I want to shower too.”

Clark cocked an eyebrow. “You’re not gonna do anything, you know, mushy, are you?”

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” Lois said with a growl. “We need to rinse the sand off.”

“Hey, who’s the one with the gutter mind, Mom? Me or you for thinking that’s what I’m thinking?”

“All right, smart aleck,” Kal said. “Shoo!”

Laughing, Clark went out, leaving them to shake their heads at each other.

“Kids!”

Lois snickered and wrapped her arms around her husband’s neck.

“Mmm, and I bet you can’t wait to have another one.”

“Well, at least with this one,” he said, rubbing her stomach, “we’ll have a bit of time before it becomes a teenager.”

“True. So, what would you like? A boy or a girl this time?”

“Girl. Definitely.”

“Why definitely?” she asked.

“Because I think a girl that looks like you would be very cute. Especially because I think her mom is
very cute.”

“Just cute?” she said, trying not to laugh.

“Stop fishing for compliments, Lane, you know you’re gorgeous.”

“Mm, Smallville, you say the sweetest things.”

He kissed her. “So, if I said let’s order the kid some Netflix and disappear to our room for some ‘alone’ time, what would you say?”

Lois heard the door to the bathroom open.

“I’d say, hold that thought, baby.”

Clark had obviously changed his clothes at superspeed as he emerged a second later.

“Ah geez, get a room already.”

Lois frowned at her son. “Watch your mouth kid.”

“You know, if you two want some alone time, all you have to do is order me some Netflix and I’m set.”

Kal raised an eyebrow at his son.

“Have you been eavesdropping?”

Clark reddened. “Uh, sort of. I swear, I don’t have super hearing or anything, which by the way, I am so glad I don’t. Yet. Really don’t need to hear the gory details.”

Kal reached out and cuffed his ear.

“I swear I don’t know where he gets that from,” Lois told her husband.

Clark just grinned unrepentantly at them.

They went to shower off the sand and changed into comfortable clothes. By the time they came back out of their bedroom, the pizza had been delivered and Clark was on the laptop his aunt and uncle had given him.

“Dad, there’s an email from Dick and Uncle Bruce.”

“What does it say, son?”

“Dick thinks he’s come up with a design you’ll really like, and Uncle Bruce says he’s been thinking about stuff like the material you’d use.”

“Oh, well that’s good.”

Dick had been working on designs for the past few weeks in his spare time, listening to their ideas and interpreting them on paper. Lois had considered Bruce’s costume as Batman but had voiced her thoughts that it might be too intimidating. Her idea was that Kal’s powers would be intimidating enough and he should wear something that was brightly coloured so he would appear friendly to the people he was trying to help.
Kal agreed with her on principle, although when he had listened to her ideas about the colours, he wasn’t so sure. She had liked the idea of using the colours of the American flag, or some of them at least, as people would see that as patriotic.

Jonathan had also suggested that in old westerns, the bad guys were usually depicted wearing black, while the good guys tended to wear brighter colours. Maybe it was a stereotype but it was one that worked.

They looked at the design Dick had sent them. He’d drawn a picture of Kal wearing the design. The suit was all blue with a yellow belt and what looked like red underwear. The El family crest was surrounded by a shield and emblazoned on the chest. A red cape and red boots completed the ensemble. While it seemed the red and blue should clash, on the image of Kal it just looked right.

Kal frowned.

“I don’t know,” he said uncertainly. “Underwear on the outside?”

“Well, Bruce uses armour as a cup so his, uh, privates aren’t exposed,” Clark said. “So maybe Dick was sort of thinking along the same lines?”

“That’s true, honey,” Lois told her husband. Bruce’s uniform was fitted with armour plating. Lois would have thought it made it more difficult for Bruce to move, but he’d had people in his company’s R & D division working on making flexible armour. Part of the armour included a cup similar to those used by sportsmen in games like football.

Bruce had suggested using a fabric similar to that which made up the rest of his costume. One which moulded to him like a second skin.

“This could really work,” Lois told her husband, who still looked a little uncertain. “Besides, I think after what happened today, it’s even more important. I mean, what if they’d started asking questions about what you did to that shark?”

Kal shook his head.

“I just stunned it, honey. Long enough for me to help Jevon get to shore.”

“Sure, but it’s something we’re going to need to be wary of. Not many people would take on a shark like you did. Actually, I don’t think anyone would.”

“You’re right. The last thing we want is for someone like Lex to start getting suspicious. I can’t always be there to protect you and Clark.”

“I can take care of myself, Dad.”

Kal smiled at his son. “I know you can, son, but bullies like Stephen Bailey are a lot easier to handle than someone like Lex.”

Lois nodded. She’d heard that the bully’s mother, who worked for LeXCorp, had been called in to a meeting with Lex, who had informed her that her son was banned from the coffee shop and why, and if she didn’t step in and curb her son’s behaviour then she would be facing her own disciplinary action. Of course, the mother had protested, saying her son was a senior in high school and hadn’t done anything wrong. Until Lex had presented her with several reports from the school principal detailing incidents of bullying. Stephen had been forced to stand up in front of the entire school and apologise for his behaviour. The football coach had benched him, putting his scholarship to Met U in jeopardy.
Bailey had of course tried to blame Clark for his woes, and had confronted Clark outside the gate early one morning. The teen had listened to his parents and hadn’t even fought back when the bully tried to punch him. The other boy had only ended up hurting himself, which had acted as yet another lesson that his actions had consequences.

Not long after that, Clark had come across his former nemesis, discovering he was nursing a black eye and countless other bruises, as well as evidence of old injuries including broken ribs. He’d convinced the older boy to see a doctor, who had confirmed the boy was being beaten on a daily basis - it turned out by the man his mother had been dating. She’d had no idea it was happening as her son had covered up for the man, trying to protect her.

Clark had realised the older boy had been acting out and taking his anger and frustration out on those he thought weaker than him because he’d felt so powerless himself. While he still thought it was no excuse, he had told his parents he at least felt he’d done some good by getting the kid some help.

Lois was proud of her son for what he’d done. Still, Kal was right. There was a big difference between a bully like Stephen and someone like Lex. At least by Kal working with the Justice League, they had a better chance of figuring out exactly what Lex was up to and putting a stop to it.
“So, Dad,” Clark said as he settled down on the couch to eat pizza. “You know it’s New Year’s Eve, right?”

“What’s New Year’s Eve?” he asked.

“It’s the night before the new year begins,” Lois explained. “People usually stay up late to count down until midnight. Some like to use the change to a new year to make resolutions.”

“Like what?” he asked.

“Hmm, like eating better, quitting smoking …”

He frowned. It sounded like New Year’s Eve was a big deal on Earth. On Krypton, they’d never done anything to mark the changing of the year. In fact they didn’t really have a lot of celebrations. Maybe the only time they did anything special was when a couple joined together in a life bonding ceremony.

“Never?” Lois asked when he mentioned it.

“That’s kind of sad,” Clark piped up.

He shrugged. He’d never really known any different on Krypton, but he was determined to change that on Earth. Since he was now an adopted citizen, he figured he should learn some of the customs. He decided he would take his wife out for the New Year’s Eve celebrations. Why shouldn’t they enjoy some of the nightlife on their second to last night in Australia?

He’d heard some music coming from what he realised was a nightclub nearby and thought it sounded pretty good.

He pulled his wife into his arms.

“I was thinking …”

“Mm, sounds dangerous,” she murmured, then chuckled at his exasperated sigh. “Okay, okay, I’ll behave.”

“We haven’t danced since the night of the Sadie Hawkins dance. Remember that?”

She nodded. “Sure I remember. You looked so hot that night.”

“So, how would you feel about going out to a club for a couple of hours?”

She kissed him. “Ooh, I love that idea. Maybe we could stay for the countdown too.”

There was a slight squeaking sound as weight was pressed on fabric. Clark was leaning over the
back of the couch, grinning at them.

“Hi, remember me? Your kid? The result of the night you went to the Sadie Hawkins dance?”

Lois frowned at their son. “Hey, how do you know that?”

“I can count, Mom,” he said, rolling his eyes. Kal reached over to ruffle the teen’s hair.

“Sorry, kiddo. The clubs don’t let in teenagers.”

“I know that, Dad! I was just kidding! Trust me, I’ll be perfectly happy sitting here watching some movies. Besides, you did want some ‘alone’ time.”

“You sure you’ll be okay on your own?”

“Moom, I’m fourteen, not four. And I know I’ve kind of been a wet blanket. I mean, this is kind of your honeymoon.”

“Hey, who said you’re a wet blanket?” Lois replied in protest. “We promised you this vacation.”

“I know, Mom, and I’ve had a great time. But you and Dad don’t have to plan everything around me.”

Lois smiled softly and reached over to give Clark a one-armed hug.

“You’re a good kid, Clark. If I don’t tell you that enough, I’m sorry.”

“What’re you talking about? I’m an awesome kid!” he said with a grin. “So go and have a good time and leave me to my por … um, movies.”

“Clark!” Kal said sternly.

“I’m kidding, Dad. Geez! I’m too young for that.”

Kal shook his head and sighed. The kid was obviously never going to let up with the teasing, but that was okay. He was glad of it in many ways as they had had a bumpy start to their relationship.

Lois went to change into something she considered good nightclub clothes. Kal didn’t think it was necessary to explain the rules to his son, since the hotel had a strict policy of using a parental lock on any movies considered unsuitable for boys his age. Not that Clark couldn’t bypass it if he really wanted to, Kal supposed. Dick had most likely shown him how to hack into various systems.

Lois came back out wearing a dark maroon coloured dress with narrow shoulder straps. The dress moulded to her gorgeous figure, only just showing the little bump of her pregnancy. Kal had been surprised that she was starting to show already even though she hadn’t reached the end of her first trimester but she’d told him it was totally normal.

He gazed at her and she smiled, obviously realising why he was staring. She had put on make-up and brushed her hair until it shone, letting it hang in loose waves down her back. How did I get so lucky to find this beautiful woman, he thought.

“Wow! Mom, you look beautiful,” Clark said.

“You do,” Kal added.

“Thank you, sweetie,” Lois replied, dropping a kiss on Clark’s crown. Kal figured since his wife had
decided to get dressed up, he might as well do the same, zipping at super speed into the bedroom and putting on the black jeans she had picked out for him while shopping in Gotham, and a dark blue silk shirt.

The club was a short walk away from the hotel. There were men at the door, obviously checking to make sure no one underage was trying to get in. Kal led his wife inside, looking around. He could hear the bass in the song they were playing. Lois grabbed his hand.

“I love this song,” she said, pulling him onto the dance floor.

*I just can't get you out of my head*
*Boy your loving is all I think about*
*I just can't get you out of my head*
*Boy it's more than I dare to think about*

Kal had to admit while the lyrics didn’t seem to be all that meaningful, the beat was fairly catchy. He did his best to keep up with his wife on the floor. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held him close.

“I used to listen to this song when I thought about you,” she said. “It’s kind of appropriate, don’t you think? I couldn’t get you out of my head.”

He nodded. “We never had music like this back home. I understand why you like it though.”

The club soon began to be filled up with others, clearly there to celebrate for New Year’s Eve. Kal noticed most of them were couples around the same age as them, or a little older.

“Well, fancy meeting you here!” a voice said.

They looked around and smiled at Wendy.

“How’s Jevon feeling?” Lois asked.

Wendy chuckled. “He’s been telling everyone he knows about his little adventure. You’d think he’d taken on the shark himself the way he’s been talking.” She grinned at them. “I see you two had the same idea. Ditch the kids and see in the New Year together.”

“Well, we have a lot to celebrate,” Lois replied, kissing Kal on the cheek.

“And I think that’s my cue to leave you guys to it. I can tell when a couple needs to be alone.”

“Oh, you don’t have to,” Kal said, only half serious.

Wendy laughed again. “Trust me, I’ve been married eighteen years. I know the signs.”

Her husband took her hand as the music changed, pulling her on to the dance floor.

Lois laughed as she watched the couple for a few moments, then turned back to him.

“This is fun,” she said. “I’m glad you suggested this.”

“Me too,” he replied.

They danced, or tried to at least, a few more songs before Lois declared she needed a drink. Kal went to order her a soda, only to find a man flirting with her when he returned to their table.
“Uh, excuse me,” he said. “That’s my wife you’re flirting with.”

The man turned to look at him, the expression on his face suggesting he was going to say something insulting, until he saw how big Kal was.

“Uh, sorry mate,” he said. “Couldn’t help it when I saw your pretty lady all by her lonesome. You’re one lucky dude.”

“Yes, I am,” he returned with a smile.

It was getting close to midnight when the sound of someone clicking their fingers could be heard over the speakers, accompanied by what Lois told him was a cello. Finally, a man’s voice began singing.

Never know how much I love you
Never know how much I care

Lois grinned at him.

“They’re playing our song,” she said. She grabbed his hand. “C’mon darling, dance with me.”

Kal followed his wife onto the dance floor. She wrapped her arms around him, then with a grin, stepped on his feet and laid her head on his chest. Kal could have floated in the air, but no one in that crowd would have noticed.

Kal stopped moving and gazed down at his beautiful wife. She looked up at him, oddly breathless, her eyes glittering from the strobe lights.

Neither of them realised the song had come to an end, so intent on each other. It wasn’t until people began counting down that they understood.

“Three, two, one … Happy New Year!”

Lois kissed him softly. “Happy New Year honey,” she said.

He kissed her back. “Happy New Year.”

More people crowded the dance floor as they began to play another song. Lois took his hand.

“Let’s get out of here,” she said.

Hand in hand, they began walking along the waterfront. Lois pointed to bright lights in the sky.

“Fireworks,” she said.

“What is that for?” he asked.

“Well, it’s like we do on the Fourth of July.”

“But why fireworks?” he said.

“You know, I don’t really know why. Maybe for us it has something to do with the celebration of independence. Like it symbolises putting the violence of the Revolution behind us. Or something like that.”

“I have to admit, it is beautiful,” he said, watching one of the displays. They had set off a number of
them over the bridge and the view was spectacular.

Still, nothing compared to the beautiful woman in his arms. He kissed her, caressing her bare arms, then glanced over her shoulder.

“I loved dancing with you tonight,” she said.

“Maybe we should do that more often,” he replied.

She looked a little uncertain.

“I don’t know. With the baby coming, and with the League and everything, what if we get too busy?”

He shook his head slightly. “All the more reason why we should,” he said. “I mean, maybe I haven’t been here long enough to know about marriage and my only experience is through my mother and father, and of course, Jonathan and Martha, but I do know that we have is very special and I never want to lose sight of that.” A light breeze was blowing and he brushed the hair off her face. “Lois, you are an amazing woman and I never want to take you for granted. So, even when our lives get incredibly busy, what with your work and mine, when I join the League, I want to make sure we never get too busy just to be with each other.”

“You know, you’re right.”

“Speaking of which,” he said, “let’s go back to the hotel. I want to show my beautiful wife just how much I love and appreciate her.”

“Kal, you say the most wonderful things sometimes.”

“You know I mean every word,” he replied.

It was almost one by the time they got back to the hotel room. Lois grinned at her husband as she spotted their teenage son sprawled on the couch. He’d clearly fallen asleep while watching a movie as the end credits were still rolling. Lois found a rug and covered him up, while Kal grabbed a pillow and gently placed it under the boy’s head.

They tiptoed to their room, shutting the door behind them. Kal pulled her into his arms and kissed her deeply.

“Umm,” she said with a soft sigh. “Have I ever told you you’re a wonderful kisser?”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, baby,” he replied with a cheesy grin. She would have rolled her eyes if it wouldn’t spoil the moment. He chuckled and kissed her again, pulling her closer, his hand sliding down her back to cup her ass. She responded with an answering squeeze of his ass.

Kal began kissing her jawline, down to her throat, sucking gently on the skin. Lois felt the tingle in her body as he found a sensitive spot and nibbled on it.

He guided her toward the king size bed. As her knees hit the edge of the mattress, she sat on it, pulling him down with her, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him, tongue tracing his lips. He murmured something which she couldn’t quite make out, not that it really mattered.

She pulled at the buttons of his shirt, pushing the short sleeves down his arms, loving the soft moans he made as traced his muscles with her fingers.
Lois turned and stood up, watching her husband who looked up at her from his seat on the bed, his lustful gaze practically devouring her. She kept her own gaze locked on him, a small smile playing at her lips as she reached behind her back and slowly unzipped the dress, kicking off her heels. She heard his breath catch as she slowly revealed herself in just her bra and panties, the dress pooling at her feet.

He regarded her silently for a moment as she stood in front of him, then reached for her, pulling her down to straddle his lap. She kissed him again, feeling his hands on her back, caressing her skin before he fumbled with the hooks on her bra. She grinned at his frustrated sigh and decided to help him out a little, reaching back to unfasten it, sliding the straps off and dangling it by one strap for a moment, then tossing it behind her.

She carded her fingers through his thick hair as he bent his head to cover her breast with his mouth, teasing the nipple with his tongue. Lois undulated her body, grinding against him. Kal moaned softly, moving on to tease her other breast. Meanwhile his hands were busy, sliding beneath her panties to cup her ass, pinching the cheeks.

She continued to rock her body on her husband’s lap, teasing him a little. He growled low in his throat and she felt the unmistakable bulge in his pants. He was rock hard. She felt her own juices leak a little at the thought of what he could do to her with that hard cock.

She lifted herself a little off his lap before grinding down, moving hard and fast, eliciting almost a pained moan from him as he tore his mouth from her breast and looked at her, his gaze a mix of amusement and lust.

“You are a tease, my love,” he said.

“Going to punish me?” she replied, laughing softly, daring him.

He answered that by standing up, still with her in his arms. She admired the play of his muscles as he moved, bending her head to rain kisses on his chest. Kal turned around, laying her down on her back on the mattress, kissing her briefly before undoing his belt and pushing his jeans down, kicking them off. He then slowly pulled her panties off, pressing kisses to the slight bump at her belly, then her thighs.

He knelt on the carpeted floor, lifting her legs to crook her knees over his shoulders. Lois arched her back and moaned at the first brief touch of his lips on her sex. Kal shushed her, clearly conscious of their son sleeping just a wall away. She shot him a glare and he smirked, before bending his head again. She suppressed another moan as his hands gripped her thighs, keeping them apart as he thrust his tongue inside her.

She shifted on the bed, clutching the bedclothes, trying not to cry out as her arousal built to a peak before breaking. Gasping for breath, she gazed up at her husband, who had a self-satisfied expression on his face. She reached for him, pulling him down to the bed with her, then rolled over and straddled him, taking his hard shaft deep within her. It was Kal’s turn to try to suppress a moan as she rocked against him, teasing him once more.

He grasped her waist, attempting to hold her in place as he thrust inside her. Lois held on to his arms, grinding against his groin before moving her body up so he would almost slip out of her, then thrust down hard. Kal groaned and she shushed him.

Kal rolled over, kissing her briefly before thrusting hard and deep inside her. Their passionate coupling was punctuated with grunts and moans as they drove each other on to climax.
Kal kissed her as they settled in the bed, their arms around each other. Lois pressed a kiss to his chest, then looked up at her husband.

“Thank you for tonight,” she said.

He smiled and kissed her again, stroking her bare arms. She yawned sleepily, the lovemaking leaving her feeling lethargic, her limbs heavy.

“Go to sleep, my love,” Kal said.

The sun was streaming in through the blinds when Lois woke the next morning. She rolled over, frowning as she found the bed empty. She saw Kal’s phone on the nightstand and picked it up, glancing at the time. Almost nine.

Lois got up and grabbed her robe, slipping it on and going out to the main room of the suite. It had clearly been tidied up as the popcorn Clark had obviously bought and left on the coffee table had been thrown out. There was a note on the glass table beside the balcony doors.

*Hey Mom, Dad went to get breakfast for you. Decided to go for a swim. Figured I might give you guys a bit of ‘alone time’ so I thought I’d go hang out at the arcade or something. Love you.*

Lois couldn’t help smiling at that. Clark was a good kid and she had no concerns about him being out in the city on his own.

She put the note back on the table just as the door opened and Kal came in holding a bag with the name of the restaurant downstairs on the front. He grinned when he saw her.

“Hey sleepyhead,” he said.

She went over to him and kissed him.

“Hi yourself. What’s for breakfast?” she added, glancing at the bag.

“Pancakes, strawberries.” He smiled. “How about we take this back to bed?”

“Why, Mr Kent, are you planning on seducing me with strawberries?” she asked coyly.

“Now there’s an idea,” he said. “Since we’ve apparently got the morning to ourselves.”

She giggled. “No time like the present,” she replied, backing toward the bedroom. “Race you.” She sent him a seductive look under long eyelashes, undoing the sash of her robe and dropping it on the floor. Kal’s eyes flashed gold for a moment before he swept her up in his arms. She was back on the bed before she could blink.
Debut

Chapter Summary

Kal, or rather, Superman, makes his debut.

Clark thrust his books in his locker and slammed it shut before throwing his bag over his shoulder and walking quickly along the corridor.

“Clark!”

Frowning, he looked around then smiled at Trina.

“Hi,” he said.

“I’ve been calling,” she said as she hurried up to him, sounding breathless. “Didn’t you hear me?”

He shook his head. “Sorry. I was miles away.”

“Guess you were.” She bit her lip, looking a little uncertain. “I was wondering. I could really use some help with my English homework.”

He shifted the strap of his bag on his shoulder, trying to make out it was heavy.

“Um, I can’t right now, but if you wanna come over after dinner, I could take a look,” he replied.

She frowned at him, clearly curious as to what would be so important that he’d blow off his friends.

“Trina, I’m not blowing you off,” he said. “It’s just … well, it’s a family thing.” They walked along the corridor together. “I mean, you know how my mom sort of spent most of my life travelling around. She still feels like she missed out on a lot, and my dad, well, because he wasn’t in my life for almost all of it, well, I guess they like including me in on stuff.”

Okay, that wasn’t strictly true, he thought, since he was the one who liked being included on family stuff. Maybe not when his parents got mushy around each other, as they usually did, but other things. Like the appointment he was dashing off to now. His mother was having a scan, which was being done by Emil Hamilton, who Clark had been told was the doctor retained by the Justice League.

He said goodbye to his friend and waited until she was out of sight before he ran at super speed to the city.

Watchtower had been set up with everything the Justice League could need, including a medical bay. Clark dashed past the bank of computers, where Uncle Bruce was working, studying something on the monitor, and made his way into the medical bay.

“Am I too late?” he asked his mother, who was already lying on the bed.

“Nope, you’re just in time kiddo,” his dad said. “Emil was about to get started.”

“Pull up a chair, Clark,” the doctor said, indicating the chair on one side of the bed. His father was on the other side, holding his mother’s hand. Clark refrained from rolling his eyes. Even Amy
thought the way they held hands was romantic. Girls, he scoffed to himself.

Emil smiled as he squirted gel on Clark’s mother’s stomach.

“Ooh, that’s cold,” she said, shivering slightly.

“Sorry, should have warned you.” He picked up the transducer. To Clark, it looked a little like a microphone, or at least, the old-fashioned kind.

Clark watched as an image came up on the screen. The equipment was a lot more sophisticated than some of the machines he’d seen in his sex education classes and the image was sharp and clear. It had occurred to him to wonder why his dad didn’t just x-ray, but he figured there was a time and a place for everything.

“Well, everything looks good,” Emil was saying. “The babies look nice and healthy.”

“Wait, did you just say babies?” Mom asked.

Emil looked at them as all three of them stared back at him, stunned.

“Yes, babies.” He pointed to the screen. “As in twins. I wasn’t sure if you knew. I detected two heartbeats at your first check-up, but figured I should wait until the scan. Anyway, there’s one baby, and there’s the other. Did you want to know the sex?”

“I do,” Clark said, looking at his parents. He crossed his fingers. Please let one of them be a boy.

His mother looked at his father, who just smiled and shrugged.

“It’s your decision, darling.”

She smiled back at him, clearly still shocked by the announcement they were having two babies.

“Yes, I want to know.”

Emil grinned and turned back to the image. “Well, you’re in luck. Looks like Clark got his wish. Of course, Clark, you do realise that little brothers can be just as annoying as little sisters.”

“At least I can show him my jump shot,” Clark grinned. “So is the other one a boy too?”

“Nope, sorry kiddo. Matched set. You get a little brother and a little sister.”

Clark pouted, then grinned at his father, knowing his dad had been hoping for a little girl.

“Wow, honey, those are some strong little swimmers you got there,” Mom said with a chuckle.

“Actually,” Emil said. “I doubt it would make much difference whether you were Kryptonian or human. There are a number of factors which could cause, uh, sorry, produce twins.”

Dad shook his head. “None of that matters,” he said. “All we really need to know is that the babies are fine and that Lois is healthy.”

Emil nodded, glancing at the chart. They’d obviously already taken a few tests.

“You’re fine. Okay, your blood pressure is a little elevated, but still in the normal range for your pregnancy. Your blood tests came back fine and there’s no sign of any abnormalities. As long as you maintain a healthy diet, stay away from coffee and alcohol and get plenty of fresh air and exercise, I
think in just under six months you will deliver two very healthy babies. I’d tell you to avoid stress, but I know that’s not always possible in today’s world.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Kal helps me de-stress,” she replied. Which was true, Clark thought, since his dad always rubbed her shoulders when she came home from work and helped her relax.

“So when can we start telling people?” Clark asked.

“Your mom’s past what we docs like to call is the danger period so I think you can start telling people now.”

“Cool,” Clark smiled. He couldn’t wait to tell his friends he was going to be a big brother.

His dad lifted his head and frowned. Clark wondered what that was about and shot his father a questioning look.

“I just heard something going on outside,” Dad said. “Be back in a sec.”

Clark looked at his mother and shrugged as his father disappeared in the blink of an eye. Mom sat up, waiting as Emil gently wiped the gel off her stomach, then pulled her blouse down. She got up from the bed and quickly straightened her clothes.

Clark followed his mother and Emil out of the medical bay and into the main room of Watchtower. Something was clearly going on outside as his uncle and some others in the League were practically glued to the monitors.

“How do I look?”

He turned and stared at his father, dressed in the uniform Dick had helped design. They’d gone for the all over blue with what looked like red briefs as a contrast. The chest piece of the tunic included a shield with a yellow background and the El family crest. A red cape and red boots completed the look.

“You look amazing,” Clark’s mother replied. “But why now?”

“There’s been what looks like a terrorist attack,” Uncle Bruce replied. “Someone’s threatened to blow up Air Force One.”

Clark followed his mother as she walked over to watch the action on the screen. A news broadcast was showing footage of the President’s plane. While nothing seemed amiss on the outside, Clark could see two military jets in the air.

“Are they sure it’s no hoax?” she asked.

“Your father’s on that plane,” Victor, otherwise known as Cyborg, reported.

Clark stared at him. “Grandpa?”

The older man nodded. “Yeah, champ. Your grandfather managed to get an S.O.S through to the Justice League frequency.”

“Around the same time as someone called in the threat to the D.C tv station. It’s now gone national.”

“I’m going to intercept the plane and see if I can get a handle on the situation,” Dad said.

Mom nodded. “Be careful honey. Those fly-boys could try to shoot you down if they get antsy.”
He kissed her. “Don’t worry,” he said, pressing a reassuring hand to her stomach. “Remember what Emil said. Try not to get too stressed and upset the twins.”

He left, his cape flying behind him. Bruce turned, cocking an eyebrow.

“Twins? You mean you’re pregnant?”

Mom nodded. “Sorry, we wanted to wait until I’d had my first ultrasound.”

“I get that,” the Gotham knight said. “But twins? You two didn’t waste any time.” He broke out in a cheesy grin. “You practiced enough.”

Clark groaned at his uncle’s terrible joke.

“Congrats,” Victor said. Bart, who was stuffing his face, as usual, added his own congratulations.

The news anchor had a hand up to their ear, obviously listening to something their producer was saying.

“Something is happening,” she was saying to the viewers. “We’re not exactly sure what it … wait, did you say a flying man?” she asked, staring incredulously into the camera.

Obviously someone in one of the military aircraft was recording the action as the station switched live. Clark cheered quietly as he watched his father flying toward Airforce One. He hovered in the air, his head cocked, the same way he always did when he was listening for something.

“Hold your fire, hold your fire,” someone, probably down on the ground, was shouting to the man in the plane’s cockpit.

Clark felt his mother grab his hand and he squeezed gently, providing reassurance as they continued to watch. His father circled the plane, then pulled at a door. Immediately the plane dropped as it depressurised.

“What is he doing?” the jet pilot asked. “He’s going to get someone killed!”

It probably took less than two minutes, but those two minutes felt like an hour to Clark. He was sure his mother felt the same way. She visibly relaxed as they watched the plane begin to descend to make an emergency landing. A blue suited figure could be seen underneath the fuselage, helping guide the plane down.

The national broadcast continued as the plane landed safely on the ground. Emergency crews and police quickly surrounded the President’s aircraft. To Clark’s delight, he saw his grandfather leaving the plane a few minutes later. He appeared dishevelled, with a cut on his forehead, but otherwise okay.

There was a whoosh of displaced air and Clark grinned at his father, who was also grinning ear to ear. Mom ran up to him and flung her arms around his neck.

“I’m so glad you’re okay.”

“What happened?” Bruce asked.

“I can unequivocally say it was no hoax. There were two men who appeared to be terrorists on the plane, holding the President and her aides hostage. I didn’t have time to get into the whys and wherefores,” he added, glancing at Clark’s mother, who was clearly already in reporter mode. “One
of them had what looked like a remote to an explosive device in the plane’s engines. If the bomb had gone off, the plane would have gone down.”

“Appeared to be?” Mom asked.

“Mom, not now,” Clark told her.

They continued to watch the broadcast on the monitors as about thirty minutes later the President held a press conference. It was fairly clear it had been hastily arranged. She looked pale and still fairly shaken by her experience, but managed a smile.

“Ladies and gentleman of the press, my fellow Americans, I wish to assure the public that, thanks to our mysterious saviour, no one was badly hurt and the two men who held us hostage are now in custody.”

“Madam President, Madam President, can you tell us who this strange flying man is?”

She shook her head. “I’m sorry, Miss Carter, I’m afraid I know nothing about the man. All I can say is that we are grateful for his assistance today. If it had not been for him, my husband would be a widower and my children without a mother.”

Clark bit his lip and glanced at his father, but said nothing.

Another reporter began asking questions which seemed to imply he thought of the save as nothing but a publicity stunt. A third reporter berated the second.

“He saved the President’s life, Carlos,” she said. “And you’re calling this a publicity stunt?”

“I can assure the media this threat was real,” Betty Travers, a presidential aide spoke up. “I saw the remote to the explosive device myself.” She had a cut on her cheek and was pale and trembling, clearly suffering from shock. “We were attacked and held hostage by two very desperate and dangerous men.”

The President smiled at Betty, then looked at the camera, wincing. She’d clearly also been hurt, but was trying not to show it.

“If the man who saved us is watching this broadcast, I would like to say that today you have done a great service to this country. I would like to shake your hand, sir.”

Clark smiled at his father. “You’re a hero, Dad.”

Bruce, ever the devil’s advocate, shrugged. “I’m sure it won’t be long before someone will start trying to paint it in a less positive light.”

Clark’s mother groaned. “Bruce, can’t you just enjoy the moment?”

“I’m just saying,” he said, squaring his shoulders.

“Cynic,” she snorted.

He cocked an eyebrow at her. “Lois Lane, calling me a cynic? Where is the hard-headed investigative reporter we all know and love?”

She rolled her eyes. “I can be as cynical as the next person. It’s just a little hard to be objective when the man in question is the father of your children.”
Bruce smiled. “True. I have to admit it did look very impressive from where I was standing. So, how are you going to handle this, now that you’ve made your debut on national television?” he asked Clark’s father, who was now dressed in normal clothing.

“That’s one of the reasons Perry knows the truth about me,” Dad said. “We’ll call him tonight and get the ball rolling.”

Bruce snickered. “Have to admit, Kal, I thought you’d be mangling idioms left and right but you seem to be learning very quickly.”

“That’s ‘cause the Kryptonian brain works faster than the human brain,” Clark told his uncle.

“Like everything else in the Kryptonian physiology,” the other man replied. “No wonder you two are having twins.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Lame, Uncle Bruce. Really lame.”

“I try,” he chuckled.

At dinner that night, all Clark could talk about was his father’s debut. Martha and Jonathan were of course excited about the twins and clearly couldn’t wait to be honorary grandparents. They were a little concerned about the attack on the President. Martha had always liked President Wallace, who was a Democrat. It had often been the cause of a few arguments around Smallville, since the majority of the population voted Republican.

Not only was Wallace the first female President, but she was also one of the youngest, at forty-two when she was elected. However, she was popular and well-liked by the constituents.

Clark was just getting up to help Jonathan clear the table when there was a knock on the screen door. His mother went to answer it and came back in, smiling.

“Clark, your friend is here.”

He smacked his forehead. “Oh, right. Hi, Trina,” he said. “We’re just finishing dinner. Hey, Martha made apple pie, you want some?”

“Sure,” the cheerleader replied. “Mrs Kent’s pies are famous.”

Clark grinned at her and cleared the table quickly, before helping to serve the pie. Trina sat down next to his mother.

“Um, so you’re Clark’s mom? My dad’s a big fan of yours. He really loves your work.”

“Well, tell him that’s very flattering.”

Clark listened to the chatter for a couple of minutes until Martha nudged him.

“There’s homemade strawberry ice cream in the freezer,” she said.

“Cool,” he replied, going out to the laundry to get the ice cream. He grabbed the scoop from the drawer and added a scoop to his pie, and one for Trina, then went back out into the dining room, sitting down beside his friend.

“Guess what?” he said.

She looked at him. “What?”
“I’m gonna be a big brother.”

Trina’s eyes widened. “Really?” She smiled at Clark’s mother. “You must be so happy.”

“We all are, Trina,” Dad replied.

“So is it a girl or a boy?”

“Actually, both,” Mom told her. “We just found out today we’re having twins.”

“Wow! That’s so awesome! Congratulations.”

Clark grinned at her. He dug into his pie, eating quickly. His father cleared his throat.

“Clark, sweetie, don’t inhale your food,” Martha scolded gently.

He smiled at her sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“That’s okay, honey.” She turned to Trina. “Is your father still working at the plant?”

Trina nodded. “He got promoted last month to shift foreman. He’s doing okay.”

“Does he like working for Lex?” Jonathan asked.

She shrugged. “I don’t know. I mean, he doesn’t see Mr. Luthor really, so he doesn’t say much. But he likes his job.”

“That’s good.”

They lapsed into silence. Trina clearly felt a little uncomfortable, but continued to eat her pie. Clark finished his dessert and got up to put his dishes in the dishwasher. He was surprised to hear another knock on the screen door.

“I’ll get it,” he said, going to answer the door. He stared in shock at the visitor. “Grandpa!”

His grandfather smiled at him. “Hey champ.”

Clark’s mother came out, clearly having heard Clark’s shout.

“Daddy! We were going to call you. After we saw what happened, I mean.”

Clark shot his grandfather a warning look and the older man nodded, following them back into the dining room. He saw Trina sitting at the table and clearly understood.

“Wow!” Trina said. “You’re General Lane. I mean … I saw what happened on the tv. I’m so glad you’re okay, sir.”

“Thank you, uh …” He raised an eyebrow.

“I’m Trina. Clark and I go to Smallville High. Actually, I came over to get Clark’s help on an English paper.”

“Yeah, speaking of which,” Clark said. “Why don’t we go out to the barn. My books are out there.”

“Sure,” she said. “It was nice to meet you, Mrs … um …”

“It’s Lane-Kent,” Mom replied, “but you can call me Lois.”
Trina smiled. “Okay.” She picked up her bag and followed Clark to the door.

Clark just knew from the way his parents were smiling at him that they were going to be talking about him and Trina as soon as he was gone. He just knew it.
Superman’s made his debut but the League still has to figure out who was behind the attack, which could spell trouble for the heroes.

Lois grinned at her father and hugged him as Clark and his friend went out to the barn.

“Dating already?” her father asked.

Kal smiled. “Apparently they’re ‘just good friends’.” He held out a hand to his father-in-law. “I’m glad to see you’re okay, Sam.”

“Thanks to you,” the former general smiled. “We all thought we were goners, actually.”

Jonathan smiled. “We were just about to have coffee,” he said. “Would you care for some?”

“That would be great, Jonathan. Thanks.”

“Just make sure yours is decaf,” Martha told Jonathan. “Remember your blood pressure, dear.”

Jonathan made a face at his wife, but went off amiably enough to make the coffee.

“Tea for me please,” Lois called out. She smiled again at her father. “We have something to tell you.”

They hadn’t even told her father about the pregnancy, since Lois had wanted to wait until the scan anyway.

“You’re pregnant,” he said, then laughed at her surprised look. “It’s hardly a newsflash, sweetheart. I’m not so old I can’t remember what it was like for your mother.” His eyes took on a faraway look. “The first time she told me she was pregnant, we were in Russia. I went out and bought her this little glass bird. You know, there’s this fairy tale in Russia, I forget what it’s called, but the bluebird is a symbol of hope.”

“I remember that glass bird,” Lois said, glancing at her husband, who sent her a loving look. “Mom used to put it in the window in the kitchen of every place we moved to. What happened to it?”

“I still have it somewhere,” her father replied. “I’ve always been meaning to give it to you, but you’ve been travelling around so much the past few years … now that you’re married and settled down, I think it’s time Ol’ Blue got a new home, don’t you?”

“You’re right, Daddy,” she said, sitting down with her father at the table as Jonathan brought out the coffees. “Anyway, it’s not just the fact I’m pregnant. We just found out today, we’re having twins. A boy and a girl.”

Her father’s face lit up in a huge grin. “That’s wonderful, sweetheart. Two more grandbabies.” He looked at Kal, who nodded.
“We’re thrilled,” Kal told him. “I know my mother and father would be very happy as well.” His face took on a wistful look and Lois knew he was missing his parents. It looked like it was time for a visit to the fortress.

She decided to change the subject and asked her father about the attack on the plane. The two men holding the President hostage had demanded money and the release of some prison inmates on death row.

“I don’t understand why they would threaten to blow up the plane, knowing they would be blown up with them,” Martha said.

“Maybe that’s a question for them,” Lois told her. She looked at Kal. “I’m guessing they’ll be in FBI custody. I know an agent I can talk to. His name’s Dan Scardino.”

“Isn’t he …” her father began.

Lois chewed her lip. She had met Scardino years ago when he had been working undercover, pretending to be a lawyer with the Federal Drug Administration, trying to uncover a scam being run by a corrupt pharmaceutical company. Lois had been chasing the story.

Scardino had tried to get her to go out with him, but she had never been interested.

Kal correctly interpreted her hesitation.

“Sweetheart, you don’t need to explain,” he said. “That happened before I came back and I know I have no reason to be jealous.”

She squeezed his hand and smiled at him lovingly. He trusted her with his heart and soul and she felt the same way.

Her father smiled.

“Anyway, the President is very keen to meet you, Kal.” He frowned slightly. “We can’t exactly call you Kal.”

“Actually, I’ve been giving that a lot of thought,” Lois told her father. “I read Nietzsche years ago.”

Kal frowned. “Nietzsche?”

She nodded. “He’s a kind of philosopher. Anyway, Carter Hall and I were having this deep discussion a couple of months ago and he reminded me of Nietzsche.”

Kal looked confused.

“Carter told me that Nietzsche believed the true hero was someone who embraced the life he was given and made it better. He called that person Ubermensch. Superman.”

Her husband still seemed puzzled.

“Honey, what I’m saying is, your powers are a gift and instead of wasting that gift, you’re using it to help humanity. That’s what I mean.”

“Superman,” Jonathan said, a small smile on his lips. “That sounds like a great name.”

The general nodded. “It does.”
Kal looked dubious. “I don’t … know,” he said slowly.

“Daddy’s right, honey,” Lois told her husband. “Now that you’re out there, helping people, they will want to know more about you. So, you need a name. Besides, I think it fits, and not just because of Nietzsche. I mean, the symbol on your suit - I know it’s the El family crest, but to the average human it looks like an ‘S’. And you are super human, and male, so … Superman. I mean, it doesn’t matter that you’re not really human.”

“Oh, that’s something you need to think about. Are you going to tell people you’re an alien?”

“We actually already talked with Perry before dinner,” Lois told her father. “He thinks we should stick to the truth … that Kal is the survivor of a doomed planet.”

“Which would get the sympathy vote,” Jonathan said with a smile.

“I still don’t know,” Kal said with a sigh. Lois’ father looked at him.

“Son, if there’s one thing I have learned it’s that you do not argue with a Lane woman. Especially when she’s pregnant. Trust me on this. They will find some way to hold it over you …” he trailed off as Lois glared at her father. “Uh, maybe I should go see what my grandson is up to.”

Kal nodded. “I think I’ll join you, Sam,” he said, getting up from the table. The two men slunk away.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Lois grumbled. “Run away. I’ll get you back.”

She couldn’t help but notice the grins from the older couple, who swiftly rose, pretending they had something urgent to do.

ONE MONTH LATER

Kal flew in to Watchtower through the open skylight, hovering in mid-air for a second before slowly lowering himself down to the main floor. His teammates frowned at him.

“You’re late,” Batman admonished.

“Sorry,” he said. “I was caught up dealing with …” He nodded toward the huge screen where news reporters were speaking on camera, relaying the details of his various saves throughout the city.

“Don’t you think you might be overdoing it?” Green Arrow asked.

Kal frowned at him, but didn’t ask what he meant. Since his rescue of Air Force One, he had been kept busy all over Metropolis, attempting to keep the crime rate down. Bruce had cautioned him about doing too much, especially since it could create resentment among the local police, not to mention the emergency services if they thought he was taking their jobs.

Still, he didn’t see that he had much choice. In the past month alone, two police officers’ lives had been almost cut short as the crime rate in Metropolis escalated. Kal had only just managed to stop them being gunned down when they had each gone to separate incidents in Suicide Slum, only to find themselves in the middle of gang activity.

Lex, while he had been uncharacteristically silent over the new superhero’s debut, wasted no time in pointing the finger solely at Kal as the cause of the rising crime rate. Superman - Lois had won that little debate - had soon discovered his share of critics as well as supporters and she had reported they were pretty much neck and neck.
“Batman, why don’t you back off,” Lois interjected. “Superman can’t help what’s happening out there.”

Batman glared at Lois. He’d been, as Lois suggested, like a bear with a sore head lately, but Kal presumed that was because he had had a few run-ins with Catwoman, aka Selina Kyle. Clearly Bruce was having issues with his would-be girlfriend and she was retaliating the only way she knew how.

Batman looked at Lois for a moment, then nodded.

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” he said. “Now that Superman has arrived, we can get the meeting of the Justice League started. What do we have to report?”

“Why don’t I start?” Green Arrow replied. “Metropolis isn’t the only city having problems with an escalating crime rate. Star City’s is soaring. It’s like the bad guys have all banded together and agreed to step up activity in every city.”

Impulse nodded. “Same thing in Central City.”

“I hate to point out the obvious, but this all did start as soon as Superman appeared on the scene.”

Kal frowned at his teammates. Could the media be right and his presence was to blame? Lois squeezed his hand, clearly knowing what he was thinking.

“No, honey,” she said. “This isn’t your fault.” She turned back to the others. “My instincts tell me there’s someone behind the scenes pulling the strings. And who do we know who likes pulling the strings?”

“Lex,” Kal replied. “You think Lex is behind this?”

“It makes sense,” she said. “I’ve been trying to talk to some of my sources, but they’ve all clammed up like, well, clams. It’s like they’re all running scared. Even Bobby Bigmouth let me down.”

Kal continued to listen as his friends talked about the various incidents. It seemed that the Justice League had its very own counterparts - a team of villains who thought they were strong enough to fight the members of the Justice League. Yet, apart from the Joker, who used the proceeds of bank robberies to finance his schemes, none of them seemed to have much money of their own. Which begged the question. Who was the money behind the Injustice League, as Impulse called them.

It seemed to make sense that Lex, with his billions, was financing various schemes to either destroy the reputations of the Justice League members, or generally to cause trouble. It was fairly clear the bald billionaire was doing his level best to turn the public of Metropolis against Superman, before Kal had really even had a chance to establish himself as the city’s resident hero.

Lex was claiming that Kal was the vanguard for a fleet of aliens, intent on taking over the planet, based simply on the story Lois had written and published in the Daily Planet. It would have been laughable if it weren’t for the fact that the other man had managed to dig up the files they’d thought buried by Amanda Waller. As much as Kal wanted to think that Checkmate was dead and buried, the one lesson Jor-El had taught him was that ideas could be buried, but they could never die.

He’d learned other lessons through the war on Krypton. Lessons which he wanted to show the people of Earth. The trouble was, most of those in charge viewed his ideas with suspicion. How could he tell them that his main motivation was to prevent the same kind of disaster on Earth that had befallen his own planet?
His family, not to mention Bruce, had advised him to not take the criticism to heart. Eventually the population would come around once they realised that he really was only there to help.

He heard a small cough and Lois nudged him.

“Oh,” he said. “Guess it’s my turn. Well, Lois has been doing some digging into the attempt against the President on Air Force One. She has a contact in the … FBI?” he asked, turning to his wife for confirmation, who nodded. “Um, so the agent working on the case said he didn’t believe the two men who tried to blow up the plane were terrorists.”

Scardino had told her the explosives on the plane had been rigged to blow the engines once they’d got what they wanted out of the President. The so-called ‘terrorists’ would have jumped from the plane before it crashed.

“Hey, you guys might want to take a look at this,” Bart called out. He had left the meeting to take a call on one of the other screens.

“What is it, Bart?” Bruce asked.

The smaller man showed them the screen, where a video of Lex showed behind the anchorwoman.

“LexCorp today announced they have won the contract to produce new security tech which the company’s CEO claims will prevent the kind of terrorist act which saw the President and several of her aides attacked last month.

“The situation, in which two men took President Wallace hostage, demanding millions of dollars and the release of several unidentified death row prisoners, was quickly ended without further incident by Metropolis’ Superman.

“However, LexCorp CEO and president Lex Luthor says this incident could have been prevented with tighter security measures.”

“Frankly,” Lex stated, “I believe the President’s security is inadequate. My company has been working on tech which my researchers believe will prevent such incidents from reoccurring.

“While I, among many other citizens of this country, am grateful to Superman for his brave actions, I find myself questioning his motives. Having said that, had my company’s new tech been in operation there would have been no necessity for Superman at all.”

Lois looked at Kal.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“If you’re thinking Lex may have been behind this attack, I would say that’s not a huge stretch of the imagination,” Bruce replied.

Bart shushed them.

“In other news, Mr Luthor has announced he is putting his hat in the ring for next year’s Republican nominations. Lex Luthor, the son of industrialist Lionel Luthor …”

Kal gazed at the screen as Lex again spoke in what seemed to be a press conference. He was highly critical of the President’s inability to protect herself and her people, implying that a President who could not protect herself was hardly in a position to govern the country.
He could understand why Lois would think Lex would be behind the attack on the President. Not only could the billionaire CEO make profits from the tech he was developing, but he could also win votes with his criticism of President Wallace.

Lois was fuming when they returned home.

“How dare he question your motives? And how dare he criticise the President? Who the hell does he think he is?”

“Honey, calm down. Getting upset isn’t good for you or the babies.”

“But he …”

He put his hands on her shoulders. “Lo, I know how you feel, but the one thing I have learned from both you and Bruce is that I cannot take this to heart. The fact is, Lex is just trying to hit back in the only way he knows how.”

Clark came in, frowning.

“I heard Mom yelling from outside in the barn. Is everything okay?”

“Just Lex causing trouble,” Kal told his son. “Your mother’s fine, just a little upset.”

Lois continued to grumble. “I oughta show that man the bad side of my fist,” she growled.

“That won’t change the situation,” he told her, trying to calm her down.

“He’s right, Lois. If you go after Lex in this kind of mood, it’s going to make things worse.”

They looked around at Bruce. He smiled.

“Sorry, I couldn’t help overhearing.”

“What’s going on, Bruce?”

“I had an interesting conversation with an old friend. Or rather, Batman did. It seems Selina has decided to change sides again.”

“Which means?”

“She came to me with some very valuable information. She knows someone who is willing to testify that Lex was definitely behind the attack on the President. I thought you might like to come with me, Kal.”

Kal glanced at Lois, who nodded.

“You should go.”

Kal couldn’t help wondering why Selina would suddenly change sides. Clark seemed to be thinking along the same lines.

“It sounds to me like this is some kind of trick. Why would Selina change sides all of a sudden?”

Bruce nodded. “I know what you’re thinking, and my instincts are telling me the same thing. Still, I think we should let this scenario play out. I mean, it’s not the first time she’s done something like this, or are you forgetting the night she tried to break in to the manor?”
“No, you’re right,” Lois said. “It doesn’t mean I trust the woman.” She turned to Kal. “It’s up to you, honey.”

“I think we need to take the chance.”


“I’ll be there,” Kal promised.

Lois still looked concerned as Kal prepared for his meeting with Batman later that night. She lay in their bed, watching him as he donned his Superman suit.

“Are you sure about this, honey?” she asked.

“As sure as I can be,” he said. He sat on the bed and kissed her, gently caressing her swollen belly. He felt one of the babies moving in her womb. Kal had read that babies moved from the moment they started growing but the mother tended not to feel it until she was well into her fifth month.

“Bruce wouldn’t have asked me to come along if he thought it would be too dangerous.”

Lois still looked uncertain.

“What if she knows about Kryptonite?”

Kal knew that was a possibility, especially if she was really working for Lex, but he didn’t want to alarm his wife. He kissed her again.

“I’ll be back soon, I promise.”

“I love you.”

“I love you,” he replied.

He flew to Gotham, scanning the streets below before landing atop Gotham Tower. Batman was waiting for him.

“Let’s go,” Batman said, all business.

Kal didn’t even ask where his friend was going as the caped crusader jumped off the tower, using the aerodynamically designed cape to propel him down, almost like a parachute. He landed on the top of another nearby building.

Kal saw a slender woman in skin-tight leather waiting for them. She grinned.

“Well, looky here, Bats and Supes.”

“Catwoman,” Batman said tersely.

She looked miffed. “What? Not even a kiss hello, baby? Bet you would, wouldn’t you Supes? I’d love to know what an alien kiss is like.”

“Miss … uh … Catwoman, we’re not here to play. You said you could lead us to someone who knows about the attack on the President.”

“Pooh, you’re no fun at all,” she said, pouting. “Fine. Follow me.”
Catwoman led them over the rooftops, occasionally glancing back to make sure they were still following her. Kal was uneasy as she led them down into the worst part of the city. There were some abandoned warehouses where the homeless tended to squat. Bruce had told him that as much as he wanted to help them, he was bound by the city bylaws and a mayor who was more interested in improving his lifestyle than improving the city.

“So, where is he?” Batman asked as Catwoman finally stopped moving and stood in the middle of the alley, clearly waiting for something.

Kal’s uneasiness intensified, along with a niggling feeling in his stomach. He looked around, x-raying the surroundings and saw there were about six people in the shadows. Something was definitely not right.

The feeling in his stomach worsened and he realised it was the same feeling he had experienced when his ship had first landed in Africa. He groaned loudly, unintentionally. Catwoman smirked.

“Something wrong, Supes? Cat got your tongue?”

There was a giggle from the shadows.

“Maybe it’s this,” the man said. He was a heavy set man with lank, greasy hair down to his shoulders. Oddly, he wore what seemed to be blue-tinted glasses over his eyes.

Kal was in too much pain to care, his stomach cramping, his head swimming. He collapsed to his knees, looking up. There was a full moon and just enough light to show the tops of the surrounding buildings, which appeared to be closing in on him.

It was a trap!
The boys have a back-up plan

Clark watched the action below, frowning as his father stumbled and fell. Kryptonite, he thought.

There was a scraping sound behind him, like a leather shoe scraping on metal and he looked around, poised to strike, staring in exasperation at his friend. Dick looked back at him.

“What are you …

“… doing here,” Clark finished. “My dad thought I should tag along behind.”

“Yeah, Bruce thought the same thing. Back up plan.”

“That’s exactly what my dad said.”

“Shame they didn’t consult with each other,” Dick replied. “What’s going on?”

“They’ve got Kryptonite,” Clark told his friend. “I just saw Dad go down. There’s only one thing that can do that.”

Dick nodded. “I’m guessing they got hold of Lex’s stash.”

Clark frowned, wondering why Lex would have such lax security. Then again, he could have just handed it to them.

Batman was struggling with three men. Clark guessed they had powers of some kind. There was a guy with big muscles who looked strong enough to even beat his father. He started to move off the rooftop, but Dick stopped him.

“Are you nuts? You go down there, you’ll end up like your dad. You’re vulnerable to Kryptonite too, remember?”

Clark thought about that for a second.

“Okay, I get that, but if we don’t do something, they’re gonna hurt both my dad, and yours.”

“Bruce isn’t my dad,” Dick said, an odd expression on his face.

“He might as well be,” Clark pointed out. “I mean, he adopted you, didn’t he?”

“I guess.” He looked thoughtful. “Huh, you know, I never really thought of it that way. Him being my dad, I mean.” He shook his head. “Anyway, let’s think about this for a minute.”

“We so don’t have time,” Clark told his friend. “Who knows what they’re going to do to them?”

Dick bit his lip. “Yeah, you’re right.” He looked down again. Clark could see Bruce still fighting with the three men and his father was struggling with the man holding the Kryptonite. Catwoman
was just standing there, watching, clearly waiting for something to happen.

“Okay, you deal with the guy with the Kryptonite and get it as far away from …”

Just as Clark began to outline his plan, there was a blur of movement in the darkened alley. A figure was doing somersaults toward the group. He frowned, watching as the figure landed on their feet, raising their head. Catwoman looked annoyed.

“Who’s that?” he asked.

“Oh yeah, you haven’t met her yet. That’s Black Canary.”

“Who?”

“Watch. You’ll see.”

Suddenly there seemed to be something happening. The man holding the Kryptonite screamed, his hands going up to his eyes. Clark realised the man’s glasses had been shattered. Even his dad looked to be in a little bit of pain.

Two of the thugs who had been fighting Batman turned their attention to Black Canary. She began fighting them, using what looked to Clark like some kind of martial arts. She was fast and skilled, easily deflecting their blows.

“Let’s go,” Dick said. Before Clark could move, Dick had already leaped off the building to the next lowest and was heading down. Clark followed him, quickly making his way down. The thug still fighting with Batman looked at him, then grabbed a weapon of some kind. Clark didn’t hesitate, rushing the thug and knocking him off his feet.

“Catwoman,” Batman growled.

Selina hissed, sounding very much like a cat.

“I’ll get her,” Superman replied, having clearly recovered. He sped to Selina’s side.

Catwoman swiped at him, to no avail. He grabbed her and she deliberately ran her gloved hand with what looked like claws, down the top of his uniform. Clark wanted to shout at her, but knew if he did so it would give his father away.

Meanwhile, Black Canary had made short work of the man who had produced the Kryptonite, who was giggling. Clark glanced at his friend. Dick rolled his eyes.

“Toyman,” Batman growled. “Someone hasn’t got rid of you yet?”

Clark tuned out as the man, still giggling, began mumbling something about rules and it not being fair that they were ruining his game.

“Start talking, Catwoman,” Batman growled, ignoring the thugs still groaning in pain on the ground.

She shrugged. “You know me, Batsy. Always gotta have an eye on the prize.”

“So how much is he paying you this time?”

“Who?”

“Don’t play games Catwoman,” Superman growled, squeezing her arms just hard enough to make
her mewl in protest. “What did Lex order you to do?”

“Who said Luthor ordered me to do anything?” she asked petulantly, but it was fairly obvious from the way her eyes darted nervously that he had been behind it.

“If the Toyman’s involved, it’s a safe bet it’s got something to do with experiments. We both know how Toyman loves to play.”

Black Canary finished helping Dick secure the remaining thugs, who had been either stunned or knocked out.

“So we gonna give these guys to the cops?” she asked.

“Canary, thank you for your assistance tonight,” Batman said. He was clearly going to add something else, but Superman shot him a look.

“No problem,” she said. “I was in the neighbourhood.” She looked at Clark. “We haven’t met,” she began. “I’m …”

“We have no time for socialising,” Batman snapped. “Robin, you and Superboy return to the Batcave. Superman and I will take Toyman and the others to the authorities.”

“Including me?” Catwoman asked, an odd smile on her face. She pulled away from Superman and purred at Batman. “Wouldn’t you rather just take me to your lair?”

Oh lord, here we go again, Clark thought, grinning at seeing the same expression on his friend’s face. Batman just glared at her through his cowl.

“No! After what you tried to pull tonight …”

She pouted. “Baby you have become a real grouch lately.”

Dick pulled Clark away before he heard Batman’s reply.

“Why don’t I join you?” Black Canary asked. She glanced at Batman and sighed. “Boy, he’s in a mood tonight.”

Dick shrugged. “He gets that way when he’s proved right about something. Especially when Catwoman’s involved.”

She chuckled. “I’d hate to see him when he’s proved wrong.”

Dick smiled. “C’mon. My bike’s not far. I can give you a ride to the cave.”

“What about …?”

“I’m gonna run,” Clark told her.

It was a quick run to the Batcave. Clark waited until Dick came in, the older woman on the back of the Batcycle. She got off and smiled at him, before disappearing into what Clark assumed were the changing rooms.

“Dinah keeps a spare set of clothes here,” Dick explained. “She often uses the cave when she’s in Gotham. I’m just gonna go change myself.” He eyed Clark’s t-shirt, which had the El family emblem on it. “You have anything to change into?”
“No. That’s okay. Dad and I’ll head home soon. Mom’s gonna have a bird when she finds out I came here with Dad.”

“Yeah,” his friend smiled. “I’d hate to be in your shoes. Your mom’s scary.”

As Dick went to change, Dinah came back out. She had removed the dark make-up she used as a mask and had changed into a sweater and black pants. She stopped to get something from the small fridge Bruce had installed and picked up a bottle of water.

She quickly explained that while she had met his father a few months earlier she had had to leave town to follow up on something else she’d been working on and hadn’t been back to Metropolis since then.

“So how is your mom?” she asked. “I hear she’s doing really well at the Planet.”

Clark nodded. “Yeah, she’s great. I’m gonna be a big brother soon.”

Dinah smiled and nodded in reply. “I heard. That’s great. You and your parents must be very excited.”

“We are,” Clark said with a smile. “It’s kind of cool. I mean, I know they’ll be too little for a while, but I can’t wait to be able to take them out and teach them stuff.”

He heard the sound of an engine and realised Batman was coming in. His father flew in, landing gently beside him and nodded at Dinah.

“Hello Dinah.”

“Kal,” she said. “Clark was just telling me he’s looking forward to being a big brother.”

His dad reached over and ruffled his hair. “We’re all pretty excited really, aren’t we champ?”

“Sure are, Dad,” Clark said.

Bruce had stripped off his cowl and was striding toward them, looking pissed. Dick came out of the changing rooms, wearing jeans and a shirt.

“What were you doing there?” Bruce asked Dinah.

“I happened to be following up on one of my own projects,” she told him smoothly. “Otherwise I wouldn’t have been here. We all know how territorial you are.”

Bruce ignored her and turned to Clark’s father.

“And what was the big idea bringing Clark without telling me?”

Kal glared back at his friend and huffed.

“Well, I’m sorry I didn’t realise I was stepping on your toes, Batman. The fact is, I didn’t trust your girlfriend at her word, and it turns out I was right.”

“I don’t care about that. Clark is untrained. Which is why I asked Dick to back me up.” He sighed. “Kal, I know you meant well, but what if Clark got hurt?”

Kal glanced at his son, who just shrugged and smiled. No harm, no foul, his expression suggested.
“Bruce, I get it, but Clark’s not a child. He’s smart enough not to go into something like that blindly.”

Clark grinned at the praise.

Bruce shook his head. “His mother won’t exactly be happy,” he said.

“I’ll talk to Lois,” Kal assured his friend. “So what do you want to do about Selina?”

“Nothing I can do. It looks like Lex paid her to do it.”

“What do you think he was after?” Dinah asked.

“Most likely me,” Kal told her. “He wants to study me and my vulnerabilities.”

“Unfortunately, Toyman will have something to report back to him. Lex will know about your problem with Kryptonite,” Bruce reminded him. “I still think we should have built something into the suit.”

Kal nodded. Bruce had suggested using some kind of armour; lead-based, since he had discovered he was unable to see through lead, but Kal had decided he didn’t want to use any kind of armour. Lead was a heavy metal; while it might not slow him down, necessarily, there might have been issues with moulding it into the suit.

“All right,” he said, nodding. “You’re both right. We’ll go talk to your Grandpa at the fortress,” he told his son, not wanting Clark to feel left out, considering it was his idea.

Meanwhile, he was still worried about Catwoman and what had happened tonight. It seemed odd that she would have agreed to the job, considering there was no real personal gain for her. Selina didn’t really care about the money Lex paid her. She was more in it for the thrill.

Kal decided he would talk to Bruce about that later, figuring it was his friend’s problem and if Bruce wanted his help he would ask for it. He returned to Smallville with Clark and sent him to bed for a couple of hours. It was almost four and Jonathan would most likely be getting up at six to take care of the chores.

Lois was awake.

“Hey,” she said. “What time is it?”

“Late,” he replied softly. “Or early. Depends on your point of view. Why aren’t you asleep?”

“Babies are keeping me up. They decided to use my womb as a boxing ring and they’re currently duking it out in there.”

Kal laughed and rubbed her belly. “Fighting already?” he said. “Sounds like a Lane thing.”

“Watch it, Kal-El,” she growled. “I can get very cranky when I haven’t had much sleep.”
He grinned, deciding to bite his tongue. He curled up beside his wife, who rolled onto her side and took his hand.

“So how did it go?” she asked.

“Short story is it was a trap. Fortunately, we had help. Bruce brought Dick along as back up and Clark …”

She sat up and looked down at him.

“You let Clark go on a mission?” she asked.

“Honey, I’ll tell you the same thing I told Bruce. He’s not a child. I trusted him to do the sensible thing and he did. If it hadn’t been for him, Bruce and I would have been in a whole lot of trouble.”

“I can’t believe you let our son …” she grumbled.

“If I hadn’t, I have no doubt he would have come anyway,” he told her. Clark had as much as demanded to be allowed to back him up before Kal had even asked his son about it. The point was, Clark wanted to be able to help on missions and Kal wasn’t about to deny him that chance.

Lois sighed, nodding in resignation. Their son was a teenager who was smart and resourceful, and more than capable of holding his own in a fight. Forgetting the little problem with Kryptonite, of course.

It hadn’t brought them any closer to proving Lex was up to no good, but Kal had a feeling Bruce would somehow manage to get the truth out of Selina. One way or the other.
Lois takes a little time out from investigating what happened on Air Force One but comes across another clue while out with her family.

“Hey Mom!”

Lois glanced up from her computer, frowning at her tall son. How was it possible he had grown at least another two inches in the past few months, she thought. He was just a smidgen taller than his father, and Kal was a big guy at six three. Coupled with the bulk of his muscles caused by his dense molecular structure, Kal looked even bigger.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

Clark frowned at her. “Can’t I come and visit my mother?” he returned.

Usually Lois made a point of not mixing her personal and professional life, although considering she was pregnant, that made it a little difficult. Still, she tried to maintain a professional distance. Apart from Perry and a couple of her other colleagues, few of them had met Kal or Clark, or the rest of her family, and that was the way she preferred it.

“Sorry,” she said, and meaning it. Of course he could come and visit her, although given the distance between the city and Smallville, it was probably not something he should do frequently. Not unless he could believably explain how he managed to get to the city so quickly. School had let out … oh, she thought, glancing at the clock on the computer. It was later than she had realised.

She slid her chair back from her desk, rubbing her distended stomach. The twins had been mercifully quiet for most of the day, but it was getting to that point where they liked to play. At least, that was what she imagined they were doing. She could feel the little kicks and punches in her womb which signalled they were awake and ready to party.

It had been a busy week between the attempt on Superman and Batman in Gotham and her investigation into Lex’s activities. Lois had been trying many of her contacts on the street to see what they knew and one had finally told her there had been someone paid a large sum of money to orchestrate the attack on the President. He had even confirmed the attack had been planned so that, if the President survived, it would still look as if her security had been lax.

So far the money trail was cool and getting colder fast, but her cousin had been working on following the trail, hoping it would lead to Lex.

Lois had been so busy that day following up on the dozens of phone calls she’d made over the week that she had forgotten to eat, which wasn’t good for the babies.

“You know what?” she said. “I could go for something to eat.”

Clark grinned at her. Lois couldn’t help snickering. She had had a few cravings since she’d learned she was pregnant. Fortunately it was nothing too weird. Mostly just pizza in the middle of the night, although she had asked her husband to buy peanut butter cups and mint julep ice cream late one
night. Which wasn’t as bad as pickles and ice cream which a colleague had claimed to have craved when she was pregnant.

She grabbed her coat and purse and followed her son out the door. Clark walked quickly, waiting at the elevator, smirking at her.

“What?” she asked.

“You’re waddling. Like a duck.”

“Watch it kid.”

He sniggered.

“It’s not funny!” she growled.

“Yeah it is,” he replied.

She sighed. “You know, you used to respect me.”

“When was that?”

Perry, probably on one of his latest fitness kicks, came down the stairs and grinned at her.

“Don’t sass your mother, kid,” he said.

Clark tried to look innocent. “Was I sassing you, Mother?”

“You know you were. You know you’re not too old for me to take you over my knee.”

He pretended to ponder the situation.

“But how’re you gonna do that when you can’t even see your feet?” he asked.

Perry swiped the back of his head.

“Maybe your mother can’t, but I sure can. You know, in my day, when a kid sassed their mother, they got a few swats of the belt.”

Clark looked at him in mock horror.

“You wouldn’t,” he said.

“Keep sassing your mom and I just might,” Perry threatened.

Lois couldn’t help grinning as the lift doors opened and Perry joined them, continuing to banter lightly with Clark. After all they’d gone through, the fact that her son felt confident enough in their relationship to tease her was comforting. She had long since let go of her guilt for leaving him with the Kents all those years ago. Of course it helped that they had become honorary grandparents.

She wondered if they would mind being called ‘Grandma and Grandpa’ with the twins. As for Clark, while he still addressed them by their first names, he had already told them he considered them to be grandparents as well. He had added that he felt luckier than most kids because he had both his parents, his Grandpa, his Grandmother Lara and Grandfather Jor-El and the Kents. Lois could barely remember her own grandparents, who had passed away when she had been a toddler.
Just as the elevator reached the first floor, her cellphone rang. She glanced at the display and smiled.

“Hey you.”

“Hi honey. Where are you?”

“Clark and I were just about to go get something to eat.”

“Great. How about I join you? I just got through my meeting with Bruce. I have a lot to tell you.”

“Why don’t we make it an early dinner?” she asked, since it was almost five.

“Sounds great. I’ll call home and tell Martha and Jonathan they have a night to themselves.”

Lois smiled, agreeing to meet her husband at their favourite restaurant in the city. Just as they were about to hang up, he sighed, telling her he heard an alarm. Perry was still talking to Clark, who was clearly enjoying exchanging barbs with the editor. Her boss smiled at her, then winked at Clark.

“So, you thinking about your future, kid?”

“I’m only fourteen,” he said. “That’s like way, way off.”

“I don’t know. Your mom tells me you’re on the staff of the Smallville High paper. Doing quite well for yourself, from what I hear.”

“Don’t encourage him, Perry. He’s got a big enough head as it is.”

“Moom!” he whined.

The older man laughed and reached up to tousle Clark’s hair.

“Have fun,” he said. He turned back to Lois. “I’ll see you in the morning kiddo. Don’t forget the early meeting.”

“I won’t. Thanks Perry.”

She watched as the man walked off, whistling. Perry tried to pretend he was gruff and bad-tempered, but the newspaper veteran had a soft spot. He’d been to dinner a few times with the family and Lois had grown very fond of him.

She began walking with her son.

“So how was school?” she asked.

“It was fine. Oh, there was this fire in chem lab, but nothing bad.”

“You didn’t, uh …”

“Mom, geeze. I do know how to control my …” He dropped his voice to a whisper. “… powers.”

Lois recalled Kal telling her about the night he’d explained Clark’s powers to him, especially Clark’s embarrassment over the heat vision and what caused it.

“How’s Trina?”

Clark rolled his eyes. “Mom, we’re just friends.”
She raised her hands. “I was just asking.”

“Yeah, but I can read between the lines. Stop match-making.”

“Who says I’m match-making?” she replied, trying to sound innocent.

Clark continued to mutter protests, but Lois was fairly sure the cheerleader and her son were more than ‘just friends’, even if neither of them really wanted to admit it.

The restaurant was a few blocks from the Daily Planet at the end of a small shopping complex. The outer design reminded Lois a little of a saloon in the old west. The entry doors were two swinging wooden doors with louvered panels, exactly like those she had seen in the old west movies Jonathan sometimes watched on a Sunday.

The first time they’d visited the restaurant, Jonathan had explained to Kal about saloons and the old west, which had eventually led to a discussion between Kal, Jonathan and Clark about the good guys versus the bad guys and being able to tell the difference.

Inside it was furnished with the same style in mind with a long bar which appeared to be polished wood and colonial style wooden tables and chairs with comfortable cushions.

The hostess greeted them with a smile of recognition.

“Good evening, Mrs Kent.”

Lois smiled back. “Hi Melinda. Do you have a table for three? My husband will be joining us shortly.”

“Of course,” she replied, studying the book at the hostess table. “There may be a slight wait for a table.”

“That’s fine,” Lois returned, noticing that only a few tables were empty. There was a four top that had a reserved sign on it and some larger ones, as well as a couple of two tops. She wasn’t going to complain about a short wait, since they could sit in the bar while they waited.

The bartender was a med-school student who worked part-time to put himself through school. Lois had always admired his work ethic.

“Hey Mrs K,” he said. “Hey Clark.” He smiled. “And before you even ask, no, you’re not allowed a beer.”

Clark snapped his fingers and shook his head, pretending to look disappointed. “Damn. Oh well, worth a shot. Can I have a coke?”

“One coke coming right up. Iced tea for you, Mrs K?”

“Adam, I’ve told you a hundred times to call me Lois,” she scolded, grinning at the younger man.

“But then you’d have no reason to scold me,” he returned cheekily, making her laugh. Adam looked over her shoulder and smiled. “Hey Mr K.”

“Hey Adam. How are the studies going?”

“Great. I got an A on my biology paper.”

Kal smiled. “That’s wonderful. Congratulations.” He leaned down and kissed her cheek. “Hi,” he
said.

“Hi back,” she replied, glancing at her husband. His hair was wet. He’d clearly just showered. Lois caught the slight odour of smoke. “Fire?” she asked.

He nodded. “Tenement in Suicide Slum. Superman managed to get everyone out safely.”

“Great!” she returned, taking the tall glass of iced tea and handing Kal a bottle of beer Adam had served him.

Melinda returned, telling them their table was ready. They followed her into the main part of the restaurant. She had given them a table by the window.

“Here are your menus,” she said, handing them each a folder. “And your server will be right with you.”

“Thanks Melinda,” Kal said.

“So what did Martha and Jonathan say?” Lois asked her husband.

“Nothing much, really. I think they were happy to have the place to themselves for the night.” He grinned slyly and winked at her. Lois smiled back, knowing exactly what he was implying. She loved that the older couple were still romantic at their age.

Clark made a face. “I don’t think I want to know,” he said.

Kal reached over and ruffled his son’s hair. Clark batted his father’s hand away.

“Not the hair, Dad, c’mon.”

The server came over to fill their water glasses. She was clearly new as she seemed nervous. Her hand was trembling a little and some water splashed on the table.

“Oh, gosh, I’m so sorry,” she said, sounding upset.

Kal smiled at her. “It’s perfectly all right,” he said. “Take your time. Is this your first day?”

She nodded, looking relieved at Kal’s easy manner.

“Don’t worry,” Lois said. “I did a little waitressing myself. It takes a little time to get used to it.”

Another customer could be heard snapping his fingers. Lois grimaced when she heard him calling the waitress, demanding she hurry up and serve him. Lex. The girl, who had clearly not yet learned how to maintain a poker face, groaned softly. Kal smiled again.

“Don’t let customers like that get to you,” he said. “People like him have no manners.” He glanced toward the table and scowled at Lex, who clearly recognised them. He stood up and came over.

“Well, I see they let all kinds of riff-raff in here,” he said. He glared at the server. “Hurry up and do your job!” he growled.

The girl nearly dropped the water carafe, she was so flustered.

“Why don’t you learn some manners, Mr Luthor, and leave the poor girl alone!”

Lois struggled to maintain a straight face as Clark told him off.
“You know, when I was that age, if I spoke so rudely to my elders …” Lex said, glaring at Clark. “What the hell are you teaching him?”

“To speak his mind,” Kal said. “And to be honest. You clearly don’t like being called out on your bad manners, Mr Luthor. This young lady is doing her best and your rudeness isn’t helping. You are not the only person in this restaurant and you cannot demand attention whenever you please. Now, I would like to get back to enjoying my evening with my family.”

Kal’s dismissal had Lex stalking off in a huff back to his table. The server smiled gratefully at them, saying she would leave them to peruse their menus and would be back shortly to take their orders.

Clark grinned at his father. “Boy, you sure told him.”

Lois shrugged. “He deserved it.” She was proud of her son for speaking up, glad that he had the confidence to be able to call out someone like Lex. She glanced at the bald man’s dining companion. The woman was a fairly attractive brunette in her early forties. Lois frowned, trying to figure out where she had seen the other woman before, but the answer eluded her.

“So, how did your meeting with Uncle Bruce go?” Clark asked his father. Lois turned her attention back to her husband.

Kal was clearly being careful not to give away too much as he spoke in a low voice.

“Bruce went to see that old girlfriend of his. The one who tried to set up the meeting last week.”

Lois nodded. She knew Bruce had gone to see Selina after the debacle the week before.

“So anyway, it turns out she was pressured into setting up the meeting by a mutual business acquaintance.”

“Pressured how?” she asked her husband, frowning a little.

The waitress came back to check on them, asking if they were ready to order. Lois smiled at her and gave her selection. Clark glanced at her before cracking a grin, then ordered a cheeseburger, with everything. After Kal had given his own order, the girl smiled and nodded, checking their drinks and went back to put their orders in.

“So?” Lois prodded.

“A friend of hers was used to help pressure her.”

She bit her lip, trying to interpret what that meant. She didn’t know Selina Kyle that well, but if there was one thing she could say about the woman, it was that Catwoman was loyal to her friends. Protective, even. It sounded like Lex had threatened one of Selina’s friends to force her to set the trap for Batman. Only, that didn’t quite make sense. Why would the Toyman have been involved and why would they have used Kryptonite? Unless it had actually been a set-up for Kal.

Her husband went on to explain that Selina’s story had been true, to a point. She had heard of someone who knew how the two men who had attacked the President had managed to get onto Air Force One.

Clark got up to go to the bathroom a short time later. Lois used the brief interlude to flirt with her husband, rubbing her foot up his pants leg. He grinned at her.

“Why Mrs Kent, planning something devious?”
“Who me?” she said, batting her eyelashes at him.

He took her hand, stroking her fingers. Sadly, the brief flirting was interrupted with the arrival of their food. Lois frowned. Clark had been gone a little while. She rose.

“I’m just going to go see what he’s up to,” she said.

She walked toward the bathrooms, as if she was going to go to the ladies’ room, and saw Clark talking with the woman who had been with Lex.

“You know, I like younger guys,” the woman was saying.

Clark was looking uncomfortable.

“Um, that’s nice, ma’am.”

“Oh, you don’t have to be so formal.”

Lois snorted. The woman was speaking in breathy tones, as if she was trying to flirt with Clark. She decided to speak up.

“You know, I realise Lex Luthor isn’t the most agreeable dinner companion, on any day of the week, but I think it’s rather bad form to flirt with another male when you have a date waiting at your table. Especially when said male happens to be my fourteen year old son.”

The woman glared daggers at her.

“I was just being friendly.”

“If you were any friendlier, lady, I would be calling the cops.” She smiled at her son. “Come on, honey. Your dinner’s waiting.”

Clark shot her a look of relief and moved away from the woman.

“Thanks Mom,” he said quietly. “Ms Atkins was a little, um, forward.”

She frowned at him. “Atkins?”

“Yeah, she said her name was Desiree Atkins.”

Oh brother, we’ve got a live one here, she thought.

Not wanting to interrupt their dinner, she chose not to comment, telling her son not to say anything to his father.

By the time they had finished dinner, Lex and his companion had left the restaurant. Kal asked politely for the check, making sure to give the manager their compliments over the server, who had become less nervous as the night wore on.

As they were leaving, she turned to her husband.

“I need to stop by the Planet for something,” she said.

“Is everything okay?” he asked, frowning at her.

“Oh, it’s fine. There’s just something I need to look up in the archives.”
They walked back to the building. Lois let herself in with her security card and took the elevator up to her eighth floor office. Kal and Clark sat on the couch while she put her bag and coat down on the desk.

“I’ll just be a few minutes, honey,” she said.

She sat down and logged in to her computer, running a search through the archives. It wasn’t long before the search hit pay dirt.

“A-ha,” she said.

Kal frowned at her. “What is it?”

“Desiree Atkins. Aka, Alison Sanders. Aka Desiree Luthor.”

Kal gaped. “Lex was married?”

“It was around the same time he came to Smallville. Desiree was known as the Black Widow. She was a teacher who seduced her first husband, then seduced a student into killing her husband so she could inherit his estate. She lost all her money after she invested it in dot coms.”

“Dot coms?” Kal asked.

She nodded. “It was something to do with the internet boom, only it sort of crashed and people who invested lost a ton of money. Anyway, Desiree got greedy, so she seduced Lex and married him, then tried to seduce someone who worked for Luthorcorp to kill him. Only Lionel found out about it and paid a private eye to investigate her. She was jailed for the murder of her first husband sixteen years ago.” She saw another article and skimmed it. Desiree Atkins had been paroled two years earlier, but had apparently kept out of trouble since then.

Kal frowned. “What would Lex be doing with her now, then?”

Lois chewed on her lip. “I don’t know. Whatever it is, it’s not good.”

“She seemed kind of confused when I was talking to her,” Clark observed.

Lois frowned at them, trying to understand why Desiree would try to seduce her son. What could Lex want with a woman who had planned to murder him for his money?
Lex glared at the woman who had once been his wife.

“What do you mean you failed?” he growled.

“I tried, but … I don’t know. There’s something strange about the boy. And his mother intervened before I could try again.”

He huffed. Desiree bit her lip, clearly wondering what he was going to do to her for her failure to get what he wanted.

He recalled how he had met Desiree seventeen years ago. He’d gone to a business function in Metropolis and she had sidled up to him telling him she had come to ‘save him’ from just another boring function. Next thing he knew, he had taken her up to his hotel room where they’d proceeded to attempt to break every record for how long a couple could have constant sex.

He’d married her within a week of that meeting, only for her to try to kill him just forty-eight hours later. He’d been lucky that Lionel had hired a private investigator who had managed to dig up the truth about Desiree and police had arrived before the man his ‘wife’ had seduced to kill him could carry out his task.

Bitter, and most definitely wiser, Lex had quickly annulled the marriage while Desiree had been sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.

Then three years earlier she had been hospitalised in the prison when another inmate had attacked her, stabbing her in the stomach. Blood tests had revealed how Desiree had managed to seduce him into marrying her. She had some kind of strange ability that allowed her to use pheromones. It seemed she had been involved in an accident in a lab in her senior year of high school. Lex had learned she had been in the lab after hours with another student and they’d both been in the throes of passion when the accident had occurred.

Lex had visited her at the prison, telling her he could secure her release on the proviso that she come to work for him. Desiree had jumped at the chance without even asking what she was going to do for him.

Lex had made sure of her silence and her gratitude by ensuring her release was drawn out, letting her know that he had complete and utter control over her.

When he needed information, her ability made her the perfect interrogator. She had been useful in other ways as well, most especially with the recent attack on Air Force One. Desiree had seduced the security team into letting the two ‘terrorists’ on board the plane.

Lex hadn’t planned on using Desiree at the restaurant, but never let it be said he didn’t recognise a good opportunity when he saw one, he thought. He had sent her after the Kent boy, hoping to learn more about his mysterious father. Lex was sure Kal was the one Checkmate had been after.
“I’m giving you one last chance,” he told her. “I want you to find the boy and talk to him again.”

“How do you expect me to …”

“My ex-wife, Lana, has a coffee shop in Smallville. It has become a popular hangout for the high school crowd. I expect you will find him there in after school hours. Do not, under any circumstances, visit the Kent Farm.”

“Why not?” she asked. “Wouldn’t that be the best place to find him?”

He suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. Desiree was certainly not the brightest of women.

“His father is more than likely to catch you there,” he pointed out.

“Why don’t I try his father instead?”

“Stay away from Kal Kent!” Lex growled.

“Why?” she said, looking sly. “Is there something you’re not telling me about him?”

He strode toward her, one hand around her neck as if preparing to throttle her. He shoved her against the wall and she cried out in pain.

“Lex!”

“Don’t cross me, Desiree! Unless you would like to end up like a few others I could name.”

She stared at him, her eyes wide. She clearly knew the threat was no bluff. Lex had tracked down a few people who had varying abilities. Some of them, like her, had received their powers through some accident. Others had come about them naturally. Lex collected such people like other people would acquire collectable objects like antiques. He had managed to imprison some of them in one of his facilities, his scientists testing their abilities for ways in which they could be transferred.

He let Desiree go, assured that she had got the message loud and clear. He’d once been fool enough to fall under her spell, but now he was the one who had power over her and she knew it.

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Clark walked in to the Talon and leaned on the counter. Lana shot him a look.

“Manners, Clark.”

“Sorry,” he said sheepishly.

“What would you like?”

“Um, what can I get for …” He dug in his jeans pocket and managed to come up with a dollar fifty odd in change.

Lana sighed. “Spent your allowance already?”

“Uh, yeah. Kind of. It’s Amy’s birthday next week and I spent most of it on a present.”

“Well, I hope the present is spectacular,” Lana said. “All right. You can owe me the rest but this is a one-time only offer. If you don’t pay me back next week you’ll be working here a couple of hours helping me clean.”
He grimaced. Cleaning was the last thing he wanted to do.

“Okay. I’ll get the money. Somehow,” he said, since he wouldn’t get any more allowance for another week. He would have to talk Martha into helping him out.

Lana grinned at him as if she could read his thoughts and handed him a mocha latte in a disposable cup. Clark turned and looked around the coffee shop. All the tables except one were full. He quickly headed for the only empty table and sat down, taking out his phone to read some stuff Amy wanted him to look over for the school paper.

“Do you mind if I join you? Everywhere else is taken.”

He looked up and frowned at the brunette, remembering her from the other night at the restaurant.

“Miss Atkins?”

“Desiree,” she said, sitting down in the chair opposite him. “I wanted to apologise for the other night.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Your mother seems to have got the wrong impression. I just thought you were a nice young man, and I…”

Clark narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

“That’s not what happened and you know it.”

She leaned forward. Clark felt the heat of her breath on his face. He was beginning to feel very uncomfortable.

“Uh, I should go,” he said. He got up from the table and left the coffee shop. He would have super sped home if it weren’t for the people crowded on the sidewalk. There was no way he could easily extract himself from the crowd and speed off without being seen.

Desiree pursued him.

“Wait,” she said. “I just want to talk to you.”

She was trying way too hard. Clark glared at her as she took his arm.

“What do you want from me?”

“I just want to talk to you,” she repeated.

He suddenly found himself cornered, not sure how she had managed to push him against the brick wall between the Talon and the next store. She again invaded his space, moving close to him.

“Lady, I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but you’re invading my personal space and I don’t like it.”

“Is there a problem here?”

Desiree looked around, her eyes widening in surprise. Clark smiled at his uncle.

“Uncle Ollie. I didn’t know you were here.”
“That much is obvious,” he said, sounding amused. “Is this lady bothering you?”

“Yeah, kinda.”

He turned back to her, seeing a flash of fear in her eyes. He narrowed his gaze, zeroing in on her pulse point. Her heart rate was up far more than was normal for a woman who was just trying to engage him in casual conversation.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I should go.”

Clark knew he couldn’t just let her disappear into the crowd.

“Uncle Ollie, stop her,” he said in a low voice as she started to walk off.

Oliver moved to intercept her. She began to protest loudly, drawing stares from people passing by.

“Desiree Atkins, aka the Black Widow.”

Desiree looked scared as Aunt Chloe confronted her.

“Who …”

“You don’t know me, Ms Atkins, but I know you. I think we need to have a little chat.”

Desiree struggled in Oliver’s firm grip.

“No, please, you don’t understand!”

Clark followed his aunt and uncle as they returned to the coffee shop. Lana looked at them and nodded.

“You can use the apartment upstairs,” she said.

Desiree was still protesting loudly as she was pushed up the stairs. Clark glanced at Lana questioningly.

“Your parents are on their way,” she said. “I think they’d rather you stay down here, but I know I can’t stop you.”

“How did you …”

“I recognised her as soon as she sat down. Don’t forget, I was married to Lex.”

Clark nodded and raced up the stairs, entering the apartment just in time to hear Chloe warn her husband not to let Desiree breathe on him.

“Why?” Clark asked.

“She has the ability to make anyone do what she wants,” Chloe explained. “It’s called pheromones. There was an accident when she was in high school. Some kind of chemical explosion.”

“That’s not …” Desiree began, then looked up in alarm as Clark’s parents came through the door. “Please let me go,” she pleaded.

“Hell no,” Clark’s mother replied. “First you try to pick up my son in a restaurant, now I hear you accosted him in the coffee shop.”
“Mom, don’t fuss, I’m okay,” he said as she put a hand on his back.

“Why were you after Clark?” his father asked. “What’s this about?”

Desiree kept shaking her head, chanting: “No, no, no, no.”

Clark figured it was time to change tack.

“I know you’re scared,” he said gently. “We can help you. You just need to talk to us.”

“You don’t understand. You don’t know what he’s like.”

“I think we do,” Chloe replied. “What did Lex want you to do?”

The woman’s gaze darted back and forth, pausing on Kal.

“He wants information. On Kal.”

“Well, that’s a rather unique interrogation technique,” Mom replied.

“How long have you been working for him, Desiree?” Kal asked.

“Two years. He told me he’d arrange my release from prison if I’d come to work for him.”

“What else has he made you do?”

“I … the plane,” she said.

“What plane?” Oliver asked.

“Air Force One.”

Kal frowned. “Superman said the security team claimed a woman convinced them to let the two terrorists on board the day of the attack on the President.”

Desiree looked upset. Clark could see she felt cornered.

“I didn’t want to do it,” she said. “But he told me, he threatened …”

“So he gets you to commit an act of what can be considered high treason,” Chloe began.

The brunette seductress looked even more scared. Clark wondered for a moment if she was putting on an act, but it was apparent this was no act. Her eyes widened in horror as she lifted her hand to her chest. His father darted forward, catching her as she collapsed.

“She’s having some kind of cardiac event,” he said.

“Get her on the floor, Kal.”

Blood streamed from her nose. His dad lay her on the floor but it was fairly obvious there was nothing they could do. She was dead the moment she’d collapsed.

“Damn!”

Clark stared as his father looked up at the others.

“What is it, honey?” Mom asked.
“I should have checked her before. I think Lex may have had some kind of electronic surveillance on her.”

“You mean he had her lo-jacked?” Chloe said. She snorted cynically. “Typical!”

“Looks like it.”

“Should we call the sheriff?” Clark asked his father, but his mother intervened.

“If we do, they’ll just take her to the morgue and I’m betting her body will disappear before they can do any kind of autopsy.”

Oliver nodded. “I’ll call Emil and get him in on this,” he said. “If we can figure out how she died, we might be able to track it back to Lex.”

Kal and Oliver elected to stay with the body. Clark let himself be led out of the apartment by his mother and aunt. Downstairs, Lana looked at them questioningly, but was distracted by someone wanting coffees.

Since his mother had flown from Metropolis with his dad, Chloe drove them to the farm. She told Clark they’d decided to visit the family for the weekend. The two children were already at the farm, running around and getting into mischief.

Jonathan had clearly managed to corral them as he carried them inside the house just as Clark was helping himself to a glass of milk and some cookies.

“Ooh, cookies!” Connor exclaimed gleefully.

“Uh uh, you’ll spoil your dinner!” Chloe told her son.

“But Mommeeeee!”

“I said no, Connor!”

“But Clark …”

“Clark eats more than you,” Mom told her nephew. “Come and sit with me,” she said, holding out her hand. Connor followed her into the parlour to sit on the couch. Laura trailed after her brother, clearly not wanting to be left out of things.

Clark took his snack into the parlour and sat down.

“So, what was that all about?” he asked. “What did you mean by pheromones?”

“You know what pheromones are?”

He shrugged. “Sure. I’ve already had the birds and the bees talk.”

“Well, I won’t go into detail about how she got her ability but it meant she could seduce anyone into doing anything she wanted.”

“I’m guessing Clark and Kal would be the exception,” Mom replied.

“Luckily for us, yes. I’m guessing her power wasn’t strong enough to break the resolve of steel.”

Mom glared at her cousin. “Funny, Chloe.”
“Why would Lex use her to try to get information?”

“I’m guessing he’s still trying to pin the disappearance of the ship on your dad. But you’re right. I do think there’s more to it. We need to do some more digging.”

Mom looked thoughtful.

“What if Lex is trying to take up where his father left off? Studying meta-humans? I remember when Brainiac told Kal about the information he’d dug up on Lionel. He was trying to figure out a way to harness the meta-humans’ abilities for himself.”

“Which could explain Lex’s obsession with Kal,” Chloe agreed. “He’s always had an obsession with power.”

“Why would he attack the President?” Clark asked, munching on his cookies.

“It’s fairly well-known that Lex has ambitions which include the Oval Office,” Chloe replied. “He may have tried to use the incident as a stepping stone.”

“Why though?”

“Well, think about it, honey,” his mother said. “Why do you think Lex would do such a thing?”

He considered this for a few moments. Lex could use people’s concern for domestic security for political grandstanding. He’d already announced his company’s research into better security technology.

“So, he can profit on the patents for the new technology,” he said, but realised there was far more to it than that.

Lex would capitalise on that fear, he thought. Use it to build a political platform promising stronger counter-terrorism measures. Clark remembered his political history, especially in various periods where dictators had taken advantage of their country’s woes and used them to promote their own agenda. Lex wasn’t the first powerful person to take advantage of a climate of fear to rise to the top of the political heap and he wouldn’t be the last.

Oliver and his father still weren’t back by the time dinner was ready an hour or so later.

“I’m sure they’ll be back soon,” his mother assured him when he asked.

“Finding out what killed Desiree isn’t exactly as simple as just x-raying her,” Chloe told him.

He nodded. “Guess you’re right.”

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Kal paced up and down Watchtower, glancing toward the medical bay occasionally.

“You’re gonna wear a hole in the floor,” Oliver told him.

“Sorry,” he replied. “Just anxious.”

While taking the body to Watchtower wasn’t necessarily illegal, since they’d asked Emil to take care of it, it wasn’t exactly ethical either.

There was the sound of someone clearing their throat and Kal looked up. Emil stood, wiping his
hands on a towel.

“Well, you’re right. This was not a natural death by any means.”

“Care to elaborate there doc?” Oliver asked.

Emil had something in his left hand. He placed it on the scanner, which then projected an image on the monitor above them, giving them a close-up. It looked like any microchip found in a computer.

“What is that?” Kal asked.

Oliver groaned. “I know what that is. It’s a chip designed by one of my scientists several years ago.” He keyed in some instructions and the scanner zoomed in on one area. There was a tiny logo indicating the chip belonged to Queen Industries, along with a serial number.

Oliver continued typing. A number of documents showed on the screen including a shipping manifest.

“It was being shipped overseas. These chips were designed to help people with various mental disabilities. They were powered by the body’s biorhythms. Except this shipment never made it to its destination. It was stolen.”

Kal looked at his friend.

“Oliver, who knew about this technology?”

“Its designer.” Oliver’s face was pale. “Winslow Schott. The guy’s a genius when it comes to anything electronic. He worked for the company for years but then, somehow his mind snapped. He started bringing in toys to work, planting explosives, so I had to let him go. Now he has a new handle. The Toyman.”

He brought up an image of the man. Kal studied it, then remembered that Bruce had called one of the men who had attacked them Toyman.

“That’s one of the men who attacked Bruce and I in Gotham last week.”

“I may not be an expert in electronics,” Emil said, “but it seems to me the chip has been adapted. It’s more than likely there are more of them out there and they’re being used to control certain individuals. In this case, it appears it was used to trigger cardiac arrest in Ms Atkins.”

“So she couldn’t testify against Lex. Once again it leaves us with no proof that Lex was behind the attack on the President.” Kal sighed.

“Since the chip can be tracked back to the stolen shipment that leaves us back at square one,” Oliver added. “Damn it!”

“I’m afraid it appears Lex has won this round,” Emil told them. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not over,” Kal told him. “We’re going to get him. We’ll get proof. Somehow.”

“Even if there is evidence she was working for him, it proves nothing,” Oliver pointed out. “The Air Force One security team could identify her, but he could still cover himself by saying she was working independently.”

Kal nodded. As much as he hated it, both Emil and Oliver were right. They couldn’t prove Lex was behind any of it. When Bruce had met with Selina, she had told him that two men had grabbed her
old roommate and threatened to hurt her if Selina didn’t set up Superman. They didn’t care about Batman. All they had wanted was Kal.

It had been fairly obvious Lex was behind the kidnapping, even if he’d only been pulling the strings.

Kal flew Desiree’s body to the morgue and Emil promised he was going to take care of the paperwork. He had a friend in the coroner’s office who would help him cover up what they’d done.

Lois was not happy when they finally returned to the farmhouse and reported what had happened.

“So once again Lex gets off scot-free,” she grumbled.

“I know,” he said. “There isn’t much more we can do about this. Without Desiree’s testimony we’ve got nothing to prove Lex ordered her to seduce the security team.”

“This is nuts,” she said. “There has to be something we can do.”

“I wish there was. The trouble is, Lex is smart enough to cover his tracks and anticipate any problems.”

“It still makes me angry.”

He wrapped his arms around his wife as she pressed her face into his chest.

“I know honey. It’s frustrating. But one day Lex will slip up and when he does, we’ll be there to catch him.” He smiled down at her and bent to kiss her. “I promise we will one day take him down. Because no one messes with us.”

“Damn straight,” she replied.

He lifted her in his arms, carrying her up the stairs to bed.
Kal and Lois have a fight which upsets Clark.

With Chloe in town, Lois was eager to start digging deeper into Lex’s activities. Despite the fact she’d promised her son she would make an effort to keep the weekends relatively work free, this was something she thought couldn’t wait.

Clark was helping Martha make breakfast when she came downstairs.

“Hey Mom,” he said.

“Hi sweetie. What are you making?”

“Blueberry pancakes,” he said, stirring the batter. Lois dipped her finger in the batter. “Moom, geez, you tell me off for doing that.”

Chloe’s two children came running in from outside, giggling, followed by Kal. Lois groaned quietly. It wasn’t even eight o’clock and they were already full of energy.

“Aunt Lois, what’s a monkey’s uncle?” Connor asked.

She frowned at him. “Monkey’s uncle?”

“Uncle Jonathan said that if Mr Luthor was innocent, he was a monkey’s uncle.”

“That’s an expression honey,” she said. She glanced at her husband who looked confused by the expression. “It just means that he thinks Mr Luthor is a bad man.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s done bad things,” Kal explained.

“But why?” he asked, looking at his uncle.

Kal looked at her and shrugged. Lois grinned. Six-year-olds were old enough to know right from wrong, but they still didn’t understand the complexities of such things.

“Your aunt and uncle don’t need to be bothered this early in the morning,” Oliver told his son. “Scram!”

“But Daddy …”

“Go!” he said, gesturing toward the living room. “It’s way too early in the morning for this.” He smiled at Lois. “Sorry. I swear, sometimes it’s like being on a game show.”

“He’s just curious,” she replied. “Uh, speaking of Luthor, I was going to go to Watchtower with Chloe and see if we couldn’t do a little digging.”
“Can I come Mom?” Clark asked.

She bit her lip, glancing at her husband. As much as she wanted to protect her son, he had as much of a stake in this as they did. Besides, he was fourteen years old. Kal nodded.

“We’ll all go,” he said.

Clark looked triumphant, clearly happy to have got his way without too much of a fuss. Lois smiled at her son. While she hadn’t exactly been happy when his father had allowed him to back him up when he’d gone to meet Batman in Gotham, after the way Clark had handled himself with Desiree the day before, she realised he could handle it. She was sure that if Kal had been on Earth at that age, he would have been dealing with the same kind of thing.

At breakfast, the younger children chattered non-stop, leaving little chance for the rest of them to talk. Chloe shot her children stern looks, but it didn’t seem to help. She sighed and rolled her eyes at her husband, who shrugged.

“That’s something we’re going to have to get used to,” Lois commented to her husband. “It’ll be worse with twins.”

Kal smiled. “Sure, but they’ll have their big brother to keep them in line. At least until he goes to college.”

Clark frowned at them. “College?”

“You’ve got three and a half years to worry about that, honey,” Lois told him.

“You guys think about this already?”

“Well, we do have to think about your future, Clark,” his father told him. “Your grandpa set up a trust fund when you were born which he wanted you to use for college tuition.”

“Does that mean he gets to decide what college I go to?” Clark asked.

“No, honey,” Lois assured her son. “That’s still up to you.”

“But he decided what college you went to.”

“That was different. He sent me to Cambridge to protect me.”

Lois had had a long talk with her father after she’d returned from Vietnam and they’d cleared the air about a lot of things. While she hadn’t been happy at the way he’d taken control of her life after Clark was born, she knew now that he had done so to keep her safe. Cambridge University was one of the oldest universities in the world and had strict rules to protect its students.

Her father had known one of the Proctors there, which had helped secure Lois’ place in the school. The Proctor had also made sure she was safe, although Lois hadn’t known she had been under constant surveillance at the time.

Since Clark helped Martha cook the breakfast, his father helped Jonathan with the dishes while Chloe, Oliver and Lois got ready to go into the city. The two younger children objected.

“We wanna come, Daddy,” Laura said.

“Sorry sweetie, but Mommy and Daddy have some boring business stuff to do.”
“Besides, I bet Uncle Jonathan will take you out and show you the farm. You could see the cows,” Oliver suggested.

Laura wrinkled her nose. “That’s okay, Daddy, cows are smelly.”

Lois almost choked on the laugh that tried to escape at the four-year-old’s candour. She pressed a hand to her swollen belly, thinking of her twins when they got to that age. God help us all, she thought.

Once at Watchtower, Chloe quickly accessed the systems.

“What are we looking for?” Lois asked.

“Any recent acquisitions by LexCorp,” her cousin told her. “It might give us some idea where he’s keeping anyone with any kind of meta human powers.”

That was a big ask, Lois thought, but Chloe seemed to know what she was doing. Clark, meanwhile, was watching his dad and Oliver, who were checking out some other leads.

A call came through the Watchtower communications. Clark ran to the console and identified the caller.

“It’s Grandpa,” he said.

Lois frowned at her son. “What would he be doing calling here?”

She stood beside her son, pressing the key to open the call.

“Dad?”

“Hi sweetheart. Hello Clark.”

“Hi Grandpa.”

“I called the house and Martha told me you were here.”

“Don’t worry,” Chloe assured them. “Communications are secure.”

“What’s wrong, Dad?”

“There’s something I thought you should know. There have been rumblings for weeks in Washington and now it’s been confirmed. Lex Luthor is trying to force a vote of no confidence against President Wallace. It’s the first step on his road to becoming the President.”

Oliver snorted. “Yeah, like we didn’t see that coming.”

Lois shot him a look and he subsided.

“We still can’t prove he was behind the attack on Air Force One,” she told her father. “The only person who could have testified is dead.”

“I was afraid of that,” the former general said quietly. “What are you going to do?”

“We’re doing it,” Lois replied. “Chloe’s doing some digging to see if we can dig up more dirt.”

“Well, be careful honey. Luthor is nothing but a snake-in-the-grass. I’m afraid Checkmate was a
cakewalk compared to him.”

“Don’t worry, Sam,” Kal replied. “We know exactly what Luthor’s like.”

Chloe had been busily typing and let out a whoop as Lois’ father signed off.

“I think I’ve found something,” she said. “There’s a facility down by the river. About five miles from here. About six months ago, they started outfitting the place with some very heavy-duty equipment. Like twenty million dollars’ worth.”

Lois looked at her husband. “We should go check it out,” she said.

He frowned at her. “Uh, honey, if anybody’s going to check it out, it would be me and Oliver.”

She chewed on her lip. “Are you telling me what to do?”

She could see Oliver and Chloe looking a little uneasy. Clark looked at her, then at his father, his eyes wide.

“Lois, you are six months pregnant and you look about eight months. What if it’s dangerous?”

“How dangerous could it be?” she asked, an edge to her tone.

“They could have meteor rock,” Chloe pointed out. “Which, by the way, hardly makes it a walk in the park for you either, Kal.”

“I may be pregnant, but I’m still perfectly capable of looking after myself,” Lois told her husband.

“I said no, Lois. I don’t want to take the risk.”

“I’ve been doing this for over ten years, Kal. I know what I’m doing.”

“You haven’t been pregnant for ten years.”

“Stop being so over-protective.”

“This is not being over-protective. This is me trying to protect our family.”

“Don’t you dare!” she growled. “I got along fine when you were gone …”

The jibe clearly hurt from the look on his face. She hadn’t meant to start a fight, but it was certainly escalating into one. She knew he worried about her, especially with her being pregnant and some part of her understood his need to protect her, but her father had always told her she was too independent for her own good.

As Kal yelled back at her, Clark turned on his parents.

“Stop it, just stop it!” he cried, running up the circular stairs to the mezzanine floor.

Oliver looked uncomfortable.

“I’m just gonna suit up,” he said, disappearing through the doors to where they kept the uniforms. Kal bit his lip, then followed the blond archer.

Chloe looked at her.

“What was that all about?” she asked. “Since when has Kal been over-protective?”
Lois shrugged. He hadn’t been really. She knew she had over-reacted, but after everything that had been going on, the tension was starting to get to her. Still, she didn’t see why she couldn’t go along on what was essentially a recon mission.

“Lo, I hate to say this, but Kal has a point. I mean, look at you. You’re huge!”

“Gee, thanks, cuz. Really needed to hear that.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean it like that. Look, when I was pregnant with Laura, I had the same problems. I wasn’t as big obviously, since I was only carrying one baby, not two. But I was sore as hell from six months on and let’s not even go there with the hormones. Ollie and I were fighting a lot, but at least Connor didn’t get to see any of it. And yes, Ollie did get over-protective. Even though as Watchtower I was more or less the eye-in-the-sky or technical support. I certainly wasn’t as ‘hands-on’ as you are. I didn’t like it, but I knew my limitations.”

She sighed, then continued. “Kal has a point, you know. Who knows what you’ll be facing at the facility.”

“This is part of who I am,” Lois said stubbornly. “I’m not going to change just because I’m married to like the strongest man on Earth.”

“And Kal knows that, sweetie, but imagine what it would do if, for instance, you met a security guard who got a little trigger-happy, or, let’s say Lex does have meta humans there and one of them decides to attack you. I know that’s a chance you have to take, but do you really want to take that chance with your babies?”

Lois stared at her cousin, picturing the scenario. She placed a hand protectively on her stomach, thinking with horror of what would happen if such a scenario did occur. Chloe was right. It might not happen, but was that a gamble she wanted to take with her children?

Kal came back in, wearing his Superman suit. He looked at her and was clearly about to say something when she ran to him, or tried to, at least.

“Kal, baby, I’m sorry. You were right. I wasn’t thinking.”

He wrapped his arms around her.

“I shouldn’t have yelled,” he said.

“I shouldn’t have said what I did,” she replied, her voice muffled by her face in his chest.

“Honey, it’s okay. I know it’s the stress. And I have it on good authority the pregnancy hormones are playing havoc with your moods right now.”

Lois lifted her head and looked at Oliver, who was standing behind Kal. He averted his gaze. Clearly the two men had had a heart-to-heart while they’d been changing.

Chloe had opened an access panel in the wall and taken out her husband’s compound bow and arrows.

“Be careful, you two. Try not to get yourselves hurt, or worse. Keep a low profile.”

Oliver chuckled. “Yeah, I’m wearing green leather and Kal … low profile?”

“You know what I mean, Hero,” Chloe told him. “This is strictly recon. No fancy stuff.”
“Yes dear. Come on, big guy. Let’s get moving.”

Lois watched the two men leave. Chloe stood in the middle of Watchtower, an odd expression on her face.

“You worry about him too,” Lois said.

“I always worry, but that doesn’t mean I can’t let him go do what he has to do.” She regarded Lois silently for a moment. “Uh, don’t you have something else to take care of?” She glanced up toward the mezzanine floor. Lois nodded.

She climbed up the circular staircase and went to look for her son. Clark was sitting on one of the couches, an MP3 player in his hand, earbuds in his ears, eyes closed. He usually pulled out his music when he didn’t want to hear something. What struck her, though, were the tear tracks on his cheeks.

Puffing slightly, she approached him and gently tapped his shoulder. Clark opened his eyes and looked at her, then took the earbuds out of his ears. Lois heard the discordant rhythm of whatever he was playing before he shut it off.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“That’s the first time I’ve heard you guys fight,” he replied. “Well, since you came back.”

She nodded, not sure what to say.

“You know, that first fight you had, I didn’t know what to do. I got scared so I went into my room and I just cried. I knew it wasn’t going to be easy, you finding out that Dad was back and everything, but I guess I thought you’d be happy to see him once you knew.”

“I didn’t give him much of a chance to explain though, did I?”

She still thought about those few moments when all she’d done was yell at Kal, not realising what he’d gone through. She’d been so busy thinking about all she had suffered she hadn’t been able to see beyond that. It was little wonder Kal had been so hurt; little wonder he’d said the things he had when he’d returned to the hotel. In many ways, he was still learning a few things about American culture, his only influence being television or the movies where people who fought would snarl and utter such horrible things.

She brushed her son’s hair back.

“Honey, I know that fight just now scared you, but never forget that I love your father very much.”

“Then why were you so mean to him?”

“Sometimes I still forget that your dad and I, and you, we’re all in this together. Part of me still wants to go out there and take action, but as your dad pointed out, I can’t exactly do that right now. Not so much for me, but for the babies.” She hugged him.

“I’m sorry I yelled at your dad, and I told him before he left. All I can tell you is, it might get worse.”

Clark frowned, not understanding.

“Why? I mean, why would you and dad have worse fights?”

“Well, having a baby isn’t all that easy for a woman, honey. Especially in the last few months. All that weight on your stomach … well, it makes your body ache all the time and then you can’t sleep
because the babies like to play. Or in the case of your brother and sister, I think they must be holding boxing matches inside my womb.”

Clark grinned. “Sibling rivalry?”

“Something like that,” she said with a chuckle.

“I’ve been sort of reading about stuff like that. Mood swings and stuff. But you don’t have mood swings.”

“Not that you’ve seen,” she told him. “Actually, your dad does his best to make things easy on me. Even when I’m too stubborn to admit that he might be right about some things.”

“Yeah, Jonathan says I get my stubbornness from you.”

“He might be right about that,” she said, laughing.

Clark wrapped his arms around her in a hug.

“Thanks Mom.”

The babies chose that moment to kick or roll over, or whatever they did inside her stomach and Clark inhaled sharply.

“Wow! I bet that must feel weird.”

“It did at first, but now I’m sort of used to it.”

Chloe came up the stairs and looked at them.

“Superman and Green Arrow just checked in. They're at the facility.”

Clark jumped up, then held out his hand to help her to her feet. Together, mother and son went downstairs to get the lowdown on the situation.
Chapter Summary

Kal and Oliver investigate 33.1 and Lois meets an old friend.

As Kal followed Oliver into the change room off the main room of Watchtower, he couldn’t help but wonder where the sudden fight with Lois had come from. He knew she didn’t like being left behind, but he wondered if she had really thought about the repercussions to herself and to the twins if anything did happen to her.

He sighed, pulling at his shirt to take it off, taking his time rather than changing at super speed. Oliver had already pulled off his own shirt and was donning the black sleeveless shirt he always wore underneath his leather tunic. His friend looked at him with a puzzled expression, seeing Kal wasn’t moving.

“Kal, you gonna change?”

“I …”

Oliver nodded, glancing back toward the main room. “Yeah, I get it. Kind of blew up out of nowhere. Look, man, all I can tell you is, you better get used to it for the next three months.”

“Pardon?”

His friend wrinkled his nose. “Yeah, it’s the pregnancy hormones. Well, there’s a reason they call them mood swings. Right now, they’re playing havoc with her moods. Trust me, when Chloe was pregnant with the kids, both times it was like she was a walking time bomb, and I had no idea when she was gonna go off. I learned to tread lightly.”

“Are all women like that?” Kal asked, putting his tunic on.

“No, but it looks like it runs in the family.” He glanced out toward the main room. “Thing is, you gotta see it from Lois’ side. She’s, like, she’s probably feeling really unattractive, not to mention she’ll be aching from all the baby weight. Imagine carrying about thirty or forty pounds right here on your abdomen,” he said, patting his own stomach. “It puts a lot of strain on the lower back and on the hips.”

“She’s been complaining … well, not complaining, I guess, but I notice she’s been getting up a lot more in the night lately.”

Oliver shrugged and nodded.

“Yeah. I don’t know why, but it’s like kids pick the night hours to use their mother’s womb as their own personal playground. Lois is probably not getting a lot of sleep.”

Kal frowned. “Isn’t there anything I can do?” he asked.

“Be patient with her. Give her lots of back rubs. They like that. And yeah, try to remember when they blow up like that, it’s not always about you.”
Kal nodded at his friend. “Thanks. That helps.”

“One thing I’ve always liked about Lois is the way she refuses to stand on the sidelines. It’s not always the smartest thing to do to jump right into the fray like she does, but she was raised by an army general. She’s pretty gutsy. Still, you had a good point. I mean, it’s not exactly the best time for her to be breaking in to a LexCorp facility. She’s not gonna like it, but I figure you’d rather not take a chance on Lex getting hold of her and the twins.”

Kal suddenly felt a sensation in his stomach of what he could only assume was nausea, since it was the same feeling he got around Kryptonite. Dread, he thought. Imagine what Lex would do to the twins once he realised they were only half human.

He finished dressing, then returned to the main room, only for Lois to approach him and apologise for the fight. It appeared Chloe must have had a little talk with her.

They left Watchtower and made their way across town. Kal flew in the air, slowing his flight to keep a watch on Oliver, who was making his way over the rooftops. He crouched on a rooftop of a building near the facility Chloe had shown them on the monitor.

It looked like a normal warehouse complex. Any person passing by would probably have assumed the same thing, except for the fact that there were security guards patrolling the premises. Rather more than would be expected for a standard warehouse, Kal thought.

He x-rayed the facility, glancing at Oliver, who seemed to be gathering his own information. Chloe had told him that Oliver’s dark glasses had a dual purpose. They helped him disguise his features but also had a built-in micro-camera so he could record what he saw. That way if they ever needed evidence to take to the authorities, he could download the file and send it to them.

From what he could tell, there were several people working in the south-east corner of the building. He concentrated and allowed his vision to pull back slightly so he could get an idea of what they were doing. Some appeared to be working on computers while others were working with some other equipment. From the look of it, it seemed to be a standard laboratory as he could see various testing devices.

He relayed the information to Oliver and Chloe.

“Guards.” Oliver pointed to two guards walking along the perimeter.

“I’ve been able to access the building’s schematics,” Chloe chimed in. “There should be a mainframe on the north-west side. I’m picking up a lot of heat generated from that room.”

“On it,” Oliver replied, getting up and aiming an arrow at what appeared to be some kind of signal booster at the far side of the building. Kal noted the high tensile steel cable on the end of the arrow and figured Oliver would use a zip line to get across.

Kal kept an eye on the guards, watching as Oliver made sure the guards’ backs were turned before shooting, then used the zip line to move down quickly, landing with a soft thump on the roof of the building. He looked back at Kal, clearly indicating he should follow.

Together, they made their way quietly into the building, keeping a watch out for any guards or personnel. Considering how they were dressed, trying to be low-profile was a big ask. Chloe had also let them know she had accessed the surveillance and had looped it so even if they did get caught, Lex wouldn’t have any proof they were there, as long as they were careful not to get seen by the guards.
Chloe called in, telling Oliver to head for the mainframe and get whatever information he could, while Kal was sent in the other direction. With a smirk, Oliver took off running.

Kal grinned and began walking along the corridor, checking through each door as he passed. There was no sign to say what exactly went on in the building. At least, no obvious signs, he thought. As he neared the north end of the building, the furthest away from the lab, he spotted a panel which was the size of the door, yet it had no handle and nothing to indicate that it actually was a door. Yet there was a smaller panel beside it. Kal opened it, not sure what he was expecting to find and stared at the panel.

“Uh, Watchtower …”

“What is it, Superman?”

“There’s some kind of security device. I’m not sure what it is.”

“Can you describe it?”

“Well, it looks like a touch screen with an imprint of a hand.”

He heard her typing and speaking to Lois in a low voice.

“Okay, that sounds like a biometric scanner. LuthorCorp began developing the technology back in the nineties, but it’s been vastly improved since then. I’m just trying to dig up some information on it.”

“What is a biometric scanner?” he asked.

“It’s a technology that they use in a lot of security systems. It’s designed to recognise people by physiological properties. In this case, fingerprint data or hand geometry. There isn’t any way to bypass it unless you have someone’s fingerprints. I very much doubt you’re going to be able to fool the scanner Superman.”

“Can you see what it’s connected to?” Lois asked.

Kal scanned it and found electrical wiring connected to the larger panel, relaying that information back to Watchtower.

“Sounds to me like that’s a door, Superman.” There was more typing on the keyboard. “Yeah, there’s nothing on the schematics. Can you scan it?”

He x-rayed, realising there was a lift on the other side. The question was, where did it lead to?

An alarm blared and he realised they had run out of time. He listened in, using his super hearing, and realised Oliver had been spotted. There were shouts from guards on the other side.

Kal moved at super-speed, spotting Oliver running toward him, being pursued by armed security guards. He aimed his heat vision at the rain of bullets, but knew it wouldn’t be enough to stop Oliver getting hurt unless he got between them. He put on a burst of extra speed and swatted the bullets before shoving the guards away, with just enough speed and strength to ensure they would be stunned but not hurt.

“Thanks,” Oliver said as Kal went to meet him.

“Get what you needed?” he asked.
“Yeah. Let’s get out of here.”

They made it back to Watchtower without incident. Chloe took the flash drive from her husband while Kal watched with Lois.

“Okay, so there’s reference to a project called 33.1,” Chloe said, having sped read her way through some of the files. Even Kal was surprised at how quickly she had read it. “I’m going to send some of this information to Bruce to see what he can make of it.”

“Is there anything on there that can tell us what that biometric scanner was for?” Lois asked.

“Sorry. No. I’m guessing it’s on a separate system.” Chloe looked at them. “It’s probably a good idea to bring Cyborg in on this. He might be able to help us access the scanner.”

“Impulse might be good for this, too,” Oliver added. “He can zip in and zip out.”

Kal could see Lois biting her lip, clearly wishing she had been able to go. He’d meant what he’d said earlier, though. It was a risk he wasn’t willing to take with her.

They decided to have a late lunch, then spend the rest of the day shopping at the mall for the babies, although Chloe and Oliver begged off, saying they were going to work at Watchtower and would meet them back at the farm in time for dinner. Clark had fun picking out toys and cute outfits for the babies, clearly enjoying the thought of becoming a big brother in three months’ time.

“You okay?” Kal asked his wife, noticing she was a little quiet. “We can sit down if you want.”

Clark had also noticed his mother’s demeanour.

“I can get some of the stuff, Mom, if you want to take a rest.”

“I’m all right, baby,” she said. “Okay, I’m aching a little, but …”

“Mom, you don’t have to say any more. All this walking around’s probably getting to you a bit.” He grinned and led her to a bench in the middle of the mall. “You sit right there. I bet you’re thirsty too. I’ll just go get you something to drink.”

Lois chuckled as Clark went off to find a stand.

“How are you feeling? Really?” Kal asked.

“Tired. I can’t believe I’ve still got three months to go. I guess you were right earlier, about me not being able to go on even a recon mission. I’d just slow you down.”

“Honey,” he said gently. “It’s not that. I mean, yes, the reality is you can’t move as fast, but that’s not the point. The point is, and I’m just trying to be honest with you, I can’t do my job if I’m worrying about keeping you and the babies safe. I mean, imagine what it would do to me if Lex or one of his people took you and started doing experiments on you?”

Her eyes widened and she lifted a hand to her mouth.

“Oh my god, I didn’t even think about that. Now I feel really stupid.”

“Honey, no. You shouldn’t feel that way.”

“Stupid baby brain,” she grumbled. “I feel like a total ditz sometimes.”
“If there is one thing you are not, Lois Lane, it’s a ditz.”

She frowned at him. “You don’t even know what that means!”

He grinned. “Probably not, but I’m guessing it’s not complimentary.”

Lois laughed and leaned in to him so he put an arm around her. Clark ran up, holding a bottle of iced tea.

“It’s your favourite, right, Mom?”

She nodded. “That’s great. Thank you honey.”

Clark spotted some friends from school and decided to go and talk to them for a little bit, giving Lois a chance to rest.

“We kind of scared him earlier,” Lois murmured.

“Yeah, that fight did come out of nowhere,” Kal replied. “I mean, I know now why it did, but …”

“I know. I’m sorry,” she said.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “It’s not fair for you to take all the responsibility. I mean, I do know that couples fight from time to time. I remember Jonathan and Martha having a fight while we were in Gotham, before we found you, that is.”

Jonathan had wanted to get back to the farm and Martha had kept telling him that they couldn’t exactly do that, since it wasn’t safe. They’d managed to get Ben Hubbard to look after the farm while they were away, but Jonathan was very particular about how things were run and didn’t like someone else stepping in, even if it had been for their own safety. The couple had argued for almost the entire day until Jonathan had stalked off in a huff.

“I didn’t know,” Lois said. She studied him for a moment. “Did your parents ever fight?”

He frowned. He couldn’t really remember his parents fighting, but he supposed they must have. His mother had never really been happy about Jor-El’s friendship with Zod, often saying she didn’t trust the man. She had been proved right in the end.

“I guess they did. There were times when they seemed a little cool toward each other but I don’t remember them ever fighting in front of me.”

“Fighting’s really tough on the kids. My mom and dad had this big fight once. I think Dad had to go overseas on a mission and he wouldn’t tell my mom where it was or what he was doing. I think Lucy was about two or three, so I must have been about five. I know there were times when my mom couldn’t understand why it had to be Dad’s responsibility, and why he couldn’t spend more time at home.”

“It’s not easy, is it? Being left behind.”

She squeezed his arm. “It’s not like that with you,” she said. “I know you have to go off and, you know, be Superman and save the world, but you have always made me feel like I’m there with you.”

“Except today,” he replied.

“That’s not true. I mean, I know I over-reacted, and yeah, it’s more than likely the pregnancy hormones, but it’s not like you made me stay at the farm while you flew off to Watchtower with
Oliver and Chloe. I was still included.”

“You’re part of the team,” he told her. “You always will be. And it’s not just because you’re my wife. You contribute in your own way.”

It was true, he thought. She had various contacts as a reporter and that gave her access to information that even Superman wouldn’t normally get. Some of the people she talked to weren’t exactly fans of his, since him taking some criminals off the street affected their livelihood.

That was a thought. He looked at her.

“Would one of your contacts know about 33.1? Or maybe even be able to help us with proving Lex was behind the attack on the President?”

She thought about it for a second. “Maybe. We can always ask.” She pulled out her phone and began scrolling through her contacts. “One of them actually works not far from here.”

She quickly tapped out a text. Kal helped his wife to her feet. Clark, seeing they were getting ready to leave, said goodbye to his friends and came over.

“We going home?” he asked.

“Nope. We’re going to talk to a friend of your mom’s.”

“Well, he’s not exactly a friend.” Lois frowned. “Maybe you should sit this one out, honey. Mickey, uh, he’s not exactly good with kids.”

“I’m fourteen, Mom. I think I can handle it.”

She shook her head. “Mickey’s not the type of guy you want to mess with, honey. And I certainly don’t want you showing your abilities. They’re not exactly fans of Superman.”

“They?” Kal asked, a little worried. Lois smiled at him and patted his shoulder.

“Mickey belongs to a gang.”

Clark snorted. “What? The Mickey Mouse Club?”

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, don’t even think that in front of him, Clark. He’s liable to take your head off.”

“So what kind of gang?”

“They’re a gang that hang out in Suicide Slum,” she said. “Mickey works as a mechanic in a garage a couple of blocks from here, but he also deals drugs part-time. He’s also a friend of Joey’s. Remember him?”

“From Singapore, Mom?”

She nodded. “Yes, that’s him.”

Kal did not exactly feel easy about this, but it seemed as if Lois trusted the man and he wasn’t about to tell her no. Not this time. This wasn’t a job for Superman. Or even Batman. Clearly a man like Mickey tended not to trust superheroes. Knowing Lois the way he did, and having met Joey, he decided the best thing to do would be to go along with it and keep a close eye on the situation.
He drove to the garage, helping Lois out of the cab. Clark opted to stay in the truck, at least heeding his mother’s warning. He followed his wife into the garage, watching for any sign of danger. There were three men working in the garage. They all stopped to look at her. One looked more than a little annoyed, wiping hands covered in a black substance on an equally dirty rag.

“Mickey,” Lois said, looking at the man.

“Yeah, whaddya want, Lane.”

“Don’t give me that bull, Mickey.”

He approached them, nodding his head at Kal.

“Who’s this?”

“My husband.”

The man smirked, showing even white teeth. He was aged maybe in his late forties, his skin a light brown.

“Yeah? When’d you get hitched, Lane?”

“That’s not your concern,” Kal replied, stepping forward. Lois put out a hand to stop him, laying it on his chest.

“Kal, let me handle this.”

“You look like you’re about ready to pop,” Mickey observed.

“Not quite,” she replied. “Can still kick your ass though, Mickey.”

He laughed suddenly. Kal glanced at his wife, but she seemed completely unfazed.

“Yeah, bet you could. C’mere girl.” He wrapped his arms around her in a hug. Clearly they were old friends. He let her go and held her at arms’ length. “Geez, I still remember you when you were running round base in those little bitty diapers.”

Lois snickered. “Yeah, yeah.” She turned and looked at Kal. “Mickey served under my dad in Germany when I was little. So did Joey.”

So that was how she knew them, Kal thought.

“Still remember the time your old man caught you hiding in the supply room, playin’ around. Never seen the man turn so white. And that’s sayin’ somethin’.”

“Heh, yeah.” Lois pulled him aside, out of earshot of the other men. “Listen, Mickey, we need a favour.”

“This can’t be good.”

“I know you guys hate LexCorp. Well, I need you to ask around your buddies. See if you can dig up some dirt.”

“Got something specific?” he asked.

Kal frowned. It seemed the man changed his dialect depending on who was around.
“Ever hear of a project called 33.1?” she asked.

He shook his head, but smiled. “No, but I can sure find out.”

Kal coughed and Lois looked at him.

“Yeah. Uh, remember that attack on Air Force One?”

Mickey nodded.

“Can you do some asking around about that?”

“Sure can.”

He walked with her to the truck.

“Better you don’t contact me here again,” he said. “You know how the guys are,” he added, gesturing toward the other men.

Kal brushed past him and helped Lois back in the truck. Mickey frowned at him.

“You look kinda familiar.”

“He has that kind of face,” Lois told him. “Thanks Mickey. I owe you one.”

“Yeah, one of these days I’ll actually collect, Lane.”
Worries

Chapter Summary

Lois' health becomes a concern as she continues to investigate Lex

If there was one thing Lois had always hated, it was being benched. Not that she could really blame her husband. He was just trying to protect her and the twins and given that she felt as big as a house now, even when she had just over two months to go, she could understand his anxiety.

He hadn’t been with her to experience her first pregnancy and that had been tough enough. In many ways, he was flying by the seat of his pants, so to speak.

That didn’t mean, however, that Lois was going to just sit quietly, not when there was work to be done. Kal was busy being Superman and everyone else was busy investigating the new threat of 33.1. Since Victor and Bart had managed to get into the secured part of the facility, bypassing the biometric system and see exactly what was behind door number one, the League had been kept busy investigating every LeXCorp facility. Oliver and Bruce both suspected there were more 33.1 facilities all over the world, since it was highly unlikely there were only people with abilities in the US alone.

Still, just because she’d been sidelined, it didn’t mean she couldn’t back them up. She’d kept herself busy by researching every little thing she knew about Luthor and trying to pick up patterns of behaviour. All she had learnt so far was that his so-called philanthropic projects were either stepping stones to his political ambition, or they benefited his company in some way.

“Knock knock.”

Who’s there? she was tempted to ask as she looked up at Jimmy Olsen. The photographer grinned at her. Jimmy had started at the Daily Planet as an intern three years earlier, working his way through college. In the days before the internet, a photographer would have been hired to do just that. Take photographs. Now they were called ‘visual journalists’ and were required to take video as well, editing them and posting them online.

“Figured you’d want to see this,” he said, handing her a print-out.

Lois glanced at it. Jimmy had managed to capture a photo of Superman after he’d rescued a young girl while putting out a fire on the highway. An oil tanker transporting its flammable cargo had jack-knifed after the driver had swerved to avoid an SUV which had cut him off, hitting a few cars on the way. The twelve-year-old girl had been trapped under one of the cars and no one had been able to get near her when the tanker caught fire. Given the tanker had been fully loaded, the oil would have burned for hours and the young girl would have died if it hadn’t been for Superman.

Lois hid her smile of her pride at her husband’s heroics. Jimmy had photographed Superman with the little girl in his arms. She had received second degree burns and a few minor injuries, but the smile on her face said it all. She gazed at Superman with what could only be hero worship.

“He’s really something, isn’t he?” the younger journalist remarked.
“He sure is,” she said. She touched a hand briefly to her swollen belly and shifted her legs, grimacing at the discomfort. She’d noticed some swelling in her legs the last couple of days. Not to mention the pounding in her head, she thought, rubbing her temple.

“You okay? You don’t look so hot.”

“I’m fine,” she said. “Just a headache.”

“Uh, you know, my sister-in-law, when she was having my nephew, she got, like, I think they called it, um, gestational diabetes, or something. Anyway, she was really unwell. It got so bad HJ said they admitted her to hospital like three weeks before the baby was born.”

Lois frowned. HJ was what Jimmy called his older brother, whose real name was Henry, but had always preferred to go by his middle name, which was also James. That could get confusing for the two brothers, who could almost be twins with the similarities in their looks. Also a photographer, the elder Jimmy had taken a corporate job in Gotham.

Jimmy still looked at her with concern, but she shook her head. The last thing she needed was for Kal to start worrying himself sick. Or Clark, for that matter.

Jimmy chatted to her for a little while about Superman. He was clearly a huge fan of the superheroes. Not that Lois minded. The photographer was a sweet kid. When she had first joined the Planet full-time, he had acted almost as if he was terrified of her. Lois knew she’d had a reputation for being a bit of a hardass, but aside from her mood swings, she liked to think she had mellowed out a little.

Her phone rang and she glanced apologetically at Jimmy. He smiled.

“It’s all good. I should get back to work anyway.”

She nodded and picked up the phone.

“Lois Lane.”

“Hey girl.”

“Mickey,” she said with a smile. “You have something for me?”

“Sure do. Want me to come to you?”

“Yeah. There’s a café I go to. Can you be there in about half an hour?” She gave him the address.

“No probs,” he replied.

Lois grabbed her bag and stood up, swaying dizzily, putting out a hand to steady herself. She shook her head. She was probably just overtired, she thought. The twins had been keeping her up most nights. Kal usually stayed up with her, as long as he wasn’t patrolling, giving her back rubs and helping her to relax, but the problem was as soon as she started to doze off, the babies were at it again.

Shaking off the sudden nausea, Lois headed out the door, walking as fast as her current physical limitations would allow, arriving at the café about five minutes before the agreed time. She ordered herself an iced tea, thankful for the cool glass. The cashier frowned at her, but didn’t comment.

Lois sat down in the booth near the air vent. It was May and hotter than usual. At least, it felt that way to her. She couldn’t help noticing a few of the people in the café were wearing sweaters or
coats, yet she felt almost as if she was boiling in her own skin.

Mickey appeared a few minutes later. He smiled and walked over. Lois had to hide a grin. Mickey liked to pretend he was a tough guy around his gang buddies and the guys he worked with at the garage, but it was mostly for show.

He’d been kicked out of the army for dealing drugs. Lois had never held it against him. He had always looked out for her on base, kept her out of trouble.

Her friend frowned at her as he sat down.

“Girl, don’t mind my saying, but you don’t look so good.”

She frowned at him. He was the second person that day to tell her she wasn’t looking well. She shrugged it off.

“I’m fine. What do you have for me?”

“There was this guy about five years ago. He was killed in Afghanistan. Least, that was the official story.”

“Unofficially?”

“Unofficially he was taken by LeXCorp to one of their facilities. To be a guinea pig in an experiment.”

“Experiment? What kind of experiment?”

“Super soldiers. See, there’s this kid who deals with one of the scientists working for Luthor. Now, he told the kid Luthor’s been studying people with, you know, abilities.”

She nodded. “I know about the research. So, he’s trying to … what, extract their abilities somehow?”

“All I know is, it’s got something to do with something called Checkmate. This all started like twenty-thirty years ago.”

Figures, she thought.

“What about the other thing?”


“Damn,” she said. “I was so hoping.”

“There is something else. They’re only rumours, mind you, but we hear tell there’s something going down on the south side. Something to do with Intergang. My guys think they’re trying to take over the territory.”

“Which could end up in a turf war,” she said.

“Exactly.”

“Thanks Mickey. I really appreciate your help.”

He smiled at her. “Only for you, girl.”
She started to get to her feet but a wave of dizziness and nausea overwhelmed her. She felt Mickey’s hand on her arm.

“Okay, that does it,” he said. “Gimme your phone.”

“Mickey …”

“Hell no, sister. You’re sick.”

She felt herself pushed down on the seat, barely aware of the voices around her. She felt so tired.

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Clark frowned. His phone had vibrated in his pocket. He wasn’t even supposed to have it in class, but he’d forgotten to leave it in his locker. He glanced up at the front of the classroom but the teacher seemed completely absorbed in the lesson, droning on and on without even looking at the class.

He glanced at the screen using his x-ray vision and frowned. Mom. She wouldn’t normally call him in the middle of the day. She knew he wasn’t allowed his phone in class.

Deciding the teacher wouldn’t miss him if he slipped out, Clark glanced around him. Even Trina was staring at the teacher with a glazed look in her eyes.

As quietly as he could, Clark left the classroom via the back door, speeding out of the school building and taking shelter in the trees bordering the football field. The phone was still vibrating insistently and he pressed the talk button.

“Mom?”

“No, is this Clark?”

“Who’s this?” he asked, not recognising the man’s voice.

“A friend. You Lois’ kid?”

“Yes. Where’s my mom?”

“Uh, your mom’s not feeling well. I couldn’t reach her husband.”

“Yeah, my dad, uh, he’s probably on the farm and doesn’t have his phone with him. He forgets sometimes.”

“Well, you got any way to get hold of him? I think your mom needs to go to the hospital, dude.”

Clark immediately became worried.

“What?”

“Yeah, dude. I’m gonna make sure she gets there okay, but you see if you can reach your dad, okay?”

Clark nodded. “Uh, yeah. Thanks. Um, who are you?”

“Mickey. Your mom came to see me couple weeks ago.”

“Oh. Yeah, you’re the guy from the garage.”
“That’s me. Look, I gotta go. The ambulance is here.”

Clark heard the click of the call being disconnected. Deciding this was more important than boring history, he ran at super speed to the city, accessing the systems at Watchtower. Bart was the only occupant, reading something on the computer.

“Uncle Bart,” he said.

The speedster looked around. “Hey kid. What’s up?”

“Have you seen my dad?”

“He’s patrolling, I think. Why?”

“It’s my mom. She’s been taken to hospital.”

Bart was immediately concerned. “She all right?”

“I dunno. I need to find my dad.”

Bart placed a hand on his shoulder. The older man was a few inches shorter than Clark, so he had to reach, but it was comforting all the same. He turned back to the screen and touched it, accessing what Clark assumed was the communicator.

“Kal,” he said. “You better come in. Clark’s here.”

It seemed like minutes but was probably only seconds later when Kal flew in to Watchtower.

“Clark, what’s wrong?”

Clark quickly explained the phone call. Kal looked at Bart, who had clearly already accessed the emergency services.

“Yeah, they’ve taken her to Met Gen,” he said. “I’ll call Emil.”

“Thanks Bart.” Clark waited as his father went to change out of his Superman uniform. He was back in seconds wearing a plaid shirt and jeans. “Come on, son. Let’s go.”

Clark followed his father out the door. The truck his parents had bought to keep up appearances was parked in a lot about a mile from Watchtower, but close enough to the Planet so no one would ask too many questions. His dad was clearly worried, but silent as he drove to the hospital and found a park.

Together they hurried up the hill to the emergency department. His father spoke to the nurse.

“My wife was brought in. Lois Lane-Kent.”

“Sorry, Mr Kent. As you can see, we’re a bit overwhelmed,” she added, gesturing at the busy waiting room. At least thirty people were waiting to be seen by a doctor. “Please take a seat and I’ll see if I can find her doctor. I’m not sure how long it’ll be.”

They found seats and sat waiting. Clark picked up a magazine and flipped through it but quickly became bored. He could see his father fidgeting.

“Kal?”
His dad looked up. Clark glanced at the man, recognising him as the same guy his mother had met with. This had to be Mickey.

“Mickey?”

“Yeah, man. Sorry,” the man said, handing over what looked to be his mom’s purse. “The staff at the café called the paramedics.”

“They did the right thing. Thank you for staying with her.”

Mickey shrugged. “Always got time for our girl. I’ve known her since she was in diapers, man. She was always a little terror.” He clearly had a soft spot for her as he smiled. “Man, she sure is stubborn. Keeps insisting she’s fine.”

Emil Hamilton joined them. Mickey nodded at the doctor, saying he needed to get back to work. Clark and his father looked at the doctor.

“How’s Lois?” his dad asked.

Emil gestured toward one of the examining rooms. They followed him in. Clark’s mother was sitting on the bed, looking about ready to punch someone even as the nurse was bustling around her.

“Mom?”

“I keep telling everyone I’m fine. I don’t know what the fuss is about.”

Emil smiled at the nurse and asked her to step outside.

“Lois,” he said quietly. “You are not fine. Your blood pressure is skyrocketing and you have mild preeclampsia.”

Clark looked at the doctor. “That’s serious, isn’t it?”

Emil nodded. “We’ve caught it reasonably early. Because your mother is carrying twins, there was always a risk of hypertension and she does have mild edema as well.” He looked at Clark’s father. “Edema is basically water retention,” he explained. “You’ll notice the slight puffiness in her legs.”

“So what do we do?”

“Well, if the babies were a little further along, I would have recommended inducing. At this point in time, I think it’s more advisable that we give the twins a little more time.”

“So bed rest?” Mom said, clearly not happy.

“Actually, no. That’s what they used to do, but it’s not always the best thing for mother or baby, or babies, in this case. Having said that, however, you need to avoid stress, so I’m afraid you’re going to have to take maternity leave much earlier than you planned. Spend time with your family, take walks in the fresh air. As for your diet, drink more water and try to eat a little more protein. Limit your salt intake. I’ll give you a prescription to help with the water retention and to lower your blood pressure.”

He smiled reassuringly. “Tomorrow, I’m going to get you in for a full ultrasound and a Doppler scan to measure the blood flow to the placenta. Don’t worry. We’ve got this. Right now I want you to go home and get some rest. And I mean rest, young lady,” he added. “If the babies are keeping you up at night, then take naps during the day. You’re no good to your family if you don’t sleep.”
Clark grinned at his mother as she grudgingly accepted the mild rebuke. He had no doubt she would still try to test her limits. That was just how stubborn she was.
Lois reveals her own worries about her pregnancy and Kal takes her to the fortress

Kal couldn’t help but laugh as Lois grumbled all the way back to the farm. They’d already been in to the Planet to inform Perry, who had agreed with Emil. He promised he would square things with the newspaper’s owner.

While Lois had grudgingly accepted the diagnosis, she wasn’t happy about having to finish work so soon.

“This is all your fault, you know,” she told him, after complaining about his laughing at her.

“How is this my fault?” he asked as he turned in to the gateway leading to the farmhouse.

“You’re the one who got me this way.”

“Ah, hello, Mom, even I know there have to be two people involved in having babies.”

“Who asked you?” she snapped.

“Don’t take it out on Clark,” Kal admonished her, glancing at his son in the rearview mirror. Clark looked taken aback at his mother’s harsh words. Lois looked mulish, her arms awkwardly crossed over her belly. He stopped the truck and got out, going around to help his wife, who had already opened her door and was struggling to leave the cab.

“Don’t touch me,” she growled, as Clark also reached for her.

The teen stared after his mother as she went off in a huff. Kal stopped him from going after her.

“Don’t take it to heart, son,” he said. “Your mother’s not feeling well and it seems to be affecting her moods as well.”

“I know Dad. I’m just not used to her being so … mean.”

“Oliver warned me things will get worse before they get better,” he said. “I’ll talk to her, all right?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

He put a comforting hand on his son’s shoulder.

“It’ll be okay. It’s just going to take her a little time to accept what’s happened.”

He didn’t want to say anything to Clark, but he was more worried about Lois. Even if Emil had assured them they had caught the problem early, knowing Lois, she wouldn’t be happy with just sitting still and doing nothing.

Clark wandered over to the barn, while Kal went into the house to find Martha and Lois talking. His wife was still quite pale and she had dark circles under her eyes.
“Uh, honey, don’t you think you should go upstairs and rest for a bit.”

She turned and looked at him. “Telling me what to do?” she asked.

“No, I’m just reminding you Emil told you you needed to rest. You’ve had very little sleep for the past week and a nap wouldn’t hurt.”

Martha looked at her. “He’s right, sweetie. You look exhausted.”

Lois scowled, looking mutinous.

“Everyone’s suddenly telling me they know what is best for me.”

Kal knew she was not feeling well, which was bound to make her bitchy, but he was starting to lose his patience with her. He had an edge to his tone as he replied.

“It’s not about knowing what’s best for you, Lois. It’s doctor’s orders. You know that.”

“Fine!” she said with just as much of an edge to her voice. Without another word, she went upstairs.

Martha looked at Kal.

“I’m guessing it didn’t go down too well.”

“No. I’m going to go up and make sure she gets settled,” he said.

Martha stopped him. “Don’t be too hard on her sweetheart. I have a feeling this is about more than her job.”

He nodded, going up the stairs to the bedroom where he found Lois already lying on the bed. She turned her head to look at him.

“Don’t say it,” she said with a sigh. “I’m being a bitch.”

“You’re exhausted and I’m guessing you’re not feeling yourself.” He sat down on the bed. She moved into his arms and he held her. “I know how much you love your job …”

“It’s not just that,” she told him. “I’m scared.”

He looked down at her, concerned. “Of what?”

“You’re right. I’ve been feeling off for days and I didn’t want to say anything because I was worried what this might do. I’m scared for the twins.”

“Honey, I know it’s a lot to take in. I’m not really sure myself what preeclampsia is, but …”

“It can be bad, for both mother and baby, or babies. Some cases can be fatal if it’s not caught in time.”

“But Emil seems confident they did catch it in time,” he said reasonably. “Honey, I know this is concerning, but I trust Emil.”

She frowned. “What if … what if this is because the twins are, you know, half-human.”

“Did you have any problems when you had Clark?”

She shook her head. “No.”
He bit his lip. She clearly needed reassurance.

“Would it help if we went to talk to Jor-El?” he said.

They’d already talked to Jor-El a couple of times as Lois’ pregnancy had progressed and Kal’s father had assured them if there were any problems they could come to him.

“We could do that?”

“Of course. Do you think you’d be able to handle a flight north?”

She sat up. “Could we go now?”

“You really should get some rest,” he told her gently, but she pouted.

“I can’t rest when I’m worried. Please, honey?”

He nodded, knowing there was no arguing with her. Besides, he thought, she did have a point. She’d rest better when she wasn’t so worried about her and the babies’ health.

He helped her up and found a warm jacket in the closet. It might be late spring, but it would still be freezing in the Arctic. Together they went back downstairs, holding hands. Clark was in the kitchen, helping himself to cookies.

“Where are you two going?” he asked.

“Your dad’s taking me to the fortress,” Lois replied. She bit her lip. “Honey, I’m sorry I snapped before.”

He shrugged. “Dad said you weren’t feeling well.”

“Still, I shouldn’t have taken it out on you. You didn’t deserve that.”

Clark hugged her. “You’ll be okay, Mom. Grandpa says you’re as stubborn as him.”

She laughed. “Grandpa’s more than likely right.”

“Can I come?” Clark asked, but Jonathan came in with Clark’s best friend.

“Dude, where did you disappear to?” Rick asked.

“Sorry, I got a … um, family emergency.”

“Yeah, well the teacher’s kind of pissed,” his friend replied. Clark sent his parents a look and went out the door with his friend, explaining what had happened.

“Clark’s not supposed to have his phone in class,” Kal explained to Jonathan and Martha who were looking confused.

“It was a good thing he did, though,” Lois put in. “When Mickey couldn’t reach you, he tried Clark instead.”

“Then it’s just as well,” Jonathan said.

Lois nudged Kal and he smiled at her. They couldn’t wait for Clark to finish his conversation with his friend, knowing the two could talk for hours if they really wanted. He told the older couple what
they were doing and left the house, still holding his wife’s hand, pretending they were just going for a walk.

Clark was standing out by the fence, leaning on the top railing as he and Rick talked. Kal paused.

“We’re just going for a walk,” he told his son, who nodded and waved his hand.

They walked away, making sure they were out of sight of the two boys before Kal picked his wife up in his arms, deciding that was the best way to carry her. He launched into the air, flying at half his normal speed, not wanting to make his wife uncomfortable.

She clung to him, still looking pale. He glanced at her, worried the flight would make things worse, but she pressed her face to his chest and said nothing. He was relieved when they finally reached the Arctic roughly twenty minutes later.

He entered the main chamber, letting Lois down and keeping an arm around her waist to prevent her slipping and falling. She grimaced, clearly not as confident as she had been earlier about the journey.

“You okay?”

“I just need a minute,” she said, sounding a little breathless.

“It’s okay. Just take your time and catch your breath,” he replied.

She still clung to him as he slowly made his way over to the console, taking out a long six-sided crystal, inserting it between other crystals on the console. A bright glow began to emanate from it, lighting the entire chamber.

“Kal-El.”

“Hello Father. We have come to seek your advice.”

“I will do what I can to provide it. What is it you need, my son?”

“It’s me, actually,” Lois said, having recovered herself. “I’ve been feeling, uh, unwell, lately and I guess I wanted to assure myself that the babies are okay. I’m, uh, a little worried that it’s because the babies are only half-human and that might be affecting me somehow.”

“With your permission, Lois, I will scan you. Please step forward so I may perform the task.”

Lois glanced at Kal, looking a little worried. Jor-El hadn’t offered to scan her before so she was understandably nervous. He smiled at her reassuringly.

“It’s okay,” he said. “Trust me. It’s painless.”

Biting her lip, she did so. She was gently lifted into the air, surrounded by a bluish light. Kal could see Jor-El’s scanner checking her over thoroughly. Just as gently, a few seconds later, she was lowered to the ground. He stepped over to help her, knowing she would be feeling slightly off-balance.

“Human physiology is not as different from Kryptonian as you assume, Lois,” Jor-El explained. “That is why the two species can procreate. I cannot tell at this stage if the babies will have their father’s abilities. It may be different from your eldest son. I do note some concern with what your human doctors call hypertension, but I believe that as long as you avoid upsets, get some light exercise and rest as much as possible, both you and the babies will be all right.”
“She has already taken a leave of absence from work,” Kal told his father.

“That is good, my son. I understand from what you two have told me, that her job can be, what is the human term? Stressful?”

Lois nodded. “It has its moments. So, we’ll be okay?”

“Rest is very important at this stage of your pregnancy. If I may, I would suggest perhaps some music to help you sleep. The infants inside you are I am sure very active.”

“They are,” she affirmed. “They keep me awake at night.”

“Kal-El was also very active when he was inside his mother’s womb. On Krypton, it was normally the custom for infants to grow within a matrix before being given to the parents, but Lara wanted to carry him herself. I could never refuse my wife.” Kal heard the wistfulness in the tone, even if it was just an A.I representation of his father. “There were days when she was very tired and I suggested to her that perhaps she should try to sleep when Kal-El was not so active. We found it beneficial to play soft music which helped settle them both.”

“Thank you. That sounds like good advice.” Emil had said much the same thing but Kal wasn’t going to remind her of that.

“Lois, I am happy you decided to come to me. I would suggest that you continue to follow your doctor’s advice. He is in a better position to assist you should the need arise. I am confident, however, that if you get sufficient rest and some exercise, you will deliver two very healthy children in approximately seventy Earth days.”

Kal could see from his wife’s expression she was feeling more at ease with the situation. He guessed she had been more worried than she had let on. Now she was smiling. She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him.

“Feeling better?” he asked.

“Much better,” she said. She yawned. “But soo tired.”

“I will not keep you,” Jor-El replied. “Stay well, Lois Lane-El.”

“Thank you, Jor-El. For everything.” She turned back to Kal. “Let’s go home, honey. I want to have a good meal and an early night.”

He grinned at her. “Well, if you’re good, Ms Lane, there might be a back rub or two in it for you.”

“Mm, trying to bribe me, Kal-El?”

“Yup. Is it working?”

“Get me home and find out,” she said flirtatiously.

He couldn’t help the wider grin. He loved it when she was in this kind of mood.

They returned home to discover that Clark’s friend was also staying for dinner. Lois wanted to help Martha with the cooking but the older woman insisted Lois sit down and relax.

“Put your feet up, honey.”

Kal decided to sit with her on the couch and switched on the television for the news. He gently
manoeuvred her so he could massage her legs, as Emil had suggested it would help with the swelling. There had been a press conference at LeXCorp. Lex was still trying to force a vote on the President.

“That man is unbelievable,” Lois remarked. “Ooh, don’t stop doing that honey. That feels great.” She looked thoughtful. “Mickey was telling me one of the kids in his gang deals with someone at LeXCorp. There was this soldier. He was supposed to have died in Afghanistan but he’s apparently being used at LeXCorp. Anyway, he said this all started about twenty or thirty years ago.”

Kal nodded. Bruce had told him Lex’s father had been involved in some fairly shady dealings and that was how he had built up his company. Investigators working on the case against Checkmate had also discovered files on Luthorcorp’s own experiments on people with abilities. It seemed that Checkmate and the Luthors had a long history.

“Mickey mentioned something else. Intergang seems to be trying to take over the south side. That’s mostly Mickey and his gang’s territory. There are a lot of poor people living there. They could end up in the middle of a turf war.”

“I’ll make sure I patrol that area more regularly,” Kal replied. He looked at her, worried she might want to start investigating the problem, which was exactly what his father and Emil had told her to avoid. “Uh, honey …”

“I’m just telling you what Mickey said,” she insisted. “I know I have to back off.”

“Sorry,” he said sheepishly.

“I’m sorry, about what I said earlier. To you and to Clark. I didn’t mean to make it sound like I was blaming you for this. Or for how I’m feeling. I mean, I hate that I’ve kind of been benched, but I know it’s for my own good. Just … don’t keep me out of the loop, okay?”

“I would never do that,” he assured her. He liked that he could discuss these things with her and get some ideas about where to go next. Just because he was Superman didn’t mean he had the answers to everything. At least by discussing it with his wife, they could figure things out together.

Clark was careful not to ask about his grandfather in front of his friend at dinner. He was clearly still worried about his mother, helping her by serving her, making sure she had enough to eat. Lois was clearly doing her best not to lose her patience with him, knowing he was only doing it out of concern.

She ate heartily, which was a good sign. After dinner, Kal accompanied her on a walk around the farm until she declared she had had enough. Her colour was much better than it had been earlier that afternoon, her cheeks rosy with the fresh air.

Kal still had jobs to do around the farm, but figured he could do them after Lois had gone to bed, which she decided to do after they had returned to the house. He rubbed her back and massaged her shoulders, turning on soft music. Lois grumbled at the music, complaining that it wasn’t her favourite band, but she relaxed all the same, dozing off a short time later. He left her to sleep and went out to complete the farm work for the day.

Jonathan joined him. They worked side by side for a few minutes, making sure the animals were taken care of before the farm closed down for the night.

“How’s Lois?”

He listened, relieved to hear her calm, deep breaths, assured she had fallen into a deep sleep.
“She’s sleeping, thankfully.”

“And how are you doing, son?”

Kal bit his lip. “The truth is, I was worried earlier when I learned she was taken to hospital, but after talking with Jor-El, I’m feeling a little easier.”

“Lois certainly seemed better when you came back from the fortress. What did he say?”

“Mostly the same thing Emil did, but at least he reassured her that it wasn’t because the babies were half-human. As long as Lois avoids stress, gets plenty of rest and exercise, she’ll be fine.”

“I guess she just needed that extra bit of reassurance,” Jonathan replied.

Kal nodded. “I know she can’t wait until the twins are born. It’s been hard on her, and not just because she’s carrying two babies this time. I think she still remembers how hard it was giving up Clark.”

“Clark was always hers. We never thought otherwise.”

“I’m glad, though, that she came to you. Clark is the amazing young man he is because of the way you and Martha raised him.”

Jonathan smiled. “Well, I’d like to think genetics had something to do with it. I remember you being quite the young man yourself.”

“I fell in love, not just with Lois, but with this planet. Humans have such potential for love and compassion.”

“Not all humans,” the older man gently reminded him.

“That is true,” he conceded, thinking of people like the Luthors. It didn’t change the way he felt about his home. He would always miss Krypton and the people there, but he’d heard an Earth saying that embodied everything he felt. Home is where the heart is.

They’d just finished the last of the chores when Clark came out.

“Dad, Grandpa wants to talk to you.”

Kal frowned at his son. “Why does Grandpa need to talk to me?”

“Uh, ‘cause he heard Mom was sick.”

Jonathan frowned. “How did he know about your mom?” he asked. “At least, so soon.”

Clark shrugged. “I guess Aunt Chloe must have told him.”

“And how did your Aunt Chloe find out?” Jonathan asked, clearly wondering if Clark had told her.

“Probably the same way Lois does,” Kal answered with a grin. “Those two have powers all their own when it comes to getting information.”

“Isn’t that the truth?” the farmer replied.

Kal followed his son into the house, quickly washing his hands and turned to the phone. Martha had been chatting to Sam while they had waited for him to return to the house. His father-in-law’s tone
was almost accusatory as he spoke.

“When were you going to tell me about Lois?” he asked.

“Lois wanted to wait until after Emil had done the ultrasound,” Kal told him. “She didn’t want to alarm you necessarily.”

“I’m coming to Metropolis.”

“Sam, all due respect, the last thing Lois is going to need is to be crowded. Both Emil and my father told her she needs to avoid stress.”

The older man bristled visibly.

“Are you suggesting I might upset her?”

“No sir,” Kal replied, shaking his head. “But if we start hovering around her as if she we’re expecting her to drop at any moment, that will make her more anxious.”

The former general nodded. “You have a point, son. All right, I’ll stay put for now. But I want an update when she has the scan tomorrow.” He frowned. “Did you say she talked to your father?”

“Yes sir. She asked me to take her to the fortress and Jor-El scanned her.”

He explained what had happened in the fortress and how Lois had seemed to feel more reassured after meeting with Jor-El. Sam appeared to relax, his voice much calmer. He clearly worried about his eldest daughter, knowing the struggles they’d gone through.

Kal went upstairs to bed an hour or so later. Lois was still sleeping soundly when he checked in on her before showering and getting into bed beside her. He pulled her close, his hand laying protectively on her stomach.
Lois started awake, not sure what had woken her up, then groaned softly, rolling over in bed and laying a hand on her belly. It felt as if one of the babies had kicked her.

“You couldn’t behave yourselves for one night, could you?” she asked in a soft voice.

She glanced at the clock on the nightstand. She had gone to bed early, even for her, at around seven-thirty. It was almost midnight, which meant she’d had roughly four hours sleep. Little wonder she still felt tired.

“Lois?”

She turned and looked at her husband.

“It’s all right, honey. Go back to sleep.”

“Let me guess. They’re duking it out in there,” he said, sitting up and placing a hand on her stomach.

“Like you wouldn’t believe,” she told him. “I was going to go make some warm milk or something.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“Honey …”

“Humour me, Lois.”

She should have known he’d follow her anyway. She understood he worried about her getting enough rest, but there was little she could do when the babies decided to play up.

Emil had told her she was doing well. Now that the birth was getting closer, he was checking up on her two to three times a week. She had made sure to follow his instructions to the letter, knowing if she didn’t her family would be on her case. It wasn’t that they were being over-protective, but learning she had mild preeclampsia two months earlier had certainly not helped everyone’s stress levels. Kal tried not to hover, but she knew he couldn’t help himself. At least, she thought, he wasn’t completely hovering. He still went out and did his duty as Superman, first making sure someone was around to see to her needs.

He wasn’t keeping things from her. She might not be at work, but she still wanted to know what was going on. Chloe was the only one who had been reluctant to share information with her, telling her she didn’t need to hear the gory details. She loved her cousin dearly, but it was driving her crazy. Oliver had been back and forth between Metropolis and Star City, as well as going on regular jaunts overseas to investigate Lex’s 33.1 facilities. The Justice League, Bruce included, had decided that destroying the facilities would achieve nothing, so they’d been performing reconnaissance missions to gather intel on each facility, taking their information to the respective authority.
None of their intel could prove that Lex had direct knowledge of what was going on in each facility. The man was smart enough to cover his tracks, which was annoying, but Lois knew sooner or later Lex would trip himself up. Someone that arrogant was bound to get complacent, thinking he couldn’t be touched.

It was frustrating, but Lois tried not to let it get to her. She’d looked at videos on relaxation techniques and had used them often in the past two months so the worry and frustration over the problem of Lex and how to make him answer for his growing list of crimes against humanity didn’t bother her as much. Kal had been wonderful in helping her relax, bringing home small gifts he found in his travels as Superman which would make her laugh. She couldn’t help but smile thinking of his latest gift. He’d been down under for a couple of days, helping the Justice League and the local civil defence after a city had been hit by a major earthquake. There had been some fatalities, which even Kal had to admit he couldn’t have prevented, but he’d saved a few lives, pulling people out of the rubble.

There had been an animal sanctuary also severely damaged by the earthquake but Kal had been on hand to help rescue the sanctuary’s small hospital which had been raising chicks of one of the country’s native bird species. The bird was on the endangered list and the sanctuary’s breeding program was one of its most valued programs. Thanks to Kal, the chicks had been safely transferred to a new home and the program’s co-ordinator had given Kal a soft toy souvenir in appreciation. He’d refused anything else, promising the co-ordinator he would talk to the Justice League about getting donations for the sanctuary.

Lois picked up the toy, which had been placed on the dresser in their bedroom, intending to put it in the nursery, but she couldn’t help cuddling it for a moment. She left the bedroom and went into the nursery to put the toy away, gazing at the furniture with a soft smile. When Jonathan and Kal had been working on the extensions to the farmhouse, they’d added a guest room, which had then been turned into a nursery once Lois realised she was pregnant. The two men had also made the furniture, lovingly carving the pieces for each crib. Kal had admitted to her he loved learning about craftsmanship from Jonathan and was getting very good at it.

As she started to make her way downstairs, she felt a twinge in her back and placed her hand in the spot.

“You okay, sweetheart?” Kal asked, reminding her that he was right behind her.

“I’m all right. Just a twinge.”

He reached out to support her as she waddled down the stairs. Moving around was much harder now as her centre of gravity was off and she was always worried about falling. She paused on the second floor landing, catching her breath, then slowly walked down the stairs to the kitchen.

The puppy the family had adopted a month earlier looked up from its basket with a hopeful expression. Lois was allergic to dogs, or their dander at least, but even she had fallen for the sweet little thing. Clark had brought the golden retriever, along with two others, home one afternoon. The boy who had once bullied him, Stephen Bailey, had been seeing a counsellor for his issues and had begun to turn his life around. Since Clark was the one who had convinced him to get help, the two had become, if not friends, at least friendlier and it was Stephen who had asked for Clark’s help when he had found the three-week-old puppies abandoned near his home.

The other two puppies had since died, which had been painful for Clark. It was his first lesson in the limits of his abilities. The surviving puppy, named Shelby, was thriving under Clark’s care. He’d managed to convince his parents and Jonathan and Martha to keep the puppy instead of turning it over to animal control. Of course, Lois thought, it hadn’t been that hard. Both Jonathan and Kal,
although they wouldn’t admit it, were complete softies.


The puppy aimed big brown eyes at Kal, who just laughed.

“Yeah, that won’t work on me, boy.”

Lois chuckled. “Won’t it? Admit it, honey, you’re just a big softy.”

“Am not.”

“Are too,” she said, reaching up to kiss him.

Her husband grinned before turning to get the milk from the fridge. Lois again felt a jab in her back and rubbed at the spot.

The phone rang, echoing in the quiet kitchen, making them both jump. Lois grabbed it and pressed the talk button before the ringing disturbed others in the household.

“Kent residence,” she said.

“Lois? Girl, that you?”

“Mickey? It’s after midnight.”

“Yeah, I know kid. Look, I wouldn’t normally do this, I mean you know we don’t like those guys interfering in our business, but it’s real bad here.”

Lois could hear what sounded like gunfire.

“Mickey?”

Kal turned from the stove, looking at her with a raised eyebrow. He’d obviously heard the shooting.

“Go,” she told her husband. He nodded and turned away, speeding up the stairs. Two seconds later, she heard the front door close. Lois turned back to the phone.

“Mickey?”

“You gotta call Superman,” he said. “Before some little kid buys it.” There was a loud bang and Mickey cried out. Then the call was cut off.

Lois leaned against the kitchen counter, her heart pounding. It sounded like the turf war Mickey had been predicting had begun. Her friend was in trouble.

She heated the milk and went to sit down on the couch in the living room. As she did so, yet another jab hit her back, this time spreading to her front.

“Oh no,” she said to herself. “Not now.”

She’d had false labour pains before, but this felt different. The pain, although not too intense yet, seemed to last a little bit longer with each one. She vaguely remembered when she’d had Clark. She’d been in labour with him for thirty hours.

“Mom? What are you doing up?”
Shelby wuffed softly. The puppy was still only a few weeks old and didn’t have much of a bark yet, but he clearly recognised his master as Clark passed. The teen had protested when it had been decided the puppy would sleep downstairs instead of his bedroom once it was fully weaned.

“Babies woke me up,” Lois told her son, not wanting to alarm him in case she was wrong.

“Oh. Did I hear the phone?”

She nodded. “Dad’s gone to help some people in Suicide Slum.”

“Why? What’s going on?” the teen asked.

“It looks like somebody’s trying to start a war between the gangs.”

She explained about the call. Clark sat with her, watching her drink the warmed milk, holding the puppy in his lap.

They continued to talk softly, trying not to wake the elder Kents. Lois wasn’t willing to go back to bed, not until Kal was back. She was worried about her friend and the innocent people who were potentially caught up in the gang war.

The contractions had begun to get more intense, more painful. Lois glanced at the clock, trying to calculate how far apart they were. She knew since this was her second pregnancy, the labour could progress much quicker than her first, but the speed with which this one seemed to be progressing had her wondering if the labour had started while she had been sleeping.

Shelby shook himself in Clark’s lap. Lois felt a tickling in the back of her throat and her nose began to itch. Great, she thought. Not a good time for her allergies to act up, and the poor puppy couldn’t help it. The itch progressively worsened the more her sinuses were irritated and she suddenly let go with an explosive sneeze. The next thing she felt was a gushing sensation below.

At first, Lois assumed she had just wet herself, but this felt worse than that. It had been accompanied by a painful contraction. With an effort, she stood up and looked at the couch cushion.

“Uh, Mom?” Clark sounded worried.

“Honey, I think you better call Dr Emil.”

Clark immediately got up and went to grab the phone. She heard him talking to the doctor but could only stare at the mess on the couch cushions in dismay. Martha would not be happy, she thought, just as another cramping pain spread through her body.

“Mom? He says you need to get to the hospital.”

Lois looked at her son, grimacing as another more painful contraction hit. She knelt on the floor, breathing heavily, trying to find some relief from the pain. She could feel pins and needles in her legs, all strength leaving her.

“I don’t think there’s time,” she said.

She was an idiot, she thought. She should have realised she was in labour before this. Instead she’d spent the last two hours just sitting there, thinking she had plenty of time.

“These babies are coming now,” she continued.

Clark looked alarmed. “Mom!” He turned back to the phone, speaking urgently. Lois could barely
hear what he was saying to Emil over the buzzing in her ears and the painful spasms wracking her body.

All she could focus on for the next few minutes was the pain. The puppy had begun yapping in alarm, clearly not sure what was going on and sounding scared.

Strong arms held her, supporting her as she fought to control the pain.

“Breathe, sweetheart.”

“Dad?”

“It’s okay, Clark. I’ve got her. Take the puppy up to your room. He might get a little confused by what’s going on.”

Lois could hear Jonathan and Martha’s voices, asking what was going on. She cried out again as another contraction came on top of the previous one. She could feel something between her legs.

“Clark, I want you to stay on the phone with Emil. The babies are coming now. I need you to relay any instructions he gives you.”

“Anything we can do to help, son?”

“Uh, towels? I’m not sure.”

“Dad, Emil says you need to look and see if she’s crowning. I’m not sure what that means.”

Lois wanted to reply, but she was so dizzy with the pain and it felt like everything was just chaos. She was sure her husband knew what to do, since he’d been doing some research of his own.

“Lois, honey?”

She looked up at his handsome face, registering the love and concern in his eyes. He guided her into a sitting position, helping her to lean against the couch and open her legs.

“I can see the baby’s head,” he relayed back to Clark before turning back to her.

“Okay, he says on the next contraction, Mom needs to push.”

Lois nodded as Kal relayed the instruction. She braced herself, reaching for his hand as she felt the next contraction and bore down. She heard her husband gently encouraging her.

“Keep pushing. That’s my girl.”

Kal could only watch, holding his wife’s hand as she strained, her face a bright red and dripping with perspiration with the effort of pushing their first baby into the world. It was not as easy as it looked on television, he thought. It still took several contractions and a lot of effort on her part to push the baby out.

“Eww, gross!” Clark commented. Kal glanced up at his son with a frown before turning back to his wife. The baby’s head was covered with blood and mucous.

Lois cried out, clearly still in a lot of pain. Kal squeezed her hand lightly, letting her know he was with her every step of the way. He hated to see his beloved wife in such pain, even if the final result was going to be worth it.
She swore loudly, much to the amusement of everyone in the room, before bearing down once more. Kal glanced at Martha, who was kneeling beside Lois, a towel at the ready. The last push had been just what was needed to get the infant the rest of the way out. Kal caught it, intending to hand it over to Martha, but Lois reached out.

He gently handed the baby to his wife. The infant began wailing loudly and Lois crooned.

“It’s okay,” she said, gently rocking it. “It’s okay.”

“Is that the girl or the boy, Dad?”

“It’s a girl,” Kal told his son. Clark grinned.

“Cool.” He turned back to the phone and spoke to Emil, before looking back up. “Dr Emil says you need to cut the cord, but not yet. Something about the cord blood. Whatever that means.”

“It’s just better for the baby if we wait a couple of minutes,” he said. He looked up at Jonathan, who handed him a pair of scissors. Lois was still holding the baby to her chest.

“How are you going to clamp it off?” Jonathan asked.

“Uh, good question.” He looked at Clark, who once again turned back to the phone.

“He says you could probably use your heat vision. It will cauterise it.”

“Kal!” Lois cried out.

He returned to focusing on his wife. The next baby was ready to come.

“All right, sweetheart. I know you’re tired, but I need you to keep pushing. Martha, can you take the baby?” He cut the cord just as he’d seen on the birthing clips and cauterised the wound. Martha took the baby, wrapping her in a towel. She in turn handed her to Jonathan, who stood by ready with warm water to bathe the infant.

Kal held his wife’s hand, noting by the way she squeezed back that she was having another contraction. He again spoke encouragingly. She was already so tired but there was still more work to be done.

It was another few minutes of pushing and gentle encouragement before their son was born. Like their daughter, Lois held her hands out eagerly, not caring about the blood and other fluids that stained her nightgown. All she cared about was comforting the tiny baby that was screaming his head off.

She reluctantly handed him over to be cleaned up, reaching out once again for the little girl, holding her close. Kal left her to bond with their daughter while he helped Martha clean up a little. Jonathan was busy bathing the boy, but handed him over.

Kal looked down at his tiny son. While Clark took after him, the little one took after his mother with chocolate brown hair and pale skin. He had the same pouty lips as Lois.

“Can I see him, Dad?” Clark asked.

Kal gently handed over the baby and Clark looked down at his baby brother.

“Why’s he so red?” his son queried.
“His skin’s still a little thin, so it shows his blood vessels, or something,” Kal replied, not quite sure he understood what he’d read.

There was a knock on the screen door. Kal frowned, glancing at the clock on the microwave, realising it was almost four am. Martha went to answer it, coming back into the room with Emil in tow.

Kal looked at him. Clearly the doctor had been driving from the city while on the phone with Clark.

“How are things here?” he asked. He observed Clark holding his baby brother. “Well now, let’s have a look at him.”

Kal stood by, watching as Emil performed some basic tests on the infant, pronouncing him very healthy. Kal picked up the baby once the tests were done, rocking him gently to quiet his cries. The doctor did the same for the girl before turning to Lois.

“Well, there is a little bit of tearing but I can fix that. I think you’ll be fine. I’d normally recommend you go to hospital, but I get the feeling you’ll be more comfortable in your own bed. Am I right?”

Lois nodded. “I don’t want to go,” she said.

Emil nodded. “I figured that would be the case.”

The babies were taken upstairs to the nursery, the baby monitor switched on. Kal watched over his wife as Emil tended to her, stitching up the tearing and checking her vitals. He could see how exhausted she was, despite the relatively short labour. There were dark circles under her eyes.

Once Emil was done, Kal carried his wife upstairs to bed, laying her down gently and kissing her forehead. She murmured something, closing her eyes. He quickly changed into jeans and a plaid shirt, picking up his Superman uniform so it could be laundered. He left the room and quietly closed the door.

Emil stood outside.

“Keep a close eye on her for a few days,” he said. “Her blood pressure’s still a little high and she’ll most likely bleed for a couple of weeks. It shouldn’t be any more than a normal menstrual bleed but if it seems too heavy or she seems to be unwell, get her to hospital immediately.”

Kal nodded as Emil explained everything he needed to know. He was going to send a nurse to help Lois with anything she needed and to check on the twins, but it was more important for her to get her rest while she could.

“Thanks for everything Emil,” he said.

“You two did all the work, Kal. And you did great.” He smiled. “By the way, congratulations. Have you thought of names for them?”

“We’ve had a few discussions,” he told the doctor.

The sun was just coming up as they returned downstairs to find Martha had already cleaned up in the living room. Most of it, at least. The couch cushion would need scrubbing.

“If you have any questions, just call me,” Emil said. “But if I know that lady of yours, she’ll be fine. She’s strong.”
“Thanks again.”
Family

Chapter Summary

Lois recovers from the birth.

Clark was tired enough to want to sleep all day, but since this was a farm, there was work to be done. He worried about his mother and his brother and sister, aware their entry into the world had been fairly dramatic. And probably traumatic, he thought.

He went outside to help Jonathan with the early morning chores, while Martha and his father continued with the clean up inside. Clark winced at the thought of the mess on the living room floor, especially the rag rug Jonathan’s mother had made years ago. It was worn and a little tattered, but he figured Jonathan and Martha kept it out of sentimentality.

An hour or so later, he had finished doling out the feed for the animals and began working in the barn, cleaning out the stalls, when his dad came in.

“I called your Grandpa,” he said. “He was in Metropolis on business.” He explained the general had been planning on coming to the farm that day anyway, knowing the birth was close and this had just meant he would be driving down earlier than he’d planned.

“Did you call Aunt Chloe?”

He nodded. “She and your uncle are in Corto Maltese investigating another 33.1 facility, but she said she hoped they’d be back in a day or two. They’ll stop by then.”

“How’s Mom?”

“She’s sleeping. Trust me, it’s the best thing for her right now.”

“But she’s okay, right?”

“We have to keep an eye on her for a few days, but I’m sure she’ll be fine. Your mom’s tough. You have to realise that having a baby isn’t easy. It puts a lot of strain on a woman’s body. Double that when it’s twins.”

Clark nodded. He knew his father was trying to be reassuring, but it didn’t stop him worrying about her.

Martha called them in to breakfast about half an hour later. She had prepared a tray with some toast for Clark’s mother.

“Do you think she’ll be hungry?” she asked.

“I think so,” his dad replied. “I’ll take it. I’ll check on the babies while I’m up there.”

Clark watched him go quietly upstairs as he ate his own breakfast. He was tempted to follow, but figured it was best to stay downstairs and keep Martha and Jonathan company. The older couple looked tired, but their expressions showed how happy they were.
“How you feeling, son?” Jonathan asked.

“Okay, I guess. Just tired. And worried about Mom.”

“Hey, your mom’s gonna be fine. She’s a tough cookie.”

“What does that mean, anyway?” he murmured.

“It means your mother’s a Lane, through and through.”

Clark looked up. “Grandpa!”

Jonathan looked up and grinned. “You made good time, Sam.”

His grandfather smiled. “Couldn’t wait to get down here. How’s Lois?”

“Kal just went up to give her some breakfast. Would you like some breakfast, Sam?” Martha asked.

“I’d love some. I left the hotel in a rush.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“So, how are the grandbabies?” he asked, sitting down at the table as Martha set a cup of coffee in front of him. “Ahh, that’s great coffee,” he added, taking a sip.

“Beautiful,” Jonathan replied. “Looks like they’re going to take after their mother.”

Grandpa laughed. “If that’s the case, Kal’s going to be in for some trouble, then isn’t he?”

“Oh, I think I can handle it.”

Clark looked up at his dad. He had somehow managed to carry both babies downstairs.

“Look who wanted to meet Grandpa,” he said, gazing adoringly at the two infants.

Clark watched as his grandfather got up from the table and took one of the babies from his father.

“Aww, look at you. Don’t you look just like your mother when she was born? And you’re going to be trouble too, aren’t you?” he crooned as the baby began making noises as if it was about to cry. Clark knew what his mother would say. Grandpa’s gone soft.

“Everything okay, son?” Jonathan asked.

Dad nodded, rocking the boy who had started to cry, probably in response to his sister. “Yeah. Lois is awake. The babies were hungry so she fed them.”

“How’s she feeling?” Grandpa asked, glancing up from his grand-daughter.

“Tired and sore, but happy. She wanted to come down when I heard your voice, but I told her it was better for her to get her rest.”

“Good idea. I’ll go up and see her in a few minutes. I figured on staying at least a couple of days.”

“You’re always welcome Sam,” Martha replied warmly.

Kal handed the baby over to Jonathan, who had finished his own breakfast and sat down at the table to eat bacon and eggs. While he didn’t want to seem rude, he was anxious to check on his wife. He
didn’t want to hover either, but right now, she and the babies were his priority.

“Dad, can I go up and see Mom?” Clark asked, having finished his breakfast.

Kal smiled at his son. “Of course you can. Just remember, she’ll be pretty tired.”

“How about I join you?” Sam suggested, still holding his grand-daughter. He’d been eating his breakfast with one hand, cradling the baby in his other arm.

Kal watched them go upstairs, glancing at Jonathan, who was rocking the baby in his arms and talking quietly to him.

“Kal, I washed your uniform. It should be dry in an hour or so.”

He smiled. “Thanks Martha.”

“What happened last night?”

“It looks like Intergang decided to start a war with the local gangs. Lois’ friend Mickey called and asked for my help.” He bit his lip. Kal had got him to the hospital barely in time. Lois’ friend might be a drug dealer but he was a good man and the last thing Kal had wanted was the man to die needlessly. Death was a way of life among the gangs but while they accepted it, he didn’t.

Lois had told him that Mickey had often looked out for her when she was little, although he claimed he didn’t think he was good with kids. Mickey had long ago decided not to have children, not wanting to expose them to the kind of he himself had grown up with.

When Kal had arrived at the scene the night before, Mickey was lying on the pavement, a bullet wound in his abdomen. He was bleeding heavily and barely conscious, so Kal hadn’t wasted any time, picking him up and flying him to the hospital. The other man had frowned at him, but said nothing as he was handed over to the doctors.

He helped Martha clean the kitchen while Jonathan continued to chatter to the baby, gazing down adoringly at the infant. While Clark didn’t refer to Jonathan and Martha as grandparents, Lois had insisted they make it official with the twins. As much as Kal missed his mother and father, the elder Kents were as close to being parents that he could have ever wanted and he was happy to comply with his wife’s wishes.

The baby began crying noisily and Kal took him from his grandfather. The boy’s diaper wasn’t wet so Kal assumed he was just missing his sister. After all, they had spent nine months in their mother’s womb. There was bound to be a kind of separation anxiety, or so he’d read from some of the books on twins.

Clark and Sam were chatting quietly to Lois, who was cradling their daughter in her arms. The baby was crying, but seemed to sense her brother in the room, her cries ceasing almost as soon as Kal entered.

“Hi,” Lois said. “Looks like somebody was missing her roommate.”

Kal grinned, glancing down at his tiny son, who had also stopped crying.

“I think they both were.”

He looked over his wife. She still had dark circles under her eyes and appeared very tired.
“We should let you get some rest,” her father said gently.

Lois shifted in the bed and winced, clearly still in a little pain. Emil had told Kal the pain would ease, but she was going to be sore for a little while.

“Do you want the twins in here?” he asked his wife, “or in the nursery?”

They’d set up a bassinet so the twins could sleep in their room if that was what Lois wanted.

“In here,” she said without hesitation. “But you still haven’t told me what happened last night.”

When he’d gone up to give her her breakfast earlier, she had asked for details. Kal had figured rest was more important than what had happened the night before so he had avoided the question.

“Later,” he promised. “Get some sleep, sweetheart,” he added, before leaning over to kiss her forehead. Her eyelids were already drooping.

The babies cooed contentedly as they were placed gently in the bassinet. Clark looked down at his baby sister and brother, smiling softly as the infants curled toward each other, touching hands, before drifting off to sleep.

The three men crept out of the room, leaving Lois to settle down in the bed. Kal closed the door softly, noticing his eldest son biting his lip, looking a little worried.

“Is Mom okay? She looked a little like she was in pain.”

“She’s just sore,” Kal told him. “Emil said she would be for a couple of days.”

“Oh,” his son said, still looking uncertain. “But she’ll be okay, right?”

“She’s just tired, Clark. Having a baby isn’t easy. Let alone having two.”

Clark looked at his grandpa. “When she had me, did she …”

“You mom did have a tough time, but not for the reason you think. She kept calling out for your dad.” Grandpa looked at Kal with sadness in his eyes. “It broke my heart hearing her calling for you.”

Kal nodded. “I know. Believe me, I know how hard it was for me on Krypton. The thought that she went through that alone …” The birth hadn’t been difficult, from what he understood, but considering his wife had been awake for almost two days, it was little wonder she was exhausted. He guided his son gently down the stairs.

“We should let your mom get some sleep. The babies will probably wake her up soon enough, wanting food.”

Clark wrinkled his nose. “I can’t imagine having to feed a baby from your own body. It seems kind of weird.”

“A lot of animals feed their young the same way. Look at the cows on the farm,” Jonathan pointed out, having heard the last of the conversation.

Clark grinned. “Yeah, okay. You got me there.”

Kal ruffled his son’s hair and went outside to the barn, hoping to get a little bit of work done until Lois needed him. Instead, he sat on the couch, looking through the small collection of photos. Sam
had given him one of Clark as a baby. He couldn’t help wishing he could somehow go back in time and change things so he would have been there for Lois, but knew that would solve nothing. He was still looking through the photographs a while later when Clark came up.

“What are those?” his son asked.

“Just some photos. Does your mom need me?”

He had been listening but the only sound he heard from their room was Lois’ deep breathing and relaxed heartbeat.

“No. She’s still asleep and the babies aren’t awake yet. I …” He turned to look out the loft window. “How did you know Mom was, you know, the one?”

“Well, I didn’t know right away. When I first came to Earth, I wasn’t supposed to interact with anyone straight away, but then your mom almost ran into me. She wasn’t exactly the best driver.”

“She still isn’t,” Clark replied with a grin.

“I remember thinking why is this strange female yelling at me, and then I got a good look at her. I thought she was attractive even then.”

“You thought she was beautiful.”

He nodded. “Only, not how you think. I mean, the girls I’d met on Krypton, well, they were very beautiful. So beautiful they wouldn’t look out of place in fashion magazines. But what made your mom more beautiful to me was not just her looks. I remember reading something. I think it was a quote from an actress. ‘The beauty of a woman is not in a facial mode but the true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul’.”

Clark frowned. “I don’t get it.”

“What was beautiful about your mother to me was her kindness. I mean, here I was, a stranger to this world, and she gave me a ride into town, bought me ice cream, and brought me out here to the farm, asking nothing in return. Then she offered to take me out the next day, show me around. This human girl, who had no idea who I was. I could have been an axe murderer for all she knew …”

“Yeah, right.”

Kal grinned at his son. “I don’t get it.”

“What was beautiful about your mother to me was her kindness. I mean, here I was, a stranger to this world, and she gave me a ride into town, bought me ice cream, and brought me out here to the farm, asking nothing in return. Then she offered to take me out the next day, show me around. This human girl, who had no idea who I was. I could have been an axe murderer for all she knew …”

“Yeah, right.”

Kal grinned at his son. “She knew nothing about me, yet she did all that for me. The women I knew were shallow; they only cared about one thing and that was the bloodline. On Krypton, joining with someone of the House of El in a lifebond was akin to marrying royalty here on Earth.” He smiled. “Don’t get me wrong. Your mom drove me crazy at times with the way she would flirt with me one minute and backpedal the next. She had so many walls up that I had no idea how to handle it. But the one thing that always stayed the same was her spirit. Your mother has never wavered. She remained true to herself and to me that’s the true meaning of beauty.”

“So, it’s like that saying that beauty is only skin deep, but the real beauty comes from within.”

Kal nodded. “That probably doesn’t answer your question.”

“Well, it sort of does, but …”

“I knew I loved your mother before I returned to Krypton, but what confirmed it was the way I felt on Krypton. It was like a piece of my soul was missing.”
Clark bit his lip.

“See, I don’t feel that. Not with Trina, and not with Amy.”

“Clark, you’re not even fifteen yet. Trust me, you’ve got time to figure that out. If it’s not Amy or Trina, then maybe there is someone else out there for you. Someone who will make you feel the way your mother makes me feel.”

He put the photo he’d been holding down on the table.

“Clark, I wouldn’t worry about love and relationships just yet. In many ways, you’re still a kid. Take the time to enjoy being a kid. Believe me, being an adult is hard. Most people don’t have to go through what we’ve all gone through, but they still have the same fears, the same worries.”

His superhearing picked up the sound of one of the babies crying and the hitch in his wife’s breath. She’d clearly woken up.

“Your mom’s awake,” he said. “Sounds like the babies are too.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Clark asked.


As soon as he returned to the bedroom, it was fairly obvious the babies needed changing and feeding. Lois had got up to pick up one of the babies and change their diaper, but the other twin was feeling left out.

Kal showed his son how to change the diaper and make sure the infant was clean. Clark was a little tentative at first, unsure how to handle the baby, but Kal was sure his confidence would grow in no time.

“So, what are their names?” he asked, holding his baby brother.

Lois smiled at Kal, who nodded. “We decided your brother’s name will be Jason Samuel. And your sister will be Jessica Mary.”

Kal smiled, bending to kiss his daughter’s tiny head.

“We thought it would be nice to name her after Jonathan’s mother, and Mary was as close as we could get to Martha.”

“Why not Martha?” Clark asked.

Kal had argued that as well, but Lois had argued for names that had a ‘rhythm’ to them. They’d already told Martha, who wholeheartedly approved of their choice, knowing Jonathan would be thrilled to have a grand-daughter named after his beloved mother.

Jonathan called up the stairs for Clark, telling him his friends had come by. Clark looked at his father, then at the babies.

“Go on,” Kal said. “Go spend time with your friends.”

“But I want to help.”

“Honey, the babies won’t be doing much except eating, sleeping and pooping for the first few weeks. Trust me, you’ll have plenty of time to help.”
“Okay,” he said, handing Jason back to his father before going out.

Lois had gone back to bed and was settling down with Jessica in her arms, preparing to breastfeed. Jason was already grizzling, clearly just as hungry as his sister. Kal helped his wife to settle both babies so she could nurse them at the same time comfortably.

Lois watched the twins for a moment then looked up at him.

“Okay, out with it. I want to know what happened last night.”

He related what had happened in Suicide Slum. After he’d left Mickey at the hospital, he’d gone back to the streets and stopped the gang war before more innocent people were caught in the crossfire. Unfortunately it was too late to stop the death of a young child which had been killed when bullets had struck the wall of a third-floor tenement.

It hadn’t taken long for blame to fall at Superman’s feet. An editorial had appeared in the Daily Planet within an hour, suggesting that Superman was not doing his job. As upsetting as that was, Kal had to wonder how word had spread so quickly and he’d sent a message to Bruce to do some digging.

Lois, of course, was incensed, and eager to investigate as well. Kal was firm as he told his wife her priority was in making sure she recovered from the birth. She could chase such mysteries later. She looked mulish, but agreed to his terms.

He left her and the babies a little while later to sleep, returning downstairs to help with the chores. Sam was working with Jonathan on a fence.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

Kal nodded. There were still calls to make, letting Perry and Lana know about the birth, but in the meantime he just wanted to enjoy his new family. He worked alongside the two older men, smiling as he thought of how happy his mother and father would be. Life couldn’t get any better than this, he decided.
Evidence

Chapter Summary

Bruce comes to visit the farm with news that they have enough evidence against Lex to go for an indictment, but will it be enough?

Jason was gurgling in the bassinet, wriggling his little body and waving his arms. Lois found herself grinning at her week-old son’s antics, even as she wanted to gently scold him for the noise he was making.

“Shh,” she said when he began to coo a little too loudly. “You’ll wake Daddy.”

She glanced over at the bed where her husband was lying on his back. He’d been out most of the night. There’d been a few incidents, mostly in Suicide Slum, but he’d also been helping at a major car crash on the I-90 and had only got in an hour or so ago. She could see the colourful puddle the suit made on their bathroom floor.

She picked her baby son up, careful not to disturb his sleeping twin. While they were fraternal, they did have more than a few facial characteristics in common. Her father had assured her that that would change in a few months. The twins had also developed the habit of curling close to each other, something she figured had started in the womb.

Lois cradled the infant in her arms and took him back to bed with her so she could feed him. She had no doubt that Jessie would wake soon enough also wanting to be fed. Her daughter seemed to be a little more demanding than her brother, being rather vocal in her demands. Jason wasn’t noisy, per se, tending to coo and gurgle, as if trying to talk already, even at a week old.

She’d spent half of the past week in bed, being waited on hand-and-foot by her loving family. Kal had insisted on it, clearly worried the birth had taken too much out of her. Lois loved her handsome husband, but there were times when his protectiveness could be overwhelming.

She knew part of the reason was the fact that he had missed so much of their elder son’s life and wanted to make up for it. He had also admitted to missing his parents and Lois could understand that. Losing an entire race of people was something she could never imagine and never wanted to find out, but she knew how much it hurt him. Knowing all of that made it easier for her to accept his attentiveness and care.

Jason gurgled again before latching on and suckling greedily. Lois leaned back against the pillows, letting her body relax, knowing it would be easier for both her and the baby. She sensed a slight movement beside her and glanced over at Kal. His eyes were open and he was watching her feed.

“Hey,” she said. “You should be sleeping.”

“Mm,” was all he said in return. He continued watching her, rolling on his side and reaching out to gently stroke the baby. Jason’s little fingers curled around his father’s single digit.

“Stopped by the hospital today,” he murmured. “I mean, yesterday. Mickey’s doing fine. He said the docs hope to release him in a day or so.”
“That’s good,” she said. She’d been worried about her friend.

“He, uh … he knows I’m Superman.” She bit her lip, worrying the flesh a little. “Don’t worry,” Kal assured her. “He said my secret’s safe with him. But it did get me to thinking. Maybe I need to cover myself when we’re out.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I guess I mean I need some sort of disguise. Like Oliver does with Green Arrow, only, kind of the reverse.”

“Well, yeah, I guess it’s a little late for Superman to wear a mask,” she said, since he’d already been revealed without one. “So, what are you thinking?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should talk it over with the family.”

Jessica started crying in the bassinet, either missing her brother or wanting feeding. Kal got up and picked her up before she could build up to a scream and wake the whole household.

“Okay, okay, Daddy’s got you,” he said, even as she grumbled in her baby way.

Husband and wife shared an exasperated look. Grandpa was right when he had said Jessica was going to be trouble. Lois sat up, gently shifting her son in her lap and began rubbing his back to burp him.

“Swap?” Kal said. She grinned at him and they swapped babies so he could burp Jason and she could feed Jessica. They’d got it down to a science.

As her daughter began to feed, Lois looked over once more at her husband, who was rubbing their son’s back.

“So, what’s been going on in Suicide Slums?” she asked.

“More of the same, really. Mickey thinks whoever’s behind the attacks is trying to drive the local gangs out of the slums and take over. He’s not completely sure it’s all Intergang though. It’s like there’s something behind them.”

“So what do we know about Intergang?” she asked, trying to recall some of her research and what Bruce had told her.

Morgan Edge had run Intergang until his retirement five years earlier and they had yet to learn the identity of his successor. Lois did recall, however, that there had been a connection between Lex’s father and Edge, as they had grown up together in Suicide Slums. She wondered if Lex was continuing that somehow.

The only way to find out the truth, she thought, was to keep digging. She might be on maternity leave from the Daily Planet but as far as she was concerned that wasn’t going to stop her from continuing to investigate.

Kal, reading her as always, didn’t even try to argue as she suggested going to Watchtower and talking to Bruce to see if he had managed to dig up anything further.

In the end, however, the trip was unnecessary. Just as they came downstairs for breakfast, each holding a twin, Lois was surprised to see a visitor at the breakfast table. Or rather, two visitors. Bruce stood, smiling as he greeted them.
“Hello Kal, Lois. I thought I’d drop in.”

“Hello Bruce,” Kal replied, shaking his friend’s hand. “This is a pleasant surprise.”

Lois smiled in welcome at the Gotham billionaire and his ward, who was already chatting to Clark.

“Well, I figured you’d be too busy with the babies to drop in on Watchtower.” He looked down at Jason in his father’s arms. “So which is which?” he asked.

“Kal’s got Jason and this is Jessica,” Lois replied, looking down at her daughter’s sweet face. “Would you like to hold one of them?”

“Uh … I don’t know Lois. I’d be afraid I’d drop it.”

“Chicken,” Lois snorted at her friend.

He grinned, clearly unrepentant. As long as she had known Bruce, he had never really shown any desire to become a father himself. She knew the only reason he had taken on Dick as a ward was because he felt guilty for what had happened to Dick’s parents. After all, it had been one of his own enemies who had caused the accident which killed them as a way of getting Batman’s attention. An added bonus for Bruce was that Dick had been raised to be fairly self-sufficient and didn’t really need a father figure.

They sat down to breakfast, with Jonathan and Martha offering to take the babies so they could eat in peace. Lois watched as the couple each fed the twins with bottles. She had pumped some breast milk and kept it stored in the fridge, hoping to get the babies used to the different method.

The older couple clearly adored their new role as grandparents, chattering to the babies whenever they held them. Kal had often said it was such a shame Martha and Jonathan had had no children of their own as she felt they were wonderful parents. They’d certainly raised Clark right as he had far better manners than most teenagers his age.

“Hey, Mom, Dad, I was wondering … my birthday’s in three weeks.”

“We’re aware of that honey,” Lois told her eldest son.

“So, I was thinking … would it be okay if I invited a few kids over for a party? We could have it in the barn.”

Martha looked up, biting her lip. Lois exchanged a look with her, aware that Martha had chosen not to have parties when Clark had been very small, only too aware that at that age he had no conscious control of his abilities. The older woman still felt a little guilty about that.

“If it’s okay with Martha and Jonathan, I don’t see why not,” she said. “But only if it stays in the barn and only if there are no uninvited guests.”

Clark looked at her. “As if I would,” he replied, sounding a little cocky.

“Oh believe me, things like that can get out of hand.”

She had once gone to a party against her father’s wishes. Or rather, crashed it. The party in question had been hosted by a kid who had been considered an outsider by some of the kids at the school she had been attending in Colorado and a few of the jocks had thought it would be a great idea to crash the party and trash the kid’s house. The police had ended up being called and had found drugs and alcohol. Fortunately, Lois had left well before that had happened and had only heard about it through
the MPs at the base.

The ‘host’ had been packed off to military school by his very strict father, who had then been a colonel serving under her father.

“Trust me, son, your mother managed to find her fair share of trouble when she was your age. Why do you think I’m bald?” his grandfather replied, his eyes twinkling.

“Daddy, really!” Lois replied in exasperation.

“What?” he asked. “You think I’m exaggerating? You’ve given me more than a few moments. Especially the night I caught you and your husband in your bed.”

“Wait! What?” Clark looked at his grandfather.

Bruce had started to laugh as Kal averted his gaze from his father-in-law, pretending to be interested in watching Jonathan burp Jessica.

“Don’t you dare, Daddy!”

“I was supposed to be in Washington but my plane was grounded so I headed back to the house only to find a mess on the living room floor. Thinking there might have been some kind of party I went to check on your mom and found her and your dad in bed together.” He grinned. “Come to think of it, that was the night of the dance, wasn’t it, honey?”

Lois was swearing revenge on her father.

“You mean the Sadie Hawkins dance?” Clark asked. “That was the night I … I mean …”

“Yup, that was the night you were conceived,” the former general told his grandson.

“Daddy, shut up now!” Lois said, “or I swear …”

He laughed at her. “Lo, I’ve faced men armed with sub-machine guns. The only thing I ever found scarier was your mother.”

“Wanna bet?” she hissed.

He continued to laugh at her. Lois had to relent at his teasing, glad after all the troubles they’d had when she was growing up she was finally able to see the softer side of him.

After the breakfast dishes were done and the twins were down for a nap, Bruce sat them down in the parlour.

“I’ve been looking into the troubles in Suicide Slum,” he said, making it clear meeting the babies was not his only reason for the visit. “Your friend Mickey is right. Someone is behind Intergang’s attacks.”

“Do you know who? Or do we even need to ask?” Kal said.

“Lex,” Lois said softly.

“Afraid so. This time I think he’s got complacent. Chloe contacted me yesterday. She’s managed to pick up the money trail, leading right back to LeXCorp.”

“So, does this mean we’ve got him?”
“I think there’s enough evidence for an indictment,” Bruce said. “But I’m not a lawyer, so I can’t tell you what the judge will say. Chloe is gathering everything we have on Lex and sending a package to the prosecutor who will convene the Grand Jury.”

“How did he manage to get control of Intergang?” Lois asked.

“It all comes back to the connection between Lionel and Morgan Edge. From what we managed to discover, Edge and Lionel were not only in on the plot to murder Lionel’s parents, but they also formed Intergang. Of course, when Lionel began building his company, he broke all visible ties with Intergang, but Morgan still had enough on him that Lionel couldn’t break away completely.”

Kal took the news calmly, even as Lois seemed to get excited. While it did seem they had finally got the evidence they needed against Lex, he knew it wasn’t going to be that easy. If Lex was as powerful as he thought he was, he would no doubt try to buy off the Grand Jury and sweep the indictment ‘under the carpet’, so to speak.

He didn’t get the opportunity to comment as a call came in from the Justice League. Not content with trying to start a war in the Slums, Lex was clearly adopting other methods to drive the gangs out. An explosion in the electrical room of a tenement building had started a fire. The building, still tenanted, was clearly in a bad state of repair and the blaze had quickly taken hold, flames engulfing the first and second floors before he was able to get there. Kal was kept busy evacuating the families - some of whom were members of Mickey’s gang. While they were still wary of him, they at least acknowledged he was trying to help save their families and worked with him to get people out.

Sadly, despite his best efforts, at least two families lost members in the ensuing chaos of evacuation.

As soon as the blaze was under control, Kal flew into the basement to check out the electrical room. His investigation was short but fruitful. He would need an expert opinion but even in his limited knowledge of electrical engineering, he could see the panel had been sabotaged. He gathered what evidence he could and flew it to Watchtower where Chloe and Oliver were working.

His friends promised they would get it to the appropriate expert, but confirmed his own theory.

Angered and hurt over the unnecessary loss of lives, Kal wanted to confront Lex, even though Bruce had already warned him not to give Lex hints at what they were planning. Still, he was angry enough that he needed to do something. He and Lois and their family were luckier than most. They had a safe, quiet home and people who cared about them. If he didn’t stand up for the people of Suicide Slum, who else would?

He flew to the top of LeXCorp tower where Lex had a penthouse apartment. The bald man had clearly been expecting something as he stood on the terrace, smoking a cigar and looking as if he didn’t have a care in the world. Yet Kal had seen a look flash in the older man’s eyes in a microsecond. He kept his distance so the billionaire couldn’t get a good look at his face.

“Well, if it isn’t Superman. To what do I owe the … honour of this visit?” Lex asked.

“I just came from Suicide Slum. There was an explosion. In a tenement building. Five people died, Luthor.”

“People die,” the other man replied with a shrug. “What do you expect when those buildings are substandard at best?”

“You really don’t care, do you? You stand here in your tower and think you’re king of the world.”

“There are two kinds of people in this world, Superman. Those who act, and those who don’t.”
“I don’t follow.”

“Take you, for instance. You fly around, helping people. Even those who are too lazy and too stupid to help themselves. Myself, I’m a man of action. I see something I want and I do what it takes to get it.”

“Even at the cost of innocent lives?”

“No one is innocent. Especially not those in Suicide Slum. You’re wasting your time with people like them.”

Kal might not agree with the things Mickey and his gangs did, but they still did their best to make sure their children grew up with better futures.

“You really think you are better than them?”

“Well, don’t you?” Lex asked.

“No, I don’t.”

The other man snorted as if he completely disagreed with that. Kal shook his head.

“I know who you are, Mr Luthor. Who you really are. And to me, you are no better than the people in Suicide Slum. In fact, you’re worse because you hide behind a veneer of respectability. At least they’re honest about who they are.”

“I rather think that’s hypocritical, coming from you, Superman. After all, don’t you hide behind a disguise?”

“For good reason,” he pointed out.

Again Lex snorted.

“Call it what you will, Superman, but no one gets to my position without sacrifice. After all, you cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.”

Kal frowned, not sure what that had to do with what they were talking about.

“Like any other citizen of Metropolis, I must obey the laws,” he replied. “You, however, seem to think you are above it.”

“I hold a certain position …”

“I believe it was Machiavelli who said something about a man who raises himself up to the highest height must also fall at a great loss.” Or close to it, he thought, remembering something Lex had told him years ago, when they had supposedly been friends.

“Paraphrased, but yes, he did say that. What is your point, Superman?”

“Your ambitions are well-known, Mr Luthor. And there is nothing that would please me more than to see you knocked off that pedestal you seem to have placed yourself on.”

“Well, we’ll see about that,” the bald man returned.

“Yes, we shall,” Kal replied, flying away before Lex could have the last word.
Birthday

Chapter Summary

Clark has a party for his fifteenth birthday

Clark stepped down off the ladder and checked the decorations, then looked down at the puppy as it wuffed happily, playing with a shiny piece of tinsel.

“What do you think Shelby?” he asked.

The puppy just ignored him, too intent on playing with its new toy. Shelby was almost three months old and had grown to more than twice the size he’d been when Stephen had found him.

“Looking good, son,” Jonathan said as he came into the barn. He was carrying a box of other decorations which they’d picked up at the dollar store in town. Clark was going to set up a table for all the food.

His father came in to inspect the work.

“Looks great,” he said. “How many people are going to be at this party?”

“Um, Trina, Amy, Rick, a few kids from my class, Steve said he was going to ask a couple of guys from the football team. Probably only about twenty.”

Speak of the devil, Clark thought, smiling at Stephen, who stood almost shyly at the barn door.

“Hey Clark,” he said. “Hey Mr K, Mr K.”

“Hello Stephen. How’s your mom?”

“She’s okay,” he replied to Jonathan’s query. “She’s been going out with this guy she met through work and he seems to be a good guy. He treats her really well.”

“That’s great. How are you getting along with him?”

Stephen grinned.

“Actually pretty good. He took me to a baseball game last weekend.”

Clark grinned back at the other boy. It looked like things were looking up for the football jock.

Shelby approached Stephen and wuffed happily as the other boy bent down and began scratching him behind the ears. Shelby clearly remembered Stephen from his constant visits after he’d found the abandoned puppies.

“Hey Shelby. How you doing?” He ruffled the dog’s fur, then looked up. “Uh, Clark, can I talk to you for a second?”

“Sure. You wanna go up to the loft, or …”
Stephen gestured outside. Clark followed him out. The other boy looked a little sheepish, practically dragging his foot on the ground.

“Um, so there’s something I wanted to … uh, you know Trina?”

Clark nodded.

“Um, I kind of … I mean I know you and she are good friends but I just wondered if it was more than that.”

“No, we’re just good friends really,” he said, remembering the talk he’d had with his father a few weeks earlier. He liked Trina but not the same way his parents cared about each other.

“So, uh, I was …”

“You want to ask her out?” Clark said, anticipating his friend’s question. “I’m cool with that.”

“I sort of wanted to before but you know she kind of thought I was a real maroon back then.”

Clark laughed. “Did you just call yourself a maroon?”

“Yeah. My mom’s new boyfriend says it a lot. He’s really cool though. He makes my mom happy and that’s all I ever really wanted for her.”

“What’s his name?”

“Steve.” He grinned at Clark’s laugh. “Yeah. So now she calls us Steve One and Steve Two.”

“You sound really happy,” Clark said, genuinely pleased for the other boy.

“I am. Things are getting better at home and, well, Trina and I have been sort of messaging on Facebook and stuff. She says she’s really proud of me for turning things around and I have you to thank for that. Anyway, I just wanted to make sure you’d be cool with me asking her out.”

“I think it’s great,” Clark said.

“You know, Amy really likes you,” Stephen told him.

“We tried that. It didn’t work out.”

The other boy shrugged. “I guess.” He looked up, watching as Clark’s parents stood with the twins out on the porch, talking quietly. “You know, I said some pretty stupid things about your parents. I can see you’re all really happy.”

“Yes, we are. I mean, at first my mom felt really bad for leaving me with the Kents and stuff, but I understood why. Now she’s got me and my dad, and the twins and things are really great.”

“That’s cool. How do you like being a big brother?”

Clark grinned at him. “Hmm, well, the twins cry at all hours of the night, waking practically the whole household up, my mom and dad are tired all the time … nah, really it’s great. I can’t wait until they start crawling and getting into everything.”

“Like Shelby,” Stephen grinned, looking down at the puppy, which had somehow managed to dig up an old rubber boot and was doing his best to tear it to pieces. “That taste good Shelby?”
The puppy looked up at him, wuffed in reply and went right back to worrying at the boot.

“So you need any help with setting up for the party?”

“No, we’re all good. We’ll see you at six-thirty?” he asked, distracted by Martha calling his parents in.

“Yeah. I gotta go pick up Trina. Her car’s not working so I said I’d help her out.” He paused on his way back to his truck. “Oh, and by the way, happy birthday.”

“Thanks.”

Clark watched as his friend got in his truck and drove away. He remembered something his father had told him a few months ago. A little kindness, even in the face of an enemy, sometimes went a long way toward changing their behaviour, but it wasn’t always successful.

Take Lex Luthor, for instance, Clark thought. In the past month there had been more attacks in Suicide Slum. Crime had escalated, but none of Mickey’s gang had been behind it. Innocent people were getting hurt, or worse, killed and the Justice League was snowed under with it. Superman was unable to help, as more and more incidents began happening overseas.

Bruce had had a few of his own people working overtime looking for information and they had learnt several people with varying abilities had begun their own campaign to strike back against the Justice League. Bruce had figured the object had been to make the heroes look as if they were unable to do their jobs. It all seemed to be a carefully orchestrated plan.

He’d heard his parents talking about the plan to send all evidence to the Department of Justice on Lex. His mother had been jubilant when Bruce had told them they finally had the evidence they needed.

He went into the house, noticing his parents and Martha and Jonathan watching the television.

“I thought it would take longer,” his mother was saying.

Clark frowned, turning to watch what was going on. His eyes widened as he realised it was a breaking news story. Lex Luthor had been taken into custody and was to appear before a Grand Jury in a week.

“What would take longer?” he asked.

His father looked at him. “The indictment. Bruce only turned over the evidence a couple of weeks ago.”

“It seems the DOJ has been on to Lex a lot longer than we assumed,” Bruce’s voice said. Clark looked around, surprised to see his uncle standing in the doorway. Bruce nodded and smiled. “Our own investigations haven’t been wasted. As far as my contact is concerned, it’s just one more nail in Lex’s coffin.”

“How?” Dad asked.

“It seems they have a mystery witness. Don’t ask me who. They’re not saying. They did say, however, that the witness was someone who used to work for Lex and they gave enough damning testimony that the DOJ began quietly investigating Lex themselves.”

“So is there any way Lex can wriggle out of it?” Jonathan asked.
Bruce shrugged.  

“Honestly? I don’t know. We all know what Lex is capable of. I think we do have to prepare ourselves for that possibility.”  

“Well, that sucks,” Clark said.  

“Clark!”  

“But it does, Mom!”  

“I know honey, but don’t swear around the twins.”  

Clark shook his head in exasperation. “That wasn’t swearing. Besides, they’re asleep!”  

As if to prove him wrong, one of the twins, probably Jessica, gave a loud cry.  

“Oops,” he said. “Spoke too soon. I’ll get her Mom,” he added, seeing her start to rise from the couch.  

He approached the bassinet and picked up his sister, holding her carefully in his arms. She made a noise that, to him, sounded like a raspberry.  

“Oh, I see. Well, right back at ya kid,” he said, blowing his own raspberry.  

She made a face and did it again. Clark poked his tongue out at her.  

“Can you do that?” he asked.  

She frowned in concentration. Clark wasn’t sure how much she could see, figuring he was just a blurry shape to her, but he liked playing with her anyway. She pressed her lips together and blew another raspberry.  

“Nice try,” he laughed.  

He was aware of his family watching, but he didn’t care. He might complain about the twins keeping him up at night, but he wouldn’t change it for the world. He had been the only one of his friends not to have siblings and had always thought it would be cool to be a big brother.  

Jessica screwed her face up and began to wail.  

“Sounds like she’s hungry,” Mom said, reaching for her. “Give her here before she wakes your brother.”  

Another cry from the bassinet, quieter this time, told them it was too late anyway. Clark handed his sister over and picked up his brother, holding him as his parents had taught him. Jason cooed contentedly.  

“Shouldn’t you be finishing getting things ready for the party?” Dad reminded him.  

“Oh, yeah,” he said. He glanced at the clock. It was almost six. He just had time to speed out to the barn and finish decorating, then shower and change. He handed Jason over to his father.  

“That’s right, I almost forgot,” Bruce said, taking a small package from his jacket. “Happy birthday.”  

Clark opened the package and grinned at his uncle, who had given him the latest Playstation game.
“Cool! I don’t have this one yet. Thanks Uncle Bruce.”

He left the house, returning to the barn to finish decorating, working at half super-speed, before heading back to the house to shower. By the time he made his way downstairs, wearing a clean pair of jeans and a light blue shirt, Martha had taken the food out.

The party guests had started to arrive. Rick had set up a DJ booth, with a playlist of some of Clark’s favourite music.

Clark was surprised to see Amy with one of Stephen’s football team mates. Jared would be a senior the next semester and would be taking over as captain as Stephen was off to college. Jared was good-looking with dark wavy hair. He towered over Amy, who was almost a foot shorter than Clark. Not that Amy seemed to mind. Clark narrowed his eyes at the couple as they smiled at each other and chatted while they helped themselves to the food.

Clearly word had got out that Clark’s family would not be far away and only those who had been expressly invited came. Some had brought dates but Clark wasn’t too worried about that. He continued to watch Amy, inexplicably jealous of what seemed to be her easy relationship with Jared. He knew he really had no right, since they had decided a long time ago to be just friends, but it still rankled.

Was this the moment? he asked himself. Was it like this for his parents?

Jared left Amy’s side and crossed the floor to head for the bathroom Jonathan had added on to the barn so he wouldn’t have to traipse through the house getting Martha’s floors dirty. Amy smiled as Clark approached her.

“Hey Clark. Happy birthday.”

“Hi,” he said, stunned when she kissed him on the cheek. “Uh, so are you and Jared …”

“We’re just friends,” Amy assured him. She shot him an odd look. “Why? You jealous?”

He snorted. “Me? Course not.”

“Jay’s my neighbour, Clark. We’ve known each other since we were both in the sandbox.”

Well, that was beside the point, he thought. Fortunately, he was saved by the proverbial bell when his family came in with his presents. Jonathan was also carrying a huge cake with fifteen candles.

Clark ducked his head in embarrassment as everyone began to sing ‘Happy Birthday’. Amy made faces at him, forcing him to laugh.

By the time the party was over at midnight, Clark was too tired to do anything but sit back and think about how the past year had changed. The year before, on his fourteenth birthday, he hadn’t known he had a father. The year before, his mother had been on the run from a secret organisation. Now he had both parents and a baby brother and sister he adored, as well as grandparents, even if two of them were artificial representations of themselves.

It was a hot night and he was still too keyed up to go to bed, so he sat out on the porch swing, just watching the night sky. The screen door squeaked as it was opened and his dad came out.

“Hey Dad.”

“Hey kiddo.” Dad sat down opposite him. “You’ve been out here a while.”
“Yeah, I’ve been thinking.”

“About what?”

“About how much has changed in the past year. I mean, I didn’t have you or Mom, or the twins.”

“A lot of changes. For the good, I hope?”

Clark nodded. “Definitely.”

His dad was quiet for a few moments, then he pulled something out of his pocket.

“I have something for you. From your grandfather.”

Clark frowned. “Grandpa?”

“Jor-El.”

He took the small bundle from his father, slowly unwrapping the cloth. When he saw what it contained he was confused. It looked exactly the same as the key his father had from the ship that had brought him from Krypton.

“A key?”

“Your key. To the fortress. When you’re ready, Jor-El would like to work with you. Expand your education. He has many things about Krypton he’d like to share with you. But, as I said, only when you’re ready.”

“Wow, Dad.”

“In the meantime, he wanted you to know that if you ever have any questions, or any difficulties, you can use the key to take you to the fortress and he will do his best to answer those questions.”

Clark smiled at his father. “Thanks Dad.”

His attention was caught by a shooting star. He knew it was only a meteor crashing to Earth, but he’d grown up listening to Martha and Jonathan read fairy tales to him and he wanted to believe it was true.

“Look, Dad. Shooting star.”

His father looked around, just catching a glimpse of it. They sat watching as it disappeared.

“You know, there’s a story that when you see a shooting star you make a wish and whatever you wish will come true, but you have to really believe it.”

His father looked at him. “Really?”

“It’s sort of a fairy tale, but when I was little I did see a shooting star.”

“Did you make a wish?”

Clark nodded. “And you know what? It came true,” he said.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How? How on Earth could the American public be so blind? It’s not enough that he managed to somehow bamboozle the Grand Jury. Nooo, the stupid idiots had to go and vote for him! Does anyone else see anything wrong with this picture?”

Kal grinned at his wife. “Honey, you’re ranting again,” he said.

The sound of running footsteps and giggles had him x-raying through the wall of the barn. Jason and Jessie were chasing each other around the barn, despite the mud. It had been raining heavily for the past few days and the ground resembled a huge mud pie.

“You two better not track mud into the house or your grandma will be very upset with you,” he called out. The giggles stopped and the children stared wide-eyed. “Don’t think I can’t see you,” he added.

Jessie came in to the barn.

“Daddy, how could you see us?” the four-year-old said.

“Daddy’s magic, that’s why,” Lois told their daughter. “Look at you. You’ve got mud everywhere!”

Kal bit back a laugh. It looked like both children had been rolling in it.

“Were you born in a pigsty?” Lois continued.

“No, Mommy,” Jason said, trying to look innocent. “We was borned from you.”

“Don’t give me that face, Jason Samuel. Don’t think you’ve got me wrapped around your little finger!” she scolded.

Yeah, right, Kal thought, grinning at his wife.

There was a whoosh, then Clark came into the barn.

“Whoa, who’s been rolling in the mud?” he asked, looking down at his brother and sister.

“Me, me!” Jessica replied, jumping up and down excitedly, moving to tackle him.

“Me, me, me!” Since Clark was in his second year at Metropolis University, the twins didn’t get to see their brother every day. Kal and Lois had made it a strict rule that he only come home on weekends, and then only if he drove down. Clark had learnt to fly a couple of years earlier, but they didn’t want him using his powers if it wasn’t absolutely necessary.

He scooped the twins up, carrying them to the house. The two children squealed at the mention of the word ‘bath’.

“You were ranting?” Kal said, looking at his wife.

“You know what that … man has gone and done now? It’s bad enough that they elected him President. President! What the hell were the people smoking?”
“Honey …”

Kal knew she was upset over the fact that, despite all the evidence, the indictment against Lex four years earlier had failed. Every member of the League thought he had managed to buy off the Grand Jury, but Kal hadn’t been surprised.

What had his wife so incensed was that Lex had announced firstly his campaign for nomination, then once he had the nomination, his campaign to win the Presidency. Again, it was hardly a surprise that he’d won. He was just powerful enough and smart enough to manipulate people into voting for him, telling them whatever they wanted to hear, contradicting himself at every turn.

“He’s trying to force all Justice League members to register,” she continued as if he hadn’t spoken.

Kal nodded. He’d heard that as well, but according to what he’d learnt about the American political system, it wasn’t simply a matter of Lex making a decision and that decision becoming law. There were various tiers of power which would vote on the decision and it wouldn’t necessarily be successful.

He finished up his work and followed his wife into the house, washing up just in time for dinner. Clark came down, the twins clean and in their pyjamas.

“So what was Mom ranting about?” he asked his father.

“Lex. What else?” he replied with a sigh.

“Figures,” Clark said.

“Well, you’d be mad too,” Lois complained.

“I am, Mom, but complaining about it isn’t going to change what’s happened. The only thing we can do is keep fighting and make sure he doesn’t abuse his power.”

“Clark’s right, sweetheart,” Jonathan said. “Lex may think he’s powerful, but he’s not omnipotent and sooner or later, the world will see him as we do.”

“Just don’t give up fighting for the truth, Mom. Like you didn’t give up when Amanda Waller and her cronies kept chasing you around the world. You didn’t give up then and in the end you won.”

Lois chewed on her lip and looked at their eldest son for a long moment.


“I got that from you, Mom.”

Kal grinned, looking around the table at his family. They’d get through this the same way they always did. Together.

Chapter End Notes

As I always say: All good things must come to an end.
I'm sure most of my readers will understand the parallels in the epilogue to a real life event. I couldn't help myself.

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